

Impact of global-India virtual interns



Interim Report
University India Centre for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development

Engaging the next generation as resilient changemakers for a better world during COVID-19

“This is the best possible internship program I have ever seen and this has truly helped the most needy people in this challenging time of COVID-19 and I see this as an effort to make the world a better place to live and bridge the increasing inequality gap, kudos to all the interns...”

Mr. Vinod Pandey, CEO of [Mijwan Welfare Society](#) (MWS) commenting on the successful and positive outcomes of a recent virtual internship programme undertaken by students from [Southampton](#) and [GRD College of Science](#) in India.

In November 2020, the University India Centre for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development in partnership with MWS and GRD College of Science and GRD Institute of Management launched “The Kaifi Azmi Global-India Virtual Internship Programme 2020”.

The initiative was an outcome of our University’s engagement with the President of MWS and a globally renowned Bollywood actress and social activist Ms. Shabana Azmi. MWS, based in rural Uttar Pradesh, is committed to building just, equitable and sustainable communities across rural India.

Working on grassroots “real” problems

The interns were assigned to two live projects exclusively focused on building resilience and safeguarding livelihoods in response to Covid-19 pandemic impact, particularly tackling the large volume of city to village labour migration.

The first project was the *Rozgar Dhaba* -a community information hub: a public policy solution creating job opportunities and mitigating unsafe migration. The task for interns was to conceptualise and design an online database system for documenting and providing a comprehensive information system for migrant workers in villages.

The second one was an ambitious *Project Samridhi* aimed at designing an e-commerce platform for women entrepreneurs in rural areas. The interns were assigned to develop possible solutions for creating an e-commerce system for rural women entrepreneurs to sell their products online-in collaboration with Mijwan Welfare Society Kaifi Azmi embroidery center.



Creating a virtual work environment

The interns were given a total of 6 weeks each spending 20 hours per week on the projects.

Akash Yadav (MBA, Southampton Business School) was paired with Meenakshi Venkatachalam (Master of International Business, GRD) and Charu Rajapandian (MBA, GRD) to work on the Rozgar Dhaba project. Meghna Sood (MSc Software Engineering, ECS, Southampton) was paired with Vishaka Sharma (Bachelors in Commerce, GRD).

The programme team met with interns online twice a week throughout the internship, set clear goals, activities and timeline.

The interns engaged effectively with MWS team and its stakeholders, beyond the call of duty with passion, hard work and resilience under a number of constraints such as poor network connectivity, cultural understandings, and time zone differences between UK and India.

The interns were asked to submit timesheets and a short report on weekly activities. All interns signed a data confidentiality agreement prior to the start of the internship.

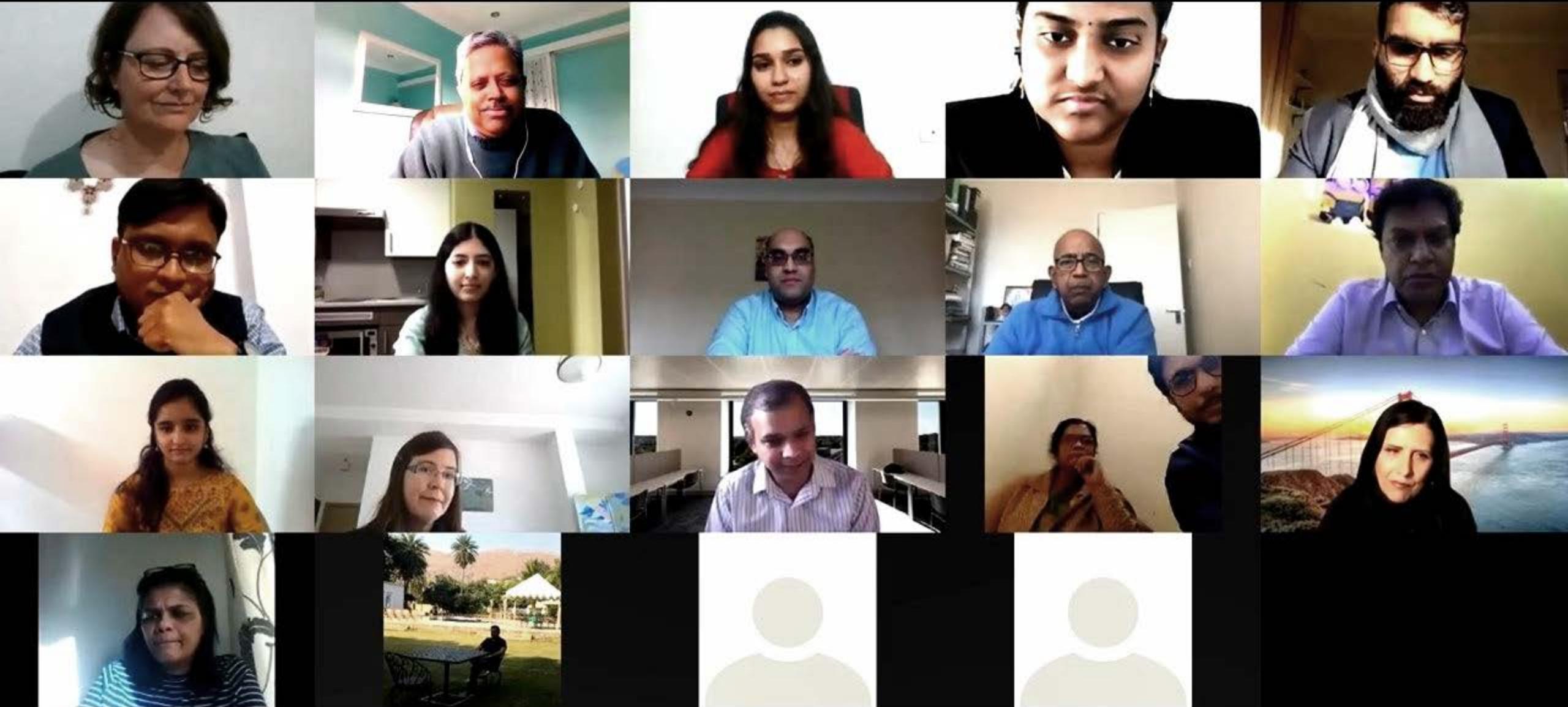
Meenakshi from GRD says “*I learned lots about the process that goes behind creation of online database systems, how an NGO works and how effectively we can work together in a virtual platform is the biggest take away*”.

Meghna from Southampton shares her perspective “*When I joined Mijwan Welfare Society as an intern, it forced me to think for the people in need and that broaden my life perspective of challenges in villages in India, I have never designed an e-commerce platform before but with Vishaka and Mijwan team we managed to do this from scratch*”.

Making the difference

The internship delivered the products beyond expectations in a short window of time. The Rozgar Dhaba database system is already in an operational mode, enabling registration of job opportunities for migrants. The e-commerce system has now been official approved by MWS and the commercial license is underway.

The impact of internship outcomes in Mijwan is two-fold. First, the Rozgar Dhaba database offers ground level solution for reskilling and job generation for unemployed migrant workers in rural areas. Project Samridhi e-commerce platform will soon enable women entrepreneurs in rural areas to connect to the rest of world and sell their products with confidence and retaining 99% of the profits.



Our interns acknowledged the opportunity for cross-cultural understanding, the freedom of creativity, innovation and mentoring support. Their work was evaluated at a recent stakeholder meeting, which unanimously concluded the quality of the work undertaken, demonstrating clear evidence of new virtual learning and problem-solving skills, original thinking, innovation and creativity.

These interns are also now skilled to be resilient and adaptive to new norms of remote working in a virtual digital world.

Mr. Amarjit Singh, CEO of India Business Group and one of the Founding Directors of India Centre says “*this wonderful journey that we embarked upon some weeks before, and the way in which the energy has been channelled in these two initiatives has been rewarding and refreshing, but also to a broader extent somewhat incalculable, these initiatives feed into the Indian Government’s flagship projects such as digital India and Make in India*”.

In recognition to the outstanding work and outputs, three interns have now been offered a permanent job as project lead and coordinator at MWS, with a competitive remuneration package.

Professor KK Ramachandran, Vice-Principal of GRD says “*it is key to really break new ground with the tools that have emerged during this time. But to connect students with another corner of society and to achieve an ideal goal was the really satisfying outcome. This was possible because of the thought leadership practiced by Southampton and Mijwan making a difference by empowering the rural people and the needy ones consistently for a long time*”.

As we move forward, the students and the project team are preparing a case study on the experiences sharing best practices for wider dissemination. Given the successful outcomes of the first cohort, India Centre will soon announce a call for the 2021 programme engaging our home students to understand and experience the opportunities and challenges of real India.

Professor Jane Falkingham, Vice-President International and Executive Director of India Centre says “*with the right team in place, a clear vision in combination with action, we can contribute meaningfully to global sustainable developmental goals and make a difference to ordinary lives*”.

Professor Sabu Padmadas,
University India Centre, Founding Director (Research and Education)
Associate Dean International, Faculty of Social Sciences



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