

Conversations Today

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

We have heard numerous stories about girls or women who have faced sexual harassment. Some of these have been grim, appalling and agonizing to hear, however not so painful when compared to the actual harassment they have actually faced.

The recent news rounds gives us reason to discuss this issue here.

Every girl or woman, has her right to live in a safe and free environment and should be confident to stand up and voice her concerns when this is not available. Sexual harassment of women has existed for ages and across societies, both rich and poor. It is only in recent times that we are talking about it seriously, and having laws that seek to provide a safer work environment for women.

In India, Supreme Court recognised the need for a law and laid down the Vishaka Guidelines against sexual harassment at the workplace in 1997. 16 years later, Parliament enacted the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

While it is mandatory to have an Internal Complaints Committee in every organisation— that has more than 10 employees, and many organisations showing on record the existence of such committees— how many of them are really effective?

Research shows that 70 percent of women do not report sexual harassment at their workplace as their employers show poor compliance. According to National Crime Records Bureau data, the cases of sexual harassment within office premises has more than doubled (from 57 to 119) between 2014 and 2015. There has also been a 51 percent rise (from 469 to 714) in sexual harassment cases at other places related to work during this period.

When a woman files a complaint of sexual harassment at workplace, most employers try to settle the issue amicably by ordering a transfer to the employee who has been accused or getting the person to apologise. Is this enough? What is the path forward?

People in authority or influential posts should contemplate on how they have been behaving in the work environment, especially with women coworkers. Awareness about the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 should be provided to all employees and appropriate action should be taken by the Internal Complaints Committee whenever a complaint has been filed. The organisation should be morally responsible for their employees even after they leave the workplace. It is better to act now than complain later.

—Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

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The Three Lenses

We can't change the way others treat us, but we can change the way we view the reality by using the lenses.



We all cherish to connect to our essence or presence. This is the space from where we experience freedom and creativity. There is serenity and true relaxation. However, certain situations or people trigger us and we move away from our presence. In those situations, if we can look at our experience and our world with these 3 lenses. Examining the situation through these “lenses” can yield important insights and encourage you to shift your thinking.

The wide lens. Using this lens requires asking yourself two simple questions when you feel triggered.

- What are the facts in this situation?
- What's the story I'm telling myself about those facts? What do I really want as an outcome?
- The reverse lens. This lens requires viewing the world through the lens of the person who triggered you. It doesn't mean sacrificing your own point of view but

rather widening your perspective. With the reverse lens, you ask yourself:

- What is this person feeling, and in what ways does that make sense?
- Where's my responsibility in all this?
- The long lens. Unfortunately, sometimes you will not find a reasonable justification for someone else's actions, and no amount of understanding their perspective will help. The long lens perspective asks you to distance yourself from the situation.
- When this occurs, begin with this question:
- Regardless of how I feel about what's happening right now, how can I grow and learn from this experience?

Source: Tony Schwartz, a pioneer of human potential movement.

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.

Waste, from the scratch



It is time that we all seriously took individual responsibility to the waste we create. In the absence of a holistic ecosystem for waste management, responsibility at the user level is the critical step forward. “The sooner we realise this, the better. With only few end destinations in place to manage the segregated waste, all that we are equipped to do right now is only a small fixture in the maze,” says Priyanka Jariwala, Project Manager at Saahas (a non-profit working in the field of waste management) in Bengaluru.

Hailing from Surat, Priyanka was always beset by the limited opportunities her city offered. In spite of pursuing her favourite course in her post-graduation (Biotechnology), she wasn’t able to edge a career in the field. “My family preferred me to stay with them. So, seeking career opportunities outside Gujarat was not an option for me. Learning that there was no scope in biotechnology, I took to my mother’s advice,” she says. Her mother, Chairperson of Apollo Clinics in Surat handling Operations, suggested that Priyanka complete Master Degree in Hospital management and join her in the same field.

It was during her Master’s in Public Health that Priyanka realised her true interest. She was inclined to community health and looked forward to working with people, paying attention to service provision. “I was more interested in working with people than managing space. I was intrigued by the genesis of health programmes and policies, and hoped to get into a responsible position soon after the course,” she recalls.

As she had expected, Priyanka got to work with the National Rural Health Mission as its District Programme Coordinator in Kheda district, Gujarat. Inspired by the vision of the programme – ‘health for all’, she felt that she had landed at the right job and all her endeavours would ensure that the Central Government programmes reached all villages, panchayats, cities and districts thereby improving the lives of poor people. Despite all the enthusiasm and the impressive goals she was chasing, she found that three simple yet significant factors were missing. “There weren’t enough doctors to serve the remote villages.

People were hardly aware of their entitlements and those who were aware were crippled from accessing due to the lack of documents that ascertain their status of poverty. This puzzle never moved towards a solution. Programmes continued, perpetuating inequity. And I, could not witness all this. All impressive targets were simply numbers that were not supported by appropriate interventions to bring about a lasting development. I was not only disappointed, but annoyed at the state of affairs,” she elaborates.

Back in Surat in 2013, Priyanka decided to focus on research in health that could have an impact on health policies. She joined Urban Health and Climate Resilience Centre as a Consultant for Public Health and coordinated their research projects. While the exposure and nature of work honed her skills, Priyanka was simultaneously being drawn towards a new concern that disturbed her. Days of field work forced her to face the enormous trash the city created. “As a resident of Surat, I never came across the scale of this menace. I felt people literally drowning in their waste”. She soon began to research on the waste management principles and models followed by big companies. “I embarked on this journey with an elementary understanding of the potential waste management promised. With no background and guidance, a colleague’s chance reference to Saahas’ and CSIM’s work gave me new hopes,” she says.

Priyanka’s homework and research began again. She learnt about small scale organisations and enterprises trying to face the challenge of solid waste management with the infrastructure in place and those that they could build upon. Inspired by Saahas’ vision, she decided to intern with them and further learn the innards of this sector. A seven-month internship helped her comprehend the scene of waste management in the country. “It is a completely different battle here, compared to other issues because no stakeholder understands his/her role in waste creation. In a country where city wide solutions are not established everywhere, the limited resources and space delegated to managing waste are only a miniscule, given the scale of the problem. Sweeping or gathering all waste together

for disposal is not the end. Households have a larger role to play beyond gathering and segregating. We must all remember that some remote region is facing the wrath of waste we create,” she warns.

During her internship in Bangalore, Priyanka also completed CSIM’s SEOP programme, which helped her visualise her own enterprise. Having decided to work in the field of solid waste management, she felt that the design of the course allowed her to imagine her enterprise as a legal entity, backed by a suitable structure that addressed the limitations in waste management other organisations faced. “It was all clear and happened faster in my mind. No doubt, I was ambitious. Waste management is a grave problem and the fact that one has to work with the government for a long term, sustainable change got me thinking hard. How do I make this a priority for all stakeholders? How do I enable citizen engagement? Where do I start? My first attempt to file a tender for Vadodara Municipal Corporation turned futile,” shares a disappointed Priyanka.

While her research about the scope and opportunities in her city continued, she realised that her lessons from CSIM were useful for her sister’s enterprise as well. She got ‘Khadi Cult’, an enterprise promoting sustainable fashion through the use of khadi, registered. Further, she went on to help her sister make Khadi Cult a ‘zero waste’ enterprise, reusing all the scrap in such a way that there was nothing left to reach the land fill. “Personally, this was a big accomplishment for us and a big source of motivation. All the scrap and waste created was used to make quilts, wall hangings, home décor items, chairs, footwear, garments for new borns, a variety of bags, tool case and many others. Instead of the paper bags they gave to customers, Khadi Cult shifted to using cloth bags, produced by wives of security guards working in a diamond company. We hand printed them to add value. Today customers love these bags so much that they want to buy them,” she adds.

Priyanka simultaneously worked on building her own enterprise. As a city that is yet to wake up to the crisis, unlike Bangalore, she had to start from the scratch. After a few months, she got two clients who barely recognised the value of the processes she was initiating. Yet, she went ahead because she had to start somewhere and demonstrate the urging need for such an initiative. She also pitched in for CSR engagement in five companies in and around Surat. “Things moved very slowly. I tried every option in hand. I found buyers for the different products Saahas produced from recycling waste. My survival was in question too. My negotiations for waste management in a Bharuch based company commenced in 2016. I submitted the proposal in July 2017, which has just got approved,” laughs Priyanka. One thing that continues to challenge her is the attitude towards waste. “When this is hardly a priority, convincing stake holders to invest is a huge challenge,” she exclaims.

Given the pace of development in Surat, Priyanka felt that moving to Bangalore would be helpful for her to gain experience and simultaneously manage the opportunities coming up in Surat. “It was a tough call,” she iterates. Presently, she is the Project Manager at Saahas, building the Surat vertical and executing the Bharuch project with her small team. Her vision is to enable Surat work on its end destination for waste management. The efforts to segregate waste at the residential level, she feels, will be futile if the city does not build its end destination for this waste. “Else, we have to accumulate and then transport to where a destination is in place. This not only makes the process way too expensive, but inconvenient and un-sustainable. City based thinking must emerge in waste management,” asserts Priyanka.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Leader & Leadership Matters...

3. Optimization: The ordinary life with extraordinary everyday stories



Meaning of Optimization – The Leader puts extra efforts when exploring options available to achieve his/her ambitions. (LOI, www.discoverself.com). The dictionary meaning is the action of making the best or most effective use of a situation or resource. Synonyms are boost, increment, augmentation, maximization and the antonyms are decline, depletion, shrinkage & so on.

The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra”, Jimmy Johnson Ordinary leaders speak of responsibilities and extraordinary leaders speak of Optimization. The ability to explore options and alternatives to achieve a task is termed as optimization.

While responsibility ensures action orientation optimization ensures the best choice to achieve the goal in a safest and smartest way. Responsibility ensures hard work while optimization ensures smart work. Being smart need not necessarily mean using any means to achieve the goal. It means being strategic enough to recognize and create new avenues to achieve the goal. Optimizations enables multi-tasking and also throws open alternate ways of reaching the goal when one is stuck with challenges. Optimization calls for ability to analyze, identify and being open to explore new pathways, seek and receive help from others, take risks and be willing to fail in the attempts.

To understand Optimization, I want you to meet Lalita S Iyer, 49 years young, bubbly, energetic, ever optimistic lovely lady from Bangalore. She has always dared to go where her passion is and not leave a stone unturned to reach her goals. She schooled in Mumbai and Delhi and graduated in Law. Soon she knew her heart wasn't in being an advocate. She dared to completely switch her career into medical transcription which connected her love for English and medicine. Having held senior positions, now she is a freelancer working for physicians and hospitals in the US and UK. As an epitome of optimization, she realized a deep affiliation she had to animal welfare. She now devotes her free time towards promoting animal rights and welfare through education and awareness and working to build a culture of tolerance and compassion towards our fellow creatures. She has fostered a huge number of pups and found loving homes for them. She networks and coordinates with other animal lovers, NGOs, volunteers, etc., to help raise awareness about prevention of cruelty, discourage backyard breeding and promoting adoptions, participating in rescues, lost and found cases, animal birth control programs, fund raising, care of strays, promoting desi dogs, etc. She herself is a mom of 3 dogs. She proudly wears the nickname “Nai Auntie” in the neighborhood.

Lalita, what does the word Optimization mean to you? And why is it important to Optimize?

“Optimization, to me is to accomplish something in the most efficient manner; No waste of effort, time or energy; basically, the shortest route to something, yet all ethical and balanced; nothing less or more, just right”. Lalita says Optimization is important because that is the way,

- Wastage of time and effort is controlled
- Changes can be ushered in an otherwise routine outdated processes
- Find some out of box possibilities
- Keep alternatives handy when stuck midway
- Solving complicated issues in the most simple way



Interesting points. Lalita, tell me how do I understand this work practically?

Lalita explains that Medical transcription involves listening to dictation of a doctor about a patient treatment process and typing the same and send it back to them. The document thus sent goes into the record. The payment is done by the lines sent and therefore, productivity is measured by the lines and perfection in work. Time is limited and to increase productivity both quality and quantity is important. Optimization here would be is to reduce the errors and mistakes while transcribing so that the repair work is least. She adds, “Transcriptionists have to continuously work to improve themselves so that they are able to do more in the available time and do it perfectly too”.



But, how do you do connect optimization with the Animal welfare work that you do?

Whenever Lalita looks for adoption, she has to figure out a lot before she can find the

right home for the abandoned dogs. She has to get maximum responses in shortest possible time. She identifies the target audience on social media, writes the posts creatively and reach out to them. She also has to decide whom to tag and who will give her the maximum spread and fastest reach. This is something that involves continuously exploring avenues and keeping the results in memory which will come of use the next time. Lalita adds, “For rescue operations too getting help in shortest time and in best way is vital and without optimization, we can't do it. Every foster puppy teaches me something new and I make a note of it and use it next time”.

You are known for Optimization in family, work and amongst friends. When did you learn this?

“Well, I think it came long back right from high school times I think. As a little girl, I had a love for trivia; I paid attention to what most people usually missed. I was also a person who knew little facts of things and learnt about them because I always thought it will come of use one day. But when I stepped into Law and later medical transcription, this attitude of paying attention to little things became more pronounced. I first realized, finding the right profession fit itself was the Optimization of my life. I was a natural born editor and my flair for language made me a keen learner. While it helped a bit in Law; it was the best in transcription work. My travels to USA, their accent, interest in their names, places – all that was considered Trivia and waste were the ones that came of maximum use to me”. It is to be noted that Lalita and her peers began at the same position when they started but soon amongst 50 employees, 5 had to be chosen as editors and Lalita was one of the top most. She grew fast and was the first person to become Quality control and assurance manager for 150 people in her organization. Lalita includes, “my Father was my best mentor. He taught me with the limited resources how to get the best – be it cooking, writing or mechanical stuff; as a Joint Managing Director of a large corporation, he taught me how to choose the best option and best person to get the work done and strike two mangoes with one stone. He would take me along for every lecture of his and make me reflect on his words”.

How do we learn to Optimize?

According to Lalita, the first belief that we have to do away with is that any one method, usually my method should work. We need to believe there is no one way of getting things done. For every problem there is a solution available and we need to go that extra mile in life and stretch to find the solution.

An agile active mind is the Optimizing mind, she says. Doing word puzzles, travelling and being interested in anything new, curious to explore and make full use of any opportunity that comes along in life enables Optimization.

Many ways or practices can help the brain to retrieve stored data and Lalita uses them. Examples:

- Giving a break gives a breakthrough. The conscious mind may not have found it but the subconscious mind will get it.
- Switching off when stuck – do totally different activity for a while and not to keep thinking – move to a physical activity and reset the mind. The alternative solution may pop up.
- Take a walk, listen or play music and calm the nerves
- Being open to ideas when people stretch to help out
- Seek ideas and share the doubts without hesitation
- Get away from Ego and Image saving practices in life
- Think ahead, pre-empt, predict and be proactive
- Rigidity is the opposite of Optimization, Beware!
- Move and change locations to see from other perspectives
- To know when to not waste time trying to figure out and learn to let go and move on

“The most critical part is to learn from every experience, document it and identify what you did extra that was not done before and remember to use that in future”.

Lalita, have you had instances where you did not optimize? What was the impact of it?

“At one point in my work, I was obsessed with perfection and my obsession to quality had affected my speed in a bad way. I had the pride of being a perfectionist. After a long time, one day I realized I was not optimizing my time and efforts. I observed my colleagues and learnt many shortcuts on the key board. I learnt the quick correct feature similar to auto correct and realized saving key strokes and avoiding mistakes are both optimization. I learnt that many simple things lead to Optimization.”

Lalita, share any interesting unusual experience of optimization at work space

“Oh, I have had interesting experiences. Once there was a very difficult dictation and no one in office actually got it. It said, ‘_____ day on which a patient got it’. The voice in the recording was not clear at all. I was not getting the word. Any amount of rewind/ replay did not help. I stopped work and sat quiet. I closed my eyes and in a few seconds, the Washington memorial picture came to my mind. I was wondering why I am thinking of Washington memorial picture and suddenly it struck me that the word was ‘Memorial day’. My brain had caught it



from the storage I had but my conscious mind was not recognizing it. Most time brain is faster in processing, but comprehending the process is what takes time”.

“While working on finding parents for the dogs, there are always new situations that we face and I have to learn from it. Every foster pup that I keep in my house has a new behaviour and I have had instances where in split seconds there is a fight and the bigger dog has snapped. I have to be ready with alternatives to handle the situation. It is very easy to give up and not undertake the less travelled path. But I have always chosen to find an alternative and walk in the path less travelled. This has only brought in a richer, more fulfilled



wholesome life for me and the others around me”.

Lalita says OPTIMIZATION IS EQUAL TO CONTINUOUS LEARNING. It is FIGURING OUT THE SAFEST AND THE BEST WAY. Being flexible is very critical to optimization. Ability to Optimize has made Lalita agile and people have automatically chosen her to lead them in periods of crisis and challenge.

Lalita is clear when she says, “Optimization can never be at the cost of ethics or Quality”. Let us discuss Quality/ detailing in next article.

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath

Initiative



This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done, and Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.

Explicit Learning

- We should learn to take initiative in life.
- 'Passing the buck' is an easy game to play.
- Doing the job is important, not waiting for others to do it.

Introspective Learning

- What is the nature of 'Initiative'?
- Why do I pass the buck?
- How do I start taking initiative?

URBAN UPLIFTMENT

Saath will be able to empower two lakh vulnerable families by 2020, by working for their livelihoods, housing (R&R), financial inclusion, community leadership and education



Urbanization is growing at a fast and unstoppable pace. In 2004, UN-Habitat estimated that 940 million people—over 30% of the world urban population—were living in slums. Since the population currently grows faster in slums than in other urban areas, this figure could reach 2.8 billion by 2030 (Lopez Moreno, 2003). This rapid urbanization has brought in its wake increasing poverty, informality, and exclusion. As per the Census of 2001 by Government of India, it was startling to note that more than 40% of urban Indians live in areas classified as slums. These are the people involved in daily supplies, transportation, sanitation, etc. playing a crucial role in making of any city.

The term ‘urban poor’ has been one of the more telling indicators of how poverty has seeped into the confines of advanced, urban societies today. In large part it involves migrant and inhabitants of informal settlements. In other words: a segment of population whose members go about in search of livelihood from city to city, playing a crucial role towards day-to-day functioning but ironically remain devoid of settlement, themselves. As a result these workers remain one of the most neglected and marginalized sections of modern society.

Since its inception in 1989, Saath has worked with the urban poor. Working on a need-based intervention model, Saath initiated operations as an informal youth group in Behrampura, Ahmedabad. “Saath’s founder Mr Rajendra Joshi used to visit the area and engage with the youth in sports,” recalls Niraj Jani (Executive Director), while tracing the early days of the organization, “One of these days, while enjoying a conversation, he learnt about the critical aspects of the community that needed to be worked upon. This is the way Saath has involved in understanding the needs of the community.”

Joshi would then identify community leaders, who would then be instrumental in facilitating the process of service.

Issues like health and sanitation were the most relevant in the 90s, but later on youth empowerment, savings and education gained more relevance. “As a result, irrelevant programs ceased to function and the new relevant ones were introduced,” says Joshi. Gradually, trust developed between Saath and members of the community. Another segment of the same community resided in an area called Vasna, which became the next area of intervention. “During the 1990s, in collaboration with Municipal Corporation, corporates, other NGOs, state government departments, Saath implemented its flagship program called Integrated Slum Development Project (ISDP). As the name suggests, it looked beyond infrastructural improvements of the slums and started adopting an integrated approach. The activities that were



conducted with the communities included non-formal education, livelihood, health, savings and credit, and housing to name a few. It aimed at identifying the community leaders who would act as change agents for different developmental aspects. It was done through forming Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Self Help Groups (SHGs).” Joshi explains.

Until the Bhuj Earthquake of 2001, Saath had presence in Ahmedabad before it began work at Kutch where it began relief work, focussing on the epicentre of the earthquake. After the Gujarat Riots of 2002, Saath started working in multiple areas for rehabilitation and largely in minority dominant area, which required intervention at multiple levels. “Immediately post riots, Saath got an opportunity to work with Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) across the city. This was the largest expansion within the city,” Niraj explains.

In 2005, Saath began a journey to pioneer another programme named ‘Udaan’, which aimed at providing formal training to the youth belonging to the informal settlement. The objective was simple: placement in formal job roles. Inspired by the model, The Gujarat Government joined hands with Saath to implement it in eight major cities.

“Simultaneously, the Rajasthan Government also adopted the model and Saath trained over 55,000 youth with more than 75% of placements,” says Shikha, “All the programmes of Saath, including affordable housing, rehabilitation and financial inclusion have branched out through crucial needs of the community at the particular time.”

During the implementation of any program, the community is an equally responsible partner for its success and sustainability. “This requires handholding support and capacity building of members, who in a way plays a major role in decision making process. Through empowerment, new social enterprises have developed. Based on the need, the program innovates itself at the next level ensuring win-win situation for all the partners,” says Joshi, “Any programme that Saath has undertaken has served as a means to achieve the vision of integrated development and not an end.” This includes programmes surrounding livelihood, education, microfinance, governance or housing.

With Government schemes like Skill India forming great opportunities for formal livelihood, informal livelihood has been neglected. “This is an irony as 80% of the country’s economy is dependent of informal sector which consists of micro-entrepreneurs, construction workers, electricians and plumbers among others,” points out Niraj.

As it steps into the future, Saath envisions the need to focus more on education, informal livelihood, and shelter—largely focusing on migrants. It plans to achieve this through a four-pronged process.

1. Implementation: as per the needs of the community
2. Facilitation: through possible linkages
3. Partnership: for wider outreach, strength and accountability
4. Data collection and information dissemination: for influencing existing policies

“Saath will follow a systematic approach to scale up in next three years,” says Niraj, “We have been

exploring the avenues where scaling can be done.” The organization is now looking at the following approaches:

- Successful models that are proving to be effective can be replicated to the new geographies considering its local context and needs
- Existing programs can be strengthened through rigorous monitoring emphasizing on quality and exploring innovative scopes
- New areas of work will be explored either based on the needs of the communities or existing partners may wish to expand in other regions or sectors

In last two years, Saath has expanded to Bihar (Madhwapur) and Jharkhand (Ranchi & Deoghar) for livelihood programs in collaboration with government. It also implements Financial Literacy Program that is aimed at facilitating affordable housing to informal settlement dwellers in Rajasthan (Jaipur), Uttar Pradesh (Varanasi), and Jharkhand (Ranchi). It is going to implement the same project in Chattisgarh (Raipur) and a few other cities of India.

“By utilizing Saath’s three decades of experience working with the communities, its market and need based innovative approach within multiple sectors, its reach and engaging with the stakeholders Saath will be able to empower two lakh vulnerable families by 2020, by working for their livelihoods, housing (R&R), financial inclusion, community leadership and education,” says Niraj, explaining what the future might hold. But to succeed, Saath will work towards building capacities, increasing its team in terms of members and community leaders. But that’s not all. “We need to use technology for bringing quality, cost-effectiveness monitoring, bring accountability, expand its current reach, leverage inter-linkages and bring in more funds by taking new approach and tapping new sources,” says Niraj, signing off.



DEVELOPING DEVOLUTION WITH SOCIAL ACCOUNTING & AUDIT

Social Audit can demonstrate to health and other commissioners that service users and staff are indeed involved in the planning, operation and management of services from social enterprises.

I believe that Social Accounting and Audit (SAA) can be a framework for accountability and reporting, which, if used to support public procurement, will enable devolution. Despite the current move towards greater control of purchasing by central government in Westminster, SAA can be a way to make devolution work.

Devolution is commonly understood to be the transfer of functions previously exercised by ministers and the national parliament to a subordinate elected body on a geographical basis.

In Greater Manchester (GM), we have been leading the way. Budgets for health and social care, planning and housing, business support and low carbon technologies have been entrusted to sub-regional level by Government.

Furthermore, 'social value' is now enshrined in GM-wide Procurement Policy, and the need to maximise spending power for the benefit of local people – to achieve a social, environmental and economic impact – is recognised as a major way to 'sweat' public, private and third sector investment for the common good.

Over 10 years ago, at the New Local Government conference, David Milliband announced, 'at the local level we need a stronger framework of

opportunity and responsibility – in fact a double devolution, not just to the Town Hall but beyond, to neighbourhoods and individual citizens'.

The Office of the Third Sector (now Civil Society) was created and local authorities were encouraged to devolve the delivery of local services to local people.

But it didn't quite happen like that...

What we have in GM isn't a 'double devolution', but it is one where the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector has a strong voice. Words like 'co-production', 'co-design', 'asset based approaches' and 'reform' are used to indicate an evolving sense of, 'we are all in it together'. The delivery isn't yet devolved to local people.

At the heart of GM devolution is a need to make the local economy sustainable. It is recognised that if this is to work, voluntary, community, social enterprise organisations, neighbourhoods and citizens must be ready and able to take the opportunity and responsibility. And they must convince Town Halls that they can deliver. Maybe therefore, this is why the double devolution hasn't really happened?

SAA is not a new concept, having been implemented in various forms and by a wide range of organisations since

the 1970s. But there is a growing number of organisations in GM that have adopted this approach to help them measure their overall impact and quality by integrating the 'proving – improving – and be accountable' processes into their day-to-day operations.

SAA accurately describes what an organisation is achieving in economic, social and environmental terms, and allows it to demonstrate to others what its principle purposes are and what it does. It assesses social and community enterprises in a holistic way, incorporating both the views of everyone connected with the organisation and measuring indicators of its success.

The framework also includes independent verification, an audit process whereby the results can be proved to be robust and reliable, which can give confidence to both the organisation and the Town Hall looking to devolve responsibility or place a contract.

One of the main elements of SAA is the comprehensive involvement of an organisation's stakeholders, and this can prove one of the most important reasons for procuring from the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. SAA can demonstrate to health and other

commissioners that service users and staff are indeed involved in the planning, operation and management of services from social enterprises.

Unlimited Potential (UP) is a social enterprise providing health and happiness services, which grew up in the Charlestown and Lower Kersal area of Salford.

Formed by residents participating in a local health task group, and now tackling health issues in partnership with local people, its work includes managing services at two local healthy living centres, health outreach services and work which addresses the specific health and happiness issues of local residents.

UP is very keen to prove its 'positive impact' as it develops a sustainable business strategy, and has used social accounting and audit to do this.

UP's ability to demonstrate the benefits of its work through social accounting and audit, adds 'value' to public service commissioners who are provided with evidence of partnership working, involvement of local people in the design and management of services, innovation, responsiveness to local need and local ownership. This has contributed to UP becoming a nationally recognised and respected social enterprise.

SAA can be used to demonstrate individual and collective strengths, prove the sector's competence as providers of public services, and meeting the challenge of taking local responsibility and citizen led action.

It can help devolution to happen.

—Anne Lythgoe

Vice Chair &

Treasurer/Finance Director

www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk

Campaigning for Change



In the context of women empowerment, the number of programmes, missions and the scale of their coverage go on to emphasise the significance of gender equity. The sub set of adolescent girls calls for a greater attention as that is the age when women mature physically and mentally. Besides, this is the time they succumb to many irrational social practices like child marriage. “This age group needs special and focussed attention in order to have a lasting impact on the situation of women across all caste and class groups,” insists Ms Mamatha Raghuvver, Founder of Tharuni Voluntary Organisation in Hyderabad.

Mamatha and her journalist mother have always tried to help children of their maids. They felt that domestic workers needed support services to move beyond their struggle for survival. “Else, their girl children would follow the same path, in spite of going through all efforts to complete elementary education. That’s unfair and unjust,” says Mamatha.

Soon, Mamatha and her mother decided to do organised work to help as many girl children as possible. Thus was born Tharuni, in the year 2000. In her engagement with a World Bank project, she was shocked to learn that girls between 10-18 years of age were not given the attention they required. “A crucial age group was not prioritised. That is the period to mould them in the right direction. Ignoring this age group comes with a huge social cost,” she warns.

Her marriage to an IFS officer also allowed Mamatha to explore new opportunities to work for girl children. His tenure as the Project Director for Integrated Child Development Scheme gave the mother-daughter duo to gain experience through a World Bank project. “This was our foundation. We saw how multiple issues were dealt with simultaneously, on a large scale. While the scale amused us, we were impressed with the micro level changes it brought about in the target group,” recalls Mamatha.

Mamatha shifted to Warangal due to her husband’s transfer. She was taken

aback by the extent of backwardness in the district and the resultant discrimination women and girls faced here. She immediately decided to start her work because she knew that reaching out to children of domestic workers will not improve the larger picture. She adopted 10 government girls’ high schools and started teaching children about reproductive health, life skills, communication, etc. Very soon, she was teaching 1000 girls in class 6 to 10 every year. Given the number of girls Tharuni reached out to and the diversity in these communities, she had to focus on other issues that disturbed the children from completing their school education. Advocacy and lobbying had to continue incessantly.

Anaemia among girls emerged as a grave concern at one point. Tharuni’s presence helped the local government distribute IFA tablets to a large section of the girls. The organisation also observed that girls were inevitably engaged in domestic work in their own houses and were seen as valuable labour pool during the agriculture season. So, the focus now glared on child labour. “Our strategy was the same - advocacy, awareness and sensitisation. We worked with a range of stake holders and all along our vision was very clear - we needed to nurture a society that accepted girls and women as equal citizens, giving them the space they deserved and needed,” she says.

Soon, the prevalence of child marriages came into focus. Apart from the regular strategy, Tharuni had to work exclusively with the girls to change the situation. The Balika Melas formed in the schools became very active in reporting about child marriages. In a span of three months, Tharuni stopped 40 child marriages with the help of these girls. A study revealed that 1500 child marriages happened every year and girls as young as seven years of age were getting married to older men.

“Tharuni, any day is a third party. Apathy from the police who do not seriously register cases and a legislation with little penalty that does not actually scare the communities, affected our reach. Therefore, we started our next

campaign, this time producing a puppet show and organising street plays. We also conducted capacity building programmes to reach out to government officials. Different methods were used to reach out to every stake holder who was capable of improving the lives of these girls,” explains Mamatha, adding that Tharuni walked the extra mile to raise the issue in every platform possible.

While advocacy, campaigning did not yield results, Tharuni resorted to legal activism. Non-cooperation from the local police forced the team to approach National Human Rights Commission in New Delhi, with a status report of 60 child marriages that were going to happen in the next two months. The order from NHRC did not turn the tide as only eight marriages were stopped. The second level of interaction brought Tharuni to the doors of National Commission for Women. At long last, a Parliamentary Committee was formed, with Tharuni as a member, to revise the legislation on child marriage. “The Prevention of Child Marriages Act of 2006 was a big achievement for us. Besides the penalty and jail term, all our suggestions on rehabilitation of the victims were accepted. Child marriages that were executed in secrecy could now be declared null and void. Any community member who encouraged child marriage was also booked. Soon, work scaled to all districts and Tharuni was stopping child marriages in all the districts of the state. We prevented over 1700 child marriages. Our excitement knew no limits,” reminisces Mamatha.

Tharuni became a resource organisation training different stake holders, organising capacity building programmes and also published IEC materials in different languages. Then came the idea of Balika Sanghas, i.e. girl child clubs. With about 10-20 girls in a group, it was designed as an entity in itself that allowed the girls to socialise, play, learn collectively about their rights at resource centres established by Tharuni. Soon it also became the ideal place for vocational training and engaging in village development activities. “Our girls became a collective

voice who knew to represent themselves, their interests and also that of their communities. They stopped child marriages and also refused to succumb to the practice. They have enabled construction of village schools and also laying of roads that led to these schools. Our Balika Sanghas have reached out to more than 13,000 girls. Earlier our girls learnt to make incense sticks, tailoring and other skills. Today, they have upgraded themselves to repairing mobiles and other electronics. They are evolving and so has Tharuni in the last two decades,” adds Mamatha.

Tharuni has also impacted child labour in Warangal through similar efforts. Today, there is no child labour in the district of Warangal in Telangana. As is the journey of an advocacy organisation, Tharuni also had to refine its focus and approach all along, depending on the issue and stake holders it dealt with. With every issue reaching a new level of representation, Tharuni marched ahead intervening in another pressing concern. “I guess that is part of an organisation’s evolution. It is only natural that we move from one issue to another, so that all efforts culminate to provide an improved standard of life for our girl children. An isolated focus on an issue can hardly change the picture,” says Mamatha.

Campaigns on female infanticide, foeticide and child sexual abuse followed suit. Tharuni Ooyala, the cradle programme became a huge success and within a year 36 children were given in adoption through the Department of Women and Child Development. Medical audits of the diagnostic centres are also carried out periodically to check the unauthorised abortions. Mamatha feels that Tharuni has a long way to go in realising its vision, yet she is content that legal activism has empowered Tharuni and other like-minded organisations to come together to seek legislative and institutional responses against social practices that have stalled holistic development of children, specially girls, for decades.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Mental illness, not mental weakness

Cancer survivors are often called heroes. Why aren't those who battle mental health?

Nine out of 10 people say those with mental illness can get better if they want to. And five out of 10 say it is a sign of personal weakness. Those results from a 2015 survey by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) in Singapore baffle Shafiqah Ramani, a mental health advocate who has borderline personality disorder.

"I always thought it was really funny that people see those with mental health issues as weak and can actually get out of their illness if they tried hard enough, but cancer survivors get called survivors," she says. "For people with mental health issues, everything can be a battle, such as getting up from bed. So I think fighting to do those little things every day is what makes you a hero."

After trying to hide her feelings of being neglected by her father for two years, Shafiqah says she "imploded" and attempted suicide for the first time at the age of 11. In polytechnic, she was severely bullied by her classmates. This led to many more suicide attempts and a couple of admissions into IMH. Last year, when she was in her second year of university, she dropped out of school and had to be in a psychiatric ward for two months. "I still get haunted by suicidal tendencies, but I have a very strong reason to keep fighting because I'm not only fighting for myself, but also my friends."

You see, Shafiqah, is not just a mental health patient – she's a social entrepreneur who's tackling mental health issues through technology. She and her team have created Psychkick, a mobile app that aims to make cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) – the most widely-used therapy for treating mental disorders – more engaging for patients.

Boring and outdated

In cognitive behavioural therapy, patients usually have to fill out a paper form between sessions. Some find this "boring and outdated" and about 60% do not do their CBT assignments properly, writing random things just before their next therapy session, according to Shafiqah's informal survey of 500 patients. The app aims to improve therapy outcomes by allowing active monitoring of patients between sessions and making the assignments more experientially appealing.

"Psychkick is basically a means for us to provide support for individuals with mental health issues. We call them heroes and we are like their sidekicks to help them in their recovery." The Singapore Centre for Social Enterprise has given Psychkick start-up funding for its beta-testing phase.

Shafiqah's work with Psychkick involves forging relationships with people with mental health issues, and seeing them regularly to find out what they like and dislike about their treatment. In her quest to institute Psychkick in the public health system, she also meets with mental health professionals, IT professionals and health ministry officials. But her efforts to help her peers do not stop with the app. She has been speaking to government ministers about getting people with mental health conditions the same kind of support that those with physical disabilities get. She has also been sharing her story so more people understand mental health issues, speaking to psychology students at university and to other start-up founders, as well as at places like the Singapore International Foundation's Young Social Entrepreneurs programme, the



LeapForGood initiative and a SCAPE community youth project called 'In My Shoes'.

"The view of many Singaporeans is that individuals with mental health issues are weak and can get out of their challenges through effort, but they wouldn't say the same for those with physical disabilities. I think one way to increase empathy towards individuals with mental health issues is to expose people to real-life stories and journeys. I share my struggles, the misconceptions from others even in my family, the current situation of mental healthcare and the gaps that have been unfilled for too long," says Shafiqah.

So does the 23-year-old see herself as a superhero?

"I see myself as a sidekick because I really want to see my friends empowered, to embrace what they're going through and say 'You know what,

I'm strong. I'm a hero because I've been fighting against my mental health issues'. I want to continue supporting my friends and the future people I meet and say you are as much a hero as a cancer survivor."

Find out more about Psychkick (<http://www.psychkick.co/>) which aims to make cognitive behavioural therapy more engaging for mental health patients.

Psychkick is one of six winners in the 2016 edition of Singapore International Foundation's Young Social Entrepreneurs programme (<http://www.sif.org.sg/our-work/gb/yse/about>)

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



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 Chennai Convocation



CSIM Chennai conducted its XVI Annual Convocation on 3rd March, 2018 at M.O.P. Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai. Shri Vasudevan P.N, Managing Director & CEO of Equitas delivered the Convocation address and conferred the Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management (PGDSIM) and Smt. Latha Pandiarajan, Director, Ma Foi Strategic Consultants Pvt. Ltd awarded Diploma Certificates to the participants of the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme.

Dr. Lalitha Balakrishnan, Principal, MOP Vaishnav College for Women and Shri PN Subramanian, Managing Trustee of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani were also present.

Over 200 students – from Madras School of Social Work, Queen Mary's College, Sri Kanyaka Parameswari Arts and Science College for Women, SSS Jain College and those who underwent training at CSIM Campus, received their diplomas and certificates on this occasion.

Shri P. N Devarajan Pathfinder Award – 2018 for Distinguished Alumnus was awarded to Mr.J. Prabhakar of Ennangalin Sangamam, Ms. R.Jeeva of Transgender Rights Association and Ms.T.Kumari of National Level Educational and Social Service Trust.

Shri P. N Devarajan Pathfinder Award – 2018 for Distinguished Faculty was awarded to Smt. Girija Kumarbabu in recognition and appreciation of her dedication, interest, and enthusiasm in teaching.

Smt. Latha Rajan paid her respects to Late Shri P.N. Devarajan and said, "He

would never say 'No' to anything." I congratulate the students who will receive their diplomas today. CSIM is one organisation that I admire. Social Entrepreneurship is very close to my heart. Since the time we started MaFoi and MaFoi Foundation in 1992 we have seen how this sector has evolved and the changes it has been through. It is heartening to see many people coming forward today and contributing in various ways."

"Recently, when I visited Europe, I had the chance to sit through an interview with Sally Osberg who has written the book titled 'Getting beyond better'. She spoke about social entrepreneurs and gave a nice example like google. Sally said anything which is unjust or unsustainable equilibrium, if we can move that to a sustainable equilibrium by offering it to the marginalised - women or children or a particular place - that will amount to social entrepreneurship. Every social entrepreneur should have a vision like a normal entrepreneur."

Smt Latha Rajan advised the students to have their goals and objectives clear. She asked them to keep seeing on what can change the equilibrium and said that there were many people in our country who were able to shift this equilibrium and support the marginalised.

Shri Vasudevan PN delivered the convocation address. He said, "It is always a pleasure to be amidst young people with bright ideas who believe that they can change the world. CSIM has been doing exceptional work for the last 17 years. If we go back to the time when India became

independent, there was a lot of divisions based on caste lines, religious lines, and untouchability lines. With efforts from various governments and general awareness amongst people, these lines have become blurred now. But today, the biggest division—which has been created over 40 years of development in our country—is based on money."

"If you look at the economic strata of people in India - of the 1.2 billion people, the bottom 30% are really poor, which government has defined as BPL and for whom the sustenance level is very low. For this section it is very difficult for any individual to do much and it is basically the government's welfare programmes which are running for this section of the society based on the taxes we contribute. The next segment is the 30%, which is above BPL, but continue to have low income and are not in a position to manage for themselves – whether education, health or sanitation. They are in need of help not grants or charity. The last 40% - the middle and upper income group are able to take care of themselves. They are the real beneficiaries of development in our country, where you can see one generation of the family being totally transformed."

"From a Social Entrepreneurial perspective, it is the mid layer of 30% that is our target, which is about 300 to 350 million people. What do you want to do for these people and how should you do it? One concept that comes to my mind is: "If you want to serve the poor, you have to be poor yourself." In India, only one person in India has said and done that too. It is Mahatma Gandhi!"

"All of us don't have to say that 'I can't be poor, hence let me not serve the poor.' Nobody is expecting that from you. It is an exceptionally difficult path to take. You lead a comfortable and good life. If you have the empathy to help someone who is poor, that is more than enough."

"We should have the clarity on what charity is and social entrepreneurship is. Charity is good but not sustainable. To be a social entrepreneur, you will have to charge for the services you provide, only then you will be sustainable. Generate revenue so that you can continue to do your work."

"As a social entrepreneur it is a crime to think small. Think big! If I can do something for 5 people, I need to think of how I will be able to reach out to 50,000 people. What should I do to benefit 5 lakh people and then to 5 million people. Nothing is a small problem in our country. You can do a lot of things and there are a lot of environmental systems for that. Money is available, and all you need to know is where to tap it. Ask yourself: "Am I passionate and committed?"

Shri Vasudevan released CSIM's Annual Report 'Prajyoth' for year 2016-2017 on this occasion.

Unsung Beacons - Volume 7 & 8, a compilation of articles featured in Conversations Today 2016 and 2017 was released by Shri Vasudevan and Smt. Latha Pandiarajan. These books can be read at <http://csim.in/unsung-beacons.php>

—Marie Banu

“NOT JUST TAMILS, I WANT THE WORLD TO LEARN TAMIL.”

Madan Karky shares with Marie Banu about his research foundation



Madhan Karky Vairamuthu is a lyricist, research associate, software engineer and film dialogue writer. He is the son of Tamil poet and lyricist Vairamuthu. Born and brought up in Chennai, Madhan Karky completed his bachelor's degree in computer engineering at the College of Engineering, Guindy in 2001. In 2002, Madhan Karky flew to Australia to pursue his Masters in Information Technology in University of Queensland, Australia. He was awarded the degree with High Distinction and a full scholarship towards his PhD.

On successful completion of his PhD, Madhan Karky returned to Chennai. He worked as Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Science, Anna University between 2009 - 2013. He has published numerous papers and research articles on Tamil Computing, Lyric Engineering is his pet area of research. He is a dynamic teacher and aims at inculcating originality in research among his students. Later, he resigned from his teaching profession in Jan 2013 and became a full time lyricist, dialogue writer and part time researcher in Karky Research Foundation.

Along with his wife Nandini, Madhan co-founded Mellinam Education, a company that offers Education related products and services to Tamils around the world. He authored Mellinam's first project iPaatti 1.0, a collection of songs for the information era Tamil children.

He was won several awards for Best Lyricist including from Filmfare, SIIMA, Vijay and Vikatan.

In an exclusive interview, Madan Karky Vairamuthu shares with Marie Banu about his research foundation.

Can you tell us about Karky Research Foundation?

Language Computing and Artificial Intelligence are my favourite areas of research. When I had to quit my teaching and research in Anna University, I wanted to continue with research. With language literacy aided by language computing as the focus, Nandini and I founded Karky Research Foundation. We started the foundation in a coffee shop with two employees. Chezhan and Rajapandian used to sit in a quiet corner in the coffee shop and started building a few basic tools. We used those tools to aid to our further research. Today, we are a team of 15 working full time on Language Computing research. We have built an online lab (karky.in/labs) where all our tools are available for the public to use. We have around 12 web tools now to help one to learn language.

Being a not-for-profit organisation, what are the main social causes that you focus upon?

Language literacy is our main focus. We

share our research outcomes as language tools and share them to public for free. We are in the process of creating one of the best dictionaries for Tamil. We want to extend our tools across all Indian Languages. We want to have tools ready for the future technologies, for generations to learn.

What was the inspiration for the Tamil language app PiriPori and Chol?

Chol is our flagship tool. We have created three dictionaries for Amazon Kindle eReaders and apps. Chol, a dictionary with many unique features, is available in our labs.

PiriPori is our morph analyser. It is a tool that we believe is going to be everywhere in the future but we cannot see or realise its presence. It can analyse 35 crore Tamil word variations and infinite compound word combinations. It can be plugged into search engines, ebooks and translation engines to make search and translation more efficient. Our word level translation accuracy is far better than what google's translation offers at this moment.

How do you plan to spread these tools globally?

We currently have over 50,000 users using our free tools. They spread the words. We talk via social networking platforms and media interviews. A few have also donated for our projects. So far, I have been funding this research via my movie projects. We have plans for the next 5 years. We are looking for funding from Public, Government and also looking for collaborations with giants like Amazon, Google, Apple and Facebook. We expect more people to use these tools and more kids to play our word games world over.

Do you think that the present generation Tamilians are not proud to speak their mother tongue? If so, what do you think are the reasons behind this? How do we break this mindset?

We need to think deeply about this question. The answer is a sad yes. We do not have the world knowledge in Tamil. Government and huge bodies should come forward and set up a huge project of converting all scientific books in Tamil. All education should be in one's mother tongue. They can learn any number of languages, but any information that the world has, should be available in Tamil. School, college, higher education should happen in Tamil. PhD thesis in physics, chemistry or any field should be submitted in Tamil. This is my big dream. Not impossible. But, if happens, will make every Tamil proud. Not just Tamils, I want the world to learn Tamil. Schools in Germany, France and New Delhi should teach Tamil as a foreign language.