



CASE STUDY

AAKAR INNOVATIONS

Pioneering the Period Economy for Women



Aakar Innovations Pvt Ltd.

www.aakarinnovations.com

Aakar is a hybrid social enterprise that has two arms - Aakar Innovations and Aakar Social Ventures - addressing sustainable period care. Aakar Innovations specialises in the production of sustainable sanitary napkins. Meanwhile, Aakar Social Ventures engages in the broader social impact of menstrual health, including awareness and sensitisation across underserved communities.



PROBLEM - SOLUTION

In India, only 36% out of the 355 million menstruating women have access to sanitary products.¹ This is most evident in underserved communities where women and girls lack menstrual hygiene. Skin rashes and allergic irritation can occur, but they are relatively uncommon. A study estimated that only 0.7% of skin rashes are caused by allergies to the adhesive in sanitary pads.² In addition to health and hygiene, sanitary pads also produce significant waste. In India alone, about 12

billion sanitary pads are discarded each year that either end up in landfills or incinerated releasing harmful chemicals and toxins into the environment.³

Aakar is pioneering an eco-solution for menstrual hygiene, addressing both women's health and environmental sustainability. They offer Anandi Pads that are fully compostable, skinsafe, and made with locally sourced raw materials.

1- Upadhyay, Aishwarya. 2019. "Menstrual Hygiene Day Facts: Only 36 Percent of the Women in India Use Sanitary Pads during Periods." Swach India NDTV. May 29, 2019.

<https://swachhindiya.ndtv.com/menstrual-hygiene-day-facts-26-percent-use-sanitary-pads-periods-34309/>.

2- Williams, Jason, Kathryn Frowen, and Rosemary Nixon. 2007. "Allergic Contact Dermatitis from Methyl Dibromoglutaronitrile in a Sanitary Pad and Review of Australian Clinic Data." Contact Dermatitis. U.S. National Library of Medicine. 2007. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17295694/>.

3- "India's Landfills Add 113k Tonnes of Menstrual Waste Each Year: Report." April 13, 2021. Down To Earth. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/waste/india-s-landfills-add-113k-tonnes-of-menstrual-waste-each-year-report-77247/>.

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BUSINESS MODEL

The sanitary napkin market was worth USD 24.5 billion in 2021 and is expected to reach USD 41 billion by 2031⁴.

The global demand is driven by the growing awareness in feminine hygiene products. Aakar operates a versatile business model using innovative, patented technology to develop their products. They manufacture and distribute products through three key models: Business-to-Consumer (B2C), Business-to-Business (B2B), and Business-to-Government (B2G). Their main revenue stream is driven by sales from their compostable sanitary pads sold through e-commerce platforms. With their wide range of products, they are able to target menstruating women with different lifestyles— creating premium and low-cost options.

4- "Sanitary Napkin Market." n.d. Transparency Market Research. <https://www.transparencymarketresearch.com/sanitary-napkin-market.html>.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN ACTION

Aakar shows their commitment to sustainability throughout the entire process, from sourcing raw materials to production and disposal in developing their Anandi Pads. They use biobased materials that are free from plastic and harmful chemicals. Their materials are locally sourced and come from indigenous waste such as jute, bagasse, and other fibers. This approach allows them to expand the lifecycle of waste. Unlike other feminine hygiene products that take years to degrade, Anandi Pads decompose and turn into manure within 90-180 days.

WOMEN IN SUSTAINABILITY

Aakar operates through a sustainable community-led model of the production of Anandi Pads. They provide a sustainable livelihood for women in marginalised communities, which empowers them to reach financial independence and social well-being. They believe that women's participation is key to uplifting communities. Aakar also offers free pads to underprivileged communities in addition to menstrual hygiene education. This supports better menstrual hygiene and awareness among women and girls.

MEASURING IMPACT

Aakar Innovations assesses the effectiveness of its circular initiatives through a comprehensive set of key metrics that reflect their impact on both women's well-being and environmental sustainability. To date, they have reached over 1 million customers. They have also empowered 400,000 women and girls through tiered education program. About 80% of their workforce are women. Aakar has 30 mini factories operating in 10 countries and has employed over 700+ women.⁵ Aakar mentioned that the government spends 1 USD on environmental costs for every 17 plastic-based pads. Meanwhile, their pads decompose and turn into compost within 3 to 6 months.⁶ Together, these metrics provide a clear and holistic view of the positive impact Aakar Innovations is creating, underscoring their commitment to providing environmentally friendly women's hygiene products and empowering women while contributing to sustainable practices. This approach aligns with their dedication to a "triple bottom line" in social entrepreneurship, encompassing a multifaceted approach to positively impact people and the planet while encouraging profitability.

GROWTH PLANS

Aakar envisions broadening its product range to include biodegradable baby and adult diapers. They also seek to increase sales by making their products available across retail outlets in India and introducing Anandi Pads to the US Market.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- First/Only Sanitary Pad Producer to receive Compostable Certification in 2018
- National Entrepreneurship Award, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Government of India in 2018
- Bio-Based Material of the Year Award, International Conference on Bio-Based Materials in 2019
- Materials World Award by Institute of Materials, (IOM3), UK in 2020
- Advisory Member, Bureau of Indian Standards in 2018 onwards
- Prime Minister of India 'Champions of Change' in 2017
- United Nations- GSC-3S Awards in September 2015
- Millennium Alliance Award, by UKAID, USAID, Gol, FICCI, World Bank from 2015 to 2016
- TSS Social Enterprise of the Year-2021 by TIE-Global
- SIA Health Award- by Option Finance and Institute de France, Paris in 2022

5 - <https://www.aakarinnovations.com/impact-measurement>

6 - <https://yourstory.com/herstory/20>

CONTACT INFO:

Address:

301, Chawla Complex Sector
15, CBD Belapur Navi
Mumbai - 400614

Phone Number:

+91 22 2757 0070

MEET THE FOUNDER

Jaydeep Mandal

“I have forever been inquisitive, enthusiastic, and an entrepreneur at heart.”



Jaydeep Mandal’s social entrepreneurship journey finds its roots during his college years— building the foundation of what Aakar is today. With this passion for social impact, he joined the Honeybee Network and worked closely with its founder, Prof. Anil Gupta. Through this experience, Jaydeep was exposed to the rich tapestry of innovation and entrepreneurship across India.

In 2010, Jaydeep led a sanitary pad project in Uttarakhand with a lean team of 10 volunteers while pursuing his MBA. Within 10 months of working on the project, Jaydeep gained immersive experience that helped him recognize the magnitude of the demand and supply gap of menstrual products for women in underserved communities.

“I realize the extent of the issue and thus paved the way for Aakar”

Driven by this, he dedicated a full year of meeting entrepreneurs in the industry to learn more about low solutions in creating sanitary napkins. Despite being a student with limited resources at that time, Jaydeep displayed resourcefulness, leveraging technology like email and video calls to connect with experts.

By 2011, Aakar was finally registered as an organization. Jaydeep spent a month-long study in Afghanistan’s Baghlan province with the Aga Khan Foundation. Talking to the women of the community, Jaydeep discovered more challenges around menstruation. Because they were in a closed community where stigma surrounded menstruation, women dealt with shame and felt the need to hide their period. They could not openly dispose of menstrual waste, fearing its visibility to people or animals tearing it apart. Motivated by this challenge, he sought to develop an eco-friendly solution. After months of research, Jaydeep launched Aakar, India’s first and only certified 100% compostable sanitary napkin.



ABOUT CIRCULEAD

CircuLead is designed to empower women entrepreneurs building innovative solutions in the Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy. The programme aims to support women leaders to strengthen their business models, deepen their leadership skills and learn from peers through a hybrid, immersive learning experience. The EU-Resource Efficiency Initiative (EU-REI) is implementing this capacity building programme with support from [Nüshu Network](#), powered by [Unlock Impact](#).

ABOUT EU-RESOURCE EFFICIENCY INITIATIVE

European Union's Resource Efficiency Initiative (EU-REI) (2017-2023) for India and aims to support India in the implementation of the United Nations global Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) agenda by way of adapting international standards and best practices in business on resource efficiency and circular economy and fostering the efficient and sustainable use of natural resources. The EU-REI aims to facilitate partnerships between Indian and European businesses and stakeholders on Resource Efficiency (RE) and Circular Economy economy in sectors of interest.

EU-REI acts as an important vehicle for the India-EU Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy Partnership.

It is implemented on behalf of the European Union by a consortium led by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), Confederation of the Indian Industry (CII) and adelphi.

ABOUT UNLOCK IMPACT AND NÜSHU NETWORK

[Unlock Impact](#) is a gender-smart women-led firm dedicated to help purpose-driven enterprises succeed across South and Southeast Asia. Powered by Unlock Impact, the [Nüshu Network](#) offers community, coaching and capital for women entrepreneurs in Asia who are looking to build and grow sustainable enterprises. Since its inception, the network has delivered 2000+ hours of learning, 1000+ hours of mentoring at 50+ community events to over 500+ women entrepreneurs.

ABOUT adelphi

[adelphi](#) is Europe's leading independent think-and-do tank for climate, environment and development. We are some 350 strategists, thought leaders and practitioners working at the local and global levels to find solutions to the most urgent political, economic and social challenges of our time. As a policy consultancy, we support a just transition towards carbon neutrality and sustainable, liveable societies. Our work is grounded in transdisciplinary research, evidence-based consulting and stakeholder dialogues. With these tools we shape policy agendas, facilitate political communication, inform policy processes and support decision-makers.

