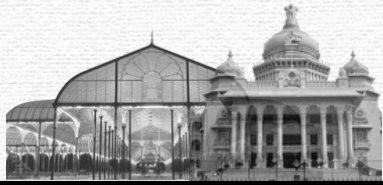




INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY MADRAS  
Office of Alumni and Corporate Relations



# THE **SOCIAL IMPACT** CLUB

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Bengaluru  
Edition

**An IIT Madras Initiative**

**Topic**

**Enabling Abilities: How CSR Can Power  
Tech-Led Ecosystems for the Differently Abled**

**5th June 2025**

**Bengaluru Edition 2 - Report**

## THE SOCIAL IMPACT CLUB

The Social Impact Club is aimed at creating a forum for CSR professionals where key focus areas and challenges faced by the CSR community are discussed, shared, and collaboratively addressed.

### OBJECTIVES

During the Second Bangalore Edition of The Social Impact Club, the CSR leaders joined hands to address these objectives:

- Explore how CSR can contribute to building inclusive, tech-led ecosystems for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)
- Discuss the critical gaps in assistive technology access, R&D, and training
- Highlight collaborative models between academia, corporates, clinicians, and users
- Inspire CSR leaders to move beyond device donations to systemic impact

### MODERATOR

**Prof. Manish Anand:** Faculty member at IIT Madras, Prof. Anand leads research in bio-mechatronics, assistive devices, and inclusive technologies. He moderated the session with an academic lens on co-creation, user-centered innovation, and tech ecosystems that enable persons with disabilities.

### DISCUSSION SUMMARY

#### 1. From Disability to Enablement

The discussion began with a reframing: impairment is a medical condition; disability is imposed by environment. Enabling environments, inclusive tech, and thoughtful infrastructure emerged as key tools for empowerment.

#### 2. Assistive Devices Need Ecosystems, Not Just Donations

Prof. Anand emphasized the gap between device availability and usability. Without customization, training, and maintenance, even well-intended device donations often fail. There's a need for holistic ecosystem-building around assistive technologies.

#### 3. Why Innovation Is Missing in Assistive Tech

Participants discussed why innovation has lagged: fragmented demand, lack of R&D funding, and exclusion of persons with disabilities from design and decision-making. Representation, scale, and business models were identified as key gaps.

#### 4. CSR Should Back Innovation, Not Just Access

From lab to market, assistive innovations need support across the value chain. IIT Madras showcased solutions like robotic rehab devices and standing wheelchairs, emphasizing the role of CSR in scaling high-impact tech beyond pilots.

## INSIGHTS & REFLECTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

### **Meenu Bhambhani, State Street:**

“I first swam in Chicago. The pool had a hoist for wheelchair users—so simple, yet we don’t think of this in India. We must build better here too.”

“It’s not just about access to assistive tech. We must invest in skilling and employment – the goal is full participation, not just rehabilitation.”

### **Sumit Chauhan, Mphasis:**

“Solutions don’t work in isolation. One device can’t serve all terrains or needs. The same user may need multiple solutions depending on context.”

### **Sweety U, Bosch:**

“Captions were once assistive tech—now everyone uses them. That’s the power of universal design: it benefits all, not just the differently abled.”

### **C. Sunil Kumar, Cognizant Foundation:**

“Assistive tech should not be treated as charity—it’s an opportunity for inclusive innovation and real-world problem-solving.”

### **Shalini Jaykrishnan, Wipro BPM:**

“Orthopedic disabilities are comparatively easier to integrate at work. But for the visually impaired or hearing impaired, real innovation is needed to bring them into the mainstream workforce.”

## SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Invest in long-term R&D and co-creation models involving academia, startups, and user communities
- Fund assistive tech pilots, not just donations—back ideas from lab to market
- Support training programs like IITM’s wheelchair skills bootcamps and tele-rehab platforms
- Co-develop accessible infrastructure and universal design solutions
- Create CSR frameworks for multi-year commitments to ecosystem building

## WAY FORWARD

The Bangalore edition of the Social Impact Club sparked deep, solution-driven conversations on inclusion, innovation, and the role of CSR in empowering persons with disabilities. With support from progressive corporate partners, IIT Madras looks forward to co-creating scalable, inclusive technologies that deliver dignity, independence, and opportunity for all.

Two strong recommendations that emerged from participants:

- A) Link assistive technology (AT) proposals to education and skilling components, as these resonate strongly with CSR boards and improve likelihood of funding approval.
- B) Design modular proposals that allow multiple like-minded corporates to fund components independently while contributing to a shared, consortium-style vision.

These insights will inform how IIT Madras structures future collaborations and proposals with industry partners.

**Interested in joining future editions of The Social Impact Club?**

**Write to us at [csrpartner@ia.iitm.ac.in](mailto:csrpartner@ia.iitm.ac.in) to stay connected.**