



THE DESHPANDE FOUNDATION
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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to you as the Executive Director of the Deshpande Foundation, the family foundation of Gururaj and Jaishree Deshpande, which is dedicated to supporting the growth and development of India through innovation and social entrepreneurship. Before I outline my relationship with the Water Literacy Foundation, I first wish to give you some important details as to how the Deshpande Foundation operates:

The Deshpande Foundation focuses its efforts on five districts of northern Karnataka, which it has nicknamed the "Sandbox." This name was not bestowed due to the area's desert composition (it's not a desert), but rather as a symbol of what it hopes to achieve through its programs in the area: a sandbox (a popular structure in America which, ironically, does not exist in India) is a space, defined by four walls, in which children create sculptures out of sand. In the same way, The Deshpande Foundation strives to nurture local organizations to create new structures that can lead to positive development within a confined space. Instead of physical walls, however, the Deshpande Foundation encloses its sandbox within conceptual walls that (with one exception) have been proven to engender positive social entrepreneurship: affordability, accessibility, and scalability. The geographical boundaries of Northwest Karnataka comprise the final "wall" of the Deshpande Foundation's Sandbox. By applying these criteria, and adhering to them, we hope to guide budding social entrepreneurs with great ideas to take their activities to the next level and beyond.

We became acquainted with the Water Literacy Foundation (WLF) through the Ashoka: Innovators for the Public foundation, of which WLF's Director, Mr. Ayyappa Masagi, is a Fellow, and have been supporting their work through grants as well as other institutional resources for the past two years. I am continually impressed by the organization's ability to elicit real change in the water supply (and, consequently, the livelihoods) of the people with whom they work. The changes in water table level are definitively increased across the board, not only saving thousands of liters of water, but also substantially improving the lives of people—through saving industries vast sums of money that used to go towards the import of water, as well as by enabling farmers to cultivate increased acres of land on their plots, diversify crops grown on those plots, and improving the quality of the crops harvested.

WLF is not the only organization to do these kinds of activities, and there are certainly other methods for achieving similar results. However, WLF's work continues to be valuable to the Deshpande Foundation not only for its impact, but also for its process. It truly embodies the principles of our four walls.

To give an example, last summer, a team of water engineers from the University of California—Berkeley came to Hubli for a project. In a group meeting comprising of the students, WLF, and myself and other Deshpande Foundation staff, the students discussed a new filter they had developed or were aware of that could do a number of valuable things to water—filter it, make it potable as well as usable for irrigation, etc. When they revealed the cost, however, Mr. Masagi of WLF noted that they (WLF) could do the same things over a large piece of land for less than half the cost of the filter. It's just that kind of ingenuity—not only having the technology to achieve something, but figuring out how to do it at a price that many people can afford—that we consider to be a hallmark of social entrepreneurs who will ultimately succeed and help lead India to assume its position amongst the world's great powers.

WLF is changing the way people in the Sandbox view their water supply and how they affect it as individuals. It's bringing the technology and the requisite knowledge to people at a cost they can afford.

If that is not a significant contribution in the global field of water conservation, I'm excited to see what is. WLF has the full support of the Deshpande Foundation, as well as me personally, for consideration for the 2009 Stockholm Water Prize.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nishith Acharya". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nishith Acharya
Executive Director,
Deshpande Foundation