

Abhilash Puljal

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Abhilash Puljal is a trained social scientist, a trade strategy and private sector development specialist with an entrepreneurial spirit. He has over eighteen years of experience advising public and private sectors, multilaterals and industry associations in conceptualising and implementing sustainable ventures, developing business strategies, interpreting and advising on policy and regulatory matters across agriculture, renewable energy, infrastructure, healthcare and education verticals. He is passionate about developmental issues affecting the Global South and is working actively on the South-South development concept by connecting sustainable technologies and building efficient capacities for Small Medium Enterprise (SME) businesses of middle and low-income economies of Africa and Asia.

He is a committed self-starter with strong analytical skills known to network with an ability to maintain long and trusting relationships. Abhilash also is an effective verbal and written communicator with an ability to articulate information in a structured and insightful manner. He has a proven ability to engage decision-makers and empower teams to lead analysis and recommendations. Also, he has a deep understanding and sensitivity towards political and cultural dimensions of environments especially in complex locations and situations. Moreover, he enjoys building and leading high performing teams to deliver innovative and result oriented solutions to achieve realistic goals. Furthermore, he is also known among his peers to be experienced in mentoring and coaching junior staff in their professional development and career progression.

Abhilash is currently revising the National Pulses Strategy for the Government of Ethiopia through the International Trade Centre (ITC), Geneva. Alongside, he is also advising the government of the Republic of Gabon on exports to India and assisting them in negotiating a Business and Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA), Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) and Social Security Agreement (SSA) with India. Furthermore, he is also advising several Indian private enterprises on their entry strategies into countries in Sub Saharan Africa and South Asia. He is also advising on raising equity and debt for such projects.

Until recently, he advised the Government of Sri Lanka, through the ITC, Geneva, on a European Union funded programme to design and draft the National Export Strategy for Sri Lanka. He led the study for two sectors and one trade support function. He also advised the Government of Bihar through PricewaterhouseCoopers, India on a DFID funded project - GROW Bihar. As a part of GROW-Bihar, he designed and drafted various policies for the Department of Industries such as the Bihar Khadi Policy, BIADA (Amendment) Act, besides providing other transaction advisory services for implementation of the Single Window Investment System. Moreover, he also advised in the implementation of the SITA project for the ITC, Geneva in Rwanda and Ethiopia, where he redrafted the Pulses Sector Value Chain Strategy for the Government of Ethiopia.

Earlier, he founded Avignam Advisors, a boutique private sector advisory that researches, conceptualises and implements sustainable projects for clients in Asia, Africa and India. He, has conceptualised initiatives from the “ground-up” with “out-of-the-box” ideas and assessing the potential of such ideas using strategic and evidence based methods. Private sector opportunities are accessed and ideated not in isolation, but after conducting a macro level study of the value chain of a certain sector and depending on the outcomes, business potential is assessed and businesses are derived from such studies.

Select projects conceptualised, researched and implemented are:

- Advised the Department of Industries, Government of Bihar and designed and drafted the **Bihar Khadi Policy, BIADA (Amendment) Act**, besides providing other transaction advisory services for implementation of the **Single Window Investment System**.
- Drafted the **National Export Strategy for Sri Lanka**. Led the study for two sectors (Spices and Concentrates Strategy and Electronics and Electrical Components Strategy) and one trade support function (Trade Information and Promotion Strategy), which have hence been published

- Conceptualised the first ever South-South based project for the **Department of International Development DFID** titled “**Supporting India’s Trade Preferences for Africa**” (SITA) and conducted the initial design study - a GBP 19 million project being implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC), Geneva; funded by DFID in East Africa and India
- Conceptualised **Ask Indus Global** - a USD 850,000 project conceptualized for a private sector investor and was implemented by **Avignam Group** as a turnkey assignment for private investors in India, Kenya, Mauritius, Tanzania and UAE
- Led the study on behalf of the **National Skills Development Agency, Government of India** on the “**India and Zanzibar’s skill development partnership: Vocational training institute**” to be set up in Vitangoji, Pemba Island, Zanzibar, Tanzania - A USD 1 million funded by the Development Partnership Administration, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India
- Led the study to identify “**High Potential Areas for Indian Investments into The Gambia**” and conducted the Indo-Gambian Investment Seminar with the Minister of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment of the Republic of The Gambia funded by the **World Bank through the Gambia Growth and Competitiveness Project** of the Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency in New Delhi, India
- Conceptualised and conducted a pre-feasibility study on “**Rwanda Knowledge City: Promoting Rwanda as an educational Hub for East Africa.**” The concept was discussed and taken up to the Cabinet level of the Government of Rwanda led by the **Governor’s office of the Eastern Province, Rwanda.**
- Besides these many smaller projects have been conceptualised, researched on and/or implemented for the private and public sector clients in India, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, UAE and the United Kingdom

Besides, he is the Trustee of the **Ooboontu Foundation** that supports in the looking after abandoned small animals and birds in the Delhi NCR area. He also volunteers on the **Executive Committee (Special Projects)** of the **London School of Economics Alumni Association (LSEAA)**, London, UK. He is the immediate past **Regional Ambassador (South Asia)** of the LSEAA, mandated to provide guidance and peer resource network to group leaders in South Asia on running their groups and identify potential country group leaders and foster potential membership of new country group leaders. Furthermore, he also is an **independent advisor** to the **P.V Narasimha Rao International Foundation (PVNRF)** based in Hyderabad, India where he advises and assists the family of P.V. Narasimha Rao, the former Prime Minister of India, on the activities of the foundation.

Prior to Avignam he served as an Alternate Director on the board of **Bharat Renewable Energy Limited**, Lucknow, India; Senior Consultant at **PricewaterhouseCoopers Pvt. Ltd.**, New Delhi, India in the Tax and Regulatory Practice working on various projects especially on policy and regulatory matters. He was earlier employed as Asst. Vice-President at **SKIL Infrastructure Limited**, Mumbai, India; **University of Sydney** as a Research Assistant in Sydney, Australia and **Sathguru Management Consultants Pvt. Ltd** as Associate Consultant in Hyderabad, India. He also previously volunteered as a Consultant at the **Overseas Development Institute** in London, UK and as a Lecturer at the **Australian Aid for Cambodia Fund** in Prey Veng Province, Cambodia.

He constantly travels to client locations around the world, understand client needs and develop simple solutions to complex problems by ensuring a balanced stakeholder interest. He networks widely across private and public sector organisations and works closely with senior management of large to mid-sized organisations. He also has developed excellent relations with senior regulators in various Governments in Africa and Asia and heads of various diplomatic missions in Africa, Asia and Europe.

He has a multidisciplinary educational background with two postgraduate degrees in Development Management and International Business from the **London School of Economics and Political Science**, London and **University of Sydney**, Sydney respectively. His undergraduate degree is in Management with a minor in Politics from **DePaul University**, Chicago. He also read briefly as an exchange student at the **Plekhanov Russian Academy of Economics**, Moscow. Furthermore, he completed a course on Markets System Development approach by The Springfield Centre, United Kingdom.