

SUSTAINABILITY AMBASSADORS GLOBAL EXCHANGE (SAGE) PROGRAM



REPORT
2024

54 STUDENTS | 72 INSTRUCTORS | 162 SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS | 97 ORGANISATIONS | 10 FELLOWS ACROSS 10 INSTITUTES



Introduction

From June to September 2024, the Sustainability Ambassadors Global Exchange (SAGE) Program engaged 24 Master's and early PhD students along with 30 undergraduates in a 20-week endeavour focused on bridging science and technology with societal challenges. The SAGE Senior Ambassadors program is a short-term exchange program (STEP) designed for Indian and Nordic graduate students in various disciplines—social, natural, physical, and engineering sciences—offering an immersive and interactive experience to explore interdisciplinary research related to pressing issues in India. In parallel, the SAGE Junior Ambassadors program includes a proprietary training program in science communication, along with community outreach initiatives.

Both stages of ambassadors participated in a gathering of over 160 network members at the second echo network summit on July 19-20, 2024. On 13th September, the echo network organised the Insight to Impact Showcase, where both Ambassadors shared their research projects and communication plans with all participants and received constructive feedback to refine their projects for greater impact.



SENIOR AMBASSADORS



During the program, I developed skills in holistic problem-solving (systemic approach) and actively listening to end users. As a Project Manager post-SAGE, I am applying these skills in my first project by designing a communication strategy. This involves conducting cross-departmental interviews to understand and address end-user grievances.

*Parth Sharma,
Senior Ambassador 2024*



A total of 24 Indian and international postgraduates, including those currently pursuing or having completed their Master's or early PhD studies, participated in this multi-week summer STEP program, which is an essential part of the echo network's multi-stakeholder Communities of Practice.

In June 2024, students engaged in interactive online discussions with global experts, exploring crucial topics and methodologies related to real-world challenges such as circularity, surveillance, waste management, feedstock, biopackaging, nutrition, production, stewardship, digitalization, and valuation. These discussions were structured around three consortia: One Health, Regenerative Agriculture, and Ecosystem Stewardship, focusing on specific issues identified by the echo network.





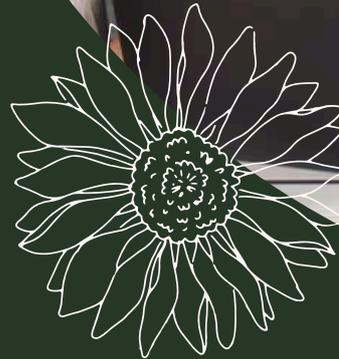
In July 2024, the Senior Ambassadors met for a two-week STEP training and networking experience in Bengaluru, India held at Atria University. During this training, students worked with consortium members, key stakeholders, and local communities through engaging lectures, research-oriented field trips to the Marappanapalya Ward, BR Hills, and MM hills, Tata Institute of Genetics and Society, Atria University and various other activities. During these visits, students engaged directly with communities, allowing them to observe how scientific principles interacted with social factors. This immersive experience enhanced their understanding and facilitated collaborative learning among peers from various disciplines to provide a holistic perspective, integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application.

The training concluded with a Network Summit where students and network members came together to discuss project goals, outputs, expected outcomes and alignments with other projects. They shared their reflections and ideas with mentors and implementation partners, setting the stage for further development. In the final presentation, students including the PhD candidates, Senior Ambassadors, and Junior Ambassadors showcased their ideas and experiences. Throughout the summit, participants worked collaboratively to analyse the projects and formulate strategies in the three key focus areas to address the challenges effectively.



As an extension of the program, Senior Ambassadors acted as peer mentors to the Junior Ambassadors. In the week prior to the summit, both groups met, allowing each Junior Ambassador to receive guidance from a Senior Ambassador in their respective research area. They also conducted additional online sessions to prepare the Junior Ambassadors for their fieldwork. This mentorship facilitated the development of evidence-based talking points, empowering the Junior Ambassadors to effectively engage with their communities.

After the two week in person training concluded, the Senior Ambassadors attended a four-week-long virtual Human Library. In this innovative program component, expert “books” shared experiences from their life stories and observations from the field. Participants had the opportunity to engage with these experts, fostering deeper understanding and connection of important topics of sustainability. This unique format encouraged open dialogue and provided valuable insights of the field and threw light on various challenges and perspectives, enriching the participants' learning journey.



On September 13, the echo network organised the "Showcase: Insight to Impact," an event highlighting the ongoing projects of both Senior and Junior Ambassadors. The Ambassadors presented their research projects and communication plans to a diverse audience during this showcase. The event allowed them to share their findings and provided an opportunity to receive valuable feedback from the echo network members, helping refine their projects for greater impact. This dynamic exchange of ideas and insights reinforced the program's commitment to translating academic research into actionable solutions for real-world challenges and its commitment to Communities of Practice.

I learned to collaborate with people from different disciplines. In my usual circle of Global Health students, I do not usually speak, let alone work together, with people studying biodiversity, conservation, agriculture

Roos Van Der Verde, Senior Ambassadors



JUNIOR AMBASSADORS



As a SAGE Junior Ambassador, I gained invaluable skills in leadership and collaboration while working on impactful community projects. The program empowered me to address real-world issues, fostering my confidence in public speaking and advocacy.

Overall, it deepened my commitment to making a positive difference and inspired me to continue engaging with my community.

Shivam Gupta, Junior Ambassador



The SAGE Junior Ambassadors program included 30 passionate students who participated in an interactive training experience along with a community outreach activity hosted by the Echo Network, Medha Foundation, and Vigyan Shaala. Using a five-step process, this program was designed to leverage the power of trust through our science-based network. These ambassadors shared the issues that their communities faced back home. They learned more about how to address the issues using Science Communication relating to health, waste, agriculture, water circularity, ecosystem services, and sustainable bio-packaging and raised awareness about the topics in their home communities.





During the community activities, local community members shared their current concerns regarding these topics, and the ambassadors responded to those needs with a targeted, evidence-based awareness plan which they made under the guidance of instructors, mentorship from Senior Ambassadors, and insights from diverse network members.

The program consisted of a 4-week course followed by a 6-week independent project for community action. The students were selected from the Medha Foundation and Vigyan Shaala programs after a rigorous selection process, with both programs assisting in course logistics. Junior Ambassadors initially participated in a one-week training program in Bengaluru. Each Junior Ambassador was mentored in Bengaluru by a Senior Ambassador, who helped them understand their research topic.

This in-person session was followed by a 3-week course in science communication that aimed to enable the students to reach out to their communities and create awareness that stimulated direct action to address the issues raised by the community.

This unique program included training in listening to communities, employing inclusive and equitable communication techniques, engaging in storytelling and multilingual media, exploring various communication methods, and creating an effective communication plan. This part of the course was hosted online by the Vigyan Shaala platform, with the Echo Network facilitating course development alongside expert instructors.



During the Insight to Impact Showcase, the Junior Ambassadors received feedback on their communications plants to refine their projects and deepen their community impact. Students then executed their plans in their home communities. This process resulted in the identification of specific community needs that the ambassadors are now tackling through inputs from network experts and community members with targeted actions.



I work with local influencers, craftsmen, musicians, and people from the community. The training I get as a SAGE Ambassador helps me learn how to communicate better and engage with others. This makes it easier for me to collaborate with these different groups and work together on our projects.

Sakshi Bora, Junior Ambassador



Community Action Snapshot: February 2024

Junior ambassadors from the 2023 cohort and The Bisleri International along with the VigyanShaala team organised a two-day awareness campaign in Berinag, Uttarakhand. During this campaign, the students and the team of experts interacted with school children, local business owners, and the Municipality waste picker community to understand their challenges.

The team also met with the local Municipality executive head to understand the gaps in the waste management system of the hill-city and define actions that could be taken to establish a sustainable waste management system in Berinag.



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Network Summit

The in-person component of the SAGE program culminated in a summit held on 19th and 20th July in Bengaluru, which brought together experts and students to engage in meaningful discussions focused on collaboration and knowledge generation. The summit encouraged active feedback, allowing attendees to refine ideas and strategies for the ongoing projects. By connecting diverse perspectives, the summit aimed to strengthen partnerships and enhance the impact of collective efforts toward making Indian communities more sustainable through science and technology.

Key take-aways:

-  Key opportunities for tackling issues in our focus areas.
-  Top project ideas that the echo network can jointly take forward in our Communities of Practice.
-  Discussions on how a collaborative approach towards science and technology can lead to community-based solutions.
-  Refinement of project aims, outcomes, and suggestions for ambassador and PhD fellow inputs to project goals.



SHOWCASE: INSIGHT TO IMPACT



On September 13, the echo network organised the "Insight to Impact Showcase". Ambassadors presented their ongoing research aimed at providing new knowledge for sustainable development related to the echo network's ongoing projects. The showcase also featured two internationally renowned keynote speakers who inspired the next generation of scientists and science communicators, emphasising the importance of building youth capacity for sustainable development and involving citizens in community science for the planet's future.

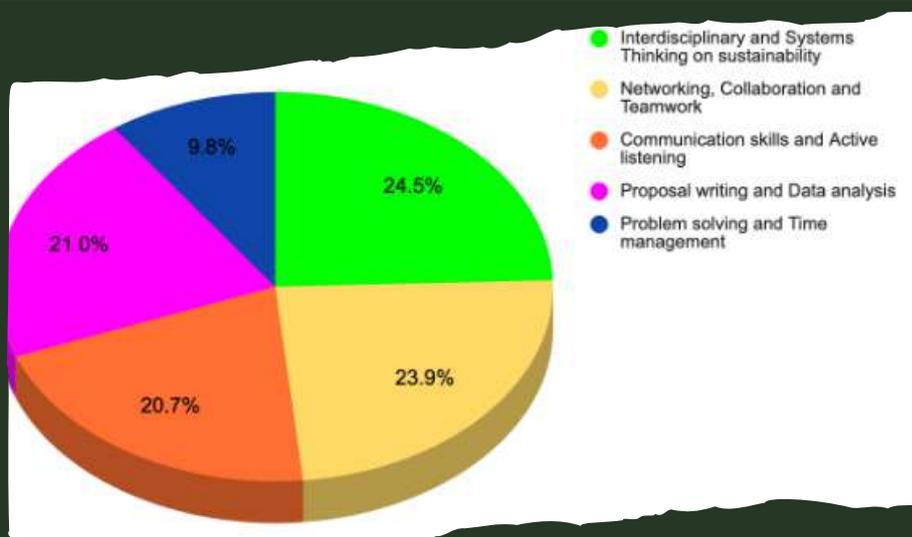
Adopting a Community of Practice approach, the Sustainability Ambassadors received feedback on their projects before completion, in contrast to the traditional academic model that typically provides feedback only after project finalisation. The showcase attracted 115 attendees from eight countries, with participants engaging for over five hours to share feedback on various projects.



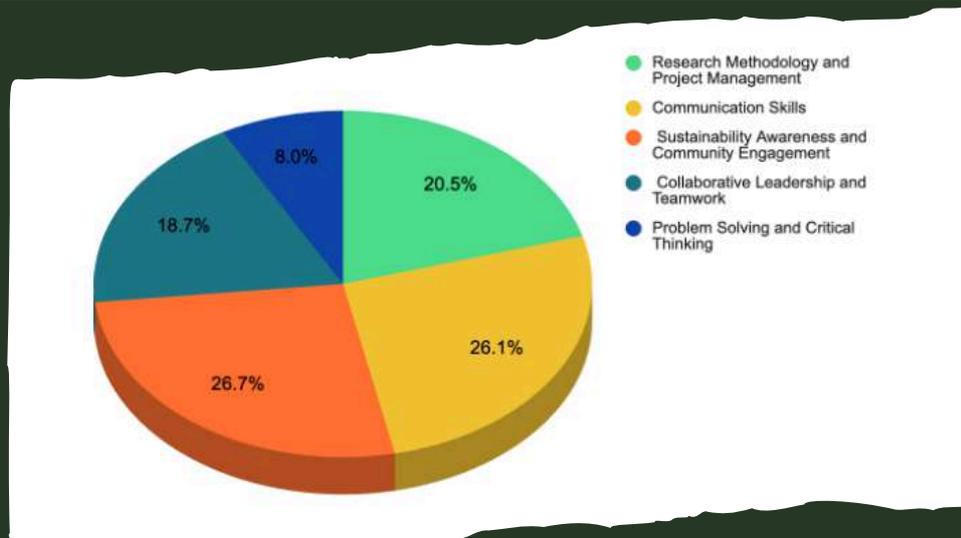
Impact of SAGE on our Ambassadors

We conducted a brief survey with our Ambassadors to assess the impact of SAGE on their experiences.

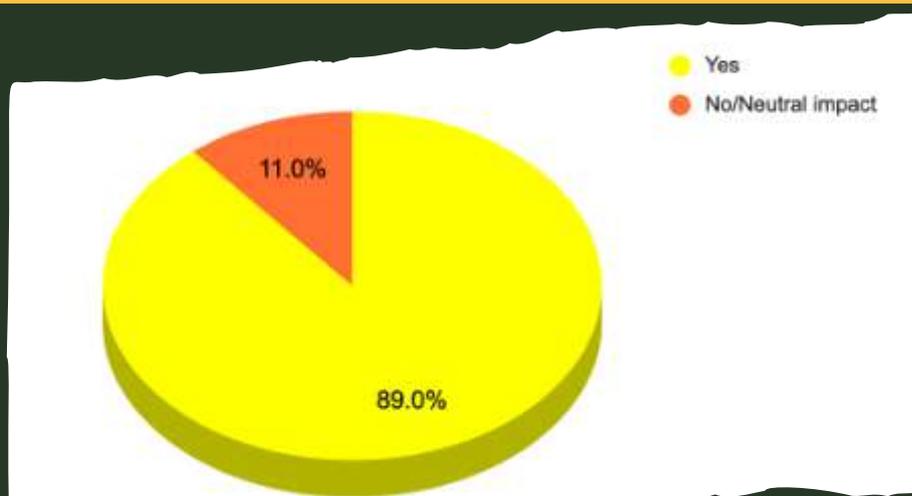
Skills developed by our Senior Ambassadors



Skills developed by our Junior Ambassadors



Career Growth of our Ambassadors



The SAGE Program has greatly enhanced the academic and personal development of both Senior and Junior Ambassadors. By connecting theoretical knowledge with practical application, participants developed essential skills in active listening, communication, systems thinking and interdisciplinary collaboration. The program's blend of immersive fieldwork, interactive training, and community engagement enabled participants to address real-world sustainability issues while fostering empathy and understanding. The diverse perspectives and networking opportunities gained have equipped participants with vital tools for future career success and professional growth. The SAGE program through its participants reinforces a commitment to sustainable development and collective impact across various sectors.

