

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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FROM “DIRTY” TO DIGNIFIED: THESE FLOWERS TRANSFORM LIVES

HelpUsGreen set out to clean India’s rivers of temple flowers. Now it’s changing lives too.

Dear Friend,

“Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment.”

— Jim Rohn

Discipline is an essential habit that everyone should possess as a civilised citizen. It is the backbone of one’s character. It is a habit that he/she acquires since childhood – from his family and environment, or by way of training.

There is value of discipline in all walks of life. Whether at school or at home, in the office or in the factory, in the playground or in the battlefield—discipline is a necessity. It gives us an opportunity to learn, experience, and grow.

Discipline builds character, develops strength and unity and fosters co-operation. It is, therefore, necessary, that children should be taught discipline from their very childhood. It should never be overlooked, as it is the secret of success in life.

Success and realization of dreams go hand in hand with discipline. A disciplined person does not have to be told to do good things; he does them on his own. Being disciplined means knowing optimal time-management, self-control, knack of making best choices, being focused, zero procrastination, always making more attempts in the field you want to advance, upright moral character, and observing morals and ethics.

It has been wisely said “For every disciplined action there is a multiple reward”. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Albert Einstein and many such personalities were successful in their lives because they led a disciplined life.

Discipline alone can lead our society forward and make our social, professional and family life, a successful one. It is the pre-requisite for growth and development.

—Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

Design: Blink Foundation

A plastic stool. This was what one woman said she liked best about working at HelpUsGreen, the social enterprise Ankit Agarwal co-founded.

Not the fact that she earns more. Or that a bank account was opened for her — the first time she’s ever had one — or that she receives insurance and retirement benefits.

But a plastic stool, “which is not even worth 200 rupees (about US\$2.70)”, says Ankit, as he recalled the exchange.

“I asked her why, and she said, ‘I’m 53 years old, no one has ever offered me a seat before.’”

For a Dalit in India, everyday dignities — like being offered a stool to sit on — aren’t taken for granted.

The caste system, a social order in India powerful even to this day, divides people into different groups based on their professions.

Dalits are deemed “untouchable” by this system, because of their occupations: for instance, cleaners of human waste (manual scavengers) and dead animals, leather workers, street sweepers and cobblers. As such, they face social discrimination, even though “untouchability” and caste discrimination are illegal.

It is this oppression, which consigns millions to injustice and poverty, that Ankit tries to tackle through HelpUsGreen.

But, the social enterprise, based in Ankit’s hometown of Kanpur, didn’t start out with the purpose of empowering Dalit women.

It had another problem in mind: the endless stream of flowers entering India’s rivers each day, offered by devotees at temples.

“There are over 200 temples in Kanpur, and the total waste was more than four tonnes a day,” says Karan Rastogi, co-founder of HelpUsGreen, and Ankit’s childhood friend.

Wanting to prevent the pesticide and chemical-ridden flowers from adding to the water pollution, they began tinkering in their kitchens, looking for ways to turn unwanted flowers into useful products.

Beginning with humble compost, the duo soon moved on to create incense sticks and cones — with harmful chemicals like arsenic and lead removed, using a formula they cooked up.

The brand name they dreamed up for these products? Phool, which is Hindi for ‘flower’.

Along the way, it became clear that the social enterprise could do more — empower marginalised women by hiring them.

“It’s very easy for us to ask, ‘Why do these people do these jobs? Why do they pick up people’s excreta?’”



notes Ankit. “But once a person knows that the person was cleaning sewage or drain pipes, rarely does anyone want to employ them.”

So he sought not only to hire women — to sort the collected flowers and craft the incense by hand — but also to create a working environment that treated them as equals.

The women earn 7,860 rupees a month (about US\$112), which is slightly above the minimum wage for skilled workers in India.

And aside from benefits like health insurance, “the first thing that we did was to provide clean drinking water, second was a toilet.”

“Two things that make sure everyone in our company is equal. Once you start having the same water, you’re all equal,” says Ankit.

Ranjana, one of the women who works for Ankit, knows what it means to be treated less than equal.

She once toiled as a hospital worker, who cleaned up after patients. “It was not dirty work, but everyone calls it dirty work, dirty work, dirty work. [But] hunger is a big thing. You have to work no matter how dirty your work is.”

Some employers, she says, think “servants should remain servants, for their whole life. I can do any work, but not as a slave,” says Ranjana.

After she found a job at HelpUsGreen through her niece, her life changed.

With pride, Ranjana shares that her bank account “always has 2,000, 4,000 rupees (about US\$30 to 60), it’s never empty.”

She and her husband no longer pay their children’s school fees late. And not only did she buy an LCD television, she was the first of HelpUsGreen’s Dalit employees to own a washing machine.

More significantly, “those of other castes, the Pandits, the Yadavs, today they come to my home, sit, have tea.

“They never used to speak to my children. But in five months here, it has all changed,” says Ranjana, her eyes sparkling. “What will happen in years? Only God knows.”

By 2020, Ankit and Karan want to employ 3,700 women (compared to 79 now), while recycling at least 50 tonnes of waste flowers every day.

Aside from Phool incense and compost, HelpUsGreen is launching a line of eco-friendly packaging material made from waste flowers, which they call Florafoam — akin to Styrofoam, but biodegradable.

While the social enterprise continues to make innovative, sustainable products, “the heart of Phool is the women who make these products,” says Ankit.

“When [the women] start working with us, there’s a perspective change that happens. They feel more confident about themselves.

“So it is not only about financial livelihoods, but also about dignity and respect.”

ABOUT HELPUSGREEN

HelpUsGreen is a social enterprise that collects about eight tonnes of waste flowers from temples daily, to recycle them into eco-friendly products - which are handcrafted by women from Dalit and other marginalised communities, providing them with fresh livelihoods. It plans to employ 3,700 women by 2020 and recycle 50 tonnes of flowers daily.

—A story by Our Better World —
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of the Singapore International
Foundation
(www.ourbetterworld.org)

Cots with a purpose

One of the social issues that is highly judged and tabooed, without basic knowledge is substance abuse. Whether alcohol or drugs, observers fail to comprehend that addiction and de addiction are not immediate results of any process. Limited knowledge exacerbates the stigma faced by affected people, discouraging all their efforts to give up dependence on the substance. Mr S Sakthivel, Founder of S N Foundation in Chennai, could not agree more.

A native of Naidumangalam village in Thiruvannamalai district, Sakthivel migrated to Chennai along with his family, at the age of three. Financial instability in the family did not allow him to study beyond class ten. He had to discontinue education even before he could make sense of his dreams. "I could barely imagine a future for myself. I did not even have an idea about what I wanted to become in life. I missed school, but could cope with this change in life," says Sakthivel. His father worked in a private company at Chennai Port and looked for opportunities to place Sakthivel in a regular job.

As the new clerk at the Clearing and Forwarding Division, he got to learn a lot about import and export mechanisms. He soon became an executive and then a manager. A successful stint at the company encouraged him to dream of his own transport business. With all ground work in place, he established his business in 2000. "I tried very hard to not give up. However, in 2007, it was a dead end for my company, suffering a loss of more than 2.5 crores. I had to give up!" admits Sakthivel. It was during this period of stress that Sakthivel took to alcohol. "All hell had broken loose. I was clueless about where to start again. This seemed like the end of life to me. I began to question all my decisions and the very idea of leaving a regular job. I did not want to face anybody, especially those who would remind me of my failure. I was completely broken inside," he recalls.

Sakthivel acknowledged his alcohol addiction and pledged to overcome this habit. His self-awareness led him to join a recovery programme voluntarily, at the Stanley Hospital. "Counselling was of immense help and I regularly attended the Alcohol Anonymous meetings. Here, I realised that I was not alone. We all realised that alcoholism was like any other disease which was characterised by certain symptoms and could be treated. Although the probability of relapse did bother me, the determination of my peers strengthened my resolve to get over this addiction. We all learnt about people who recovered completely and returned to regular work/businesses and also about others who were still trying. I chose my path," he says.

Deeply touched by the lives of patients



who could not access help, Sakthivel began to think seriously about their rehabilitation. "It was at this point in time that society's stigma and their judgemental attitude disturbed me the most. My family stood by me, but this is not the case for everyone. Being an 'Alcoholic' cannot become someone's identity. I therefore established the S.N.Foundation in 2013 to support recovering alcoholics," he says.

S.N. Foundation runs a de addiction-

rehabilitation centre for recovering alcoholics and also a home for the aged, together reaching out to around 100 beneficiaries every year. "We saw families breaking and driven to suicidal thoughts and wanted to extend support to such families. As a collective vision, it helped check the tendency towards relapse," says Mr.Thyagarajan, who is a caretaker in the centre.

To equip himself with the requisite knowledge, Sakthivel completed a

diploma in Rehabilitation. Very soon he got to know about CSIM and its work from a friend. "I took up the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme seriously. We started the Foundation without any theoretical knowledge about its administration activities. The CSIM course not only helped me chart the progress of my Trust, but also encouraged me to think beyond conventional rehabilitation. The motivation from CSIM drew me to pursue a degree in psychology," he says.

Sakthivel came up with the idea of a special cot to suit the needs of bed ridden patients. His design features the cot with an in built toilet with flushing system and an automatic control panel that would allow patients to alter their posture whenever they wanted. This idea that came up during the project work of CSIM course was appreciated by his mentors and he was encouraged to work on the design further. "The special cot would be a boon for patients as they can communicate their needs on time. It would also play a crucial role in their treatment and would make them feel less dependable," says Ms.Rajalakshmi, Trustee of S.N.Foundation.

Sakthivel is now prepared to launch a socially responsible business that can supply these cots to those in need. He believes that introducing these cots at a reasonable cost will be a great boon to all care takers – either families or rehabilitation centres.

–Shanmuga Priya.T

“AN EXEMPLARY LIFE”

Our Founder and Mentor-in-Chief P.N. Devarajan, fondly known as PND, lived a life driven by a passion to serve. Throughout a brilliant career in industry and banking, he amassed a wealth of friendships with the who's who of business, bureaucracy and society. He was often looked up to by his equally illustrious associates for advice and perspective. In his later years when he set out to establish institutions of excellence in service, he continued to touch lives of people in a profound way. His enormous networks and success in career were more than matched by his vision of a “healing society,” his belief in creating a skilled workforce/industry out of working-class individuals and his life-long efforts to find sustainable solutions to deep-seated social problems. His passing has left a void in our midst that is quite difficult to fill. We only hope to keep his mission alive by going to work with the same principles he lived by and his sheer drive every single day. In this commemorative first anniversary edition, Shri. Chakravarthy Saranga Pani, a close friend and confidante of PND, fondly recollects his many valuable memories and special anecdotes about the latter.

To begin with, a little about Shri. Chakravarthy Saranga Pani. Born in 1930 in Vellore (Tamil Nadu), an engineer trained at the celebrated Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc) and at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Shri. C.S. Pani further studied at the British Electricity Authority Thermal Plant in the UK. Since the beginning of his career in the early fifties, he worked with various public undertakings such as the Central Water and Power Commission (CPWC), Bhilai Steel Plant, Hindustan Steel Ltd. and Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. (BHEL). His grounding in engineering often took him on deputations abroad and led him to briefly take up teaching at the University of Delhi where he set up the Measurements Lab. By 1970 he gradually shifted towards managerial roles in the then nascent “Group-5” of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). “Group-5” would later become independent and be known as the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI), where he remained for another 19 years until his retirement as the Executive Director. Since his retirement, he has served on the boards of various industrial corporations. He also generously donated his 9000 sq. ft. house in Bangalore to Siva Sakthi Home for children and adults with disabilities. Shri. Pani still works every day, attracting sponsors and volunteers aplenty for the Home.

“How did you meet PND?” We ask. “My first meeting with PND came about in 1974, quite by chance” he answers, “At the time, I was a manager at IDBI (Mumbai), handling projects in about every sector except in Chemicals and Textiles. A colleague of mine handled all the Chemical Engineering projects as he



was a qualified Chemical engineer himself. When an application by the Gujarat Narmada Fertilizers Ltd., for assistance on a fertilizer project near Surat came his way, he coolly went off on a prolonged leave, forcing me to handle the process. Knowing nothing of fertilizers, I read the application end to end and still could not understand how to go about it. One day shortly after, while having lunch at a Matunga eatery, I saw a bus with the board of ‘Hindustan Organic Chemicals Ltd.’ (HOC) headed back to the HOC campus in Rasayani, Maharashtra. I asked the driver if I could take a ride with him to meet the chief there. He obliged and later that afternoon I found myself standing at the door of the Managing Director’s office. The name board read ‘P.N. PND’. I walked in to the office, thinking here I had found someone who could help me with the task I was assigned. When I explained why I was there, PND had a hearty laugh. Imagine my surprise when he told me,

fertilizers were inorganic chemicals! I sheepishly confessed to my ignorance on the subject, so PND sat me down, explained how plants require Nitrogen for growth but since atmospheric nitrogen cannot be absorbed easily by them, plants would need to be fed nitrogen through another source. Over the course of an hour, he gave me a basic understanding of fertilizers and then put me in touch with one Prof. Sharma, an eminent chemical engineer at the Institute of Chemical Technology in Wadala, Mumbai asking the latter to help me with the project. I went back to Mumbai, deeply thankful to PND for both his patience and for his resourcefulness. With this help, a potentially bad situation at my work was not only averted but my efforts were recognized and I was subsequently promoted, surpassing three more people in the process.”

Shri. Pani describes how he kept in touch with PND through the next few

years, “PND moved on to be the Chairman of the Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd. (IDPL) in Delhi. I would often visit Delhi on work trips and would run into him every now and then.”

“PND was a walking encyclopedia,” remarks Shri. Pani, “I learnt a lot from him. I would go to him for advice on any number of subjects and the man always had an answer. If he didn’t know something himself, he would put me in touch with someone who did know. His connections in bureaucracy, business and in almost every other sphere amazed me.”

“PND always came up with innovative ideas. He made suggestions to set up advisory committees for industries that needed multiple experts on largescale projects. He recommended SWOT analysis when the term was relatively new to the industry. He kept looking out for technology experts to promote as entrepreneurs,” says Shri. Pani. “In an era where large businesses were

exclusively run by dynastic families, PND wanted to introduce working-class technological experts into business," he says.

Shri. Pani gets emotional when recalling some of his more personal interactions with Shri. PND. He says, "I lost touch with PND for a few years around the time of my retirement. PND had settled in Chennai post his retirement and I was living in Bangalore with my ailing wife and mother. To be closer to medical facilities for my wife, I had moved away from the house I owned in the suburbs to an apartment in the city. Shortly after my wife passed away in 1996, so did my mother, in 1998. Suddenly finding myself all alone, I was enveloped in grief and felt miserable. Yet again, by chance, I met PND at the Chennai Airport, where as luck would have it, our arrival times from different flights had coincided."

"PND remarked at my apparent loss of form asking me why I looked so forlorn. I told him the reason for my sorrow. He said, 'Come with me' and took me to Siva Sakthi Home for the mentally challenged, in Valasaravakkam, Chennai. There, a child with multiple disabilities came towards me and sat on my lap, caressing my hair. In that moment, I felt so comforted that my misery seemed to have faded away into thin air. It was an out-of-the-body experience!" remarks Shri. Pani, adding that, "I continued to visit this Home regularly. Over a period of time, I noticed that the Home was getting cramped and crowded. It suddenly occurred to me that I could put my house in Bangalore to good use. I offered to donate it to Siva Sakthi Homes, if they should find it suitable to move premises."

"PND thought I must be joking," laughs Shri. Pani. "Are you sure?" he asked. "I assured him that I would be delighted to donate the house for the sake of the special children. Thus, on 15th January 2000, after a fair share of struggles to re-possess the house from a deviant tenant, on the death anniversary of my wife, Siva Sakthi Home was successfully inaugurated in Bangalore." Today, with a dedicated fulltime caretaker taking charge of the premises, the Home houses 25 persons with varying degrees of mental disabilities, five full-time staff, and has a beautiful garden with ducks, hens, dogs and cats. Festivals are celebrated with gusto and visitors and donations are flowing steadily. "I have no worries today," claims Shri. Pani, "I have no anxieties about the Home and its future. It is in safe hands. Being involved in this gave me a community that I never thought I'd have. I can now happily kick the bucket."

"While I was working in the corporate sector," recalls Shri. Pani, "we always had the necessary resources to solve problems that cropped up every now and then. One could always access the right infrastructure, monetary or material resources as and when required. When you start a social enterprise, you have to improvise with the little that you have." He further adds, "PND and I discussed many problems. These discussions were a tremendous learning experience for me. They enabled us to take up the challenges of starting a whole new institution. It is through these discussions that the idea for Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS) and CSIM came about."



PND's out of the box ideas include the Dal-Oil-Sugar Scheme, by means of which hundreds of families help feed hundreds of others through donating everyday ingredients from their pantry.

"PND's out of the box ideas include the Dal-Oil-Sugar Scheme, by means of which hundreds of families help feed hundreds of others through donating everyday ingredients from their pantry. This creates

an attitude of giving and sharing among people. PND used to say that Corporate Social Responsibility ought to be more than mere financial contributions from companies. He often mentioned to me that employees of Corporates should be given sabbatical to go out in the field and work at the grassroots level," says Shri. Pani.

When asked what in his opinion is the greatest accomplishment of PND, Shri. Pani says, "Throughout one's life, one accumulates baggage - either in material terms or spiritual. It is not often possible to shed this baggage before passing. PND was an exception to this rule. He never hesitated to provide monetary help to his friends in their time of need. Though he led several senior positions in his career and accumulated a lot of wealth, once he decided to dedicate his life to social work, he let go of all his material possessions, led an austere life, redirecting any material possessions of his for the benefit of charity. This in my opinion is his greatest

achievement." In continuation of this Shri. Pani says, "PND was absolutely insistent that cultivating social entrepreneurship skills and honing them from time to time was the way forward, for non-profit institutions such as Siva Sakthi Homes. His mission was to identify caring, passionate people like Vijayakumari (founder of Siva Sakthi Homes) and build their skill-set specific to the cause they were dedicating their time to. He mainly started CSIM to attract young, talented individuals to learn the ropes of instituting and managing NGOs that focus on a single social issue of their choice, to make major advancements in that focus-area, in the long run. CSIM today has a wide reach in several places such as Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Coimbatore and so on. Apart from Social Entrepreneurs, CSIM is also creating a band of social-auditors who conduct social audit of CSR programmes, for-profit and non-profit social enterprises, and NFBCs, develop methodologies for quantifying programmes, which are not easily quantifiable. This is leading to a shift in thinking in terms of impact, rather than output. This is a major accomplishment that can be attributed to PND. He had the creativity, the skills, the knowledge and the conviction to convert his ideas into working institutions."

In parting, we asked Shri. Chakravarthy Saranga Pani "How do you think PND would have liked to be remembered?" He thinks about it for a bit and says, "I guess he would much rather like for there to be more PNDs in the world - people with a vision to impact the lives of all those who are unfortunately challenged with some problems; to wipe out the avoidable tears from the faces of such people. Fortunately we have a good working model in the life of PND. We need more PNDs in our society to make a change." We couldn't agree more.

— Archanaa Ramesh

BOTTOM-UP RESCUE MISSION



In its 11-year-long journey, Oasis India has tried pulling off the near-impossible. It has persevered to tackle the widespread problem of trafficking, and in doing so, has rescued thousands of women and children across the country. “Trafficked women and children rescued and assisted back to wholeness – 1224 in the past 11 years,” says Matthew Nathaniel, Regional Head (South), Oasis India.

Confronting, tackling and solving a problem like trafficking, for Oasis, can be quite challenging owing to the complexity involved. The main issue is simply that the victims of trafficking haven’t quite been accustomed to a world beyond it. Tackling that issue has become part and parcel of

solving the problem. “Many young girls born to sex workers have not seen the world beyond a red-light area. They are confused and distraught to make a decision and step out,” says Nathaniel. “Oasis India works towards equipping those who leave the Red Light Area to reach their potential. Oasis’ Nirmal Bhavan is a home for rehabilitation through counselling, aftercare and training. Jessica Gunjal, Nirmal Bhavan coordinator has worked with these women for many years.”

Ask Jessica and she tells you that the most stunning aspect of trafficking is that irrespective of age, the vulnerability remains. Added to this is the problem of the red-light area becoming a world of their own. “We have girls who are very young and

also women in their 40s. They all have no general knowledge whatsoever,” she says, “All they know is what they have seen and heard in the Red Light Area.”

So, the question of ‘how can we help them?’ arises. One of the answers is Oasis India’s Livelihood programme. In a nutshell, the programme aims to make these women and children self-sustainable. It is long-term, focuses on growth and is a bottom-up approach towards rehabilitation.

“Oasis India’s Livelihood Programme helps them to learn, grow and become self-sustainable. Although it’s a long-term goal, they take it one day at a time,” says Nathaniel, “They learn how to sit,

It’s important to remember that trafficking is regarded by many to be a kind of modern-day slavery.

eat, talk, travel and self-groom. Some of them have not held a pencil in their lives.”

Jessica adds, “We had an 18-year-old who cried every time we asked her to hold a pencil. It took her four months to learn just that.”

The programme also focuses on some of the basics: like teaching the children to read the time, remember the days of the week, and names of fruits and vegetables.

“This entire process leads up to finding their interest and directing them to the right training,” says Nathaniel, “And at Oasis, our training is as diverse as can get: we have a Vocational tailoring course, a hairdressing project, cooking and Home-based nursing care.”

He explains that the ultimate goal is to create a leap of faith – into the real world with confidence and the necessary skill to succeed. But there’s another key ingredient that Oasis has deemed necessary for the women and children to make the shift. And that is awareness programmes.

“These are awareness programmes for the community people through FGDs and street theatres, establishing Anti Human Trafficking clubs in schools for children, creating Community Vigilance Groups that comprises of people from the community who will monitor the safety of the community and respond appropriately if and when needed,” explains Nathaniel.

While he explains that the situation with respect to trafficking has improved to a vast extent, there is still a long way to go, because the core problem continues to persist. “The issue of trafficking rapidly takes different shape,” Nathaniel explains, “Our ultimate

goal is to make the communities we work in safer for women and children, and ensure protection from abuse and trafficking.”

Through its journey, Oasis India has racked up some impressive numbers. But its goals are even more interesting. The NGO plans to rescue nearly a hundred children every year through its early-encounter programme – the key target area being railway stations. It also plans to rehabilitate 45 women, paving a way for them to leave the red-light area in a year, and find other livelihood options. “We also hope to support 30 children of women involved in sex work,” says Nathaniel. So far, nearly 25 boys have been given night-shelter in a year, while 15 women have been rescued from red light areas and rehabilitated, in a year.

Nathaniel admits that it is hard to imagine a world without trafficking, but says that it is possible to reduce the problem. “It’s important to remember that trafficking is regarded by many to be a kind of modern-day slavery. But it’s much more complex than we think it is,” he says. “It requires bottom-up approach as well as top-down approach when it comes to combating it.”

Given the effort and the initiatives that Oasis India has taken to reduce the problem, through prevention, education and awareness, it isn’t hard to imagine that these goals may be just around the horizon. However, the key is to persevere and try harder with every passing day. Like Nathaniel says, a bottom-up approach could well make the difference between the scourge of trafficking, and a near-trafficking-free environment.



Oasis India’s Livelihood Programme helps them to learn, grow and become self-sustainable

CAUGHT IN A SPIN – CAN IMPACT UNLOCK A CONTRACT?

I have recently had the honour of being involved in the Investment and Commissioning Panel for the Impact Management Programme (IMP). Examining a range of exciting submissions from across the country, I have read how enterprising organisations are seeking funding from the Impact for Growth strand of the IMP to raise investment for their work or write successful tenders, and in many cases to seek contracts with the Public Sector.

A healthy number of these organisations have also secured previous 'social investment' to help with their contract readiness.

But experience leads me to query why an ability to manage their impact will make these charities, social enterprises and 'ventures' more likely to secure a contract with the Public Sector?

As Adrian Hornsby wrote in an article for the same programme in October 2017: "ventures and commissioners 'pass like ships in the night'; and with commissioners showing hesitancy around impact, and social investors inevitably following revenues back to commissioners, the question arises as to where the essential driver for impact management can be found."

Adrian's article added to my questioning; what would be the motivation for managing and explaining your social impact if social investors and commissioners pass the buck back and forth between them?

Having been involved in commissioning services from voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) providers for many years, I wonder if the problem for commissioners goes deeper than just a 'hesitancy around impact'...

Perhaps it is a wilful misunderstanding caused by austerity and the need to make financial savings and efficiencies caused by pressures on the public purse?

In their desperation to raise income to replace lost government money, public agencies are courting partners who they think will bring in additional funds, and not necessarily giving social impact the proper consideration that it should be given.

Essentially, they see social impact as a means to draw in money without fully understanding what social impact means.

Furthermore, we could be heading for a situation where the Public Sector descends into simply becoming a 'regulator', diminishing their commissioning role completely. With the reduced strategic contracting capacity of a local and independent organisation with responsibility for public benefit, who will encourage social impact when all society's ills have to be addressed purely by free markets?



Back in the days of plenty when I worked for Salford's New Deal for Communities programme, we could afford to work with our providers to understand their impact and the outcomes that they were generating for us. We could even afford to provide training in the tools and techniques which are now part of the IMP.

Now we live in a vastly different world. With the increasing squeeze on public budgets, I am witnessing an appeal from the Public Sector to charities, social enterprises and ventures to bring in other money – grant funding and social investment – for services and activities which were previously fully funded by the Public Sector. But why would people with money invest in these services – unless there is something for them in it?

In Salford, the amount of money flowing from the Council to the VCSE sector through contracts and grants has reduced by over 40% in the last 5 years. Our research shows that the middle is falling out of the sector – small community groups which rely on volunteers continue to thrive, their members driven by a shared interest in tackling unfairness, poverty and inequality in today's society; and the larger 'enterprises', many of whom are national organisations or Public Sector spinouts, continue to succeed in contracting.

This leaves small and medium-sized 'ventures' caught in a spin between the Public Sector pushing them towards

I believe that the Public Sector doesn't really understand that 'social investment' must get a return, just like any other form of borrowing, and social investors don't really understand the state of panic in the Public Sector.

grants and 'social investment' as means of enhancing dwindling budgets; and social investment providers offering support for them to be ready to contract with the Public Sector.

I believe that the Public Sector doesn't really understand that 'social investment' must get a return, just like any other form of borrowing, and social investors don't really understand the state of panic in the Public Sector.

So, should this be where impact management fits in?

Public Sector commissioners want services, and they want outcomes. They want people to have better wellbeing, better lives; and ultimately, they need people not to need public services so much.

Social investors want many of the same things, but these outcomes must be measurable and accountable. They need

to understand the financial and the social return, they may need to see financial growth, but ultimately the investment should be repayable in both social, and often also financial, impact one way or another.

So, a better understanding and management of the impact that a charity, social enterprise or venture is creating will help bridge the gap between the investors and commissioners.

And, I believe that it is also essential for their survival.

The NeuroMuscular Centre (NMC) in Cheshire has been part of the GSK Impact programme for several years. Over a 10-year period, NMC has kept social accounts, covering both the impact that the Centre is having for service users, their families and other stakeholders, and how it is managing the organisation in financial terms to maximise that impact.

NMC has a greater understanding of outcomes and impact; continuous dialogue with service users, funders and commissioners which takes places to prepare the social accounts; and the ability to accurately describe their impact in tenders, funding bids, and publicity. All this has helped this organisation triple its turnover and move from a position of uncertainty to one of a secure and rosy future.

By embedding social accounting and audit as a means of impact management, NMC has broadened its financial base, grown in size, and secured its position as the leading provider of services for people with neuromuscular disease in the country.

And who should pay for this impact management? I believe that if commissioners or social investors want evidence of 'impact' they should also have to pay for the work evidencing the impact.

In conclusion, there will always be a need for social and community organisations to take the heat out of the public purse – social accounting and impact management are probably the best ways for them to achieve this.

Social investors and Public Sector budgets will come and go, but the people who need support from charities, social enterprises, and other community-based organisations will always be there!

Ultimately, I believe that the essential driver for impact management should, therefore, be to achieve the best possible outcomes for the people (and/or the environment) that an organisation supports, and in doing so making it relevant, investible and successful for the long term.

—Anne Lythgoe
Social Audit Network, UK
www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk



Vision for Humanity

Shri. Narasimhan Rajagopal is a chemical engineer with over four decades of experience in Chemical Plant Operations, Engineering, Project Execution and has held managerial positions. He has travelled across Asia, Europe, Middle East and USA in connection with business and in development of new projects.

He is an active member of Rotary Club for over 40 years and has maintained his association with the club even while moving to different cities as work demanded. He is now associated with the Rotary Club of Chennai KK Nagar since its inception and is keen to work on community based projects.

He got to interact with Shri PN Devarajan during his teenage days and after many years of working with him, he still remains spellbound at the man's vision for humanity.

"I first met PND during my college days in 1956 at my father's office. It was PND who inspired me to pursue Chemical Engineering. His narration of significant national and international developments that led to the production of various chemicals not only interested me. It helped me see the change brought about in people's day to day lives. His knowledge of different chemical processes made me wonder if he was a walking encyclopaedia. He was an excellent teacher, who always endeavoured to open up students' minds to new thoughts, ideas and possibilities. A zealous reader, he was all ears when students wanted to discuss any subject and his contributions enriched exchange of thoughts. I have always wondered how he gets to know so much about, practically, everything," says Narasimhan.

Narasimhan was not only inspired by PND's expertise in his field, but was also touched by PND's concern for the common good. The way PND engaged with communities and different social activities encouraged him too. As fellow



members at the Rotary Club of Mettur, they worked together in many initiatives. He fondly recollects a project from the 1970s, in which both of them worked together to mobilise resources and support to lay pipelines for supply of drinking water in a village. "The villagers were moved to see water flowing in the pipes. PND was then working in a company that manufactured PVC pipes. In six months, we completed the work and the villagers are still enjoying the result of these efforts. Even today when I think of that experience, I feel overwhelmed. I will forever cherish such moments," he says.

Narasimhan and PND were always in touch with each other, in spite of working in different cities. "I would contact him whenever I needed his advice. He made himself available for many enthusiasts like me. The clarity I used to feel after talking to him has been a positive force behind all my decisions," says Narasimhan, still in awe of PND's dynamism. Success in the industry never disturbed PND's interest

in the community. The great motivator he is, all associates were driven into social service. His vision for the community grew richer by the days and he dreamt of a society where working class was in the fore, leading the process of development.

PND has always emphasised contributing whatever is possible from one's position. "Help people till it hurts you," he would say. Driven by his passion for service, PND's appeal to his friends was never turned down. "You can never say no that man," laughs Narasimhan. PND once introduced him to a visually challenged person in Thiruvannamalai and asked Narasimhan if he could help the young man in earning a sustainable income, through the Rotary Club. Efforts materialised and the young man, trained in tailoring, used the sewing machines provided to train women from the nearby villages. Today, it is a handloom that weaves sarees with in house, authentic designs. "It is such entrepreneurship that PND wanted to promote on a large scale. His

ideas and thoughts are so compelling that all of us get drawn to it," he adds.

Narasimhan and PND together visited the Siva Sakthi Kakkum Karangal regularly. It is a home for intellectually challenged children and adults. Mobilising contributions for this Home through the Rotary Club of Madras was a commitment they had made to themselves and Narasimhan feels very proud about this endeavour. "All that PND initiated had a long term perspective and is relevant even in the changing maze of poor people's needs. Whether rights or welfare, PND insisted that vision for future must direct all efforts undertaken now", recalls Narasimhan, while mentioning about PND's collection and redistribution of staples programme. The Dall-Oil-Sugar scheme, as it is known, intended to collect these staples from willing individuals/households and consolidate the collections to be distributed regularly to orphanages, homes for aged, rehabilitation centres, etc. With his family still being a part of this scheme, administering the collection loop, he believes that it is programmes like these that inculcate the value of giving in the younger generations as well.

PND founded the Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) to train unemployed youth, both men and women, to earn a sustainable income through social work. Narasimhan feels that PND's idea was just in time to promote social entrepreneurship on a large scale, drawing interest on socially responsible/inclined business models. Also engaging differently abled persons and drop outs who could not access education for different reasons, PND once again proved that it was ideas that always prevailed, irrespective of where they came from. Social entrepreneurship was a channel to give life to these ideas, which may otherwise go unheard.

—Shanmuga Priya. T



Sensitivity



A man began to give large doses of cod-liver oil to his Doberman because he had been told that the stuff was good for dogs. Each day he would hold the head of the protesting dog between his knees, force its jaws open and pour the oil down its throat.

One day the dog broke away and spilt the oil on the floor. Then to the man's great surprise, it not only lapped up the oil that spilt on the floor but came back to lick the spoon.

That is when the man discovered that, what the dog had been fighting was not the oil but the manner in which it was being given.



Explicit Learning

- A. We fail to see that there are different ways of doing same thing.
- B. We are comfortable doing things our way rather than the right way.
- C. Sensitivity calls for an understanding, that each person receives the maximum when given in the way in which he/she is most receptive.



Introspective Learning

- A. What am I really interested in - 'giving my way' or 'giving'?
- B. What is the nature of 'Sensitivity'?
- C. How do I become sensitive to others' way of receiving?

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Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani. 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.

For more information, please visit our website www.csim.in

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CSIM also facilitates **Social Accounting and Audit** for social enterprises, CSR projects, and NGOs through Social Audit Network, India (SAN India).

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Leader & Leadership Matters...

11. A. Sensitivity in relationships : heart works

“Your smile is your logo, your personality is your business card, how you leave others feeling after having an experience with you becomes your trademark.” –Jay Danzie



Meaning of Sensitivity in relationships:

The Leader understands people in his/her relationships, and (s) he is aware of their feelings and emotions. (LOI, www.discoverself.com). Sensitivity meaning according to dictionary is an ability to understand what other people need, and be helpful and kind to them. The synonyms are awareness, sense, subtlety, consciousness, receptiveness and so on. The antonyms are apathy, numbness, insensitive & so on.

A human issue cannot be dealt with an organization based decision and an organizational issue cannot be dealt with a human based decision. The humaneness in a Leader has been often underrated and viewed as something soft and optional. The reality is that Sensitivity and compassion are the foundation and the true heart of any relationship. For a Leader, in the consciousness era emotional consciousness is critical attribute. While a lot of emphasis may be placed on Leader's capacity to handle his/her own emotions and be conscious of it; it is equally or more important to identify, understand and empathize with fellow colleagues and subordinates as well as in family and in all relationships. The antonyms of sensitivity show that being numb to oneself and other's feelings and emotions are the barriers to connection and relation. The bonds of the relationship are held by the silken threads of sensitivity.



There are interesting stories on compassion and gratitude that stems out of Sensitivity. One of the best example for sensitivity at work are the popular anecdotes from Dr. Abdul Kalam, our late president's life. The missile man of India was the epitome of kindness and humility and referred to as 'People's President'. Dr. Kalam was serving as a manager at DRDO and he and his team were working on a significant project. As the work pressure was high the team was working dedicatedly to finish the work in time. One day, one of his subordinates requested to grant leave early that day as he wanted to take his children to an exhibition nearby. Dr. Kalam readily agreed and the subordinate got back to work. The subordinate was so involved in his work that he lost the track of time and forgot to leave early.

He reached home, feeling bad that he could not keep up his promise and looked for his kids, but he could find only his wife. When he enquired about kids who were not to be seen anywhere around, to his surprise his wife told: "your manager arrived around 5:15 and he took the kids for the exhibition".

Apparently, Dr. Kalam observed that his subordinate was involved in the work and was sure that his subordinate would not

make it on time. Feeling that the kids would be hurt if they would not be taken to the exhibition, Dr. Kalam took it on himself to take the kids out to the exhibition

Even the on the last day of his life he was sensitive to the aide (Jawan) who travelled with him standing with the gun from Guwahati to Shillong.

Sensitivity has to stem from a true belief that there is equality and respect form everyone who is working for the team and is fulfilling the vision and purpose of the organization or family. Sensitivity is often mistaken to bring down the power and assertiveness of a Leader. In reality it increases the respect and belongingness of the recipient towards the Leader.

"Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in our absence." — Sheryl Sandberg



I recount my own interesting experience as an intern in Titan Industries. Shri Xerxes Desai was the managing director. I was interning in the Human Resources department. I was working on a HR personnel policy manual reporting to Manager HR. One evening, it was past 6.30pm and I was printing the final copy of the manual at his secretary's office. The MD, who I have never seen before walked across and noticed me at the printer printing papers all alone and stood to speak to me to find out what I was doing at 6:30pm in the evening when I should be home. I explained my work with lot of pride. He listened and appreciated me and also checked if I needed a coffee. Went ahead to call the admin to check if there is transport for me to reach home and organized the same. Only when I walked down to admin did I realize it was actually the MD of the organization with whom I was inter-acting. Even after 30 years, the experience has remained as one of the best experiences of internship. I truly felt taken care of while working in the organization.

Sensitivity is deeply and closely connected with empathy. It is much more than perceiving the situation standing in the shoes of the other person. They have a strong emotional antennae and can pick up both expressed and unexpressed feelings and emotions of the people who work with

them. They are Leaders who have the ability to recognize the moods and appropriately sense the needs before they are spelt out. People easily open up to these Leaders and they end up being unofficial counsellors and coaches. They become good sounding board for others who are processing issues in their head.

A Leader's sensitivity is experienced when they are able to

- View the situation from multiple perspectives
- When they emerge from the 'here and now'
- When they are non-judgmental
- When they do not interpret the situation or the person's behaviour from their own perspective
- When they move away from 'right and wrong' and 'good and bad' perspectives and see what is appropriate
- When they are not caught in hierarchy and are willing to see facts of the situation
- When they are thinking how they can help than how the other person should have behaved
- When they can accept the person emotions without denial but can see the pros and cons of it objectively

Leaders, at times justify the feelings and emotions of the team members, without actually enquiring. They also conclude the possible actions and decisions that have to be taken based on that. At times, emotional outbursts are simply just an outburst and no action is needed. Just a hug and solace will do. Staying or standing the ground while the emotionally disturbed person is sharing and talking of decisions is sometimes the best response. After the outburst is over and when they are calm if the discussion happens, there is a higher level of receptivity and informed choices can be made. Giving space for such natural emotions to be expressed is in itself indicative of sensitivity in a Leader.

Sensitivity forms the fulcrum of a relationship, be it at work place or in family and social circles. Meeting and discussing with a sensitive and emotionally conscious Leader becomes very important for understanding this attribute. The next episode will continue with this topic in an experiential way.

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—Dr Kalpana Sampath

“NO RULES OR REGULATION IS AS EFFECTIVE AS SELF-REALISATION.”

Dr. B. Poorna shares with Marie Banu the USP of SSS Shasun Jain college



Shri Shankarlal Sundarbai Shasun Jain College for women in Chennai has been established with a generous contribution made by Smt. Sundarbai Shankarlal Charitable Trust of the SHASUN Family and Group.

Dr. B. Poorna is presently the Principal of SSS Shasun Jain College. A postgraduate in Computers, she has been in the teaching sector for three decades. She left her IT job to become a teacher, which she realised was her area of interest. She completed PhD in 2003 to ensure a good career in the teaching domain.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. B. Poorna shares with Marie Banu the USP of SSS Shasun Jain College.

About your education and your career path?

I did my schooling in Trichy at BHEL colony. The first step I took outside my colony was only to attend College, that too by traveling in a ladies special bus.

I did my UG in Physics and joined

MCA in 1985 when computer education was just coming up. It was an eye opener for me. In a class of 36, there were only 12 girls.

My teachers fascinated me since my school days. Hence, I decided to enter the teaching profession after completing my education.

I served for 12 years in Vaishnav College in Chromepet, Chennai and then worked as a Controller of examinations in MGR Educational and Research Institute at Maduravoyal. Later, I joined SRM Easwari Engineering College as Head of MCA department and then joined SSS Shasun Jain College as Principal in 2012.

I am passionate to always do something new and exciting. I also want to give back to the society.

Your thoughts on the teaching profession today?

One should evolve as a teacher; have a feel for it. At Vaishnav College, I underwent a rigorous one-month

training on how to become a teacher - from interacting with students to holding a chalk piece. I was literally guided in the process of maturing into a teacher. This is definitely missing now!

Unfortunately, we find many teachers today who have chosen this profession by chance and not out of passion. In my opinion, around 80 percent of the teachers consider teaching like any other job. This is where all the problems arise - be it for a man or a woman.

I feel that the degree of compassion and affection is certainly more for a woman. I would therefore suggest having more women professors in co-ed colleges as well as in boys' colleges as it definitely would make a difference.

What is the USP of SSS Shasun Jain College?

SSS Shasun Jain College focuses on discovering, developing and drawing out the hidden talents lying dormant inside its students.

From academics to co-curricular activities, a 360 degree development and grooming is of supreme importance in today's world. Our institution creates an environment for future leaders, entrepreneurs and professionals who possess skills and aptitudes.

The USP of our college is values and technology in education. We push technology to our students' as they will have to face a world where technology is used for almost all aspects of life.

Recently, we have launched a Shasun app where the students and faculty can subscribe and network with their peers. It is like any other social media app. We encourage staff to share posts and update on events. We have an administrator who moderates the posts. Hall bookings for functions and feedback on services are all coordinated through this app.

We document the students' attendance on a tab, which is linked to our ERP. This saves a lot of time for our teachers. We also do profiling of students. The idea is to do a data analysis of student's academic credentials, psychometric analysis and understand their area of interest so that we can provide the necessary intervention.

The college is consciously creating awareness on social issues amongst our students and has copyrighted a women's safety app 'Shasun Raksha' and an e-waste management app 'Shasun Swetch'.

Can you share with our readers about the Social Connect Programme?

In today's education there is a total disconnect between society and education. Even moral science and vocational courses, which were part of school education 30 years back, is no longer there. In a fast food world we are graduating pretty fast and retiring fast too. A medium pace growth, which is holistic, will do good for the society as well as the individual.

It is with this intention, that we launched the Social Connect Programme along with Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) in 2015 where students are encouraged to voluntarily enroll.

As part of this certificate programme, students are oriented on social issues and taken on a field trips to charitable organisations. They are also provided one-month internship in an NGO to gain experiential learning.

This exposure has led to a change in mindset amongst our students. Many students have expressed that they are now able to appreciate what they possess. Many parents have lauded this programme and some have even mentioned that they find their children to be more responsible and humble now.

What steps have you taken to handle the present generation learners?

Children of this generation look around them to learn. I have consciously told my teachers to never raise their voice, keep a happy face, listen patiently, and talk to people with concern. I have also requested them to not restrict to academics alone, but to talk about values and social issues happening across the world.

We also have a set of people who work with students on digital detox. Learners in the Internet age don't need more information. They need to know how to efficiently use the massive amount of information available at their fingertips - to determine what's credible, what's relevant, and when it's useful to reference. We sensitise our students on how to use cell phones wisely and not become addicted to it.

Our students are around 17 years of age and they have crossed their formative years. For them, reasoning alone works. No rules or regulation is as effective as self-realisation. We keep reiterating and reinforcing students on what is expected from them.

Your advice for parents?

Do not fear about changing society.

We will all be learning till the last breath of our life.

Realise that things are much better now than it was for us when we were young.

We should give our children a healthy environment to grow.

Joint family system will strengthen one's mind.

Exposure is essential at every stage of the child's growth so don't be over protective. Of course, you will have to keep a watch so that your child does not fall back.

Don't help your child in taking decisions; let he/she make mistakes and learn from it - as long as it does not cost heavily.

That way your child will grow stronger and will know what is best!