

# Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

It is an irony that water is not only life, but also death.

Kerala is reeling from the worst flooding in nearly a century. Since the monsoon hit the State on May 29, the rains have engulfed entire villages, caused landslides and thrown open dam gates. All 44 rivers in the state are in spate and 35 of its 39 dams are overflowing. A red alert has been sounded in all 14 districts while 12 of them are already flooded.

It is being reported that 350 people are killed by the disaster, and 220,000 people are displaced. This number would have been much more, if not for the immediate and effective rescue work carried out by the State along with the military. Helicopters airlifted the stranded families from the rooftops of their homes, and the navy rescued the survivors who were struggling to swim across the fetid waters. The people have been resilient and

There is an outpouring of goodwill and support from across the country and abroad, and the State government has acted quickly to make online contributions to the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund possible through a dedicated portal.

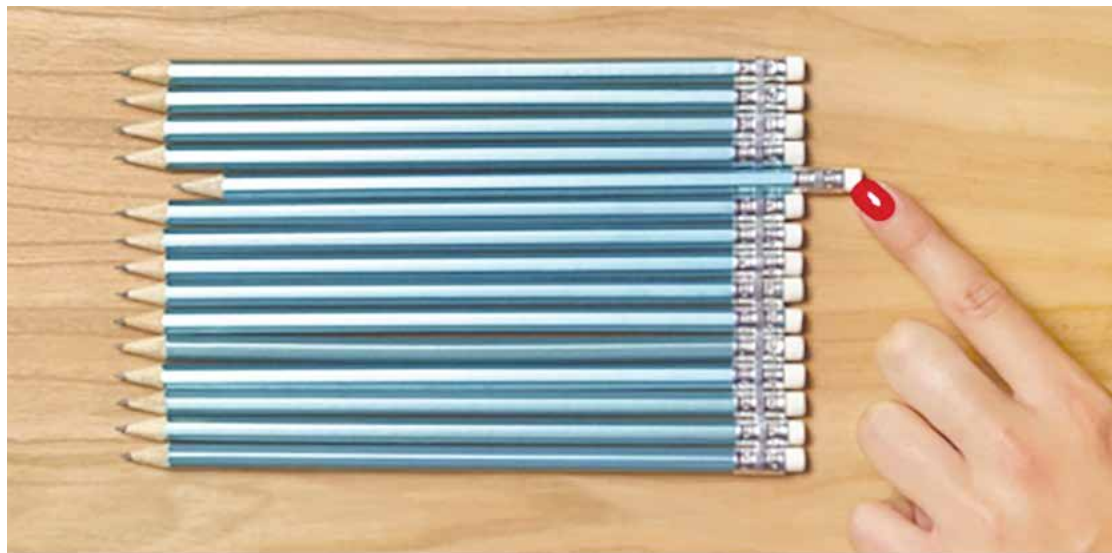
Several volunteer groups are coordinating relief and are mobilizing aid through various sources. Support groups from neighbouring States such as Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have begun sending relief material, although the disruption to road connectivity has left a lot of it stranded at the inter-State borders.

Our country has faced several natural disasters in the past, and our learnings from them have made us handle such crisis situations better than before. But, what efforts are we going to take in order to mitigate future disasters?

—Marie Banu

## If finding weakness is your greatest strength

*“Imperfections are not inadequacies; they are reminders that we’re all in this together.”- Brene Brown*



In a world that rewards perfection, leaders are tuned to finding weaknesses. Not only leaders, but parents, friends, family..... all share what is not working. If the words you are using often are “you should be better at..., you are wrong, you made a mistake and so on,” then there is need to pause. All this is necessary, however, dwelling in it all the time will only make the past stronger and future weaker.

One can say instead

1. How about... ? Have the courage to offer something better, rather than simply pointing out inadequacy.
2. You're great at ... How can you bring your strengths to this challenge?
3. How might we make this better?

On the same lines, embrace imperfection

1. Develop imperfect solutions. 80% is good enough for most things.
2. Launch early.
3. Iterate: Test often. Adapt as you move forward.

In a world where it is very difficult to satisfy, would you like to spread positive energy by

1. Noticing three strengths for every weakness you point out.
2. Say what you see when you see progress. Not always waiting for the end result or outcome to give your opinion.
3. Giving yourself permission to know that sometimes we must accept things as they are. Yes, strive for better.

*“There’s a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.” ~ Leonard Cohen*

It's those imperfections that help navigate our journey, pushing us forward in new directions. Once you let go of perfection and embrace the imperfections, your heart will feel lighter. You'll find being your most genuine self and living in an honest, realistic way will energize you from your core.

## EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu

Design: Blink Foundation

### 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](mailto:bhuvaneshwari@teamthink.co.in) for arranging Positive Energy training and Coaching sessions.



# Life-skills for children

*“I needed a guide who would evaluate my thoughts and ideas, detaching them from my sensitivities. And CSIM turned out to be that guide.”*

Development is a context driven process, manifesting in different forms in different regions. This is probably the reason why every individual gets to perceive development differently, based on his level of experience and exposure. Accordingly, comprehension of impacts of the development process also vary and hence, the difference in association with different social realities. Mr Mahabaleshwar Bhat, a software engineer turned life-skills trainer, always believed society to be a big sociological laboratory and his observations led him to conceptualise Ajeya Foundation as an NGO that can provide life skills training for school children.

Having spent almost 25 years in Wipro at Bangalore, Bhat realized that it was time to change gears. “I know it sounds cliché but the very thought of giving back to society is exciting,” says Bhat who tested the waters by volunteering with some non-profit organisations for about three years. Volunteering gave him an opportunity to realise the scope and potential of simple, small scale interventions that had a great impact. “The fact that your time and skills can make such a difference, is very rewarding. My engagement in the development sector also honed my skills and I became a more conscious observer,” he asserts. Soon, Bhat decided to pursue Masters degree in Sociology to equip himself for the development sector.

A colleague referred him to CSIM Bengaluru and Bhat felt that he would receive the exposure he needed from the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme. “My decision about the course was not just to prepare myself. I am a very sensitive person. I needed a guide who would evaluate my thoughts and ideas, detaching them from my sensitivities. And CSIM turned out to be that guide,” he says.

With no prior association in the non-profit sector, the course brought about a revelation in him. Bhat not only learnt the innards of this sector, but also identified himself and his ideas in this area. He was startled to learn that social outcomes were a result of a set of factors, unlike the corporate sector where every outcome had a pre-conceived, measured input. Soon after his realisation about the significance of social objectives in any organisation, Bhat decided to focus specifically on imparting life skills education to young children. His decision was based on his personal experience and observations in the



society. “Attending an interview was very daunting then. I used to be terrified at the very thought of articulating personal opinions. This fear also kept me from socialising with friends and colleagues from different backgrounds. I saw many children, who were capable of doing wonders, if only they knew how to articulate well. A lot of behavioural training happens in the corporate sector. The same could be imparted to children as well, but I was not sure if they received such opportunities. I read extensively and came to know that these skills could be and were actually being imparted to children in different ways,” he elaborates.

The ensuing research he undertook to further understand the trends in life skills training helped him analyse new perspectives and their relevance. He believed that any intervention had a lifetime and this had a great influence on the resultant impact. “What has to be long term, must be planned as a long term intervention. Lifeskills training is one field where short term goals are not



only inadequate, but also restrict the very progress in impact. The values we try to inculcate must be reiterated so that it ultimately becomes a part of a child’s personality. The clarity I was gaining

reminded me of the responsibility at hand,” he recalls.

Bhat also adds that life skills were important in improving children’s cognitive learning, analytical ability and personal development. Hence, they were important for children belonging to all age groups. Acknowledging the efforts in this sector, Bhat felt that non-profit organisations had a critical role to play in filling the gap in delivering such trainings to children and wanted Ajeya Foundation to share this responsibility. With the business plan in hand, Bhat is now working on the content for training. He wants to ensure that the content balances all present needs and leaves room for emerging needs as well. He intends to run the programme in five schools for a year, and then scale up after evaluating the results.

By preparing himself for the role of a trainer, Bhat is all ready to launch Ajeya Foundation soon and is determined that this experiment is worth it all.

—Shanmuga Priya.T



# Leader & Leadership Matters...

## 8. Expression : Spoken language of the true heart

*Leaders in organizations have to be nurturing and development oriented as in Benevolent Leadership. If they do not express themselves succinctly they are perceived as not being confident.*



**Meaning of Expression:** The Leader expressing his/her feelings, emotions, and thoughts in his/her relationships (LOI, [www.discoverself.com](http://www.discoverself.com)). The dictionary meaning of Expression is the action of making known one's thoughts or feelings. It is also a look on someone's face that conveys a particular emotion. The synonyms are utterance; voicing; venting; remark; rendition; asseveration and so on. Interestingly, the antonyms are question, concealment, silence, denial, suppression, and so on.

In Era of consciousness where there is an enhanced position for the heart and where the limitation of the head has been acknowledged, 'Expression' as a value plays a key role in Leader and in Leadership matters. Expression has been often misconstrued in work space to be

- more connected to social and personal spaces
- efficiency in work goes down with interference from heart
- expression pertains only to sharing personal life stories
- sharing personal life and happenings are a waste of time
- personal opinions and feelings are not critical for leadership; in fact, they are detrimental

Expression has not been given the value and importance that it ought to get. In the new era where machines are fast replacing humans, where coordinating and management jobs are going into oblivion, the survival is in the spaces that a machine cannot effectively replace. That will call for efficiency in expression and sociability skills that cannot be duplicated or satisfied through artificial intelligence.

Expression being more experiential and less academic, to understand the nuances of the same, I discussed this with Gurudev Nagaraj (Guru) who is one of the most suitable person to represent the value. Guru, a sales and marketing with Portfolio/ Program management professional, Formerly Director - Client & Business Solutions at Broadridge USA is also a regular marathon runner, filmmaker and producer working for several social causes. He is out and out an extrovert and a people person. He attributes his successes largely to his communication and networking abilities. Guru was born and schooled in Bengaluru, India and has worked a larger part of his life in California USA, while travelling to umpteen number of countries and meeting people of varied cultures in the last 3 decades. He got his MS from The George Washington University and MBA from UC Davis, California.

His stint into producing films comes from his marriage to a popular Kannada actress Suman Nagarkar who has made a grand comeback to acting after nearly 15 years. He has been extensively with the world running community last decade with several medals and awards. To talk to us about Expression as a value is here, a person with most affable, endearing, ever smiling, expressive personality and an out and out blend of the best of East and West.

**Guru, according to you what is Expression and what do you see as key differences between the East and the West?**

According to Guru, "Expression is a form of communication, where you share your inner feelings, enable relationships and

enhance communication. It is a method of building relationships through connecting the dots and bridging the gaps. So expression is not just verbal which we are usually more comfortable; it is including of body language, emotions and silence in between." Guru opines that the social media method of communication that seems to be taking over



the world is not as effective as real expression. No emoticon can replace the true facial expressions and the tone of voice that carries the intention. The text is read the way the receiver perceives. He thinks we have lot to lose if we think of social media as a substitute for expressive communication. "I have had experiences where I expressed a concern in my conversation through text, but it has been totally misread by the other". In many cases he says it leads to miscommunication depending on the ability of the communicator and the receiver to perceive, analyze and interpret.

Guru made an interesting observation that in West when people choose to express, they actually talk about themselves. In the East, especially India, when people express, it is more about others, their opinions and assumptions. "In USA, expression is very formal in business, but the same is significantly informal in most Asian cultures. In USA People talk about what I did; I want to do; I think like this and so on. The expressions are high but the authenticity and depth may not match the expressions. But in East, it is usually what she did; how he thinks; what he wants to do and so on. If they open up and express, they mean what they are saying and expect you to believe and accept the expression. There is an expectation to value expression in the East that is evident. Also, in USA people express their opinions easily and care less about what others would think; while in India there are more layers of masks to be peeled before they dare to share their honest opinion."

**Guru, I saw you're LinkedIn profile and most of them acclaim your capacity to connect and build relationships. Where did you get this capability and how did you build it?**

"My paternal grandmother M. Gundamma has a large role in this. She was a self-made person, an educationist, social worker and mentored by Lokasundari Raman, the wife of Sir C V Raman. She came through high hardships in life as a young widow and she was highly expressive. I loved her and was tutored and grew seeing her relate to people. Further, because of my work I have travelled across the globe. And my own openness to observe and understand the cultural differences help me differentiate the cultural nuances of expression. My connection to the running community gave me multiple opportunities to express my thoughts and feelings building a strong network amongst them." When the capacity to express is honed, appropriateness to context can be learnt to make communication effective.

**Why are some Leaders hesitant to express and how do you think it affects the team?**

When the Leaders do not express usually they are

- hesitant because they perceive a threat in the environment and are not sure they will be accepted as they are – "what will someone say or what will someone think"
- they fear being judged for what they think and say
- their experiences shroud them with anxiety
- they do not value the need to know others or others to know them better
- they are more worried about maintaining their self-image and prefer wearing masks
- they would like to avoid conflict and controversy in their dealing
- they might have language barriers and comprehension difficulty
- they may lack the required knowledge and competency to share their thoughts
- they have low self-esteem and inferiority complex where they do not value their own opinions and beliefs
- the environment is highly hierarchical and expects subservient behaviour than openness

Guru says that Leaders in organizations have to be nurturing and development oriented as in Benevolent Leadership. If they do not express themselves succinctly they are perceived as not being confident. "What you know is less important than whom you know"

An appropriate amount of expression has major impacts on their career like

- Build larger social circle
- Enable to help and assist others
- Enable others to open up and share their thoughts and feelings
- Build a larger network and connect the dots to increase productivity and efficiency
- Garner more ideas from others and bring out the talents in others

- Enable appreciation, openness and dialogue amongst the team members and increase the trust amongst them

**What are your experiences as a leader in enabling higher level of expression in the teams you have worked with?**

Guru gives his classic large grin and ruminates, “well, it is unfortunate that most organizations do not teach how to express; it’s through experience, trials and mistakes that one learns what is right and what is not. Very few actually do cultural training and awareness of issues in diversity. When I was in grad school doing my MBA, I took a group of students to Japan for an international study trip. Every one of us had to go through a deeper level of understanding of the Japanese culture and models. Their eating, meeting, greeting etiquettes, body language and perfectionism are very different and important to know. In my running marathon experience the run for promoting usage of millets was all about expression and propagation. We interacted with 13 cities within 13 days learning about the people, culture and village practices from the farmers. It was a great opening up experience for all of us in the team. I have always looked for spaces where I can connect and correlate behaviour of people with their orientations in expressions.”

Guru pays a lot of attention to body language when he tries to understand the

other person. It is an integral part of expression. We use our body extensively when we are communicating and that forms a part of the expression. He recollects the amusing ‘Indian head-roll’ that some of the University professors get confused with as against the clear nod of an American.

Guru being a film maker and producer thinks artists are usually given to higher level of expressions and expression itself is a means to satisfaction. It is unfortunate that he observes, “The artists in current times have no interest in



connecting to others. They do their shots as though it is a mere job and then are stuck to their smart phones rest of the time. There is hardly effective thoughts or feelings transaction. Earlier it would like a large family working on a project. People would share a lot of ideas, thoughts and perspectives, read books, do crosswords together which would add

to the quality of the production. Now it is just a group of people doing their work and roles to complete their work commitment.”

**How much is it important that as a Leader that you share your feelings and emotions with your team?**

“To a certain extent it is very critical to share expressions. It typically may not happen initially at ice breaker or forming or norming level. But at the storming phase of a team building activity the team has to get to know each other and expression becomes very important. Being open about few things and enabling the sharing can best be initiated only by the Leader. Unless you are not comfortable talking about your feelings no one else will open up to theirs.” Guru emphasizes that Leaders should spend time knowing the team members; talking about similarities and differences in thoughts; discuss the have enough triggers to open them up and allow the team to share and care. Social activities done jointly goes a long way and CSR plays a large role in enabling expressions.

**Guru, what would be your key points about expression?**

“In the current times, people are communicating but expressing less. Sending a message and completing conversation is not expressing. We have to put efforts to raise above becoming yet

another robot. The language of heart when forgotten will take away what is human. Find spaces to connect the dots, share feelings and allow others to share.”

Expression needs two things – consistency and appropriateness. It has to be relevant to the context and in sufficient measure, be specific and reach out. Some are born with such capacity and some aren’t but it is largely a learnt behaviour that can transform any situation if expressed appropriately.

Let’s explore in the next sequel, the art of giving freedom to others in relationships.

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath



# Love



The holy man Junaid, dressed in beggar's clothes, entered a barber's shop in Mecca. The barber, who was shaving a nobleman, left his wealthy customer to shave this beggar first. And not only did he not charge him for his services, he even gave him alms and sent him on his way.

Junaid was so impressed; he resolved he would hand over to the barber whatever he got in the way of alms that day. It so happened that a well-to-do pilgrim gave him a purse full of gold coins. Overjoyed, he ran to the barber's shop and offered him the purse. When the barber understood why he was being given the gold, he was enraged. “What kind of a holy man are you,” he yelled, “that you come to reward me for an act of love?”



## Explicit Learning

- When you seek a reward, your gift becomes a bribe.
- An act of true love can only be paid back by love.
- No amount of money can adequately reward love and kindness.



## Introspective Learning

- What does love mean to me?
- How do I respond to love?
- What do I expect in return for my love?



# A CALL TO CARE

*When it began, what Mobile Creches successfully managed to do was initiate an intervention in the lives of children when there was no awareness surrounding malnutrition.*



“A beaming young face with scraggy hair and a missing tooth looks out at you from the first folder that Mobile Creches put out in 1970. The few words that go with it are: Every Child’s Birthright - Nutrition, Education and a Happy Childhood. These words tell you a lot about Mobile Creches, what we believe in, what we set out to do. Of course, we have learnt a lot more about early childhood since then, about what a happy childhood means and how complex it is! But that has not deterred us or deflected us from the course,” says Devika Singh, Co-founder, Mobile Creches.

The Mobile Creches Model of providing crèche services for children of migrant construction workers has gone into “folklore” of the NGO world.

It was a first in many ways – the target population was migratory, children ranged in age from birth to 14 years, the programme ran in partnership with the construction industry – where one challenge reinforced the other. Delhi was in the throes of its first wave of urbanization and, very soon, the programme spread from construction sites to slum settlements.

Since 1969, the organization has impacted 8.67 lakh children and trained 6,500 women as childcare workers; this it has done in addition to facilitating 1,000 day-care centres, to have them up and running. They have partnered with 250 builders, and developed 100 network partners. Today, MC reaches out to children in need through the provision of day care services that include health, nutrition, learning, care and protection for eight hours a day, six days a week.

In the last year, MC has reached out to 10,828 children through its day care programme at 72 urban construction sites and slum centres. Of these, 9,632 were children at construction sites in Delhi NCR, and other cities, (Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Mohali and Chandigarh), while 1,196 were children in the slum settlements in Delhi.

When it began, what Mobile Creches successfully managed to do was initiate an intervention in the lives of children when there was no awareness surrounding malnutrition. MC developed a model for childcare, for young children of marginalised communities, in the form of day care centres at a place of work, a construction site, in a settlement, or in an urban slum. It bore fruit when the organization’s efforts resulted the Planning Commission announcing the first-ever Creche scheme in India, in 1974. This was an important first step for the creche movement.

In 1989, MC co-founded a national network - Forum for Creche and Child Care Services (FORCES) - to lobby for childcare and maternity support for poor working women.

MC has been involved in the formulation of policy through participation in committees and working groups constituted by various ministries and government bodies to formulate programmes and policies for the young child. MC was also actively involved in the landmark discussions for the formulation of the Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, which was approved by the Government in September 2013, following which the amended Maternity Benefit Act in 2017 made crèche facility mandatory for every establishment employing 50 or more employees. Unfortunately, this Act only covers 2% of the working women, who are employed in the formal sector, leaving out the other 98% who work in the unorganised sector.

The MC Day Care model comes to life in different ways – MC sets up a crèche and staff deliver childcare services, MC helps set up a crèche, trains others (organizations or individuals) to run it and makes an exit, MC helps set up a crèche, trains the service provider, and continues to supervisory and quality inputs, and lastly: MC guides others purely in the capacity of a technical resource.

Through its journey, MC partnered with policymakers and civil society organisations to create awareness about early childhood care and development. As per NFHS-4 data, the national average of children under 5 years who are underweight has reduced from 42.5% as reported in NFHS-3 (2005-06) to 35.7% in NFHS-4(2015-16). Similarly, the figures for children who are stunted has come down from 48% to 38.4% in the same period.

While MC started its daycare centres at construction sites initially, reaching out to urban slum communities was also part of the plan. “Now, we are replicating these models of crèches and daycare centres through

Business Transference Mode to other civil society organisations spread across Delhi NCR, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Mohali and Chandigarh,” says Sumitra Mishra, Executive Director, Mobile Creches.

The organization has expanded to Lucknow, Chennai and Madurai. In its training capacity, MC is running programs in the following states, partnering with state governments and local civil society organisations – Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Telangana, Gujarat, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Assam, and Odisha.

Mobile Creches is also in the process of taking the next big leap by expanding to other work settings that have crèches as a mandate. “Thanks to generous support from Grand Challenges Canada for our Transition to Scale project, we will be taking our knowledge and experience in early childhood development to rural areas, tea plantations, factories, and brick kilns over the next three years,” says Sumitra. “Under this project, MC will partner with employers, government, local community groups, and civil society organisations to provide access to quality crèches and day care centres in vulnerable areas and nurture many more young lives.”

India has committed to the SDGs of health and nutrition security for all its citizens. In order to meet its target, several initiatives have been taken – like the Poshan Abhiyan and other interventions to tackle malnutrition and child mortality in defined aspirational districts across India. Various programmes and schemes are now also focussing on IYCF (Infant and Young Child Feeding) norms to create large-scale awareness on exclusive breastfeeding for infants below six months of age. Sumitra admits, however, that the challenge lies in ensuring that these initiatives do not exclude the most marginalised sections of India – Dalits, tribal, and the disabled children. “Therefore, a lot more is required, than flagship schemes, to ensure no child is left behind,” she adds.





# SOCIAL IMPACT: SUCCESS OR FAILURE? NOTHING SUCCEEDS AS MUCH AS LEARNING THE LESSONS FROM FAILURE...

I have written several obituaries in my life. It is not easy to describe what someone has done and what they have achieved in a few paragraphs. It also raises the question of success – have these people succeeded in what they have done? Have they attained their individual goals? Can we consider their life as being a success – or a failure?

This got me thinking about what do we mean by success – what yardstick can we use; and, indeed, are the conventional yardsticks the ‘right’ ones?

In introducing this, allow me a couple of anecdotes.

A relative of mine is just graduating and his father was saying that he hopes he gets a job in the City of London and makes lots of money. Why? Because he will then be regarded by his peers and others as a ‘success’.

Mmm...

About twenty years ago I met an elderly Irish priest in Central Java. He had moved there donkey’s years previously and worked in what we used to call ‘community development’. He worked with community groups supporting them to improve their and their children’s, livelihoods. He did this very successfully but with little recognition.

Mmm...

These contrasting examples raise several points about what we mean by success. ‘Success’ (or indeed failure) is dependent on the definition of ‘success’ – and more particularly the parameters used to define ‘success’ which are often dictated by the society and culture that one is a part of...

Defining and measuring success is as important for enterprises as it is for people. With enterprises, assessing success depends on the type of business as different types of enterprise use different measures for assessing their success or failure:

With mainstream commercial business, recognising success is relatively easy. If a business is growing, if the turnover is increasing year on year, if the profit margins are widening; if shareholders’ dividends are increasing – then it is seen as a successful business.

With a business that has a social conscience and a strong commitment to social responsibility, success can be assessed by the normal business measurements alongside how much money and resources are given for charitable or social aims.

With a social or community enterprise, assessing success gets a bit more complicated. These are



enterprises that use economic activity to benefit people and communities, provide value to society and are consciously not adversely affecting the environment. Achieving these things is their core business – not just an add-on to a mainstream business activity.

However, in reporting on success/failure, a social or community enterprise has specific challenges. One of the most immediate problems is to regularly report on how they affect people, communities, the environment, the local economy and the prevalent culture.

Social enterprises often consider that it would be good to do this – but why, as it is not a statutory requirement? And then how can it fit in with what they are already doing? How do they know it is a good use of resources to report regularly? And how do they understand and demonstrate whether or not they are successful in achieving their main purpose? In other words, how do social and community enterprise assess their success or failure?

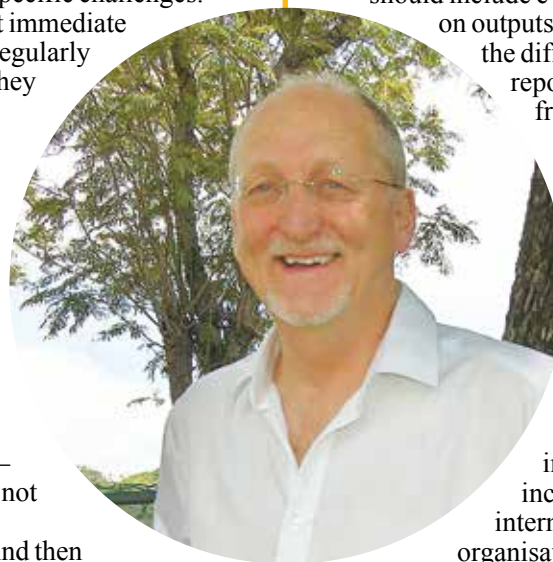
In the Social Audit Network (SAN), we have been grappling with some of these key questions. Social accounting and audit is the framework used by SAN. In supporting social and

community enterprises to keep track of successes and failures, we believe enterprises should be clear about what they do, how they do it and who is affected; collect qualitative and quantitative information; report on successes and failures; and get the report verified through a ‘social audit’ process.

The framework is flexible and should include evidencing data on outputs and outcomes, the different views and reported outcomes from all stakeholders, costs and reported benefits and targets. The subsequent reporting brings together quantitative and qualitative information – including an internal report on the organisation’s approach and ethos. It then discloses

this independently audited information and invites the wider society to assess its success or failure.

Adopting the framework is not rocket science. We think that it is a sensible approach to showing others an organisation’s progress (how it proves itself) and this then relays back into how it can improve as an effective organisation. The verified report highlights and recommends new directions, changes, improvements; and all this can be fed into planning for the future.



By its nature, the recommended structure for a ‘social report’ encourages a range of data from different sources and goes beyond Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – and such like. Indeed, a note of caution should be attached to ‘targets’ and KPIs. We have found that targets are really useful if they are presented alongside other information. But if they become the ‘report’, the focus moves away from overall improvements in quality to changing the actions to fulfil the target.

In essence, regular social reporting is crucially important – particularly for organisations whose social and community benefits are its *raison d’être*. Through this reporting, they can assess the degree of success (or failure) they are having in different areas of their work.

The success parameters applied by an organisation are multi-perspective and set by the organisation – but crucially these parameters are then tested by subjecting the social report to an independent audit

Subsequent systematic social reporting can then track the progress of an organisation, and in looking critically at that story people in the wider society, can assess themselves on the success or failure of that social enterprise.

So, going back to the wider anecdotes at the start of this blog... Success can be defined in different ways depending on values, the experience and the understanding of those trying to assess ‘success’.

Lastly, and perhaps as an addendum, we should not perhaps ignore the importance of failure. I leave you with a quote from Kenneth Boulding (1910 – 1993), a British economist, educator, peace activist, poet, religious mystic, devoted Quaker, systems scientist, and interdisciplinary philosopher who wrote:

“Nothing fails like success because we don’t learn from it. We only learn from failure.”

Mmm...

Postscript: In 2005 John Pearce wrote *Learning from Failure* which focussed on four social enterprises that had failed. He wrote about why and how they failed and the lessons to be learnt from their experience. It was published by Co-active which I believe no longer exists. If you would like a copy, write to alan.kay20@gmail.com.

—Alan Kay  
Co-Founder,

Social Audit Network, UK  
[www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk](http://www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk)



# Handyman for Social Enterprises

Ofentimes the non-profit sector, especially in India, functions without one or more of the fundamental infrastructures required for any organization to run efficiently and durably. It is all too common for an NGO to start its operations out of someone's backyard, with little to no material or personnel resources to begin with. The founder's will to fight for their cause is what keeps its momentum going, gathering these resources along the way. Funding remains a visibly important factor in the ability of an organization to continue its activities for a prolonged period of time. However, does money alone guarantee an NGO/NPO's success? Arguably, it doesn't. There are very many grassroots organizations that prevail the test of time even with a paltry budget, compared to large multinational NGOs that go under, despite finding patronage from some of the wealthiest philanthropists. Clearly the reasons for the endurance of an organization are many, not the least of which is the skillful management of the organization itself. Today we get an insight into the work of a non-profit company who have made it their business to help NGOs manage themselves better.

ToolBox India brings private sector skills to non-profit organizations, aiding in change management, with strategic management and operations expertise. We got in touch with CEO Vijaya Bhaskar, who explains that non-profits can see their impact 'amplified', if they were to leverage the skill of volunteers who have the expertise and substantial experience in the working of various departments of private sector enterprises. How did this idea come to be, we ask. Says Vijaya, "In 2002, a group of friends who had just returned to Belgium after studying or working abroad, notably in the UK and the US, got together to discuss the idea of providing management support to non-profits by sharing know-how and skills. Preliminary research into the acceptance or understanding of these different notions in Belgium quickly evolved into the founding of ToolBox in Belgium. With preliminary success in working with NGOs in the city of Charleroi, the founders were able to get large-scale funding and support from the King Bedouin Foundation and the Bernheim Foundation to further develop the initial concept and gradually establish a methodology for wider distribution. In 2009, ToolBox India was founded by Charles-Antoine Janssen, Managing Director, KOIS Invest and Sandeep Naik, Managing Director – Asia Pacific, General Atlantic Partners."

"ToolBox India was formed with a vision to help non-profit organisations do significantly more 'good' with the same resources by improving their management expertise," says Vijaya,



"Our goal is to partner with non-profit organizations (NPOs) to integrate management and communication techniques of the private sector to improve their positioning and to ensure their sustainability." When asked about their methodology of working, Vijaya explains, "The collaboration with an NPO begins after a thorough analysis of their management and internal organization structures, and an identification of the different work streams that need to be addressed. The range of services provided include: strategy, finance, human resources, communication & marketing, IT and legal advice, typically rendered through skilled volunteers."

"Since its inception, Toolbox India has deployed over 300 Volunteers, who have helped more than 75 NGOs, spanning the sectors of Education, Women's Empowerment, Livelihood, Community Health, and Sustainable Community, by executing over 200 projects. Their varied backgrounds is what essentially allows Toolbox India to provide a diverse service offering," says Vijaya. The ToolBox India website lays out the framework within which a collaboration usually takes place. The partnership with NPOs lasts for 2-3



years, meaning that ToolBox India takes on an equal sense of ownership in increasing the efficiency of their partner organization as well as in bridging the skills gaps wherever necessary. Toolbox India also tracks its NPO partners post project-completion to understand how the solution is being used and how it has been able to support the organization, thus monitoring the efficacy of their own work.

What are some of the challenges facing ToolBox India? "Skilled volunteering is not easy to come by," says Vijaya, "for people to commit time over a specified period requires persistence and not just passion. The project management at Toolbox India is very rigorous which has been one of the factors that has led to the growth of the program." She adds, "NPOs sometimes want a solution to a specific issue only and may not necessarily be interested in engaging beyond that. While Toolbox India would like to build a longer partnership, sometimes there can be a push back. We have realized that as long as we are fulfilling our mission of supporting the NPOs, we must allow for time to build the trust and then engage some more". While fund-raising remains a constant challenge for many of the NPOs seeking out ToolBox

India's help, human resources, networking and leadership are some of the commonly addressed pain-points as well. Further through their impact assessment study, ToolBox India have developed newer interventions to take their services to the next level. "We learn that our partner organisations have a clear direction towards the

fulfillment and achievement of their envisioned goals and milestones, when we have addressed some of the issues faced by them and have helped in bridging efficiencies through customizing solutions for them," says Vijaya, adding that, "We try to minimize the time spent on "non-programs", redirecting those hours and efforts into programs in alignment with their goals."

ToolBox India boasts of a diverse list of high ranking corporate gurus on its advisory board. When asked what attracts such an eclectic group of people here, Vijaya says, "the social impact sector in India is going through one of the most exciting times with innovation, new systems and bringing in a lot of professionals who are crossing over from for-profit companies. As for the team, a lot of us came in after our respective stints in the corporate sector and found Toolbox India to be the perfect junction where our own passion for this work and some of the skills that we had picked up, met." She adds humbly, "mostly it was the sheer inspiring work that was being done by so many charismatic committed people in the development sector that this turned out to be not a career-shift but a calling of sorts (for us)."

—Archanaa Ramesh



# Free food for the community, by the community

*Can free meals for those in need build stronger communities? Free Food for All believes so.*



One man is using the power of food to connect people across Singapore, and to reignite the 'kampung (village) spirit' in their communities.

Meet Nizar Shariff, who founded charity Free Food for All, or FFFA, in 2014 to serve balanced, halal meals to the less fortunate.

Friends and family call him "Big Bear", and you can see why. At 1.85m tall, Nizar cuts a formidable figure. Mind you, he comes across more Teddy than Grizzly.

Nizar was a successful Singaporean businessman, before he was struck with a desire to do something meaningful.

The question was what. To find the answer, he stuck his nose in the charity sector, and quite quickly, sniffed out his second calling.

He had noticed that while several organisations were regularly distributing cooked food to the poor, these were either vegetarian or non-halal options.

Free Food for All fills the gap for daily halal meals.

Since it started, the charity has given

out more than 320,000 meals.

Nizar emphasises that while many of the beneficiaries are Muslim, Free Food for All does not discriminate. Anyone who needs food can request for it, he says, "regardless of race or religion," and counts non-Muslims among the beneficiaries.

FFFA has since evolved into more than a project to feed people. It is also about strengthening communities through the currency of food.

"Food is the glue that binds us all together. It opens doors. It creates opportunities. It builds bonds and relationships, so that we can all be contributing members of society," says Nizar.

Haslina Manaf and her family were once beneficiaries of the FFFA's Daily Dinner Delivery programme. But when Nizar discovered she enjoyed cooking, he asked her to manage the meals for the residents in her estate.

In exchange, she would receive a small fee to buy groceries, and could use what was left to help with her family's household expenses.

Taking on this responsibility has not only enhanced her relationships with

her neighbours, it also complements her other role as a grassroots leader.

"Meeting them with a smiley face, really makes my day," says Haslina. The free meals have encouraged beneficiaries, many who are elderly and isolated, to come out of their homes and to socialise.

"Previously, they were very lonely and moody. Now, when I see them, they start to wave from afar. I have seen changes in them. They are more confident, jovial and outspoken," she says. The food distribution programme would be impossible without the commitment of volunteers, young and old.

Take 74-year-old retiree Lee Teck Guan, who finds satisfaction in bringing the packets of food to his neighbours who are ill, weak, or immobile.

He is practical: "Delivering food benefits my health. Climbing the stairs is a form of exercise."

And also philosophical. Of one woman who lost her leg to diabetes, he says, "When I get food for her, I feel as if fate has brought us together."

Says Nizar, "No man is an island. If

we were to do things on our own, naturally it's going to be a very difficult task."

One major challenge is keeping FFFA's food programmes running. Nizar has been shouldering most of the costs, dipping into his own savings to fund the project. But giving up is not an option. And he hopes more awareness will inspire the public to dig deep, so no one has to go hungry.

"It's tough to do something you're passionate about and there's not enough funding. But the dreams of the people I help, who tell me how important it is, the food or services that we provide, gives me the strength to wake up in the morning."

Free Food for All is a "a community project for the community, by the community," says Nizar. "It creates channels, opportunities. It also empowers people."

"So that they in turn would help others," he adds.

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



## CSIM is now in Tindivanam



**C**SIM has launched a one-year programme -Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative & Management in Tindivanam on 21st July 2018. Ten participants have enrolled for the programme.

Mr. Vaithiyanathan, Professor and Head of Oilseeds Research Station, KVK was the Chief Guest for the inauguration. Mr. Sankar, founder of Tribal society and Mr. Chandrakanth of Uyir Foundation were the Guests of Honor.

Mrs. Latha Suresh, Honorary Director of CSIM and Mr. Jothi, CSIM Coordinator oriented the students about the course and handled sessions.

Mr. Vaithyanathan shared with the participants' information about his organization and emphasized on

'Values'. He said, "Each of you must have a vision and a mission to carry out your social duties. There are many social areas in which each one can concentrate upon, but the essence is in being truthful in what you do and keeping up with your commitment."

Mr. Sankar spoke about his work for the Narikuruvar community. He said, "This CSIM course will assist you in creating a roadmap for your social entrepreneurial work."

The PGDSIM course will be held at VEL Technologies, No. 36. Pillayar koil street, Gidagal, Tindivanam on every Friday and Saturday of the week. If you wish to know more, please call Mr. Arul Kumar at 99520-70796 or 90803-23500 or write to [chennai@csim.in](mailto:chennai@csim.in)



**C**entre 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](http://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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# “India has an impressive and a great power to play the leader in Social Entrepreneurship.”

## Cynthia Helen shares with Marie Banu the scene of Social Entrepreneurship in The USA.

Cynthia Hellen is the Founder & CEO of SMPLCT Lab (pronounced “simplicity”) an innovation laboratory creating sustainable solutions for people and planet.

Hellen regularly gives keynotes, hosts lectures, seminars and workshops at conferences, corporations, universities, nonprofits, and community groups on gender equality, social entrepreneurship & storytelling worldwide.

In 2013, she launched socentech, an online community where she investigates social entrepreneurship, and low-cost technology for poverty reduction. In 2012, she became the recipient of a Bloomberg Businessweek and Sandbox Network Fellowship for empowering women in a remarkable way. Her work has been profiled nationally and internationally.

She serves as Chapter Leader of New York Women Social Entrepreneurs (NYWSE), nonprofit promoting young women social entrepreneurs. In 2018, she became a prestigious scholarship recipient of Reality Impact Fellowship, a Schusterman Initiative. In 2017, she was honored with the “Mayor’s Award For Outstanding Civic Contribution” for her work in entrepreneurship and technology. In 2016, she was honored with the “Phenomenal Women Award” by Baruch College. In 2015, she was awarded The Coaching Fellowship.

She is a mentor at Harvard, Columbia, Princeton Universities. She is also an active volunteer at Project Sunshine, a nonprofit that creates fun activities for children living with medical challenges in hospitals.

*In an exclusive interview, Cynthia Helen shares with Marie Banu the scene of Social Entrepreneurship in USA.*

### About the Social Entrepreneurship scene in USA and contrast it to what is happening in India?

In the USA, we are seeing some great examples of Social Entrepreneurship from students to even former corporate individuals who are fully focused on making an impact through business. These Social Entrepreneurs, may have the resources they need to launch, sometimes this doesn’t mean their idea will take off because at the end, you will need more than just having a solid idea, you will need dedication, execution, a team, and last but not least thorough understanding of the problem, and/or customers. This could also be said for the Social Entrepreneurs in India.

The Social Entrepreneurs in India that

I have met, are aware of the problems that exist in their communities and are creating a business to tackle these problems. The fact that they have creatively found a way to launch even without any resources, has been impressive to say the least. This tells me that the Social Entrepreneurship in India not only have solid ideas but are dedicated, believe execution and team is key to scale their idea into a startup.

I am inspired by the amount of love that each of these men and women Social Entrepreneurs in India have for their community.

India has a great advantage to be innovative because when you have lived with the problem your whole life, you have a better understanding of it. No textbook or statistic will compare to real life experience of perhaps your own village lacking water or electricity. This need will not only motivate you to persist but become more creative until you have found a long-term solution. Necessity is after all the mother of invention.

### Any cross learning opportunities?

India has an impressive and a great power to play the leader in Social Entrepreneurship, because in order to build a business that would make an impact, you need to have an understanding of the problems. This means engaging with the community and learning amongst them.

I believe, both cities, New York and Chennai, have their own strengths, and their weaknesses. Both can learn a lot from each other, from looking at the problems in their communities, cities, country from different lenses in order to come up with creative solutions to collaborating on these problems that may not only affect one city, but perhaps both.

### You seem to have many social entrepreneurship projects focused on women. Has this being consciously done?

There is no doubt in my mind that women are as creative, if not more so creative than men. But it shouldn’t be about who’s better. It should be about how both genders can work better. Certain projects I have developed may have started as an idea, but without my teammates,

who are men and women, the idea wouldn’t have fully developed into the projects we now have today. Some projects are for women but this does not mean men aren’t playing a role in these projects.

We don’t intentionally develop projects for women only, we intentionally develop projects that are sustainable and scalable.

### Can you tell us about Social Entrepreneurship education in The US?

Now more than ever, we are seeing more and more programs on sustainability and social entrepreneurship. From organization, such as Young Women Social Entrepreneurs (ywse.org), which is an international nonprofit that supports the next generation of women change makers, and I happen to be President and Chapter Leader of the New York Hub of YWSE, where the NY team develops workshops and talks on social entrepreneurship and sustainability to Universities like Columbia Business School’s The Tamer Center for Social Enterprise, in New York, USA, which educates leaders to use business knowledge, entrepreneurial skills, and management tools to address social and environmental challenges.

We also have conferences like Harvard Social Enterprise Conference in Boston, USA (socialenterpriseconference.org) which brings people together to engage in dialogue around the field of Social Enterprise. As well as online platforms like Acumen Fund’s (plusacumen.org)

“Social Entrepreneurship 101” that anyone and everyone can log on and learn about Social Entrepreneurship.

### About SMPLCT Lab?

SMPLCT Lab (pronounced “simplicity”) is an innovation lab creating sustainable solutions for people and planet. We are a multi-disciplinary team from diverse backgrounds with experience in developing innovative strategies, creating sustainable businesses and accelerating a product’s path to market. We use human-centered, design strategy, fieldwork, storytelling, exploratory design, and prototyping - we deliver products, and experiences that change not only the way we tackle local and global challenges but break perception on poverty. We work with visionary leaders, Corporations, Government Agencies, Nonprofit Organizations, Institutions, Social Enterprises and Foundations worldwide, because in today’s globalized world, it is essential to know how to collaborate with people from different cultures across a broad spectrum of industries, including education, energy, healthcare, media and technology to evaluate problems, spot opportunities, and create environmental and social change.

Founded in 2013, SMPLCT Lab is headquartered in New York, NY. In 2012, I returned to my native country, Peru with one purpose, to challenge myself and live on less than \$2 a day. For 3.5 months I lived in rural, urban communities and villages where I learned from my neighbors the value and simplicity of life. While living in Peru I collaborated with nonprofit ODS, PCP Bank of Peru, ALAS Peruanas Engineering University, and a for-profit recycling venture in Pisco, Peru, a community that was affected by a 7.6 earthquake. This inspired me to pilot SMPLCT Lab which focuses on creating cross cultural collaboration between communities, design low-cost solutions for those living on less than \$2 a day; and educate society on sustainability.

Our mission is to create cross cultural collaboration between communities between artists, designers, technologists, scholars, researchers, policy-makers, and citizens worldwide; design low-cost solutions for those living on less than \$2 a day; and better educate society on sustainable living.

We value culture, collaboration and creativity. We value a good design especially when it benefits the world’s poor.



Photo: Marie Banu