

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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About Nallasanthai Producer Company and Farm to Consumer Private Limited



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**"I did not know that history was in
the making when my father
converted the lawn into an
agricultural field."**
An exclusive interview with
Shr. S.S. Rajsekar

From the Editor

Dear Friend,

The start of every New Year is when we all make plans to change our life for the better over the forthcoming twelve months. Let us resolve to spread thoughts of goodwill in all directions. This accomplishes several things. It reminds you of your own goodness, so that you don't—in defense of your self-image—revert to the sort of denial that refuses to admit that any harm was done. It strengthens your determination to stick with your resolve not to do harm. And it forces you to examine your actions to see their actual effect.

Thai Pongal, a major festival of the Tamil community, is celebrated in January and is a very vital sense a celebration of life itself and its continuity. This is on account of the fact that on this day the sun and its outpouring, life-giving energy become a strong prayer focus of the celebrants of Thai Pongal.

What enhances this life-related theme of this great feast day is the fact that Thai Pongal also marks the beginning of the harvesting season. It is therefore, is a vibrant symbol of life itself and all that is associated with it: energy, food and a renewal of the earth's vital resources which sustain the globe's living organisms.

The changemakers featured in Conversations Today are all those who are celebrating life. During this festive season, let us join them in spreading goodwill around us.

On behalf of Editorial Team of Conversations Today, I wish all the readers a Very Happy Pongal!

—Marie Banu

The Path Ahead: Seeing clearly through Positive Energy Lens



New beginnings always bring new opportunities - not just to earn more money or acquire more possessions, but to enrich our inner energies; to renew and transform.

So what stops us from renewing our energies? Most often, we measure our success through material acquisitions and enhanced status. We are also settled in our comfort zones, seeing obstacles and difficulties, and fostering new fears.

Let this New Year help each one of us 'see clearly'. By renewing our energies in the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of our life, we are able to drop our bad feelings and perceptions around obstacles.

The renewal of energies enables us perceive and experience life with a clearer vision. With a clear vision we see things as they are, without any distortions, fears, or judgments. We experience life in every moment, without any worries of the past or future. We begin to live more mindfully; we enjoy every wonder of nature; we see the

marvels of life unfold in every moment of our existence. Living becomes a joy!

At the onset of new year, it is once again time to walk on this path with renewed energies and move ahead with the rhythm of life, with trust.

Here is a short song, which captures the essence of what will happen to one's life, when we see clearly.

*I can see clearly now, the rain is gone,
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright) Sun-Shiny day.*

*I think I can make it now,
the pain is gone
All of the bad feelings have disappeared
Here is the rainbow I've been prayin for
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright) Sun-Shiny day.*

*Look all around, there's nothin but blue skies
Look straight ahead, nothin but blue skies
I can see clearly now, the rain is gone,*

*I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright) Sun-Shiny day.*

— Johnny Nash, *I Can See Clearly Now*

What does seeing clearly through a Positive Energy lens mean entail -

- Becoming aware of and addressing limiting beliefs (such as gloominess, bad feelings, obstacles, judgments, fears, etc.)
- Seeing things the way they are and not allowing the mind to add filters of assumptions and biases
- Living life in a 'flow' - flowing with life and not resisting the miraculous unfolding of life in each moment
- Becoming aware of the positive energies operating through each one of us, and continuously renewing and enriching our energies to live in complete trust and surrender

Live and experience a joyous absorption in the experience of living!

Yours Energetically

Dr. Bhulakshmi V and Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi are trainers and facilitators of the Positive Energy (PE) program. They are spiritual seekers with a vision of transforming their own energy state from surviving to being. In this journey they have gathered deep insights and are 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, the authors are working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.

This intervention is being offered by GapSkills Learning Solutions Pvt. Ltd to corporates and schools. You can contact them at info@gapskills.com to design a customized intervention for your organization or join the PE open program - www.gapskills.com.

Bridging the gaps

Interest in the social sector can develop as early as the formative years in school. Despite the lack of formal knowledge on the sector, it is intriguing to know how intimately such programmes or events are organized by school students. “Channelizing all these efforts to enable constructive engagement in the sector can make a world of difference,” says Mr Manmohan Jain, Co-founder of India Literacy Project, Hyderabad Chapter.

Manmohan quit his software career in September 2014 and is now engaged full time in taking the activities of ILP Hyderabad forward. He was the leader of Students Organisation for Social Service (SOS) while at school. “I never knew what Social Entrepreneurship was then. We used to run a small refreshment stall during the lunch hours at school. The money earned was used to buy books or gifts for underprivileged children in the neighbourhood. This was my first experience of generating revenue, where the ideas of business and selling goods at marginal profits became comprehensible,” smiles Manmohan.

Having lived in Rajasthan, Hyderabad, Chennai, and the United States, Manmohan comes in with a wide range of exposure and experience that has added value to his engagement in the social sector. During college, he was in the photography club and also the President of the Students’ Union. This allowed him to engage actively in extra-curricular activities. By now, it was time for him to move to US for his Masters in Computer Science. Manmohan had lived in the United States for about 14 years working as a Software Engineer and also volunteering to teach students in primary classes when he got the opportunity.

“I volunteered with Junior Achievement in New York that allowed me to teach World Economics to primary grade students. The unique way of teaching that comprised of business models helped me enjoy my work with young people. My focus on children and education was becoming clear and apparent,” says Manmohan who was soon introduced to a similar project – India Literacy Project in India. He managed to engage himself with ILP through donations, but could never engage himself directly with the project activities. On his return to India in 2003, he decided to give a proper shape to his interests on children and education. His exploration of ideas and opportunities had led to many brain storming interactions, allowing him to grasp the extent of ideas that came across from individuals engaging in multifarious fronts. “My neighbor was also part of this process. We used to discuss our ideas for children and exclaim how blessed our children are while there were millions of them who



Manmohan liked the classes at CSIM very much. He feels that the course emphasizes the significance of an NGO to have a structure that encompassed elements of marketing, accounting, scalability and methods – all that which any organization would think of to survive and succeed

lacked access to basic amenities.”

Manmohan, along with his neighbor Ms Sangeetha co founded the Hyderabad Chapter of India Literacy Project in 2005. Beginning with simple story telling and book reading sessions in the Madhapur Government Primary School, they went on to develop a “Shared book” methodology to stimulate interest in literacy and reading among the underprivileged children studying in government schools. With the help of many volunteers they are now running Pustakam sessions in 10 government schools across the state of Karnataka.

“We also conduct mentoring and career counseling sessions for Class 8 and 9 students wherein we impart academic help, soft skills training, explain about various career options and general life skills guidance. In addition, ILP Hyderabad also provides scholarship support to students who are keen to pursue higher education, but cannot afford the cost. Along with these year round programmes, we also strive to ensure that the students of the government schools have a well-rounded multi-dimensional education. Summer camps, field trips, teacher training workshops and setting up of libraries are organized to meet this objective,” adds Manmohan.

Manmohan and team also engage corporates in meeting the critical infrastructure needs of these schools such as toilets, electricity and provision of additional classrooms. They consciously

facilitate interactions between the elite schools and the government schools to sensitize the children from affluent background on the broader issues faced by society and also make them realise how fortunate they are to enjoy the privileges that they have.

During his work with the schools, Manmohan was introduced to CSIM Hyderabad by his friend. “As she insisted that I take the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme (SEOP) with CSIM, I did my bit of homework to learn the course details. It did interest me and the fee was also nominal. So, I decided to give it a try.”

Manmohan liked the classes at CSIM very much. He feels that the course emphasizes the significance of an NGO to have a structure that encompassed elements of marketing, accounting, scalability and methods – all that which any organization would think of to survive and succeed. Further, he was in complete agreement with the idea of quantifying an organisation’s impact through regular social audits. “Not just to present it to the stake holders, an idea of our impact is a matter of personal satisfaction and is very motivating.”

The very notion of NGOs being capable of addressing the triple bottom line successfully drew him to the idea of sustainability through the model of social entrepreneurship. “It is very risky to depend entirely on donors. This concept was very much relevant to the state of



affairs in the sector,” he says.

Appreciative of the networking opportunities that CSIM provided during and after the course, Manmohan realized that there were many individuals who were passionate about change, yet chose different paths depending on their levels of exposure and extent of engagement that was possible. “This observation was very critical according to me. With different approaches on a particular concern taking shape, I was more conscious about the utility of the model we were developing at ILP Hyderabad,” he introspects.

Manmohan has also appointed an alumnus of CSIM in his organization and is now encouraging his Coordinator to attend the course at CSIM. He dreams of two things—establishing a teacher training institute and a mobile library. Given the quality of education in many government schools, he feels that adding value to the most critical link in the system—between teachers and students—can create a lasting impact. He wants to see the day when this mobile library will grow to be a mobile learning unit that will be there accessible by children, even if schools were not capable of supporting it with additional staff and maintenance.

“It is very crucial to bridge the digital divide in this generation and am sure this small effort in digital literacy can develop as a successful model for replication,” concludes Manmohan.

—Shanmuga Priya. T

Heart beats for child and women welfare: Rajapaneerselvam

In 1990, after recovering from the accident and embarking on his new lease of life, Rajapaneerselvam started the first set of activities at villages near Vaniyampadi by adopting tribal children.

There are persons who encounter heavy odds in life at an early age for reasons such as accidents. When they survive such an accident, they find themselves at a crossroads on how they should handle their life going forward. Every now and then, we come across the rare person who fought great odds and dedicated himself or herself to meaningful social causes.

Early days

Rajapaneerselvam was born in a village in Thirupathur Taluk, Vellore district. He studied till the tenth grade in a village school and then went to Tirupathur for high school education. He obtained his Master's degree in Economics in Chennai. Later, he went for a teachers' training course and completed his bachelor's course in education. He later pursued a degree in law as well. This shows the side of his character that valued education as a necessary tool for becoming a good human.

His father was a moral science teacher. He imbibed a high sense of commitment towards society by listening to his father. His mother, who was involved in animal husbandry, also did supportive work at farms. He helped his mother at her work for about six years. While at school, he was studious, but still found time to be active in small saving schemes, capturing historical events and reciting civic stories. He was an active participant in school festivals on occasions such as Independence Day and Teachers' Day. He had a deep interest in philosophy.

Triggers

Two important triggers strongly influenced Rajapaneerselvam to pursue development activities in the later part of his life. The first was an imprisonment while at college and the need to fight a legal case for seven years to clear himself of the allegations. This made him pursue law and understand the rights and duties of a good citizen. He realized that to win justice, one needs to put extra efforts, as the onus of coming out clean lies on the accused or the deprived. This may not be the position everyone adopts, but it is what differentiates Rajapaneerselvam from others.

The second incident was on December 27, 1989. He was working as a schoolteacher when he met with an unfortunate road accident. Though he survived the massive crash, he lost his left eye. Normally, a person from such an economic background would have strived



for an easy life with the chance to earn a decent living. Instead, he decided that he must commit his future to social service by quitting his teacher's job and serving the needy where he lived.

It was critical for him to continue to receive support from his mother and family to fight setbacks to his pursuit of developmental activities. His mother looked sympathetically at his desire and will to serve the community, and encouraged him a lot. With that encouragement, Rajapaneerselvam got a society registered for rural development promotion services in 1990. This was by no means a small effort for a person born to a middle-class family and aspiring to be independent.

Drive for social cause

In 1990, after recovering from the accident and embarking on his new lease of life, Rajapaneerselvam started the first set of activities at villages near Vaniyampadi by adopting tribal children.

Their isolation distressed him, and he involved himself in giving them an identity by putting them through confidence-building exercises. He focused on ensuring basic amenities for them. He represented these students at government offices for getting them ration cards, education and health care. The results of these actions gave him tremendous self-satisfaction and built up his drive to extend his activities. The zeal to help tribal children live a normal life is a noteworthy trait!

He decided to ignore his limitations and extend his social drive further. He started working on HIV AIDS awareness and environment-friendly practices like local organic farming. He used to gather his friends and like-minded people to help him out with his activities. His leadership trait was of great help in enabling him to do so. He held propaganda meetings at street corners, deliver messages through folktales and drama. All these actions look simple and straightforward, yet they are difficult to implement at ground level.

Rajapaneerselvam was aware of his resource limitations. He thought that the best way to serve economically and socially deprived people was to link up with available state and central government schemes. Not everyone can do this, as it requires in-depth understanding of government machinery and the ability to liaise effectively with officials and persuade them to make things work. Moreover, there were challenges posed by suspicious beneficiaries as well as officials, who had doubts on how he could deliver efficient social service.

Rajapaneerselvam spent long hours every day working with the stakeholders concerned to implement afforestation schemes, childcare (day) centers, tribal welfare schemes, rain water harvesting and cleaning of water tanks and bunds (embankments and dikes). His beneficiaries were illiterate, necessitating a lot of handholding and patience. He developed a flair for understanding government schemes and taking them to the people—a remarkable leadership trait!

Support of well-wishers

The effects of his accident and the increasing scale of his activities required him to seek the support of other people. Rajapaneerselvam was not in a position to build a social venture or approach funding sources to enable him to augment his human resources. He believed that he had to use the strength of networking to help him out with his cause. Between 1987 and 1991, when he was headmaster of a high school, he had supported 800 poor men and women by giving them opportunities to become qualified teachers in government schools. This was done at a very low cost to them, without expectation of pecuniary return. According to Rajapaneerselvam, 80% of these people were living below the poverty line when he helped them out.

Many of them lived in the areas covered by his operations and were happy to support his cause. This was an appreciable factor in his life as a social worker. It came up mainly because of his nature to do good for people with no return expectations! This made his beneficiaries support him at the most crucial times even when he had not sought any help from them.

Scaling up

One could observe that his engagements increased over time! He had the enthusiasm to scale up his activities, even though factors like the location, the limited scope for resource

mobilization and the need for personal attention, along with his physical limitations, were major challenges! He had the drive to overcome these challenges. Since 1996, Rajapaneerselvam has initiated about 289 women's self-help groups (SHGs). There are about 5,200 members. Many of the member are tribal folks, people living in the foothills, destitutes, widows, sex workers, people dependent on forests for livelihood and people who walk long distances because there was a lack of adequate transportation networks.

He started training these women in the three aspects namely: reading, writing and arithmetic. He also gave attention to training them in hygiene, in handling atrocities against them and in the evils of female infanticide. He was passionate about spreading his messages on the evils of addiction to drugs, tobacco and liquor. Trafficking in women was a massive problem that victimized innocent women. He was deeply concerned about this menace. He initiated a number of programs to create awareness about the problem, and was personally involved in rescuing women who been trafficked. He facilitated these SHGs to mobilize Rs 36 crores of loan, use the proceeds profitably and efficiently repay the entire amount. Instead of looking at these achievements as mere activities of social workers or chores of NGOs, one must see them against the backdrop of Rajapaneerselvam and his determination to fight the limitations imposed on him by his accident. One can then observe his deep desire to work for deprived, directionless and unfortunate women who were being exploited by antisocial elements.

Rajapaneerselvam started focusing on taking his involvement in social service to a higher level. This necessitated the creation of a core facility from which he could operate. He had been deeply concerned about the injustice prevailing in the region (like in so many other parts of the country!), especially injustice directed at children and women. His primary activities included fighting female infanticide, raising a voice against atrocity towards women, rehabilitating women involved in trafficking, supporting destitute women and women who were mentally ill due to abduction and forced sex work.

In the following paragraphs, the author documents Rajapaneerselvam's determination to fight injustice against child and women.

In 2000, Rajapaneerselvam built the headquarters for all the activities of his society at Tiruppathur in Vellore district. It provided 24-hour care. Between 2001 and 2003, his focus was on raising HIV/AIDS awareness among women engaged as sex workers. He encouraged them to give up their profession, join the social mainstream and live with dignity. According to him, the society he leads interacts with about 800 sex workers every year, attempting to change their mindsets and to bring them back into the mainstream of society.

In 2004, he increased his scope of activities, under a central government scheme to support destitute women and children. He focused on training women to be self-employed and live independently. They were then moved back to live in society. He has helped nearly 70 women through this scheme in Tiruppathur. During a period of about four years, he rescued 24 infant girl children and entrusted them to care under the government's cradle scheme.

Attention to children

Since 2007, he has been running a center for rehabilitation of orphaned children at Tiruppathur. He helps to get them adopted by eligible couples. Even though female infanticide rates are reportedly coming down as people get more educated on the appalling nature of such crimes, incidences still happen. Abandoned girl children are found in or near garbage bins, bus stops and depots, canal banks, hospital corridors and police stations. He has set up a system whereby he receives messages about abandoned girls through informers and rushes to rescue them. According to him, some children are even attacked and injured by street dogs before he retrieves them. His challenge is to lead them back to a normal life with adequate nutrition and health quotient. Further, he is able to achieve only a small part of what he desires, as there are physical limitations to communication and synchronization of activities. He has extended his operations to beyond Vellore district, covering Tiruvallur, Villupuram, Tiruvannamalai and Cuddalore districts. He shows his tremendous resolve by taking personal

care to save every abandoned child.

This is challenging work in terms of the effort, time and diligence required. The processes are rightly stringent. Rajapaneerselvam brings extraordinary humanity to the whole process, in which there is no commerce involved. It is a matter of resurrecting the life of a child and possibly later, a couple and that child, and of harmonizing the relationship through mentoring—something that is key to success. One would understand the depth of effort involved only when one probes into every activity involved in the process of getting a child cleared for placement and then finding the right couple. The activity requires clearly demarcated areas, staff and medical care for the children. Even though most centers of this sort do yeoman service by resurrecting children and make couples happy, Rajapaneerselvam's passion in this service as well as his other activities is phenomenal.

All these activities require extensive record keeping; the documentation part has to be handled with great care to validate the quality of care and attention given to beneficiaries. He personally supervises all these activities. Though it takes time in terms of recording, maintaining and filing reports and returns with the government, this is critical for sustaining the operation.

Similarly, under another scheme called Gokulam Home for Children, launched by the Government of India in 2000, he runs a home for resurrecting children whose parents ignored and disowned them and homeless orphans who have been surviving by begging on trains and streets. He approaches the courts to bring these children home and send them to school. Currently, he serves 15 girl children and one male child under this scheme. These activities show his passion for children's well-being.

He runs a program to educate adolescent girl children on the need to be safe and careful against likely offenders, and equip them to protect themselves. He conducts workshops once in a quarter. He has a wide network of friends who are auto drivers, petty shop owners, teachers and local leaders in villages and assist in running these programs by acting as torchbearers for protecting young girls. The leadership shown by Rajapaneerselvam is appreciable.

Many of the girls are misguided due to lack of mentorship.

Spreading wide

Along similar lines, he retrieves trafficked women as soon as he gets information on them. He then communicates with the appropriate authorities in each woman's home state to coordinate the work of placing them back in society. This again requires personal attention and care from him. This project comes under UJJAWALA, the Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-Integration of Victims of Trafficking for Commercial Sexual Exploitation, under the supervision of the Ministry of Women and Child Development. While he conducts all these activities through his registered society, he is operationally responsible and needs to involve himself.

Conclusion

We have observed that Rajapaneerselvam has showed tremendous character in fighting for justice. His physical impairment due to an accident has not deterred him, but rather, drives his passion. His upbringing and ingrained nature of carrying out benevolent services facilitated him to strengthen his focus. His passion has been to fight against female infanticide and injustice against children and women. Operating in a backward district and a small town, he needs a lot of energy and drive to pursue his passion. He does not have the money or stature to attract professionals to work with him. However, these limitations never stopped him; some of his activities even go beyond his local area. Avoiding any temptation to attract funds, he stays focused on his deeds, impacting the beneficiaries directly. Here is a man who has stood tall against all odds and worked to make women and children safe and secure from atrocities. It is to be wished that there were more such women, because then women and children would be happy and peaceful on Indian soil.

— This is part of the book *"Incredible Champions"* authored by N. Chandrasekaran and published by Partridge Publishers 2014.

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND MANAGEMENT



Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani. It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship. **CSIM offers training and consultancy to social enterprises – for-profits and non-profits – to facilitate**

them to apply successful business practices and yet retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives. CSIM operates in Chennai, Coimbatore, Hyderabad and Bangalore.

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CSIM also facilitates Social Audit for social enterprises through Social Audit Network, UK and SAN, India.
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ORGANICALLY YOURS

One look at nallakeerai.com shows you how far Jagan and Saravanan have progressed in successfully marketing organic farming to the end-consumer.

Jaganathan Rajendran and Saravanan Santhanam studied together. But even before they met, their fathers were friends. And if there was one attribute that was perhaps a tad thicker than their friendship, it was their zeal to develop a social edge to their lives and work. Which is why ever since the duo graduated in the mid-1990s, they went about doing their bit for society, educating the inhabitants of a tiny rural hamlet called Pakkam located in Thiruvallur District. Part of their efforts included starting a weekend computer centre for the youth of the village. “But around the year 1999, Jagan happened to chance upon a family who had gone to bed one evening with no money to feed themselves,” recalls Saravanan, Co-founder, Nallasanthai Producer company, “On further enquiry, he realized it was because they were into agriculture, and business wasn’t good.” In many ways, that incident allowed Jagan — who would go on to co-found Nallasanthai Producer company with Saravanan — the kind of an impact agriculture made, to people of this village.

Neither of the two had a background in agriculture. But all it took was a

simple survey to discover that nearly 60% of costs involved in agriculture went towards procurement and application of fertilizer, insecticides and pesticide. “The big question was: how do we get around this,” says Saravanan, going back to what went into founding Farm to Consumer Private Limited (F2C) that the two of them run today. The answer was quite simple: organic farming.

While Nallasanthai Producer Company focused upon farmer networking and organic produce, Farm to Consumer Private Limited (F2C) was launched to market organic produce. “Nallakeerai” was the brand that was promoted through these companies.

One look at nallakeerai.com shows you how far Jagan and Saravanan have progressed in successfully marketing organic farming to the end-consumer. The website is, in fact, an extension of a process that began in the early 2000s. “Once we decided that organic farming was the way forward, we had to decide what kind of methodology we were going to adopt to get the farmer to adopt an organic approach to agriculture,” says Saravanan. “The first question we had to ask ourselves was: what kind of



Jagan



Saravanan

crops would be the most suitable for organic farming? We learned that leafy greens were the most suitable for organic farming given the kind of patronage that the crop enjoyed among consumers.” Thus began a series of research activity into the types of greens that farmers could produce. “We came up with nearly 45 varieties of the crop that would make good business sense,” says Saravanan.

Beyond this noble attempt to rehabilitate agriculture, there lay a far nobler reason to promote organic farming — public awareness about the dangers of pesticide and fertilizer. “Punjab bears the dubious distinction of having the most number of cancer cases in India. In Tamil Nadu, it’s Erode with the most number of cancer cases,” points out Saravanan, adding: “It’s the same State and district that also sees a great deal of agricultural activity in the

country.” No doubt, the parallels between agricultural practices and the onset of cancer couldn’t be ignored. That led to the duo to actively promote organic farming in the minds of the public. “There has to be a holistic approach,” insists Saravanan, “Cultivating organic greens is a great way to start. But we need organic millets too. Organic farming and consumption of organic products needs to become part of our common lifestyle.” And that is exactly what nallakeerai.com sets out to achieve.

The last two years have seen the nallakeerai.com achieve great success locally, as it has grabbed the world of online retail by the horns. The business model is quite simple: Saravanan and Jagan encourage farmers to cultivate organic produce and go the extra mile in processing the crop. “We do this so as to eliminate, to an extent, the need for middle-men in selling these crops,” explains Saravanan. In keeping with this plan, the duo has helped farmers with the necessary machinery to process their crops, after which, the company purchases the processed produce from the farmer. “If the farmer makes, let’s say, 14 rupees for raw agricultural produce, he makes

24 rupees after he processes the crop himself thereby not losing out on that extra money to a middleman,” he explains, “So that means more money in the hands of the farmer and lesser middle-men involved in selling agricultural produce to the consumer.” After F2C buys the processed produce from the farmer, the company sells the crops on nallakeerai.com pretty much like Flipkart and Amazon sell books, accessories and electronics. Keeping the sale of agricultural produce limited to a producer, retailer and consumer helps in restoring the organic nature of the produce itself. “After a great deal of research that we funded ourselves, we began selling on our website a couple of years ago,” says Saravanan. F2C hopes to tap nearly 1,000 customers across 20 locations in Chennai alone this year, even as it hopes to break even by the end of 2015. In doing that, the company could successfully manage to raise better awareness about eating organic, while restoring some sense of economic stability to farmers: a two-pronged approach to successful organic farming and consumption.



Where Every Drop Matters



Backed by the likes of Harvard Angels and Google's Rajan Anandan, Karthik Naralasetty's Socialblood aims to be a global one-stop platform for blood donation. In his own words, he wants to bring innovation into this space and change the perception that dealing with blood is not cool.

Karthik Naralasetty always had an entrepreneurial streak in him. He dropped out of Rutgers University in 2010 and started an Internet business. But what he didn't anticipate was that one day he would be building a business that would impact millions across the world. "Once, I came across an article in a newspaper about a young girl from Karnataka, who was suffering from a disease called Thalassemia. Picture this. She needed 30 units of blood every month, just to survive and lead a normal life like us," he says.

This led him to visit several blood banks in Bengaluru to understand how blood banks operate and how the blood donation system works. "These visits made me realise that blood donation is not just a challenge in India, but, across the world. The solution is simple; ask people when in need of blood. But nobody does that," he opines. Thus, in 2011, he founded Socialblood, and as a first step, he created eight Facebook groups for each blood type

and invited his friends to join each group. Within a month, there were 10,000 people using these groups.

By November 2011, he was invited to the U.S. by the Staples and Asoka Foundation, to present the idea to the likes of Sean Parker (founder of Napster). "Parker felt the idea was good but believed that unless I focus completely on developing it, I won't create a sustainable impact. His words stuck with me," recalls Naralasetty. As a result, he researched the blood donation segment in the U.S. as well, and spent a few hours every week developing the concept. "The fundamental

"The fundamental difference between India and the U.S. is that in the U.S., by law, the hospitals should not ask the patient's family to identify blood donors. They partner with blood banks, which always have a stock of blood, and through a software process, source it when needed."

difference between India and the U.S. is that in the U.S., by law, the hospitals should not ask the patient's family to identify blood donors. They partner with blood banks, which always have a stock of blood, and through a software process, source it when needed," he explains. Whereas, in India, when a patient is in need of blood, it is the family's responsibility to source it. "That's why we felt there was a strong revenue model in the U.S. and we can capitalise on it," he adds.

Soon, Socialblood also moved out of Facebook groups and became a single platform where blood donors and blood seekers can transact. "We wanted to create a platform where hospitals and blood banks can come on board too. And, we launched this first in India," shares Naralasetty. Thus, while in India, it focuses on connecting the blood donors and seekers through its platform, in the U.S., it is developing software tools to connect hospitals and blood banks.

The company raised its first round of funding from Rajan Anandan of Google, who also brought the likes of Karthik Reddy (Blume Ventures), Ravi Gururaj (VP-Citrix) and Ramesh Kumar Shah (Harvard Angels), on board. Then, after shifting base to the U.S., Naralasetty participated in an accelerator

programme and raised a second round of angel funding.

Today, Socialblood is in the process of developing Facebook tools to improve connectivity between hospitals, blood banks and donors. For example, it is exploring an opportunity to introduce an icon which allows the user to add their blood type on the profile page. "If this is implemented, anybody can search for anyone's blood type through graph search," indicates Naralasetty. With these tools, he also plans to capitalise on the African and Asia-Pacific market where the problem is as prevalent.

"Ultimately, we want to position blood donation as a cool thing among youngsters. For this, we want to present stories instead of facts. With respect to hospitals and blood banks, which have seen no innovation in the last 50 years, we meet them and show them how the technology works. Once a few come on board, the rest will follow suit," indicates Naralasetty.

In the long run, he aims to build Socialblood as a global one-stop platform to donate and seek blood.

—Madhumita Prabhakar
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In perspective

Establishment of Trusts, Societies and Social Enterprises have given a structure to seeing one's social intentions get manifested. But, the foundations laid by personal experiences and the resultant vision enable putting these intentions in perspective, creating space for the following actions or interventions to be more relevant and necessary. Ms Kumari Thanigachalam's journey from her childhood to establishment of NEST – National Educational and Social Service Trust, in Arakonam, Vellore District, Tamil Nadu, is just the perfect instance in this context.

Kumari lost her parents early in life and was brought up by her grandmother. She had to discontinue studies beyond class 9, but kept herself associated with a number of small initiatives in her town near Arakonam. Her social skills soon gave her an opportunity to work as a Coordinator with a funding agency there. Unfortunately, Kumari was disappointed to learn the umpteen number of obstacles that restrained her from doing what she wanted to do for the needy families that were approaching the agency for assistance. "Hailing from a poor family, the way I conceived and associated with a situation in the field was completely different from the protocols that the agency had adopted," recalls Kumari.

Kumari started her career with a salary of 500 rupees. Her passion for social work helped her delineate between what was being done and what was supposedly the best option available for the programme beneficiaries. "Women used to come to the centre for counselling services, legal assistance, etc. There were situations where they had to go to a police station, which I encouraged and also supported. I also had to get some women into Homes to ensure their safety and better standard of life," shares Kumari.

Kumari had always insisted that interventions must be open to accommodating people's real needs.



"This marks the significant impact on a small scale. Overlooking real needs just because they do not fit into the realm of an organisation's planned interventions is a serious threat," says Kumari, who launched her own organisation to work according to what she thought was more appropriate for the families and communities that required assistance.

Kumari had always prioritised working for elderly and destitute women, especially those who could not afford caring for themselves. As the thoughts on NEST were taking roots, she also worked on focussing on these issues through specific actions. "I had known what women from poor families needed. I never approved of getting money in return for any services that my organisation would provide. Being an insider, I was also better positioned to analyse my options clearly," she explains.

Beginning its journey in 2009, NEST currently works on three areas—women empowerment by promoting economic activities like tailoring, embroidery, painting and making of paper cups,

Beginning its journey in 2009, NEST currently works on three areas—women empowerment by promoting economic activities like tailoring, embroidery, painting and making of paper cups, assistance for marriages, scholarships for out of school children, and school drop outs.

assistance for marriages, scholarships for out of school children, and school drop outs. As a trainer of SHGs for almost a decade, Kumari was able to pool in women through these programmes and help them set up their own small scale enterprises. Recently, a group of women succeeded in starting a tiffin centre that also managed snacks

making and packaging. Interestingly, Kumari has not raised any funds for the activities of NEST. She tries to connect women to the schemes under the Social Welfare Board and makes sure that a wide range of people like carpenters, painters, plumbers, etc., get to know and avail benefits under schemes designed exclusively for them.

NEST is also being prepared to focus on environmental education in schools at Arakonam. Alongside, NEST is streamlining its contact base to promote awareness on bonded labour and sensitise people from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities to raise voice against bonded labour. Focus on these two fronts came up as NEST began to realise the next level of needs among the people. "A sustained rapport with the people in the community has helped us decide our focus areas and the appropriate interventions that we can initiate," asserts Kumari.

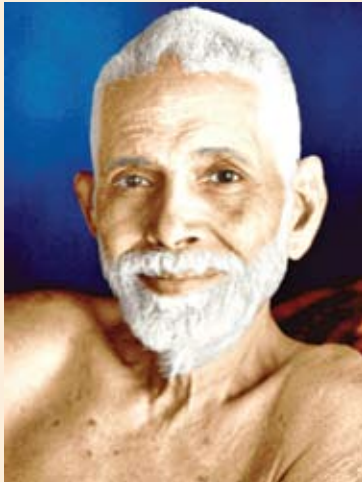
Given a job that cannot be constrained to eight hour timings as in conventional jobs, Kumari attributes her accomplishment to her family who have always understood, appreciated and prioritised her engagement in the field as and when required. Her trainees are now leaders of Panchayats, heads of federations in gram panchayats and also cluster coordinators of SHGs. Today, she is not only a role model for the women she has trained, but also to her own children.

Being the face of NEST, she is now actively doing her ground work for the future—establishment of a home for the aged and a crèche, both of which can have a significant impact on the lives of uncared senior citizens and women aspiring for economic independence. Guided by a clear perspective in mind, NEST desires for a long and eventful journey, addressing people's real needs, one at a time.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

Mr. Raj Krishna found Sri Bhagavan alone on the Hill at about 5-30 p.m. and prayed: I have been desiring since my tenth year to have a glimpse of the Reality. I firmly believe that I can be helped in this only by a sage like Sri Bhagavan. So I pray for Thy help. Sri Bhagavan looked at him for a few minutes. The devotee interrupted, saying: "Even if I cannot realise in my life let me at



least not forget it on my death bed: let me have a glimpse at least at the moment of death so that it may stand me in good stead in the future."

M.: It is said in the Bhagavad Gita, Ch. VIII, that whatever may be the last thought at death, it determines the later birth of the person.

It is necessary to experience the Reality now in life in order that it may be experienced at death. See if this moment be different from the last one, and try to be in that desired state.

D.: I have limitations. I am unable to rise to the occasion. Grace can achieve for me what I cannot achieve myself.

M.: True, but unless there is grace this desire will not arise.

They were walking slowly, conversing at the same time. The devotee said: "There is a girl of eleven in Lahore. She is very remarkable. She says she can call upon Krishna twice and remain conscious, but if she calls the third time she becomes unconscious and remains in trance for ten hours continuously."

M.: So long as you think that Krishna is different from you, you call upon Him. Falling into trance denotes the transitoriness of the *samadhi*. You are always in *samadhi*; that is what should be realised.

D.: God-vision is glorious.

M.: God-vision is only vision of the Self objectified as the God of one's own faith. Know the Self.

—Excerpted from talks with Shri Ramana Maharish

Performance and Cultural Excellence - hand in hand

Business Process Management Introduction and Overview

One of the biggest challenges of Social Organizations lies in building and sustaining efficiency in all organizational processes. While they are rich in passion and vision due to various factors the efficiency remains a challenge, especially in India. They may be effective but efficiency is altogether a different matter. Effectiveness comes from structured processes and efficiency comes from these processes being aligned to the vision and values of the organization. This is true to any organization be it corporate or social sector. Any organization requires processes right from inventory to product delivery. The ways in which these processes are executed are dependent on the context. The complexity of how various tasks and activities are executed, sequenced, written, understood, communicated, mitigated and handled are different. There may be some standard practices seen as the business/enterprise becomes larger and broader.

Social entrepreneurs are usually visionary people with high passion and focused on the achievement of that vision. They are backed by people who believe in that vision. They may be great thinkers but cannot be expected to be great executors. The people who support need to be well trained in the business process management if the social organization has to be a successful in fulfilling its vision. While the members of the organization may have a shared vision, it is critical to also have a shared and respected business process too. If many people who identify with the vision and the objectives of the organization come together to form the social organization but are not focused equally on the business process management everyday operations and sustaining efficiency will become a challenge. Noble intentions and noble thoughts require effective ways of



execution and constant improvement to make it a success.

The word process means in simplified terms –

- a systematic series of actions directed to some end
- a continuous action, operation, or series of changes taking place in a definite manner
- Synonyms
- Operation, procedure, proceeding, applies to something that goes on or takes place.
- A process is a series of progressive and interdependent steps by which an end is attained

When a social organization is formed by the social entrepreneur, forming the vision is one of the first and most critical steps. E.g. The vision of Habitat for Humanity: A world where everyone has a decent place to live. This vision will have to be backed by actions that will be in line with the vision. These steps have to be integrally connected to each other.

In order to move in the path of vision if Habitat for Humanity undertakes a



research, the team that would be working on the research need to look into what is the basic minimum requirement, what is the global standard, what is the local and global picture on this, what does it cost, what's the effort, etc. Some of the critical questions and details that needs to be identified, defined, documented would be -

- What all info will you want
- how will you get this info
- how will you use this info
- how to approach
- where is it sourced from
- when all can I get this information
- who will give me this information
- who will use this data

The answers that come for each of these will help define a process- a means to the desired end. But the understanding of process does not stop here. Business process entails a number of other elements too. The series of articles that are going to be covered in future articles in this column would discuss those elements in detail.

As we move deeper in the understanding of process, business process, project and

excellence journey, many areas would be covered that can help and sharpen the understanding of how to run an enterprise with better-interconnected, well-woven & interdependent holistic processes that can help achieve the vision of the social organization. These processes have to be connected and aligned to the vision and values of the organization. This would make the performance excellence and cultural excellence to go hand in hand.

Performance excellence includes

- A clear and deeper understanding of business process
- The importance and role of project and process in an enterprise
- The meaning and relevance of project management
- The knowledge areas of project management
- The scope, time, cost, quality, risk, communication, procurement and stakeholder management of the project and their management
- The ways to integrate project management in an organization
- The use and importance of technology usage in organization process and project management
- Ways to improve the business process maturity and
- Ways of assessing the organization excellence

A deeper understanding of the above elements also requires an understanding of various tools and techniques that can be used for social organizations. The vision, values and learning processes have to go hand in hand with the business process for efficiency in project management to be attained.

This is the first article in the series 'Performance and Cultural Excellence – hand in hand'

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath and Prathaap B

Creating a CSR Road Map



Recent trends have shown that a growing number of investors would prefer companies with strong CSR programs. They see CSR involvement as an indication of the company's long-term potentials. Organizations around the world, and their stakeholders, are becoming increasingly aware of the need for and benefits of socially responsible behavior. An organization's performance in relation to the society in which it operates and to its impacts on the environment has become a critical part of measuring its overall performance and its ability to continue operating effectively.

Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA) and Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) believe in the need to facilitate the design, development and delivery of a contemporary CSR training which takes into account the basic CSR guidelines, developmental priorities, reporting frameworks, and contextualizes it in order to deepen responsible business practices in the country.

In this context, IICA and CSIM jointly organised a two-day Management Development Programme titled "Creating a CSR Road Map" on 9th and 10th of January, 2015 at Hotel Savera in Chennai.

Dr. Bhaskar Chatterjee, Director General & CEO, Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs, Ms. Gayatri Subramaniam, Convener & Chief Programme Executive, National Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility (NFCSR), IICA; and a team of resource persons from CSIM handled the sessions.

"If we look at CSR now and three years down

the line, the questions are going to be asked primarily on whether it has really created an impact on ground? The answer will come from Social Audit. Only when you evaluate the programmes on ground and find out the lasting impact it has left, will it answer the question of whether CSR has helped in furthering the development agenda of the nation. That should actually be the primary focus of CSR!" said Dr. Bhaskar Chatterjee adding that IICA is looking to create a whole vertical for project evaluation and will be looking for professional Social Auditors, who would make sure that every single company and all their projects are being evaluated and published.

"Imagine 16000 companies with an average of five projects each - which would sum up to 80,000 projects to be evaluated," he added.

30 participants—Senior Managers from Corporate houses, NGO Heads, and academicians registered for this programme. All the participants have lauded the trainers. They said: "A good exposure to new subjects and law/Act/rules providing for CSR. A very novel; concept and idea for developing our nation and enhancing the economic status of its citizen. Should be followed rigorously and sincerely" - An IFS Officer

"A great Opportunity to learn about creating a new landscape in CSR. Feel Inspired. Very competent and Innovative facilitators" - A non-profit consultant

"It was elaborative to Corporates who are actually implementing directly. The templates were useful though we are still using conventional ones" - A Senior Manager (HR) of a PSU



“I did not know that history was in the making when my father converted the lawn into an agricultural field.”

Shri SS Rajsekar talks to **Marie Banu** and **Latha Suresh** about the importance of agriculture.

Shri. S SRajsekar, the Managing Trustee of NAF, is an entrepreneur with over 30 years of experience in real estate promotion and trade. He is the son of former Union Minister C. Subramaniam and has been actively involved in the area of rural agriculture management and social and community development.

He was appointed the Hon. Lieutenant Governor of State of Alabama in May 2009.

Rajsekar is a proactive Rotarian involved in several socially relevant projects in and around Tamilnadu. He has held leadership positions in many firms such as Oil & Natural Gas Company Ltd.

He is a Past President of Rotary Club of Madras East and held various offices at the district level. As a Rotarian, he helped his club organize a series of fairs, workshops and public education campaigns that were of supreme relevance to the improvement of quality of human life. He also promoted environmentally and socially sustainable development projects.

In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu and Latha Suresh, Shri SS Rajsekar talks about the importance of agriculture.

Your father Shri C Subramaniam was known as the real architect of the Green Revolution. What was the reason to launch National Agro Foundation?

My father felt that the first green revolution was predominantly aimed at improving the genetic potential with a concept of “Seed to Grain” whereas there was a need to address the challenges in agriculture in the context of changing global conditions. Moreover, the Indian farmers are predominantly small and marginal land holder; they face different sets of challenges and bringing them to the mainstream was the priority. Thus, National Agro Foundation was launched by my father—Shri C Subramaniam—on his 90th birthday in the year 2000 to bring about the second green revolution with special focus on small and marginal farmers. He termed this approach as “soil to market”. There was a need to address the issues of farm and farmers holistically so as to empower them and bring about rural prosperity.

NAF is involved in creating model village clusters wherein a multipronged approach of agriculture development is focused upon. It includes agriculture allied sector development, water and natural resource management, community empowerment, and training and capacity building—which we call 4E model

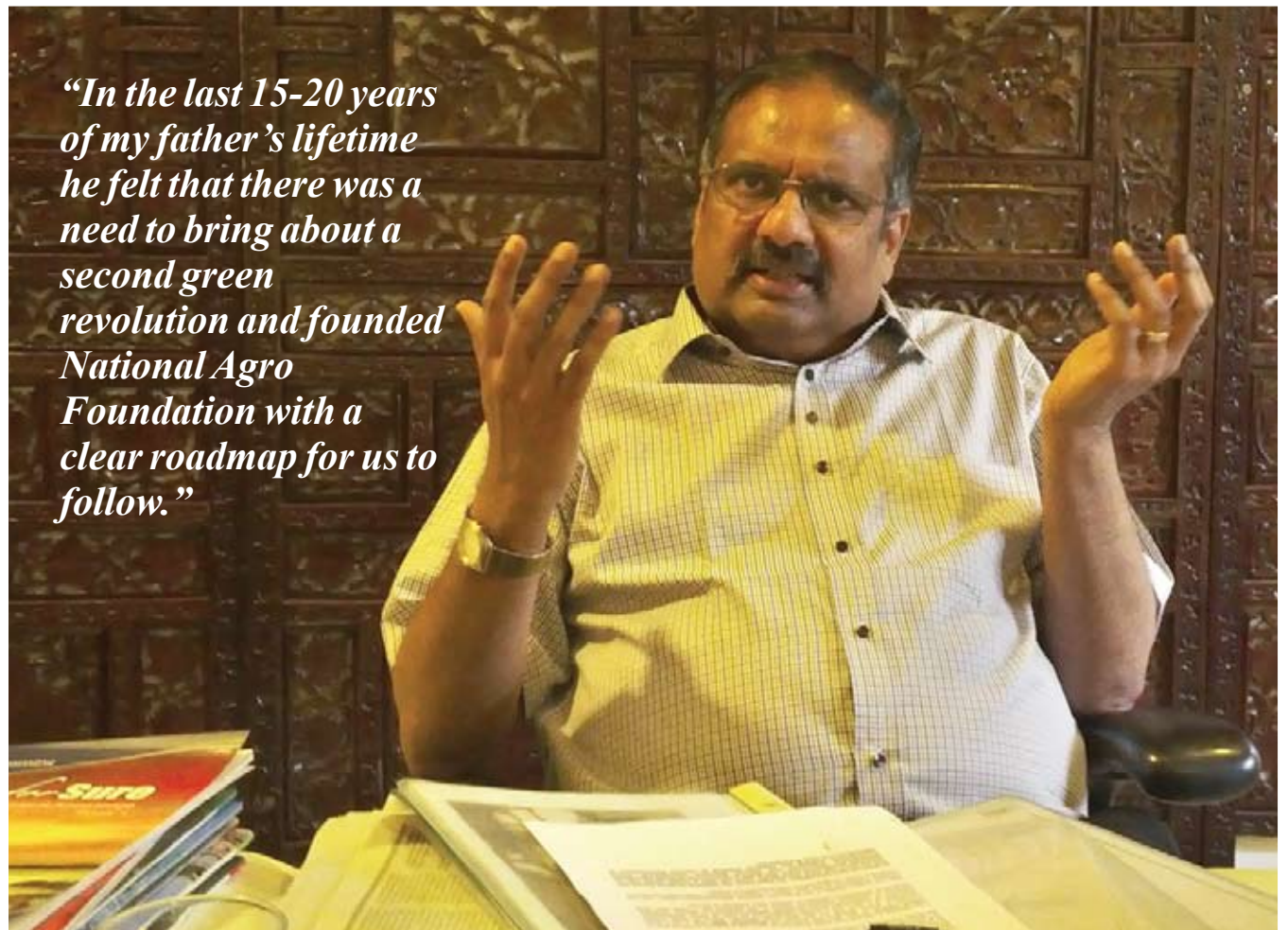


Photo: Marie Banu

“In the last 15-20 years of my father’s lifetime he felt that there was a need to bring about a second green revolution and founded National Agro Foundation with a clear roadmap for us to follow.”

(Education, Earning, Environment and Empowerment).

What are your thoughts about organic farming?

Organic farming is a growing science and has to be approached in its proper perspective. Organic farming, in its true sense, is readily applicable to large land holdings. But, under small farm holder conditions, it has to be a community approach wherein the farmers should adopt to conditions of organic farming collectively in order to prevent the “spill-over effect”.

Our farmers have to go a long way in adopting organic farming. However, NAF advocates “Lean Farming” wherein the excess use of agrochemicals is discouraged and the entire crop production process is approached with a combination of organic, bio and inorganic ways which is need based. This reduces the dependency of farmers on external inputs.

Can you tell us about NAF’s training programmes?

Training to build the capacity of various stakeholders of rural development is of

utmost importance for sustained benefits. NAF strongly believes in training the stakeholders like farmers, youth, women, skilled workers, bankers, agri-entrepreneurs. Its curriculum is two pronged viz., “Technology Oriented” and “Participant Oriented”. The training programs are designed in such a way that it brings about Change in Attitude (A), Builds the Skill (S) and enriches them with Knowledge (K) – “ASK”.

NAF closely works with agencies like NABARD, Government and Corporate houses in imparting farm sector skill training. The training center campus is spread over 5 acres consisting of classrooms, model farms, farm machinery workshop, residential block, and an open air theatre. Farmers from across the country as well as from Nepal, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh as well have undergone trainings at NAF.

As a boy, you had to give up playing cricket as the 5-acre land was converted to grow wheat. Can you share this memorable incident?

I was too young to understand as to what was happening in 1964 since I was just a 10

old boy. My father took up the challenge of solving India’s food problem when it was near a famine situation and the western world had written us off. Ship loads of wheat used to come from U.S and it was termed by my father as a “ship to mouth” existence.

In order to prove that new high yielding varieties would solve India’s food problem, he undertook demonstration plots in his own backyard in New Delhi which used to be my playground. This was converted into a farm overnight and Mexican and Indian wheat varieties were grown for comparison. I distinctly remember that my father himself used to measure the plant growth and observe for grain formation. At that stage I did not realize that history was in the making. Thus the Green Revolution transformed India’s Agriculture.

In the last 15-20 years of my father’s lifetime he felt that there was a need to bring about a second green revolution and founded National Agro Foundation with a clear roadmap for us to follow. I am carrying forward his legacy and we have a long way to go.