

Nishant Jacob

A Reusable Bag



Courtesy Social Networking

A new age has dawned. Every instant terabytes of information hurtle effortlessly through cyber space, humanity seems to have reached the next stage of its evolution, climbing to the pinnacle of communication, technology, networking and interface, from here there seems to be only one path; straight up, above and beyond our wildest fantasies.

Today social networking sites allow people to interact with millions of people around the world with just a click of the mouse. Channels are now available for information and ideas to flow effortlessly through the digital system, but what will all this lead to, surely we must harness these awesome forces to do some good, to help solve some of the dire obstacles we now face. These obstacles include global warming, climate change, extreme poverty, haphazard development, energy crisis's, food crisis's, geo-political instability, and the decimation of the planet inherited and the shared biodiversity.

It serves absolutely no purpose for a panel of experts to debate the energy and food crisis on a BBC

talk show in Texas if the 6 billion people on this planet couldn't care less and don't quite know what's happening. What we need is ways to capture the attention and above all else the ideas and the solutions that can be put forth by these same 6 billion people, who are all more than capable of contributing towards humanities continued existence. It is one such contribution that I am going to explore, in the form of the "ecobag".

The ecobag movement started in Australia 5 years ago. In a matter of months the entire continent managed to ban plastic bags. This was made possible due to the confluence of a number of events, organizations, ideas and action. The policy makers in form of the Australian government initiated the

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process by introducing legislation against plastic bags. Private entrepreneurs then took the lead by creating a new product called the ecobag and supplying it to shops across Australia. Finally the general public embraced the concept and carrying plastic bags was frowned upon across the Australian community.

Using this model as a reference point, our environmental non-profit organization, Confluence, decided to embark on a similar journey in order to ban the dreaded, unnecessary and highly wasteful plastic bag in India. It is not that the group has anything against plastic. It is a powerfully, multi-faceted material if used in a sensible and sustainable manner, but the use and throw format of plastic bags in today's world make absolutely no sense and its effect on the environment is drastic and visceral.

Working under the aegis of the Bangalore based NGO, Industree Crafts Foundation; Confluence consists of three 12th graders, Agastya Muthanna, Keshav Hingorani and Nishant Jacob of Mallya Aditi International School, Bangalore.



This group was started in 2005 and has been dedicated to dealing with diverse environmental issues including composting, rain-water harvesting, garbage segregation, climate change and now the ecobag.

As far as our proposal for ecobag goes, the vision was much less complicated than a solar farm. The bags would be made from Kora cloth, a completely natural material that is durable, light and easy to fold. All the bags would fold or crumple {depending on one's tolerance to creasing} into a small pouched stitched onto the bag so the bag could be placed in a handbag, laptop case or even a pant pocket. This makes the bags convenient to use and easy to remember to bring along to the grocery store or supermarket, a far cry from the bulky jute bags with bamboo-stick handles, something nobody would like to stick into his or her pocket. This is an example of retrospective innovation, a seemingly oxy-moronic but powerful concept. By embracing the concepts and solutions of the past and then transforming them into viable solutions for the future we can avoid getting trapped in cyclical ruts, repeating our mistakes and not learning from them. India has a rich, historic cultural heritage and it would be a crime not to utilize these learnings while dealing with global issues but we must remember to develop them through innovation and current context so

they don't become anachronistic.

One such solution comes in the form of ancient craftsmen guilds, which have had a 21st century, make over into Self Help Groups. Our bags are being produced at a cost of approximately Rs. 15 a bag by a Self Help Group in Krishnagiri run by 20 tailors. These tailors have each invested a small sum of money into the group, using this money they have bought equipment and rented a shed, after earning additional income through the use of machinery they can gather enough money to take a sizeable bank loan and start a small business.

This form of decentralized entrepreneurship is essential for rural development, inclusive growth and the bridging between income divides. Education is another huge factor and again a decentralized system seems to be the best option, providing learning kiosks fitted with internet connectivity and information technology that allows for flexible education right through from elementary school curricu-

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lums to vocational training and computer skills.

In the reality to come, Confluence hopes to sell the ecobags at supermarkets across India, starting with Max-hyper-markets, to serve as a viable alternative to plastic bags. By utilizing the awesome power of mass media in the form of social networking sites like facebook, radio campaigns and newspaper articles we hope to launch a civic movement involving the urban youth across various cities, inspiring in them the desire to create change and above all else, helping them realize their potential to become the change they wish to see. The future seems filled with looming demons intent on destroying everything we have strived so hard to create, but armed with a young population, devoted to solving these issues instead of running away from them, the future of our common humanity is bright indeed.

Any reader questions or comments should be sent to ecoconfluence@gmail.com; www.eco-confluence.blogspot.com