

UNSUNG BEACONS

Volume VII

Stories of people for whom humanity matters

A compilation of articles featured in
Conversations Today - 2016

**CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE
AND MANAGEMENT**

UNSUNG BEACONS

Volume VII

*Stories of people for
whom humanity matters*

*A compilation of articles featured in
Conversations Today 2016*

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Table of Contents

Foreword	1
Editor's Note	3
I. Alumni Talk	4
1. Desingu	5
2. Kalaiselvi.....	8
3. Kalpana	11
4. Madhusudhan Reddy.....	14
5. Dr Mohammed Rafiuddin	18
6. Nandineeshree	22
7. P Narayana Reddy	25
8. Radha Madhav	29
9. Shravan Kasam.....	33
10. Kanniyappan	36
11. Swati Kureti	40
II. Inspiring Conversations	44
1. Mr. Aroon Raman.....	46
2. Dr. Gavin Melles	49
3. Mrs. Gayatri Subramaniam	53
4. Dr. Kalpana Gopalan.....	57
5. Dr P.Kuganantham	62
6. Mr. Murray Culshaw	68
7. Mr. Nassar	73
8. Dr. Raja Samuel	76
9. Mr. Samuthirakani.....	81
10. Mr. Sashi Kumar	84
11. Dr. Saundarya Rajesh.....	88
12. Dr H Sudarshan	92

III. NGO Profile	96
1. Arvind Foundation	98
2. Education4all	102
3. Gift Your Organ Foundation	105
4. Makkala Jagriti.....	108
5. Orione Seva.....	111
6. Raza Educational and Social Welfare Society in	115
7. Reussir Trust.....	118
8. Samagra.....	122
9. Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement	125
10. TataGyan	129
11. Vidiyal	132
IV. Positive Energy	136
1. Caution or Compassion	138
2. Working with the Inner Critic	140
3. Aspiration or Ambition: what will renew your energies?.....	142
4. Questions that matter	144
5. Workability: We face, every moment, the choice of who to be and what to do.	146
V. Trendsetters	147
6. Abhinavgram Society.....	148
7. Baale Mane.....	152
8. Bal Utsav	155
9. Bhoruka Charitable Trust	158
10. Borderless World Foundation.....	161

11. Buzz India	164
12. DESH	168
13. Evergreen Rubber Producers Society.....	171
14. Hasiru Dala.....	174
15. InSIDE-North East	177
16. LIVE.....	180
17. Mendipathar Multipurpose Cooperative Society	183
18. National Conservation Foundation	186
19. Reaching Hand	190
20. Samuha	193
21. Social Work Organisation.....	196
22. Swabodhini.....	199

Foreword

India, it is often said, leads the world in both the good and the bad. Whether the one outweighs the other is really a matter of perspective – as evidenced by the debate that rages in every sphere of modern Indian discourse. There will probably never be one commonly accepted answer, but perhaps that is less important than the question: where are we heading as a nation?



By almost any standard, the country has progressed on a variety of socio-economic indicators over the last 25 years. But despite, improvements in key indices such as per capita GDP, establishment of a diversified industrial base, food availability, infant mortality, spread of education, and so on, the Human Development Report of 2017 makes sobering reading. We have slipped one notch from 130 to 131 in a list of 188 countries ranked by the Human Development Index. Our HDI, at 0.624, places us on par with Congo, Namibia and Pakistan, and well behind Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Since the HDI is basically an assessment of three fundamental dimensions of human society – a healthy life, access to knowledge, and access to a decent standard of living, our current position leaves much to be desired.

This is where civil society and NGOs have to continue to play a vital role in the progress of the nation, especially where state interventions have been at best weak or of limited impact.

This timely booklet by CSIM contains many useful accounts and case studies of a whole gamut of exceptional organizations and individuals that have worked precisely to do this. From health care to tribal uplift, all-round rural development to disability, from empowering women

to spreading knowledge and education – the people and institutions in this book represent inspiring struggles and approaches to the diversity of problems and the challenge that is India.

Given the staggering numbers in India, the task of nation building to create an inclusive society for all Indians can seem extremely daunting and indeed create self-doubts among us as to whether we can really a difference. The accounts you will see in this book will show otherwise: that it is up to us as Indians to make the difference.

I can do no better than to end with a quote from Gandhiji:

“It’s the action, not the fruit of the action, that’s important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there’ll be any fruit. But that doesn’t mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result.” – MK Gandhi

Aroon Raman
Entrepreneur & Author

Editor's Note

I am happy to share the seventh edition of *Unsung Beacons*, a compilation of articles featured in *Conversations Today* 2016. This book brings to light the efforts of unsung heroes in the social sector space.



I wish to place my thanks and gratitude to Mr. PN Subramanian, Managing Trustee, MSDS; and Mrs Latha Suresh, Trustee, MSDS for their continuous support and encouragement.

My warmest thanks and appreciation to my fellow writers and designer who were carefully chosen to provide the perfect blend of knowledge and skills.

It would have been an impossible task for me to write for this publication without the support of my family. My most sincere thanks to my parents and my children for their love and understanding.

This book not just a collection of stories, but a guiding light for many budding social entrepreneurs and change agents.

Inspire, get inspired!

Happy reading!

Marie Banu

Chief Editor – *Conversations Today*/

Director - CSIM Chennai

I. ALUMNI TALK

*Stories of social change agents who have
pursued their Social Entrepreneurship course in
Centre for Social Initiative and
Management (CSIM)*

Writer: Shanmuga Priya. T



1. Desingu

Practicing Equality

Labour rights have to be taken with a pinch of salt. The generation of reforms, revolution and thence the evolution of labour rights can be witnessed in any city or town even today. The current generation is, no doubt, enjoying the most robust framework that has been in place for labour and human resources. However, one can't deny that these are also the times when exploitation of manual labour has reached new levels, significantly impacting the cycle of inter-generational poverty.

“Equality remains elusive. It is very true! Daily wage is a convenient option in many sectors. But it is hardly a priority to check if all labourers received their wages on time, and much harder to see labourers coming forward to collectively voice against atrocities at work place. On the other hand, the idea of ‘union’ is still not completely accepted by both workers and companies. I have learnt my lessons,” says Mr Desingu, Founder SHEEP Trust in Madurandagam, Tamil Nadu.

Born in a simple family of farm labourers, Desingu struggled to complete his schooling. “Studying beyond tenth standard was not possible for me as I had no support and had to work to help my parents,” recalls Desingu who moved to Chennai in search of work opportunities.

Desingu started with a monthly earnings of 800 rupees. Being articulate about labour issues, he had to face suspension seven times in a period of 8 years. “I was with the plastic industry and according to rules we must be paid three times more than what we received. Companies extracted work but never respected their contract or commitment. Besides such low wages, we had to survive under poor conditions of work,” laments Desingu, who then initiated efforts to establish a union in the company to fight for labour rights.

The union won the case and many workers got their arrears. But, Desingu was terminated in 2004. He moved back to his home town and joined the Human Resource Development Foundation in Thirukazhukundram as a field staff. Despite liking the job and feeling content, he decided to leave.

SHEEP – Social Health Education Empowerment Programme Trust was established in 2011 in Gudappakkam Village. Desingu was the face of this trust and worked extensively with the communities. Now, he represents all the community issues on appropriate platforms with the concerned authorities. Re-admitting school dropouts through the unfilled reserved seats helped him engage with the communities. He also established a cordial relationship with colleges to facilitate re-admission processes and be able to follow up on the progress of these children.

The next focus for SHEEP was women livelihood and their access to welfare measures. Steeped in ignorance and lack of awareness, women did not know their entitlements. Through the Trust, Desingu helped women access all services that were due to them and also cleared legal issues they faced regarding land ownership.

“There is no dearth of issues here. We only need an eye for detail to identify, prioritise and then act upon it,” he laughs. Issues concerning ration cards, land pattas, pension for the elderly interfered in the dynamics of a household’s livelihood. SHEEP trust, cognizant of all such implications, has represented these issues with the District Collector. Alongside, the Trust also organized social awareness programmes on nature, organic farming, pesticide in food, environmental sustainability, and also plantation drives periodically. Having known the importance of Gram Sabha meetings and the power of local governance, Desingu also

worked strategically to spread awareness on Gram Sabhas, encouraging people to actively participate in these meetings.

Hooked into local governance structures and their potential to transform rural lives, Desingu participated in the ward member elections but lost by a margin of 11 votes. Undeterred, he continued to work with the communities with renewed rigour aspiring for something that no one ever did in the region.

“Gudappakkam is a village with 400 votes, but no basic amenities, services or welfare measures. The land documents narrate the story of domination and oppression between caste groups. Ever since the administrative division of Perumbakkam Panchayat, the two wards – Waypanai and Avarinodu surrounding the Gudappakkam village have been doing well. However, this village remains in between, at the behest of influential local leaders,” explains Desingu, concerned about representation of families living here. According to him, declaring it as a separate ward is the best way forward and this is what I want to fight for. Equal representation is what democracy is all about,” he asserts.

“The SEOP programme changed the way SHEEP organized its work. The fact that funds could be raised motivated me. I am now looking forward to initiate new programmes at SHEEP trust that catered to the needs of different sections of the people here,” says Desingu who completed the CSIM course in 2015 and intends to launch initiatives that focus on destitute women and property rights of women. Pursuing equality as a value all his life, he is hopeful to inculcate the same in the next line of leadership at SHEEP and in the communities.



2. Kalaiselvi

Tailoring to Empowerment

Women empowerment programmes are sometimes claimed to be reiterating the very gender stereotypes which must be done away with. Common in this context is the idea of training women in tailoring and providing sewing machines to women as a livelihood opportunity. Empowerment has to start from home, however, livelihood opportunity must be supported by other measures to ensure that women realized empowerment.

Ms S Kalaiselvi, Founder of Survo Trust in Kancheepuram, also had to resort to the beaten track. Having failed in her class 10 exams, she had no other option, but to take up tailoring classes. Well established in her village, she decided to train women like her who had no other opportunities here. “Most of the men were alcoholics and hardly shared their income for household expenditure. Women, with no source of income lived in a deplorable state and needed help. All I knew was tailoring and so initiated training classes for women,” says Kalaiselvi.

In early 1994, Kalaiselvi led a movement with families affected by alcoholism and presented a memorandum to the District Collector,

condemning the liquor shops in the village. “Young girls were raped and the women who participated in the movement were threatened for life. We all faced threats. But it was a phase that soon passed away as district authorities acted on our memorandum and removed all the liquor shops from our village,” she says.

The impact of these training classes is not as simple as she portrays it. Young, adolescent girls trained by her were able to join reputed companies. Older women, usually earned from their homes. The cycle of income generation among the women and its impact on households encouraged Kalaiselvi to update herself and all her other students so that what they learnt was always resonant with market needs. She was conscious not to create a divide between market needs and the skills of these women, so that it was easy for companies to recruit from other places/communities. “Women from my village could not afford missing such an opportunity,” she insists.

Kalaiselvi undertook a course in Fashion Technology from the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in Taramani. “I learnt the complete chain of processes involved in the garment industry, beginning from buttons to packaging. Now, there was more to teach and our contacts brought in more trainers,” says Kalaiselvi who soon expanded the operations of Kalai Training Centre in 1999. Later, in order to reach out to more women and run a full-fledged training programme, Survo Trust was established in 2006. With an organized set up, Kalaiselvi feels that reaching out to women through community structures became easier. SHG women were also trained and local women were groomed as trainers. Before the trust was established, Kalaiselvi charged a nominal monthly fee of Rs.50 per month from every trainee. Once the Trust was in place, courses were offered free of cost and sponsors were roped in to cover the costs incurred.

Suggested by a friend, Kalaiselvi enrolled in CSIM’s SEOP programme at Chennai in 2015. “I learnt NGO management in depth and adapted it to the needs of the village. I realized the momentum of my work, its potential and most importantly, the possibility of engaging in other initiatives as an organization,” says Kalaiselvi, with exuberance.

Besides women empowerment, Kalaiselvi is deeply concerned about protection of child rights as conventional practices like child marriage not only affected children's health, but also their decision making power as they grew older. The fact that 1098 – Child Helpline was not promoted actively, according to her, was a bad sign. Women from Survo Trust have been actively involved in promoting awareness on legislations against child marriage, childline. The Trust has stopped child marriages and also admitted victims in schools to help them complete their education.

As a member of the Child Rights Committee in her village and other federations, Kalaiselvi also trains women in other villages to act against child marriage and other oppressive practices. Given the presence of Survo trust and its influence, authorities from the Forest Department invited Kalaiselvi on board to promote awareness on the significance of increasing water table for agriculture. As part of such programmes, she also organized plantation drives across villages.

The Trust also runs night schools for poor children who cannot afford tuition classes. Completely run by volunteer support, there are now five centres benefitting over 60 students. "Initially there were 10 centres, but we could not manage them due to lack of volunteers and resources. Raising funds to keep the programmes running is the next big responsibility we have at the Trust," she emphasizes. Children and women are also taught basic computing and Kalaiselvi dreams of opening a full-fledged computer training centre in her village in the future.



3. Kalpana

Influencing learning in Government schools

Education system in our country, despite all the improvements, is still confronted by many challenges that not only call for a new approach, but for a new equation in its very service delivery mechanism. Ms. O. Kalpana, Founder of Prardhana Charitable Trust in Hyderabad has understood this quite early with her own bag of experiences. Coming from a banking background, her transition to the development sector is one interesting tale.

Three years into banking, she realised this was not her cup of tea. Upon quitting, Kalpana volunteered with the Spastics Society and Blind School in Delhi. Back in Hyderabad, she worked in the marketing sector. “I saw a lot of children in Hyderabad who were out of school for different reasons. The reason ranged from disinterest and inability to afford to special learning needs not being addressed. In 2001, she established a Trust to work for the underprivileged children. “Our focus was to identify out of school children, provide them basic training, and mainstream them in Government schools. In the next couple of

years, we realised that this was not addressing the systemic issues that eventually led children out of schools. We therefore decided to change our strategy,” explains Kalpana.

Government schools, they found, were lacking essential resources like place, human resources, and teaching aids. Even the schools that cooperated to admit out of school children could not do much due to these constraints. The Trust, therefore, began to involve with the schools to build their capacities. However, they were very conscious since the beginning. “Building schools’ capacities is not an easy task. More so, when these are Government schools. We got in touch with the SSA department to learn the details of land allotment for schools. Then, we collaborated with local NGOs, corporate representatives, NRIs, friends and others to match resource mobilisation with needs of identified schools. The Trust soon built three schools and got children admitted in them,” shares Kalpana.

Alongside, the Trust also allocated resources to other schools to build toilets, provide water facilities and other amenities. Having worked on infrastructure concerns, it was then the turn to focus on strengthening teacher-pupil ratios in Government Schools. Qualified private teachers were employed in schools who were supported by the Trust. Then, teaching aids were provided to further enhance the learning outcomes and experience of under privileged kids in these schools. “Six students have now finished B.Ed and are teaching in our schools. Some of them have completed Engineering and volunteer with us to prepare new learning aids for the children,” says a contented Kalpana.

With the basics in place, Kalpana and team decided to improvise the learning methods as children were not able to go beyond the pre-designed question and answers in their text books. “From mundane methods, we wanted to move to fun filled methods,” she adds. The new tool, comprising of cross words, puzzles, quiz, board games, Sudoku, maps and other thought provoking activities, was called the ‘Locofunsia’. This tool, the team felt, could provide all other features that private kids could experience while learning. Upon its good reception, Locofunsia was introduced in 16 schools across Hyderabad and Rangareddy districts.

The Trust has managed this extensive reach with a group of committed volunteers, who had contributed where and whenever possible. “Some of my students would come home to help me with the learning kits. All of these tools are prepared by us manually with the help of volunteers and alumni students,” says Kalpana. In terms of infrastructure, the Trust is also extending support to setup libraries and computer laboratories in Government schools. Games circulated in these libraries are also prepared in house by the team.

As interventions took good shape within the schools, the Trust introduced scholarships with flexible rules to ensure that the most needy and interested students were brought into the schools. In the process, they also assisted students who were challenged by the transition from English to Telugu medium due to resource constraints.

Kalpana is proud and elated to see her older students – now engineers, teachers and chartered accountants – come back regularly to help her with the Trust’s activities. The frequent interactions between the students and the team has also facilitated building in a feedback mechanism.

Amidst all this, Kalpana still felt the need to pursue CSIM’s SEOP programme. “It is a bigger team now and we know the scope of our interventions. Naturally, we did not want to restrict our reach. Prardhana’s growth needed a new paradigm and CSIM’s course gave the answer to this,” she says.

Kalpana holds that CSIM has something new to offer her every time she visited the centre– whether perspectives, insights or new network partners. “In fact, the locofunsia tool originated at CSIM as a project. It was only known by a different name then,” she informs.

Coming across a wide range of expertise within the classroom has helped her put all her concerns and ideas together within an operational framework. “I could go ahead without any intimidation. Thanks to CSIM!” she signs off.



4. Madhusudhan Reddy

Rehabilitation for the Intellectually Impaired

Mental health care and rehabilitation is an area sidelined not only in India, but across the globe. On an average, there is one mental health worker per 10,000 people in the world. Our nation, besides the systemic issues like lack of mental health workforce and adequate budgets, has also been battling the misconceptions and social stigma around intellectual disability. Given the socio cultural influences on those affected by intellectual impairment, care for them has also to be customized for every individual.

Madhusudhan Reddy is a Mathematics Graduate, also trained in Speech Therapy to help children who could not speak properly due to hearing impairment. “I wanted to help children, who were like my cousin, to speak properly and study like other children. I could not see them being left out as unproductive individuals,” says Mr Reddy, who along with his wife Ms Surekha, established the Sadhana Institute for the Mentally Challenged in Habsiguda, Hyderabad in 1996.

Hailing from the drought prone Nalagonda district in Andhra Pradesh that also faced the wrath of excess fluoride in ground water, different

forms of disability like blindness, stooped backs, bone diseases, crooked hands and legs and mental retardation was a common sight to the couple. As a speech therapist consultant from 1988 to 1996, Reddy realized that there were very few institutions that provided residential rehabilitation services for such children, especially girls. Further, there were no such institutional services available in the rural areas. This pushed the couple to start a Special School, which had only 2 students in the initial years. Boarding and lodging facilities in the campus allowed care takers to bond with the children and build a routine that was comfortable for them.

Besides funds, the biggest challenge for Sadhana was to get the community accept the need and utility of such an institution in the neighbourhood. “Our neighbours refused to support us. They were completely against such an institution coming up in the locality. Repeated persuasion and sensitization got them to cooperate with us. When the community accepted the initiative, the next challenge was acquiring a suitable building,” recalls Reddy. The couple lived with the children in the same campus and passionately monitored developments in the children. From humble beginnings in rented structures, the Sadhana institute presently has two special schools (one each in Hyderabad and Tekulasomaram village in Nalagonda district) under its banner.

Open to children, adults and elderly alike (5 years to 65 years), the schools provide special education to the mentally challenged. Those with severe and profound disability are taken in as permanent inmates, while those with mild and moderate mental disorders, are trained and then mainstreamed. While anybody would adjudge this as a very difficult, loaded responsibility, Reddy simply denies this proposition. “This is a responsible job. Yes, but I wouldn’t say it is difficult. Ensuring safety and security of all the inmates is the primary responsibility, which can be managed efficiently,” remarks Reddy, confident of the internal systems put in place, where inmates also participate. It is therefore not surprising that parents from across the country bring their children here.

Sadhana also has an in-house transport facility for children so that any emergency medical concern like convulsions could be addressed immediately. “We have had challenges all the way. One small mistake is enough to derail all the progress. Apprehensions kept vehicle

companies away. They were bothered about their reputation and the risks involved in moving mentally retarded children and adults. For us at Sadhana, vehicles were a necessity as 40 percent of the residents had medical problems. We couldn't take chances, therefore had to procure our own vehicles," he explains.

On knowing about the CSIM's SEOP programme from a friend, Reddy was at first apprehensive to enroll. "I was not even able to communicate in English. I was not sure if I could complete the course". But when he was told that the course would expose him to a range of skills which will help administer the centres more efficiently, Reddy could not miss it. "Practical knowledge and theory are at cross roads most of the times, in the development sector. Given this premise, we must prepare ourselves to do the best of what we can to succeed against all odds. Such preparation requires knowledge on different aspects. The SEOP programme helped me build on what I had learnt from a decade long work. When I did the course in 2006, I did not even have an email id," quips Reddy. Today, Sadhana has a well-designed website and the visibility created helped Reddy and team seek support from the corporates too.

Efficient utilization of resources at hand is something Reddy appreciates very sincerely. "We planted saplings around our campus and our children are enjoying the fruits now". It has been twenty years now. Sadhana has acquired its own building, cadre of well trained and committed staff, yet sustainability is a challenge as most of the contributions come in kind. "Raising money for recurring expenditure is very difficult," Reddy asserts. Most of the children here have single or no parent, thus left with no reliable domestic support for their upbringing. Living together as a family and engaging them in the routine administration of Sadhana has brought a lot of order in their lives.

Sadhana is supporting more than 250 children through these two special schools. "These are children who were denied the chance to socialize with children of their age and mental orientation, simply because the country has not provided schools tending to such children. Parents, having yet to comprehend what has actually happened to their children and what might happen in their absence, cannot advocate for changes in the system. In such a predicament, institutions like Sadhana have

an instrumental role to play,” opines Reddy, who along with his wife, dreams of building a sheltered workshop where special children can be trained to develop, produce a product, which can then be marketed by their society.



5. Dr Mohammed Rafiuddin

Empowerment is Real

Entrance examinations in our country dictate the career choice of most young minds. Almost every student prepares for these exams, but there are very few who actually prepare themselves for other options. Dr Mohammed Rafiuddin is one from this majority of people who sincerely prepared and appeared for the examination. However, he did not succeed in the first attempt. Aspiring to be a doctor, he decided to appear for the examination once again in the following year. “On my cousin’s insistence, I joined Bachelors in Social Work at Osmania University as I did not want to waste my time,” he says.

Mohammed intended to pursue the Social Work course only for a year as all his interest was in studying medicine. But, this course changed his perspective towards life and he began to visualise a better future for the underprivileged children. Realising that Social Work was a professional discipline that had the potential to rewrite development stories, he continued with the course, securing a University Gold Medal.

“As a doctor, I thought my ability to reach out could be restrained due to multiple reasons. Social Work helped me open up as a person and better comprehend the realities in which majority of our countrymen lived. Every challenge forced me to devise new strategies. My first encounter

with street children moved me and since then I decided to focus my work towards improving their lives in some way or the other. I felt motivated and was on the right track,” he recalls.

Interacting with children on the streets during a project, Mohammed learnt that most of them were unhappy with their families. The circumstances in which they lived, the dynamics between the family members, the lack of importance given to their presence and aspirations impelled them to do something to improve the conditions. “They wanted to help their mothers by all means possible. The only way out, which they also happened to observe amongst their peers, is to engage in daily wage labour in local, small scale industries. And there they are, caught in the vicious cycle of street life!” he laments.

Mohammed and friends began to spend evenings with the street children and gradually learnt about their lives, routines and struggles. “It was interesting to know that some of them had very good grasping power, few were good in communication, and some were excellent in managing teams. It was also good to note that some read newspapers regularly. While these strengths mattered to us, children had forgotten their aspirations in the midst of their struggle to survive. We had to do something for them; that’s how Hyderabad Council of Human Welfare (HCHW) was conceived in 1990,” shares Mohammed.

During the communal riots in 1992, the team lost contact with children for 15 days. In a meeting, post the riots, the children felt that a home for their own was a genuine need. With the help of local leaders, HCHW managed to establish its first residential centre in 1993. Mainstreaming the street children through school education and reuniting them with their families was a routine. Children independently managed all the work required at the centre and did not require any supervision. “Their sense of responsibility amused us. They accepted us easily. Professional backing from the Social Work course gave us the confidence to deal with one child at a time,” he recalls.

“Challenges soon emerged. Some children were not interested in education, and this disturbed the performance of other children. It was then HCHW decided to open its second residential centre that was responsive to the needs of children interested in education,” he adds.

Alongside these direct interventions, HCHW took upon the task of sensitising the public and police on street children who are vulnerable to exploitation. “If any incident happened in the community, our centres were targeted for investigation. This affected the children’s morale and we had to therefore intervene before the children felt adversely affected. Finally, after three years of our campaign, one nodal officer was appointed to handle matters related to such children,” he says.

Mohammed saw the 1098 helpline as the best strategy available to assist vulnerable children on a 24x7 basis. He studied the model and introduced it in Hyderabad city in 1998 with the support of police and officials from other concerned departments. In 2001, this service was handed over to the State Government to integrate it with the national programme.

Mohammed felt the need to assess why children lived on the streets and a survey revealed that 60% came from rural villages while around 40% came from Hyderabad slums. The team then decided to build the capacities of rural NGOs to prevent migration of rural children and this effort proved successful. In the city’s slums, the pressure to earn money and to access credit never diminished. What could be addressed was the role of money lenders who kept this pressure high and compelling. “Women approached money lenders even for small sums like 200 rupees. HCHW used the strategy of self-help promotion to eliminate money lenders. After a decade, women are now able to access credit up to 20,000 rupees and there are no money lenders in the communities,” he smiles. This economic empowerment of women led them to taking conscious choices on their children’s education and health. Their active participation in the local economy led to the reduction in child labour and child marriage. All activities are now completely managed by the women.

“You must see to believe empowerment is real,” says an elated Mohammed, under whom HCHW won the ‘Best NGO Performance Award in 2011’ from the State Government. HCHW’s interventions have made way for shelter homes in the Juvenile Justice Act Amendment, thereby allowing total rehabilitation and education for children living on the streets. This development led to HCHW consciously monitoring performance of street children in the schools.

“None of the schools were empathetic towards these children. They weren’t ready to share any information. We had to make it mandatory. Besides attendance and performance, we also advocated for the schools to alert us on children who were absent for more than three days in a row,” he quips. These evaluations led to HCHW opening its own day school to be able to reach out to more children.

HCHW’s school now has 250 children studying from kindergarten to class 5. Over-aged children are guided to complete two grades in one academic year. Bus services ensure that commutation and safety concerns do not stop the children from attending school. While the young studied, there were also older siblings who enrolled in skill training programmes and then placed in suitable jobs. 100 youth were trained every month and the placement record shows a success of 73% per batch.

More than two decades in the field, Mohammed felt the need for a refresher course to update his knowledge and revisit HCHW’s strategy for street children. “CSIM gave me the new energy. The SEOP programme enlightened me on how to manage human resources—whether children or adults from different backgrounds. I knew why it was critical to prioritise principles of management in a non-profit organisation,” shares Mohammed.

Now busy with the silver jubilee preparations of HCHW, Mohammed is all set to launch a mobile clinic that will make real time diagnosis and timely health care accessible to poor households in the city. “Families are pushed into poverty due to catastrophic health expenditures. Simple health issues are ignored due to lack of medical care and basic needs are all compromised. I wish to see the mobile clinic change people’s attitude towards health care. That is the first and significant step,” he asserts.



6. Nandineeshree

Get ready to help

Health has become a challenging phenomenon, particularly for the poor for whom access and utilisation of services is extremely difficult, owing to the systemic inequities and ‘asymmetry of information’ that has been sustained over the years. For a simple domestic worker who takes her child to the hospital, every word uttered compounds her fear. It is hard for her to decipher what is wrong with her child. Most of all, poor find it difficult to comprehend instructions on the prescription and follow up on checkups. Burdened by labour routine and the lack of confidence to approach hospital staff, most people from this section of the society often find themselves lost amidst the bustling hospital crowd and procedures, thus leaving with more number of questions than they came in with.

Ms Nandineeshree is well aware of the repercussions of such a predicament. “There is a huge gap between affordability and the actual cost of health care services. Further, poor are burdened by the

information gap that determines the impact of the services received. They do not understand what neuro, cardio, and nephron unit means. Hospital staff is busy with their chores that they are not able to help them with simple instructions. Having children die because of all these issues disturbed me a lot,” says Nandineeshree.

A typical Chennai girl, Nandineeshree completed her Post graduation in Science from Loyola College. She came to know about Ekam during her volunteering days and spent a lot of time in medical support activities that was coordinated by the organisation. From explaining prescriptions, out-patient timings, diagnostic procedures, directions to reach specialisation units, she also coordinated Ekam’s support services like distribution of nephrology aids and free medicines.

For children who missed school due to operation or other treatment procedures, Ekam also provided Montessori training. “Patients are not aware of the number of out-patient units in the hospital they visit. The imminent crowd in some units naturally consumes the time that could be spared for patient-doctor interactions,” she laments.

“I engaged in every role that Ekam offered and loved my work here. I was awarded ‘Best Volunteer of the year’ trophy in 2011 by Chennai Social Service organisation. After my studies, joined Ekam as a full time staff,” she informs.

As a full time staff at Ekam, Nandineeshree had more scope to explore her roles and responsibilities. She became the Chief coordinator at the Institute of Child Health hospital and supervised the ‘May I Help You Desk’ activities, Youth Wing programmes, camps and also the plantation drives which introduced medicinal plants around hospital premises. With her support, Ekam took the responsibility of organising Balwadi camps wherein patients were guided to approach the nearest government hospital.

Nandineeshree also served as a Welfare Officer and followed up with children who had undergone treatment at the hospital. Further, she supervised volunteers from other city colleges while moving from one role to another at Ekam.

Inspired by Ekam's work and CSIM's SEOP course, she established her own NGO in 2014. "CSIM's course in Social Enterprise Management helped me to identify what I wanted to do. The network that I built in the process was priceless. There were people from all walks of life in my batch and their positivity was a driving force for me to lean towards my vision," shares an excited Nandineeshree, who admires the bottom up approach inherent in all procedures at CSIM and how it grows into a value that students wish to imbibe in their own institutions.

Nandineeshree feels that the continuous hand holding offered by CSIM gave her the confidence to dream of her own NGO. "Through field exposure, professional acumen, and real life case studies CSIM helped us to understand and realise our future plans. I also learnt the dynamics and significance of body language," she adds.

Nandineeshree launched 'Aayartham Ayudha Foundation', meaning 'get ready to help' in 2014. She wanted the foundation to provide skill development programmes and services for orphan and differently abled children. While education is widely recognised and provided by different players, skills on the other hand, is not yet an exclusive focus area in the development sector. Given that skill acquisition is in itself not accessible and affordable for many, underprivileged children are doubly discriminated in this front.

Nandineeshree wishes to alter this situation. Run completely on a volunteer basis, Aayartham Ayudha foundation has shown a lot of progress in its first three years. The foundation's networks have built the visibility their workshops enjoy today, but there's still a long way to go," she says.

Nandineeshree wishes to see orphan and challenged kids live their dreams – both in personal and professional lives.



7. P Narayana Reddy

Engineering Livelihoods

The discourse on development is never complete without touching upon a society's ability to create sustainable livelihood opportunities for every section of its population. Often times, the process of development has also led to the loss of livelihood opportunities at a scale that could not be addressed with the rehabilitation plans in place. Under these circumstances, it is very significant to ensure alternate livelihood opportunities for all those displaced due to development and also those communities whose vocations are no longer relevant. The growth of formal sector has led to such a predicament where traditional livelihoods are unable to cope with the pace of modernization and thus co-opt or lose out in the race. Mr P Narayana Reddy was always wary of this vicious circle that culminated in the need to promote livelihood opportunities so that all communities could enjoy a decent standard of living.

Born to a middle class farmer's family in Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh, Reddy graduated in Metallurgy from NIT, Durgapur. Unexpected placement as a Development Apprentice with PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action) in Chhattisgarh introduced him to the development sector. Two years in managing the NGO's projects exposed him to the demanding environment in the development sector, also shaping his thoughts in the process. Raw and rustic, his interest in this sector grew. Soon, he was also able to identify his area of interest. "Sustainable livelihoods must be the focus because only this endeavor can help people realize their right to choice and a decent standard of living. Only livelihoods can create purchasing power through which people can access other opportunities. Poor communities must not be forced to live out of what is left by the rest of the society," asserts Reddy.

His next stint as Domain Expert for Microfinance Technologies in Hyderabad allowed him to work with SHGs and notice the transformation innovative technological solutions that were customized to local needs could bring in. Moving to SKS Microfinance Limited after six months, he was involved in monitoring programmes on a daily basis and managing public relations with different stake holders, especially the local government agencies. During this tenure, Reddy came to know about CSIM's SEOP programme through social media.

"Their advertisement interested me. My work at that point in time required me to play a key role in promoting the enterprises that I worked for. So, I joined the course as it also allowed me to handle work without any break or distraction," says Reddy.

Reddy felt that CSIM's SEOP programme not only strengthened his domain knowledge but also helped him learn the knack of promoting social enterprises. Hooked into the sector, he also pursued a Post Graduate Diploma in NGO Management. "I saw my future here and wanted to learn all that I could to prepare myself. I saw the need for professionalism in the field," shares Reddy.

The following years from 2007 to 2015 were probably the most happening years in his professional life. His engagement with the BASIX group of institutions in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Bhutan, Tanzania and East Africa

exploited his capacity in programme initiation, management and also impact assessment. Livelihood promotion through different models like the SHGs, JLGs, CIGs, Grameen model and the Cooperative model under different projects promoted his expertise that was acknowledged by his membership in the Bhutan's Working Committee on the country's Financial Inclusion Policy. Under his leadership, UNCDF project implemented through the Bhutan Development Bank Limited was able to establish the largest branch network among the financial institutions and importantly, farmers outreach banking services across the country. He also led the team which performed a diagnostic study of the non performing assets of Bhutan Development Bank.

Africa had more in store for Reddy. As the Country Programme Manager, he was in charge of establishing and implementing the African Livelihoods Partnership that focused on financial inclusion, youth entrepreneurship and self employment, agricultural productivity enhancement and value chain financing, by creating a network of local organizations including the Government, NGOs, banks, MFIs, private sector, University and others. Reddy played an instrumental role in promoting Producers' Business Centres that were owned and managed by the communities, while also providing technical assistance to MFIs that financed women's groups.

Presently, he is working with SKS Microfinance in Hyderabad trying to automate field operations, execute a cashless disbursement process, introduce alternate delivery channels for deposits and systems to improve processes . In all his work places, Reddy began from the scratch – scanned the local situations, environment, needs, then devised a strategy to promote livelihoods, developed a project action plan, implemented and also evaluated these endeavours.

Having studied metallurgy, Reddy entered the development sector out of pure interest without any prior association or experience. Eventually, he decided to pursue his career in this very sector so that he could work for what he believed – access to livelihood opportunities that ensured access to all other opportunities, emphasizing the right of choice of the common people.”

Reddy chose to contribute his part by working for organizations that had a similar vision and prepared himself to reach this level of professional leadership. With close to 13 years of experience in the field, he still does not dream of starting his own enterprise. “I want to engage in promoting sustainable producer companies that provide integrated member centric services to improve the living standard of underprivileged sections. I look forward to collaborating with various organizations working for the same cause.,” he smiles.

If you wish to seek his advisory services, please write to pnarayana.recd@gmail.com.



8. Radha Madhav

Sustaining Agriculture

In spite of being the mainstay of Indian economy, agriculture has not received the attention it requires. It is no longer an attractive option for farmers themselves. The scale of footloose migrations and the unparalleled burden on the farmers time and again indicate the need for sustainable agriculture. Mr Radha Madhav is very passionate about sustainable agriculture and wishes to integrate natural methods into the current system of farming. Having worked in the corporate and government sector, he always favours strategies that emerge from experience and insights, backed by a detailed analysis than the conventional decision making that is being followed.

A post graduate in Agriculture and Social Work, he has always wanted to work for farmers and the development of rural population. “This is not just about agriculture, it covers a whole gamut of human rights issues like child labour, farm labour rights, farm safety, equity in distribution of farm income, promotion of technical aspects which the farmers must adopt only after studying the suitability in their farms and many others,” he reminds us, adding that a major challenge faced in the knowledge economy of agriculture is the farmers’ attitude of following what the neighbouring farmer does.

Soon after post-graduation, Madhav joined Dr Reddy’s Lab, a pharmaceutical company. He was part of the team that researched

about plants capable of treating water and the recycling of waste water. After about six years in research and as a trainer and auditor on safety, health and environment systems at a private company, he joined the Government of Andhra Pradesh as an Agriculture Officer. Driven by the desire to work with the farmers, he moved to rural locations while promoting agriculture extension activities that focused on farmers as ‘Adarsh Farmers’. More than an experience, this tenure turned out to be inspiring for Madhav. “Every day was a new learning experience with the farmers. Their enthusiasm to feed the nation has to be supported by other services. I saw the reality they faced,” says Madhav who believes that his stint as an Agriculture Officer has improved his personal skills. “Following a constructive approach in dealing with issues is critical. You not only begin to negotiate your stand confidently, but also introspect decisions from all perspectives,” he adds.

He dealt with farmers working on ten thousand acres in more than ten villages. Identifying progressive farmers was the initial step that allowed officials like him make an entry into the communities. Thereafter, the farmers were introduced to new technologies, trained on efficient farm practices, exposed to platforms where they could learn collectively, share best practices and leaders were identified to promote new programmes. His initiative on farmer clubs in a remote village is still consistent and empowering farmers to be self reliant in all aspects from accessing knowledge to converting them to actions.

With experience, Madhav learned the difference between corporate and government sectors. While the former was equipped with resources, expertise that favoured the introduction and scaling of new initiatives, the latter lacked acknowledgement, resources and man power remained a big constraint. After about six years with the Government of Andhra Pradesh, it was time to move back to the corporate sector to explore what more could be done in agriculture. Madhav joined Monsanto as the Human Rights Lead and also took charge of the CSR & Sustainability initiatives of the company. Protecting farm labour rights was the major focus and he got to engage with more than thirty thousand farmers every year. He has worked across the country in states like Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat and Rajasthan. “Our primary task was to ensure that there was

no child labour on the farms, farm labour including women workers were given fair treatment i.e. ensuring fair compensation, preventing discrimination and harassment, and that all farmers received adequate compensation. Equally important was the responsibility of providing safe and conducive atmosphere in the farms, which called for the play of multiple factors,” explains Madhav, lamenting the lack of importance given to farm safety in the country.

Yearning for a change in the sector and backed by experience with the government and corporate companies, he dreamt of being more professional in dealing with NGOs in Human Rights role and also initiate an informal network of farmer caring champions by starting his own organisation to work further for the farmers. Suggested by a colleague, he joined the SEOP programme at CSIM Hyderabad. Adhering to a professional approach in development interventions is a challenge in itself and the course had helped him understand the layers of systemic interactions with farmers. The learnings on developing programme implementation frameworks, art of hand holding communities and the art of researching communities, he says, made it easier for him to play a key role in managing the Human Rights and CSR programmes at Monsanto and a champion of the Monsanto Global Sustainability Network. “I was able to look at the implementation of CSR programmes on water harvesting, sanitation, sustainable agriculture, farm management and women empowerment from the beneficiaries’ side. With this holistic understanding, I could play an efficient role in hand holding the farmers and communities,” says Madhav who also mentors similar programmes across Asia and Africa.

Madhav’s responsibilities were not just restricted towards the farms and farmers. He and his team with NGO partners also visited farmers’ families and counselled them on farm safety, implications of child labour and their importance in maintaining the country’s food security by sustaining natural resources. Fully conscious of the benefits sustainable agriculture can bring in, he recently undertook visits to model villages like Ralegaon Siddhi and disseminated best practices among the farmer communities, also creating platforms where farmers from different regions/communities came together to share and learn from each other. Aware of the larger picture, he recommends that all knowledge and

expertise is documented in simple language and published, so that it can be availed by everyone. “A great share of knowledge in agriculture is not reaching farmers. They have immense local knowledge, but are carried away by the information that reaches them from other external sources. They are still not aware of best practices and market opportunities. They are helpless,” he explains.

Reiterating that farmers and agriculture are his areas of interest, he also acknowledges the potential of knowledge transfer in agriculture. “Our farmers were into subsistence farming, but were forced to take on an entrepreneurial role with increasing population. However, they were not equipped with the requisite support services. Intervention at this level can be instrumental in moving towards sustainable agriculture,” says a hopeful Madhav.

Visibly excited about the scope of working with the farmers, Madhav continues to prepare himself for this role in his dream of building an informal network of farmer caring champions to further spread best practices for sustaining agriculture.



9. Shravan Kasam

In the journey to initiate

No one ideology or perspective can help analyse a situation in totality, nor can it absolve all social maladies. “Whether for-profit or not-for-profit, each approach has its own strength and best suit a set of development concerns,” says Mr Shravan Kasam, Project Head for AP State operations of Vidya Helpline, Nirmaan Organization, Hyderabad.

Born in an upper middle class family, Kasam had always been passionate about social issues and approaches followed to address them at different levels. Along with a group of friends, he began to contribute and organise recreational programmes for orphanages and homes for aged, during his college days. “We all got hooked into this activity. We looked forward to planning new programmes and executing them,” recalls Kasam. The friends together registered a society called Aikyata (serving souls) to continue such work regularly and in a more organised manner.

Eventually though, this did not last. He pursued his Masters in Pharmaceutical Analysis from the Kingston University, UK. After four years, he returned to India with the resolve to start a social enterprise. Kasam, as an individual, always disliked the idea of working for

someone else. “Given my family background, I was clear about starting my own business. Not as a conventional enterprise, but as something that can influence the society in a positive way. I had no one to guide me through this path, hence explored on the internet and came across many inspiring case studies. I gained confidence and thus stepped into the social sector,” he elaborates.

His initial plan was to start an agriculture information centre, but in the absence of his family’s support, he established his own online shopping enterprise, hoping to convince his parents eventually. Along with business, he made time for volunteering with NGOs and associated himself with institutions/individuals who strived to make a difference in the lives of the underprivileged. He says, “It is during this phase that I got to know about CSIM from a friend. The course at CSIM was an inspiration in itself. I met people in their 60s and 80s who were passionate about specific issues and pondered over their ideas to initiate change. They were all so confident and supported each other. I realised that I was not the only one who had to confront opposition from family to pursue career in the development sector. I was exposed to a kind of networking that was unseen in the corporate world - connected by purpose, resolve and mutual admiration. It all encouraged my interests and prepared me to leave my business.”

Kasam left his business and joined Nirmaan as its Sustainability & Expansions Coordinator. Nirmaan, founded in 2005, is an example of what constructive discussions among students can lead to. A group of students from BITS Pilani, while deliberating on the idea of a developed India, decided to fulfill their responsibility towards the marginalised and under privileged. Intending to promote grassroot social innovations, volunteerism, active citizenship and social citizenship among the youth, Nirmaan introduced a number of initiatives like village level knowledge centres, rehabilitation (including livelihood opportunities) of flood victims in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh, vocational training centres, entrepreneurship development centres and many other programmes focusing on education and livelihood, engaging community members as key stake holders. In a decade, Nirmaan has evolved into a citizen movement with six chapters spread across the country.

Nirmaan's initiated the Vidya Helpline in 2010 (1800 425 2 425/22/27/28) to offer free tele-counseling services for rural youth on academics and career-to help them decide on their career choices and the avenues available. Lack of 'relevant information on demand' and inadequate monetary support have limited career choices for rural youth. Without such information, they are unable to make critical decisions, and pursue a career that can improve their lives. Under this project, Nirmaan also conducts regular career counseling workshops in different schools and colleges in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Assam and Karnataka.

Its been about a year and a half for Kasam, who is now heading all operations of Vidya Helpline in Andhra Pradesh. "I am very happy now" says an elated Kasam, recalling his journey ever since he started his online shopping venture. "I used to follow inspiring stories on facebook. Stories on start-ups did not excite me. Charity work made me feel jealous. So did volunteering. Later, the clarity and confidence I had acquired through acquaintances from CSIM, changed this perspective," he explains. He left his business to start a social enterprise, but lack of experience was a concern. He was very cautious not to enter the sector without knowing its innards and gaining some experience on managing such a model. "Nirmaan is doing just that for me. Surrounded by all young and passionate minds constantly looking out to initiate change in communities, I have been able to observe this sector very closely," remarks Kasam.

According to him, social entrepreneurship is the model to opt for when we focus on empowerment, rights based programmes and similar initiatives that have to be self sustainable. Inability to mobilise funds must not inhibit social, behavioural change which is essential for dynamic development. On the other hand, education for poor children, adoption services and similar services can follow the non-profit approach because such services continue to be unaffordable for a large section of the population. Backed by all this experience, perspective and resolve, Mr Shraavan Kasam dreams of starting his own social enterprise in the near future.



10. Kanniyappan

Identity matters

Identity is a serious issue; at least for the tribals and other marginalized groups who have to time and again prove their identities to avail benefits from the system.

“Not just benefits, but access to basic amenities are also defined by one’s identity, without any effort to know if people were able to acquire their identity instruments,” contends Kanniyappan, Founder of Tribal Youth Welfare Society in Villupuram district, Tamil Nadu. It has been 68 years since independence and our nation is still debating on a suitable approach to tribal development while a section in the civil society laments the disconnect between policy perspectives and the routine life struggles of the tribal population.

Kanniyappan belongs to the Irular tribe community and his journey through school and college reiterate the aforesaid struggles. Born to daily wage labourers who managed to educate their children, Kanniyappan hardly knew the significance of a caste certificate. “Getting the certificate was very difficult and I couldn’t move into higher secondary classes. My father struggled to obtain that certificate,” he recalls.

Now that admission to class 11 was not possible, he decided to pursue a course at the ITI in Sankarapuram. Here again, the admission process was a stalemate for the same reason. So was the case when they had gone to the Employment Exchange. “It was only after facing denial at these places, we got to know what a caste certificate is and its value for us. We had to learn it the hard way,” says Kanniyappan whose studies had to take a break for two years. During this period, he tried his hand at different jobs to supplement family income—from goat rearing to a daily wage labourer.

In these two years, Kanniyappan and family had to face multiple enquiries by department staff and the local authorities. Being the only student from his village, it seemed that the authorities who were required to come in person, check and then issue the certificate did not process his application. As his father had given up, he himself followed up all these processes and finally succeeded in obtaining his caste certificate.

With the certificate in hand, he was able to continue his studies without any hurdles. During his undergraduation days, he became an active member of the Pazhangudi Irular Padugappu Sangam along with his father. Led by a senior professor, this centre helped the Irula tribes fight for their fundamental rights. Inspired by him, Kanniyappan volunteered to teach at the summer camp every year and also got involved in the paper work required for cases on bonded labour. “The interest I developed here influenced every choice I made in life thereafter,” he says.

As Kanniyappan’s job did not pay him enough, he took up other odd jobs like painting and plumbing simultaneously. “Every day was a struggle. I could not afford a proper accommodation. Therefore, I returned to my village and joined an elementary school as teacher,” he says.

“I would go to professor’s office after school hours and help him with his work. Applications for electricity connection, caste certificates, paper work on land dispute litigation, bonded labour and many others were prepared on behalf of the people and posted to respective authorities. As the system and people never interacted here, this liasoning was very critical to protect their rights,” Kanniyappan recalls.

With all this work piling up at the centre, Kanniyappan wanted to work with the youth to prepare them as agents of change and thus founded the Tribal Youth Welfare Society (Villupuram) in 2009.

As he explored the interiors of Dindivanam and Villupuram districts, Kanniyappan came across a village where people had to dig the ground to collect drinking water. Moved by such state of affairs, he wrote to District Collector and advocated for the need of basic amenities like water, electricity, land pattas for the tribals who resided in these villages. After a wait of six months, Kanniyappan and his team were able to procure land documents for 43 families and community certificates for 150 families. His interventions also helped 11 families in Jakkampettai village of Dindivanam district obtain their Voter Identification Cards.

Tribal Youth Welfare Society has been organizing many awareness programmes on bonded labour, government welfare schemes, special rights/privileges under Indian Government in the villages around Villipuram. Kanniyappan himself has penned awareness songs and short stories that are regularly used in these programmes. He mobilized a group of 63 tribals who attended the three month long training programme on rescuing bonded labourers, organized by International Justice Mission and Adivasigal Kutamaipu, in Chennai.

As he travelled extensively within the districts, he also identified other needs which came in the way of providing education for girls. Children, especially girls who were abandoned, orphaned and belonged to migrant families working in the brick kilns, often dropped out or never attended school. Tribal Youth Welfare Society ensured that they all studied in schools by admitting them in hostels. Vocational training was also provided for girls who could not pursue their higher studies.

Referred by a colleague to CSIM and its SEOP programme, Kanniyappan expected the course to help him perform better. According to him: “Social Work has its own set of skills and it was important for me learn them to be able to better socialize with the system and communities.” Better performance meant value addition to interventions and effective actions in the communities. “I could not think of anything more. But the course enabled me to think beyond what I was doing. It was motivating to see many others like me. I was not alone,” he smiles.

He admits that fund raising and networking were the key learning gains and appreciates the space given for funding agencies, NGOs, social workers, human rights activists to come together. “When I joined the course, I did not know anything about 12A or 80G. I was more of a problem centric worker, helping people represent their issues at the right place. Now, there is more clarity on how to administer my organization. I now focus on learning the issues completely with the communities. This self-awareness has helped me organize my responsibilities and dreams in line,” asserts Kanniyappan who dreams of a day when all children from the tribal communities will attend school without dropping out.



11. Swati Kureti

Specially Connected

Special children need special care. Unfortunately, this special care is defined by the socio economic status of families, parents' occupation; availability of family members who can be with their children round the clock; and the stigma the family has to face in the neighbourhood. Many times, these factors affect the morale of care takers, primarily parents, leading them to restraining their children within their houses. Ms Swati Kureti, Founder of Special Friends in Hyderabad, was deeply disturbed by such practices and attitudes of the society towards intellectually challenged children.

She moved to Hyderabad during her high school days from her native, Karimnagar. Although she had to pursue Hotel Management due to her parents' compulsion, the resultant job opportunity in a reputed MNC allowed her to engage in social service activities. "I met Ms Ayesha Rubina, a Social Worker, in 2006. She is now a Corporator in Ahmed Nagar, Maharashtra. Inspired by her work, I also attended a few

carnivals and events that she had organised for special children. I felt connected with those children,” she recalls.

Swati was deeply concerned about children who did not have adequate care at their homes. Three years’ association with Ms Ayesha allowed her to explore all facets of caring for children. She was instrumental in counselling under privileged women to set up creches for slum children in Adilabad district. “I did not want to stop with this. I also worked with ‘Seriously Amusing International’ an international NGO, and Genesis Special School. I met Mr K.L. Srivatsava, Director of CSIM Hyderabad at an event and that’s how CSIM happened to me. The diverse crowd I met and their perspectives helped me to visualise my own organisation. I felt encouraged and completely engrossed with these engagements and decided to build a career in this sector,” says Swati, adding that her decision came in sooner than its execution. She then joined Google, but did not give up on her aspirations. She continued her social service activities and involved her colleagues who were interested in her work. Swati, was now the point of contact for all CSR activities at her campus.

Two years later, marriage allowed her to plan for her own NGO and family’s support let her embark on a new journey. She moved around city’s slums to learn the plight of special children, particularly those of daily labourers. “Their practices were alarming. Children were locked in the houses until they returned from work. They were socially restricted in every possible way. It was complicated to help parents realise that this was not difficult, let alone proposing a suitable solution A series of home visits, focussed group discussions with mothers, community members and counselling sessions helped shape the idea of a school for these children,” says Swati. She did convince her stake holders and finally started ‘Special Friends’ with four children in 2013. She equipped herself with an Undergraduate degree in Psychology and is now pursuing her masters in Clinical Psychology. She says: “I would like to learn and prepare myself to handle the special children better. They are my responsibility now.” Special Friends also provides pick up and drop facilities to ensure safety of the children while commuting between the school and their homes.

Special Friends attends to children with various intellectual challenges like Down Syndrome, Autism, Hearing and Speech Impaired, Muscular

Dystrophy and other physical impairments. While academic skills is the focus for children below 12 years of age, older children are also equipped with vocational skills. Where children need other specialised services, the school also refers them to other institutions in the network. Swati raises funds to support the schooling of children from slums. For other children, parents pay the fees and a portion of this is also used for the under privileged children.

Swati feels deeply connected with Special Friends and her children. She feels relieved about building a space that is preferred by parents than keeping their children locked in their houses. The school intends to prepare children for mainstream school atmosphere. “The process of preparing a lesson plan for every child is an experience in itself, where children are grouped according to their IQ levels. Learning and recreation go hand in hand and utmost care is taken to ensure that children do not feel burdened by the activities they are given. As the days pass by, children want more and the team prepares to match their enthusiasm. We all grow together,” says Swati.

The school initially focusses on building basic skills that help the children to manage themselves independently. Children learn to write their names, addresses, phone numbers, packing objects and other simple tasks. They learn to follow instructions and communicate their thoughts. “Communication is critical. We set a goal for every three months and keep the parents abreast about their children’s development. It is now more interesting to see how parents keep a track of their children’s improvement. They are contended,” she asserts. The school equally focusses on training parents and families so that they know how to handle these children.

Some children take time to distinguish girls’ and boys’ toilets. They must be given the time to understand their gender. “While cleanliness is the first target we all want to work at, care takers should also be prepared to handle issues involving adolescents, older girls, and the pertinent information they are exposed to,” warns Swati.

Mainstreaming entails a chain of processes. Passing the threshold IQ level is just the beginning. Children need support to retain their IQ levels and then move on to socialising with children without intellectual

challenges. Special Friends has demonstrated the impact of intervention but keeps creating awareness on the criticality of early intervention. Presently hosting 18 children (aged 6 years to 35 years), the school hopes to spread the message that 10-11 years of age is the best time for any therapy. “The earlier, the better!”

II. INSPIRING CONVERSATIONS

Interviews with Inspiring Personalities
by Marie Banu



1. Mr. Aroon Raman

“Corporate building for NGOs is important; capacity building for corporates is important.”

FAroon Raman is an Indian entrepreneur and author. Raman did his Masters in Economics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi and then pursued his MBA from Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. He is married with two children.

Raman currently owns a Research and Development company and till date, he has written two two thrillers – The Shadow Throne and a Mughal period adventure called The Treasure of Kafur. Both books were published by Pan Macmillan and have become the national bestsellers.

In 1991, he set up “Raman Boards”, a company involved in electrical materials, which was later bought by the ABB Group in 2007. He then started his Research and Development Company named “Raman FibreScience” in 2008 which has been acquired by a U.S. company in November 2014. The company specialises in wet-laid composites and offers end-to-end solutions to research and innovation problems. His

company is also well known for developing talent at the grassroots level.

In 2010, he was elected Chairman of the CII Karnataka State Council for a period of one year. He is the Convener-CII CSR Panel.

In an exclusive interview, he shares with Marie Banu the need for synergy between corporates and NGOs.

What inspires you to write books?

I was a reader since very young age and enjoyed reading Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, thrillers and boys adventure stories. I grew up on that diet of fiction and then got into non-fiction. I always had been good in English at school, but went on to study Social Sciences, business, and so on. But, I kept up with my reading habits. When I decided to sell my first company, writing just came back in full force.

I sat down and wrote my first book ‘The Shadow Throne’ which was published by Pan Macmillan. That did well and I launched into my second book ‘The Treasure of Kafur’ which is on a Mughal adventure. Now, am writing my third book called ‘Skyfire’. The first book that I wrote was on a nuclear kind of Armageddon scenario. The third book is a sequel to the first with the same characters, but here the plot revolves around artificial weather manipulation. It is an interesting theme and not many people might be aware that there was a UN Environment Modification Convention (ENMOD) 20 years ago where various countries got together and said that we will not manipulate the weather or environment for military purposes. So, the militarisation of weather has been a kind of a hidden agenda in various military technologies for some time. So, this book is a take on that and has some basis in scientific effect

Your interest in the social sector?

I sold my first company in 2007; started another R&D company which I sold in end 2014. Ever since then, it has been my intent to engage in the social sector more strongly. I had also been part of CII for a long time in various capacities and thought I would take up the convenorship of CII-CSR panel which comes focused specifically on disability.

I must say that disability has been a challenge. Corporates do engage to some extent; of course, some are much more engaged than others mainly in the area of inclusion at workplace. Among the manufacturing companies, I find this to be still nascent.

In CII, while we did the conference titled ‘Engage Ability’, I have since found it to be uphill going. There is a lot more that needs to be done to energise the corporate world and particularly after our tie up with Disability NGO Alliance (DNA), I must say that I have not been able to do a lot. I have certainly not given up, but it is clear that we need to achieve a lot more on the ground before we can say that we can make some progress.

How can we sensitise corporates on inclusion?

This is vital. One of the things I am hoping that we will take up in future is—better understanding of corporate CSR and what needs to be done and how to make CII more relevant. For example, DNA has a couple of good programmers which they would like to take up. Eight out of ten corporates would have chosen schools as their CSR agenda which are aimed at mainstreamed children. The moment we start looking at disabled children in every school, the intervention becomes complex. It has been more of a struggle to get the corporates involved in disability programmes because the investment per child seems to be much higher. It could be due to that or other reasons. One of our tasks to look into the corporate views in such matters. There is a huge amount of learning to be done!

How to enable synergy between the CSR and NGO programmes?

NGO capacity building is crucial and well understood. Apart from us, NGOs themselves are aware and are trying to expose themselves as much as they can. But, corporates also need as much inputs, particularly the mid-sized ones and others. Corporate building for NGOs is important; capacity building for corporates is important. Each side has to understand the other better. They have their own strength and weaknesses, and deeper involvement is probably required to bridge this gap better. Otherwise, right now there is a lot of cheque book related involvement which may not be the best way forward. That is one of the challenges going forward which we need to try to pitch.

2. Dr. Gavin Melles

“The issues are not absent in Australia but are different; and the attitude towards social enterprises—there is growing acceptance.”

Dr Gavin Melles is Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Health, Arts & Design, Swinburne University (Melbourne Australia). He is a researcher with the Collaborative Research Centre for Low Carbon Living, teaches research methods and supervises PhD candidates in Design for Social Innovation. He is a social business mentor for the School of Social Entrepreneurs (Australia) and assessor for the Australian Research Council and Swiss National Research Council.



He has been visiting research fellow in Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland. He has PhD (Education), Masters of Linguistic Anthropology, and is completing an MSc in Sustainable Development (SOAS, University of London) focused on livelihood oriented social enterprise in Southern India.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. Gavin Melles shares with Marie Banu the Social Enterprise scenario across the globe.

About your trip to India?

I have been coming to India for a couple of years now. I have a strong relationship with Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CSIE) at IIT Madras. Swinburne University of Technology at Melbourne and IITM have an agreement and joint research and PhD students. I have been teaching at Swinburne University for the last 10 years and was also until 2016 involved in international relations and research.

In addition to CSIE I do have some connections with Social Enterprise organisations — Okapi Consultancy, Villgro, and DesiCrew — in Tamil Nadu.

I am presently completing MSc Sustainable Development (Development Planning) at SOAS, London, and the focus is the links between social enterprise – in the various ways that is conceived – and social development especially as understood from a sustainable livelihoods perspective (a framework developed by DFID and also promoted by World Bank and others). So, this visit in India I am specifically completing the dissertation work about livelihood oriented social enterprises for my research purpose.

Can you tell us about the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University?

Swinburne University has a Centre for Social Impact (CSI) where there is common Master's Programme taught by four different universities in Australia. I have occasional linkages there and recently evaluated one of their PhD students who is looking at social enterprises at Vietnam. Professor Jo Barakeet heads CSI. In our Business and Law Faculty (FBL), entrepreneurship and innovation are strong and one branch of that is Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

This coming year I will be teaching to the Masters in the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme about creativity and innovation.

What made you get interested in the social enterprise area?

Although recently I have got involved in social entrepreneurship, there has been a history or context for me to get interested in this area. About 30 years ago, I lived in Costa Rica along with my wife for some years. I was working for a church based group and at the same time studying in a university about indigenous languages and culture. While I was doing my Masters in Linguistic Anthropology in Costa Rica, I started to think again about how the society in Costa Rica was divided with the indigenous people at the bottom. When I did my PhD (Education) I did an ethnography about migrants learning English as a Second Language (ESL) and that kept my focus on culture and social issues.

I now volunteer as a social business mentor for the School of Social Entrepreneurs (SSE) which is setting up in Delhi, India. I also teach social innovation through design at university and invest in Milaap micro-finance platform.

What is your view about the entire social enterprise sector across the globe?

I have realized over the time that when people say ‘social enterprise’ they mean a lot of things – for profit and not for profit; and individual focused and community focused.

You can’t understand social enterprise in India or Vietnam or Australia or UK, unless you understand the socio-cultural and institutional environment in which it operates, ie., government social policy initiatives, venture capital that is available, and the NGOS. All these organisations make the environment favourable to change or development. In India, from what I know, you have the caste, gender, socio-economic status—all of these influence the extent of which social enterprises is acceptable and for whom. Three books have helped me understand current challenges: Sen & Dreze’s book *India: an Uncertain Future* (2013), *Recasting India* (2014) by Hindol Gupta, and Ramachandra Guha’s (2011) *India After Ghandi*.

In Australia, we have an excluded population of aboriginals who have much lower life expectancy and health problems. The issues are not absent in Australia but are different; and the attitude towards social enterprises—there is growing acceptance.

About the ideology on social enterprise in India?

A year or so ago, I had met Professor Amaresh Chakrabarthy, head of engineering design, Iisc Bangalore at an Indo-Dutch Conference on Design and Well-being. He said that I should think of India like Europe and not the USA as it is like a bunch of different countries with difference languages put together. These regional and district level differences affect how social enterprise works or is accepted.

When you talk about Social Enterprise and even the basic division about the poor North and the more developed South in India, it would only make sense to talk about social enterprise with a regional understanding. There are a lot of claims about how social enterprise is changing India but whether there is a good connect with government social policy remains to be seen. The entrepreneurial spirit, affordable innovation and the fortune at the bottom of the pyramid; there is so much to do and as an outsider I can see that change is happening!

Do you think that Social Accounting and Audit is essential for the social sector?

I was discussing with Joe Barakeet, Head of Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University exactly about this as in Australia, where there is debate about impact assessment. Joe said to me that she thought that Social Accounting approach of the Social Audit Network (SAN) is probably one of the best formal holistic process.

Essentially, I see the problem globally wherein people are not assessing but just telling good stories. It is not enough. There is a small move in Australia towards needs based assessment. But, I think that if we allow the organization to have its own system – the downside is how would that be consistent?

I found the recent training organized by SAN, India in Chennai a great way to make an organization explicit about their work.

3. Mrs. Gayatri Subramaniam

“Section 135 of the Companies Act has endeavored to bring CSR from backroom to boardroom.”

Gayatri Subramaniam is the Convener and Chief Programme Executive of National Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility (NFCSR), Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA). She has an academic and industrial experience of over 30 years and has been associated with Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs since its inception.



Gayatri’s main area of work is to contribute towards policy advisory service and undertake capacity building and knowledge dissemination initiatives in Corporate Social Responsibility. She has been a part of the evolvement of the new legislation on CSR in India representing IICA at various national stakeholders’ consultations and has also represented IICA at various international forums.

She is the Convener for NFCSR - a unique platform created for Government, Corporates and NGOs for taking up development and sustainable initiatives at a national level. At present, she is heading the Implementation Agencies Hub of IICA and in her personal capacity, she is on various advisory committees of leading Corporates and NGOs.

In an exclusive interview, Gayatri Subramaniam shares with Marie Banu how corporates can identify implementing agencies to network with.

Do you perceive that CSR projects would contribute better to the socio-economic development of India than the 3.1 million NGOs working in India?

Yes of course, I definitely perceive that CSR projects would contribute better to the socio-economic development of India than the 3.1 million NGOs working in India. The reason being what most of the 3.3 million NGOs are doing at present are not projects, but sporadic and one off activities. There are of course very good NGOs who are doing projects but the numbers are really few.

What Section 135 of the Companies Act is looking forward is a combination of Corporates and NGOs working towards development initiatives. The combination of the project management skills, professional attitude and funds from corporates amalgamated with the passion, connection and communication of NGOs with the community will certainly be beneficial. Believe me, this combination is really going to do wonders and will hopefully change the scenario of social economic development of India for the better.

Corporates are not expected to do CSR by themselves. How can corporates identify NGO, Trust or Section 8 Company to network with?

True! Corporates are not expected to do CSR by themselves. They can either have their own foundation established as a Trust, Society or Section 8 Company or can use any such independent entity as their implementation partners provided it has an established track record of 3 years. But, the fact is that there is a huge trust deficit between the corporate and the NGOs. Therefore, corporates would definitely like to conduct a due diligence on the NGO partners before they engage them. Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA) established by Ministry of Corporate Affairs has an Implementation Agency Hub that provides this service.

IICA is creating a database of efficient and effective Implementing Agencies. To enroll in this database, NGOs would have to go through a thorough due diligence process. We get them verified through a statutory auditor and once their papers are found in order, they are sent

to 7 Ministries and 4 departments for clearance. This entire process establishes the fact that these NGOs have a valid legal live status and are not blacklisted by any major body.

Do you think CSR will enable corporate employees to be sensitive to social needs and respond to it?

That is a very good question! Although the concept of CSR has been advocated for decades and is generally propagated by companies globally, argument on how CSR should be defined and implemented remains a contentious debate. This gap is problematic because corporates are generally being required to align with societal norms while generating financial returns and maintaining balance between the two becomes difficult at times. Therefore Section 135 of the Companies Act has endeavored to bring CSR from backroom to boardroom. By doing so, many of the corporates have started thinking about CSR and also on how to implement it. Once they get involved in the process, the comfort level between corporate employees and community will increase thereby resulting in the sensitivity to social needs and forcing them to respond to it.

What are the major social issues that you think that the CSR projects should focus upon?

In India, the gap between “have” and “have not” is tremendous. The need is huge. Schedule VII of the Companies Act (which the companies have to follow) has taken care of almost all the major social issues on which the CSR projects could be focused upon. Other than this, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs through a clarification (issued on 18th June, 2015) has allowed “liberal interpretation” of Schedule VII.

However, any CSR project should be need based and should focus on all the stakeholders. A good CSR project should have a baseline survey, in consonance with the need of the beneficiaries; a specific timeline; defined objectives; clear milestones; and specific output and outcomes to have a greater impact.

With making CSR mandatory, will India be able to achieve our Vision 2020 targets on social development?

The journey has started on a very positive note. We at IICA see a great potential in this endeavor. The companies and implementing agencies are going full steam ahead and we definitely see a bright future.

Will Social Audit of CSR programmes make reporting more effective?

CSR activities has become a critical part of the business strategy today and this is particularly important in India, since we are the first country to have legislated the need to undertake CSR spending and make CSR reporting mandatory under the Companies Act 2013.

As of now, the companies are required to constitute a CSR committee of the Board, make a CSR policy and undertake to spend 2 percent of their profits in pursuance of their policy. The companies are mandated to report in the prescribed manner on how they have spent and disclose reasons for not spending.

The Social Audit of CSR programmes would definitely make reporting more effective as social auditing would help to narrow down the gaps between vision/goal and reality, between efficiency and effectiveness. Social auditing would also be able to provide information for effective response to external claimants that make demands on the organization. The social audit would be able to bring out all the weaknesses and strengths of the organization's endeavors to social initiatives, thus bringing in more transparency and give room for further improvement if required.



4. Dr. Kalpana Gopalan

“In Social sector infrastructure it is not just the product, but the process which is important.”

Dr. Kalpana Gopalan is a serving officer of the Indian Administrative Service for 29 years. She has worked in land administration, urban management, rural development and education, and is now Principal Secretary to Government, Administrative Reforms & Training and Director-General, Administrative Training Institute, Government of Karnataka.

A practitioner, policy-maker, scholar, author, advocate for social causes and a mother, Dr Kalpana Gopalan wears many hats. She has a unique mix of academic and practical experience. She honed her research skills as a Doctoral and Masters Student in public policy in IIM Bangalore. She was rated among the ‘top two percent of Doctoral Candidates in the past decade,’ for her research on infrastructure public private partnerships.

A gold medalist and university topper in her undergraduate and master’s, she was fellow in the University of Salerno in Italy; Chevening scholar, UK; and Maxwell public policy scholar in Syracuse University, USA.

While serving as a public service professional, Dr Kalpana Gopalan concurrently continues her academic activities as a Senior Research

Fellow in the National Institute of Urban Affairs, New Delhi, Visiting Professor/Fellow in the Institute of Social & Economic Change, Bangalore, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore and Indian Institute of Management Bangalore and Guest Faculty, Kuvempu University, Shimoga.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. Kalpana Gopalan IAS shares with Marie Banu her views on Public Private Partnerships.

About your childhood, education?

I studied at Vidyodaya School in Chennai and did my Graduation and Post-graduation in English Literature at Stella Maris College. My parents had an inter-regional marriage; my mother is from Gujarat, and my father is from Tamil Nadu. My father grew up mostly in Orissa and Andhra, so most of our family members (the older generation) speak very good Oriya and Telugu as well. We always had a pan-Indian ethos in the family.

I was a very good student, a gold medalist in both UG and PG. I joined IIT Madras for PhD and was a All India topper in the Common Examination for Research Admission.

I was there for a year, wrote the Civil Services Examination, and joined Indian Administrative Service.

What inspired you to join Indian Administrative Service?

It was serendipity! My father set the goal. He always had this as an option, but I was interested in academics. I did not find a PhD programme tailored to my research interest, therefore I looked elsewhere. The real encouragement came from my paternal uncle and a neighbor. In the Chennai of those days, we were all in and out of each other's houses and the whole street was like a family. I had a neighbour who used to like me, because I was good at studies. That's how I got encouraged, wrote the Civil Service Examination, and passed in the first attempt, standing 20th rank in the All-India Merit List.

Any momentous occasion in your career that you wish to share with our readers?

Several, perhaps. In IAS, we work very closely with people and that is the real strength of IAS. That keeps you going!

I have worked in several parts of Karnataka—in Dharwad district about 25 years ago which has now been bifurcated into three districts—and in coastal Karnataka. Even now when I go there, people recognize me, especially in the rural areas. They come and tell me: “you gave me a house” or “you gave me a piece of land and I have set up a dhaba and my life was made because of you.” This is not one such incident, but happens frequently.

In 2013, I served as the Managing Director of Cauvery Handicrafts Development Corporation and as part of my work I used to meet artisans across the state. When I visited Bidar, I came across an NGO that was specialized in sandalwood handicrafts. They used to buy sandalwood from us and engage artisans and make figurines, etc. The reception was over the top and they offered me a garland made out of sandal wood. I was surprised as people are usually nice, but not so very welcoming. I went around the unit and met the women working here. The owner of the unit came towards me and said: “you are not able to recognize me, but when you were in the Rural Development Department, you had sanctioned the seed money of Rs. 2 lakhs for me to set up this NGO.”

This person had come to Bangalore, was waiting in my office for my approval, but as I had cleared his file and sent it I did not get to see him. This happened around 20 years ago. You really see the fruits of what you have done. Although it is your responsibility and duty, it is still a great feeling!

Your experience with social work organisations?

In IAS, you have a lot of opportunity to get involved in social work, but you do it partly with the mantle of authority which the service gives you. I have been associating with NGOs since my probation period. One of the earliest association that dates back almost 30 years is with Swami Vivekananda youth Movement which is promoted by Dr

Balasubramanian in Mysore. When I was serving as a Probationer at HD Kote, Dr Balasubramanian and his colleagues were young doctors who had just come out of medical school and were trying to do some service. I used to walk along with them for 14 kilometers every day to work in the villages and even lunched together. I still tease him about his poor cooking!

Many years later, I took on a more formal honorary association with GRAAM (Grassroot Research and Advocacy Movement), which is an offshoot of SVYM, as their Technical Advisor. The informal association I had over the years with social organizations, crystallised when I took a sabbatical to do my PhD in IIM Bangalore. That is a whole different kind of experience where you are without your regular portfolio or network of authority, and are looking at things from a different perspective. You might have an open mind even otherwise, but to look at it from a different vantage point was very good. This also coincided with my children growing up and family responsibilities being lesser.

After that, I began to associate in a more formal way as an advisor to several social work organizations. After completing my PhD, I committed to give more and more of myself, not only with GRAAM, but also several other organisations like Bangalore Women's Forum, The Akshayapatra Foundation, and so on.

Why is the social sector infrastructure and service delivery challenging? How can Public Private Partnerships enable meeting these challenges?

In social sector infrastructure it is not just the product, but the process which is important. You can build a bridge or construct an airport, but you need mindfulness, involvement and empathy in the social sector. PPP can definitely enable meeting these challenges provided they are well designed and managed.

The formative phase of PPP project, whether hard or soft infrastructure, is critical. Networking or working together becomes easy when public money is not involved. When public funding is involved, it calls for two things—from the public side it calls for greater flexibility which should be built in the structure. It is not just a mindset change as is popularly

believed. There should be some leeway for delegation, financial flexibility, and dispute resolution. From the private side, what is largely lacking in the NGO sector, is that there should be an assumption of fiscal responsibility. You cannot expect that it would be ‘free for all’. There is an attitude that people feel that is it the government money, so there need be no accountability. This is the crux of the problem.

NGOs and Government have equal commitment, passion, and hard work, but with structural financial flexibility on the one hand and financial responsibility it is possible to succeed in social sector PPPs.



5. Dr P.Kuganantham

“In Social sector infrastructure it is not just the product, but the process which is important.”

Dr P.Kuganantham is a practicing public health expert in India for the past 30 years. He has served as the Director of Communicable Diseases Hospital in Chennai, Consultant for UNICEF (United Nations International Children Emergency Fund), Centre for Disease Control (CDC, Atlanta India division), Project Director, Public Health Management Institute, Hyderabad and the City Health Officer of the Greater Chennai Metropolitan City.

He has led several disaster reliefs and rehabilitation programmes across India and is presently Head of the Department of Social Medicine & Infections Diseases at SIMS hospital, Chennai.

In an exclusive interview, Dr P.Kuganantham shares with Marie Banu the need for effective systems in disaster relief management.

Tell us about your experiences as a public health expert in the management of natural disasters

I have worked for the disaster relief programme in Gujarat, the tsunami programme and the recent floods in Chennai. Our system seems to remain unchanged even after 69 years of independence. The Government machinery reacts efficiently to such situations to tide over the emergencies instead of establishing a permanent system to prevent or to manage such situations. For instance, organising temporary corrective measures, food supply to the affected and alternate accommodation during disasters continue to be a major task every year.

The recent floods in Chennai are a clear example of unpreparedness and non-existence of effective systems in place. The 28 canals of Chennai city, which includes Koovam, Adyar, Buckingham canal and 8000 km length of storm water drains were all dysfunctional; they were clogged with silt with no outlets to drain. They were built with considerable funding from World Bank, but were not serving their true purpose. Hence the floods heavily affected the low lying places in Chennai, dislocating nearly 5 lakh families with several deaths. Proper planning of the city to cope with yearly rains and flooding was not done, which resulted in the disaster.

In the Gujarat earthquake, I was able to see the foreign medical teams, especially female doctors from Russia who were able to rescue children from the deep debris, while our Indian medical doctors were not accustomed to do that. Here, the question of disaster management training for Doctors in our medical schools arises. Disposal of large number of dead bodies with the discrimination of low caste and high caste by the military team of Gujarat was heart-breaking. I shed tears that day at the lack of humanity in the midst of such suffering. However, over the years, there has been a change in the mind-sets of our people. For the first time, the Chennai youth were involved in flood relief. Sex workers from Kolkata contributed more than 10 lakhs for the flood relief programme. This is laudable!

Chennai's population exceeds over 1 crore, out of which one-third of people live in slums, who are vulnerable to all natural disasters by virtue of their living conditions. But, what is our agenda to ensure that these people have better living conditions? We are yet to develop a concrete plan for the provision of protected drinking water and rehabilitation of slum areas with spacious high raised buildings instead of removal

of slums along with people to the outskirts of the city, where they do not have livelihood. I have always raised these issues in almost all my delegations at Smart City Health, NUHM Projects and the UNICEF, CDC meetings.

Can you tell us about the Chennai Corporation programme that focused on burial ground workers?

We have more than 200 burial grounds in Chennai where the Vettiyans or burial ground workers have been employed for over 250 years. While working with the Chennai Corporation, I had the opportunity to interact with these Vettiyans, who are engaged in this occupation, not out of choice but because they belong to a particular community. Almost everyone suffers from chronic diseases or alcohol addictions and their contributions to their families is inadequate. Chennai Corporation health department used to provide them identity cards to carry out the work as they have to get services charge from the public for their living.

When I consulted their families with several meetings, I learnt that they were unhappy as the household income was low and the quality of life was miserable. During a meeting, the corporation officials complained that the Vettiyans were fleecing. I mentioned that their livelihood depended on burying the dead, hence they were not fleecing.

I supported the Vettiyans because they were doing a good job which others do not want to do and their voices were unheard. I proposed the Chennai Corporation to employ the Vettiyans on permanent basis and offer them a standardised pay scale. Today, we have 200 of them on payroll. We also provided them with alternative work options like gardening, watchman, hospital worker or driver. 50 percent of them have now come out of this occupation. Chennai Corporation won a national award for this effort and the press provided good coverage.

What efforts have been taken to rehabilitate the youth living in slums?

The plight of our youth living in slums is pitiable, and most of these children are school dropouts. While working with the CDC from 1990-1998, and again in 2001, I mobilised the poor children from slums and conducted various training courses such as: nursing assistant, lab

technician and multi-purpose health assistant besides life skills. We have trained over 2000 students so far and many are gainfully employed.

We have 360 Corporation schools in Chennai, but most of them do not have enough students. This is because people prefer to educate their children in English medium private schools. I suggested to the Chennai Corporation to start night schools and convert at least one per zone into residential schools for slum children. This will help us to teach them, establish good behaviour and also provide them with a safe place to stay.

The Supreme Court has passed orders stating that any institution established for the purpose of education should not be used for any other income generating activity. Therefore, such initiatives will be beneficial for the children.

Can you tell us about the Amma Unavagam initiative?

The idea of Amma Unavagam was conceived by the health department after encountering a few women who were running food stalls on the road side. I had proposed to the government to start food canteens at affordable costs and employ those women, as it would ensure better health standards as well as secure employment for women. The proposal was well received by our Honorable Chief Minister and the allocation of rice, oil, dal and other provisions were provided at subsidized rates that was sanctioned by the Government.

Initially, there was a lot of criticism and when a team from Egypt and North India visited, they stated that this programme was not cost effective. I told that the Government of Tamil Nadu and the Hon'ble Chief Minister that they are committed in investing in our people rather than focusing on revenue. Cost effectiveness and benefit depends on people's well-being. We now have reduced rates of mortality and malnutrition among the marginalised.

Can you tell us about the facilities available in our Government Hospital?

Government Hospitals serve large poor and the middle class population in Tamil Nadu especially Chennai. 60 percent of the income earned by the poor people is spent for health care in private hospitals. We have an average of 8000 patients visiting the Government General Hospitals in Chennai, but there are no adequate doctors employed to take care of them in out-patient units.

There is no separate structure to provide basic health care services. Ideally, this should be provided by peripheral hospitals, but everyone visits GGH, which is a tertiary care hospital. We need to have more doctors and nurses to reduce the disparity between those seeking health care and those who are providing it.

The Government sector has been playing a great role to a large section of our population as their services are offered free of cost. Although the government has been providing good medical facilities, many choose to go to private hospitals.

When compared to other states, Tamil Nadu is in a much better position as our health structure was structured as early as 1950s. The Primary Health Centre (PHC) concept has been very efficient since then. I would always compliment leaders like Shri Periyar, Shri Kamaraj and the Chief Ministers for creating awareness on health issues.

What is the state of communicable and non-communicable diseases in our country?

I have played a big role in reducing communicable diseases in our State- especially cholera. Providing treatment alone is not sufficient; it is important to target the source by providing clean drinking water.

With regard to HIV, we have greatly increased awareness amongst our people, especially the pregnant women. While working for UNICEF as officer-in-charge for Prevention of Mother to Child Transfer of HIV Programme, we organised doctors and social workers to treat and

counsel pregnant mothers. Within a decade, we observed a drop in rates of HIV among antenatal mothers from 0.75 to 0.25.

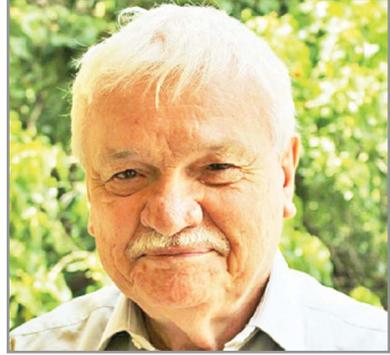
It is pertinent to say that non-communicable diseases are now on the increase. It is a paradigm shift! For instance, we have about 60000 to 70,000 deaths/year out of which 32 percent is due to heart diseases. I also understood that globalisation brought in international food courts, soft drinks, confectionaries, fast food and commercial oils. They are at the reachable rates to people from all walks of life, including people living in the slum areas.

Non-communicable diseases like hypertension, diabetes, PCOD among young women, Cancer colon, breast cancer are showing an increasing trend not only in the urban population but also in the rural areas. We need to provide services such as lifestyle management and sustainable treatment programmes to reduce increasing number of morbidity and mortality. Health care services should become a people's movement to reduce human sufferings in India.

6. Mr. Murray Culshaw

“Communicate or Die. So be it!”

Murray Culshaw is a senior Development Consultant who has mostly worked with the voluntary sector in India. Murray has worked with civil society organisations—from local to international levels—advising on management, communications and fundraising.



His passion for many years has been to encourage voluntary/ civil society organisations to communicate with and raise resources from the public and become more accountable. He has spearheaded several initiatives to support the voluntary sector including India Cares and Credibility Alliance as part of the founding core group.

In an exclusive interview, Murray Culshaw shares with Marie Banu the need for communication amongst Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

Can you tell us about your first experience in the development sector in India?

I was born in Kolkata and went back to England for schooling. I returned in 1964 to work in a Church run technical school. Gradually, that developed into interest in skills training and rural development which eventually ended up as a being responsible for Oxfam in India.

While with Oxfam in India from 1989 to 1994, I became very conscious of the importance of communicating social causes to the Indian public. I worked hard to encourage Oxfam to do it, but didn't succeed although we did small experiments. I left Oxfam when I realized I was not able to help to convert Oxfam into an Indian agency.

In that process, I developed the idea that social organisations should communicate to the public so that the public gets to know about social

needs and in return support people and organisations working on such needs. Another idea I had was that the international aid-agency system was bypassing the Indian public. I felt this was wrong because the agencies giving grants were not accountable to the Indian public and the organisations receiving grants were also largely not accountable to the Indian public because they were accountable to the international agencies.

The only way for CSOs (we don't call them NGOs anymore) to become accountable to Indian society is to communicate and raise support from society. Furthermore if this happens, organisations will be much stronger because they would have national support, and the public would be much more aware of the society needs.

About Murray Culshaw Consulting?

When I left Oxfam, I said to myself that I would spend the rest of my time helping organisations communicate their work, engage Indian society, raise resources and become accountable to society. From 1995, this is what I have been doing!

The first step was to do consultancy work. I was fortunate to have a home in Bangalore as my wife is from here. I had various contracts which kept me going. Gradually I built the consulting work into quite an extensive service. At one point we had about 15 people conducting communications and fundraising training workshops for CSOs in different parts of India; and provided consultancy.

In about 2000, I began to realise that we were not 'viable'. We did not focus on working with the bigger agencies, but focused on smaller and medium agencies who could not afford to pay the fees for the quality of staff required. So, this came to an end.

What was the reason to launch India Cares?

My next step was to help start 'Bangalore Cares' along with three others in Bangalore who as volunteers wanted to 'help the social sector', particularly in Karnataka. We organised conferences, released publications—it was ad-hoc as we did not have any staff.

In 2008, we were invited by the organisers of the ‘World 10 kilometer race’ in Bangalore to be their charity partner. That led us to employ two full-time staff and since then we have been the philanthropy partner for this big international 10 kilometer race which is held annually in May. The title sponsor for this event is now Tata Consultancy Services.

Through the World 10k race we have now helped CSOs raise 20+ crore rupees from participation, and since 2014 by serving as ‘Philanthropy Partner’ for Airtel Delhi Half-Marathon we have enabled organisations to raise a further 11 crore rupees. There are many great aspects about participation in these international quality events; one is that organisations learn to communicate their work to the public and raise vital funds.

When we moved to Delhi we changed our name from Bangalore Cares to India Cares. We are registered as a Trust. I am Chairperson of India Cares and help guide the philosophy. We have an active Board which helps with new initiatives and implementation. We receive income for our services which really turns us to be what is now called a ‘Social Enterprise’. We have grown without a grant or investment which makes us quite pleased with ourselves!

There are several distinct ideas within India Cares. Donations do not pass through us; they go directly to the organisations that are registered with us. We are cause neutral, and do not raise funds from the public and distribute funds in the form of grants. We want donors to make donations to the causes they believe in, and we want CSOs to learn to relate directly to donors and they can only do this when they get directly involved.

We are now diversifying our activities into a number of other services, for instance, a ‘CEO Forum’ has been established to encourage Chief Executives of CSOs to meet around specific subjects. The idea being that Chief Executives rarely meet each other unlike in the corporate sector where they frequently meet through Clubs or industry associations - and in meeting have an opportunity for peer learning. We now have had the CEO Forum running in Bangalore for the last eight months and have started in Delhi and Hyderabad.

What are the other services offered by India Cares?

We are developing Donor Services, for organisations who do not have staff to work on public communication. Many organisations do not have the funds to invest in communications staff. Our service will help organisations develop communication skills by having our staff work with them for a period of six months to one year. Hopefully in that time, the organization will build its own skills. This service will also include database management, developing proposals, individual donor relations, corporate relations and so on.

What else do you work on?

I am also Chairperson of Sense India, a national level organization serving the cause of people who are deaf and blind. This is a unique, niche disability. Five years ago, the organization was 90% dependent on international income. During the year that has just passed (2015-2016), it ran on money raised by its team in India. It is no longer dependent on international income and this year is looking at expanding its services. It has a very interesting national structure working through other organisations in different parts of India.

It is estimated that 500,000 people have this disability in India. Sense India's services are from baby screening to enabling adults engage in economic activities. I concentrate on strategic thinking, strengthening governance, and resource mobilization.

I am grandly called 'Senior Advisor' for Mahiti – a technology company with a mission to enhance the impact of social initiatives. I help with strategic thinking and management issues. I see Mahiti as very complimentary to some of the other work I do. There are also important links between Mahiti and Sense India; Mahiti and India Cares. Mahiti has exciting potential for growth because of increasing awareness that technology must be a part of enhancing the impact of social programmes.

Known as a Father ('now almost a dinosaur') of Fundraising, what is your closing remark for CSOs?

CSOs must communicate their work to the Indian public; spread an understanding of the work they are doing, and generate support – both financial and in kind. In other words, communicate or die! So be it!



7. Mr. Nassar

“At first, women empowerment must happen in my own industry.”

Nassar is Tamil actor, producer, writer, director, lyricist, and singer. He hails from Chengalpattu, Tamil Nadu and studied at St. Joseph’s Higher Secondary School. He moved to Chennai after school, where he finished his pre-university at Madras Christian College. At Madras Christian College, he was an active member of the Dramatic Society. Later for a brief time, he worked in the Indian Air Force.

He joined the Film Institute in Chennai, in the year 1982-83, and received his diploma in acting. Prior to this, he also underwent training in acting at the Acting Training Centre, affiliated to South Indian Film Chamber, Chennai. He entered the film industry in 1985. He has acted in about 300 films, which include Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Hindi and English language films. He also became popular in TV serials. Nassar is married to Kameela and they have three sons.

Presently, Nassar is the President of The Nadigar Sangam, historically known as the South Indian Artistes’ Association, a union for film, television, and stage actors in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, based in Chennai. Formed in 1952, the group has a charitable trust fund to

provide pension to retired actors, voice support for actors caught in controversy, and have collectively protested socio-political issues.

In an exclusive interview, Nassar shares with Marie Banu his views on women empowerment.

What was your inspiration to join the film industry?

I chose acting as a profession. I don't put special effects to be remembered as an actor. This is my job and I do my best as I have to compete and stay long. Acting is no more an art here. I have to excel in my profession and stay long in my career.

One of my sons learnt music, but has taken up acting. Another son is getting trained to become a cinematographer. It is their wish and I am trying to give them the best education possible.

Can you tell us about your training programmes?

I train people who aspire to become actors in Blue Ocean Film & Television Academy (Bofta). I also have a trust called Adavu which looks into the native arts. Mostly, I look into 'Therukoothu'. Now, I have shifted my entire focus on Nadigar Sangam.

Being the President of Nadigar Sangam, what are the areas in which your present team is focusing upon?

We are trying to help the thousands of traditional theatre artists who are poorly paid. This is our prime focus. In due course we are planning to conduct workshops and bring back the conscience of the theatre, because it has lost all its colour.

Sangam will work better with the support of all the actors and committee members. With the help of Agaram foundation team, statistical data will be collected about the members of this association. According to the data collected each and every member will benefit through the policies and schemes. The committee will concentrate towards benefiting underprivileged members and their children's education.

How do you think we use media to create social change?

Theoretically, we call film as a media, but I doubt it has been used as an effective medium for social change. Probably, during pre-independence, when we only had theatre and film, we used it intensely to propagate the freedom struggle. But, now it is not so.

To accept the fact, films made now focus only on entertainment. To my knowledge, in whole world, it is only in Tamil language that we have made the most number of films against corruption. So, where did the message go? It is obvious that because the message will sell, such films were made. If the message is ineffective, it might as well not be told.

Now, I see a lot of social media sites active. I think it is because we were a suppressed community for a long time, people are using social media to spurt out whatever they think. One should be cautious while expressing his or her view in the social media. At times, without confirming or analyzing whether it is right or wrong, people post messages thereby creating problems.

Most of the people in our country can afford smart phones and various levels of interactions in social media are going on. But, I don't know if it would bring about a revolution as in Egypt or in other countries. It is time for introspection! The new generation should be responsible.

Your thoughts on women empowerment?

At first, women empowerment must happen in my own industry. We find the percentage of women in the film industry to be less. A lot of women should come to direct movies, work with camera, etc. Women have proved to be as capable as a man in doing any job—whether physical or mental. It is good that our country has given them space to fly fighter planes. Of course, somewhere, men are jealous. Finally, they have meet the challenge!

We still have a long way to go. Women empowerment should spread from urban to rural areas, thereby having our entire nation covered. Many jokes on husband and wife relationships are shared in social media. If power and responsibilities are shared equally amongst men and women, these silly jokes will fade away. This will solve a lot of problems.



8. Dr. Raja Samuel

“The hallmark of Social Entrepreneurship is the capacity of creativity and ideas that can be channeled into a particular service for people.”

Dr. Raja Samuel is the Principal of Madras School of Social Work. Born and brought up in North Chennai, witnessing poverty and deprivation and experiencing it to some extent, Dr. Samuel has grown up in stature to head one of the premier Institutions for social work education in the south. In his childhood, devoid of access to books for extra reading, he used to read whatever he came across in print. This habit of reading laid the firm foundation for his language skills. He attributes his success in career to the hard work and investment of time he made in all his endeavours and the blessings of his parents and the Almighty. He is also fortunate to have the support of his wife and two sons.

In an exclusive interview, Raja Samuel talks with Marie Banu about the need for social entrepreneurship in education.

About your education, and interest in research?

I studied at Don Bosco School in Perambur and did my UG in English Literature as well as PhD in Loyola College. Fortunately, Loyola College has PG in Social Work and therefore I pursued this course

specializing in Community Development. From then, my career has been linked broadly to social work and social development.

The years I spent at Loyola College was very fruitful. The Social Work Department gave its faculty full freedom to take on funded research projects from outside. They offered space and computer to work on data analysis. This was around 1992 when we were migrating from DOS to Windows. I had huge support from my teachers and colleagues, Mr. Arulraj and Mr. Sarvesan, who taught me about computers and research respectively. I used to read a lot of books on data analysis and explored research software.

I had the opportunity of conducting a state level study at M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation on ‘Women in unorganized sector’ and that is how I established a connect with MSSRF and landed there later on. The years at MSSRF, in Project ACCESS, further consolidated my research expertise and also taught me how research can be converted in to a tool for advocacy.

What are the changes in mindset or perspectives that you see in students studying social work today?

In Tamil Nadu, as in the rest of the country, we have Human Resource Management (HRM) attached to Social Work making it a mixed bag. A lot of students apply thinking that social work is all about HRM. This trend is quite worrying and must be reversed. Some Institutions have made the course generic or have separated HRM from Social Work. However, I find that whoever opts for the MSW course is committed to social development.

In terms of intention, commitment and attitude to work, I don’t see much change compared to now and then, though I wish that all students who opt for MSW have the zeal for it.

About Outlook ranking MSSW as third best institution in India? What makes your organization unique?

Outlook based on popular perception and user survey has ranked MSSW as third best institution in our country. It is getting more difficult

to maintain this image as there are a lot of colleges now. Staying on top is a real challenge.

We revise our curriculum thoroughly every three years and also make changes annually. Our curriculum pattern is the best and there are many institutions within and outside the city who borrow the papers we offer. We have a very good Board of Studies in which we have external members from the industry and social work organisations who offer excellent suggestions. We also bring in elective papers on new themes like social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, etc. What makes us unique is our willingness to experiment within the boundaries of academic freedom and the quality of our students who are generally vibrant and give their best to any activity.

What is your take on Social Entrepreneurship?

Social Entrepreneurship (SE) is something that has tremendous potential, not only in terms of actual entrepreneurship possibilities outside but also in terms of training within the college. Today, funds for NGOs are coming down in several ways and the welfare model is phasing out. In fact, people in Tamil Nadu are better off when compared to other states. So, what is the substitute for development activity to take place?

Development involves a lot of participation and intention to develop oneself. That is where it matches with Social Entrepreneurship which focuses on helping people develop and where people participate not only physically but also monetarily. When one pays for a particular service, even a token amount, the value of the service goes up. This is where Social Entrepreneurs come in. The hallmark of Social Entrepreneurship is the capacity of creativity and ideas that can be channeled into a particular service for people.

Traditional social work or social service or welfare never had that opportunity. They had a package of services which we think need to be offered. But, SE comes from the needs of the users. In that way, there is tremendous scope for SE and we at MSSW seized up this issue and integrated SE in a major way. Some departments have a paper on SE, some departments offer an elective, and some offer certificate

courses in SE. We may not be ready to have an exclusive course on SE immediately, but we think time is ripe for it.

We are also in the process of launching a Skill Lab with CSIM. The social incubation centre which is part of the Lab will motivate few of our students to start up a social enterprise.

About Social Work today?

A lot of professionalism and diversity is getting into this area today. Participation of social workers in human rights advocacy is also on the increase. However, several others without social work qualifications also operate in that space. That poses a challenge. We are re-examining what exactly is our core domain and where we can pitch in. Social Work's core domain earlier was working with individuals. However, we focusing more on communities as our problems are large scale.

Although our overall focus is on development of individuals and communities, one of the main challenge is the recognition from the government of what Social Work can do. In India, we do not have a council for Social Work like the Bar Council or Medical Council. MSSW is closely partnering with Professional Social Workers Forum and we are trying to see whether we can move towards a Council and talk with the government.

Recently, the Government of Tamil Nadu has asked MSSW to conduct a study on Government children homes. The government wants us to look into the conditions of the children homes and recommend measures to improve them. This is a great opportunity not only to improve the situation but also to reinforce the role of social workers.

Your advise for student who wish to study at MSSW?

MSSW is a place which offers several opportunities for learning. We would like applicants to be focused on what they want to do and come prepared. Then, there is a likelihood for them to join our institution. I would say: "Don't apply if you are looking at obtaining a generic degree in MA or MSc."

We have a UG as well as PG in Social Work. We have a lot of students applying for UG in social work and psychology. We encourage diversity in several ways, and welcome applicants from other states.

About the fees and scholarships offered?

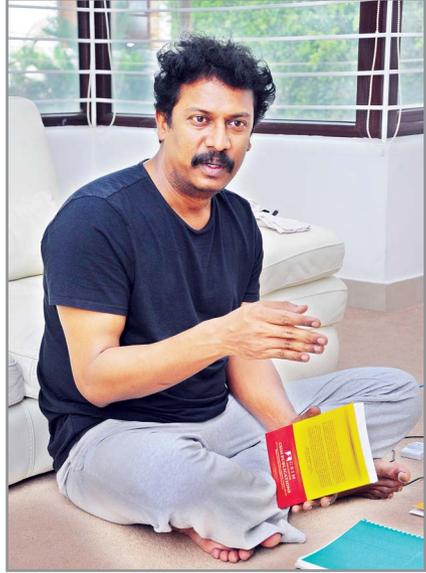
The fees is affordable and we have a variety of scholarships. We also have scholarships instituted by our alumni, which was one lakh rupees last year. We have a strong alumni network and our recent meet was attended by 300 alumni. Our Parent-teacher association is vibrant and we have many parents who offer support for students. The best outgoing student award is offered by our PTA.

Thus MSSW offers one of the best opportunities for students to prepare for a career in Social Work and Human Resources.

9. Mr. Samuthirakani

“When a child is properly taken care until the age of 15, nothing can change him after that.”

SSamuthirakani is an Indian film Actor, Producer and Director who predominantly works in the Tamil industry besides appearing in a number of Malayalam films. He worked as an assistant to Director K. Balachander. His 2009 directorial Naadodigal was a runaway hit, which was later remade in three languages. He has acted in several films as well and is best known for his performances in Subramaniapuram, Easan, and Saattai.



Subramaniapuram showcased Samuthirakani as an actor with potential and Nadodigal helped him prove his mettle as a director. His recent film Appa is about the role of a father in his child’s life.

He has won the National award for best supporting actor in 2016 for the film Visaranai.

In an exclusive interview, Samuthirakani shares with Marie Banu why his films focuses majorly on social issues.

Given that your recent film is titled Appa, can you tell us about your family and your role as a father?

I hail from Sethur, a village near Raja Palayam in Virudunagar district, Tamil Nadu. My family were engaged in agriculture. I lost my father when I was 15 years old. He used to say: “Money will not be of use at all times; one should earn the goodwill of people.” I bear this in my mind as I travel my life’s journey – earning the goodwill of people.

The conversations I have had with my son who is studying in 9th standard is what appears in most of my films. In fact, he has directed a short film and released it in youtube independently.

My daughter is studying in third standard. I am lenient towards my children and give them 100 percent freedom while my wife is strict towards them.

Your thoughts about the present generation. Are we giving them enough freedom?

It is wrong not to give freedom for our children. They need to enjoy their childhood—dance and play at the age when they should—so that when they grow up they can face the society rightfully. But, in reality, parents are designing the lives of their children and forcing them to do what they wish them to do. It is like a captive monkey who is made to dance to the tune of its master. This is very wrong! Some parents decide on what their child should become depending on what their neighbour's children does. They wish for their neighbour's envy more than their own child's happiness. This is betrayal of our next generation.

What is the reason for most of your films to be focused on social issues?

I love my society! When I arrived at Chennai at 15, I met several people who were good—a police constable who was on his night patrol; a watchman who gave me space to spend the night; a hotelier who offered me a job, etc. Like this, there are many good people who are quiet. At the same time there are also not-so-good people who are loud. The world seems to recognize only the loud people.

This is the reason for me to produce/direct films like Appa. People who have not watched films for more than ten years are now watching my films. I am receiving calls from theatre owners and my film distributors across the state informing me that many school children in Namakkal are being taken to watch Appa.

I wish the next generation to lead a pollution free life. No one is living a 100% life! Presently, we are all living a life filled with adjustments and corruption.

Films portray villains in a very admirable way. How do you think we can sensitise the future film makers?

I do not compromise on my films. I trust my audience and risk producing. Although other creators may desire to convey a message through their films, they are not in a situation to do so as they cannot afford it. Their producers demand assurance for their investment and have a formula which they want to follow.

People like me believe in breaking this formula. My films are all different and the public are accepting it.

You have donned several hats – Actor, Director, Producer, and Dubbing artist. Which of them would you like to be identified for and why?

I want to learn all the techniques in cinema—including editing, art direction, and camera. Only then I can get fully involved in cinema.

Appa is going to be remade in 12 languages and I wish to direct all of them. The issue about parenting is global and I want the message to reach a larger audience.

Which of the social issues are your most passionate about?

Child labour and child abuse. When a child is properly taken care until the age of 15, nothing can change him after that.



10. Mr. Sashi Kumar

“The overall philosophy of our journalism education is to sensitise the future generation of journalists to the reality of India.”

Sashi Kumar is a prominent media personality from Kerala, India. In the late seventies he was among the earliest Newscasters in English on Doordarshan, India’s national TV network, and over the next decade, became a familiar face in TV households in India as news and current affairs anchor, film critic and producer and director of topical features on television.

He was the first West Asia correspondent of The Hindu in the mid-eighties. He directed the film Kaya Taran in Hindi based on the short story “When Big Trees Fall” by writer N.S Madhavan. He is the founder of India’s first regional satellite TV channel Asianet.

Sashi Kumar founded and chairs the Media Development Foundation, a not-for-profit public trust which set up and runs the prestigious Asian College of Journalism in Chennai.

In an exclusive interview, Mr. Sashi Kumar shares with Marie Banu the changing trends in journalism in our country today.

Your career graph and most cherished moment ?

My cherished moment, of course, is being part of Doordarshan as a News Producer. Those were the days when it was a one horse race where Doordarshan was the only act in town. We had the advantage of having the entire nation watching us, but today the channels have to vie with one another to get their viewership.

From there, I moved on to print journalism. I was The Hindu's West Asia Correspondent and started their bureau at Bahrain in mid-eighties. It was the time of Iran-Iraq war and it was quite exciting to coordinate the coverage for The Hindu. I then came back to India to set up a television for Press Trust of India in Delhi. It was then my own entrepreneurial instincts were aroused and I started thinking of setting up a television station all of my own. That's how I founded Asianet which is based out of Kerala and now seen by a large section of Malayalees across the world.

After 10 years in Asianet, I divested my stakes in 2000 and founded the Media and Development Foundation, a not-for-profit Public Trust. The idea was to give back to journalism what journalism had given me and for some people like us. My good friend Mr. N Ram is a fellow Trustee; Mr. C.P. Chandrasekhar, a well-known economist; Mrs. Radhika Menon, my wife, and a publisher of children's books; and Mr. N Murali are also Trustees. We set up Asian College of Journalism to enable excellence in journalism education. Journalism as a distinct discipline was not available in India then. We had Mass Communication, but Journalism is distinct of Mass Communications. We were the pioneers in that sense.

Looking back 16 years later, I can say that we are the leading journalism college in the Country today. We plan to expand and start courses in Financial Journalism and so on. Unless we have ideas and keep translating ideas into actions as far as possible, you stop living. For me, it is not a great act of courage or boldness or self-sacrifice. For me to live, I have to keep doing things and this is part of that whole exercise.

My career graph has been interesting and I have been learning through the whole process. Today, many young adults learn about journalism and talk about it, because journalism is at cross roads and is not as how we knew it. With modern technology, everything is delivered on your smart phone with buzz feed, tweets, and blogs where viewers, readers,

and listeners are themselves the producers of journalism—Citizen Journalism is rampant. We are learning as much as we are imparting.

ACJ’s scholarship for Dalit students. Can you give us more details?

Diversity in the news sphere has been a very important part of my agenda. News organisations in India have been earlier very gender insensitive. There were times when news organisations will not take many women, but now we have far more women than men in journalism. In our college, year after year, the proportion of women to men is always in favour of women. A lot of women are entering journalism and with generations we will see the impact of that. It is true that women have not made it to the top editorial positions, particularly in the print media, but that will change eventually.

Like gender injustice, there has also been class and caste injustice. The most invisible part of journalism was the Dalit voice and the presence of the Dalits. We always wanted to change this and hence instituted scholarships for Dalit students. These have fluctuating fortunes to it as the problems were not always the scholarships, but finding qualified young Dalit students who could cope with the course. The medium of instruction being English, they should have the language skills to grasp the programme. We used to despair sometimes on how to change that.

This year is a Dalit year at ACJ where we have six full scholarships offered for Dalit students and also Mr. Surjit Ambedkar, the great grandson of Dr. Ambedkar studying here. I dare say that the Dalit journalists who are working in the industry today are those who have studied at ACJ. This gives us a lot of satisfaction.

About ACJ’s Covering Deprivation Programme?

The overall philosophy of our journalism education is to sensitise the future generation of journalists to the reality of India. Reality of India is not shopping malls, not fashion and designs, not movies and gossip, nor voyeurism—it is also the reality of the ordinary man on the street. It is about people living in rural India who hardly find any presence in media, whether print, television, or radio. We have been trying to correct that.

It is a great, difficult, and daunting task and our students are equipped to handle it. When they move out into the real profession, they find little space to do stories and that has been the kind of relationship into which the students or the journalists who come from here enter into the media organisations and niche out their spaces to publish their stories.

Reality of India is rural India, and our ‘Covering Deprivation programme’ looks at vast areas of India which live in relative deprivation – in terms of child labour, female foeticide, gender injustice, social inequality, unemployment, farmer suicides, and many other areas.

When our students leave from here, there is a reality check. They are mentally equipped to see India not the way they were born and brought up, but understand their duty not to talk about ‘shining India’ but the ‘struggling India’.

What are the features of ACJ’s module on investigative journalism?

Investigative journalism is a specialize module at ACJ. In fact, we have instituted an award for investigative journalism from last year. We give a sum of two lakh rupees for the best investigated story in print for the entire year, another two lakhs for the best investigated story in broadcast. The first prize was won by a lady who wrote about the famous Raj Rajaratnam case and how they were using the maid as the front person for their bank accounts. This article was published in *The Caravan*.

Investigative journalism is a new thrust area for us. Real journalism is all about investigative journalism. Normal journalism is becoming everybody’s cup of tea. You get all the information you need from Google or Wikipedia. So, the real litmus test of true journalism is how investigative your stories are.

We have too many media channels today. Your thoughts?

Yes, we have many media channels, but we get more and more of the same—whether Times Now or NDTV or India Today or News X or TV 18. You are getting the same headlines in the same order, the same news discussions, and same experts appearing all these discussions. People have no choice. Normally, when you have a variety of channels, you must have variety of news.

11. Dr. Saundarya Rajesh

“I realise today, that, I was the change I was waiting for.”

Dr. Saundarya Rajesh is an entrepreneur from Pondicherry. She is the founder-president of AVTAR Career Creators, FLEXI Careers India, and is the managing-trustee of AVTAR Human Capital Trust. She is best known for her work in the area of flexible working, second careers for women, and increasing women’s workforce participation in India. She has a PhD in human resources and is based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.



In an interview, Dr. Saundarya Rajesh shares with Marie Banu the role of women in Indian Economy

What motivated you to launch AVTAR?

About 25 years ago with a new-born, an increasingly demanding job at a leading multi-national bank and a husband with his own fast-paced work schedule, I realised I was burning both ends against the middle. With a lot of hesitation, I went to my manager and proposed a flexible working arrangement that would ensure I finished my job while also managing my home-care and child-care duties. My manager’s reaction made me realise that it was a long way before a woman can aspire for both a career and personal life. Soon after, I took the decision of quitting my job.

Within just a few weeks, I realised I wanted my career back. Not that same job in that same bank, but my career. And that’s code for, I wanted my economic freedom, time with people other than my kids or mother-in-law, the adrenalin surge that came with completing a project, the acclaim and appreciation from peers – the whole package. I wanted my identity back. I wondered if it was a fundamental human right to desire to be intellectually and economically liberated and if so, was

there some organization, some impassioned evangelist who would fight for that right for me.

No company and I repeat, no company was ready to employ a woman with my credentials on a flexi-time basis. It was either full-time or bugger-off! And on full-time, it was equal opportunity, the way the fox offered the crane equal opportunity to drink soup in a bowl. I decided to take the more scenic route and embarked upon a circuitous journey into HR consulting, Teaching, Radio production, Face-painting (yes I did that!) that finally led to my own entrepreneurial adventure - AVTAR. I realise today, that, I was the change I was waiting for. Today, AVTAR is India's Number One evangelist for Working Women – on the areas of Flexible Working, Career Enablers, Specific Career Opportunities for Returning Women et al!

What do you think is the role of women in Indian economy?

In my opinion, Women Power is the answer and solution to India's metamorphosis into a developed nation. In the years 2007-10, when the rest of the world was reeling under the impact of recession, India was able to hold its head high, due to the large amount of savings that Indian banks held. These were household savings accounts – held to the maximum extent by women! Thus, Indian women were an important reason for India to maintain its balance during the recession. Women impact in a very strong way since she spends more for the family. Women who not only save, but also earn translates to the following:

Doubling in household incomes – The Income level of urban Indian women has doubled in the decade 2001-2010. This has led to the average urban household income doubling – from up from Rs 8,242 to Rs 16,509

Even greater increase in savings - The Urban Indian woman who earned Rs 4,492 per month in 2001 was taking home as much as Rs 9,457 as of 2010. This in turn led to a huge increase in savings.

Increased participation in buying process - While 34% of women participated in the actual buying process in 2003, by 2010 that number had gone up to 43%.

Increased financial independence - There has been a 33% jump in the number of women who have a savings bank account in the last decade.

According to the 2015 McKinsey Report, India could add \$700 billion of additional GDP in 2025, upping the country's annual GDP growth by 1.4 percentage points, by advancing women's workforce participation.

Just imagine women being able to work to the same extent and numbers as men! All the statistics mentioned above will be doubled and trebled. This means that within a short span of time, India will be a FULLY DEVELOPED nation, with a GDP that will be the highest in the world.

Please tell us about AVTAR I-WIN which provides flexi-careers for women.

AVTAR I-WIN expands to read AVTAR Indian Women professionals Interface Network. It was conceptualized and launched in December 2005. When it was launched, AVTAR I-WIN was India's very first career service for women. We specialize in creating and providing opportunities for women who have taken a break in their careers and are now intent on getting back to the mainstream. This is for the woman who has her career aspirations as high as her family priorities and is now ready to balance both. We are probably India's largest creator of career re-entries for women.

AVTAR I-WIN was a path breaking initiative which revolutionized how the industry worked – a true blue-ocean idea. After creating thousands of careers and improving thousands of lives in the process, we have evolved AVTAR I-WIN into more than just a recruitment service. Today, we are India's best when it comes to women's careers and a 40,000-strong network of women professionals across India. Our recruitment service is still as strong as ever (over 8000 placements and counting) but we now cater to every aspect of a woman's career.

What are the present activities of The AVTAR Human Capital Trust?

At AVTAR Human Capital Trust, we have been working in the space of economically empowering women for the past 8 years. Our work

has been in the areas of Girl children life skills enhancement programs, employability workshops for women in various colleges in Tamil Nadu, Prevention of Sexual Harassment training and education support. As of now our work has primarily been in the states of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, we are hoping to spread our impact to other parts of the Indian geography too.

Did you know? Almost one in two women across India cannot read or write - this means 165 million females in India are illiterate. The returns on investment in girls' education are higher than for boys; educated women can increase earning potential and eventually economic growth rates. The national average female illiteracy rates (age 15 and older) to men is 45.5%: 23.1% (UNFPC, 2009). The health of future generations is directly linked to the physical condition of females. Only one in 100 girls reach the final standard of school. Women with higher levels of schooling have a lower risk of physical or sexual violence with their partner. An extra year of education boosts their eventual wages by 10–20%; for boys, the returns are 5–15%. Infant mortality decreases by 8%, for each year a girl stays in school. Schooling and social inclusion empowers young women to actively participate in civic life, take informed decisions, exercise their rights, and advocate for community improvements.

Thus, our new initiative – Project PUTHRI! Our new project 'PUTHRI' is aimed at skill-building of girl students from Government run corporation schools to prevent drop-outs and to ensure economic empowerment by way of sustainable careers. The end-goal of this project is to make 10,000 corporation school girls career intentional EACH YEAR and ensure that they pursue white-collar jobs upon graduation. As such this is a longitudinal project and one that requires investment of time, volunteers, efforts and cost. For Project PUTHRI, we seek volunteers, mentors, corporate sponsors and training spaces. Organization and individuals who are keen and passionate about building a future India that is built on a strong foundation of empowered and intentional girls. We would like to reach out and request discerning organizations to partner with AVTAR Human Capital Trust on Project PUTHRI.

12. Dr H Sudarshan

“The joy of giving and saving lives cannot be compensated by monetary benefits.”

Padmashree Dr. H Sudarshan is the Founder and Honorary Secretary of Karuna Trust. Karuna Trust has pioneered and implemented successful Public-Private-Partnership models with government and corporate to strengthen the primary healthcare and reached out to over 1.5 million people of underserved communities with affordable and quality healthcare. Dr. Sudarshan holds an MBBS Degree from Bangalore Medical College.



Dr. Sudarshan has dedicated his life towards working for the upliftment of the Soliga tribal communities in Karnataka. In 1981, he set up the Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (VGKK), which has blossomed into a sustainable tribal development program with only a few peers in the country. He has shared his wide experience by volunteering with the Government in his Chairmanship of the Karnataka Governments’ Task Force on Health & Family welfare as well as leading a ‘battle against the ‘epidemic of corruption’ as the Vigilance Director of the Karnataka Lokayukta (Ombudsman).

In an exclusive interview Dr H Sudarshan shares with Marie Banu his work with the tribals.

About your childhood, education?

I was born in a cowshed, as my mother was not allowed to deliver inside the house. I come from this background! My father came to Jayanagar in Bengaluru and I studied in a school here. At the age of 12, I accompanied my father to a village and he literally died on my lap due to lack of medical aid. It was then I decided to become a doctor and dedicate my life for those who did not have access to medicine.

At 16, although I had scored good marks in the board exam, I could not pursue higher studies as I was below the required age by two months. This was because I got a double promotion in school. I worked in a flourmill for one year and earned 110 rupees a day. I saved my salary and paid for the medical college entrance fee.

I read about Swami Vivekananda and I received motivation from him. It was clear for me that I should reach the unreached and save their lives. I joined the medical school, and after my internship worked in Ramakrishna Mission Hospital in the Himalayas. I heard about BR hills, and in 1980, I came here and started my work with the Soliga tribes.

You have been working for more than three and a half decade with the Soliga tribes. Can you please share your experiences?

I started with curative health – saving people from snake bites, pneumonia. Then I found that the community were prone to many epidemics like whooping cough, hence I engaged in immunization - Community Health. I found that I did not have pills for poverty, so I had to find ways to get access to land and forest resources. This became community development and we have been fighting for the last 34 years for land rights. We finally succeeded two years ago by getting land rights and community rights for minor forest produce.

We were in midst of a wild life sanctuary, and today it is a tiger reserve – a biological hotspot. We call this sustainable development – Biodiversity conservation and livelihood of tribal people. It was a gradual evolution from curative health to community health to community development to sustainable development.

We therefore focus our work in areas of health and education. We started a school with six children in 1981 and two out of the six have become doctorates—one in forestry and the other in social work. These are the first generation learners and several graduates and post-graduates have come up.

We also have income generation activities for them, mainly based on the forest produce and we have a cooperative where the forest produce

is collected, processed and sold. We have also promoted a lot of women self-help groups.

What is your concept of tribal development?

Our concept of tribal development or my own understanding is that we should first go and live with the people, understand their strengths—the traditional systems which made them survive—and build on those strengths. This is the basic theory! We need to also understand their core values, culture so that we can promote this in their education system.

I do not believe in bringing them to the so called ‘national mainstream’ as diversity is their strength. Development should be based on their decisions – self-determination. The tribals can’t live in the past as they do not have access to the forest as before. So, they have to change their lifestyle a little. They now have land for cultivation. Within these limitations, we need to see how best we can preserve their value system, family system, and other social systems to bring about development.

About Karuna Trust and its programmes?

Jadaya, the first doctorate from the tribal school is now the President of Karuna Trust. Many tribal people themselves are part of VGKK and they are taking care of it. We also have income generation activities to sustain tribal development as we were depending on grants and donations. Now, we have Gorukana, an eco-tourism project which is managed by 25 tribal youth. The guests are taken on a trip to the forest and are exposed to the tribal life. All the profits from this social enterprise goes to the tribal development.

All tribals have got their land titles and participate in the Panchayat Raj system. We had a Soliga woman as the vice-president of the Zilla Panchayat, we also have women heading the Taluk and Gram panchayats.

We found leprosy spreading in the tribal areas in the foot hills. Whatever the tribals had was recent infection, hence we wanted to work on leprosy eradication as it was hyperendemic in Yelandur taluk. Thus we launched the Karuna Trust! We eliminated leprosy in Yelandur taluk and we found

that there was a particular type of epilepsy called ‘hot water epilepsy’ as named by Dr. KS Mani, Director of Nimhans, wherein when one takes a hot water bath they get seizures. We conducted an epilepsy control programme for the rural people living in the entire Yelandur taluk and brought it under control by cost effective intervention.

We found that the government also had its own infrastructures—primary health care centres in the areas where we were working. I met the Secretary and asked him to partner with us instead of duplicating efforts. That’s how the PPP came and the government agreed to give two primary health centres in the tribal areas which we manage. At first, the government granted a 75% funds and then 90% funds for this project.

After launching this model in South Karnataka, we have now moved to Northern Karnataka as well. Arunachal Pradesh government invited us and this place is more difficult than the BR Hills. Even today, most areas do not have electricity or telephone connectivity. We took up the challenge, and now we have 11 PHCs in Arunachal Pradesh, 11 in Meghalaya, and 3 in Manipur.

Therefore, we started our work in Veerapan’s territory and then we worked in Naxalite areas of Karnataka and Orissa, and we worked in insurgency areas in the North East. So, we take up very remote areas and places where there are conflicts and difficult situations to render health care.

At present, we are reaching out to about 1.5 million people and through our primary health care, taking one indicator of infant mortality rate; we have prevented 550 infant deaths in the last year’s intervention.

Can you share a quote of yours to inspire our readers?

The joy of giving and saving lives cannot be compensated by monetary benefits. There is a great joy in giving, and that is what I have realised. One of my classmate, an oncologist who earns more than a million dollars, once said to me: “You are leading a much more meaningful life.”

III. NGO PROFILE

*Inspirational stories of uncelebrated people
whose organisations strive to make a
difference in the lives of the deprived.*

Writer: Shanmuga Priya. T



1. Arvind Foundation

Sensing the Special Children

Conscious parenting is not a strategy but a new trend where parents are educated to be more conscious of their children’s development. They are told the impact their decisions can have on their children. Simple choices, habits and many other factors influence the growing child and peers. As conscious parents, couples also spread the message through their lifestyle and attitude towards their children. “It does take time, but this must be the way,” says Mr Athma Raj, who founded Arvind Foundation along with his wife Ms Sudha Athma Raj, in KK Nagar, Chennai. The Foundation works for underprivileged children with special needs.

Their son, born after four abortions, was affected by cerebral palsy. They knew it early on and went through the same phase as any ignorant parent – denial, trauma and the question “why we?” kept ringing in their heads. They did not have an answer nor did anybody give them one. It was their son, Arvind, who made them conscious. “He was carrying the message for us—Arvind Foundation is the answer. We realised there

were other parents like us, but did not have the capacity to take care of their intellectually challenged children. They needed help and we knew we could do something about it,” shares Athma Raj. The couple soon adopted two children marking the beginning of the Foundation in 2004.

Today, Arvind Foundation runs four outreach centres, hosting 145 children across the state. Two of the centres also provide bus services to pick up and drop children along with their mothers’ as it is unaffordable and uncomfortable for mothers in remote locations to carry their children to the centres. These day care centres use a combination of physiotherapy, occupational therapy and musical therapy to promote healing in the children. Regular curriculum is taught depending on age and ability of the children. Alongside subjects like history, geography, science, and mathematics, the children are also taught vocational skills like pottery, carpentry and jewellery making. Arvind Institute of Vocational Excellence trains inmates on computers, catering, administration and other tasks where the students can engage independently. “They just need guidance. They sense things faster than normal children. You will be surprised to see their creations. Pottery was introduced for the benefits it assured — concentration, improvement of fine motor skills and creativity— addressing sensory needs. Our children have created magic with what they learnt,” he says proudly.

Interestingly, gardening is an important part of children’s routine here. Kitchen gardening is practiced in all the centres and completely managed by the children themselves. “Gardening is a therapy in itself. It is a significant part of growth and healing in our children. When they see what they have grown, they feel achievement. They feel positive and capable,” says Athma Raj.

He also emphasises on the criticality of early intervention. The first five years of a child is the golden period, as the possibility of training and healing is very high. “A lot of inputs can go into the child; peer adaptation and socialisation becomes easier. Early intervention is a magical opportunity and we cannot afford to lose that magic,” he says adding that “The later it gets, children get violent and there is a whole lot of unlearning they have to go through, including for the parents. Therefore, growth in these children and development is slow. While delay in detection and intervention is a cause for concern, Athma Raj

is more concerned about the pattern parents set into. He is worried that ‘they don’t see the soul caught in a crippled body’. Any intervention must appeal to the soul and create a balance between their mind, body and soul, to facilitate healing and growth in the children. Curative education iterating the holistic approach towards every child is practiced in the Foundation’s schools.

The couple are categorical about not promising a remarkable change in the children. Cognizant of the fact that every child is unique and each child has its own pace of learning and equipping with skills, tailor made story telling is followed to engage all of them. However, he also warns that all these efforts may not be fruitful if practices in the family, or parents’ habits disturb the children. “During a family visit, we noticed parents taking the younger sibling with them whenever they went out. The older, challenged child was left alone at home. Parents did not ask what the child wished and presumed that he will be comfortable at home. But, the child felt left out and unloved. In another instance, we found a non-verbal autistic child missing the school uniform as her younger sibling wore it while going to school. Once the uniform was given, the child would get ready happily and wait to board our bus to the centre. Parents have to be brought out of such patterned behaviour,” he opines.

Another commonly raised concern by parents is: “what after us?” Parents are always apprehensive of the dependence of their children and can hardly imagine what their children might get into in their absence. Arvind Foundation is building a residential facility to answer this concern. The facility will host challenged children of under privileged parents, orphans and those who do not have care takers within the family. Regular training and education programmes will be administered to engage them meaningfully and help them lead independent lives. Besides assuring a shelter away from home, this facility also intends to protect them from abuse and neglect.

As a first step, Nirman programme has been initiated at the Poonamallee centre where children come and stay with parents for a day and return home after the sessions that teach them one-to-one support, thereby preparing them to live independently. Parents can follow the same in their homes to build their habits. “We actually see parents growing with

their children. The smile on their faces is all we want to feel assured of the work we do,” he says.

Athma Raj and Sudha are very grateful to their staff and leave no stone unturned in capacitating them. Also conscious of the need for trained therapists, care takers and specialists in the field, Arvind Community College was established in 2010 to promote Diploma, Certificate course in rehabilitation studies. They are both contended with development in the children and the staff who have also grown over the years. “The love showered by our staff is the medium through which we have reached where we are today. We have seen our children getting jobs and entering colleges. Parents coming out of stigma about special schools is a positive sign. Their smiles during PTA meetings and narration of developments during home visits only encourage us to do more. We wish to do a lot more to realise the larger dream of inclusion”.

2. Education4all

The Pencil Man



Social Services is a mixed bag. Where one contributes not only depend on their strengths, but also their limitations. The sooner one gets to realise this, the sooner will they be able to begin their cycle of contribution to the community. Mr Venkatraman Krishnamoorthy realised this.

Known as the Pencil Man, Venkataraman is a Chartered Accountant from Mumbai who moved to Dubai in 1992.

As years passed by, he founded his own software services company. “When I turned 50 in 2009, I felt contented. I had earned and saved for my children, and lived my dreams. I wanted to do something for the community. I visited homes for the aged to figure out if there was anything I could do for senior citizens, but soon realised that this was not my cup of tea,” says Venkatraman.

“I could not see people in pain, whether it was children or older people, as it disturbed me very much. I therefore decided to focus on something that needs many hands—Education,” he explains.

Education is the best investment for mankind’s future and everybody must enjoy this as an entitlement. However, Venkatraman was bothered by the inequities creeping in different forms. Stationeries used by his children who outgrew them were acknowledged as a ‘luxury’ for underprivileged children by one of his friends, Mr Raghavan. Within a month, Venkatraman managed to collect 80 kilograms of pencils/colour pencils and distributed it to 50 schools in India.

“Lack of proper pencils or even colour pens discourages children. Their yearning distances them from the learning process,” he says. Cognizant of the fact that surplus led to wastage amongst the financially well-off sections, he decided to collect and route them to the needy. His approach did address some critical gaps in the system. “There are children who have only two sets of uniforms provided by the Government Schools. An extra pair of uniform means a lot to them. An extra notebook means they can practice writing more efficiently; and extra pencils mean they can write more. While stationeries have become a lucrative business, wastage of extras or unused stationeries meant a lot more to me,” he says.

Venkatraman began collecting all extra stationeries, books and other utility items for school children from the two countries. Education4all took shape in 2009 and was solely managed by Venkatraman’s efforts. From the thought of committing an hour a day for the community, Venkatraman engages himself full time in coordinating awareness programmes and collection drives in schools, corporates and other places. Simple messaging services helped him facilitate interested individuals manage the collection and deliver things at his place. From stationeries, he moved on to collect uniforms, books, board games, and toys too. With his support, libraries have also been set up in rural schools in India. Connecting with many NGOs in 15 states in India, education4all is now active in more than 120 rural schools across India, 44 in Tamil Nadu alone. Now that these efforts take care of providing the essentials, Venkatraman feels that funds allocated for such expenses could be utilised for other necessities. From 2016 onwards, he along with Raghavan, started distributing sports items and school infrastructure items like benches and chairs.

“Education4all is not country specific, nor is it limited by the network of people known. The organisation’s website www.education4all.info connects with all interested individuals and those who wish to help schools in their locality. They just have to get in touch with us,” insists Venkatraman, whose vision has helped reach out to 25,000 children across India and Africa.

He is now gearing up for the largest collection drive in Dubai for refugee children. During one of his school visits in Tamil Nadu, Venkatraman

found that the cost of milk bought from open markets limited food expenditure in a school. He then pooled in resources and gifted a cow to the school, inspiring many others to do the same. Local villagers were engaged in maintaining the cows and milk was bought by the school at a subsidised price. Twenty families living around the school are now above poverty line and empowered with a livelihood.

Education4all also began to focus on quality of teaching in rural schools. Volunteer teachers, housewives and interested students from Mumbai and Dubai spend an hour a week to teach children in remote schools in Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh, through skype. Teaching through skype has also made it possible to teach music and nutrition to children in these locations.

From stationeries to infrastructure, and quality of teaching to learning – education4all has intervened in all these fronts, making a remarkable impact on the quality of education in government schools. Recently, Venkatraman and Raghavan expanded the activities of ‘gyanavahanam’ which is a mobile van with laptop and internet connectivity manned by a science teacher who visits schools on a rotational basis to promote visual learning.

His principle is very simple—“Education is meant for everybody. No conditions - whether background, terrain of habitation or access to learning aids - must limit one’s entitlement to education.”

Venkatraman strongly believes that goodness spreads and that ideas must not go unattended. Only an initiation is needed. What one starts with and what one ultimately manages to do – the journey between these points is the experience we seek. He is also categorical that ideas must not be restricted to the people behind its initiation.

“Anybody can execute an idea in his or her own way. What matters is execution for the goodness of all. After all, doing good is an addiction too,” he smiles.



3. Gift Your Organ Foundation

The gift of second life

Organ transplantation has a long history. The advances in Medical Science have revolutionized the idea of treating different diseases, promising a second lease of life to many. With the advent of immuno suppressant drugs and other breakthroughs, organ transplants became efficient, also promising a longer survival for the recipients. While science could successfully carry out organ transplants saving many lives, societies could not take to this easily. Misconceptions around organ donation, which are reinforced by lack of awareness hinder voluntary donation of organs. And thus, demand and supply are never in balance.

Vital Organs like heart, liver, kidneys, intestines, lungs, and pancreas can be donated only in case of ‘brain death’. Other tissues like corneas, heart valves, skin, bones etc can be donated only in case of natural death. All that is required is a registry that allows the doctors and donors to communicate easily during times of need. India does not have a registry. Unfortunately, The Transplantation of Human Organs Act, 1994 also does not mandate the maintenance of a registry. The green corridors in the north and south are an achievement in every sense, yet we have only 0.08 organ donors per million population.

Given this scene, the awareness drives and the registration for organ donations promoted by civil society have had a significant impact. Several Foundations, with the support of the government have come together to build the case for a registry and promote pledging for organ donation through different means.

Gift Your Organ Foundation is a registered Charitable Trust based in Bangalore, founded in 2011 by a group of likeminded individuals who wanted to transform the scene of organ donation in the country, that was beset by deficiency and lack of awareness. “Many people think that eyes and kidneys are the only organs that can be donated. Deceased organ donation is much wider in scope and execution. Communities have to be educated about this,” says Ms Priyanka Shylendra, Director for Operations at the Foundation. Alongside building awareness on deceased organ donations, the foundation aims to bridge the gap in the functioning between the government, the hospitals and the organ donors. It also serves as a national registry for those interested in pledging their organs in the possible event of brain death, which is linked to, and has the support of The Zonal Co-ordination Committee for Transplantation in Karnataka (ZCCK) – a Government of Karnataka body.

One of most successful projects of the foundation is the community project of introducing the option of organ donor on drivers’ license cards. Priyanka graduated in Forensics from the UK and worked for a private lab in India. Driven by the desire to do something for the community, she developed this project while pursuing the Self Expression and Leadership Programme at Landmark. “In countries like the US, one can pledge organs while taking license. This way they got to pool in a large number of donors. It is believed that one organ donor can save up to 8 lives. So, wanted to try this in India but was not aware of others in the field who could help me take this forward. That’s when I got to know about the foundation and my vision aligned with theirs,” recalls Priyanka.

Beginning with the departments of Health and Transport, she contacted all the key stake holders and managed to get all the paper work done in the next six months. Funded by the state government, the driving license project took off successfully and the second grant has also been used to initiate a similar drive in Udupi district of Karnataka and Mumbai.

Udupi district saw the first organ donation happen in March 2016. As she later admits, the government support to work from the RTO office was the key as it allowed the foundation to meet and follow up license seekers easily. The foundation employs full time staffs who work at the RTOs to interact with the license seekers. The interaction is mediated in such a way to sensitise them on the need for organ donations and unravel the myths surrounding this concern.

Having completed two and a half years, the DL project is now active in seven RTOs in the city of Bangalore. 1,35,000 DL applicants were approached at the RTOs, out of which 45,000 had pledged to donate their organs in the event of brain death. Efforts not only educated the DL applicants, the regular follow up created a chain of interactions with friends and family members, educating families and communities in the process. Remarkably, the project was able to reach out to people from different walks of life. The rich, poor, educated, illiterate, auto/truck drivers, women, differently abled – all of them could see the difference organ donations promised.

The only challenge faced was the fear in their minds. Some people thought that they might succumb to illegal organ trade and some others also misunderstood that their religion was against donation of organs post death. All such misconceptions were cleared and some procedural ethics were also explained. “We had to explain and assure that bodies of the deceased would be returned for final rights after the harvest of organs. This experience also helped us see the need to build support systems, especially for paper work, so that the process can flow smoothly,” shares Priyanka, who is happy to see a steady rise in the number of organ donors in the last three years. The team is content with the progress and is more excited about the fact that they are building a person independent system that will continue to benefit lives even after they leave.



4. Makkala Jagriti

Learning more at HDLCs

According to the latest report on Children in Difficult Circumstances by Plan India, 80% states reported street children and child labour as key concerns in the context of child rights. While trafficking and child marriage also emerged as major concerns, it must be noted that all these issues feed into each other. Biases in the planning and intervention of one issue against another led to complication. The resulting chain of processes and the dependence on point interventions have not mitigated the issue, yet have been able to mainstream as many children as possible.

“Over the years Makkala Jagriti understood this dynamics. When Ms Joy Srinivasan began in 2003, there were many children on the streets of Bangalore, but lesser number of schools. Education is the way to build a society. We wanted to help children get back to schools. Our focus was to enrol them in public schools that can ensure holistic development of children in the formative years itself,” narrates Mr M Murali, Chief Functionary of Makkala Jagriti in Bangalore.

By 2009, the reality of drop outs from schools and the general preference for private schools by parents from all classes forced Makkala Jagriti

to recalibrate its strategy. By empowering the marginalised people, one cannot ignore their aspirations and increasing consciousness about ‘good quality education’. While these parents saw private schools as a solution, Makkala Jagriti invested in building the capacities of government schools in order to improve their quality of education.

“Quality education is a fundamental right. Even the poor must be able to access this wherever they go. Therefore, government schools, which functioned as a centre for education with benefits like midday meals, had to transform into learning institutions that focussed on the holistic development of children. Thus, Makkala Jagriti rebuilt government schools to make the most of both features – quality education and benefits to promote equity,” says Murali.

Makkala Jagriti introduced learning centres within government schools, that operated according to the school timings. With all requisite permissions in place, schools gave them one class room and ensured one period per day for each class for children to undergo supplementary learning. Language development, Creative development, Life Skills and Physical development were the areas of focus for the organisation. “Listening and Speaking is the most important part of communication, but only reading and writing are being focused in school. Our Language development classes aim to bridge this gap through reading programmes with grade specific texts, developed in line with the syllabus followed by the school,” explains Murali.

Activities like arts and craft, dance, and debates are also organised to foster creativity amongst the children. These activities not only encourage creativity and lateral thinking, but also reinforce the concepts that the children have learnt during regular classes. Makkala Jagriti has been very categorical about the space that needs to be provided for life skills. “These underprivileged children come from a background of ‘no’ or ‘less care’ at home. Their social skills are poor, they have low confidence levels and are also weak in decision making. Life skills was the way to redefine their personalities within the school environment, so that they could experience the change in themselves,” Murali adds.

In Karnataka, schools with less than 175 children do not have a physical education teacher. Therefore, there are no physical activities in such Government Schools. Recognising the importance of play in healthy

child development, the learning centres organise outdoor sports and karate classes. Aptly, these centres are called the Holistic Development Learning Centres (HDLC).

Presently, there are 12 such centres – 7 centres in schools across Bangalore, 3 centres in Koppal district and 2 in Bangalore’s urban slums. With the experience gained at two delivery points—schools and slums—Makkala Jagriti is all geared to focus on its third delivery point—the Juvenile Homes. Vocational Training (life skills and counselling services) will be focussed in these Homes. “Otherwise, they too may land on the streets,” warns Murali.

Learning centres in the slums teach English and Computers during the day for the youth. In the evenings, these centres encourage children, whose parents are still out at work, to study.

In order to provide counselling services and vocational training to the youth, Yuva Jagriti was established in 2006. Youth from the slums, largely school drop outs, are sent on camps, guided to develop their competency map and are then enrolled in vocational training centres within the network. Thereafter, they are also placed in jobs across Bangalore. “Mobilising youth is a huge challenge. With no guidance, they are left astray, to deal with their issues of adolescence, peer pressure and also pressure from families to earn money. They are disconnected from all forms of education or growth,” says Murali, adding that Yuva Jagriti takes them through multiple stages of screening so that the decision to undergo training in a particular field is a fully informed decision of the individual. This process ensured that the youth did not drop out from the training centres.

Having reached out to over 20,000 children so far, Makkala Jagriti continues to refine the contours of holistic development by addressing core issues at the micro level. “Dropout rates in schools have decreased. Student strength in government schools has increased. 80% of the children in schools have achieved the desired learning outcomes for every focus area. While moving to a new school, children looked forward to a HDLC there. Makkala Jagriti is contended with the impact it has been able to create in a decade,” smiles Murali, dreaming to see the organisation’s work further addressing the issue of street children.



5. Orione Seva

Enabling Opportunities

A society's progress is driven by the desire to create opportunities that enable people to move up the social ladder. Inequity in access to these opportunities defines the trajectory of growth and therefore, needs to be addressed holistically with a long term vision. While social welfare programmes abet rehabilitation of vulnerable groups, there are also others that intend to build capacities so that even the most vulnerable will be able to realize economic independence. Thus, the emphasis on skill development and vocational training programmes focusing on specific sections of the society. And most certainly, the earlier we start the better.

Orione Seva (the operational name of Kripa Trust) is an NGO based in Bangalore, working for the poor communities in Chikka Byrathi. Drawing inspiration from a 20th century Priest, Don Orione, the NGO has worked extensively to build opportunities here, to impact lives of the needy. Cognizant of the discrimination women and children had to face, their presence in the community also helped to build trust thereby

enabling a conducive atmosphere for learning and development. “We found that women and children were the most disadvantaged. Further, children with learning difficulties also became our concern as there were no other programmes or services that reached them here. They were just left to deal with themselves at the family level,” says Fr Mariano, Director of Orione Seva.

The socio-economic dimensions of poverty compelled them to find out ways to ensure women, children and especially those with learning difficulties had their own space to acquire basic skills. A decade ago, manufacturing illicit liquor was the main livelihood here. With development around the city pushing migrants to this village, parents had no means to support educational and nutrition needs of their children. Since most of them worked for daily wages and often reached very late, they were not even able to spend quality time with their children. As a result, there was no motivation for children to study and they invariably dropped out. To address this issue, Orione Seva decided to run a tuition centre in its premises where children will not only be able to study in the evenings, but will also be provided food to meet their nutrition needs. “The programme has been operational since ten years and the rapid urbanization has made this intervention more necessary and relevant,” he says.

During the course of work with the tuition centre, Orione Seva also came across children with learning difficulties who had no means for constructive engagement and learning. Parents felt helpless and did not even know how to interact with their own children. Unaware of the role they could play, Orione Seva’s intervention only raised their expectations. Dayaniketan is a day care centre for children with learning difficulties that was established three years ago. It presently serves 34 children from the community and new admissions are taken in as and when need arises. Children from the slums of DJ Halli were enrolled in the centre which provided pre-vocational and vocational training programmes for children belonging to the age groups 5 to 15 years and above 15 years.

“Fortunately, mobilization was not an operational challenge for us. Families had no issues sending their children to Dayaniketan. In fact,

they encourage us to expand the operation of this centre,”he says adding that “the only challenge Orione Seva had to confront was the high expectations from parents and community.”They took really long to comprehend and accept the limitations of their children. Parents must know that they are equally responsible for the progress in their children. So, we decided to take them along in the journey. Thus, the decision against making this a residential centre.”

Having recognized this, Orione Seva consciously engaged parents through monthly meetings to help them learn how to handle their children and encourage their learning, development at the household level.

Orione Seva recently began its work at Chandanaduru village in Chikkaballapur district, Karnataka. Very much similar to the pattern of operation in Bangalore, it all began with a tuition centre that allowed the organization to comprehend needs of children in the community. “But, here it is a weekend tuition programme as lack of public transport makes the commute difficult and expensive,” he informs.

Soon, Orione Seva recognized that Chandanaduru and the five villages around it in Gauribidanur Taluk had no programmes or services reaching out to the children with learning difficulties. There were no special schools in this region. A day care centre similar to Dayaniketan was introduced and it was received well by the community. Having been operational since two years, the centre now trains 16 children.

Working with women was an unexplored option and Orione Seva has started from the scratch. Initially, the women were brought together to spend some time together. Women had no place for socializing, nor was there any means of recreation. Orione Seva decided to bring them all together and engage them in constructive activities. Learning their interest in stitching & embroidery, Orione Seva provided them with all raw materials to produce pieces of art using the anchor stitch that they were good at. “We explored avenues to sell their products in the market, and thanks to the quality of work of these women, we found takers. We started getting orders from Mother Earth and other enterprises,” says Fr Mariano on how this initiative evolved into a livelihood project called *Thayi*. *Thayi* now boasts of a wide range of products – wall hangings,

clay products like bells & diyas, multi-purpose pouch, cushion covers, bags, wallets, etc.

With these initiatives, along with school sponsorship programmes and medical camps going on steadily, Orione Seva now wants to find out ways and build its own capacity to reach out to children with severe learning difficulty.



6. Raza Educational and Social Welfare Society

From Child Labourers to Entrepreneurs

Elimination of child labour is more a contest of strategies as the institutional and legislative responses laid down by the State were in themselves not adequate to transform the situation. In spite of the UN conventions ratified and the national legislations passed, contextualization of issues in every community has been a challenge and small scale initiatives by different organizations have promised a better tomorrow.

Raza Educational and Social Welfare Society in Bangalore also adapted its own strategy and demonstrated the impact. Established in 1994, RESWS believes in ‘development’ as a participatory process. “We try to help the deprived understand their situation objectively. It has to start from here to elicit their meaningful participation,” insists Ms Benazir Baig, Founder Secretary, RESWS. “I lived a life of facilities. Father was in the Air Force, so life in the quarters was all equipped and pleasant. Once in Bangalore, the conditions in which children worked

shocked me. I had not witnessed this before. I easily bought a chocolate for ten rupees, while children had to work through an entire day to earn that ten rupees,” says Benazir, who then set on to explore child labour.

Children, she emphasizes, are not the reason for the plight of poor families, but are pushed to take up responsibility on their shoulders. She began with evening tuition classes for child labourers where she hoped to introduce basic literacy. “The children took six months to hold a pencil properly. Children needed an eco-system of support services to help them come through these tough times,” shares Benazir, who lamented the challenges in rescuing child labourers. According to her, the most critical part of their work was to make children believe that they all had their inherent capacities. Children were acquiescent with their lives and hardly looked forward to a change. They were so busy at work and worked very hard that they hardly had an opportunity to imagine lives without the arduous work.

Poverty is seen as the root cause of all problems. Therefore, to eliminate child labour, RESWS decided to work with the mothers as well. Women empowerment programmes helped encourage women to question the lives their children led and promote education, as the ensuing chain of impact not only ensured economic progress, but also inculcated life skills.

“Getting them to believe in this was a challenge, because education would lead to their children not being able to earn for the family. The change in this attitude is apparent now and communities understand the significance of ‘moving forward’,” shares Benazir.

RESWS runs non-formal schools under the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) where rescued child labourers, street children, school dropouts and out of school children are taught basic reading, writing, and then mainstreamed into regular schools. The Excellent English School established by the society has played an instrumental role in the process. Children could experience quality education, along with training in life skills and computers. The school follows the State syllabus and can host a strength of 600 children from kindergarten to class 10, every year.

There are also vocational training programmes for school students and young wives/mothers. While the students group are taught computers, spoken English and personality development, women are trained in tailoring and embroidery as they had no employable skills earlier. To visualize them as breadwinners who could invest in children, ensuring that at least one adult in the family earned, it was essential to equip women with some basic skills. As families often denied women the possibility to go out for work, training them in tailoring/embroidery gave them the space to establish and operate small units from their own houses.

RESWS is now embarking on a new journey. Entrepreneurship programmes for the youth have been introduced in collaboration with the Scotland Youth School. Candidates will be trained in entrepreneurship and their new businesses will be funded through the programme. They will also be provided assistance in management of the businesses. “This is a new beginning for all of us. 20 students who were subjected to a life of vulnerabilities have been shortlisted for the programme to be educated and supported to become an entrepreneur. I look forward to see new Tatas and Birlas grow from here,” says an ambitious Benazir.



7. Reussir Trust

To Reussir Learning

Mental Health has been and is mired with myths, prejudices, stereotypical notions, that conditions which can be addressed during early years also go unnoticed. Lack of awareness and the stigma around mental health issues have kept families of the affected on a denial mode. Knowing and accepting the fact that the child is having such an issue is the first and critical step to help the affected children. Ms Shanthi Sathish, Founder of the Reussir Trust (Bangalore) did not learn this easily. As the parent of a child with learning difficulty, Shanthi’s journey through Reussir is the answer to all challenges she had to confront, in the best interest of children like her son.

Shanthi’s son had difficulty in reading and writing, he was a left hander too. His schooling was not as exciting as his parents expected it would be. Being forced to write with his right hand created disinterest in attending school. “He was harassed,” she recalls. Shanthi then shifted him to the Montessori system and here again there was no significant progress “But, he was happy! We could revive his interest in going to school,” she adds.

Shanthi then zeroed in on a school that used traditional methods of teaching under the Montessori system. The teachers understood him

better. “We got to know that our son was verbally very good, but had difficulty in writing,” she says.

In class 1, he could not take the pressure to learn cursive writing and almost declared that he would no longer go to school. “All this while we were clueless, we did not know what was happening. He would also not play with his friends. All that we knew was another school could help him and again changed his school, but admitted him in a lower grade. Kannada classes introduced in class 4 took us all by shock. He saw it is a drawing class and the letters were designs according to him,” shares Shanthi, who then got to know about dyslexia from different sources.

“The hindi movie – Taare Zameen Par – was an eye opener,” she admits. But now that the issue is identified, Shanthi was again lost like every other parent of a child with learning disability. “We did not know the intensity of this problem, we did not know where or how to get an assessment done. This is when I took a break from my 15 years long career in the Human Resource Management,” she says.

Disheartened by the responses she got from some of the mainstream schools and the limitations in accessing special schools, she decided to work on creating awareness on learning difficulties that will sensitise parents and teachers alike. The reach of the first workshop she organized at Palace Ground was phenomenal. “I had expected only around 100 participants, but more than 250 turned up. We also saw parents like us who had no idea of how to help their children,” says Shanthi who felt the urge to support them.

Her first concern was the absence of a standard tool of assessment in India. NIMHANS assessment tool was limited as it was meant only for children below 14 years of age. With no parent knowing what an IQ was and what to infer from such assessments, the task of identifying a special educator further complicated the choice for their children. There were few special educators – some charged very high while others who were affordable lived far away. If one thought of resorting to remedial classes to help children post school hours, nobody knew where these were. In rare cases, where all these fell in place, the economics of this system were an added burden on the parents.

In her effort to pool in support systems for children with learning difficulties, Shanthi also learnt that the Government of Karnataka's policy accommodated such children by making the evaluation process flexible. But most of the schools were not open to adopting this system as it entailed additional responsibilities. Given such an atmosphere, Shanthi felt the need to establish an organization that can help parents support their children with learning difficulties. This required the parents to know what was going on with their children and that every child had their own way of interpreting or understanding things. Reussir – named after the French word which means 'to succeed', therefore prioritized organization of training cum awareness programmes for schools, parents and educators who intended to work with special children. Reussir manages to organize five to six such workshops in a year.

Conscious of the need for adequate number of special educators, Reussir introduced the five month certification programme in collaboration with Times Foundation and Pearson. Participants get to learn new training tools, tools for screening children, methods to identify problems like dyslexia, launching children into reading, working memory, IQ related tools and others from this programme.

Launched in July 2015 with 21 trainers on board, the programme was successful in introducing the participants to new teaching methods. During the course, educators screen a child and based on this screening, they develop an individualized Education Plan. After completing this course, educators work with two children and then present their case studies. This facilitated discussion on case studies allowing the group to learn new methods of teaching from each other. "This was an amazing exercise. We all learnt that the concept of planet could be taught using an onion. Some taught mathematics using straws. The educators were very creative in finding out child specific ways of teaching concepts. This is a huge success for us. Parents who came crying to us found their own unique ways of teaching their children," shares Shanthi.

Reussir also introduced intervention classes that could help children after school hours, reinforcing the learning process. They follow a transparent system here, informing the parents of every child's strengths, weaknesses and interests, which the parents use to facilitate learning process at home. Thus, the teachers and parents work as a team

in helping the child's progress. This centre also sends a similar report to school teachers so that they can also use the suggested methods that the children have gotten used to, thereby maintaining the learning continuum. The latest experiment at Reussir is the introduction of Robotics. In this programme, children with and without learning difficulties are brought together to work in pairs to complete predesigned modules on assembling the robot's parts. "Children with learning difficulties are very good at hands on tasks. Their confidence increases and fine motor skills improve. Significantly, this exercise helped in improving their handwriting by helping them gain a better grip. They will soon be able to represent words in writing," explains Shanthi. The best part is where the children learn sequencing through this exercise. "Sensory integration develops. Our children can now button shirts without any confusion," she adds, hoping to procure more kits soon.

Reussir wants to see the day when parents stop coming here and accept learning disability just like other ailments like myopia, which can be treated effectively. They want to prove that inclusive education is holistic and not just about grades. "Once such an understanding develops, the system will naturally give way for a stressless environment, where every child enjoys childhood. It is we who stress our children," asserts Shanthi who has designed all programmes in such a way that Reussir can operate sustainably. Her vision has been to develop Reussir into a one stop support centre. As the first step in this direction, Reussir has launched the eduportindia.com website, which provides an exhaustive list of special schools, special educators, doctors, therapists and will soon list NGOs which cater to children, education and vocational training. They all can enroll and avail others' services through the website.

"I found it very difficult to find an appropriate school for my child. Not all parents have the resources to do the same. Nor do they have contacts to build their support systems. They need help at just the right time. Eduportindia.com is the answer from Reussir and we intend to develop this into a mobile app soon," she signs off.



8. Samagra

Better Sanitation

Urban planning and development in India makes for an interesting story. Every city has its own characteristics and challenges. And, slums have become an integral part of our cities. Provision of basic amenities to slums remains a challenging task to civic authorities. More glaringly, the question of sanitation has been daunting for multiple reasons. There are still people who defecate in the open and the establishment of public toilets, instead of solving this concern has only created a bigger menace. “Lack of user engagement is the lacuna here,” begins Mr Swapnil Chaturvedi, Founder Director of Samagra.

Samagra is a social enterprise that was established to provide sanitation services in the urban slums of Pune. It was registered as a For-profit private company in 2012. Eventually, the Non-profit unit – Samagra Empowerment Foundation was founded in the year 2014, in Pune. Samagra’s work revolves around three inter related aspects – redesigning community sanitation facilities, introducing user engagement to sustain these facilities and operationalise this model on a large scale to bring

about an enduring behavioral change in the urban slum communities.

Samagra's long term vision is to see open defecation free slums. The widening socio economic divide due to lack of basic amenities is an impediment to the idea of resilient cities. Chaturvedi points out that sanitation plays a critical role in this context, along with water and hygiene. Their extensive research across few slums in India attempted to learn why sanitation services in slums were not successful and the potential impact of such facilities on life in the slums. Unexpectedly, design has never been prioritised. Women, children and also elderly found the generic models uncomfortable. As mentioned earlier, there has been no user engagement in the process which can create a sense of ownership and thus sustain the behavioral change. Third and most of all, absence of sustainable operational assistance has left these facilities in a deplorable state, when people get back to conventional behaviour, reconciled to open defecation. "There is no money allocated for operational assistance in the budgets of city corporations. Building the toilets cannot bring the change we seek," remarks Chaturvedi.

Samagra began by taking over the community sanitation facilities from the municipal corporation and then worked on redesigning these facilities for better usage, suiting the needs of different sections of the population. Alongside, a management platform was created to make these user friendly facilities self-sustainable. "Communities have to be an inherent part of this exercise because without their engagement, the facilities cannot be maintained properly and this flaw will impede the behavioral change we intend to see in the community's sanitation behaviour," Chaturvedi explains. Reiterating on user engagement, he insists that a nominal charge levied helps generate revenue to maintain these facilities, without depending on external funds. Building this sense of ownership is the key. However, it is more easily said than done.

"Urban slums are characterised by low levels of literacy and heterogeneous population where every group of people stick to their own set of habits. Everybody looks forward to a clean city, but do not come forward to clean it. Given these characteristics, ownership is the biggest challenge, more apparent in urban slums due to lack of basic infrastructure. We ask people to pay for usage so that they can eventually own and operate these facilities," he elaborates.

Samagra's provision of ventilation, lighting, sanitary dustbins, kids' accessories in the toilets and other features have made the toilets welcoming. New toilets have been established in areas closer to homes so that they are easily accessible. Regular community workshops are organised to engage the community members rationally and emotionally, so that a collective and long term impact can be made. Monthly family passes are issued to encourage the entire family to form a behaviour. Brand ambassadors from the communities continuously influence people from their radius of influence.

Samagra has successfully mapped the urban slum communities in Pune at the household level on google, enabling the specific analysis of families who go out for defecation, those who have toilets in their houses, families that do not have a toilet at home, but have the space for constructing one and also the public sanitation facilities available for the communities. Such a detailed mapping is first of its kind and had come to be a very valuable input to evolve a comprehensive, targeted intervention in the field of sanitation. Around 20-30 percent of the families in every slum can have toilets, but data is needed to help identify these families. Subsidies can make a significant difference only when they reach these families within the communities. This data has been made available to agencies who oversee the construction of toilets in urban slums according to government schemes.

The reach of all these efforts definitely need a mention. Toilet usage among women has increased remarkably. Presently, there are about 4500 women users in a day. Paid usage of toilets has increased by a whopping 600% and customer satisfaction stands at an appreciable 92%. Samagra's idea of using 'technology and psychology' to bring about a desired change in sanitation behaviour of urban slum communities has worked. The model provides scope for replication, promising the kind of change yearned by many development thinkers. And the vision, seems achievable!



9. Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement

Empowering Communities

A group of students introspecting on the pros and cons of development, with the determination to bring about change in their own ways is not a rare occurrence. As they evolve, their very journey and their reach at different levels have a range of stories that can influence the idea of development and the society's perspective on the same. A group of young medical students from Mysore Medical College did just that in Mysore, beginning with the H D Kote Taluk. Inspired by Swami Vivekananda's words and learning the consequences of trying to treat diseases without considering the socio-economic history of patients, Dr R Balasubramaniam and his group of friends came together to build a platform that could provide 'rational, ethical and cost effective' medical care to the poor. And so was born Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement (SVYM) in 1984.

Beginning with the collection and distribution of physician samples of medicines to the poor, the team went on to organize blood donation camps and rural outreach clinics around Mysore district. During this course of work, SVYM also came across indigenous tribal groups who had lost almost everything to development projects in the region.

Setting up a clinic in the tribal hamlet, SVYM was not contended with the medical service they could offer. “Our concern was for the next generation. The tribes had no reliable source of livelihood. We believed education could lead the way for the generation next, so opened an informal school for the tribal children,” Dr Balu recalls.

After about a decade, SVYM established two hospitals that became the epicenter of all its health interventions – Vivekananda Memorial Hospital in Saragur and Vivekananda Memorial Hospital in Kenchanahalli taluk. The former is a multi-speciality hospital providing secondary health care through a combination of allopathy and ayurveda, while the latter is an ayurvedic treatment centre. Mobile Health Units are managed in such a way that each of the 70 tribal colonies is visited once every week. There are also specific programmes focusing on reproductive & child health, community based rehabilitation of the disabled, palliative care and HIV/AIDS control programme, that was documented as a best practice model by UNAIDS.

The informal school eventually evolved into a residential school for the tribal kids in 1990. Alongside the regular state curriculum, the children are taught yoga, meditation and are also prepared to use safety equipments like fire extinguishers. Interestingly, Viveka Tribal Centre for Learning deutes a team on a rotational basis to follow up on students who do not return after the vacations. In a conscious effort to reinforce tribal values, teachers are sent to the tribal colonies to observe and understand tribal life. Imbibing these observations while teaching helps promote reflective thinking. Only a nominal fee of 10 rupees from a non-resident and 15 rupees from residential students is collected by the centre. Another school, Viveka School of excellence was established in 2002 in Saragur. The two schools together provide ‘child centric quality education’ for 940 students every year. Scholarships and new family saving schemes ensured that poverty did not prevent children from enrolling in schools.

It was palpable that access to services like health and education, was only a beginning. The communities needed support to further evolve and grow independent of the movement. As Dr Balu puts it, “This is work in progress and we have a long way to go”. SVYM, conceived to engage citizens as participants, has grown physically and also in terms

of ideology. Tribal chieftains and youth meet every month to deliberate on issues and identify workable solutions addressing these issues. Every month, SVYM facilitates a discussion on development so that ‘members from the community begin to understand what is best for them and appreciate the development they have achieved.

SEEP – Socio Economic Empowerment Programme was initiated in 1989 to ensure sustainable, holistic development of the communities with reliable assets. Basic infrastructure needs were provided and self employment avenues were created. The team got to learn construction engineering in the process, with the community. There are more than 100 women’s groups which act as key facilitators in building the communities. The groups meet every month in a different tribal colony every time, so that all families in HD Taluk and adjoining districts get to know about different government and non government schemes they can avail of. Development communication, participatory decision making and right to information reached a new level of functionality in the communities with the setting up of Janadhvani community radio station at Saragur.

SEEP’s programmes were founded on the principles of micro level planning so that community members, specifically women and youth, could be groomed as emerging leaders. Efforts began to show results. With an emerging second line of leadership, tribals could take over the administration of SVYM’s many programmes, in the place of non-tribals. Organisational leadership is also emerging, creating more space for social and political leadership too. In the recent Gram Panchayat elections, 8 men and 28 women from these hamlets had contested without spending any money. Students from the residential school have also been trained by the Vivekananda Teacher Training and Research Centre to join the school as teachers. This centre runs a two years Diploma in Education programme, reserving 20% of the seats for forest based tribal students, especially girls.

Dr Balu opines that tribal development is a ‘mixed bag’. “Conventional wisdom that subscribes to the simple matrix of human development did not answer all our questions. It is unfortunate that the country’s development narrative prioritises economic growth over human and social capital,” he elaborates. With the novel thought of sharing

SVYM's tryst with development and developing education leadership in the social development sector, SVYM established the Vivekananda Institute for Leadership Development in 2002. SVYM also runs the country's only university accredited Master's in Development Management programme at Mysore to prepare a generation of young leaders who can be social change agents for the nation. With new collaborations and new strategies, SVYM has continued to grow in terms of its ideology, physical presence and firmer in values. "Our appreciation of development has matured over the decades," says Dr Balu.

Recipient of WHO Award for excellence in primary health care (2012), ICAI (Institute of Chartered Accountants in India) award for excellence in financial reporting (2009 & 2015), Karnataka State Award for Child Welfare (2008), NaniPalkivala award for civil liberties (2013) and many others, SVYM continues to inspire many in the development sector, continually contributing to the idea of development, as it evolves.

Conscientisation, participation, leadership emerging from the communities are some facets of the developmental paradigm that constantly seeks to expand human and social capital, which in turn can lead to economic and social consequences. Consistently learning from the communities, SVYM's adherence to the aforesaid model made it possible to build a cadre of young minds from the rural, tribal families who have embraced reflective thinking. "Very few of us have the courage to reflect. Reflective thinking must be encouraged. The culture of questioning will bring out a lot of learnings from within, paving the way for solutions to emerge".



10. TataGyan

Empowering rural women to teach children

The Indian Education System has come a long way since independence. With new players in the field, entrepreneurship in education has brought in new models and approaches that try to use education as a medium for social change. The age old residential schooling was one such initiative that tried to equalise opportunities for both genders. Yet, sensitisation is not on everybody's cards. Even before we examine that further, do all children learn at all? Enrolment and learning are two distinct things. 97% of our children might be in schools but more than 250 million children are wrought with serious learning difficulties. Schooling is not able to achieve desired learning levels probably because around 80 million children (mostly from rural areas) lack an enabling environment prior to joining schools. Enrolment with requisite learning skills has become the order of the day, so this deficiency results in high dropout ratios even before children reach class 8, as rural families cannot afford pre-school or early childhood education.

Another deep concern in the rural areas is the status of women. Gender sensitisation, although dreamt of and acted upon for decades, has not

been achieved. Gender Inequality Index ranks India 132 out of 148 societies. In the rural areas, most women don't just miss an enabling environment prior to schooling, they almost give up schooling to help manage families. With limited education and lack of proper skills, women workforce is largely restricted to farm and domestic activities. TatvaGyan is a social enterprise based in Odisha that aimed to address these two issues simultaneously. "TatvaGyan chose to offer high quality, affordable early childhood & remedial classes through a chain of women managed learning hubs (called 'Think Zone') in the villages of Odisha," informs Mr Binayak Acharya, the Founder of TatvaGyan.

Their pilot in 2014 proved that students' performances improved and positive changes were also observed in their behaviour. TatvaGyan's baseline revealed that parents from low income households were willing to spend up to 15 percent of their income on education. Thus convinced of this market based approach serving the low income families, TatvaGyan launched its learning hubs. TatvaGyan began by providing a play based programme in a safe and stimulating environment for preschool training. Enrolling children was initially a challenge. Eventually as the after school programme to support every child based on their levels of ability (instead of age) demonstrated the effectiveness of this programme, parents became more open to this effort. Strengthened by technological interface that further enhanced the experience of activity based learning, this programme helped inculcate interest in learning from the formative years itself. Along with preschool what has also become unaffordable for those 'in the bottom of the pyramid' are remedial classes that supplement the learning process. Therefore children who went to schools but could not follow the pace of curriculum transaction were able to continue learning at their own pace. The programme's design made sure that the children acquired a threshold level of competence before moving full-fledged into the local school system.

But all of this was not done by highly educated volunteers or well paid teachers. The complete chain of operations and the 'ThinkZones' are all managed by local women, capacitating them to become local leaders and offering real livelihood opportunities outside farm/domestic work. TatvaGyan consciously invested in building its core team that

developed teaching materials, pedagogy and the technological set up, and also trained women from the community in using these tools to teach the children. Binayak recalls that the whole process brought about a significant transformation in the women who were now more articulate and confident about choices for their children.

TatvaGyan's vision is to build this programme into a sustainable, replicable, community managed model where the learning hubs were managed by locally generated revenues. As every community member engaged in this chain of processes was trained, the quality of instructions, execution of the think zones and thence the scaling of these hubs promise to create a double impact on the society. "We follow a process oriented approach and the pilot has been very convincing," insists Binayak soon adding that monitoring of learning outcomes by the women themselves allowed them to assess their performances. The women, by carefully using the tablets given to feed in learning outcomes, have also been contributing to the improvement of curriculum and training programmes. As this ensures availability of real time information on student performances from all the hubs, TatvaGyan also builds evidence to validate this model, which can then be replicated by other communities.

TatvaGyan's model was chosen as a 'high potential social enterprise' by Villgro and Intelecapp in 2014. Villgro also acknowledged TatvaGyan as the best Odisha based social enterprise in 2015. As one among the 18 global cohort of social enterprises recognised by the GSBI (2015) and the upcoming social enterprises at the Tata Social Enterprise Challenge (organised by IIM Calcutta), the two year old enterprise dreams to make its presence felt in 220 villages in Odisha, reaching out to 8000 students by the year 2018.



11. Vidiyal

Goat Rearing through Mobile Learning

ESelf help groups are seen as the keystone to women empowerment in India. Having been in existence for the last two decades, the very concept has been exploited to engage women from communities in different actions. In many places, the women’s network that was built was used to deliver informal education for rural women, promote participation in democratic processes like Gram Panchayat elections, besides others. Establishing such credible, sustainable networks of women has been challenging and many institutions have followed their own strategies to reach out to the needy women.

Vidiyal is an NGO in Theni district initiated by a group of youngsters in 1986. Drawing his experiences from other professional engagements, Vinobha Bhave’s movement, it’s Founder – Mr Kamaraj, wished to work with youth and build their capacities to lead development in villages. “I was inspired by Gandhigram. Swami Vivekananda’s words resonated in me. I wanted to prove the potential of a youth group,” he shares. However, the group eventually disintegrated, shifting the focus from rural development to women and farmers’ empowerment.

Kamaraj and team started forming SHGs in 1994. Alongside, responding to the need for a local health centre, a village committee centre was initiated to provide first aid to the injured or sick and guidance to villagers on matters pertaining to community life. Residents of Rasingapuram village paid 10 rupees each to enrol in this centre. The Health Centre's programmes were collectively sponsored by the villagers and external sponsors regularly pitched in to manage the cost of medicines. "In all that we did, we imbibed the culture of community participation and ownership so that the process is seen as a community effort. It built accountability on both sides," Kamaraj explains.

As a lawyer, Kamaraj also provided legal aid services through Vidiyal. The SHGs meanwhile, settled for a monthly meeting routine where every income and expenditure was reported and assessed. By 1996, a women's collective for every Panchayat was established as a point of contact to coordinate matters within the respective Panchayat. Spreading out to 25 villages, the Vidivelli Women's Federation came into being. "Little did we know that Vidivelli would evolve as a model in itself," smiles Kamaraj.

Vidivelli set standards for operation and maintenance; these standards were set by women themselves following a deliberation on what they could possibly do. Women adherence to these protocols gave Vidivelli the credibility it celebrates today. The federation soon became the focus of micro finance operations in the villages.

Every group contributed a one-time deposit of 3,000 rupees toward s the corpus fund which amounts to 7 lakh rupees. Every member in an SHG pays 100 rupees a month to support the maintenance costs. "We built a corpus to save on the interest amount which is paid to the bank. As women borrowed from this corpus, the interest earned was added to the SHG revenue," explains Kamaraj.

Allowing only 10 instalments in every group and also giving back 3 percent to the group if the borrowing woman repaid on time, the rate of repayment was never a concern. All decisions pertaining to distribution of money or shortlisting of deserving women for loans was taken by the groups and funds were disbursed through the village Gram Panchayat, further ensuring accountability. For those women who needed more

money than what the group could afford, Vidivelli recommended bank loans.

“Vidivelli as the epicentre of all micro finance operations has made it easier and more comfortable for women to borrow and repay loans. Banks lent money through Vidivelli and thus the federation was responsible for repayment. In the event of a default, Vidivelli repaid the bank, but the concerned group remitted a fine to Vidivelli. Loan defaulters were not allowed to access loans for the next three months,” says Kamaraj, adding that the Commonwealth of Learning from Canada was inquisitive about this model and wanted to use this network to promote ‘livelihood security through knowledge empowerment through Life Long Learning (L3)’.

Vidiyal also focused on educating women and farmers using mobile technology. Though an ICT model, the nuances of the programme were collectively decided by the villagers through participatory rural appraisals. In fact, the choice of mobile phones as the medium was also suggested by the people. On the activities that could be carried out, majority of them had suggested goat rearing. They wanted appropriate training to procure and rear goats. Women themselves worked out an approximate cost for the purchase and rearing of one goat. “Vidiyal operationalised its standard protocols here too. Women were educated about goat rearing, the costs involved, bank procedures, related terms and conditions, wealth creation, etc. We also insisted that women contribute a small portion of the fund required from their end too and they agreed,” says Kamaraj.

Vidivelli decided to screen 300 women from the 1500 applicants and set the project on roll. But, the banks were speculative and felt that mobiles were an ‘asset burden’. Every group met the bank representatives individually and explained why the loan was very critical for them, also their ability to manage their responsibilities and repayment. Finally, the banks agreed to support them. Vidivelli women arrived at a protocol to acquire bank loans and meet on the 23rd of every month. Till date, Vidivelli has organised 350 such meetings.

The standards of project management set in the process emerged to be a new benchmark. A project monitoring committee comprising of

members from NABARD, Insurance Company, Bank, Department of Agriculture, Department of Animal Husbandry, 5 loan recipients, Vidivelli representatives and a veterinary doctor meet once in three months. This was also represented by the telecom company that partnered to provide the requisite services for mobiles. Since 2008, 5 voice messages on goat rearing have been sent out to recipients.

“People had decided to repay their loan within a period of 5 years, but settled all the loans within two years, thereby becoming owners of 1.5 lakh worth of assets. This was a win-win model. The proportion of non-performing assets with banks reduced, goats were healthy as there were prompt messages on their rearing shared on the mobiles, and banks welcomed more loan applications. Commonwealth of Learning and Gandhigram University that studied the model’s strength and impact, also piloted this programme in seven other countries. We have also received awards from many reputed institutions like the NASSCOM and Vodafone,” says Kamaraj with pride.

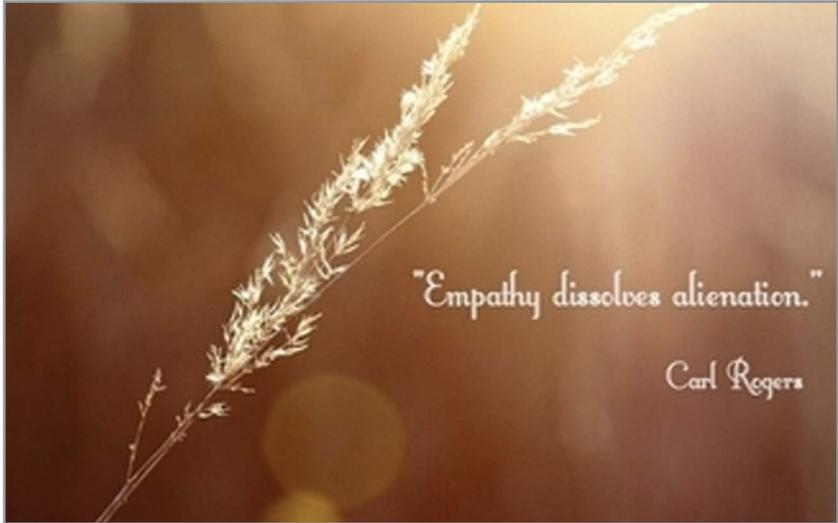
In 2011, women who benefited through this pilot project organised a convention to inform all banks, including RBI about the concept and its strengths. “Vidiyal and Vidivelli were proud to see our women take over the stage and vouch for two percent of the future loans to be set aside to promote learning amongst women. RBI also studied the impact of our project. 1050 of our women are now engaged in business as resource persons on goat rearing. Extending the programme to cover other relevant themes, we now intend to educate 30,000 learners across 3 districts,” says Kamaraj.

Completely convinced on the strengths of this model, Kamaraj feels that this could be used effectively to build social capital in any sector. Vidiyal has now emerged to be a resource organisation, building capacities of all likeminded groups.

IV. POSITIVE ENERGY

Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi is trainer, facilitator and coach of the Positive Energy (PE) program. She is a spiritual seeker with a vision of transforming her own energy state from surviving to being.

In this journey she has gathered deep insights and is continuously working towards creating a pathway for more seekers. With years of exposure to spiritual practices like yoga, reiki, and personal development interventions like coaching, she is working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.



1. Caution or Compassion

“Empathy, of course, is a special kind of understanding. It’s not an understanding of the head where we just mentally understand what another person says. It’s something far deeper and more precious than that. Empathic connection is an understanding of the heart in which we see the beauty in the other person, the divine energy in the other person, the life that’s alive in them.” Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A language of Life*

In a recent discussion with a friend, I got to know that he had a ‘rough’ discussion with a women colleague who broke down in a meeting after he commented on her work. I heard my friend say, “After that , I became a bit cautious while talking to her”. At that moment it struck me how our habit to become cautious blocks compassion, separating us from the other.

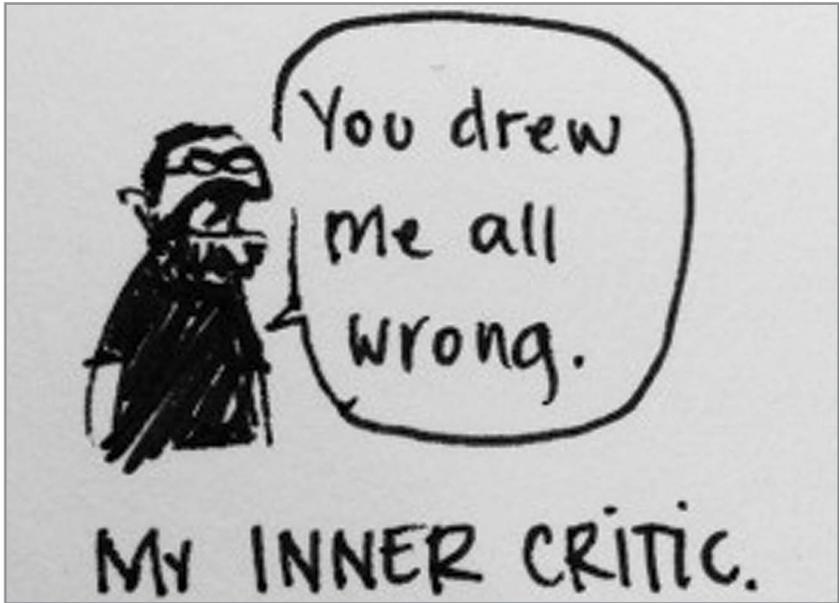
I consider Self Empathy as the first step to experience compassion. Lack of self-empathy makes us cautious about our own feelings, resulting in mental chatter. We then project it to the outside world in multiple ways.

Empathy is a respectful understanding of what others are feeling. It is “I feel your feelings”. Normally instead of empathy, we often have a strong

urge to give advice. Empathy, however, calls upon us to empty our mind and listen to others with our whole being, being fully present to what is alive in the moment. It is a divine energy that connects us beyond thought-level connection that we regularly establish for ourselves with others. Self-empathy is the same process, now the “other” replaced with oneself.

Self-empathy results in an inner calmness and centeredness, allowing us to be present to the current moment. The way to practice self-empathy is to connect to our feelings and unmet needs and imagine that our needs are met. On doing so our feelings shift, opening us to new possibilities that we were previously blocking with judgment and expectations. From this place, we can then be available to the world with the ‘emptiness in our mind’ and ‘openness in our heart’.

Here is the start of compassion. When we are transformed within us, we can step out of the “enemy images” (described by Marshall Rosenberg) and perceive the moment, disregarding the past that continues to keep us away from life.



2. Working with the Inner Critic

Most of us have an inner voice that is self-critical. Some of us have this inner voice so high that it can disrupt our life. Some event, conditioning that we received in our growing years—perhaps the voice of a parent, a teacher, a peer have strengthened the inner critic or the gremlin.

The inner critic maintains the status quo and does not allow one move forward confidently. The action happens largely at the mental level and is largely about looking at things as right or wrong. This inner critic comes from fear, from the need to control, leaving one with very little openness to natural unfolding. The inner critic masks one's presence as a human being. What is so central to being 'alive', the qualities of awareness, of appreciation are lost as the inner critic dulls down and contains it all. The inner critic injures the actual amazing delight in our heart.

Ajahn Sumedho, a Buddhist monk says, "I used to have what I call an 'inner tyrant', a bad habit that I picked up of always criticizing myself. It's a real tyrant — there is nobody in this world that has been more tyrannical, critical or nasty to me than I have. Even the most critical

person, however much they have harmed and made me miserable, has never made me relentlessly miserable as much as I have myself, as a result of this inner tyrant. It's a real wet blanket of a tyrant, no matter what I do it's never good enough. Even if everybody says, "Ajahn Sumedho, you gave such a wonderful [inspiring talk]", the inner tyrant says "You shouldn't have said this, you didn't say that right."

Disengaging from the inner critic helps in being present to the experience in the moment. The method of disengagement needs to be conscious and intentional, in contrast to the habitual automatic ways.

In the Sufi tradition it is suggested that our thoughts should pass through three gates. At the first gate, we ask of our thought, "Is it true?" If so, we let the thought pass through to the second gate, where we ask, "Is it necessary or useful?" If this also is so, we let the thought continue on its way to the third gate, where we ask, "Is this thought rooted in love and kindness?" Judgmental thoughts, which are neither true, helpful, nor kind, falter at the gates.

Pema Chodron tells an old Native American story of a grandfather who has two wolves in his heart, one was vengeful and the other kind. One day his grandson came up to him and asked him which wolf wins in a fight, to which the elder replied, "Whichever one I feed."

Take a breath; it's time to get started on a new chapter...stop feeding the "inner critic wolf".



3. Aspiration or Ambition: what will renew your energies?

When we talk of ambition—it is about deriving personal advantage, meeting desires related to education, wealth, recognition, power and so on. Aspiration is the longing to make a difference to oneself and many others, through an expression that comes from completeness within.

While the methods to fulfill ambition and aspiration may be similar, it's the inner state of the “doer” which differentiates if ambition or aspiration is the driver.

This inner state is derived from the wholesomeness one manifests in following a pursuit. So, ambition is a desire to acquire something to gain wholesomeness, whereas, aspiration is a journey of “opening-up” because of the unity within.

It is not to say that ambition is bad. Ambition as a manifestation is definitely fulfilling, but is likely to ‘dry-up’ as soon as the goal is met. This therefore leaves the doer with a sense of vacuum and restlessness. On the other hand, aspiration is an expression of possibilities, creating a thriving that not only motivates the doer but also is contagious to bring more people into its fold. This is the pathway to renew energies.

The Longing, by Steve Taylor

You feel restless and uneasy, but don't know why. No matter how many ambitions you fulfil no matter how many desires you satisfy frustration never seems to fade away contentment always seems to elude you.

But trace your desires back to their source – no matter how they disguise themselves, and even if they're so misdirected that they take you further away from their goal, at the heart of every desire is a yearning for oneness, or an impulse to escape a sense of lack. You don't really want power, success, wealth or pleasure – deep down, your soul aches to be reunited with the world.

This is the real source of your frustration –not because you haven't achieved enough not because you're being deprived of what's rightfully yours not because you're being plagued by misfortune but because you were never meant to be separate, trapped inside yourself.

You're misreading the signals, choosing wrong solutions, or else devising clever strategies to try to distract yourself from the pain of separation which just reinforce your separation, and intensify your original frustration.

Your deepest drive is to expand outside yourself to slip through the net which is tightly wound around your mind and stretch and spread through space, beyond separateness to embrace the world, to enfold and absorb her vastness and become part of her oneness.

And there's no need to be timid, or to suppress your desire because the world wants to absorb you too. She feels your absence, senses your unease. She's reaching out to you, as you are to her. She's pulling you towards her, with electric currents of desire, with a soft magnetic radiance that shimmers through the space between you. She's sending subtle signals, chemical messages that say: we belong to each other.

And now you know the real nature of your desire you'll no longer be diverted or deceived and a time will surely come when boundaries melt away, and individuality dissolves and your soul returns home, and merges with the world – an ecstatic marriage, a timeless consummation in which all desires disappear, and all frustration fades away.

4. Questions that matter



“Most misunderstandings in the world could be avoided if people would simply take the time to ask, “What else could this mean?” — Shannon L. Alder

A recollection of our past surely takes us back to the questions that we used to ask as a child. Of course, some questions were welcome and many not. Yet, questions were the way we discovered our life. Along the way, the questions reduced and judgments, advices & assumptions became more prominent. To the point that we rarely ask questions and whenever we do we are quite hesitant. My own coming back to questions happened when I enrolled into a course of coaching. I struggled to ask questions.....every time my “coachee” would bring up something to discuss, it was ‘natural’ for me to give solutions. I had to really really pause, listen and ask questions that gave the coachee insights about their own dilemmas. Asking a question that clarifies, that is generative leaves both the coach and the coachee empowered in their ways of engaging.

When one asks a question instead of making a conclusion from a fixed point of view, belief, or decision about something, one would be co-creating the future with the universe as the question energetically opens up the space for something different to show up.

At this moment, ask these questions to yourself and listen to your thoughts and feelings:

- What do you want?
- What's holding you back?
- What is it costing you to continue holding back?
- What new habits will you put in place to fortify your new mindset?
- What is the most meaningful action you could take now?
- What new skills or support systems will ensure your success?
- How could you have this conversation so it empowers everyone concerned?
- How can you learn from this problem so it never happens again?
- How can you create more value with less effort?

My practice of non-violent communication (NVC) again takes me to a place of observation instead of evaluations. Here again observations give me the foundation to ask questions, deepen my inquiry. A questions can be a request too. If you are engaging with your child, would it not be useful to ask a generative question than blame or judge?

I am really enjoying my journey back into the world of questions. By the way, it is useful to ask What and How questions over Why questions if you are reflecting about life, relationships...A wise friend once said, a why question is often compelling but the answer useless.

So what touched you most in this article?

5. Workability: We face, every moment, the choice of who to be and what to do.



Workability is the condition that is suitable to generate favourable results, it is the capacity to be highly effective. The intention for Workability becomes the spark for us to play a bigger game in life.

To understand workability, it's important to understand what stops it in our life. Fear, anxiety, caution, judgments, failures come in the way of workability. We stop creating a future and resign to a default future because these emotions do not allow for capacity to be built. Instead it creates doubt, hesitation, insecurity and indecision. Normally we convince ourselves that we're not free. Our actions are only determined by our unconstrained choices and not by circumstances.

When one stands up for something, takes responsibility, workability improves. For example, I had a fall during a trip at an offsite training place where I was a participant. I was alone and had an injury that put me in a mental spin about what could go wrong. My automatic response would be to worry and be anxious about not having help. I chose to stand up to be comfortable with solitude and that opened up for me speaking-up to ask for medical support during classroom sessions (normally I would be conscious about it) and pursue my learning tasks without getting grounded. This to me is a process of taking responsibility to build workability in areas of my life that are not comfort zones or are unfamiliar.

I believe, having flexibility, being open to make mistakes, having acceptance and being authentic sets one up for workability in relationships and in situations. Do you wish to translate your awareness into real results? Then, aiming for workability brings together awareness, action and accountability.

V. TRENDSETTERS



6. Abhinavgram Society

Villages managing development

Rural development in India has a long history and has resorted to different approaches over the years. While the idea of schematic approach was criticised for one sided perspective and lack of people’s participation, development thinkers gave a new identity to rural development by establishing participatory rural appraisals. They even cleared the myths and biases on rural development, calling for a new, holistic approach that resonated with local needs and resources. The concerns addressed from this perspective also gave way to the realisation of self-sufficient villages in our country. Much in line with this idea is the work of Abhinavgram Society in Namakkal district.

Its Founder Director, Mr Thirupathi, grew up dreaming of a self-sufficient village. “I used to walk seven kilometres every day to my school. Children from neighbouring villages used to come by buses. I always wondered why some villages like mine were not connected. I discovered different answers to this question as I grew up,” he recalls. Hailing from Dindigul district, Thirupathi completed his schooling in public schools and Bachelors in Commerce from Gandhigram Rural

University. One of the subjects, Rural Development, helped him comprehend the idea of development as an evolving phenomenon. “My professor, on learning the issues in my village, encouraged me to write petitions to the District Collector and follow them up with people’s support. I did know that things will improve, but not that they have to be improved. I felt a sense of responsibility from within,” he admits. Encouraged by his own insights, Thiruppathi pursued Social Work in his post-graduation.

Working as a Trainer on self-sufficient model villages for Kaveri Village Development Society in Mayiladudurai, and then as a Research Fellow with Gandhigram Rural University gave him opportunities to observe how local communities responded to the idea and the obstacles that prevented them from taking ownership about issues concerning development of their villages. “What seemed natural for me was not as straight forward as I thought it could be. Every community had its own struggles and coping mechanisms and I saw the rationale behind them,” he says.

Soon after, Thiruppathi headed the Fundraising and External Affairs unit at Ekam Foundation. It was here he witnessed the PRA tools in operation, giving way for participatory decision making in the villages. Thiruppathi envisaged Abhinavgram Society as a movement that will help people address their own needs as well as move on to other villages. On the field, this vision calls for rigorous discussions, planning and collective execution by the villagers. His experience from his own village helped him build on this vision. By 2009, he was able to influence bus services, electricity and construction of toilets in all households, and successfully handed over balwadis that were managed by youth groups to the Government. These new developments in Sikkubolagowndanpatti village, Dindugul District and active people’s participation encouraged him to create a village forum that can be capacitated to administer and maintain these activities. Building such a representative forum was the next part of his strategy, to sustain the movement. The youth parliament that was formed to represent four villages in Kanyakumari district has now been closed due to new developments.

In 2015, Abhinavgram Society conducted a pilot study in Namakkal district covering 305 villages around Kolli Hills. “We gathered primary

and secondary data; organised PRAs, focussed group discussions, conducted social mapping and door to door surveys to identify the remote villages from where the programme could start,” he says adding that, “of the 57 villages identified, 3 villages each from Gundurnadu, Thevanurnadu and Cerakarainadu Panchayats were chosen for the first leg of operations. Agriculture, livelihood, education, health, infrastructure and IT were the focus areas.”

Farmers’ clusters were formed and they were trained on zero budgeting natural farming. These ongoing training programmes are often revised to update information amongst members. Direct marketing was revived and the farmers are now able to market their produce without any middlemen. Value addition on some of the traditional farm produce, like footwear from lantana crops, were promoted through local women’s groups, farmers’ clusters and other tribals as an income generation activity. “Our next focus was on tourism. We did not want to call it ‘tourism development’ because the intention was not to promote the villages as a holiday destination. We rather wished to see visitors experiencing tribal life first hand without any intimidation. The village youth are trained to manage the visitors who eat the local food and stay in small tenements. This exchange between tribals and outsiders has contributed to the development process, both in terms of revenue generation and new insights on value addition,” he says.

Thanks to the success of this programme, villagers have completed primary school and earn an average of 10,000 rupees a month. All programmes are administered by the respective Youth Parliament, who are in charge of identifying needs and initiating necessary interventions. Youth Parliaments are supported by a Village Welfare Committee, represented by a member from every household that meets once in a month, pooling in a contribution of 100 rupees per household. The fund collected is used to address needs and execute programs whenever necessary. “They have managed to build a rented accommodation for teachers so that they can come and teach in schools in remote locations. Seeing the Youth Parliament focus on education, health, farming, sanitation, and infrastructure has given us the confidence to entrust them with all responsibilities,” says a contented Thirupathi.

Abhinavgram society has therefore managed to live the dream of self-sustained model villages. Tribal owned local livelihoods have grown to support the development of their villages. “We were earlier a catalyst, but now have been reduced to be a monitoring body. This is what we had wanted. By 2020, our work in Kolli Hills will be completely taken over by locals and we will move to another village to conduct pilot studies. This cycle will repeat,” he smiles.

—Shanmuga Priya .T

7. Baale Mane

ALL FOR THE GIRL CHILD

In the year 2000, Mary C, who worked with the Paraspara Trust, noticed a worrying trend. The number of homeless girls in Bengaluru (then, Bangalore) was on the rise. “In Malleswaram alone, our survey revealed that there were 70 girls on the street, in 7 wards in the locality,” she says. “We found it necessary to make a start somewhere, to ensure that these children were taken care of.” In a way, that’s how Baale Mane began. It began as a temporary shelter that could house 40 girls. The aim was to feed them three meals a day and give them a home. But more importantly, the



objective was to bring an end to the exploitation faced by girl children. Mary was thus entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing this new initiative of the Paraspara Trust. When Baale Mane would go on to become an independent trust in 2007, with the objective of providing its girl children with long-term shelter, Mary officially became its Managing Trustee.

“In the beginning, we wanted to concentrate on four main thrust areas with respect to the girl child — protection, development and participation,” Mary explains, “We didn’t have the wherewithal to raise funds, so that was a major challenge for us. We approached the Women and Child Welfare Department, but somehow our priorities were different.” This difference in priorities was simple. While the Women and Child Welfare Department wanted a day-care centre for girls, Mary’s vision was more long-term. “We wanted to focus on our thrust areas, safety, we needed space, we wanted to cater to different age groups of girls,” she explains, “We were firm that we wanted to

start a permanent shelter for our girls. Our aim was to start a home for 55 girls.”

The challenge was resources required to feed the girls. It didn't help that corporate enterprises that Mary approached, also had different priorities: “Most companies wanted to fund items like stationery. We needed help when it came to feeding girls three meals a day.” Thankfully though, with aid from its parent trust, the Paraspara Trust, Baale Maane could expand a fair bit. “We moved into our second shelter in 2002, and by 2003, we found a place that could shelter 70 girls with basic amenities. Groups like the Leaders Quest, are thinking of supporting us for a longer time with proper shelter facilities, and daily operational amenities,” Mary explains.

There was some more assistance when it came to caring for girls under the trust's fold. The priority remained feeding the girls and funding their education. “The Paraspara Trust and the group called ‘The Friends of Baala Mane UK’ supported us financially and helped us until we finally moved into a suitable place in Gopalapura in 2007,” says Mary.

Since becoming an independent trust, Baale Mane has continued with its mission of making the world a better place for homeless girls in Bengaluru. It has executed that mission through simple steps, like for instance, street plays that help the girl child understand her rights, highlights crimes like child abuse, and helps build awareness. “The aim was to ask questions about education and the rights of a child,” Mary explains. What began as a one-room project and only enough funding for one meal a day, soon grew into a permanent home for 70 girls, today. Along the way there have also been beautiful stories that have emerged from the organization, like that of 20-year-old girl who lost both her parents to HIV at a young age, but who is now pursuing her BCom with dreams of becoming an international banker. “Stories like that of hers bring me such joy, that makes all of this worth it,” says Mary, “Through my time here, I've enjoyed giving love, support and shelter through different age-groups, with the focus on reaching our goals. It's that, which brings me great satisfaction today.”

Once the girls at Baale Mane reach 18, a process of transition begins where they begin living an independent life. The trust currently has

around 20 girls who are in the process of undergoing this transition. Some of these girls aim to get college degrees, while some others focus on vocational education. Meanwhile, the girls back at the trust, continue with their busy schedules. Each child wakes up at 5.45am, begins the day with yoga, joins a common prayer session, has her breakfast and gets ready for school. They either walk, or board a Baale Mane bus and spend their days in school till around 3.30pm when they return.

The Trust's present-day goals have evolved into building on its expansion plans. "We are also recruiting girls who are in need even as we focus on developing our facilities, mentoring programmes and streamlining our efforts and attention on everything that is needed for a self-sustaining adult life. To reach this stage, Baale Mane is now focusing on strengthening life skills, soft skills as it develops special programmes surrounding computer education and career counseling," says Mary.

Going forward, Mary says the aim is to get other institutions to replicate the model that her trust has so successfully implemented for the last 15 years. "If this can be replicated on the larger scale — sustainable shelters for girls with three meals a day — it could make a sea-change to the world we live in," she says, "Doing this ensures that we uphold a girl child's rights, that we eliminate child trafficking and in doing that, we reduce crimes against women and children."

— JS



8. Bal Utsav

Back To School

In 2011, one of the major landmarks in Indian policy was notched up, when the Right to Education Act was introduced. Almost immediately, a beacon of hope arose for the millions of Indian children who were out of school. A number of these children were the focus of Bal Utsav’s education drive on the back of the Right to Education Act in 2011. The NGO had its priorities in place. “We began our first intervention on the back of the RTE,” explains Ramesh Balasundaram, one of the co-founders of Bal Utsav, “But our priority was to bring about education through multiple parameters. And that’s how it has been for the last seven years.”

The problem with education often lies in the simple fact that children don’t quite receive the education they need. Given the situation, it’s easy to deduce that this automatically means missing out on India’s growth story. Bal Utsav’s aim in correcting this, is to ensure that at least every child knows to read and write. To achieve that, the mission is to understand the problem and devise a strategy. But by Ramesh’s own admission, another one of Bal Utsav’s missions has been to avoid what he calls “the band-aid approach” to poverty eradication. “The problem is instant gratification,” he explains, “When we see someone hungry, we

feed them. We don't try to understand why they are hungry or ensure they don't stay hungry." The solution, then, Ramesh feels, lies in education, which continues to remain an unfulfilled area in social work despite the presence of nearly 3.3 million NGOs in India (according to Planning Commission data). "When we started out, we didn't think the problem was too big that it couldn't be solved," he insists, "All we did was to ensure that we start working with the future, and that's the children of today." In a nutshell, Bal Utsav focuses on the following approach to education: innovative learning opportunities for out-of-school children, sustained initiatives for all-round development of scholastic children, education and counselling of parents, and upgrading global teaching skills and thereby make teachers active learners for life. A large part of this has been achieved through the multi-grade, multi-level pedagogy that Bal Utsav has, by now, made its own.

But the problem was more than mere optics and PR. The first step that Bal Utsav took, was to consciously avoid stereotypical representations of poverty. "Nearly 400 million children require help," says Ramesh, "Strangely though, in India, these children are portrayed by the media as kids with torn clothes who look right into the camera." He continues: "These children not the only kind of children in the country who need help. Poverty isn't only about image." A large part of that effort has been evident in the last four years of Bal Utsav's operations, where the NGO has been putting together a major intervention for out-of-school children. In 2011, Bal Utsav introduced what Ramesh refers to as the 'Museum School Model'. "The aim was to use a channel to touch upon multiple aspects of education," he explains, "Our Museum School model was a basic everyday school for children from urban slums. The school itself would function from museums in the city, and the curriculum was built around exhibits as the museum." But that was only the start.

In 2013, Bal Utsav quickly re-focussed its target, and came to realize that children from construction sites were a major part of the young populace that needed help. "In due course, these children became our second-largest contributors to our out-of-school children," says Ramesh. Only the next year, the third big contributor to Bal Utsav's out-of-School children, were children from tribal pockets. The NGO

set up four centres in the Nilgiris district: two centres for workers at the region's tea estates, and two for tribal children. The same year, Bal Utsav teamed up with the Karnataka Government to rehabilitate out-of-school children in the State. The aim was to supplement existing efforts made to educate children. "We worked with the government to utilise unused classrooms in government schools to educate most of the kids," says Ramesh, "The most heart-warming aspect of the work we did, is the fact that it is today, a scalable model that can be implemented in virtually every Indian State."

Another encouraging result from teaming up with the government was the natural expansion in available infrastructure for Bal Utsav's work. "We moved children from nearby slums and construction sites to these schools," Ramesh explains. In undertaking this mini-exodus of sorts, Bal Utsav went all the way in overseeing the formalities that accompany such enrolments. The NGO began taking care of the paperwork for these students, including arranging for caste certificates in some cases. In fact, it was this landmark that allowed the NGO to begin 2015 by approaching education with renewed focus. "Since last year, we have been focusing on strengthening existing government schools," says Ramesh, "We have begun to understand that our system needs the maturity to absorb the children we educate. So, we are now picking up existing government schools and re-vitalizing them." This facelift on many levels has caused multifarious interventions in areas like infrastructure, teacher development, scholarships and water sanitation. "We hope to touch over a hundred schools this year, and in doing that touch the lives of almost 100,000 children."

— JS



9. Bhoruka Charitable Trust

Taking Rural To Another Level

He was just 13 when P D Agarwal moved out of his home in a rural pocket of North India, but only to return around 30 years later. However, when he moved back to a village that was for some part of his childhood, his home, some of the grim realities of life began hitting home. Infrastructure and basic amenities were two of the basic challenges that Agarwal's village faced – issues that needed urgent addressing. Agarwal knew that something had to be done. A few years later in 1962, he founded the Bhoruka Charitable Trust which began by providing financial assistance to the deserving, including educational institutions and hospitals. Although this was a start, the trust itself did not take up projects during this period, owing to limited scope. This carried on until 1973.

It was only the next year that the Bhoruka Charitable Trust adopted what it would go on to call the 'Social Service Approach' to rural upliftment. This period lasted for 11 years (1973-84) when Bhoruka began initiating activities in and around Agarwal's village Bhorugram. "When he was still a boy, this village was called Nangal Badi," explains Dr Surya Prakash, Project Director, Bhoruka Charitable Trust (South), "Eventually, such was the magnitude of work that Bhoruka did in the

village, that the village itself went on to be renamed Bhorugram.” While being associated with this initiative, BCT also directly became involved in implementation of activities relating to development of rural infrastructure and formal education. BCT spent its own resources during this time with no external funding.

Soon after, the trust began what it called the ‘development approach’ towards social service. The key here was to encourage development through holistic participation from the community. This entailed including members of the community in decision-making, looking for funding, and helping in the development of grassroot organisations. All this, of course, in the quest to bring about empowerment.

“Over time, Mr Agarwal’s sons have continued the tradition of giving back to the community,” says Dr Surya, “His youngest son, Dr Ashok Agarwal completed his Master’s degree in Public Health from John Hopkins, came back, began IHMR. In due course, he became a trustee of the Bhoruka Charitable Trust.” Even today, the Bhoruka Charitable Thrust has designed what it calls, its major “thrust areas”. Surya explains: “This includes water, Sanitation, health and livelihood. “

While the Bhoruka Charitable Trust is wholly dedicated to the social-economic transformation of rural and remote areas of India, its focus lies on specific weaker and socially underprivileged groups. The trust helps achieve these ends through physical, social, cultural and economic development of rural populations. “An ideal example is the thought that went into empowering the women of Rajasthan. We did this by starting self-help groups within the community,” says Dr Surya, “Women there, hardly come out of the house. Hence, we felt this could lead to income-generating activities like tailoring, and housekeeping.” Another challenge that the trust also took up, was the propagation of family planning in Rajasthan. Surya continues: “Another challenge was the education of the girl child. We had to adopt many schools to help in that cause.”

Interestingly, BCT has not been left out of the education space. The trust founded the Bhoruram Jiram Das Public School in 1976 to offer children a formal education that was otherwise, at that point in time, not available to them. Today, BRJD Public School continues to educate

young minds, drawing more than 1200 students for its current school year. In 2012, BCT wished to further its potential in the academic field, a decision that gave birth to the Prabhu Dhan Degree College. Twice a month in Bhorugram, the Chogmal Bhoruka Hospital runs eye camps to perform surgeries, and improve the eyesight of more than 100 people per camp. Interestingly, BCT offers these eye camps free of charge and it's only one of several health programmes.

But the cause still remains on women empowerment. In fact, Dr Surya explains how working in women empowerment near Chennai isn't exactly the best example. "We have been working in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. We have noticed here that women are more empowered." But BCT has done in the meanwhile, is spread awareness on HIV. "A lot of this campaign was done with truckers as the audience. In fact we began spreading HIV-AIDS awareness among truckers in 1996." The trust also covers sex workers, migrant labourers and garment factory workers in the rural upliftment department.

Perhaps the greatest reason for pride is simply the fact that BCT is largely self-funded. While Dr Surya does admit that a small portion of the funds comes from external agencies, the funding for these programmes are usually generated from within. At this time, BCT is also looking out for people to become more involved in the work it does. 'There are many ways individuals can become involved with Bhoruka Charitable Trust. Professionals looking for a meaningful and fulfilling work environment, as well as interns seeking to gain valuable experience in the development sector are encouraged to apply', says a notice on the company's website. And why not? After all, community development and social integration are the two key points of BCT's strategy. All that's left is to check the scope of involvement and learn more from it in the laboratory of life itself.

10. Borderless World Foundation

Kashmir's Children: Rescue, Rebuild, Revive

Think about Kashmir and the first two contrasting words that often come to mind are ‘beautiful’ and ‘tragic’. It’s strangely conflicting how the nation’s most beautiful landscape has for nearly 70 years now, been at the forefront of the bloodiest conflicts in India’s history. That’s what Adik Kadam and Bharti Mamani discovered when they visited the valley in 1997. The duo surveyed 369 villages in the Kupwara district, only to discover that there were nearly 15,000 orphans, born out of the Kashmir conflict itself, many of whom were shockingly, young girls. “We had gone to Kashmir for a three-month programme, but I decided to stay back to help,” says Adik, the founder of Borderless World Foundation, “It’s been nearly 20 years since I took that decision and I haven’t looked back.”



The aim for Adik was simple: find a way to help those who were affected by the Kashmir conflict, most of whom were young girls. The first six years were spent in extensive research — understanding the conflict, surveying the kind of toll it took on the State’s populace, and discover ways and means they could help in some way. when Borderless World Foundation was established soon after, the NGO’s efforts were directed towards satisfying these needs. “Today, we have four homes for girls who lost their parents in the violence. We have children in our homes aged between a year and 22 years,” says Adik, “We have over 200 girls, some of whom are even studying in cities like Pune and Nashik, today.”

While Borderless World Foundation has spent the last two decades committed to work for children who have lost their families in the Kashmir conflict, its work in the valley doesn't end just there. "We realized that what Kashmir also needed was emergency medical care," Adik explains, "Last year, we began emergency medical services in the State." But the focus, for the organisation, continues to remain on rehabilitating children affected by the conflict. "Many children under our wing have seen their parents die in cross-firing," Adik says, "A number of these kids have had their parents die in their laps." Caring for such children of conflict has helped the organisation win hearts. But it hasn't been easy.

"Being a Hindu who works in a Muslim-dominated State is the biggest challenge," says Adik, "The fact that we're working with girl children has only added more sensitivity and scrutiny to the work that we do. I have had to face challenges from religious clerics and from the general air of uncertainty that the valley faces." But the foundation adopted a well-thought-out strategy to countering such challenges. The first ten years were spent towards confidence-building measures. Once the situation changed slightly, for the better, Borderless World Foundation was able to expand its programme. "Kashmir has over two lakh orphans today," Adik says, "The aim is to guide them and bring these children towards the mainstream." While the organisation was focussed on research for the first decade of its operations, Adik took a decision to focus on the practicalities of what they were doing and not restrict BWF's job to merely writing proposals. That decision was an inflection point of sorts, as BWF's began making heads turn.

"One of the girls were took under our wing, has managed to enter politics and now has plans to build a computer laboratory in a village even as she runs a family," Adik recounts with some pride, "Her uncles were terrorists who were killed by security forces. Subsequently, her father was taken in for questioning too, tortured and killed. Her mother's whereabouts are unknown." But Adik explains how the most awe-inspiring parts of this story is just how the girl isn't harbouring feelings of animosity or revenge. "She chooses to concentrate on development, instead," he says, "This is the kind of change we are seeing in the people we began to care for."

The journey, however, hasn't been easy in more ways than one. "Apart from facing flak from religious clerics and locals, working in area plagued by terror attacks is another huge challenge," says Adik, "Ultimately, I realized that there's something inexplicable that draws me towards Kashmir." And does his family support that decision? Adik laughs with some sense of resignation. "It's been 20 years and my family still doesn't believe that I'm on the right path," he says with a smile, "You can't blame them though. The news that normally flows in from Kashmir is only of death and destruction. So, they're worried about me, but I know what I'm doing and why I'm doing it." Kupawara incidentally, has been a hotbed of terror attacks even recently.

Adik has Borderless World Foundation's future course charted out. The next goal is to build a larger home for the girls. "We have fifty to sixty girls in a home and that is a problem, because our living quarters aren't exactly the largest ones around. We want to build a proper home for 200 children, spanning 16,700 square feet. I'm currently on the lookout for funding to satisfy that need." Once this does come about, and these plans bear fruit, Borderless World Foundation should realize a lifelong dream — to give Kashmir's people and its girls in particular — a better future even in a place torn apart by conflict and tragedy.

— JS



11. Buzz India

Understanding the anatomy of Poverty

When Dave Jongeneelen, the Founder of Better Future, a purpose-driven consultancy, thought of offering personal development programs to people in rural India, he had no idea how he would do it. His experience in Africa had taught him that people in the rural countryside were as enthusiastic about developing leadership skills and reaching their potential as their urban counterparts. But would a leadership program work in rural India? How should such a program be designed? What should be its objectives and how should they be accomplished and measured? Dave had more questions than he had answers.

As luck would have it, Uthara Narayanan, a young social entrepreneur, was looking for some answers herself. Specifically, to the question “How do people lift themselves out of poverty?” So was Suresh Krishna, the head of Grameen Koota Financial Services Pvt. Ltd., a microfinance institution that offers collateral-free loans to rural women. Suresh was questioning whether micro-lending should be supported with capacity

building to help women see real impact. Inevitably, their paths crossed and the idea of Buzz was sown.

Uthara co-founded Buzz India in 2012. The organization delivers Self-Shakti, a free personal development program that includes elements of financial literacy and life skills, to rural women at their doorstep through a travelling bus. Why women? Because women are naturally inclined to collaboration and knowledge sharing. They constantly strive for a better tomorrow for their children. They also have inherent leadership skills that remain largely untapped because of their own reticence to lead.

In rural India, women display extraordinary strength and resourcefulness to overcome the challenges of poverty every day. They are leaders in their own lives. However, they live for the day. They have no long-term plans. Their dreams are unrealized and often even unspoken. Self-Shakti helps them articulate their dreams and build concrete financial plans to achieve them. The objective of the Self-Shakti program is to change rural women's attitude toward poverty by changing their behaviour toward money. For instance, in most rural households, the women have no idea what the household income or expenditure is – even though it is they who run the house. They want to educate their children, build homes, start businesses but have no planning or financial management skills and no access to quality information regarding federal and state rural development schemes from which they can benefit. As a result, they continue to live hand-to-mouth, day to day.

“Financial inclusion by itself cannot solve the problem of poverty,” says Uthara. “Giving women access to ready credit without equipping them to manage, invest and grow their wealth, will only lead them to debt traps.” Self-Shakti includes modules on asset management, communication and conflict resolution skills, daily money management and long-term financial planning that helps women understand that they control money and money does not control them. A 10% random survey that Buzz conducted on women who participated in the Self-Shakti program revealed that 95% of them moved away from private moneylenders after the program and over 50% of the women increased their savings by more than 50%; as many as 13% became first-time entrepreneurs.

Poverty is not just a lack of money. It's a "lack" at many levels – lack of access to education, health, skills, power, inclusiveness – that establishes a mindset of "lack". It keeps people poor. "We came across many situations where 'leadership training' could play an instrumental role in shifting their perspective from "lack" to "possibilities". But, we can't sell the idea of leadership in rural areas where people, especially women, are preoccupied with fulfilling basic needs. Money is always the first priority, so we used the route of financial education around which we built the personal development program", says Uthara.

Because of Buzz India's heuristic approach, the Self-Shakti program has evolved over several versions to its current form. Local insights and lessons from experiments in regions like South America and Africa helped build the curriculum. But, it is a continuing education program for us," says Uthara adding that "Ground research and surveys are an integral component of our Operations. We learn a lot from every annual community survey that we conduct and where necessary, we revisit whatever aspect needs revisiting –whether our operations model, our curriculum or our approach."

Buzz India is now in its fourth year of operations. There is a greater urgency to establish long-lasting impact. As with all social projects, sustainability is critical and sustaining behavioral change is a huge challenge. "We appoint community change agents to drive and sustain change," says Uthara. Buzz Gelathis are women who have participated in the Self-Shakti program and can show measurable impact in their own lives from implementing Self-Shakti. They become Buzz community ambassadors and mentors within the community. The community engagement program is structured to achieve specific objectives. The Buzz Gelathi's mandate is to help women maximize the benefits of the Self-Shakti program in their lives. Each Gelathi is assigned a community of 200 to 250 women with whom she engages over a year in order to achieve the program's goals. She is supported by Buzz India with knowledge, skills and tools to execute her role. Buzz India intends to develop every Buzz Gelathi into a community influencer who can then take on the mantle of leadership by inspiring her women to work towards a shared development vision for their community.

By 2025, Buzz India hopes to have delivered its Self-Shakti program to one million women in rural Karnataka. Uthara is, however, quick to clarify that while reach is important, the organization is deeply invested in impact. “Women should become problem solvers in their communities. They should become financially secure. They must have the courage to dream of new possibilities and the confidence and know-how to realize their dreams,” she says. “There was an Anganwadi teacher who participated in the Self-Shakti program. When she came to the program, she wasn’t able to feed her family without her neighbors’ help. She was so inspired by Self-Shakti that she resolved to become financially independent and live with dignity. She worked with her Buzz Gelathi who encouraged and mentored her over several months. She made significant changes in her lifestyle, behavior and attitude which helped her save enough money to buy a cow. Now, she has an income from dairy farming, manages all her expenses and even saves for the future. She’s just one of several such women who have become aware of their own strengths and turned their lives around after attending our program. That’s the kind of impact we’re looking for and we’re confident we’ll get there,” signs off Uthara.

— Shanmuga Priya .T



12. DESH

INFORM, EMPOWER, CHANGE

The Deepam Educational Society for Health (abbreviated to read DESH), was founded in 1991 with the sole aim to bring about more awareness about HIV-AIDS. It managed to achieve this initially, through programmes in slums, industrial areas and educational institutions. “We began by establishing counseling centres at government hospitals in Chennai,” Dr. Saraswathi Sankaran, Founder and Chairperson of DESH. “While our aim was to initially begin with HIV-AIDS awareness, the cases we began witnessing at our counseling centres led us to extend our programme into the realm of reproductive and child health awareness too.” This transition allowed DESH to serve several subsets of beneficiaries, with the sole aim of enabling a journey towards safer lifestyles. This, even the NGO focused on the task of empowering women in order to make them agents for social change.

One of the key approaches that DESH has adopted is SHE, which stands for Social Health Education. With the potential to touch the lives of youth in and out of school, Women and their families, and migrant workers to name a few, the programme has won appreciation from all quarters. This has also led to DESH developing a battery of equally

appreciated communication materials. “Based on the needs that we observed, we started developing our own materials,” explains Navin Kumar, Senior Manager, Operations & Development, DESH. “Over time, these have been tried and tested, and have been appreciated by our external evaluators like The Tata Institute of Social Science and the Madras School of Social Work.”

The key to DESH’s success since its inception is its reluctance to stop with mere information awareness, and pursuit of accountability. “Our aim is to empower those we come into contact with and make them accountable for what they are doing,” Navin explains. “That way, we create a collective movement that helps to spread the message across. Our methodology is unique, and is being followed across our outreach programmes.”

As part of this massive outreach drive, DESH has reached out to truck drivers across States like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, UP and Rajasthan. “We’ve taken up an entire block in Cuddalore,” says Navin, “We’ve managed to work with more than 6,000 people in Chennai and Villipuram alone, as part of our projects in Tamil Nadu.” DESH is also the training partner of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. As part of this tie-up, the NGO has also engaged in the training of primary health centre doctors in seven states. As part of its journey, the NGO has covered 2,500 schools using its novel methodology. “We begin by sensitizing heads of these institutions, develop specializations for a few teachers, and then help take the message forward through peer educators,” explains Navin. “Using this approach, we manage to sensitize all students in the school.” As part of its journey, the NGO has worked with donors like UNICEF and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

A large chunk of DESH’s work in India is with government education departments. “We call ourselves trainers and have implemented programmes for them,” says Navin. The most impressive feature of these programmes though, is that they are easily replicable and scalable. “The approach we follow is quite simple. Like I mentioned before, we begin by devising our methodology and material,” he explains. “We then engage in capacity building at other NGOs. In doing that, we share that expertise and don’t hold it to ourselves.”

As part of its R&D programmes, handouts, flipcharts and reference manual and have been used to bring about awareness, empowerment and accountability. DESH has ensured that these materials are prepared and time-tested. Another approach that it takes is the use of folk art in the form of street plays, mime and dance drama as vehicles for mass communication of social messages, with each of these messages designed and conveyed to suit the taste of the local population. Since 1993, DESH has managed to pull off over 600 street plays which have garnered an audience of over 1.5 lakhs people.

Going forward, Navin says DESH is keen to extend its school programme (branded happy, abbreviated to read ‘Health Action Programme for Progress of Youth). “As part of this initiative, we plan to build capacities at NGOs across all States. Like all our previous programmes, this is also going to be scalable and replicable.” Still in its infancy, HAPPY is being implemented in one district in Tamil Nadu, as of today. But even as DESH takes it forward, the programme’s current avatar will turn into a model centre of sorts. The school programme will also serve as a comprehensive health programme, encompassing basic health and mental health. However, Navin says the focus is being centered around the much-discussed topic of substance abuse. “Many children today, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to smoking,” he says. “So, while basic and mental health is a key ingredient of the programme, we would like to focus on the topic of substance abuse.”

Through its near-three-decade-long journey, DESH has interacted with both, government and partner organizations too, with direct interventions also remaining a key part of its activities. In Navin’s words, “our specialization is the human touch. That’s what sets us apart from the rest.”



13. Evergreen Rubber Producers Society

The Karbis and their tryst with Rubber

The Karbis are among the earliest inhabitants of Assam and predominantly live in the Karbi Anglong and Kamrup districts of Assam. The Karbis traditionally practice jhum cultivation in the hills. They grow variety of crops which include foodgrains, vegetables and fruits like rice, maize, potato, tapioca, beans, ginger and turmeric. They are quiet self-sufficient and have homestead gardens with betel nut, jackfruit, oranges, pineapple, etc. which fulfill their nutritional as well as food needs. However, with the integration of the traditional lifestyle with the market economy, many of the traditional institutions and way of life has been left damaged, bringing about unending sufferings on the people. Karbi people have the highest HPI (Human Poverty Index) value of 33.52, indicating that this tribe has the highest number of people in human poverty.

Sambhu Keleng, 30 years, of Rewa Maheswar a village in the Kamrup district of Assam hails from a traditional farming family where rice is cultivated once a year and vegetables during the other months. 80% of the people in this area were small farmers and the rest had migrated to towns for employment. He lived in a joint family and after the death of his father, the family land was distributed amongst his uncles and him. He had to take care of 3 of his brothers and his mother from the meager income that he earned from his share of land. Fortunately, Keleng was introduced to rubber when he was 20 years old. He had also read

about rubber in Tripura when he was in school and he decided to start rubber cultivation in one patch of his land which was not used much for cultivation. With the help of the Rubber Board he planted around 200 rubber trees and started his life as a rubber farmer.

Seeing his farm and the support meted out by the Rubber Board Extension Officers to him, many followed suit and started to plant Rubber in their small holdings. Today, Keleng heads the Evergreen Rubber Producers Society, started in 2007, with 48 youngsters hailing from 6 neighboring villages as members. Six of them have started tapping around 900 rubber trees and others are eagerly waiting for one or two years to start tapping. All the members are below 30 years of age and they are all convinced that their lives would be secured in a few years after seeing the success of Keleng. Their aspirations of owning two wheelers and cars are nearing fulfillment which has been a great motivation for them to get into rubber farming.

“The rice and vegetables we cultivated in our farms were largely meant for our own consumption and we are able to sell only small quantities. It was sufficient for our day to day existence only. We never had any regular earnings, money for any emergencies or savings. Now rubber farming has enabled us to have bank accounts and also save money. We are also able to afford getting new clothes and celebrate festivals. If not for rubber, I would still be living in penury, the way in which my dad had lived most of his lifetime,” says Prokhen Rehang, the Vice President of the society.

“My brother is a veterinary doctor and he, along with his wife, works in Guwahati. I am sure that within two years my earning potential would be more than him and I can have all the luxuries that people in cities have. I am also certain of having the greatest joy of living in my village along with my friends and family,” says Keleng. His wife says: “After seeing the way my husband has prospered after planting rubber, my father has also engaged in rubber farming two years ago.” This trigger effect generated by rubber has brought in fortune to the Karbi farmers.

“I got a job for 15,000 rupees in Jorhat, but I did not join. I tap around 160 trees on alternate days and am able to collect a sizeable quantity of rubber latex. I am sure I can earn 50,000 rupees a month after a few

years. Why would I ever want to leave my village and seek employment outside?” asks Keleng. The youngest member in the group is pursuing his first year of graduation in a local college. “It will be a double treat for me when I finish my graduation after two years as my rubber trees would be seven years old and I can start tapping them. I am eagerly waiting for that day to come. Sambhu has been a great source of inspiration and a role model to me. I look forward to selling my rubber and making money!” says this young lad.

Krishna Das, the Extension Officer of Rubber Board working for the Kamrup District is a very content man. “I am very happy to see the way these Karbi tribal have settled in their lives. It gives me an immense pleasure to work for them. They value and follow all the instructions given by us and eagerly wait for our visits. I am so glad that Rubber brought riches in their lives. I can write a series of rags to riches story on every Rubber farmer I interact with,” says Krishna Das.

— Latha Suresh



14. Hasiru Dala

Bangalore's Garbage Army

Garbage is a universal urban problem. The very existence of urban waste and the need to dispose the same has posed many a challenge in several cities. In Bangalore however, the situation has thrown up several additional challenges. But a sustained and combined effort to streamline this process has resulted in garbage-collection and waste disposal becoming solid processes through the efforts of the BBMP and the Hasiru Dala network. As researcher Chaya Chengappa writes, “The combined effort of a network of organizations working together proved instrumental in initiating the registration process and in forming a city-wide waste pickers’ and waste itinerant buyers’ membership-based organization called Hasiru Dala.”

The objective was simple. Organize and streamline the garbage collection system in Bangalore. “The network is formed by many organizations working with waste pickers across the city. The alliance of Indian waste pickers is most broadly reaching these organizations as it supports the advocacy efforts and works with all the network partners that represent the city’s waste pickers,” Chaya writes. Having participated in active and influential activities promoting the concept of

decentralizing waste management in the city, the gradual progression lay in integrating waste-pickers into a more organized system.

The reason for this of course, was to build a strong network of waste pickers to aid the system and tie up loose ends that had existed in the process of garbage collection. With Bangalore being an IT capital and industrial activity having hit a peak, there was of course a major challenge in implementing the idea on the field. However, the first step lay in integrating waste pickers, and getting them to work the basics. “This group called the solid waste management round table had proposed and promoted the integration of waste pickers and small scrap dealers running dry waste collection centres,” writes Chaya. The strategy towards achieving this end lay in a studied “top-down” approach that Hasiru Dala was keen on implementing, which was in stark contrast to approaches in the past that took on the ‘bottom-up’ model. “In contrast to previous “bottom up” efforts, the network as a whole used a “top-down approach” as a key method of engaging the BBMP in enumerating and registering waste pickers,” writes Chaya.

The reason for the reverse approach working in Bangalore lay in the advocacy of top leadership in the municipality. Given the general enthusiasm that the initiative received back in 2011, getting the idea across wasn’t exactly the greatest challenge. The only ones that did exist were those challenges on the ground. But that also, Chaya writes, was quickly overcome. “Challenges on the ground were successfully overcome because organisations mobilized and trained waste pickers intensively across the city,” she writes, describing how Hasiru Dala came to be. However, while organizing a pool of waste-pickers was a task in itself, the greater challenge lay in applying the right kind of process to the plan. For that to happen, a well-thought-out methodology or strategy was required. The one that Hasiru Dala came up with was beneficial to both, the organisation itself and the BBMP. “The methodology enables the BBMP to register and issue authorized photo identity cards. It requires authentication of waste pickers through an introduction letter from residents, NGOs or scrap dealers,” Chaya’s report states.

Interestingly enough, the approach and strategy won praise from across the board and was well accepted by all zones in Bangalore’s

municipal layout. In due course, a pilot project was conceptualized and subsequently executed. “The pilot was tested in the city’s west zone. The gaps identified in the pilot helped improve the efficiency of the registration process.” By 2011, nearly 3,000 waste pickers were registered, with a target to scale that number up to 5,000 by March 2012. The registration allows such waste pickers authorization to collect waste and therefore “protect themselves against harassment from the police, municipal authorities and the public,” as Chaya’s report states.

In many ways, Hasiru Dala was historic in its inception. For only the first time, an urban municipal body began registering waste pickers in the country. The network partners began by forming and training small and informal collectives of waste pickers to tackle several requests to provide waste management services the BBMP’s Dry Waste Collection Centres and for bulk waste generators. “These services include composting organic waste and collecting and segregating recyclable waste. The collection centres and bulk generators are waste pickers’ main sources of livelihoods as door to door waste collection is contracted out,” the report states. But the work didn’t end just there. “Continuous dialogue with citizens and officials has resulted in the BBMP approving Hasiru Dala to operate three Dry Waste Collection Centres in the city.” In many ways, these baby steps helped the organization climb the ladder of success to achieve more out of what it set out to do. By this time however, a clear methodology, strategy and implementation procedure was well firmed up, as part of the bigger picture.

There has also been a sustained effort towards developing training modules for waste pickers, which include the process of enabling such individuals to develop life and entrepreneurial skills of their own. In the aftermath, Hasiru Dala is today, at the forefront of waste management in Bangalore. The organization spear-heads source-segregation drives in close to 20,000 Bangalore households, in addition to also organizing green events, wherein waste is kept to a minimum. But some challenges continue to persist, like for example, how such workers can be sustained only by contributions from households, many of which are reluctant even today, to pay for their garbage to be cleared.



15. InSIDE-North East

Inside the North East

Non-profits working in conflict regions have their own unique set of challenges, starting with their entry into communities. Earning trust of local communities and living with them to improve their lives is not as straight forward as one can imagine. Within each community, strategies have to be adopted to be able to open dialogues with them. Perhaps, this could be a little easier for an insider, or at least, that is the commonly held perception.

Mr Hejang Misao, Director of InSIDE-North East in Saikul, Manipur, disagrees. For youngsters like him, all that they could aspire for is Civil Services. “Our parents cannot think beyond this. You will see Civil Service aspirants in every household, consistently preparing for competitive examinations. That is the only way we can acquire a government job and feel secure,” says Hejang, who disappointed his parents by pursuing Social Work.

Saikul, popularly known as the Kargil of Manipur for the recurring civilian conflicts, has filled Hejang’s childhood with memories of guerrilla training, combat operations and forceful recruitment by the rebels. “I was trained in guerrilla while studying in class 8. On the eve of my class 10 exams, I was captured by police and beaten up throughout

the night. I was part of the village protection force too. Ultimately, choice was in our hands. While most of my friends chose to continue with the movement, I decided to pursue higher education,” he says.

Like most others, Hejang also aspired to be an IAS officer. His mother, still tries to convince her 37 years old son, calling him a ‘mad guy’ who chose to work with the community. Despite his love for Science and Mathematics, he could not pursue science as it was ‘expensive and unaffordable’. He therefore chose Arts and completed his graduation in History. “It was the most boring subject in high school,” he smiles.

It was during this time that Hejang got exposed to community based organisations and started working with them. “Livelihood, micro finance, rural development and child development—I saw my community responding to these programmes in hope for a better future. This was when I comprehended the lives of forced recruits and those who were left behind and had nothing else to get back to. All of them were psychologically disturbed and had no one to help them find their directions. More than leadership and guidance, it was space and platform that they needed. A place where they can feel togetherness, happiness and hope, a place where they can connect for Peace,” he says.

A few songs on the guitar brought smiles on their faces. Huge crowds came forward to be part of the their musical evenings. Hejang and his friends were happy to see that simple gestures helped people connect and reminisce, amidst routine life that was dictated by terms of the conflict. They understood the desperation with which people, especially the youth, looked for options to get out of the situation.

InSIDE – North East (Integrated Social and Institutional Development for Empowerment) was born in 2006 in response to these wishes. The organisation focused on life skills, civic citizenship, women empowerment and adolescent health, and reached out to different communities thereby empowering them to be self-reliant.

“When children were exposed to a drawing class, most of them drew guns. When asked about ambition, many said that they wanted to join the militants. We had to take them beyond these circumstances and help them dream of a better future, where they could connect with their

culture without being rendered powerless. Their low levels of self-esteem was the biggest challenge we faced,” explains Hejang. As the journey began, he realised the significance of education in such a society. “Education starts from family. Schools are just one part of the cycle,” he asserts adding that working with the young was incomplete without working with their mothers. Simple livelihood support programmes improved their earning capacity, empowering them in the process to make informed decisions for their children.

Their flagship project ‘Guns to Pens’ has attempted to revive grass roots education and experiential learning, in order to facilitate realisation of democratic values. Hejang feels that his post-graduation in Social Work helped him have a better insight of how things worked in the field. “I was able to develop the culture of analytical thinking among the youth we worked with. This is the magic that education does. It helps one recognise commonalities and differences as simple attributes. This is the foundation on which a peaceful society can be nurtured,” he says.

Education, according to him, is the only hope for people of Manipur. Lack of opportunities, industries, history of conflict have kept these people at bay. Over the years, getting to see the children have dreams was a milestone for the team. “They have ambitions. They have their dreams. They no longer draw guns,” apparently, he is over the moon.

Hejang is grateful to the MSDS fellowship and the opportunity it has provided him to connect with like-minded organisations outside Manipur. “This is an important milestone, validating our principle. We do not want to grow organically as an organisation. InSIDE – North East wishes to evolve as a platform for the young, letting them represent themselves at all occasions. They must be able to remain connected in spite of the disturbances in the region,” he says.

— Shanmuga Priya.T



16. LIVE

Keeping the dreams of students alive!

Twenty years, 10,000 certificates, 5,000 diplomas, 50 awards, 60 newspaper appreciations, 4,000 alumni speaking highly about the benefits. LIVE is still going steady and strong!

With promises to keep and several roads ahead to take, the Loyola Institute of Vocational Education (LIVE) is now celebrating its 20th anniversary, and bouquets from various quarters are pouring in.

Looking back at the strolls and strides it has taken in the past, the institution now looks ahead, armed with more plans drawn up to meet the challenges of the future. Established in 1996 by Loyola College (Autonomous), a Jesuit institution owned by the Loyola College Society, functioning in the heart of Chennai and set back from the hustle and bustle of the main road in Nungambakkam, LIVE has been alive to the aspirations of youth and the academic needs of society.

That vocational education holds the magic key to the mission of solving the unemployment problem has been accepted all over the world by academicians and administrators. An article in The Guardian

corroborates this theory: “Vocational education tends to result in a faster transition into the workplace, and countries—Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands— that have it at the core of the curriculum and have been successful in maintaining low youth unemployment rates.” (The Guardian: Vocational Education: Why the Finns do it best: January 15, 2014.)

Out of Loyola College’s outstanding concern for and commitment to the welfare of students was born LIVE, in keeping with the generally accepted notion and value of vocational education on which the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Government of Tamil Nadu had also laid thrust as a sine qua non of higher education.

LIVE has been offering an education which is live, capturing the spirit of the name of the institution, with vocational education values and utility. The educational programmes are tailor-made to suit the tastes, temperaments and targets of diverse aspirants in the fields of media, travel & tourism, film-making, medical laboratory technology and else for about two decades. Courses offered by this institute are widely recognized by the industry for their merit and quality and the students who have passed with flying colours have landed in plum posts at reputed organisations.

C. Kothandabani, who did the Travel and Tourism Management Course at LIVE between 2000 and 2002, gained quick experience moving up the ladder from Assistant Ticketing Officer to Tour Leader and ultimately setting up his own tour company in 2015 called ‘Exploring India’. In September 2007, he was invited to travel to Netherlands to receive the prestigious Best Tour Guide Award. He says: “The Travel and Tourism Management Course at LIVE has enabled me travel to Europe (Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and France) which gave me a good understanding of the tourist industry and allowed me to behave in a professional manner while dealing with tourists from other countries.”

Sanju Vatsan, Senior Web Designer with COMODO, says: “I have always felt that I was so lucky to be a student at LIVE and I can positively say LIVE has made me a better person. It has helped me develop a positive attitude towards my studies and discover more about

myself. Teachers are very caring and interested in students' well-being. They make sure every class is fun, educational and interactive.”

Santosh Munish feels that LIVE was one of the best learning experiences he gained. He says: “The professors were so informative as well as friendly and made students so comfortable that we never had any hesitation to clarify our doubts related to the subjects. We were well trained in all the media subjects. I would take this opportunity to thank each and every professor for giving me confidence to survive in this competitive industry.”

LIVE has designed courses so as to develop knowledge, skills, attitude and sense of social responsibility of pre-college students and graduates. Socially relevant and employment-oriented, the courses meet the needs of the industry. The curriculum is regularly updated and validated by the industry in order to bridge the academics-industry divide. The faculty have rich industrial and academic experience which enable the students to gain an insight about how the industry really works.

For instance, students pursuing film-making course, cinematography and film editing gain exposure through personalities visiting and dwelling at length on their specializations. Film workshops, festivals and galas are organized so that the students keep abreast of the developments. Predominantly, students are trained through group discussions, seminars, business games, audio-visuals, case studies, research assignments, field visits, production-based practical's, industrial visits, educational trip and internship in their respective fields.

To bolster the students' career, many LIVE-industry agreements are in place which help students gain practical experience in the industry as a regular part of their classes. Besides, students do internships in industries of their choice. Even as the students pass out of the institution, LIVE also assists them in placements. Armed with PG diploma, diploma, certificates in languages and other relevant titles awarded by LIVE, the students leave the portals of the institution with skills to conquer the job market and with memories to cherish forever.



17. Mendipathar Multipurpose Cooperative Society

The Rubber Growing Garos of Meghalaya

Garos are the second largest tribal group inhabiting the Karo Hills and Khasi Hills in Meghalaya. The Garos are one of the few remaining matrilineal societies in the world. The individuals take their clan titles from their mothers. Traditionally, the youngest daughter inherits the property from her mother. Sons' leave the parents' house at puberty, and are trained in the village bachelor dormitory. After getting married, the man lives in his wife's house. Garos are only a matrilineal society, but not matriarchal. While property of Garo's is owned by the women, the men folk govern the society and domestic affairs and manage the property.

Rubber was first introduced to the Garos by a Medical Mission Sister, Sr. Rose Kayathinkara in the late 80s. Sister Rose was appalled at the poverty and the wretched conditions in which the Garo tribes were living when she landed in Rajabala in Garo Hills in late 70s. She would visit each and every house in the neighborhood and suggest various ways for people to break free of poverty. She introduced poultry and dairy farming and a few of the Garos started rearing pigs and cattle. It was then the idea of rubber cultivation stuck the nun, daughter of a rubber plantation owner in Kerala state's Kottayam district.

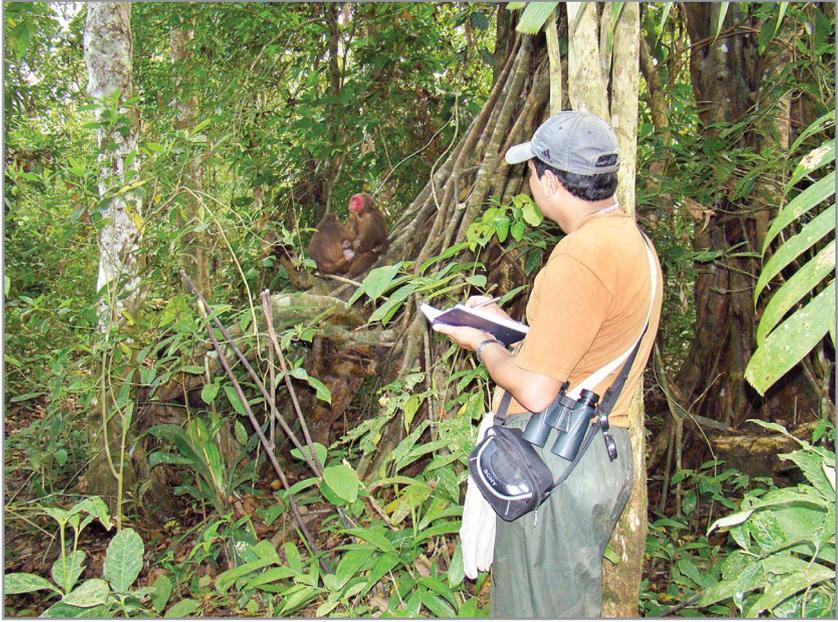
The Rubber Board of Kerala backed her idea and she took up cultivation seriously from 1987. She organized a meeting of the villagers to explain about rubber. “Nobody had heard about rubber trees at that time. Some asked me what they would get to eat from the rubber,” she recalled. The nun said it took her time and patience to convince the people. She provided them free rubber saplings and funds to start cultivation. People’s attitude changed after a few villagers began to tap the rubber and improved their economic status.

One such village which took to rubber farming was the Chirimdare tribal village on the East Garo Hills with a population of around 180 people. The Maraks have been living there for over four generations. They were practicing jhum cultivation growing paddy and vegetables and were living in extreme poor conditions till the late 80s. Sister Rose’s visit to their house changed their lives forever. On her request they started rubber cultivation in 1987 and today they have over 2000 rubber trees. “I knew Sister’s suggestion to grow rubber would not be a futile one. We believed in her and her intentions of uplifting us. She wanted us to prosper and that is why she painstakingly climbed the hills and reached out to us in our homes. We agreed to her idea of setting up a rubber farm and a few of us in this village planted the saplings provided by Sister from the Rubber Board,” says Jengsen Marak.

“Once we started tapping the rubber, we used to go to Tura, about 90 kms away from here by cycle or bus to sell the rubber. A kilo rubber used to sell at Rs.35 – 40 those days but the middlemen would give us only between Rs.12-18. We did not get much returns from rubber initially as the middlemen were fleecing us. When we told Sister about this, she came to our rescue and started the Mendipathar Multipurpose Cooperative Society in 1998. Now, we are very blessed. We have to go just a few kms away and sell the rubber to the cooperative. We get good prices at the Cooperative and our earnings have increased. I was living in a kachcha house before and in 2003, I built a concrete house. I sent my children to school and college and today my family’s future is secure because of rubber. My whole family is involved in rubber cultivation. We men are involved in tapping and the women help us in processing the latex. Sister helps us in getting our subsidy from The Rubber Board also.” says Marak.

“The improvement in human living condition is possible through a proper marketing system and empowerment of people at the grassroots level,” asserts Sister Rose. The Rubber initiative has completely changed people’s lives. Every household narrates the same story of prosperity. It has ushered a silent economic revolution in the Garo Hills.

— Latha Suresh



18. National Conservation Foundation

INTO THE WILD

India's fragile ecosystem couldn't have found a better friend in need than the National Conservation Foundation. For two decades now, the foundation has been actively engaged in the use of science to conserve wildlife in India. Through its exploits, the group has been using science to aid it in the process of conservation. Based in Mysore since the foundation was set up in 1996, NCF India has also done its bit to promote knowledge and conservation of India's wildlife heritage. NCF traces its origins to a group of students who met as classmates at the wildlife institute of India at Dehra Dun, which back then, was the only institute that awarded a Masters degree in Wildlife Science. Spurred by their understanding of wildlife and ecology, and the threats to the same, these four idealistic individuals felt the need to begin a conservation programme for wildlife. With a collection of 500 rupees each, the organisation started with a grand corpus of just Rs 2000.

Over the years, in the pursuit to promote conservation of wildlife, NCF India has also gone a long way in understanding the survival needs of endangered species. Prime examples in this case are snow leopards and elephants. These exploits have also opened the door to not-so-well-known species of corals and spiders. “Without this basic knowledge, there’s no way of knowing or understanding what can be done to address the threat,” says Pavithra Sankaran, Development Manager, NCF, “In the case of the snow leopard, it’s interesting to remember that for centuries, people have lived and co-existed with the snow leopard as part of the same landscape. However, things have begun to change in the last 30 or 40 years, because people’s relationships with their landscape have begun to be influenced by new forces. Conflict between people and wildlife has existed in the background but it has taken on a new dimension in recent years: the economy is changing and people’s relationship with the landscape and its wildlife too are impacted. So, in our efforts to conserve wildlife, we have seen the need to understand society in order to understand wildlife. So, a large chunk of our efforts lie in understanding the relationships that people have with the species.”

That is perhaps why the organisation’s research programmes have in large part, dealt with how humans have had an impact on wild species and the ecosystems that host such creatures. It’s this knowledge that is put to use while the organisation thinks up conservation strategies that are locally-appropriate. In conforming to this methodology, NCF also ensures collaboration with the local demographic who are directly dependent on natural resources. Therefore, promotion of wildlife conservation also brings about a sense of sustainability through livelihood safeguards and overall social development. “We’ve always studied people in order to understand society and wildlife,” says Pavithra, in continuation to her earlier point, “It has taught us that we can’t do much to conserve wildlife without the support of the local community. And by support, we don’t mean distant acquiesce, we mean active involvement where we put in place an intervention in collaboration with the local demographic and step away. Financial inputs may be needed, but ownership of any conservation lies with the people belonging to that landscape.”

Interestingly, the working principle of the organisation lies in its federation of programmes. While each of NCF's programmes is headed by a programme head, who sets goals for programme itself, of note is the concept of each programme being autonomous and independent of the other. "The very nature of the work that we do demands that this autonomy is exactly what our programmes ought to have. So, in a sense it's independent and autonomous by design and not by grant," says Pavithra. She continues: "Our Programmes are the core of our work. And this autonomy that they are bestowed with translates into many things in practical terms: programmes for instance raise their own programme funding. And because funding is raised on its own, the programmers are free to determine what they want to do with the study; whether they ought to go deeper, or replicate a certain model platforms, as the case may be."

This area of autonomous research programmes has NCF focus on multiple areas of independent research. Research at the organisation stretches across geographies like the Himalayan region, or the oceans. It has dealt with subjects like hornbill biology, interactions between rats, seeds and rainforest trees, tree phenology, understanding patterns and processes in vegetation recovery following shifting cultivation being some of the key study areas. The work that the organisation has done in the past involves monitoring threatened wildlife, exploration surveys and management of reserves, to name a few.

While on the face of it, funding for NCF does not seem to be much of a hassle — the organisation has funders from the likes of The National Geographic Society and the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund to other big names like Attica Zoo in Greece, Chester Zoo in the UK and the Department of Science and Technology in New Delhi, India — Pavithra says that this isn't completely true. "We have never had trouble raising money for conservation," she says, "But the bigger challenge is to raise funds for fundamental research, because fundamental research is something that is under-funded, today. And given the fact that the focus and scope of most of this research is in locations that may not exactly be closer home, the function of distance has served to act as a deterrent in assigning priority to the research itself, on the fund front."

Going forward, the organisation plans to continue growing organically, as it has through the years. “At the end of the day, we are looking for creative, energetic people to join us,” says Pavithra. “On our part, we will provide them the space and resources to grow since we firmly believe that good work can only be born out of passionate, invested people.” She adds: “For instance, if someone comes to us and says ‘I’m passionate about the gharial and I want to do something for it; here’s the track record for work I’ve done so far’, we’ll be happy to provide that individual with resources and space.”

— JS



19. Reaching Hand

HANDS THAT HELP

In 1996, two gentlemen who went by the name of VM Samuel and KT Saju felt the need to lend a helping hand to underprivileged children. The first option at hand was to start a scholarship programme to provide financial assistance to such children — funds that would help them with their education. “What began as an initiative by this group of passionate professionals soon grew into a programme that would go on to cater to provide abandoned, destitute and vulnerable children with the necessary support, protection, healthcare and education so that they could in turn contribute to society,” says Akshaya Kumar Sagar, the Chief Operating Officer of Reaching Hand, the NGO that Samuel and Saju began. The same NGO which has in the last two decades helped with the education of nearly 1000 children, and the housing needs of nearly 50 orphan, destitute and underprivileged kids.

From its inception in 1996, Reaching Hand has been unwavering in its mission to educate. “We strongly believe that through education, poverty can be addressed and eventually eradicated,” says Sagar, “However, many children in our society are unable to pursue their education simply

because of financial constraints.” It was here, that Reaching Hand saw the perfect opportunity. And while providing scholarships seemed like the most viable option at hand, it did not come easy. Several like-minded people who identified with the NGO’s mission were instrumental in providing help. And one of the beneficiaries was the NGO’s very own housekeeping staff, Susan, who lost her husband in 2011, and had a daughter in class 8 to bring up on her own. “We stepped in and took care of Smitha (Susan’s daughter)’s education back then,” recalls Sagar, Today, Smitha is pursuing a BCom programme in her second year, and plans to become a chartered accountant. Her life story is a wonderful example of how we have had the privilege and honour to invest into the lives of numerous underprivileged children, and turn today’s destitute into tomorrow’s leaders.”

Education, however, wasn’t the sole aim of the Reaching Hand. India’s growing rate of poverty among children was also a worrying factor in the NGO’s journey. Doing its bit for India’s 20 million orphaned children was something it hoped to achieve as well. The primary problem here seemed lie in that most of these children were without homes. “These children were in danger of losing opportunities for school, health care, growth, development, nutrition, and shelter, in short, their rights to a decent and fulfilling childhood,” recalls Sagar. It was here that Reaching Hand saw another opportunity, and launched its next big project. Christened ‘New Home’, the project was started to address the need to provide housing solutions to destitute children. “Our objective was to achieve this by providing these children with the necessary support, protection, nutritious food, health care and quality education with life skills so that they can be mainstreamed and become productive members of society,” says Sagar. He continues, “When we began in 2006, we started with 10 children. Today we have two shelter homes for orphans and destitute children for both girls and boys consisting of 46 (23 girls and 23 boys) children.” This year alone has seen several of New Home’s first children, who arrived at the facility a decade ago aged 5 and 6, graduate from school and begin their college education. On the anvil now, is a bigger housing project, which will see Reaching Hand build a bigger facility for children. “We have completed phase one of the construction, and hope to complete the project by 2020 where the facility will be able to house and cater to 500 children, and include a clinic, staff quarters and a residential school,” says Sagar.

Through the last two decades of its existence, Reaching Hand has continued to emphasize the need to not just ‘provide’ for children, but do a whole lot more in ensuring a better future for them. “While providing for children might be helpful in the short term, the long term goal should be to transform them into contributing members of society,” affirms Sagar, “This can happen only by creating opportunities for them to succeed.” To create such opportunities, the NGO has also launched a series of programmes. One of these projects is Namma Shale, which focuses on developing infrastructure facilities at schools like classrooms, toilets and libraries. At present, the project has impacted more than 10,000 children at 50 government schools. Reaching Hand expects it to impact an additional 25,000 children by 2020. Other projects along these lines include the likes of Spoorthi (after-school programme aimed at improving learning level outcomes of children), Girls Glory (sanitation and hygiene initiative for girls), Pratishtha (vocational skill-training programme) and Reaching Hand’s Women Empowerment Programme, which aims to empower women by providing training to start businesses. The NGO’s Pratishtha and Women Empowerment Programme have impacted 200 youth and 226 women, so far. The NGO hopes to impact 2,000 youth by 2020, and help an additional 100 women every year by developing on these two programmes.

As it sets its sights on the future, Reaching Hand finds itself with an array of challenges, but like Sagar says, the team is more than excited. “A majority of India’s population, by 2020 will comprise of individuals between the ages 10 and 24,” he says. “While this is great news in terms of potential for economic and social progress, it also poses a great and serious challenge that needs to be addressed.” Reaching Hand has also deduced that a young generation brings with it, a certain set of specific needs, challenges and aspirations. “The youth of today can be the leaders of tomorrow only if they have the right skills, education, health and direction. This is where Reaching Hand believes that we can and need to play an active role in the overall development of our youth by contributing in the fields of education, health and skill development,” says Sagar as he signs off, “Only then can we truly grow and succeed as individuals, as communities and as a nation.”

20. Samuha

Water everywhere, but...

Water shortage, drought, long dry spells. With climate change rearing its ugly head in the last decade, there has been much spoken about and debated on what kind of impact Climate Change can have on a city’s water supply. Take Chennai, for instance. It saw historic rainfall and flooding in late 2015, to the point of turning into a serious disaster. Yet today, it is a city that could well be bracing for an acute water shortage in the summer. Bangalore for that matter is expected to encounter a near-apocalyptic water shortage in the next decade — one that could render the city near unliveable. In times like these, serious introspection into water



conservation and management is the need of the hour. Karnataka-based NGO, Samuha has its sights set on just that.

Samuha has been working in North Karnataka’s Raichur district since 1987. Ever since the organisation began at Raichur’s Deodurg Taluk, its guiding philosophy has been to “Improve the Quality of Life of Vulnerable People”. Over time, however, the group has realized that one of the key areas of focus to achieve this mission, is through water conservation and management. That is precisely why the last few years have seen Samuha focus on water conservation in specific areas like irrigation, lake conservation and the enhancement of overall water quality.

“We received a grant from Hindustan Unilever Limited to look at water conservation and management in flood irrigated and canal irrigated

paddy cultivation,” explains T Pradeep, Secretary, Samuha, retracing how the organisation took on the mission of water conservation and its research, on a war-footing. Pradeep goes on to explain how the organisation’s long-term goal is saving a whopping 179 billion litres of water in five years. “In the first year alone, we were able to save nearly 3.1 billion litres.” Not happy to rest on these laurels just yet, Pradeep is more than willing to push the envelope of water conservation and research. “The real question is: why can’t we save 10 trillion litres of water?” he adds. To help find answers for questions like these, Samuha has set up Water Pressure, as a centre for water enquiries.

“A key area that we are currently studying is to do with the use of excess water in irrigation,” explains Pradeep, “Farmers often believe that since water is good for the plants, excess can only be better. Of course it isn’t, since excess water makes plants more vulnerable to pest infestation.”

As part of the centre’s work with water conservation, Climate Change is also an issue that Water Pressure is exploring, especially in areas of climate adaptation. “Our partnership with the Hindustan Unilever Foundation has allowed us to understand the criticality of water to adaptation. Their support is allowing us to focus on field innovations: Water-centric Sustainable Development Goals, water monitoring technology, WaterSmart Rice, Community Water Credits, amongst others,” says Pradeep.

Water Pressure is also trying to understand waste water as a resource. Bengaluru receives around 1000 MLD (million litres/day) as Cauvery water. 80% of this flows back into the Dakshina Pinakini as sewage. The Dakshina Pinakini then flows into Tamil Nadu as the Ponnaiyar river before draining into the Bay of Bengal near Cuddalore. If all this water could undergo secondary and tertiary treatments, that 800 MLD would be a critical resource for communities and farmers in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. For people squeamish about the thought of treated sewage water as potable water, Pradeep reminds them: “the cool, clean water that flows of London’s kitchen taps is treated water from the Thames.”

Says Pradeep, “It is important to understand that sewage water is not bad; untreated sewage water is bad.” It’s ideas like this that Samuha

will look to bank on, in its effort and mission to achieving optimum water conservation and improvement of water quality.

Most of the work that Samuha does with water is born out of a singular acknowledgement: that water is central to growth. It is with this understanding that Friends of Lakes, Pradeep says, could also consider taking its programme to Chennai — another city that has long-suffered the scourge of water shortage. Samuha's twin targets of saving 179-billion litres in paddy cultivation, and influencing 10 trillion litres of water savings and quality will see SAMUHA focus more and more on Water for Life and Water for Livelihoods in its near future. It will be exciting to observe how achievements under these twin tracks are notched up at a time when urban and rural water shortages have become an issue hotly debated across the country.

— JS



21. Social Work Organisation

Sustaining Livelihoods

Tribal life is diverse across the country. So is tribal livelihood, but their close association with natural resources is something that remains the same everywhere. This is both their strength and vulnerability. Having understood this quite early in life, Mr Ramesh Babu, Founder of Social Work Organisation in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, aspired to work for the tribals by getting into the system. However, his not-so-good experience led him to establish his own community based organisation.

Hailing from a middle class family in West Godavari district, Ramesh completed his post-graduation in Social Work from Nagarjuna University in Guntur district. He also studied Social Work in his under-graduation, hoping it was the best fit to equip himself to serve as a government official. He followed the work of Social Welfare Department to keep track of the new developments, and possible implications on the lives of the tribals. “Every time, paying fees was a struggle,” Ramesh recalls. Lack of financial support restricted his access to other opportunities that could prepare him for a government job. While he had decided

to discontinue studies, his by-chance encounter with the Indo German Social Service Society encouraged him to pursue his higher studies without any obstacle. “I learnt that they supported poor students for their education. All they asked was an assurance to work for the cause of the poor and needy for two years, post the completion of my course. I happily agreed,” he says.

Ramesh worked for different NGOs and his work with the Chenchu tribe in Nallamala forest in Srisailem area helped him comprehend the struggles that tribal poor faced on a daily basis. Whether food or education or health, the complex web of social interdependencies were determined by the livelihood options that were available to them at any point during the year. “I saw many challenges in reaching out to the poor tribals. Terrain only exacerbated things,” he adds.

Experience at BOSCO and ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Agency) prepared Ramesh to do his own way of service to his community. Dharamshala in Mangalore inspired him. “They did great work for poor people—mass marriages, educational institutions, mobile hospitals, free food for the devotees and poor, and the recent rural development project—all were administered in such a way that the local communities were engaged productively in the complete chain of processes. I was inspired by their scale of work,” he says.

Having realised that volunteering was the best way to serve communities, Ramesh established his Social Work Organisation (SWO) in the year 2004. All his previous work experience allowed him to gauge tribal issues and recognise services that could improve the lives of the tribals. Simple methods like low cost technology that could cut short the distance they walked or trekked to fetch fresh water for consumption and better management of crop storage facilities made a difference. Value addition worked wonders for these people.

“All that they needed was value addition that could strengthen the existing livelihood options and add new ones, if possible. Livelihood is very critical for tribals as they have to invest in their transport as well. Their needs are basic, but operationally very challenging,” describes Ramesh. What worked to his advantage was the association he had built up with the local community members. Hence, working with the communities was no longer a challenge.

Run with the help of volunteers and local members, SWO introduced low cost technology in agriculture that helped increase productivity of the farmers. But, crop storage remained to be an issue for long. This was also addressed through better storage methods and aids. Gradually, they also intervened to promote water purification and offered simple methods to purify water within their own homes. As these concerns began to settle down over the years, Ramesh decided to focus on forest based livelihood improvement to sustain the livelihood options people had. “Livelihoods have to be sustainable. They cannot be seasonal, nor can they depend on factors external to the community. Sustainable livelihoods was the answer to many issues they faced,” says Ramesh who then introduced the idea of forest based entrepreneurship and formation of producer groups.

The versatility of local produce created scope for value addition. Therefore the producer groups’ capacity building and chain management made the current practices efficient and reliable. Once this was ensured, value addition managed to improve the quality of present products, introduce new products, offer better price, and market them. “All these have to go on long term and must be internalised to realise the vision of self-sufficiency. I have had 15 years of experience in livelihoods and sustainability. I still have a long way to go, and it is so for the people too. We will move together,” says Ramesh, whose long term plan is to establish a food processing industry that will be collectively owned and managed by the local tribals.

“Plenty of forest resources is a gift. The tribals must know how to fully exploit this in order to nurture their lives and the forest in return,” he says.

“Running the NGO had its own challenges. My evolution as a social worker has had grey days too. I have travelled without reservation and survived on simple, low cost, street food. I have even borrowed money for my work now and then. My family put up with all these struggles, but now, when I see tribals happy and empowered, and having a vision for themselves, I am contented. We will continue to move together in this path,” he signs off.

— Shanmuga Priya.T



22. Swabodhini

Understanding Autism

Back in 1989, a school for special children was started with the sole purpose of catering to the needs of just four special children. Today, 27 years later, Swabodhini — run by the Swabodhini Charitable Trust — has nearly 45 children with special needs, under its fold. These growing numbers point to an increase in awareness that autism — a neuro-developmental disorder that affects nearly 21.7 million people world over — has received. “There is much more awareness about Autism and autistic children in society today. There have been a number of movies that have depicted about people with autism, autism awareness walks and charity initiatives that have help spread awareness,” says Radha Ganesan, who is the founder and director of Swabodhini and the managing trustee of the Swabodhini Charitable Trust. Today, Swabodhini is committed to the educational needs of special children, in addition to providing speech therapy and occupational therapy to such children.

“Autism is a hidden disability,” says Radha, as she tries to de-bunk some of the myths associated with the disorder. She continues: “Corporate enterprises, the industry and government must reach out to provide open or sheltered employability opportunities for students with autism, schools and colleges must introduce extra credits for

students volunteering service. Autism awareness programmes have to be conducted throughout the year to make an impact in society,” summing up all the present-day requirements that are needed to spread more awareness about the disorder. In a sense, that’s also exactly what Swabodhini has been facilitating for nearly three decades now, in its attempt to rehabilitate students with autism. “Swabodhini has placed three of its students into open employment in the assembly line of Grundfos India — they have been designated as Junior Technicians and are doing well for themselves for five years,” says Radha. Another one of school’s students won 3 gold medals in roller skating in the Special Olympics held in Chandigarh.

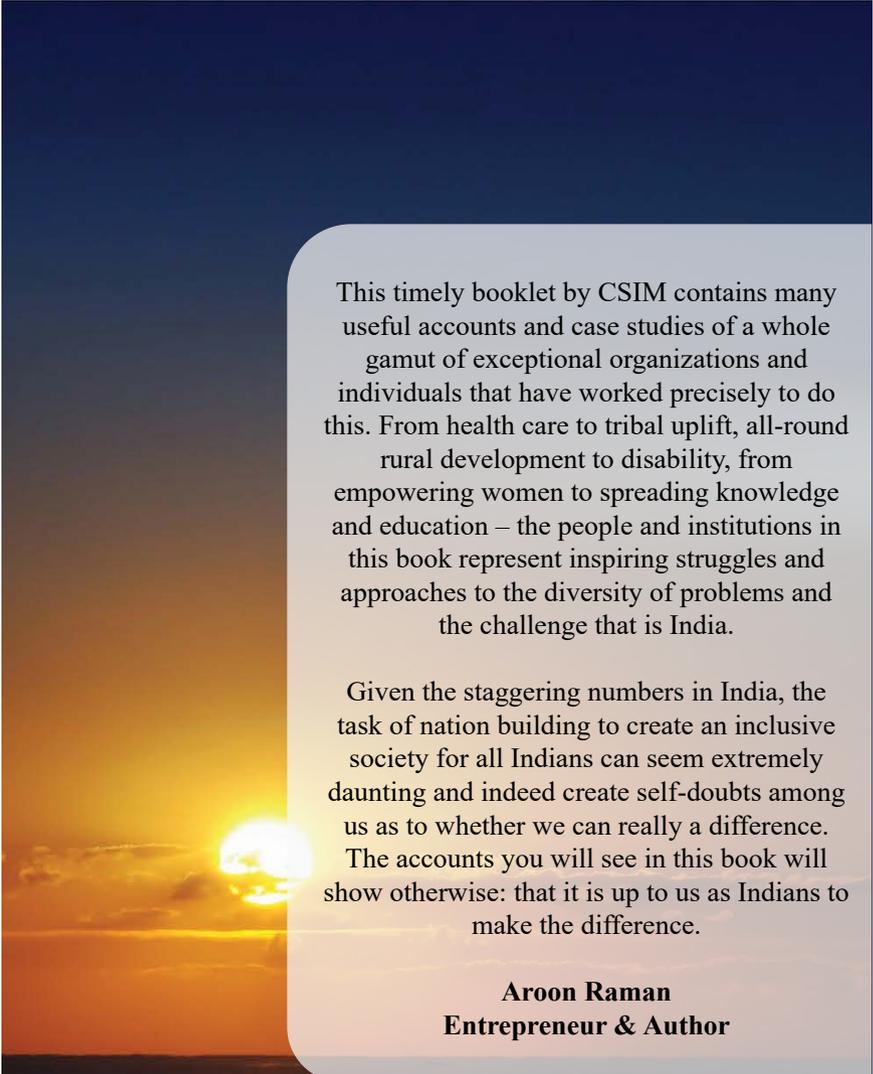
All these achievements aside, the real worry, Radha feels is the number of myths that continue to persist about autism itself. “One of these misconceptions is simply the fact that people think children with autism are intellectually disabled,” she says, “Many children with autism have normal to high IQs and some of them excel in maths, music and art.” Another misconception is the notion that autistic children do not make friends. “Opportunities must be initiated and consistently followed to make friends. As children with autism are not able to communicate the way we do, they are seen to have no desire for relationships,” Radha explains. The misconceptions do not end there. Another huge misconception is the continued belief in the ‘vaccine hypothesis’, a 1997 theory suggesting that vaccination was one of the causes of autism — one that has been retracted. “The fact is simply that autism is a neurobiological disorder characterised by impaired social interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication and restricted and repetitive behaviour,” clarifies Radha, “What we at Swabodhini strive to work on, is to improve our children’s communication, socialisation, behaviour and life skills. In doing that, we also provide opportunities for skill-development — like road crossing, bus travel, shopping experiences and financial transactions.”

But challenges have always been around the corner. The biggest one facing Swabodhini today, is the difficulty in renting out a premise to set up a school for special children. “The very mention of a ‘school for special children’ usually elicits a negative response,” says Radha, drawing attention to the stigma that continues to exist with respect to

neuro-developmental disorders in society. “That’s why another big need today, is to convince and sensitize parents into understanding that acceptance of their child’s disability is the first step to faster progress.” That is perhaps why Swabodhini also dedicates part of its mission towards counselling and educating parents of special children on turning into educators themselves. Finding special educators and trained therapists, is of course another challenge in itself.

Even as this continues to take place, the priority lies in treating autistic children. A large part of this treatment lies in regular teaching of subjects like science, sports, gardening and even extra-curricular activities. Yoga therapy, speech therapy and play therapy have also helped along the way, in facilitating the process. Radha is quick to insist though, that although not curable, autism is indeed treatable. “There are some effective treatments and training methodologies and approaches for children with autism that facilitate their ability to function better,” she says.

In the immediate future, Swabodhini will continue to do what it does best: cater to special students aged between ages 4 and 25. “The school offers vocational training programmes in Computer and Admin skills, retail business skills, culinary, photocopying and paper cup making,” says Radha, recounting the many aspects that make Swabodhin stand apart. She continues: “Our vision is to be a centre of excellence for providing state- of- the -art vocational training to prepare students with autism and intellectual disabilities for sheltered, open or self employment thus enabling them to lead independent and dignified lives as integral members of society.” In doing that, the school has taken a giant stride towards both: removing the stigma associated with developmental impairment, and paving a pathway towards a better future for children afflicted by a neuro-developmental disorder like autism.

A vertical photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is a bright yellow circle on the horizon, with its light reflecting on the water. The sky transitions from a deep orange near the horizon to a dark blue at the top. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white rounded rectangle on the right side of the image.

This timely booklet by CSIM contains many useful accounts and case studies of a whole gamut of exceptional organizations and individuals that have worked precisely to do this. From health care to tribal uplift, all-round rural development to disability, from empowering women to spreading knowledge and education – the people and institutions in this book represent inspiring struggles and approaches to the diversity of problems and the challenge that is India.

Given the staggering numbers in India, the task of nation building to create an inclusive society for all Indians can seem extremely daunting and indeed create self-doubts among us as to whether we can really a difference. The accounts you will see in this book will show otherwise: that it is up to us as Indians to make the difference.

Aroon Raman
Entrepreneur & Author



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