

From Leaf to Sip: An Entrepreneurial Opportunity from Coconut Waste

KID: 20250211



Every time we take a sip from a plastic straw, we are a little aware that this is going to add to a global crisis. What if the solution to this was lying on the way we walk – literally? Yes, in the quiet corners of Southern India, where fallen coconut leaves were crunched unnoticed underfoot and left for compost, today they are building the blocks of a straw that bends, not breaks, that help the environment sustain itself and provide jobs to underprivileged women. This is the story of a Sustainable entrepreneur and the venture Sunbird Straws, born from an opportunistic sight.



Plastics have become an integral part of modern life. According to the UNEP Report, 2024, annually, 19-23 million tonnes of plastic waste enter the aquatic ecosystem, harming marine life.

Sunbird Straws is a Bengaluru-based enterprise founded in 2020 by Prof Saji Verghese, an English Professor at Christ University, Bengaluru, whose quest to combine environmental protection with community impact led him from the classroom into the realm of agro-waste innovation. The opportunistic sight started with a trigger while conversing with a visiting gentleman from the Netherlands, who commented that single-use plastic straws are a scourge to the environment. The next day, while taking a routine walk, the sight of a naturally curled coconut leaflet immediately suggested its potential as a drinking straw, a moment of opportunistic observation. He gathered a few dried coconut leaflets; here, his kitchen became his experimental lab. This means-driven experimentation marked the beginning of sustainable innovation.



Entrepreneurship commences with the recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Further, this experiment revealed the leaflets' natural wax coating conferred Entrepreneurship

commences with the recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Further, this experiment revealed the leaflets' natural wax coating conferred hydrophobic and antifungal properties, enabling the production of biodegradable drinking straws that remain structurally sound in liquids for at least four hours. Dr. Verghese recognized the abundance of coconut leaflets, discarded by nature and unexploited as a sustainable raw material.



In entrepreneurship, opportunities are the “situations in which new goods, services, raw materials, markets, and organizing methods can be introduced through the formation of new means, ends, or means-ends relationships” (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003).

Sunbird Straws offers an FDA certified alternative to the harmful plastic straws. Prevents the burning of over two million fallen coconut leaves. As Shepherd and Patzelt (2011) emphasised “Sustainable entrepreneurship is focused on the preservation of nature, life support, and community in the pursuit of perceived opportunities to bring into existence future products, processes, and services for gain, where gain is broadly construed to include economic and non-economic gains to individuals, the economy, and society.” Sunbird straws fit this as it has averted approximately 451 kg of CO₂ emissions, while generating sustainable livelihoods for more than 100 women across India's coastal regions.

At the center of entrepreneurship lies the capacity to realize opportunity in places where others overlook. Sunbird teaches us that the strongest businesses are not those that take away but those that give back, the heart of Sustainable Entrepreneurship.



[1] Ms Mantry Priyathees

PhD Scholar

[2] Dr Jayshree Patnaik

Assistant Professor

Department of Entrepreneurship and Management