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FROM WARDS & VADDOS

Ground Reports Telling Stories That Matter



O HERALDO

A JOURNEY INTO THE HEART OF GOA

In our continuous efforts to put people at the center of our journalism, we bring to you a weekly collection of stories, specially curated from our ground-level reportage which celebrates the joys, and shares the sorrows of people in their grassroots. These are, at heart, very simple stories, simply told. Interesting initiatives, out-of-the-box thinking, dogged persistence on any issue, and the struggles of people over the years as they try and put their disrupted lives back together are not just news stories.

Each is a document from the wards and vaddos of Goa, a postcard, a letter, a share. This collection is brought to you from **O Heraldo's** team of reporters who have been given one simple mandate - go out, travel, and speak to people about their lives.

From Wards and Vaddos is as much your project as **O Heraldo's** and we welcome all of you on this journey into the heart of Goa.

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SMALL-SCALE FARMING, BIG IMPACT:

Divya Ravichandran & Inchara Shanthappa transformed dead soil into a tiny, thriving oasis

ERWIN FONSECA

ASSAGAO: Water is life. Nothing can exist without it. Water makes up a major part of our planet and our bodies. Without water, there would be no vegetation. That's why during the harshest summer months of April and May, agricultural activity in Goa slows down, as water becomes scarce. But two agriculture enthusiasts, Divya Ravichandran and Inchara Shanthappa, who proudly call themselves Neo-Goans, are ready to change that. They want to show Goan farmers that with proper water management, agriculture can flourish year-round, yielding rich dividends.

About a year ago, Inchara Shanthappa, a student of botany, chemistry, and biotechnology, met Divya Ravichandran, an expert in solid waste management. Both shared a common goal: turning solid waste into compost and combating plastic pollution. With a

small piece of land from a generous farmer in Assagao, the duo began their farming project. The soil however was dead, lacking microorganisms and water retention capacity. But they didn't import

any new soil; instead, they nurtured the plot meticulously for six months. They treated it with kitchen waste and organic materials, building up enriched soil layers. "We generate lots of kitchen waste and throw it out rather than using it to

live up our soil and plants. We are at an age where we want an easy lifestyle and have adopted an attitude of just 'use and throw',

which is very bad," said Inchara, adding that they only brought in twigs, dry leaves, goat dung, wood chips and powder or husk to rejuvenate the soil. Then, they planted seeds, ensuring daily care to keep the soil moist.

Divya emphasises that farming isn't just about planting seeds and applying fertilisers; it's a deep science connected to nature. Inchara stresses the importance of maintaining ecological balance, advocating for natural farming practices that preserve biodiversity. "Using chemical pesticides and insecticides disturbs the entire ecosystem and plays into the hands of corporations," she remarks. They built raised beds of enriched soil around three metres high, and planted tomatoes, pumpkins, and ash gourds. Despite initial challenges, their efforts paid off; the ash gourd vines bore 20 fruits. "Once we are done with ash gourd, we hope to cultivate pumpkins, and after that, bitter melon and long

“We can enrich dead soil by adding various types of solid waste to it. It's crucial to promote the development of beneficial bacteria in the soil through aerobic conditions. The compost produced should never emit an odour and should not be sun-dried. These practices are sufficient to rejuvenate dead soil. We must return to the soil what we take from it and participate in the ecosystem cycle. Regarding pests, some of them, like butterflies or bees, are beneficial for pollination. Another farming method is multi-crop farming, which naturally deters pests. In nature, if there's one type of pest, there must be another type to prey on them. When we use insecticides or pesticides, we disrupt this delicate balance, potentially allowing one type of pest to dominate

Inchara Shanthappa

beans, all in the same area. Since the beds are raised, we don't see any threat of water logging even during heavy rains," said Divya.

The two young women lament humanity's disconnect from nature, advocating for a return to sustainable living. They urged people to compost kitchen waste and embrace biodegradability, emphasising the need to live in harmony

with nature. With proper planning and commitment, they believe every Goan family can cultivate a small plot of land like theirs, which is only 10 sq metres, grow up to 20 different vegetables, and enjoy fresh produce all year-round. "One doesn't need a large farm to be a farmer; every Goan can cultivate their own land and reap the rewards," they quip.



“The soil's water holding capacity should resemble that of a sponge, which is why earthen pots filled with water have been placed in the nursery bed. These pots serve the purpose of maintaining soil moisture without wastage. Plants only require a certain amount of water; excess water evaporates. To conserve water effectively, we've placed earthen pots in the bed. This allows plant roots to sense water, absorbing only what they need. Especially in peak summer months with limited water, this technique ensures the bed remains fresh and healthy without the need for frequent watering

Divya Ravichandran

TOUGH BOSS, SHINY BUSINESS:

How Josephine D'Souza turned her humble car wash into a local landmark in Mapusa

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MAPUSA: When Josephine D'Souza took over her husband's small car and bike wash in the late 1990's, she did not have much experience running a business - but as a mother of five young children, she knew how to get things done.

In 1991, her husband, Sylvester D'Souza had started the car wash in a small shed opposite the Football Ground in Mapusa, with meagre savings from his years working as a defence mechanic in Muscat. A few years later, Sylvester fell ill, and passed away. "When my husband passed, I could not sit at home and feel sad about it, I had five children to raise," says Josephine, in a matter-of-fact way.



Today, Josephine is 72 years old, and her once-humble carwash, 'Good Shine Elma' (named after her daughter), is now a shiny, swanky enterprise with a workforce of around 20, which also offers a wide range of detailing services for high-end vehicles. Josephine is still the matriarch, showing up at work every day, interacting with customers and dealing with persistent problems of finding and training workers.

"She truly is a tough lady, with an iron will. There are many times when I get tired, I give up when many things go wrong. But she never shies away from a difficult situation

“If you start a business you can stand on your own feet, you don't have to be under anyone, you can be your own boss. I have struggled a lot to reach this position. Over the years, many people approached me, asking for this space on rent, offering me a lot of money. I told them off, saying I will run this business for as long as I can, and then my son will take over

Josephine D'Souza

or conversation," says Elly, Josephine's only son. After a stint in the UK, Elly returned to Goa eight years ago, to help his mother with the car wash business. "Things were quite difficult for her after my dad passed away - mum somehow managed everything - took care of us, cooked for us, ensured that we studied well, dropped and picked us up from school when she could, along with running a physically-demanding business. She is truly remarkable," says Elly. Josephine on the other hand credits her son for expanding the business.

The five siblings - Elly and his four sisters - also pitched in to wash cars after school and on holidays. "We were one of the first to provide this service at a time when there were hardly any cars on Goa's streets. I remember charging Rs 13 per car wash," he reminisces fondly. Today, their services

have expanded to include tyre work, ceramic coating, pricey polishing jobs, scratch-resistant wraps and the like, which sometimes cost upwards of a lakh. "And we have the clientele who want to take good care of their luxury cars and motorbikes. We are busy all the time but mum always has a handle on things," says Elly.

"If you start a business you can stand on your own feet, you don't have to be under anyone, you can be your own boss. Even after my husband's death, I managed to educate all my kids well - I sent my eldest daughter to London to study MBA and she now works for the government in London. My youngest daughter is also abroad, in Australia, and my son also worked overseas before coming to join me. I trust them to keep 'Good Shine Elma' in sparkling shape always, I am happy now," she signs off.

From Rosalina Cardozo's farm to Pedrina

Gomes' table: This aunt and niece duo support their families selling fresh produce in Raia

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RAIA: Raia is a quaint village situated around four km east from the district headquarters of Margao. As one passes by the road leading to Ráchol, through the 'Coleam Dongor' in Raia, one cannot miss the wizened little woman seated on a chair with a few vegetables on the table in front of her. This is Pedrina Gomes who greets every customer with a warm smile and farm-fresh produce. Pedrina sets up her small little stall every morning at 8. She then goes home for lunch at 2 pm to return at 3 pm and keeps her little stall open until 8 pm. "I began selling vegetables about 40 years ago," she says. "It's good that I live very close to my stall, otherwise there would have been an additional expense of travel," adds Pedrina.

Downplaying her sales acumen, Pedrina credits her aunt Rosalina Cardozo, as the driving force behind their small business. "She is the woman behind the success you see placed here on this table," she says. "I only assist in selling what my mother's sister Rosalina grows in her field, sitting here along the roadside," she adds. On striking a conversation with Rosalina, who is also in her 60's like her niece, she shyly explains that she cultivates two pieces of land: one situated in Raia and the other in Ráchol.

“We grow crops like radish (mullo), red spinach (tambdi bhaji), string beans (virvil), and white sweet potato (dovim pos-kongam) for sale, while chillies are grown in a small quantity only for home use

Rosalina Cardozo

However, both these pieces of land are cultivated only once during the year. "We grow crops like radish (mullo), red spinach (tambdi bhaji), string beans (virvil), and white sweet potato (dovim pos-kongam) for sale, while chillies are grown in a small quantity only for home use," she said. Rosalina is dependent only on tap water for irrigation with no other means available.

able at her disposal, thus adding to cultivation costs. She adds that she has no one who could go door-to-door with her produce and must solely depend on sales happening at her little stall along the road. There are days when not a single bundle of vegetable is sold, rues Rosalina. The tough old farmer manages both her fields independently, without any kind of help from anyone. "Earlier, we would use dried leaf ash and goat/pig droppings as manure. The ash was first sieved using a bamboo sieve to make it free of any rubble and only then used as a manure," explained Rosalina. "I do not use any synthetic pesticides," she says.

Back in the day, she would use traditional bull-drawn ploughs to prepare her field for cultivation, but now due to lack of ploughing manpower and rise in expenses, she cultivates her field manually without any modern or mechanised techniques.



Pedrina Gomes

Isaac Furtado's rise from barback to business owner is a cocktail of ambition, determination and Goan flair

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MARGAO: When Isaac Furtado started out as a struggling 'freelance' bartender, he already knew he would one day own a company and create employment for others like him. It was just a matter of focus and hard work, says the driven 29-year-old, who is today a mixologist in demand, managing his own hospitality start-up with a team of ten bartenders and barbacks.

The journey, however, wasn't easy, as employment opportunities were not plentiful in and around Curtorim, where Isaac hails from.

"Everyone around me was going abroad, to work on the ship, or in the UK/Gulf, and I also wanted to go. However, my mom was dead set against sending me overseas - she emotionally blackmailed me, telling me how hard life was and how I would feel homesick, and so, I stayed here. And I'm glad I did," chuckles Isaac, who has been working since he was 15.

Recalling his teenage years,



Isaac and team

Isaac says he used to take up odd jobs for catering companies just to earn pocket money. "The pay was only Rs 200, but I would walk from Maina-Curtorim to Loutolim and back in the night, for that sum. The first time I went, they gave me an entire sack of onions to peel, and I did it with great enthusiasm. I eventually got sick of the onions and jumped to the bar section, where I would help with prep," reminisces Isaac.

The idea of setting up a 'mobile cocktail bar' for events was sparked first during a wedding catering job, where a mobile bar team was called in from North Goa. His clients explained that nobody in the South district offered

such services, and this immediately piqued his interest. After completing his studies in catering and hotel management at St Alex Higher Secondary School, Curtorim, Isaac began to work in the hotel industry, and at various bars and shacks on the coastal belt. He kept updating his skill by watching videos on YouTube and later did a diploma in mixology.

Ironically, Isaac has given up alcohol and spends the little free time he gets in the gym.

Starting with uncertain prospects and scant knowledge of his potential earnings, Isaac floated his company, 'The Ideal Bartender' in 2017, taking the plunge into entrepreneurship solo. With



nothing more than a box of ingredients, bar tools, cutting board and glassware strapped to his bike, he traversed the length and breadth of Goa, catering to events ranging from birthdays to christenings. "I didn't even have a table; I'd rely on customers to bring the alcohol and decorations for my makeshift setups," he reminisces.

The early days were a blur of logistical hurdles and financial struggles.

As his clientele grew, Isaac juggled the roles of bartender, event manager, and logistical coordinator single-handedly. He then employed other young like-minded youth with the enthusiasm to work, and trained them not just in mixology, but also to build a rap-

port with guests.

"Being a bartender is more than just pouring drinks; it's a blend of artistry, hospitality, and sheer hard work," he says with a grin. "Guests today are keen to know what goes into their drinks, and part of the job is to explain to them the spirit's qualities, the techniques we use - all while mixing their cocktail," says Isaac.

"Speed is also of essence - you should never keep a thirsty guest waiting," he adds.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic dealt a crippling blow to Isaac's event-centric business model. Forced to adapt, he diversified his revenue streams by leveraging social media to promote his company and putting out cocktail tutorial videos. "Innovation is key to staying afloat in a competitive

“Being a bartender is more than just pouring drinks; it's a blend of artistry, hospitality, and sheer hard work. Guests today are keen to know what goes into their drinks, and part of the job is to explain to them the spirit's qualities, the techniques we use and other interesting tidbits - all while mixing their cocktail

Isaac Furtado

landscape," Isaac reflects.

A master multi-tasker, Isaac also works behind the bar at a popular beach shack, juggling both business and job with flair, while also finding time to impart training and treating his team of 10 - which includes a female bartender - to excursions on off-days. "Four people who worked under me, now have their own cocktail bars. They also come and help me from time to time, whenever I need an extra hand," he adds.

"Now, my start-

up isn't merely about cocktails and mocktails, it's about curating unforgettable experiences," he asserts proudly, describing how his team goes beyond the bar counter to be 'party-starters', hyping up guests with dances and cocktail samples, making every event memorable.

