

# [Startup Bharat] NR Narayana Murthy reveals what it would take for Hubli startups to be No. 1 in India at Sandbox Hubli's Startup Dialogue 2019 event

Hubli entrepreneurs draw notable tech names like NR Narayana Murthy, Gururaj 'Desh' Deshpande, others to this emerging startup hub in North Karnataka

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A vibrant innovation-driven startup ecosystem has until recently been a phenomenon associated only with the large cities of India. But the recent **Startup Dialogue 2019** event at Hubli, North Karnataka was evidence of the thriving environment for innovation beyond the metros, with venerable tech names such as Infosys Co-founder **NR Narayana Murthy** speaking at the event and revealing what it would take for Hubli startups to gain prominence.

Setting the tone for the event organised by the **Deshpande Foundation initiative Sandbox Hubli**, NR Narayana Murthy, told Hubli entrepreneurs and startups during the keynote panel discussion on 'Building in India',

**"The first principle that everybody assembled here has to remember is that it's not what we have but what we do with what we have. The corollary of that is: we have to stop worrying about what we don't have. (Instead of saying) Hubli doesn't have this, Hubli doesn't have that... I think that mindset has to move to, Hubli has so many good things and we will do everything that is necessary to make it even better."**

NR Narayana Murthy was joined by **Gururaj 'Desh' Deshpande**, Founder, Deshpande Foundation, and Indian-American venture capitalist **Ramanan Ramanathan**, Mission Director of Atal Innovation Mission, at the panel moderated by **Shradha Sharma**, Founder and CEO of **YourStory**.



L-R - NR Narayana Murthy, Shradha Sharma, Ramanan Ramanathan and Gururaj Desh Deshpande

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They were among over 30 speakers and close to 800 attendees at Sandbox Hubli's annual Startup Dialogue event, which saw the participation of over 200 startups and many aspiring entrepreneurs.

**"I am amazed at the kind of progress that is taking place here. Desh Deshpande and his team have contributed immensely to Hubli and brought a tremendous sense of confidence to startups assembled here," said NR Narayana Murthy, while speaking about the startups at Sandbox Hubli that are building solutions for social problems.**

While startups are commonplace in a city like Bengaluru, initiatives like Sandbox Hubli are helping startups in smaller towns demonstrate the impact and transformation that social entrepreneurship and innovation can create. To drive the shift from larger cities to smaller cities, organisations like the Deshpande Foundation have been working on building centres like Hubli's Sandbox, which houses a co-working space and labs, hosts events, and conducts mentorship sessions.

Speaking about how a Sandbox is enabling innovation to drive social impact, Desh Deshpande said,

**"The idea is to build an ecosystem that works on larger problems and issues. In some ways, the problems of the rich are boring. The action is going to move where you can make a substantial difference in the lives of people."**

## Sandbox Hubli: solving problems for the people

Entrepreneurs here are excited because they have an opportunity to make something better, added Desh Deshpande, who along with his wife Jaishree Deshpande founded the Deshpande Foundation in 1996. Sandbox Hubli was launched by the Deshpande Foundation in 2007, with the aim of strengthening the local ecosystems, building leaders and entrepreneurs, and catalysing innovation to spur the creation of scalable, sustainable ventures that can deliver significant social and economic impact.

**"I am building a company to change the mindsets, and when you change mindsets, you change the culture," said Desh Deshpande. "Solving problems for the rich is not going to be as meaningful as solving problems for people," he added, something startups in Sandbox Hubli are rightly doing.**

At Sandbox Hubli, one venture, started by audiologists, is building portable hearing testing devices that can save costs by up to 80 percent. Another venture, by an engineer, is building a portable converter to help farmers prevent tractors from catching fire, which can save many lives as well as millions of rupees.

While Sandboxes are a step towards encouraging the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in cities beyond the metros, the real shift will happen when the mindset of the masses changes and you do things outside your comfort zone, said Desh Deshpande and Narayana Murthy.

The real bottlenecks are in our mind, said Narayana Murthy, who quoting Raghunath Mashelkar, added, **"We all fight a battle with our mind, which is our engine of progress and the mindset, which is our engine of dilemmas, fear and doubts."**

It is to bring in this shift in mindset that the government has started the Atal Innovation Mission. According to Ramanan,

"We have resources that are the envy across the world - 1.4 million schools, 10,500 engineering institutions, 150 million students who are entering the workplace and 65 percent of the country is under 35 years. Yet these 150 million students entering the workforce - how do we harness their energies and talents? That is why the Atal Innovation Mission has been set up. We aim to create an ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship across the length and breadth of the country."



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It is important also that young students get the opportunity to tinker with new-age technology in a fun atmosphere of learning to encourage innovation and work on real-world problems.

"They may see problems from their schools to homes and create a solution using 3D printing, IoT devices, AR/VR, do-it-yourself kits," said Ramanan. Over 5,441 schools across the country have been equipped with Atal Tinkering Labs in a year and 2,500 of them are operational, he added.

Parents, he says, play an important role. "Even in the schools, we get parents to see the innovation capability of their children in the innovation labs. It helps them realise their full potential," said Ramanan.

Similarly for Hubli startups to realise their full potential, a change of mindset is crucial among Hubli youth, NR Narayana Murthy said,

**"Remember that Hubli is going to become even cooler than what it is. Not because somebody in Bangalore ordained that Hubli should be this or that, or somebody in Delhi said so. No, that's not the way it happens. The way it happens is because every young man and a young woman assembled here, and perhaps many more outside, will say that we will make Hubli number one in India."**

Ramanan said much is being done to create an ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship. Product challenges are being launched in places like Hubli, where local entrepreneurs solving real problems are immediately connected to commercial buyers.

However, founders and entrepreneurs need to overcome the fear of failing and be open to learning from people around them, the panel said. Deshpande concluded,

**"The more you participate in activities that aren't orchestrated, you broaden your comfort zone and this only makes you more confident, creative and you add more value."**