

SOCIO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN AUROVILLE

L’Avenir d’Auroville requested us to help identify key industries and income generation activities for Auroville, in order to better cater to the interests and skill sets of Aurovilians.

We believe that the activities we identify, should build on the experiences and pain points of the existing units, and at the same time address the education and work aspirations of the youth. Hence, we touched base with unit holders and the youth of Auroville through one on one interviews, online surveys and printed questionnaires. Our findings are given below.

UNITS IN AUROVILLE

We first conducted an online “warm up” survey of 42 commercial units to determine if the base assumptions we were making were valid. Findings are given below:

1. >86% of the surveyed units stated that their unit is interested in expanding
2. > 70% agreed that Aurovilians and newcomers are willing to join their unit
3. > 70% mentioned that their unit wants Aurovilians and newcomers to work with them
4. > 90% believed that Auroville needs more successful units for its growth
5. 34 units agreed to participate in one on one interviews

For interviews, we chose 12 of these units from different sectors, of different sizes and age to better understand their experiences and concerns. This helped us identify the following pain points that some units currently face in their operations. Each of these provides a possible improvement of the Auroville economy.

1. Working groups:
 - a. lack of clarity regarding the Auroville Unity Fund
 - b. lack of support from the ABC
 - c. Dissatisfaction regarding the working of L’avenir (town planning and communication)
 - d. Lack of awareness and clarity of Auroville policies and guidelines
 - e. Lack of efficiency in the Auroville administration
 - f. Attitude of Entry Group towards newcomers working in commercial enterprises
2. Support structure:
 - a. Lack of sufficient incentives to start a new unit
 - b. Obstacles in setting up a unit
 - c. Difficulty to get loans for starting new units
 - d. Lack of coordinated marketing initiatives for Auroville units
 - e. Lack of business hubs and incubators
 - f. Obstacles for some units to export
 - g. Lack of a structure for apprenticeships
3. Missing skill sets for units in areas of
 - a. management
 - b. accounting and administration
 - c. marketing and communication
 - d. Indian law (labour, sales tax, etc.)
 - e. farming
 - f. food technology
 - g. computer literacy
4. Negative attitude of Aurovilians
 - a. Towards commercial unit holders
 - b. Towards outside investors
 - c. Towards work in commercial units

We asked unit holders what enterprises/activities they would suggest for Auroville, and their suggestions are given below

1. Food:
 - a. an organic food cooperation
 - b. food processing in Auroville
 - c. herbarium
2. Constructions:
 - a. database of construction suppliers for builders and architects
 - b. heavy construction machinery (concrete plant and crane)
3. Collective efforts:
 - a. collective marketing for Auroville products
 - b. collective purchasing for eateries
 - c. collective purchasing for builders and architects
 - d. more Auroville boutiques in and around India
 - e. business hubs
4. Health and wellness
 - a. Training centre for health therapies
 - b. Spa's and health resorts
5. Education and training
 - a. centres to host conferences and workshops
 - b. centres to host volunteers and interns
 - c. seminars, workshops and courses
 - d. apprenticeships
6. Knowledge based businesses and consultancies in
 - a. alternate energy
 - b. alternative farming methods
 - c. landscaping

WORKING GROUP MEMBERS OF AUROVILLE

We spoke with seven members of working groups to get their perspective; these were members of FAMC, BCC, ABC Support Group and AV UF

Feedback from WG members

1. Need of the hour is HR and the economy
2. Auroville's strengths: it's multilingual and multicultural population and in it's global networking
3. labor intensive production will come to an end - not sustainable
4. ABC has no time to take up the concerns of units
5. It's easy to get a loan in Auroville
6. maintenance is too low
7. negative attitude towards commercial units can be resolved if there is more transparency
8. Succession as an issue for unit holders / working group members has not been planned

Suggestions from Working Group Members

1. Pattern of production
 - a. new units should be less labour intensive
 - b. existing units to try and reduce dependence on labour
2. Support structures
 - a. more business hubs, and even service hubs are needed
 - b. divide ABC into two – for big units and small units

- c. ABC to act as an advisory body for units; should be equipped with core management skills
- d. large units to share experience and resources with new and small units
- e. large units to set up a fund till the new small ones get afloat
- f. outlets that bring all small activities together - commercial / service outlets

On new types of enterprises

- 3. Food
 - a. food production and processing
- 4. Collective efforts
 - a. marketing service for commercial enterprises
- 5. Health and hospitality
 - a. Health/yoga based
 - b. hotels/ hospitality tie-ups
- 6. Education
 - a. tie up with universities
 - b. educational consultancies
 - c. applied research
 - d. guest educational programs
 - e. educational workshops
- 7. IT/ITES sector

YOUTH OF AUROVILLE

We surveyed a total of 278 youth in and around Auroville to better understand their education and work aspirations. The focus group includes senior students of Future School, Outreach schools, schools outside Auroville, youth in Auroville and youth living outside Auroville (but born and/or studied in Auroville). Key findings from the surveys of youth are given below

Senior students of Future School, Outreach schools and schools outside Auroville

- 1. Auroville students are interested mainly in Arts, Green work and Technology.
- 2. Kodai, Lycee and Pondy students are interested more in New technology, Green work and Humanities, followed by Business and Engineering.
- 3. 90% of the respondents from the Outreach schools want to study further-.Degree courses (Humanities, Science, Computers, Business Administration and Commerce) is most popular for these students. Only 11% plan to fund their studies by taking a loan.
- 4. Many respondents want Auroville to focus on education and youth facilities.
- 5. Majority of students want to live in Auroville mainly due to family and friends rather than for work related reasons.

Youth living in Auroville

- 1. Highest level of education for the majority is High School education.
- 2. Some seem frustrated with Auroville, with decision making in particular, or the lack of it.
- 3. "Learning" plays a very big role with this group, and in what they do.
- 4. Majority mention that Auroville needs to focus on education and training, (also voiced by students), followed by infrastructure and housing. Surprisingly, this group is not concerned with the economics of Auroville.
- 5. Majority have not left Auroville for more than a year, and majority of those who did, left for education and training.

6. This group is most interested in Technology followed by Communication and Business. They want to see ventures related to New technologies (solar energy, electrical bike, etc.) in Auroville.
7. 25% have stated that Auroville's current greatest challenge is politics and governance, followed by a conscious movement towards Auroville's ideals and security of land.

Youth living outside Auroville

1. This group has lived for a median of 14 years in Auroville and almost all of the respondents regularly visit Auroville. Majority are currently living in Europe, followed by NA and India.
2. Highest level of education for is High School (for 37%), followed by Bachelors (23%).
3. 77% mention that the main reason for leaving Auroville was for further education and training. Family and work related reasons were cited by 20%.
4. Many (over 65%) wish to return to Auroville at some point in the future. The main reason being Auroville by itself followed by family and friends (59%). Work opportunities do not appear to motivate this group to return to Auroville.
5. Green work, Business, Humanities and Arts are the main areas they would like to be involved with when they return.
6. Education, finances and Auroville ideals are reasons holding this group back from returning to Auroville.
7. The majority of this group wish to see ventures in New technologies (solar energy, electrical bike etc.), Green work and Humanities in Auroville. They also believe that Auroville should focus on further education, youth facilities and research.
8. Only 21 respondents (out of 64) believe that Auroville provided enough support for their personal development (in terms of education, infrastructure and employment opportunities).
9. 64% said that Auroville ideals are what inspires them most about Auroville, followed by nature (33%).

Suggestions from Youth

1. Infrastructure
 - a. free internet / Wi-Fi all over Auroville
 - b. clean energy supply
 - c. public Transport
 - d. ayurvedic center
 - e. women's issue centre
 - f. a sound proof area
2. Education and work
 - a. higher education: tie up with Pondy University
 - b. professional training centre for music and/or dance
 - c. internationally recognized apprenticeships
 - d. job recruitment facility
3. Support structure
 - a. support to start a unit/project
 - b. Interest-free loans for youth
 - c. waiver of housing service charges
 - d. financial support for young mothers
4. Entrepreneurial enterprises
 - a. AV to focus on businesses based on it's own internal needs
5. Others
 - a. higher maintenance needed: - people who have money can survive comfortably while young people with little or no savings, debts from study outside and the desire to live in AV find it difficult.
 - b. Auroville to become self-sufficient in organic agriculture
 - c. Auroville to become environmentally sustainable

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE TEAM

- a. an integrated marketing service
- b. discussion about the split between services and units
- c. working group members visit all auroville units
- d. regular meetings for all units
- e. added value initiatives such as labeling (organic, fair trade, socially accountable, eco friendly etc.)
- f. an advisory board for units
- g. online database of human resources in auroville
- h. catalog of auroville products and services
- i. a more in depth study on a larger sample is needed