Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

The ‘World Elders Day’ is celebrated in India on 1st October every year. The day is observed to acknowledge the contributions and knowledge of the elderly and bring the needs and challenges faced by them to the notice of governments and societies.

Why do we need a special day to be reminded about elders? Shouldn’t we be honouring our elders all through their lifetimes? Is it because we are too busy with our own lives that we do not have time for the elders in the family? This is the hard reality.

The growing number of old age homes seems to be a convenience factor for many families to send their elders away. The reasons are many: lack of tolerance and increasing impatience among young men and women; both husband and wife being employed and the fear of leaving the elderly at home alone, lack of space in the home with children requiring more space as they grow older, etc.

I would say that families who send their elders away are committing the heinous crime of forcing out someone who spent his/her entire lifetime caring for them.

Psychiatrists believe that fulfilling the physical, psychological and emotional needs of elders is the key to keep elders healthy and happy. Intentional or unintentional neglect, impudence and maltreatment inside the families and in the society often lead to high levels of stress among elders. This in turn could lead to various physical ailments, psychological and emotional disorders and even cause death, in some cases.

Elders need attention at homes and if we don’t give it, they start demanding it. Attention to our elders does not mean providing only basic amenities like a place to stay, food to eat, some money and new clothes. It also means the quality time we spend with them.

It is time to reflect and correct our behaviour towards elders before we leave this as a trend for the coming generations to follow.

Here are a few tips: Do not take them for granted. Find out their interests, their requirements, and their concerns. Show respect to their feelings and consult them on important issues. Make them feel important.

As always said, everyone has to face aging. One day you will be an elder too and you wouldn’t want your children to ignore you. Let us work towards bringing the much needed change, right at our home, right now.

Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

Failure as an experience is not often discussed. The word failure evokes feelings of fear. The fear may come from the following:

- The challenge with handling the emotions that come with failing —embarrassment, shame
- Lack of self-confidence — “What will others think if I fail?” “How will I cope with my reputation being affected?”
- Dealing with the set back — “I put in so much effort and now it is all gone to waste”

Failure is something that’s looked down upon—if I make a mistake or fail I’ll be rejected and what makes me good enough or important is having people think well of me. Such limiting beliefs around failure hold us back from tapping into our creative energies, in pursuing possibilities, making us play small.

We are used to a narrative of negativity around failure and vulnerability. The vulnerable parts of oneself reveal itself when we don’t get it right, when there is failure. Admitting failure allows us to embrace vulnerability. When we learn to be more vulnerable, we learn things much more quickly. We become less scared of getting hurt, so aren’t avoiding failures all the time. We can choose to be honest with how we feel about failures, share our fears and express what we need.

There is infinite power in embracing vulnerability. It means letting go—letting go of failed relationships, failed projects and anything in the past that felt like a failure—and putting oneself out there in the now. When we don’t cover up our mistakes, we reveal ourselves as human—we become people whom others can identify with.

Yours Energetically

Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi is trainer, facilitator and coach of the Positive Energy (PE) program. She is a spiritual seeker with a vision of transforming her own energy state from surviving to being. In this journey she has gathered deep insights and is continuously working towards creating a pathway for more seekers. With years of exposure to spiritual practices like yoga, reiki, and personal development interventions like coaching, she is working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.

She can be contacted at bhuvaneshwari@teamthink.co.in for arranging Positive Energy training and Coaching sessions.
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ignificant proportion of children from the down-trodden segment of India who are enrolled in government schools fail to complete their school education. Dropping out of school is not a new challenge, but that has multiple underlying reasons behind it. Most common reasons being financial constraints, illiterate parents, puberty in girls, early marriage, distraction with peers, etc.

While many organisations aim to bring notable changes in this area, lack of experience on how to guide and motivate the children who drop out of school remains a challenge.

However, a few NGOs have skilfully handled this issue and have moved on to be role models for others. One such organisation is ‘Turning Point Educational Trust’ founded by Moraji Desai in 2008 that focuses on promotion of quality education among children in slums in Chennai.

When asked what motivated him to focus on this segment of the population, he says: “During 1995-1998 I studied at Loyola College, Chennai, and enrolled in All India Catholic University Federation (AICUF). It was through AICUF that I started working part time in ‘Nesakkaram’, an organization which promoted education awareness in the slums in collaboration with the police. I also worked for a while with ‘CHOLAI’ an organization that worked with at-risk children in Thiruvanmiyur. This, was the turning point in my life.”

“I have a passion to work for the cause of children hence continued to work in the slum areas for a couple of years until tsunami hit the sub-continent in 2004. As tsunami heightened the proliferation of slums and poverty, I began to grow increasingly concerned about the future of the children who dwelt in them,” he adds.

In the earlier days, Moraji found it difficult to deal with children from different backgrounds and bring about positive changes in their lives. It was during that time he joined the four-month Certificate Course in Social Entrepreneurship at CSIM.

“Running an NGO comes with its own share of difficulties. Several issues arise during the functioning of the NGO, like providing training for children, handling the problems they face in their home front, motivating them to continue their school education, etc. Even though we try to fix most of it on our own, we need guidance for some to help solve them,” he adds.

“I have learnt some of the most valuable lessons pertaining to running of an NGO from CSIM’s course. I learnt the skills required to run an organisation in a successful and sustainable manner, and how to cater to the needs of children. CSIM also made my identify like-minded people in various institutions who work for the welfare of children and their education journey,” says Moraji.

Turning Point Educational Trust conducted regular motivation sessions and kept children engaged and focussed. The team was capacitated in handling unexpected problems while dealing with slum children.

Currently, Turning Point Educational Trust works in five slums in Chennai and identifies children who need educational assistance. Regular activities – spoken English classes, healthcare tips to manage the COVID situation, painting, story-telling and personality development classes– are conducted to keep kids engaged throughout the week.

Many children lack motivation and interest to attend school regularly and study. Hence, extra attention is given to such children so that they remain focussed and do not drop-out of school. Moraji says, “I attribute the success of my programmes and the change I was able to bring among the slum children to CSIM. Their experienced faculty, subject experts, and the exposure visits made me manage my NGO efficiently.”

He adds saying, “Our team continues to face challenges in enrolling girl-children dropouts, counselling adolescent children, etc. Thankfully, the dropout rates have decreased to a large extent now. Further, with the help of Government officials and Police officers, especially Shri. V. Balakrishnan IPS, Joint Commissioner of Police, Chennai, we have enrolled 18 of our children in Colleges.”

Currently, Turning Point has 20 staff members who are engaged in COVID relief work. They also conduct daily online classes on motivation, and skill development. “Most children are not interested in education, so we need to plan regular classes and interactive competitions to keep them engaged during the lockdown,” says Moraji.

“Until date, we have managed to help 500 children. We work in 5 slums in Chennai, but there are many more children who need help and guidance to build a good life for themselves. Our dream is to continue helping children and reach out to more children living in other slums in Chennai,” he signs off.

Aatika Kouser
I was a beautiful evening and the gate creaked open at 5 pm. Reena walked in with her usual gusto and bright smile. “Hi, Aunty! How are you?” There is always a surge of love and happiness in Padma’s heart when Reena walks in. “Hello, my dear. Come in. It’s been over two weeks since I saw you.” Reena apologetically said, “Sorry, aunty. My college work has been eating into all my evening time. I had a deadline to meet, and my coffee with you got sacrificed, hahaha.” Padma knowingly gave a shout, “Manju, make two cups of coffee. Reena is also here. Also, bring those murukku (fried savoury) for her to eat with coffee. “Oh, wow, Aunty, your murukkus are always amazing. Did you get them from Anjali’s marriage you attended last week?” Padma smiled and nodded her head.

Sipping coffee, very thoughtfully Reena slowly shared her bit of gossip that she got from her mom. “I heard that everyone in the lane attended Anjali’s wedding except for Suguna Aunty. They say she never speaks to anyone and has isolated herself. She is not seen in our social club activities too. Uncle Ramu attends sometimes, but even he has gone quiet. Do you know why?”

Padma let out a sad sigh, adding, “Yes, I noticed that over the last two years. A lot has changed for them, and Suguna seems to be heading towards a depression. I met her last week and tried to speak to her. This is not something that has happened now. It has spread like slow poison over the last decade.”

Reena’s curiosity was kindled, and she was quick to grab the story time. “Aunty, what actually happened? I haven’t seen her son much too, and her daughter Sudha has been away for ages, isn’t it?”

Padma went into her reflective mood as she recollected and reconstructed the issues for Reena. “They had a good life of being financially well for a typical middle class. Sudha, as you know, is the eldest daughter. She was brilliant and good in her academics and school activities. She got an excellent score, completed her engineering in bioengineering, and earned high grades. She fulfilled her dream of going to the USA for her Masters degree by availing an educational loan and sought admission in one of the reputed universities. On completion of her degree, she got placed with a modest salary. By then, Uncle Ram lost his job, and the family fell into financial difficulties. The onus of clearing the educational loan fell on Sudha. She really had to work hard, live frugal to ensure the education loan was paid, and somehow the family stabilised. Her brother who was also good in academics, chose an undergraduate course and worked alongside to meet the family expenses.”

Reena joined, “This is a typical middle class happening. But, what was the real issue for them to isolate themselves?” Padma lovingly patted Reena on the back and said, “Don’t jump the gun. Understand and empathize. Many things worn up in our environment in casual chit-chatting and leaves a deep scar in the heart. When Sudha left for the USA, the rest of the relatives discouraged them. They told Suguna that getting Sudha married was more important than her education and career in the US and told her to get her daughter married before she left for the States. The relatives even said that Suguna gave Sudha too much freedom and that she would regret it when she loses control over her life.

They said things like: We belong to the middle class. Having a daughter of marriageable age and a son who is still studying, it is not wise to avail education loan for one’s daughter’s higher education. Instead, the loan amount could be used for the son’s education and daughter’s marriage. What if she doesn’t want to come back to India at all? What will you both do?”

Well, as expected, after four years in the USA, Sugana started marriage talks for Sudha. Initially, Sudha pushed it for three years with reasons and excuses and met a few proposed alliances in the USA, but it never worked out. No one was willing to go ahead with a girl who was meeting her family’s expenses and repaying loans. Meanwhile, the pressure mounted on Suguna and her husband. At any social event they attended, relatives and friends only asked about why Sudha was not married as yet and did not enquire about how well she was doing in her career. Sugana’s sisters and brothers offered to search for alliances, advised several rituals to appease the Gods. Sudha, on the other hand, met some spiritually inclined friends, learned meditation, enjoyed her solitude, and had formed a life that was meaningful to herself. She had moved on from the idea of stereotype marriage, family, and children. None back home even attempted to know who she had really become.”

Reena interjected, “Unjust! Aunty, I never cease to understand how a man who takes to the spiritual path is glorified. Families pride to say he is moving above and beyond to reach God. But, if a woman proposes to have her own way, it’s not acceptable.”

Padma gave a pained smile and said: “True, Reena! Suguna and her husband, including her son, went through many jibes and blames from relatives and friends. People spoke behind their backs that there should be some issue, or love failure, or physical disabilities, or into a live-in relationship, and so on. Eight years back, Sudha had visited India. She heard so many comments and faced humiliation that she has never come to India after that.

Suguna cried every time she received a wedding invite from her friends and relatives. She stopped attending any social events or meeting known people and isolated herself totally now. Her mental health was affected and she succumbed to diabetes and hypertension.”

“But Aunty, what happened to their son? He is handsome (even with the grey hair), earns well, still single, and doesn’t meet any of us eye to eye.”

“Reena, we all may get academic qualifications and become literate, but we are not necessarily educated. Suguna and her husband told him that until his elder sister Sudha gets married, it is not becoming for him to think of his own family life. He fell in love with a colleague but couldn’t commit to a marriage. Hence, the relationship ended badly. He did not interact much with the neighbours and sticks to his close friends. Both Suguna and Sudha are blamed for ruining his life too.

Suguna’s self-respect, self-esteem, and confidence in herself shattered. She thinks the entire world is pointing the finger at her and her daughter whenever she is in a social circle.”

Reena felt disgruntled as she listened to the story. She reflectively added, “Aunty isn’t it ironic that we are willing to provide similar educational opportunities for the boy and the girl but are not willing to give them a similar extent of space to build their life and own it proudly? We are happy to make a girl feel guilty if she strays from the societal norm, even a wee bit. Even the parents feel shamefaced and try to justify, apologize to the entire world. I hate this! If the parents and family can support and be proud of what Sudha is doing and talk about her work and
A stubborn young donkey once prevailed upon his indulgent parents to obtain for him a lion’s skin, in which to masquerade about. At great cost and inconvenience to themselves they provided him with the disguise he had begged for. Clothed in it, he strutted forth believing himself to be a lion, causing men to flee before him in terror.

But it chanced in the end that, partly by the length of his ears and partly by the discordance of his bray when he tried roaring, he was discovered by the lions with whom he had sought company. The herd fell upon him so mercilessly that he only saved himself by flight, leaving his brave coat behind him, while men on every side laughed and pelted him with stones as he flew to his native common.

Explicit Learning

A. We are most of the time, moving around with masks.
B. People in the long run can see through our masks.
C. Very rarely do we expose our real selves.

Introspective Learning

A. What is the nature of a ‘Mask’?
B. How do I respond to people who wear masks?
C. Why do I wear masks?
THE NEW NORMAL IN MENSTRUAL HEALTH

One of the major challenges brought about by the COVID-19 lockdown, in its initial stages, was the breakdown in supply chains. As a result of this — despite several promises that supply of essential commodities would continue — several essentials were available on the helpline which also doubled up as a safe space that could be accessed at the caller's discretion where they could maintain anonymity," says Dilip, "Our helpline assistants from Sukhibava were able to connect callers to an accredited healthcare professional and facilitate a tele-health consultation to address key clinical concerns. This also helped encourage women and girls to prioritise their health in spite of COVID-19 constraints.

What the team knew all too well was that without awareness over positive gender roles, most of these initiatives would go to waste. "The key to promoting positive gender roles within the urban poor context is to understand how to share and mainstream," says Dilip. "Our IVR radio ads are tailored towards men to acknowledge the stress and uncertainty they are experiencing during the COVID-19 crisis while raising awareness about the largely invisible stress that women and girls are experiencing."

In a study of Dilip's, "Hello Saheli" strives to create a space of "trust and confidentiality to encourage men to be vulnerable about stressors in their life." The initiative has also identified non-violent ways to resolve conflict and reflect on the relevance and importance of strong relationships during a pandemic. "It also helps as a great tool to provide gender counselling and support men and women in their understanding of how men can support women and girls' health and wellbeing," says Dilip.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sukhibava's role has been to ensure there are reduced consequences of COVID-19. It has also guaranteed that its work could continue even in the absence of specific government funding, he says. "We are working towards reaching out to over a lakh women next year," says Dilip.

Despite many significant steps towards better awareness surrounding reproductive health and menstrual hygiene, Dilip believes India still has a long way to go. "The momentum has picked up over the last five years we might need another 10 years of collective work to even introduce clinicians that are sustainable yet impactful," he signs off.

Sukhibava has helped thousands of women gain access to healthcare and sanitary products

O ne of the major challenges brought about by the COVID-19 lockdown, in its initial stages, was the breakdown in supply chains. As a result of this — despite several promises that supply of essential commodities would continue — several essentials were not available. Coupled with the fear of going to hospitals to seek healthcare and a clinician within communities stating that owing to availability of doctors, women have not been able to access healthcare facilities.

For six years now, Sukhibava has helped thousands of women gain access to healthcare and sanitary products. However, the pandemic has made its work a lot more challenging. "The impact of the global health crisis has been widespread and a recent UNICEF report highlights the heightened advocacy lead by women and girls during this time," says Dilip. "Building on our global research, our teams conducted a remote assessment to evaluate the impact COVID-19 has had on women and girls across urban and rural pockets, the lockdown worsened the supply of sanitary pads and contraceptives suffered during the lockdown.

In the initial phase (of the lockdown), there were critical issues around access to sanitary pads and contraceptives," says Dilip. "In the initial phase (of the lockdown), there were critical issues around access to sanitary pads and contraceptives," says Dilip. "In the initial phase (of the lockdown), there were critical issues around access to sanitary pads and contraceptives," says Dilip. "In the initial phase (of the lockdown), there were critical issues around access to sanitary pads and contraceptives," says Dilip. "In the initial phase (of the lockdown), there were critical issues around access to sanitary pads and contraceptives," says Dilip. "In the initial phase (of the lockdown), there were critical issues around access to sanitary pads and contraceptives," says Dilip.

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TRIBUTE

**Mrs. Savithri Vaithi**

Mrs. Savithri Vaithi, who founded Vishranthi Old Age Home, passed away on October 10.

Hailing from a family of judges, Mrs. Savithri engaged in social work since the age of 16. She founded the Monday Charity Club in 1974 along with a group of women and subsequently the Vishranthi Old Age Home in 1978, as part of the Charity Club. The Home was made possible with an acre of land in Palavakkam donated by Shri. AV Meappa Chettiyar and funds provided by HelpAge India.

She provided a safe haven for over 175 abandoned women through her Trust, which is based out of Chennai. The home, in addition to providing shelter to elderly women, takes care of their last rites. We learn that Mrs. Savithri used to perform them herself, as long as she was physically able to do so.

Savithri began social work in the slums of Choolai. As part of a social group called Barefoot Walkers, she would attend to basic health needs and education of the residents of the settlements.

The Monday Charity Club recently celebrated its golden jubilee this year and on the occasion, a postage stamp of its founder Savithri Vaithi was released by Minister for Tamil Official Language and Tamil Culture K Pandiarajan.

Mrs. Savithri Vaithi was a philanthropist, an activist and a true social entrepreneur. She has been an inspiration to many and her passing away is a huge loss for mankind. CSIM has been associated with Vishranthi since our inception. We extend our heartfelt condolences to her family and friends.

**MEMORIES LIVE FOREVER**

Mrs. Raji Gopalakrishnan (82), former Trustee of Vishranthi, has been associated with Mrs. Savithri Vaithi since 1978. She was one of the founding members of Monday Charity Club and has treaded the journey along with Mrs. Savithri in providing care for the elderly.

She shares a few moments with Mrs. Savithri which are close to her heart.

I have spent over 50 years with Mrs. Savithri in her journey as a social worker. She used to say, “I am only the engine; Raji and the other members are my batteries which keeps the train moving.”

We were a group of 10 friends living in Mandaveli during the 70’s. We realised that we could do something meaningful in our free time from 10am to 2pm. This led us to launch Monday Charity Club and thereafter established Vishranthi Old Age Home. Our passion was to serve the un-served, especially the elderly. While we had many supporters, who contributed funds for our work, we engaged in physical work during the early days. This was the difficult part!

My husband allowed me to engage in social work. It is with the family’s support that one can do selfless service. When I lived in Chengelpet for over five years, as my husband served as Dean at Chengelpet Medical College Hospital, I used to visit the Home everyday to oversee the activities.

Mrs. Savithri was open to learning, and a very humble person. We both pursued our Master’s Degree together and she used to come to my home to learn from me.

We used to take our residents on tours once a year and I was given the responsibility of organising the trips and led the team. On such occasions, Mrs. Savithri used to spontaneously identify and talk to the elders in the tour spots, recognise those who have been abandoned, and bring them along with her to Vishranthi.

Vishranthi has been a home for elders belonging to all religions. Our first resident was Mrs. Martha, a Christian lady. Mrs. Savithri performed the funeral rites for her when she passed away and also for Sahiba, a Muslim woman.

About 20 years ago, when one of our residents passed away, the locals refused to carry the body nor allowed us to pass through their street. This was because the deceased woman belonged to a particular caste.

Mrs. Savithri spoke to the youth in the area and sought their support. When she shared this incident with Mrs. Sivasankari Chandrasekaran, she immediately sponsored a funeral cart and later a motorised funeral cart to overcome such situations in future.

Once, two sisters (one was bedridden), who were abandoned, were heading towards the Marina beach to commit suicide. A shop vendor in Kutcherry road spotted them around 9pm and informed Mrs. Savithri who then called and asked me to meet the two sisters. I lived in the same area, hence counselled them and took them to Vishranthi. While one of the sisters passed away the very next day, the other (one was bedridden) lived for a few more years.

Savithri has been a second mother for all the abandoned elders. She has added meaning to their lives. Her presence is missed, and I pray that her aatma rests in peace.

Marie Banu

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Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM)

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**

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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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overty and health expenditure have an intricate relationship where one impacts the other significantly. When poor take a call to get themselves treated for a disease, there are many things they forego. “It is a tough call for them. They must compromise on livelihood, taking care of other children or elders in the family. They are compelled to go through this and the ensuing disturbance in family’s economy. There is a lot they have to decide about,” says Mr Anil Nair, CEO of St. Jude India ChildCare Centres, Mumbai.

In case of a tertiary disease like cancer, where there is recurring expenditure for a few years, the family gives up on their right to a decent living. “Paediatric cancer is affecting the poorer families even more. While treatment in itself is a big burden for them, managing care takers’ stay and food during the treatment period is a challenge. Families that are unable to manage this, eventually give up. I am sure we have lost many children due to this socio-economic predicament,” laments Nair, who is unable to accept such compromises on children’s right to life.

The founders of St. Jude India ChildCare Centres, Mrs and Mr Kaviratne were moved by such scenes outside Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai and decided to help parents with comfortable stay during the course of their children’s treatment. “If safe and hygienic place of stay can ensure completion of treatment why not provide it to them?,” say the founders who launched the initiative in 2006, in a small rented space to accommodate eight families. As oncologists noticed the difference this effort made on the children’s treatment, some doctors offered a building to the Centre to set up space to accommodate 41 families.

Driven by rigorous volunteer support and generous contributions, St Judes centres’ layouts made sure that families had their personal space too. However, all this did not come easily. Anil Nair recalls the effort that was needed to persuade families to live in their centres. “Families took time to understand that the centre was trying to provide them a home away from their homes. Doctors’ references were a big game changer and that helped counter all their qualms. Although free space and rations are offered, issues around toilet usage, kitchen routine, and restrictions on consumption of alcohol/cigarettes were a challenge,” he admits.

While all the standard operating procedures began to show a positive influence on children’s health, the team evaluated the genuine need for such an effort. Increasing incidence of cancer among children, specifically poor children, reiterated the relevance of this effort and need for expansion of centres in other cities too. An important reason for the success of this model is an open outlook where they chose to set up units in spaces offered and building capacities of other like-minded organisations to also engage in this activity. “This was, in every sense, a new strategy for us. As we replicate and expand, partnering with smaller organisations saves a lot of our time and ensures that the objective is never side-lined due to lopsided focus on space,” says Anil Nair.

As families came from different locations and backgrounds, the founders took a serious call on staff well-being too. “It could be emotionally draining for the staff to go through difficult conversations in every unit and get them used to the protocols here. Therefore, we made Counsellors available to support both staff as well as inmates. As recovering children also stay in these protected units, it led to reduced vulnerability to other life-threatening infections which otherwise they were prone to while dwelling on the pavements,” he adds.

All these concerns are more valid in a pandemic situation where the centre left no stone unturned in ensuring safety of the children and their families. “We stocked up supplies to ensure steady availability, followed strict hygiene protocols, prohibited visitors and volunteers, and arranged transport facilities for essential staff and families who were returning home after treatment. We also dispatched medicines to families living in villages and suggested that they stayed indoors for the safety of their children. All education activities and counselling sessions were delivered online to reduce all possible risks of succumbing to the virus. Every child’s life saved makes our effort worth,” says a contented Anil Nair.

The team has successfully established and replicated this model in nine cities, with a capacity to house 475 families across 38 centres. “Raising funds for our work is like running on a treadmill. We must keep going on because there is a growing need and it is bound to increase in the coming years. This is why working with smaller organisations with local reach seems a viable approach,” he says.

Shanmuga Priya, T
COVID-19 AFFECT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

Sustainable Development Goals

In the year 2000, leaders of 189 countries came together to solve the global issue of extreme poverty (population living below USD 1.25 per day) in all its form. It was then decided that till 2015 eight predetermined goals, named as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), will achieve targeted results. In 2015, United Nations reviewed MDGs and all stakeholders decided to take things forward in new and much detailed form. In 2015, Eight MDGs got extended to Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals in the year 2000 and then in 2015 were conceived and implemented to bring common focus for UN Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, “Everything we do during and after this crisis must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face.”

Steps Taken During Pandemic

The targets for SDGs were planned to be achieved in specified timeline i.e. 2030, and certainly after COVID-19 everyone is now susceptible about it. This pandemic affected development programs at local, national and global level. Development agencies have shifted their focus more on handling pandemic, leaving immediate development outputs on next priority. Governments and donor organizations have come forward to invest in data collection, this step helped in channelizing financial and non-financial resources to specific geographies.

“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” got derailed in most of the countries due to excess pressure on health infrastructure and human resources on one hand and managing social distance on the other. In many countries, disruption in health services brought halt to programs related to mandatory vaccination, screening of critical diseases, family planning, eye care related programs, etc., pushing all efforts back by almost a decade. Estimates show that Covid-19 will pull in additional 710 crore individuals living under extreme poverty conditions (SDG-1), this could be the indirect result of global financial slowdown or may be recession, still the debate is on. Income inequality, i.e. SDG-10 is another area of concern for many, vulnerable section of society is now more vulnerable than pre-covid situation. Pandemic also affected supply chains, logistics and production of essential goods including agriculture; this affected SDG-2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture) and stakeholders in the overall value chains including producers, labours and transporters working in rural areas.

Adding to these pandemic related issues is political tensions among super powers, which may lead to less or interrupted cooperation of developed nations towards achieving pre-determined SDGs by 2030. This also means that funding cooperation may see some criticality in coming days, or there may be a shift in geographies as per the funding priority on case to case or may be affinity basis. This also effects SDG-16 and SDG-17 which relates to “promote peace and safety” and “strengthening international partnerships” respectively. According to UN Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, “Everything we do during and after this crisis must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face.”

Way Forward

Looking at the width and depth of this pandemic and its immediate to long term after effects, think tanks and policy makers are now paying more attention to data gathering, analysis and using the same for policy advocacy. Globally, economists and statisticians are working hard to set up convenient and user friendly systems of data collection, this is to ensure the operational continuity of ongoing programs and plan for the future policy initiatives. Pandemic has affected development programs in a hard way, more than that monitoring and evaluation of projects is now going to be nightmare, not only for next cycle of funding, but also to ensure that right amount of funds get allocated for hard pressing issues.

International community should come forward to invest in data collection systems, its analysis and using the same for designing better projects and optimizing resources to achieve equitable inclusive growth.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi
Poverty is a vicious cycle—that is what we all read and get to learn from others’ experience. But, living in poverty is a totally different game.

Following her inner call, Dr. Aquinas moved to Odisha and what followed thereafter was a culmination of efforts that yearned to acknowledge the right to health of people.

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I consider social media as a very good medium not only for the public but also for the police officials.

V. Balakrishnan IPS shares with Marie Banu his passion for issues affecting women & children

Shri V. Balakrishnan IPS presently serves as Joint Commissioner of Police, North Zone, Greater Chennai City. He has over 17 years of experience in Law and Order and other subjects of policing. With the prestigious Chevening scholarship, he completed his Post Graduation Human Rights from University College of London and with ICAR fellowship he pursued MSc Agriculture from Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi.

During his stint as Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mylapore, he was the Chief Negotiating Officer in the Jallikattu protest movement in 2017. He also ensured rescue and rehabilitation of people from sluam areas in Kotturpuram in Adyar river during the unprecedented flood in Chennai.

Balakrishnan’s interest lies in fighting crime against women and children, rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents and cyber criminals.

In an exclusive interview, Shri V. Balakrishnan IPS shares with Marie Banu his passion for issues affecting women and children.

About the Police Boys Clubs and Policy Girls Clubs you launched in Trichy schools?

When I joined as DIG of Trichy, I had five districts under my command: Trichy, Pudukottai, Karur, Ariyalur and Perambalur. Although Trichy is a city, the rest of the delta region and the districts surrounding Trichy are essentially rural.

We analysed the problems in the area and identified issues related to women and children. One of the strategies we adopted to address these issues was to launch Police Boys Clubs and Police Girls clubs in the city. We identified five important issues that needed attention.

1. Suicide among women
2. Domestic violence
3. Child marriage
4. Crime against women
5. Teenage pregnancies

The problems were severe and immediate. We approached the College principals and police officials to launch the clubs. Initially, we had to attempt it in five colleges.

The impact of evidenced based policing with regard to crime against women?

Evidence based policing is a popular concept world over. But this has not been used in cases on crime against women in our country. We analysed 75,000 cases on crimes against women that occurred over the last 10 years and plotted them on a GIS map to identify the hotspots in each area.

Under the current set up, the crime against women is dealt by the All Women Police Stations. For each DSP Sub Division there is an All Women Police Station and in Trichy we have five of them. In each of these jurisdictions, we found five hotspots, hence introduced a Special Police Beat. It was more focused on prevention rather than reaction because the damage is already done when an incident happens in cases related to crimes against women.

The women police officers visit the villages and identify factors which are conducive for victims. The women police officers visit the villages and identify factors which are conducive for crime against women. This was done after a lot of deliberation and field studies. I have personally interacted with the village women and discussed issues they faced at home and outside. We were able to instill a sense of security in them.

We realised the need for improved follow up systems to be carried out for victims. Hence, we volunteered to conduct a ‘Family day’ at our Police Station every month. We invited families who had lodged complaints in the last six months to come and share their experiences so that other families could benefit. The intention was to ensure that they are living happy. We also invited Gynecologists on this occasion.

This was because there were many cases of suicide among women being reported. The intention was to ensure that they could not conceive and were harassed and stigmatised in their community.

Your effort to include Transgenders in Police Home guards in Madurai?

In 2014, before the Supreme Court pronounced that Transgenders should also be considered for Government jobs, we included them in the Police Home Guards. In fact, we were looking for solutions to find a legal source of income for them, especially for those who were involved in sexual crimes. This idea came up, as there was no bar on recruiting Home Guards in any service. It was basically a mindset, and we tried it out.

As it was a new initiative, I saw that the initial teething issues were sorted out. After I got transferred, it continued for a while and then died out. Fortunately, the Supreme Court Judgement now makes them eligible for recruitment in Government jobs.

Is the present media (including social media) a bane or boon for policing?

I was in Indian Information Service and worked for Press Information Bureau for a while. I had close interactions with the top journalists in Delhi and have maintained a friendly relationship with the media from the beginning. According to me, whenever there is a problem with the authorities and the media, it is due to the failure to understand each other’s compulsions.

Media want to take the information to the public first while the authorities have a protocol to follow before they communicate to the public.

The problem with social media is that there is no time tag or credibility check attached. It is an extension of freedom of expression although there are constitutional limitations in certain areas. We cannot discredit the entire social media just because some people are misusing it. Social media gives lot of power to the common man and when one uses it liberally, we should try to inculcate a sense of responsibility in citizens. Curtailing the freedom in social media is not a solution.

Recently, there was a news item about Kasimedu fishing harbour, but the picture shown was a file photo—which was taken before the incident happened. Unwittingly, they ended up in sensationalising the entire issue. A sense of responsibility is therefore essential while reporting.

I consider social media as a very good medium not only for the public but also for the police officials. This is the fastest medium now, faster than 24x7 news channels. When news with videos are posted, the credibility increases. Sometimes, the videos are also edited and projected out of context. Readers should not be judgmental and jump to conclusions. They should verify the facts and the source of information.

As a police officer, social media has been extremely useful for me as I am able to communicate with the public. Also, the media persons take a cue from my posts and if it is a news of interest, they collect more details.