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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Life is not about living in the future or in the past; it is about being in the present moment and accepting it. Each of us confront new opportunities and challenges from time to time. It is therefore essential to practice patience and perseverance. When you want to achieve something in your life, it is your responsibility to understand the process and time required to do the work.

Patience is a virtue and its importance should be realised as it makes us better people. In this modern age, most of us have forgotten to be patient and get irritated very quickly over minor issues. Being patient can make us reach out for the stars and avoid taking hasty decisions. When we are in difficult situations and seek advice from people, they usually tell us to take decisions when our mind is calm and composed. This requires positive thinking so that we arrive at probable actions to overcome the challenges.

When you lose patience and get frustrated, it is an indicator that negative things have hijacked your attention, and you are no longer focused on the work that needs to be done. Also, when people are impatient, their stress level increases quickly. It not only made the situation more difficult for them, but also for the people around them.

Perseverance is the ability to continue working on the task until you succeed. It means determination regardless of any odds or obstacles that may exist. It is to insist and to be firm on getting something done and not giving up.

Perseverance is required in our day-to-day lives, because many things we need are not optional. You must therefore persevere to find a way to be happy and owe it to yourself and those around you. Having said that, you should have the right perspective and humility too. People who persevere show steadfastness despite how hard it is or how long it takes to reach the goal.

Patience and perseverance require focused attention. When you lose focus, you lose patience, which in turn diminishes your perseverance. This happens when you complain about working the process, get irritated about the time that is required, or get annoyed at the obstacles you have to deal with.

Both patience and perseverance — and the focus that comes with it — are essential disciplines of leadership. People with patience have an enormous competitive advantage over impatient people. Patient people solve problems faster, get better results, and experience significantly less stress.

Patience and perseverance are essential for achieving any goal, be it personal or professional. It would take time and process, but your efforts would certainly turn out to be fruitful. So, trust the process, keep doing the work, be patient and keep going!

Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh

Marie Banu

REFLECTIONS - THE STRENGTH OF OUR FEET



Our feet carry us through every phase of our life, all the way from the time we learn how to balance as toddlers to the time we become old and find it difficult to walk. My favorite body part to move are my feet – delicate, beautiful, yet incredibly strong.

As a young girl, I had a strong affinity towards the outdoor environment and vividly remember times when I would dance barefoot in my backyard every morning before school. Reflecting upon those days and experiences, I have come to appreciate the coordination and cohesion that our feet create amongst all the anatomical parts of the entire lower extremity. Only with such wonderful coordination, we are able to feel immense power and strength in our posture and movement. Along with creating cohesion and coordination, I pride my feet for the range of extensions, flexions, and locomotive freedom they provide for me to be able to carry out complex dance routines. I believe that we require a balance of this kind of flexibility in various aspects of our lives – work, relationships, family, and health.

I like to think that my feet reflect my body and that they can help heal the entire body - they are energy neutral and help maintain proper balance. When we walk barefoot, the soles of our feet are the only part of our body in touch with the environment. They contain a large number of sensory neurons that are involved in

a feedback loop of action transmission. These sensory neurons receive the initial stimulus and generate the electrical impulse to be sent to the brain, responsible for creating movement. I celebrate the fact that the foot sole is one of the parts of our incredibly complex body containing the largest number of nerve endings, facilitating communication with more than a hundred other muscles, ligaments, and tendons that keep us upright and stable.

The feet also help facilitate proper alignment, optimum control, and a maintenance regime for dance. Having taken a class to better understand the elementary understanding of contemporary, I have been in awe of how the feet help dancers develop choreography routines, technically and artistically. Personally, I spent a lot of time understanding how transferring body weight creatively generates variation in dance moves. This angle of choreography has helped me create interesting movement pieces for several classes in high school and college.

Having quite literally carried me through the stronger and weaker moments of my life so far, I can't put in words how grateful I am to be gifted my lovely feet!

Kaushiki Ravi

STRENGTHENING HUMAN CAPITAL

Gender is a social concept that has been understood and interpreted in varied contexts. Gender stereotypes are more openly discussed and debated now, also questioning the traditional assignment of roles in a family set up. Many women have responded to this through their life journeys, proving that passion knows no gender. “That one leap where we realise our passion is the trigger for change, the moment we clearly see the drive in us and gives us the courage to face all obstacles,” says Ms. Mercy Granzia, Founder of Rural Women and Children Development Trust in Chennai, who comes from a family that is submitted to women’s responsibility within the family.

Mercy got married when she was 20 years of age and her life revolved around her two children until she decided to help single women and women from underprivileged households in Chennai. She believed that Self Help Groups were a good medium as it defined the decision making process. “I believe women understand their needs from a broader perspective and therefore helping them manage it will result in community’s growth. I learnt this from my personal experience and every time I did something for others, I began to introspect. I also trained women in tailoring and helped women set up their tailoring units. My network with women and micro finance institutions grew wider. I was known for prompt repayment of loans and companies came forward to entrust me with more funds. On the other hand, I had to encounter family and friends who believed that all this was men’s work,” shares Mercy.

After about six years of active social life through SHGs and NGO friends, Mercy decided to establish a Trust to organize community programmes. “Again, my gender became a subject of concern for everyone. Somehow, a few were of the opinion that I won’t be able to do this. Their apprehensions of a Trust, coupled with that of a woman running it sounded ridiculous and silly,” she laughs.

Mercy knew she had to move on and let her work speak for itself. Thus, she founded Rural Women and Children Development Trust in 2012 and soon Mercy became a household name in communities around Thiruvottiyur. Scholarships, school admissions and college admissions for underprivileged children, loans for needy women and a broad spectrum of services were offered through the Trust. Single women were also supported through different programmes. “Whenever I saw my efforts being useful for others, I felt good. In spite of all the discouragement, when I saw my beneficiaries’ lives improve, I knew I must go on,” says Mercy.

Collection and distribution of stationeries for tribal children in villages at Thiruthani, Perambakkam, and Arakkonam and facilitating their admissions in government schools became a regular intervention of the Trust and reinforced the idea of building human capital. Population can be a source of immense strength, if only there were timely channels to harness their potential. As Mercy saw this transpire in her communities, she began to plan activities that strengthened human capital in every possible way. Be it loans for rescued bonded laborers or employment opportunities for single women or scholarships for children from tribal communities, every intervention widened her network and women from her circles also began to engage in similar work in their villages. The organic growth of a network with 50 villages led to the establishment of a NGO network that met every



Scholarships, school admissions and college admissions for underprivileged children, loans for needy women and a broad spectrum of services were offered through the Trust

quarter to discuss ground realities, share resources and possible range of interventions.

Amidst all that, in 2018 Mercy also established a Rehabilitation Centre for alcoholics and drug abusers. “I saw families and women suffer from alcoholic and drug addiction. To help families, I knew that I must help them recover from addiction, hence started the centre with the resources I had in hand,” she says. The centre is not only known for its record of recovery but more for the inmates’ participation in essential services like cleaning, cooking, washing, gardening, etc. The dialogues with psychiatrists help the inmates reflect on their lives. Interestingly, Mercy ensures to consult inmates’ families at every step in their treatment. Over 200 inmates have recovered and are in regular touch with Mercy.

Mercy Akka, as she is fondly known, has become a part of so many families now. From discouragement and negative thoughts, her community now look upon her as an inspiration and strength. “The Rehabilitation Centre was successful because of the support of neighbours who always stood by me at all times and even to guard the centre during night time. Be it my ideas or their support, it has all evolved and together, we have all witnessed the power of human capital. While at CSIM, I understood these ideas when mentors shared their experiences. I have a bigger responsibility now, to harness this evolution for larger community interests,” promises Mercy.

Shanmuga Priya.T

THE SAVE SOIL MOVEMENT : A PERSONAL VIEW

Devastation, ruin, and lives destroyed. Stories of natural disasters, such as the recent Assam floods and landslides in Manipur are in the news with increasing frequency.

It's heart-breaking to see the pictures of entire homes and families left abandoned and the thought of all those emaciated toddlers.

Just looking at the scale of climate-related damage itself is overwhelming. Understandably, many are tempted to turn away, feeling this is too much for them to absorb. The monster of Climate Change is bound to gobble up the world, and we are too small to combat it.

This is the backdrop in which the global 'Save Soil Movement' was launched during March to June 2022 when Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev undertook a 100-day, lone-motorcycle ride across 27 countries to create awareness of the plight the world is in and offer relevant solutions. The whole-hearted support from international agencies, heads of countries and the general public were widely reported in the media.

The sceptics also had their air-time. Many questions were raised, whether calm or indignant. What had happened to carbon emissions, fossil fuels, plastic, other environmental concerns? Why soil now, and in fact why soil at all? With so much happening to cause human suffering, surely there are more important areas to focus on?

Along with scores of other readers, I wanted to explore the reasoning for myself. Going back to the basics, I soon realized the extent of my ignorance in thinking of soil as just as an inert substance that is part of the earth.

How soil degradation affects us?

In just a few moments of reading I found that many eminent soil scientists have spoken about soil dying and the extreme negative impact it has on world hunger, drought, flooding, carbon emissions and other factors.

One of the most respected among these is Professor Rattan Lal, a recipient of the World Food Prize in 2020 and the Padma Shri Award in 2021. Professor Lal, who grew up in Punjab, has spent over five decades on soil research across the world. He believes that the health of soil, plants, animals, people and the environment is one and indivisible.

Two years ago, Professor Lal said in an interview that one-third of the world's soil is degraded, leading to lower productivity and quality of food. The UNCCD (UN Convention to Combat Desertification) talks about 90% of Earth's soils being degraded by 2050, unless we act now. 2050 is less than 30 years away! Our children and grandchildren could be the ones to face debilitating hunger, floods, global warming.

In India, the Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare echoes the UNCCD. The situation is dire, with nearly two-thirds of India's soils having less than 0.5% organic carbon. To put this in perspective, healthy soil must have a bare minimum of 3% organic content, with the desired average between 6% to 8%. Various parts of the world report a similar trend. Farm soils in the UK have lost 40-60% of their organic carbon, 60-70% of soils in Europe are in an unhealthy condition and more than 50% of America's topsoil has already been lost.

This degradation has meant that our food has substantially lower nutrients, including vitamins and proteins. Crop yields are falling and could reduce by up to 50% globally by 2050. Floods, drought and other disasters caused by global warming will continue with ever-increasing frequency and intensity.



The cause of soil degradation

All is not lost if we act now. At this stage, the gap for soil to become healthy is such that it can be addressed over the next 25 years, whereas if we wait until then, it could add 200 years for us to fight for survival.

The 76-year-old Professor Lal puts it succinctly, "The global issues of the present era are climate change, food and nutritional security, water scarcity and renewability and world peace and stability. Solutions to these and other issues lie in soil, both directly and indirectly".

In India, increasing organic carbon by just 0.4 percent a year can substantially reduce the risks of floods, droughts and greenhouse gas emissions. Instituting agricultural practices that promote soil health will not only increase the income of marginal farmers but greatly improve our food security and nutrition levels.

However, present satellite images show that nearly all Indian states have increased their degraded soil over the past 15 years. Scientists link the increasing desertification to farming practices that have changed, such as the absence of crop rotation or cover crops and using chemical fertilisers. UN Environment reports that soil organic matter has fallen from 8-15% to less than 2% when natural grasslands or forests were converted to farms, because farm soils were not constantly replenished by organic matter.

Unnoticed, the impact of increasing population and higher demand for goods of all kinds from food to furniture to phones has caused farmers to adopt practices that will give quicker yields and financial return, essential for their survival. Evidently, the fault for this development cannot be attributed to anyone, but our future generations could be the ones paying an unbearably heavy price.

The Save Soil Movement

Backed by international organisations, eminent scientists, world leaders and influencers from every walk of life, the Save Soil Movement (www.savesoil.org) offers a way out to address the core issues facing mankind. As Professor Lal says, "As a soil scientist, I could not expect a greater blessing than this Movement."

The objective of Save Soil is straightforward. It aims for the organic content of soil to be increased to a minimum of 3% to 6% through government policies that would be supported by the electorate. One such



area could be incentivising farmers through better prices for their produce, if they achieve certain targets through sustainable farming practices.

A key part of the movement is creating awareness and inspiring others to learn, join the movement and support the policies. Children and adults everywhere express their passion for soil in different ways; creating art, writing songs, posting on social media. Over fifteen million children have written letters to the Prime Minister in India. Enthusiasts take on special challenges, with a high point being the display of a Save Soil banner on Mount Everest earlier this year.

Globally, nearly four billion people demonstrate their concern for future generations and support policy redirections to safeguard, sustain and nurture soil.

The world has accepted the importance of soil and the imperative need to adopt the movement at the earliest. 74 nations have agreed to actively work on soil regeneration practices. What is needed now is speed in implementation.

Humus, the humble life-giving matter composed of dead leaves, twigs, microbes, insects and other animal waste material, is in only four to twelve inches of topsoil. This thin layer has the destiny of all life on earth within it.

Saving soil is imperative. For the sake of our future generations, we cannot afford any delay. The time for action is now.

Karuna Luthar

PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE: THE WAY FORWARD

Social justice can be truly attained when: a. People are aware of the structural inequalities that cause their problems; b. Individuals know their rights and; c. When each one actively participates in governance and influences policy. It is with this in mind that in 1984, a group of student social workers of the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, started Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) an organization that works with impoverished, oppressed and marginalized people, helping them be their own drivers of change.

Doel Jaikishen, the Communications Manager of YUVA explains their philosophy as, “Jinka Savaal, Unka Netritva”, roughly translating into “Those who suffer problems first-hand, are best positioned to determine solutions and approaches for change”. How does YUVA help people lead their own change? By expanding access to information, educating communities of their own rights and the policies governing them, organizing people to rally and represent their needs to decision makers, and by empowering them to be vocal and ready to pitch in with ideas for change.

YUVA's programs today are broadly classified into the following thematic areas- Poverty (including programs on Habitat, Livelihood, Child Rights and Youth Rights); Environment and Climate Justice; Urban Governance and Planning. While the organization is headquartered in Navi Mumbai, their programs extend to different regions in the country.

One of the highlights of YUVA's work is in facilitating a people's movement in Nagpur to access tenure security and basic rights for marginalized populations. YUVA, in collaboration with the people's organization that they helped facilitate—Shekhar Vikas Manch—have been actively advocating for people's access to tenure security. Their constant advocacy efforts for nearly 20 years led to the state government announcing land tenure for all slums on government land in Nagpur and other select regions of Maharashtra in 2017, and extending this to slums on private and mixed use land in 2019—a big win! In recognition of their incredible transformative work, this initiative was also featured in the 2019 edition of “Atlas of Utopias”, an initiative by Transformative Cities. The Atlas is a collection of 33 stories from 24 countries that showcases community-led initiatives that have helped gain access to water, food, energy and housing.

YUVA also works with informal workers (such as daily-wage workers, construction workers, street vendors and domestic workers) to help them access their Right to Work, Wages and Welfare. YUVA's Labour Helpline, for instance, supports access to wages, welfare and just working conditions for construction and daily wage workers. The Helpline has helped recover over INR 60 lakh wages since 2015–20.

In November 2020, YUVA and Bal Adhikar Sangharsh Sanghathana, a children's collective facilitated by them, launched the “My Ward, My CPC” campaign. In a bid to create child-friendly cities, the campaign demands the formation of functional Child Protection Committees (CPCs) in every ward of Mumbai. This is mandated by a 2014 Government Resolution (GR) and till date has yet to be implemented to its full capacity. Children used the platform to share the challenges they faced, especially during the lockdowns, via posters and campaigns. When the campaign team approached the District Collector of Mumbai Suburban with their demands, he accepted them, approved the toolkit prepared by YUVA in collaboration with the Department of Women and Child Development and vowed to form and activate all the CPCs by the end of the year.

YUVA's mission to shape the aspirations of youth took the form of Anubhav Shiksha Kendra (ASK), an experiential learning program for youth, started in 1993. Consisting of training workshops, a youth exchange program, motivation and social awareness sessions and more, this program runs across districts in both urban and rural regions in Maharashtra. ASK helps boost confidence and a heightened sense of social awareness among youth who typically face caste, gender and class-based inequalities. Between 2017 and 2020, over 147,000 youngsters from over 28 districts have engaged in the program. “ASK has taught me how to understand and engage with society. I now conduct different kinds of programs on the core values of ASK and people look up to me as a social reformer” says Prakshik Meshram, an ASK member from Yavatmal (quoted with permission).

Each year, YUVA organizes ComplexCity, an annual festival celebrating urban diversity. Through youth conventions, city walks, interactive exhibitions, photography contests, and a showcasing of lived experiences of the diverse communities in and around Mumbai, this festival brings together unlikely groups of people, helping each one appreciate the contributions of the other into making Mumbai the city that it is.

In March 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic YUVA conducted a rapid needs assessment of 34 communities across 4 cities in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). The findings of this assessment informed their relief work. They launched the ‘Together We Can: Spread Love, Not Corona’ campaign and raised INR 6,00,00,000 towards ensuring access to food and basic needs for the most impoverished people in these cities. Aside from providing hundreds of thousands of cooked meals, dry rations and essential item kits, YUVA, as a part of the Jeevan



Rath network, also ensured that over 1,000 migrant workers had a safe passage back home in the MMR, Nagpur and Nashik.

While documenting their efforts, YUVA's team also recorded the lived experiences of the migrant workers at this time of crisis. The testimonies brought out deepening existing social inequalities, uncertainties and increasing vulnerabilities of different groups of people, such as women and minority genders, construction and other daily wage workers, and so on. YUVA was also able to write about possible solutions to these issues, including why access to food remains a struggle for Mumbai's poor, and why the universalization of the Public Distribution System is necessary.

Further, across the MMR, YUVA has since helped impoverished and marginalized persons access legal entitlements (such as Ration Cards, Aadhaar Cards) and social security. At the advocacy level, YUVA developed a charter of demands and several policy briefs on the issues facing the urban poor to take it ahead with decision makers, and continues to use ground-up evidence to drive better policy making, while supporting the capacity building of marginalized groups.

What are some of the challenges that the organization faces today? Roshni Nuggehalli, YUVA's Executive Director says, "Increasing levels of regulatory compliance cause a pressure on our already strained systems." She also says that the organization would like to invest more in the capacity building and development of their employees. This essential expense is often overlooked in the non-profit sector, although it's much needed to help teams constantly develop their capacities to take on new challenges.

What is the way forward, for YUVA? Roshni says, “In these challenging times, it remains as important as ever that we continue to ensure that the most marginalized groups are able to access and assert their rights, that we as a catalyst help them along the way with information, capacity building and as partners in representing their interests in policy-making. We also believe that a 360-degree approach to looking at issues is the only way to develop longstanding solutions to emerging social issues.”

Archanaa Ramesh

CO-EXIST, CO-CREATE, SELF-SUSTAIN



co-create in harmony. As part of its expansion plan, the organization hopes to reach more rural and remote locations within India through various community projects, collaborate with more government schools, and to have as many partnerships and collaborations with different kinds of institutions and organizations. It also wants to open more educational centres in slum areas over the next two to four years.

"We have a clear vision for ourselves but haven't defined any numbers that we want to achieve," says Raashi Anand, "Our thoughts and beliefs involve working for the welfare of society, and these beliefs are clear and genuine. So, it doesn't matter whether we impact a million or 10 million lives because we will be happy with both scenarios."

For Lakshyam, the goal is clear: believe in the quality of impact as opposed to the quantity. With every passing day, the organization's gigantic steps towards empowerment and upliftment goes a long way in resuscitating the lives of women and children, and improving its overall quality. Through various interventions, the organization has successfully carved out a model of the way to go about ensuring self-sustaining lives through the right livelihoods and skill-development.



For nearly a decade, Lakshyam has been at the forefront of empowering and uplifting women and children from poverty. To date, the organization has impacted over a million lives, through direct and indirect means.

"We noticed that there are millions of children in India who live below the poverty line, and were not able to afford education due to poverty," says Ms. Raashi Anand, Founder, Lakshyam, "These children are also unable to afford basic human needs like water, food and shelter, and are thereby forced to beg on the streets and engage in physical labour."

Raashi Anand points out that lack of basic facilities and abject poverty has forced children to a life of crime, which can be prevented through education. "So, we decided to help such children and designed our Butterfly programme," she says, "Every child should live a good life and experience the joys of childhood. Our job is to help accomplish the long-term vision of ensuring a safe space where all living beings co-exist in

harmony, and we know that children can be the catalyst in making that happen."

But it isn't just children that Lakshyam turned its focus on. The plan to empower less-privileged women, although slightly delayed, is an important part of the work it does. "Women play a significant role in decision-making surrounding children that whether they will go to school or beg on the streets," she says.

There are multiple challenges that Lakshyam faces when it comes to working with uplifting women, including a lack of skill and confidence. The solution: creating an impact by changing lives, providing skills, setting goals and conducting training sessions to create self-sustaining lives.

When it came to children, Lakshyam's Toy Library programme has helped in advancing outreach by leaps and bounds. "We collect toys and books, and identify remote locations to set up toy libraries," explains Raashi Anand, "We are present in 17 locations across India, including remote areas." The organization's

Butterfly programme is run in its own education centres. "We choose a slum area in the city and manage the programme there," she says, "Today, we have four centres in New Delhi and plan on expanding to other cities as well."

Lakshyam's Rooh programme has helped the organization with its grassroots outreach. "Through the initiative, we have been able to provide skilled training to less privileged women living in slums and rural areas," says Raashi Anand, "Over 4,000 women have been empowered and are now able to earn a decent living for themselves, while supporting their families."

Rooh has an interesting six-step model. It reads:

- Identify women in the community who are in need of help
- Counsel women on the importance of fiscal independence
- Provide training with respect to basic fiscal awareness

- Provide comprehensive skill training to create saleable products
- Build on basic financial skills teach methods to save and invest
- Teach about marketing channels used to generate money

Through these methods, the focus of Rooh remains purely on making women self-reliant and independent. "Once we leave the community, we firmly believe that beneficiaries of the programme should sustain themselves," says Raashi Anand. There is a great deal of discourse surrounding self-worth and importance in society. Lakshyam organizes a bevy of counselling and financial literacy sessions as part of the programme. "Providing just vocational training will not suffice," she explains, "Until and unless women are equipped with other basic information and knowledge about society and its way of functioning, little progress can be made."

Today, Lakshyam has operations overseas as well.

However, Raashi Anand admits that the foray was purely incidental. "It was never part of our plan to go international; it happened because of the love and support from our volunteers," she says, "Two of our volunteers who spent some time with us loved our handmade products made by our women, and decided to sell these products in their countries, and organize small fund-raising programmes, there."

Lakshyam's goal is to establish a social enterprise named Holy Cow Lakshyam, in order to make the organization more sustainable and thereby not depend solely on donations, in order to carry out good work. "Through the venture, we are selling products made from cow dung, and made by rural women," says Raashi Anand, "The money that is generated is then utilized for cow welfare programs and women empowerment projects."

The overarching goal is to create a sustainable and replicable model that supports Lakshyam's vision of creating a place for all living beings to co-exist and



GOAL! JAKARTA STREET KIDS SHOOT FOR BIG DREAMS

How KDM uses sport to empower street children

Siti Nur Yasyfa (Nur) is a 16-year-old girl who has spent much of her growing years on the streets of Jakarta, Indonesia.

Coming from a low-income family, she spent most of her time with the children in her neighbourhood and when they started begging on the streets, Nur did the same without the knowledge of her parents. Something she's not proud of now.

"It wasn't pleasant and I was embarrassed to be begging," says Nur.

Nur's parents did not want her to be on the streets. So when they saw that she was spending more time wandering the streets and getting into brawls, her parents decided to send her to Kampus Diakoneia Modern Foundation (KDM).

KDM, a non-profit organisation established 50 years ago, started with assisting and housing people with disabilities, those living with mental health concerns, as well as the elderly. But decided to turn their focus to children in 2000 when they saw an alarming growth rate of street kids in Indonesia. In 2018, the Indonesian Social Affairs Ministry reported that there were close to 17,000 children living on the streets across the country.

Poverty is notably the main reason why children wind up on the streets. Based on a 2020 UNICEF study, over 12 percent of 80 million Indonesian children live below the national poverty line. So unsurprisingly, some kids end up begging on the streets for survival.

"One person on the street could approximately earn 80,000 to 160,000 (Indonesian) rupiahs (US\$6-US\$12) in a day which could be equal to or more than the minimum wage," shares Sotar Sinaga, the Executive Director of KDM.

He also explains that for some, being a street child has been in their family for generations; something that their parents and grandparents would have done their whole lives, making this break in pattern more difficult.

So KDM started reaching out to children on the streets and identifying those in need of help. Providing marginalised children with a safe place to live, basic necessities like food and clothing, and an alternative education program that allows them to develop their knowledge based on their interests. In the last 5 years, KDM has helped 1,261 street children, aged two to nineteen years.

A NEW BEGINNING

However, adjusting to the more structured environment that KDM provides can be difficult for a street child.

Nur admits to running away from the KDM home several times for the freedom of the streets. But a family tragedy involving her brother stopped her in her tracks.



Like Nur, her brother had been sent to KDM but ran away to be with his friends on the streets. Whilst begging at the nearby train track, he fell as a train was approaching and didn't manage to escape in time.

"We used to be really close. Whenever my friends bothered me, my brother would defend me," recalls Nur, "but he's not around anymore."

Shaken by the tragedy, her father insisted on her staying in KDM to keep her safe.

Nur finally decided to give KDM a chance and quickly learnt that KDM could provide her with opportunities and new life skills.

"I have learned to do things that I couldn't do before," she says, "such as cooking and studying independently."

KDM not only helps and teaches children, they also encourage them to think about what they can do for others.

"As part of our education program, we also ask them to recognise what others need," says Sotar, "our motto is 'take what you receive now so you can give it back later.'"

KDM explores different ways to provide opportunities and instil values in the children under their care. One such way is through sport. Futsal is a popular sport among the children

in Indonesia. Seeing this as an opportunity to encourage the children to believe in themselves, KDM began collaborating with local communities to send a team to the 2022 Street Child World Cup in Doha, Qatar.

The Street Child World Cup is an event that brings together street children from across the world to take part in a football tournament that aims to raise awareness of homelessness among youths, as well as to remove stigma about vulnerable children who live on the streets.

In 2014, KDM sent a mixed boy-girl team to represent Indonesia and placed 8th in the tournament. This year, they will be sending a girls team, in which Nur is on track for being selected.

"In 2013, we learned about how sports can be used for intervention," says Sotar, "we reached out to 150 girls in

Indonesia this year through this football program."

Giving the children, especially girls, this opportunity through football not only empowers them, it also gives them the chance to develop their interests and have their own aspirations for the future.

Nur now has big life goals. Having learned about children's rights and the right for education at KDM, she aspires to meet other children from the streets and share her experiences with them.

"I'd like to be a teacher," she says, "someone the children can look up to."

"I also want a better life so that I can help my father who has a lot of responsibilities," she says, "and I have written reminders for myself to not go back to the life I came from."

ABOUT KDM

Kampus Diakoneia Modern Foundation (KDM) is an Indonesian non-profit organisation dedicated to child protection and fulfilment of children's rights by providing them with housing, food and informal education. They create an environment that fosters growth and development while ensuring that every child feels safe and comfortable. They do this to allow each child to bring out their best potential.

A story by Our Better World (the digital storytelling initiative of the Singapore International Foundation

www.ourbetterworld.org



ENSURING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



“What grade are you in?” has been a conversation starter for many kids. We often see kids asking this innocent question from each other. While growing up, I casually assumed that every kid attended a school. With time, when I met people from different sections of the society, I realised education is a privilege that not many can afford. For Mumbai based Mangal Pandey, he witnessed this contrast closely. Being born in a lower-middle class family as a son came with a privilege. He got a chance to study in a private school while his sisters attended a government school.

“My sisters struggled to complete their education while I was given the full freedom to pursue what I wanted to study. When I connected the dots, I realised that it was unfair to my sisters and it is unfair for the many lower-income group children,” Pandey recalls.

Pandey’s story is not an exception. As I look around, I find many such families sharing similar stories. For them educating children is a privilege that can only be given to the child who has more chances of giving back to the family. But can we blame them? When quality education can’t be afforded, what can one do?

“Children’s only chance to succeed is getting hampered due to the lack of quality education. The more I understood this; the more motivated I became to do something about it,” said Pandey. After completing his higher education, Pandey started his corporate job and spent a lot of time volunteering as part of the company’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). He taught in variety of government and low-cost private schools. And what he found out after several years of engaging with different children was something that could change the way early childhood education works.

The key findings

Pandey spent four months with the low-income community in Bengaluru, Karnataka to understand what and how young children were learning. That study, along with secondary research, threw the sad state of Early Childhood Education in this country.

He found out that Anganwadis focus only on health and nutrition with little time for play and learning. The Anganwadi workers were untrained and unskilled to teach anything to the child. India’s Government schools begin only from age six i.e. grade one and hence fail to capitalise on the brain development of children before

age six. Research tells that us that 90 percent of the brain development takes place before age six, but not much is done to help in that development.

“The practices and engagement children from low-income communities receive are far from conducive to their brain development. That is when we decided we wanted to build an organisation that focuses on ensuring that children are school ready when they enter grade one,” he further added.

The common thread across these children from low-income group was that their foundation was weak. The beautiful resources various NGOs created for them felt inadequate because the children did not have the basic literacy and understanding to use it to skill themselves.

“I realised that instead of focusing on the higher-order skills and knowledge we need to focus on the basics. We need to work at the root of the problem and ensure that our children should be able to ‘learn to read’ which is the only way to ensure that then our children will be able to ‘read to learn’,” Pandey shared.

Finding the right way of learning

Pandey started Key Education Foundation (KEF), an NGO that ensures that children acquire the foundational skills that are necessary before they enter grade one. They work with children aged three to five years and improve their skills in all five areas of development. i.e., Language, Cognitive, Social-emotional, physical, and Creative.

KEF majorly covers three problem areas of the education system:

1. What should children study in the age group of three to six years?

Unlike grade one and upwards, there is no standardised structured curriculum for pre-primary years at the centre and state levels. This often leads to random stories, rhymes, or non-age-appropriate content being taught to children.

“We have seen children as young as four years old being forced to rote memorise the table of four. We have seen heavy stress on rote memorisation of numbers and alphabets,” Pandey shared.

KEF helps children to learn through play by providing age appropriate, safe and affordable teaching and learning materials that cater to language, cognitive,

creative, physical, social and emotional development of each child.

2. What are the skill and mindsets required to be a good Early Educator?

Pre-Primary educators are the least paid and trained. Hence, they are often the least motivated in the entire cadre of education staff. “The most motivated and skilled teachers should be entrusted and motivated to teach our youngest children,” he said.

KEF provides comprehensive teacher training and one on one coaching support to ensure that early educators have the practical skills, mindset and knowledge to excel in the classroom. A host of classroom videos are made available to teachers to use as they plan for activities in the classroom. Teachers are also given lesson plans with age-appropriate activities to conduct in class every day.

3. What is the role of parents in the learning of their child?

Parents from low-income communities believe they cannot play a role in their child’s learning due to their academic and financial constraints. Research tells us that parents can and should take part in teaching their child. If empowered in the right way, they can influence their child’s learning powerfully and positively.

KEF tries to make this happen by leveraging technology and community work. KEF conducts parent workshops to build awareness among parents to help support their child’s development in the early years. Children also get weekly take-home worksheets that guide and encourage positive parent-child interaction at home.

The core level impact

KEF’s intervention has shown holistic development in not just children but also teachers and parents. Pandey claims their evaluation demonstrates that children who have gone through KEF’s program consistently outperform students who are not a part of the program. The learning level are also much higher than the average School Readiness Index of children in the country. They have shown both physical and mental improvement and are more responsive.

In addition, 30 percent of parents evaluated show a positive shift in their awareness of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and mindsets towards play-based learning. The parents also started showing interest in their kids’ education. Average attendance increased from 30 percent to 60 percent in Parent Engagement workshop sessions

The curriculum has also helped teachers in different ways. “One of our biggest wins was successfully launching an online teacher training platform with a certificate course for early educators and certifying over 200 teachers. Through this platform we were also able to create and deliver courses that were relevant to teachers in the COVID context,” Pandey mentioned.

Eighty two percent of teachers engaged with KEF have begun following developmentally appropriate practices in their classrooms regularly. “The curriculum is well structured and the lesson plans are helping teachers cover syllabus effectively and on-time,” shared Mahesh Kumar M, Principal and Owner, Mount Everest School.

“Change at scale is a slow task. For any organisation it is easy to get dissuaded by the pace but in the long run that is the only sustainable path to take,” Pandey concluded.

Shreya Pareek

LEADER & LEADERSHIP MATTERS

OWNERSHIP & RESPONSIBILITY: ACTION ALONE SPEAKS



We continue our journey of mapping Leadership attributes and move towards Responsibility. A leader may have high aspirations, but they remain as dreams if no action makes the dream or idea a reality. The dictionary meaning says it is to have a duty to work for or help someone who is in a position of authority over you. Interestingly, responsibility is also used to blame! When things go wrong, someone has to own up to the commitment. We can also understand the word ‘response’ and ‘ability’ – the ability to respond to the situation. Action is, therefore, very closely linked to this value word. While responsibility has a power and leadership connotation, it also has a negative connotation through the antonyms being freedom and exemption. This has made responsibility seemingly bondage and control rather than uplifting the self and path leading to learning and development.

To capture the essence of Ownership & Responsibility as a value, let’s meet Geetha Mohandas. She is the ‘all’ and ‘end-all’ of Punarnava Ayurveda Trust – heading the Trust and managing its programmes and activities. Punarnava Ayurveda Trust is a charitable organization registered in India, functioning in Coimbatore, focusing on improving villagers’ health, education, and welfare. Its vision is to create a local, sustainable community centered on Ayurveda and Natural farming principles.

The Trust is attached to Vaidyagrama, a healing village that promotes Ayurveda. The sustainable community is built around this village, which is the fulcrum of the community.

Geetha (60) is a retired Bank employee. She lives in Coimbatore, caring for her 90 plus years old mother. A lady bubbling with energy is a wonder how one can smile in any situation, never say ‘no’ to any new task, manage work and people in unison, and always ready to support. She is the ‘Go to person’ on all issues regarding Punarnava Trust, be it village issues or work-related administration jobs. The most commendable factor is that she works full-time as a volunteer and refuses to take any monetary benefits from the Trust. Geetha has two daughters, sons-in-law, and two grandchildren living with their family in the USA.

Geetha, what does the word Responsibility and Ownership mean to you?

Responsibility is to do what I have committed I will do. It is to live up to the trust that the person reposes in me. Ownership is to be ready to die for it and I give my entire being for its success. My faith in God makes me believe that I am born to do this task and therefore unquestioningly do it well.

But, Geetha, this is a very different definition and meaning. Many think of Responsibility as work and more burden. What do you have to say about this?

I am a volunteer at the Trust. I could have stayed home caring for my mother or lived with my children in the USA. When I met Dr. Ramkumar, the Managing Director of Vaidyagrama, he asked me if I would run the Trust? Will you be the Amma for the orphans in Balagrama? I didn’t see it as work or an extra burden. I saw someone giving meaning to my life, a noble purpose of using all my capacities and capabilities. His trust deeply touched me. If I take it up, I must be responsible and honest.

I had never worked in an NGO earlier. I was a novice. But, I am hardworking and dedicated to whatever work I am given. When we take responsibility voluntarily, we cannot assume it as a burden. Taking up ownership is to own our life and its purpose.

Geetha, tell us about your life journey and how you got into the banking sector?

Geetha opened the pages of her life, relishing each memory with deep engagement and enthusiasm. “I am the third child of my parents. My passion was to teach. But, by the time I was completing my Bachelor Degree in Science (Chemistry), my father was retiring. He wanted me to find a job and get married soon. Everything happened within a short period and I had less choice. In the second year of my graduation, I thought of studying MSc and seeking employment in the same college where I studied. I felt that they will absorb me as a lecturer if I secured a first class and I need not have to look for a job anywhere else. This was my secret plan.

But, my elder sister applied on my behalf for the Banking service recruitment board. This was an all-India test. I had my second-year practical exams in college on the day of my banking exam. I told my father that I would not attend the Bank exam. But he insisted and told me to seek my Principal’s permission. I was confident that that the principal wouldn’t permit, so I courageously went and asked for a change in the date for my practical exam. Contrary to my expectation, the principal told me that it was a good opportunity and willingly changed the date for the practical exam. I didn’t buy any books or prepare for the Bank exam and attempted only 30 marks out of 100.

Interestingly, everyone, I knew failed, but I passed. Because of negative marking, though I had answered only 30%, everything I had written was correct, so I passed. This is called fate. Therefore, at the end of the 3rd year, my job at the bank was ready. Meanwhile, my father’s friend fixed my marriage with his son. Geetha laughs heartily and adds, “a known person is better than an unknown devil. So I agreed. I got married on the day I got my graduation results. The following week joined the bank.

Geetha, in Bank, you have had an excellent track record. How did you see responsibility and ownership in that Job?

For me, Responsibility is holistic. It included both family and Bank. In the banking sector, having a promotion means transfer. Coming from the grounding that a lady has to take care of her family, I remained as a clerk for 23 years and took care of my two children.

The involvement in work was so much for me that I could give my life for the bank as it gave me whatever I needed. I got money, a house and the bank also supported me in every possible way. It was like somebody was holding my hands. Like a loving husband holding your hand, and you are dedicated to family life; similarly, the bank was holding me to have a safe and sound life.

When my husband suffered from cancer, I saw other families suffering financially. He had prostate cancer and passed away when he was only 40 years of age. My bank covered all costs and I didn't have to withdraw even my fixed deposit. My spouse could claim 75% of the medical expenses. I was prudent in saving for my children's expenses—without any extravagant spending.

I am not looking at it as work. I'm looking at the larger picture of that organization and my small role, like a squirrel doing a little bit to grow the organisation/organization. I was always a hands-on mother to my kids, and even more after my husband passed away. When my elder daughter graduated and the second daughter was studying in class 12, she said she wanted to shift to Mumbai.

I needed more money to pay for rent in Mumbai. My elder daughter said that she learnt about life and values by observing me since she was 18 years old and wanted the whole family to relocate to Mumbai.

That's when I had to move on from being a clerk. I took the promotion exam. When applying for a promotion, I had to give three choices of places. I wrote Mumbai for all the three options. The Bank officials called and told me that it is rude to state the same place, and I told them that it meant that I would accept the promotion only if I am posted in Mumbai. Finally, they gave me a Mumbai posting. For officers, we get a free house. Within a week, I got a place in Mumbai. My Bank again supported me.

As a volunteer in Punarnava Trust, yet responsible and accountable, how do you manage you daily, Geetha?

Vaidyagrama is my home now. They have understood my need to care for my mother and support me. This is not a mere task but my life. I think of Balagrama and the villagers all the time. I am constantly worrying about how to raise funds to meet the Trust expenses. I don't leave any stone unturned. I look for opportunities and grab them. I have told my daughters that I can support them to a limited extent as long as I don't have to travel to the USA. I believe God has designed my life, and I should always do my best."

Geetha, what are the qualities that a person should possess in order to handle responsibility with accountability?

I have been thinking of expanding my team in Punarnava Trust. The person who we choose should be passionate and hard working. They cannot be talking about money constantly as work cannot function by focusing on monetary returns alone. Money is part of life, no doubt, but it cannot be the first priority for any



person. Then comes time, effort, and engagement. If there is a scope for a person to grow in the organisation, they will remain interested. Space for learning should be provided.

I came from a structured and boundary-driven corporate culture and if I am told what to do, I will complete it in no time. In Vaidyagrama, there is no boundary. That isn't easy and for that to happen, people should be hardworking, passionate, and clear about what they want to contribute. They must be willing to learn from others and set aside their ego.

Geetha, how do you handle faults and failures while being responsible and accountable?

I apologize when I realize that I done something wrong. I sometimes find it hard when I receive negative feedback and try not to justify. In the beginning, I was angry that people didn't realize I was a new person and a novice in handling Trust activities. But I always go back home and reflect on their feedback, come back the next day and make the necessary changes. It is not easy to accept failures and feedback, but it is necessary to learn if we have to be responsible.

Dr. Kalpana Sampath



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Contact Persons:

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS). It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship.

CSIM offers training and consultancy to social enterprises – for-profits and non-profits to facilitate them to apply successful business practices and yet retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives. www.csim.in

Ms. Marie Banu. J
Director, Chennai
@ 9884700029

Dr. Madhuri. R
Head, Coimbatore,
@ 91-9840222559

Dr. Agyeya Tripathi
Head - North & NE India
@ 91-8058662444

Mr. Sandeep Mehto,
Head – Hosangabad,
@ 91-96696 77054



CSIM also facilitates **Social Accounting and Audit** for social enterprises, CSR projects, and NGOs through Social Audit Network, India. (SAN, India is an overseas chapter of Social Audit Network, UK covering India and Middle East.)

For further information, please contact:
Ms. Latha Suresh
Director, SAN, India
@ 92822 05123.
www.san-india.org

"CSR helps create a collective conscience and a brand for the organization."

Shalini Sarin shares with Marie Banu the need for creating eco-partnership

Dr Shalini Sarin is the former global Senior Vice President HR at Philips Lighting, now Signify. Her experience ranges from, global Chief People Officer to leading Sustainable Social business and has worked across India, Europe and the US in regional and global roles. Value creation through intangibles like purpose and leadership is her mantra. She is the co-founder of a EV charging CPO- Elektromobilitat and sits on a few boards where she serves as an Independent Director.

Shalini serves as an Independent Director with Linde India, Meritor Automotive Axles and Kirloskar Oil Engines in India and on the Global Supervisory board of Nagarro SE, Germany and serves on several committees including audit committee, Risk committees, Nomination and Remuneration Committee, and chairs CSR the committee. She also serves on the advisory committee of a few not for profits namely Alliance for Energy Efficient Economy (AEEE), Worldwide Sherors (D&I) etc. And serves on the Academic Council of MDI, Gurgaon and Trustee & Chair at Center for Clean Energy at Plaksha University.

She started her career as a professor of Organization behaviour and has over three decades of Corporate experience. In her role as the HR head, her specialization has been change management, leadership, succession and a significant experience in transformations during mergers, acquisitions, restructuring, divestiture and IPOs. She advises companies on restructuring, culture and other strategic HR areas.

In her experience as head of CSR & the Foundation, she has been able to create a global strategy aligned with the business, establish a global foundation, with an Independent board and governance. Mobilize over 90 projects across the globe spanning from LATAM to Indonesia including India & Africa, in the area of energy access and entrepreneurship through the Foundation funds and leveraged funds from various Governments and multilaterals funds in collaboration to build the complete eco system. She now chairs several committees for CSR and Sustainability to bring this leaning.

In the base of the pyramid, social impact business, she has been able to build the business through local experimentation and insights from the grassroots, working with social enterprise, MFIs, OEMs etc. She is an Executive Director with Elektromobilitat, which is an EV Charge point operator (CPO), which has global and local hardware & software partners for intelligent charging and managed services.

Shalini holds a Doctorate in Organization Behaviour, and a Masters in Sociology and Human Resource Management. She has an Advanced Human Resource from Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, an Executive Coach from Motorola University-Chicago and a Psychometrician from British Psychology Society. She is also certified from INSEAD on International Director's program and on Sustainable Business Strategy from Harvard Business School. She has authored many articles and presented at various Indian and International Conferences.

In an exclusive interview, Shalini Sarin shares with Marie Banu the need for creating eco-partnership.



Your thoughts on CSR?

CSR is not a cost, it is not a 'nice to do' or mere adherence to the 2% mandatory requirement stipulated by the government. CSR is a 'social responsibility' defined for responsible businesses and goes way beyond the 2% budget or few initiatives.

It is very important that organizations align their CSR strategy not far removed from their business. The Leadership team should map out the entire business value chain to study the touch points with environment and community and give back twice as much they take from the community. An organization cannot be working in Lighting and undertake CSR activities in building old age homes or tree plantation drives. Since India is a developing nation, there will always be a lot of areas that we can contribute in and all these areas could be tempting to work towards as they heal the soul. The pertinent question to ask is : Do we have the capability and skills to deliver it or are we just doing it to tick the box of having spent the CSR fund? For example, an electric product manufacturing company can make use of a lot of electricians in manufacturing energy efficient products. Therefore, what this company can do is to skill the community near its plant—the electricians—on skills that make them suitable to be hired in its factory and/or for field work. As the company utilises their skills, it is well prepared to build their skillset in domains suitable to its needs.

Similarly, a company in the business of paper manufacturing consumes a lot of water for production, then it is incumbent for it to ensure that it gives back twice as much water as it takes and not limit itself to just water harvesting or conservation.

Therefore, in whichever operation you are engaged, you should contribute twice as much as you consume. That is social responsibility! ESG is extremely important and that should encompass social responsibility; not just philanthropy that we keep

doling out. It is more of participation in the value chain. **About the CSR spend and accountability?**

I am really glad that the 2% bill has atleast forced companies to think about community and contribute. Before the bill, only the responsible companies were contributing and they don't need the bill to tell them what to do.

However, I am disappointed because:

I see no proper well defined CSR strategy where the companies are able to justify why they have chosen a particular initiative. Is it aligned with their value chain or their expertise?

I see poor correlation with what people are doing and what they are reporting. It is important to invest in technology for accurate data reporting.

CSR helps create a collective conscience and a brand for the organization. It is not just the responsibility of the CSR team or the leaders, but it enables engaging the entire organization.

CSR is not just a photo opportunity to post on LinkedIn.

Are there adequate monitoring and evaluation of CSR programmes being done?

The new guidelines under the CSR bill mandate M&E. However, companies and NGOs will always have a dilemma on how much to spend on M&E, where we would much rather use the budget to impact more people.

Are CSR projects consciously aligning with the Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDG)?

Very few organizations do a good job of aligning their CSR activities with the company strategy and even fewer who align it with SDG. However, I am a great advocate of aligning CSR activities with the SDGs which are very comprehensive, unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Do you think that NGOs are capacitated enough to meet the demand of the corporates?

We still need many more professional NGOs and build more capacity in the current ones to deliver the SDGs. It is unfortunate to see that while a lot of effort is being invested to build capacity, it lacks in urgency it demands. We need to double up the capacity building programmes to bring more structuring and accountability and be robust in terms of process and outcomes. With reporting, third party assessment and validation of NGOs, I am hopeful that the NGOs would meet the corporate expectations.

We do need more cross pollination of people from the management or from the corporate sector to be able to move over to the development sector and vice versa. I urge CSR companies to nominate their staff at least for a year of secondment to these NGOs so that we build their capacities. In the process, companies will build good leaders who would have learnt and gained richly from the development sector.

About NGOs and creating eco-system partnership?

Programmatic intervention is the need of the hour. One NGO does not have the expertise to deliver a complete end to end program therefore, partnerships are the only way to get scale.

For example, Swachh Bharat Mission required people to build civil infrastructure, sewage disposal, water supply, electricity, security, daily cleaning & maintenance. And over and above all of this education, awareness and behavioural change management. We have seen that despite all infrastructure, where mindset change had no allocation of budget, people are using the toilets to keep cattle or goats. Therefore the Lighting organization cannot claim good work just by installing the lights, but by ensuring that the toilets are being used and maintained.