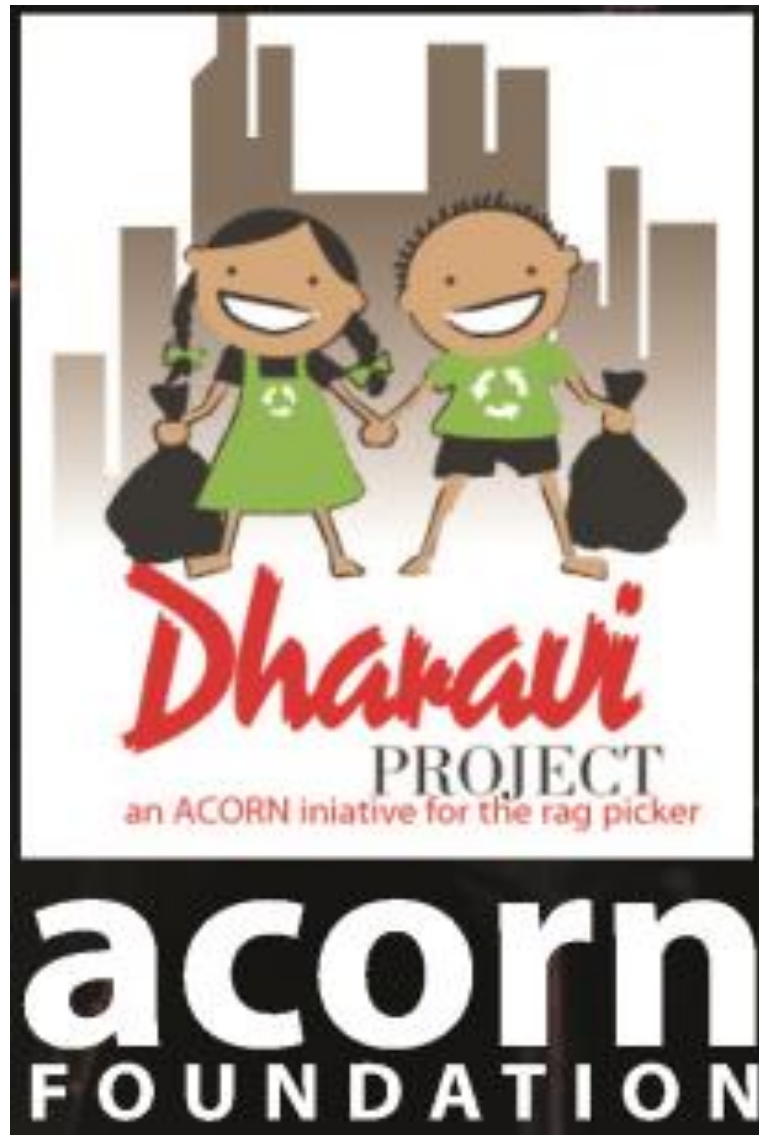




**ACORN FOUNDATION (INDIA) &
WOMENS' RESEARCH AND ACTION
GROUP (WRAG)
ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21**





Letter from the Director

Dear Supporters,

At the outset, I would like to thank you all for your continued belief and aid; ensuring ACORN Foundation could make a positive and substantial impact on the lives of the people of Dharavi.

The year 2020-21 has been a challenging one. With the lockdown in place and the residents of Dharavi, incomeless and unable to afford even basic necessities such as food, medicines and soap, the ACORN representatives and volunteers within the community struggled to find a way to support the people of their neighbourhood, especially its most vulnerable.

At such a testing time, ACORN volunteers -- adults and youth -- rose to the challenge. They activated their network to first identify the families most in need and document their stories. Next, they utilised all means available to deliver dry rations and hygiene necessities to over 360 families for a continuous period of seven months. In addition, to support those without the means to cook food, ACORN volunteers distributed over 75,000 ready-meals twice a day, daily.

Today, past the worst phase of the lockdown, our leaders, youth and children within the Dharavi community have taken the necessary measures to ensure the safe restarting of the community centre. The children are back to learning English, updating digital skills and creating art in the form of music, paintings and films. Their initiative, motivation and perseverance has made me believe that our efforts will carry on to make an impact and be the voice of change in the community through them. Our children have also gone on to shoot a video, to share with the world what the Dharavi Rocks Band stands for. Laxmi Kamble, our community centre manager, has been featured in the *Washington Post*, shedding light on the plight of her people during the Lockdown.

The ACORN Foundation India and WRAG 2020-21 Annual Report captures the journey, efforts and stories of our leaders and community network (parents, children and volunteers); who together survived the Covid-19 Lockdown. After more than a decade's work, this perhaps, was our most important and humane engagement with the people of Dharavi.

Adv. Vinod Shetty
Hon. Director & Founder
ACORN Foundation India

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About us: ACORN Foundation India

Founded in 2008, ACORN Foundation India is a non-profit organization and registered charity trust in Mumbai. Founded in 2008, under the leadership of Advocate Vinod Shetty and trusted volunteers, ACORN launched the 'Dharavi Project'. An initiative for the welfare of ragpickers/recyclers and their families in 'Dharavi'.

One of the first projects undertaken by ACORN was producing a documentary on the lives of young ragpickers/recyclers in the Dharavi area. The film "WASTE" was directed by Parasher Baruah and over the last 10 years, has screened in over 75 colleges, schools & institutions of Mumbai and viewed by over 100,000 people. Thus began ACORN's journey as a platform supporting and propagating the 'voices for change and progress' of the people of Dharavi.

In 2009, ACORN started a community centre in Dharavi with its own resources to serve as an office, recycling centre, library, studio and school for the community. Then, in 2017, as part of the Lab 13 project supported by the British Academy, ACORN collaborated with artists and academics- Mr. Ben Parry, of the University of Bath Spa (UK), Mr. Graham Jeffery, of the University of the West of Scotland, Ms. Sharmila Samant and the late Mr. Tushar Joag, of Shiv Nadar University, to start an Innovation Lab in Dharavi. The lab's aim is to expose and train the children and youth of ACORN in cutting-edge digital technology such as 3D printing, robotics and computer graphics along with humanities and art.

ACORN is also conducting classroom activities with children between 10-14 years at the Xavier's Technical Institute. Along with this, the ACORN Football Club, started a decade back, trains community children professionally in football at the Xavier Institutes football field. The ACORN football teams have even participated in junior football tournaments across the city.

For more information visit: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x41s6ju>

Currently, the Dharavi Project is educating more than 150 children in the Dharavi area in its informal classrooms and its multi-media community centre. Offering training in music, 3D printing and robotics, spoken English, short filmmaking and fine arts.

In addition, the Foundation has been spearheading efforts to inculcate civic and environmental consciousness in schools (The American School, The Dhirubhai Ambani School, The Oberoi International School, and The German School) and office establishments (including Bloomberg, Marsh Insurance, and Amazon). So far, it has reached out to over 50,000 students and employees through various waste management campaigns. As part of its initiative, the Foundation also sources, collects and segregates dry waste from schools and offices on a regular basis and recycles it in Dharavi, ensuring a livelihood for the recyclers.

Finally, as part of its outreach program, ACORN plays host to many academics, researchers, artists, international students, and volunteers from universities and schools. ACORN has also been the subject of many research projects and documentary film projects from all over the world.

Dharavi Rocks

One major element of this Project has been the formation of a junk band, 'Dharavi Rocks'. At any given time it consists of 30 to 35 children between the ages 14 and 25. In the last 12 years, more than 5,000 boys and girls have received training in music from popular Indian musicians including Suneeta Rao, Shankar Mahadevan and Rajeev Raja and bands like Agni; and International musicians visiting Mumbai, such as, Sowetto Kinch, Apache Indian, Jane Aurora and numerous others have conducted workshops for the youth. As of 2021, the band has performed in more than 200 shows all over India, and in the UK. Some band members have acted in films and television shows and performed and recorded professionally with the top musicians of the country (i.e Yashraj Films *Hitchki* with Rani Mukherjee, TV shows i.e IPL, Big Boss, NDTV cleanathon with Shri Amitabh Bachchan). In addition, as part of their skill-training and the livelihood project, Dharavi Rock band members have been training & mentoring students in the schools in Dharavi in music. The success story of the Dharavi Rocks Band has highlighted the role that music can play in giving the youth a voice, and a platform opening up avenues to multiple livelihood streams within the creative arts.

For more information visit: <http://www.dharaviproject.org/> and <http://ACORNfoundation.in>; <https://youtu.be/Smu0JsvyEsk>; https://youtu.be/h_rBQsnulXM

Promoter Organization: Women's Research & Action Group (WRAG)

The Woman's Research & Action Group (WRAG) is a non-profit organization and registered charitable trust having 80g and FCRA registration. All donations to WRAG are exempted from 50% tax.

WRAG was founded in the year 1993 by a prominent group of women academics and researchers led by Adv. Vahida Nainar and Dr. Vibhuti Patel. The objective of this research and advocacy group is to work to create a gender-just and secular society. The organization aims to protect the social and legal status of women and youth especially those from the most vulnerable sections of society, ensuring that a woman regardless of her class, caste, and ethnic identity has an opportunity to fulfil her potential. Towards these objectives, WRAG partners with movements, networks and community-based organisations such as ACORN.

For more information visit: <https://www.slideshare.net/VibhutiPatel/womens-research-action-group-wrag-mumbai-report-of-activities-201014>

Affiliation:



ACORN International, founded in 2004, serves to support local community-based organisations across the developing world. Currently working directly and in affiliation in over 15 countries including India. Working to trigger change at the grassroot level by empowering the community through a democratic approach. ACORN Foundation India is a community-based organisation, affiliated with ACORN International; and focuses on empowering the ragpickers/recyclers community within Dharavi.

For more information visit: <http://ACORNinternational.org/>



ACORN's Work in Dharavi

Vision & Purpose

In the last 12 years, the Dharavi Project's vision and purpose has evolved, from supporting ragpickers/recyclers and their families; to supporting the intellectual development and actively guide the livelihood pathways for the youth in Dharavi; to eventually giving the youth of Dharavi a voice through music.

Today, it is at the stage of creating **leadership within the community.**

The evolved vision and purpose is based on the belief that **'vulnerability creates the best leaders.'** For such leaders are not only empathetic, compassionate and hardworking, they also know what it means to be at the bottom. Their lived experience, of having survived and reached leadership positions makes them the best mentors for the next generations. 'They are the change they want to see in the world.'

Whether it is the Dharavi Rocks band members imparting music training to youth in the Dharavi schools, or Laxmi Kamble, a single mother, from Dharavi who is now the lead manager of the ACORN community centre, or the children who are part of the ACORN community, who hope to grow up and start their own development initiatives, ACORN Foundation is training and mentoring tomorrows **'Leaders for Change'**.

After 12 years of hard work, today, ACORN is a foundation **"by the people, of the people and for the people of Dharavi."**



The Covid-19 Hunger Project



The Situation

On 25th March 2020, to prevent the spread of Covid-19, India instituted one of the strictest lockdowns in the world. Dharavi was a major focus in the Covid-19 response in Mumbai. It was feared that the virus would spread like wildfire through the dense population; controlling the virus' spread in Dharavi and similar localities was key to winning the battle against Covid-19.

With people living in cramped housing, accessible through narrow lanes, and using community toilets, concepts such as physical distancing are a luxury in a place like Dharavi. It was also unreasonable to expect people to wear masks in the heat and harsh climatic conditions. The residents of Dharavi were subjected to particularly severe treatment and confined to their homes. Barricades were put up at the end of lanes, and those who stepped out of their houses often faced lathi charges by the police.

The nationwide-lockdown and closure of small business deprived the residents of all work, whether as staff in offices, or household work, or self-employed as taxi drivers, small vendors, and other manual labourers. Without an income, many residents who were migrants, post the halt on transportation across the country, walked back to their villages. They chose to walk back 'kms' to be home rather than starve in the city. However, the long-term residents of Dharavi, many of whom live a hand-to-mouth existence, were left locked in with no source of income to pay for food and other basic needs; dependent on government to provide these necessities. At a time as such, the ACORN volunteers within Dharavi, took it upon themselves to find solutions and support the vulnerable members of their community.

The Initiative

During the Covid-19 lockdown, the inhabitants of Dharavi were left jobless and access-less to income. Without which, meeting their daily needs such as food and hygiene in Covid times, became a cause of anguish. ACORN Foundation's volunteers faced with this crisis in their community, got together with a single mission – to provide food to the most vulnerable in Dharavi (from March to October 2020).

Measures Adopted

- The Foundation delivered supplies of dry rations (packets that included wheat, rice, oil, pulses, potatoes, onions and spices, sufficient for a family of four for 15 days) and hygiene products (including soap, disinfectants, sanitizers, sanitary napkins).
- Provisions were sourced from nearby shops, transported to the ACORN office by cab-drivers from Dharavi, made into packages at the office, and distributed by ACORN volunteers navigating the narrow gullies on motorcycles to reach rooms deep inside the settlement. Volunteers sometimes faced harassment from police for breaking curfew. They also faced personal risks.
- Households in need were identified by the volunteers using their networks. Provisions were delivered on a rotational-basis (every 15 days) daily (seven days a week), to 30 households each day for a continuous period of seven months. A record was kept of all deliveries and identification documents in order to maintain a continuous supply of provisions, and to avoid repetitions within the rotation cycles, ensuring maximum outreach.
- For those without the means to cook, the team delivered ready-to-eat food packs consisting of vegetables, dal and chapatis, twice a day. Over the seven-month period, ACORN distributed over 75,000 cooked meals. In addition, to keep the spirit going, the team distributed sweets during the festivals of Eid and Diwali.

The People Whose Lives We Touched



Ujan Shaikh a waste segregator, waiting for the economy to reopen and supporting her family on INR 150/- a day. Unable to pay rent and dependent on finding avenues to borrow money



Gita Waghela is a resident of Dharavi for 15 years. Her son lost his job owing to lockdown. They have no income to pay the rent and are waiting for businesses to resume to support themselves.



Mohammad Sheikh lost his job working at a restaurant and received no assistance from his employers despite government and state regulations requiring the payment of daily wages



Saipan Shaikh a 58-year-old daily wage earner who has lived in Dharavi for 4 decades. Living without an income since the lockdown.



RAIN
MUD
SUNDAY

FOOTBALL

dharaviproject.org

Key Activities Resume

Despite All Odds!

Compound 13 Lab

**Music &
Celebrations**

Despite All Odds



The Initiative

In October 2020, the reported Covid-19 cases started to drop, the lockdown eased, and the barricaded life of Dharavi residents started coming to an end. On the insistence of eager ACORN children and the Dharavi Rocks band members, the ACORN team then started working on plans to restart classes while ensuring:

- Physical distancing,
- Provision of hygienic conditions (clean water for drinking and hand washing, soap, sanitizers, etc.),
- Access to educators at minimum risk, and
- Access to nutritious food to the students.

Measures Adopted

- To meet the above conditions, the ACORN community centre was upgraded with smart TVs, computers, and high-speed wi-fi network.
- The Art and English-speaking classes were immediately restarted with the instructors delivering the lectures online. Students attended the classes in batches of approximately 12 to ensure following of physical distancing norms.
- Eventually, the drumming and music training too were restarted, but in person, by an in-house ACORN leader, Sandip Mondal.
- By November end, the centre also started hosting in-person film-making classes, training the children to conduct interviews, identify problems and develop documentaries (to be the voice of their people; an initiative also part of Lab 13).
- Lastly, a trained artist (Priyanka Khatri) conducted an art and music workshop for the children, where the children let loose their creativity and painted to the beats played on drums made of recycled plastic. The workshop too was conducted on two separate days in batches of approximately 12 students per class to ensure physical distancing.

The ACORN community centre is now back to functioning fulltime. Classes are held for a total of about 50 children (divided into 2 batches) from 4 to 6 pm, Monday to Friday (after school hours); and 12-5 pm on Saturday and Sunday.

Compound 13 Lab



The Initiative

As part of the Lab 13 project supported by the British Academy, ACORN collaborated with Mr. Ben Parry, of University of Bath Spa, Mr. Graham Jeffery, of the University of the West of Scotland, Ms. Sharmila Samant and the late Mr. Tushar Joag, of Shiv Nadar University, to start an Innovation Lab in Dharavi.

As a space for experimental design and learning, our programme introduces design and media tools, audio-visual technologies, 3D design, and digital fabrication to disadvantaged, marginalised citizens who because of their socio-economic status do not normally have access to these resources. The materials and resources of Mumbai's recycling industry are the starting point for learning and teaching about ecological design and living solutions.

At the Lab, young minds are placed at the centre of their own learning. They co-design and develop a 'living curriculum' that responds to their issues, addresses their needs, and aids their future goals. Through a programme of workshops and residencies by artists, scientists, engineers, and designers, the lab shares tools and technologies with the children of Dharavi.

For more information visit: <https://www.compound13.org/>

Workshops 2020

List of events C13 Lab 2020-2021

- January 2020 Ian Dawson Residency- Rethinking Waste (<http://www.iandawsonstudio.com/compound-13-lab-residency.html>)
- February 2020, Sharmila Samant, Flamingo Man

COVID-19 Lockdown (March-October 2020)

- December 2020, Amol Lalzare workshop (ongoing)
- January 2021 Beginning of online art classes (ongoing)

The Covid-19 situation also affected Lab 13 activities. The 'Flamingo Man' was an initiative in which local visually challenged craftsmen from Delhi travelled to Dharavi to craft a larger-than life size flamingo out of recycled waste to be displayed at a recycled-waste art event. The initiative was started towards the end of February but could not get completed due to the beginning of lockdown restrictions. The ACORN team supported the craftsmen who stayed at the community centre, and later helped them return to their home by train just before travel halted.

Following the criteria of physical distancing and hygiene provisions, and in collaboration with the ACORN community centre, workshops were restarted online and in person in December 2020. The currently active workshops are being hosted by:

- Amol Lalzare, filmmaker and community correspondent, has been conducting workshops on citizen journalism at C13 Lab, around the issues of healthcare, housing, and waste management in Dharavi, with the young students at ACORN Foundation;
- Vrishali Purandare, an art practitioner, has been facilitating art classes for children from Dharavi and Mahim, exploring the idea of place-based learning;
- Vinesh Nair, drummer of MH 15 the band, conducts weekly drumming workshops with the children, and
- Anushree Chatterji, a psychotherapist and artist associated with ACORN foundation for the last 8 years, currently facilitates weekly drawing and painting workshops with the students.

Music & Celebrations Continue



The Initiative

Last but not the least, in the spirit of Dharavi, the ACORN community centre continues to celebrate the efforts of its leaders, volunteers and children. Though it was unable to throw the annual Christmas-New Year party, the centre hosted a get-together for the children.



Overall Impact

Over 75,000 ready meals distributed

Over 360 families provided daily ration for 7 months

Digitalization of ACORN Community Centre- 2 Smart TVs installed

Conducted over 50 educational workshops online & in person to continue the education of ~50 children



Bloomberg
Equality
Summit

Data driven. Designed for action.

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Media Coverage & Achievements

ACORN continues to be a platform voicing the needs of Dharavi and its people, shedding light on their struggles, needs and achievements, sharing their joys, their stories, and their lives.

- Our very own Laxmi Kamble features in Bijal Vachharajani and Radha Rangarajan's book *10 Indian Champions Who are Fighting to Save the Planet*.
(<https://www.firstpost.com/living/in-10-indian-champions-who-are-fighting-to-save-the-planet-stories-of-pragmatism-amid-climate-change-8748011.html>)
- Shedding light on the Dharavi Lockdown, ACORN India founder Vinod Shetty speaks with BBC
(<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3csz7xz>)
- ACORN features in the *Washington Post*.
(https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/dharavi-coronavirus-india-slums-mumbai/2020/05/11/beb2a4fe-8e1b-11ea-9322-a29e75effc93_story.html)
- Followed by a performance by the Dharavi Rocks Band, Sandip Mondal, lead drummer and trainer at ACORN, shares his story at the Bloomberg Equality Summit; accompanied by founder Vinod Shetty
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6tIFsj_75c&list=PLk_dRJVyaR2wQ1KmKOtWBoVp2eTiHxwDL&index=10)
- A film documenting the lives of the children part of the Dharavi Rocks Band (<https://youtu.be/Smu0JsvyEsk>)

Kamble, a single mother with a determined air, noted the total and her team returned on motorbikes bearing supplies. For those with the means to cook, they hand out rice and lentils. For others, there are packets of prepared food – spiced vegetables, cooked lentils, chapatis. They come back again in the evening.

The supplies are for the most desperate, Kamble said, but there are always more people than packets, jostling and asking for help. "There is always a feeling of fear," she said. "We cannot feed them all."



The helping hands of our society need your help now!

As the world around the COVID-19 pandemic grows, the lives of a large number of families in Dharavi have been shaken up. At this great hour of need, The Acorn Foundation stepped in to provide food support to such families in Dharavi and to help them take supply of meals in the absence of employment opportunities. Help us to fight the coronavirus pandemic by helping...



Following

@acornindia

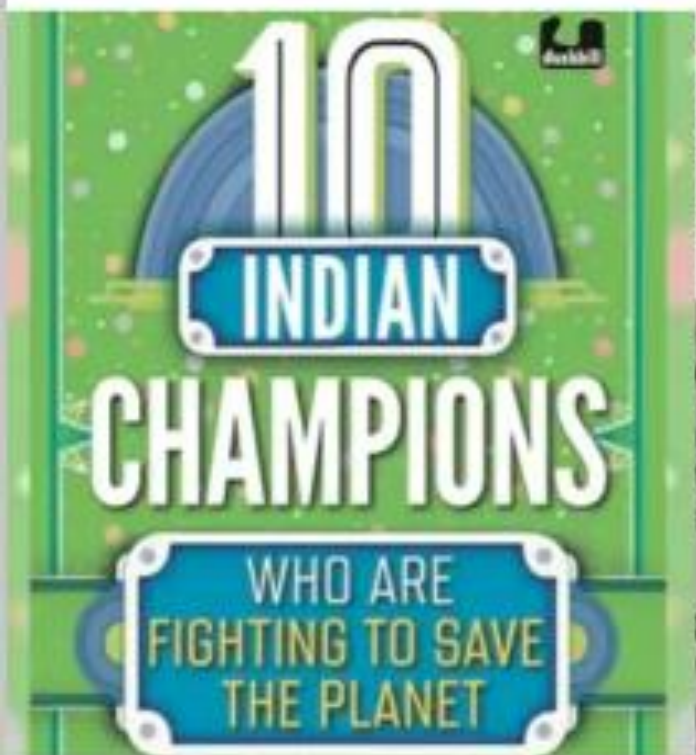
@acornindia1

Acorn Foundation runs the Dharavi Project in Mumbai. The Project utilises artists to change the living conditions of over 100,000 'rag-pickers' in the city.

Mumbai dharavi-project.org Joined January 2020

50 Following 50 Followers

Not followed by anyone you're following



@acornindia @acornindia1 - Sep 23, 2020

We are honoured to have Laxmi Kamble of @acornindia1 #DharaviRocks feature in @bijal_y & Radha Rangarajan's book: 10 Indian Champions Who Are Fighting to Save the Planet firstpost.com/living/in-10-i-...



Social Media Presence

To stay updated on the work of ACORN Foundation India's leaders, volunteers, children (Dharavi Rocks Band) in their neighbourhoods in Dharavi-

- Follow us on: <https://twitter.com/ACORNIndia1>

- Visit our website: www.dharaviproject.org

- Subscribe to our YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMbAnsSRq0_0ZK6ncHTA

[HBw](#)

- Contact us at: dharaviproject@gmail.com

ACORN Partners



Bloomberg



WRAG-ACORN Team



Laxmi Kamble, ACORN Centre Lead



Sandip Mondal, Dharavi Rocks Trainer



Ainul Jamal Sheik, Field Staff Recycling



Kattyayani Tushar Joag, Lab 13 Manager

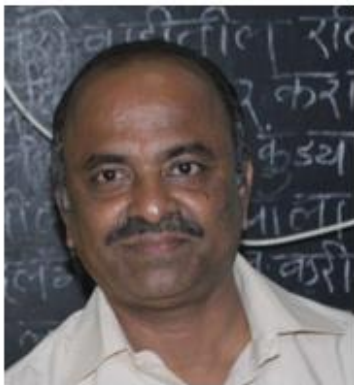
WRAG-ACORN Team



Adv. Ketaki Rege, Legal Advisor & Trustee



Leena K.K., Accounts Manager



Suryakant Monde, Office Assistant

ACORN Volunteers



Keya Aarti, Website Designer



Sameer Khedekar, Tech Leader



Priyanka Khatri, Strategy Advisor & Content Lead

ACORN Trainers



Sunita C Bhagatjee, Volunteer Educator



Vinesh Nair, Dharavi Rocks Trainer



Anushree Chaterji, Art Trainer



Amol Lalzare, Citizen-Journalism Workshop Facilitator

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- **Suresh Kadashan**
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THANK YOU!

