

# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES

Established by UN Women and the  
UN Global Compact Office

2021 UN Women  
Asia-Pacific WEPs Awards  
Regional Awardee Profile



Winner

## Baeru Environmental Services



Divya Hegde  
Founder

### Baeru Environmental Services

**Country:** India  
**Employees:** 51-200  
**Industry:** Waste Management

**Website**  
[www.baeru.in](http://www.baeru.in)



### About the Company

*Baeru Environmental Services is a leader in waste management practices in South India and empowers women as key agents for sustainable and economic development in coastal communities in India. With Baeru, women lead waste-management centers in their communities, turning waste into wealth by forward-linking material for recycling or upcycling waste into handmade lifestyle products.*

### Empowering Women as Change Agents

Divya Hegde, Founder of Baeru Environmental Services, believes women are vital for development in rural India. Divya's aspiration is to empower women in the Udupi district of coastal Karnataka in South India, where generations of her family hail from, with the resources needed to help them recognize their own capabilities and ambitions. Her vision serves as the foundation of Baeru's mission - to equip women to be leaders in climate action, civic awareness, and sustainable consumption in their own communities and local governing councils, known as panchayats in local parlance.

With the volume of waste in low-income countries expected to triple by 2050, Divya wants to ensure that women are at the forefront of actively developing and leading waste management practices. She is passionate about enabling women as climate change leaders in rural India. As a community that have typically experienced limited access to environmentally sustainable goods and services, endured negligible participation in decision-making in the home and outside of it, and have been excluded in the distribution of environmental management benefits. Divya is sowing the seeds of change by equipping women to lead waste management centers in their panchayats, and empowering them to play an active role in educating their communities on waste management and sustainable practices. With support from local partners, women are encouraged to lead programs and self-help groups in their communities.



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*One of our main learnings has been that we cannot hope for change without being inclusive of rural India. We cannot bring big-city solutions to the region, nor can we bring urban lessons to local women. Instead, we need to provide a neutral platform for debate, discussion, and immediate action, all of which can be driven by women. The changes in lifestyle and aspirations will then come from within the community and be truly sustainable.*

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- Divya Hegde

## Sustainable Impact in Karnataka

To enable climate action and gender justice, Divya follows a three-pronged approach of creating partnerships with government bodies, developing local infrastructure (e.g., waste management centers, supportive technology, and education), and generating livelihood opportunities through training programmes in community management and waste handling.

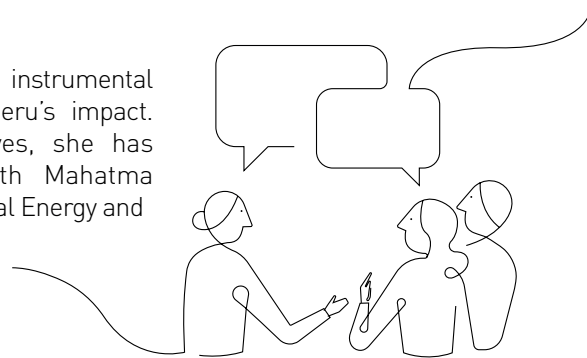
Baeru's biggest strength lies in leveraging the power of design and technology in a lingual and regional context. The organization works under five verticals:

1. Women-led Waste Management and Advocacy
2. Ocean-Bound Plastics Mitigation and Recovery
3. Climate Technology
4. Community Engagement
5. Eco-School Education Programs

The low-literacy waste management app is introduced as a tool for women to input data on collected materials, draw insights on the nature of waste collected, track recycling and/or upcycling of waste materials, and educate their communities on ways to reduce unsustainable waste. The app is available in the local dialects and uses relatable imagery and icons for easy usage and integration into local contexts. Through the use of the app, women in the targeted local communities now have an increased understanding of waste generation patterns and are self-generating opportunities for active leadership in waste management centers and shaping sustainable development within their communities.

Over 800 women have economically benefited through Baeru's model, supporting women's financial independence. Between August 2020 and March 2021, Baeru gained the trust of 1200 women from 200 local women's groups in Karnataka who are excited to work with Baeru and bring their ambitions of entrepreneurship to fruition.

Partnerships play an instrumental role in sustaining Baeru's impact. Through her initiatives, she has signed an MOU with Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Rural Energy and



Development (MGIRED) across five major districts of Karnataka, under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and encompassing the regions of coastal Karnataka, Coorg, Uttara Kannada, and the Western Ghats, a UNESCO-designated heritage site. To expand opportunities for women in environmental leadership, Baeru partners with MGIRED to train women's self-help groups in renewable solar energy, rain harvesting, and the production of solar lanterns.

Baeru has enabled a growth of sustainable businesses in coastal Karnataka by selling recycled materials from women-run waste management centers to local business partners who upcycle these materials for use in handmade lifestyle products. Given that the distribution of the recycled materials is only possible through the hard work of women running the centers, Baeru ensures that the money earned from the collection, segregation, and sale of the materials goes to the salaries of the women. This has created another avenue for women to earn income and promote sustainable products in the marketplace.

## Moving Forward

Divya's mission is to make India's coastal communities active participants in climate action through the recovery of ocean plastics and mitigation of ocean bound pollution, the development of a circular economy, and continued generation of livelihoods for coastal women.

Her ambition to empower women as sustainable leaders in Karnataka has enabled the adoption of sustainable alternatives to plastics in 5,000 households across the region. This came to fruition by women educating their communities on sustainable consumption habits and by Baeru upcycling discarded textiles that were collected by the women into handmade cloth bags to promote an alternative to plastic bags. Baeru encouraged self-help groups to stitch cloth bags using the textiles collected by the women and then purchased these upcycled cloth bags to make it available to 5,000 households in the region. Baeru continues this exercise to promote circular economy practices and sustainable purchasing habits.

Harnessing technology and data are key to expanding Baeru's training support. Divya aims to transfer digital training to every panchayat in Karnataka, run waste management tracking platforms, and develop women's project management skills in local waste management centers. To date, Baeru has reached over 3,000 women in five districts in Karnataka. As a new ambitious endeavour, Divya hopes to train 2,000 more women per district with the Government of Karnataka by 2025 to be self-employed and/or entrepreneurs. By setting this ambitious goal, Divya believes that more women will be empowered to build self-reliance and become leaders of change in their households and communities.

## Women's Empowerment Principles



High-Level Corporate Leadership



Treat all Women and Men Fairly at Work without Discrimination



Employee Health, Well-Being and Safety



Education and Training for Career Advancement




Enterprise Development, Supply Chain and Marketing Practices




Community Initiatives and Advocacy



Measurement and Reporting

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