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## 'E3' challenge incubates biz buzz among the disabled



Turning idea into jobs: Waste flowers from hotels and temples being turned into organic colours.

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**New Delhi, May 4:** Ghazipur district in Uttar Pradesh's heartland may be the back of the beyond, but an entrepreneurial initiative involving people with disabilities from the region has emerged a winner.

A business proposal by 'Manav Kalyan Uthan Samiti' aimed at using aloe vera — a naturally growing shrub in the area — to make shampoos, cosmetics, gel and juice has been judged as one of the best emerging ventures in the 'E3 Challenge'. The contest aims to create entrepreneurs among people with disabilities.

Another winner is a micro enterprise from Birbhum district of West Bengal where 25 people with disabilities and their families propose to use the local *kantha* embroidery to create women's clothing and bags for the retail market. They expect to clock Rs 24.4 lakh of revenues in the first year.

The competition, where the three 'E's stand for Economic Enterprise and Empowerment, has endeavoured to identify innovative ideas that can be nurtured over four to five years until they turn into profit-making enterprises.

An initiative of Arunim, the marketing arm of the National Trust, a statutory body under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for the welfare of persons with autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation and multiple disabilities, along with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), set up under the Prime Minister's National Council on Skill Development, the contest was announced in September last year. Thirty business proposals were submitted, of which six projects have emerged winners.

Apart from the aloe vera and *kantha* initiatives, there was the Society for Child Development's proposal in Delhi – Avacayam. Avacayam does the innovative job of collecting waste flowers from temples and hotels and converting them into organic herbal colours and organic manure. The organisation is also producing a whole 'trash-to-cash' line of products including recycled art paper and cloth bags. The organisation already clocks sales of around Rs 22 lakh, but expects to upscale to five cities over the next three years with revenues of Rs 55 lakh.

Two individual entrepreneurs also made the mark. Arshad from Delhi has polio. He started his small business by producing artificial coral reefs for aquariums. He and his group now hope to make their product available on a large scale. Rita and Sangeeta Verma from Ratlam, both artists with cerebral palsy, would like to take their venture - 'Amazing Art' - to another level.

The six chosen projects will be Arunim's first pilot projects, which it will facilitate in marketing, packaging, retailing and services. Apart from NSDC, for the E3 challenge, Arunim has partnered UNDP, Ernst & Young and 'Start Up!' an angel investor for social entrepreneurs. The partners will be facilitators, and will help in providing guidance, mentorship and support.