

Naandi Foundation — The Experiment That Made Poverty History in Araku

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In 1999, Adivasi families in the Araku Valley of Andhra Pradesh's Eastern Ghats were selling wild coffee to middlemen for a few rupees a kilogram. The forest was degrading. Youth were migrating. Twenty-six years later, Araku Coffee is served at artisan cafes in Paris and Bengaluru. 1,300 tribal farmers from those same communities have become millionaires — verified, documented, not aspirational. 47.5 million trees have been planted across the valley with an 85 percent survival rate. The valley holds what is described as the world's largest biodynamic agriculture hub spread across 1,500 square kilometres.

The model has a name: Arakunomics. It won Rockefeller's 2050 Food Vision Award. It is published as a G20 policy recommendation for nutritional and environmental security. Naandi, which in Sanskrit means "new beginning," has built the evidence that a new beginning is actually possible.

Who They Are

Naandi Foundation was founded on November 1, 1998, as a Public Charitable Trust born from the idea that professionally managed organisations with corporate-discipline governance could demonstrate large-scale successful delivery of public services. Anand Mahindra chairs the board. Life Trustees include Satish Reddy of Dr. Reddy's Laboratories and Kris Gopalakrishnan, co-founder of Infosys.

This architecture — civil society mission, corporate governance — produced an institution that could operate at government scale with NGO accountability. A 5,500-strong team across 15 states has touched more than 6 million people across three verticals: Child Rights, Sustainable Livelihoods, and Safe Drinking Water.

The Mid-Day Meal at Scale

Naandi executes the Government of India's Mid-Day Meal programme in four states, providing hot and nutritious meals to more than 1.2 million children every day through 22 centralised kitchens. They have delivered over a billion meals. The HUNGaMA (Hunger and Malnutrition) survey that Naandi produced became the watchdog document on child malnutrition that influenced national nutrition policy — giving civil society the data language to hold government accountable for what children actually eat.

For Odisha NGOs working on school nutrition: Naandi's centralised kitchen model, quality protocols, and monitoring systems are directly transferable lessons for organisations trying to improve Mid-Day Meal delivery beyond the minimum compliance threshold.

The Araku Model: What Happens When You Remove the Middleman for 20 Years

Naandi's work in Araku Valley has benefitted more than 60,000 tribals directly and, in its broader agricultural model, touched 100,000 Adivasi farmer families. The specific mechanism: they aggregated the world's largest tribal farmers' cooperative overseeing regenerative cultivation of specialty coffee, removed middlemen entirely, built the Araku Coffee brand directly, and connected tribal farmers to premium global buyers. The value that previously went to traders now stays with farmers. 1,300 families have crossed into millionaire status.

The 47.5 million trees planted — projected to sequester 5 million tonnes of CO₂ over 20 years at an 85 percent survival rate — make Araku simultaneously an agricultural

livelihood programme and one of India's most significant community-based carbon sequestration initiatives.

For Odisha NGOs working with tribal farmers: the Araku model is the most compelling available evidence that tribal communities can become premium global market actors when the institutional infrastructure — cooperative aggregation, quality systems, brand building, direct market access — is built alongside them rather than imposed on them.

Community Safe Water Services

Naandi Community Water Services operates decentralised, sustainable water systems across 696 villages in 7 states using a tripartite partnership model: village governing body, technology provider, and Naandi. The model was designed specifically for the conditions of high-poverty, high-contamination rural areas where neither government systems nor individual household investment can deliver safe water reliably.

For Odisha's water-scarce KBK districts and fluoride-affected areas, the Naandi Community Water Centre model is relevant wherever groundwater contamination or seasonal scarcity makes a piped community system economically necessary.

The Girls' Education Commitment

Naandi's Nanhi Kali programme — in partnership with K.C. Mahindra Education Trust — has provided academic support to 450,000 girls, covering books, uniforms, and material support to ensure girls complete ten years of schooling with equal access to boys. The programme's community support system specifically addresses the dropout drivers — household economic pressure, early marriage risk, distance — rather than only the school-level factors.

Contact and Further Reading

Website: naandi.org | **Araku Coffee:** arakucoffee.com | **Water:** naandewater.in

Key evidence:

- Naandi website: naandi.org — Arakunomics, 1,300 millionaire farmers, 47.5 million trees, Rockefeller Award
- Give.do Naandi profile: 300,000 tribal individuals lifted from poverty, 450,000 girls, 30 million trees
- Forbes India, March 2023: *How Naandi Turned Araku Valley's Food Gatherers into Millionaires*
- NHHM/K.C. Mahindra partnership profile: billion meals documentation

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