

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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From the Editor

Dear Reader,

Season's Greetings!

In the life of every nation there are certain days which are considered as red-letter days. The Republic Day of India which is celebrated on 26th January is one such day. It is perhaps the most important day of our country as it marks the birth of our nation as a republic. It was on this day that the Constitution of India replaced the Government of India Act, 1935.

The Indian Constitution assured our people a fair and dignified life; free from the clutches of interference, unjustified authority and disparity. Today, we are free to elect our political representatives, free to live or work in any of the states of India, free to express, and free from any supreme authority.

Republic Day marks the birth of our nation. It is a day of remembrance, thanksgiving, and rejoicing. It is a day to remember our heroes who have shed their blood for our freedom. It is also a day of national pledge when we decided to make our country, sovereign, democratic, and republic.

A great deal more remains to be done, to achieve this pledge. It is up to you and me to redeem this pledge and make our nation truly democratic and republic.

Jai Hind!

—Marie Banu

Clearing the path for your best self

"The Clearing is an opening for action which has been previously unavailable -Lori Dorley."



As we live life, we have learnt to accumulate. Equally important is the process of clearing. Clearing not only of tangible things, but also of the subtle—thoughts and emotions. The Clearing Process supports identification of closely held beliefs, emotions, and attitudes that often stand in the way of achieving desired results. It uncovers the hidden assumptions and conditioning that have influenced perspective, decisions, and relationships. The way to start clearing is to express vulnerably. It is in listening to the inner voice that restrains and calling it out. Are you willing?

*Do not try to save
the whole world
or do anything grandiose.
Instead, create
a clearing
in the dense forest
of your life
and wait there
patiently,
until the song
that is your life
falls into your own cupped hands
and you recognize and greet it.
Only then will you know
how to give yourself
to this world
so worthy of rescue.
—Martha Postlewa*

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

Yours Energetically

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

She can be contacted at bhuvaneshwari@teamthink.co.in for arranging Positive Energy training and Coaching sessions.

Respecting the Abandoned

Street life in our country is very dynamic and one has to walk down the lanes to understand the influence of those bustling activities on our everyday lives. While there is an active and productive side, it also has a sorry face that many choose to ignore. This is because they are clueless about where to begin. Thamizhendhi, Founder of Maatru Trust in Chennai tries to delve into these unnoticed details and build a respectable identity for abandoned souls in our streets.

After dropping out from class eight and with no further encouragement to continue studies, Thamizhendhi joined his father and helped him in his carpentry and construction work. He also accompanied his grandmother who made cow dung cakes and sold them for a living. “I come from a generation where every individual either studied and managed to get a job or learnt to do some work to earn a living. As I was hooked into this earlier in life, I learnt the value of independence. I learnt tailoring in order to earn independently and live without the support of my father or grandmother,” he says.

Thamizhendhi got to work in many export companies. Simultaneously, his life was inspired by Shri Periyar, the founder of Self Respect Movement and Dravidar Kazhagam. Thamizhendhi’s father, an ardent follower of Periyar’s teachings, influenced him as well. He got hooked into social events and actively followed the progress in social development. When he was about 20-years-old, he founded the Thiruvalluvar Senthamizh Peravai for the revival of Tamil language and culture. “In the rush to go up the social ladder, we cannot dissolve our identities. Our language and culture are an inherent part of our identities. This realisation forced me to analyse the situation of social justice in Tamil Nadu,” recalls Thamizhendhi.

In an effort to encourage people to critically understand the picture of social justice in the society, he organised many conferences through this forum and published the proceedings of these conferences. Some of the topics covered included ‘Dalit philosophy and Independence’, ‘Women Empowerment and Independence’.

Thamizhendhi took due care in bringing together activists and experts in the field to present papers at these conferences. He believed that people needed to be guided to have conversations on these topics. He felt that change was not possible and oppression would continue to be a way of life for one part of the society unless they were able to discuss these issues in a relatable manner.

Thamizhendhi used his revenue from tailoring to organise these events and print the publications. When he realised that this was not sustainable in the long run, he decided to establish an NGO. Thus was



born Maatru Trust in 2013, to work for the oppressed and marginalised communities. In the process, he also initiated efforts to revive traditional identities of the marginalised communities. He felt that this was necessary to make them feel important as a community. Traditional games, traditional medicine and also dialects were brought to light through simple cultural programmes. However, this was just a small beginning. “We have tried to know what had once existed as part of our ancestors’ daily lives. We have a long way to go and this requires work at different levels,” he says.

While on his search for an appropriate step forward, he got to observe the life of beggars near Mylapore in Chennai. “I still remember the scene vividly. I was waiting for a friend at the bus stop when two beggars were trying to find some place to sit. Every time they found a place, the very look of the people around forced them to look for a seat elsewhere. To me, it was the sight of a human being, terrified to even sit quietly for a few minutes. That was the moment I decided to start working with them,” shares Thamizhendhi.

The beggars were accustomed to a life of rejection that they were unable to trust someone who was genuinely interested in improving their lives. Thamizhendhi and his team felt that unless they lived with them wherever they went, it was not possible to communicate their genuine interest in their well-being. He therefore travelled with them, stayed with them at different places and also ate with them.

Following them like a shadow was the only thing he could think of doing to earn their trust and it worked. They began to converse with him and shared their life stories. As the rapport built, Thamizhendhi took them home, bathed, shaved, and counselled them. He also managed to reunite some of them with their families. Some of them were also recruited in small enterprises to earn a living. “Each day I worked with them, I was breaking the myth that the general public had about beggars, and their attitude towards life and work in particular. Beggars need only an opportunity and acceptance. With time, I saw them trusting the same society they hated earlier. However remarkable the change was, I was not in a position to sustain this effort although I used my personal resources and my home. The beggars themselves felt hesitant to stay longer. After about two weeks they would leave and again, with no place to be accepted, they resumed begging,” explains Thamizhendhi, moved by the way of life they were forced to lead.

Forty five rupees is what these beggars require to use a public toilet and clean themselves. As most of them did not have the money, they remained dirty. Thamizhendhi was more disturbed by the fact that there were well educated men from all age groups amongst these beggars, who were ready to do any kind of labour. Their inclination to work further differentiated them from those beggars

who begged outside temples. Having analysed the dynamics between these groups, the team from Maatru realised that they were dealing with abandoned souls in the society who ate what was given in alms, who stayed wherever they found a place and took whatever was given. They did not own any form of identification and were not covered in any of the surveys. Therefore, they could not find shelter in the government homes. Thamizhendhi was shocked to find engineers, lawyers and scholars among them.

“It was a huge pool of human resources left to rot simply because no one, including their families trusted them. Hence,

they were vulnerable and likely to be used by anti-social forces, without their knowledge.

Some also indulged in criminal activities. They were open to harassment by anyone, including the police,” he adds.

In his search for a sustainable change in their lives, Thamizhendhi decided to prepare himself by enrolling in

CSIM’s Post Graduate

Diploma in Social Initiative and Management programme. He not only learnt how to operate his Trust but understood the need for collaboration in his efforts. “However strong your understanding of an issue is, there are little details that distract you from main course of action. CSIM helped me learn all that. I now know all the little details that matter in operationalising my strategies. It was also a journey of correcting my self – an alumnus from an earlier batch corrected my perspective on NGOs. From acting merely on service instinct and understanding at a personal level, I have moved to work on guidance,” confesses Thamizhendhi, whose work was felicitated by IOCL at their golden jubilee celebration, in 2015.

Presently, he is working on a model to build a permanent shelter for beggars where they can stay and also undergo skill training. He believes that skilling them was the only way to help them lead independent lives. Thamizhendhi dreams of a day when all of them will have a livelihood and an account where they could deposit their earnings. He hopes to see them settle down to a respectable family life, very much like all other fellow human beings who rejected them.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

From acting merely on service instinct and understanding at a personal level, I have moved to work on guidance.

LEADER & LEADERSHIP MATTERS...

1. Introduction to Leadership journey

The word 'leadership' and 'Leader' have a very strong affiliation, such that, Leadership happens and the 'Leader' happens too and vice versa. It is more like egg and chicken story of who comes first. Does Leadership happen and therefore Leader is born; or Leader is born and therefore Leadership happens. It is an enigma, a mystery. Yet, it is important to take cognizance of the fact that the quality of Leadership is dictated by the quality of the Leader. Leadership development therefore is akin to Leader development. Be it corporate, academic institution, country, household, community or social organization, it pays off to grow the Leaders to have good Leadership. An understanding of what contributes to Leaders or Leadership if foundational, it applies to a wide variety of corporations.

Review of the literature indicates contributions both about Leaders as well as Leadership. While the Leaders is about their personality traits, Leadership has been about their styles. The personality traits and the styles are part and parcel of the business paradigms existing in every era. Business paradigms have constantly evolved over the last century in stages. While the nineteenth century represents the Agrarian Age, the twentieth century inaugurated the Industrial Age where skilled labor constituted the predominant requirement. Accordingly, leadership development efforts were focused upon developing the expertise in handling machinery and production. Subsequently it registered a marked shift in the Information Age of today where intellectual capital is the critical requirement of leadership development. Knowledge, learning, re-engineering systems and processes are the focus, and 'customer satisfaction' and 'change' have become the main buzzwords. The Information Age is giving way to the Consciousness Age, where cultural capital will be the predominant feature; creativity, vision-values and customer collaboration will become important; and emotional intelligence is an expected competence. While social responsibility will be expected, the buzzwords will be 'transformation' and 'evolution' (Barrett, 2001).

The exigencies of the new economy have generated the need for still other competencies that leaders perhaps have to deliberately focus upon. Schematically, these might include:

- Personal creativity where value alignment assumes importance
- Personal productivity where mission alignment gains



- predominance Knowledge/Experience where professional development becomes critical
- Emotional Intelligence where personal mastery is essential

"As the level of consciousness enhances, it will no longer be the survival of the fittest, but the survival of the wisest." (Sampath J.M, 2000)

The coming era of consciousness (or 'concepts' as some prefer to describe it), requires the twin themes of 'transformation' and 'evolution' to become its major planks. Clearly, cultural capital, creativity, alignment of vision and values and customer collaboration are some of the attributes that will come to form the essential elements of organization culture. Emotional intelligence will be an expected competence in every manager (Barrett, 2001). A special premium will be attached to being wise rather than fit.

What does it mean to have an enhanced level of consciousness? The word 'transform' emerges from 'trans' meaning 'to go beyond' and 'form' implying 'going beyond the form'. There is a significant difference from being 'form centered' to being 'essence centered'. Clearly, this movement will have to be accomplished. This new era will address and encourage work on holistic paradigms where recognizing relationships and their inter connectedness have assumed importance. The proliferation of popular books and movies that are making news are evidence

of the explicit acceptance of complexity and subjectivity of the world and yet pushing a synthesis of rationality and intuition. The growth of integral psychology and leadership tie-up; the marriage between quantum physics and behavioral science; rise of Indigo children concepts are all indicating towards an enhanced level of awareness of self and the consciousness.

The plethora of studies and research in management goes to indicate leadership is the ability to lead oneself first and then in that living, a group that is willing to learn and evolve to "who they are meant to be rather than who they think they can be."

There are several approaches that people have studied with regard to Leadership. Leadership being a set of traits; possessing a set of skills; expressing certain power; relationship between leader leading and people following etc. The reality is no one particular style, or trait or quality makes a leader. It is a combination of several dimensions and a fine alignment and balance between each of these dimensions that makes the leader different from others.

This is the beginning of a new series on Leader and Leadership matters. The content for Leader and Leadership development have been drawn from nearly two and half decade of research and documentation of the works and tools of Dr. J.M. Sampath popularly known as the LOI (Life Orientation Instrument). He has identified 30 foundational attributes that the Leader will have to

grow as well as balance in order to bring excellence in leadership. These attributes have been classified into 5 critical orientations that play a significant role in the holistic development of the Leader (www.discoverself.com)

To begin with, the word Leader is referred to as the Person who has the capacity to first balance self and Lead oneself; and in showing the capacity to lead oneself, the Leader also becomes a role model to lead others. There is also a finding from the research that indicates that the values/attributes of Leadership interact with each other creating an inter dynamics that affects the quality of the Leadership. It also determines the Leadership style and the impact that each Leadership style creates at behavioral as well as functioning level.

The 30 Leadership attributes that are addressed in the coming months are –

1. Aspiration
2. Ownership
3. Optimization
4. Involvement
5. Planning
6. Time sense
7. Expression
8. Acceptance
9. Responsibility
10. Sensitivity
11. Appropriateness
12. Influence
13. Empowerment
14. Credibility
15. Task involvement

16. People involvement
17. Organized and structured in task
18. Prioritization
19. Urge to learn
20. Openness
21. Initiative
22. Understanding learning
23. Integration of learning
24. Structure for learning
25. Time for learning
26. Outspokenness
27. Concern
28. Authenticity
29. Conviction
30. Context sensitivity

These attributes have been classified into 5 orientations

- **Achievement:** Every Leader requires to achieve the set goals and mission in order to walk on the path of the vision. Aspiration, ownership, optimization, involvement, planning and time sense would contribute to excellence in achievement.
- **Relationship:** The heart of the Leadership matter lies in the ability of the Leader to relate. People management and connection are the key to excellence in team performance. A Leader who can understand, relate, empathize, empower and nurture is more successful and sustaining than one who is a task master. Expression, acceptance, responsibility, sensitivity, appropriateness are the attributes that make excellence in relationships.
- **Leadership:** Everyday tasks are directly affected by the style of Leadership a Leader adopts to get

the job done. Leaders who are empowering, developmental, credible and appropriate are influential and followed by others. Leadership is not by birth or nationality but by choice and has to be carefully nurtured and developed to bring in excellence.

- **Learning:** There is no pathway to excellence without Learning. Learning does not happen by chance or by default; it happens with choice and a keen interest to learn, understand, integrate and grow. An open mind is vital for learning. The attributes curiosity, open mind, initiative, understanding, integration and time for learning contribute to excellence in learning.
 - **Nurturing:** Every Leader has to be foundationally developmental and nurturing. The competence to give and receive feedback is core. No positional authority can capture the attention of the team as much as a genuine, strong, straight forward nurturing Leader can do. The attributes that contribute to excellence in Leadership nurturance are outspokenness, concern, authenticity, conviction and context sensitivity.
- There is a dynamic interplay between all the attributes and it is essential to know each of them independently too. While understanding the orientations leading to excellence in Leadership matters the route we wish to take is to know the Leaders and their thoughts, feelings, perspectives and actions. So the forthcoming articles will bring real existing Leader's life stories and experiences that show case the attribute and its impact on Leadership decisions.

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath



Involvement



A woodcarver called Ching had just finished work on a bell-frame. Everyone who saw it marvelled at it, for it seemed to be the work of spirits. When the Duke of Lu saw it, he asked, "What sort of a genius is yours that you could make such a thing?"

The woodcarver replied, "Sir, I am only a simple workman. I am no genius. But there is one thing. When I am going to make a bell-frame, I meditate to calm my mind. When I have meditated for three days, I think no more about rewards or emoluments. When I have meditated for five days, I no longer think of praise or blame, skilfulness or awkwardness. When I have meditated for seven days, I suddenly forget my limbs, my body; no, I forget my very self. I lose consciousness of the court and my surroundings. Only my skill remains. In that state, I walk into the forest; stop at the tree which will give me the bell-frame. I see the bell-frame in all its perfection. Then my hands go to the task. Having set myself aside, nature meets nature in the work that is performed through me. This, no doubt, is the reason why everyone sees that the finished product is the work of spirits."



Explicit Learning

- A. When you want to turn out the best, work like Ching.
- B. It calls for absolute involvement to create the best.
- C. The quality of your work is directly proportional to the extent of your involvement.



Introspective Learning

- A. What makes me turn out my best?
- B. What is the nature of 'Involvement'?
- C. How do I enhance my level of involvement in anything I do?

LOCAL LEARNING

A typical KOR session is centered on reading aloud, a bilingual book in English and Tamil in an engaging way.

When Rajashree Natarajan, her husband Sairam Kumar Jayaraman and friend Sudha Yagna Narayanan began Katha On Ratha around two years ago, they had little idea that it would soon expand to 36 schools in just over 18 months. When they began, the focus was rather simple. “The language children use at home and the books in their mother tongue which they are expected to read are quite different,” explains Rajashree, “Most of the reading for these children is limited to prescribed text books, which compel them to memorize and write even before they acquire skills to read and comprehend fluently. English is not taught phonetically in most of these schools, which makes it challenging for these children to grasp. This instills the fear in reading & lowers their confidence to even try!” The solution: a bilingual approach to learning English. The basis was the belief that learning a new language – like English becomes easier and faster with transliterated reading aids. “Things get easier if these transliterated reading aids are based on familiar native language scripts like Tamil,” Rajashree says.

That focus led to the formation of the trio’s initiative, Katha on Ratha or KOR. Out of the 36 schools that KOR is practiced at today, 17 are run by private trusts or NGOs, while 19 are government or government-aided schools. “What started off as a pilot project at Sai Sankalp School with 230 children has enabled over 80 reading coaches that reach more than 3,000 students with the support of 18 partners,” Sairam adds.

“Being a parent ourselves, we observed that most of the children who pick the habit of reading books early, have either parents or elders who would have read out a book during bed time,” Sudha says, explaining the premise on which KOR works. She adds: “Through such bed time stories, children not only learn to read books in one or more reading languages, but they also learn to comprehend different situations, express emotion and develop imagination.” However, with shrinking family sizes and prevalence of TV and digital media, this practice is on the decline. In some cases, Rajashree explains, parents themselves lack reading skills. “We wanted to provide such children an opportunity to learn to read through stories, which motivated us to

start the KOR programme.” And that was how KOR hoped it could instill “passion and confidence” in reading and learning among children.

At KOR, teaching methodology is the key. Factors like choice of native names for characters, associations with local flavor like food, flowers and festivals are supporting acts in the initiative. “In one of the NGO-run Schools, a simple story of the hare and the tortoise is narrated through a puppet show where the hare is named ‘Rani and the tortoise, ‘Pandi’”, says Sudha, “The race happens through local hills.” The strategy, according to KOR, has doubled up as effective training for teachers too.

“A typical KOR session is centered on reading aloud, a bilingual book in English and Tamil in an engaging way. These sessions are enriched through appropriate role play, storytelling techniques and through conducting activities to improve phonemic awareness, language fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, critical thinking and creativity,” says Rajashree explaining what a typical day is like, at Katha on Ratha. “The important skills that need to be developed in a child are the skills required to analyze and interpret messages conveyed in a book or other media. Children also need to build the skill to articulate their thoughts and opinion clearly and creatively.” Building attitudes is also part of that process. And hence, Rajashree explains, reading a story and analyzing it from different perspectives goes a long way in fostering a sense of plurality among these children.

Challenges, however, are aplenty. The biggest challenge that KOR faces on the ground is to do with confidence. “Sometimes children find it difficult to pronounce full words and struggle to comprehend anything out of what they attempt to read,” says Sairam, “This naturally lowers confidence and creates a barrier towards progress in reading and learning.” Breaking this barrier has called for an approach that helps children read phonetically. “A short reading duration

Challenges, however, are aplenty. The biggest challenge that KOR faces on the ground is to do with confidence.

helps to read simple 3 or 4-letter words and sight words, thereby helping them to read simple sentences,” explains

Sudha, “This entire cycle runs multiple iterations innovatively using flashcard-driven games.” These flashcards support activities conducted in a class that aim to improve listening, reading, comprehension, vocabulary, critical thinking and creativity. “We have also started to provide AV content to

teachers to aid in preparation for KOR sessions,” Rajashree adds.

The future is bright. KOR wants to reach out to over 10,000 students by the end of this year. “We need to work with 50 to 60 more schools and scale up partnership with like-minded institutions,” says Rajashree, detailing the NGO’s strategy. She continues, “We have been working with partners to implement this programme. To achieve our goals, we are reaching out to multiple partners including CSR groups, Education Officers, NGOs with shared objectives.” This of course, even as KOR is also complementing its efforts by reaching out

to government and government-aided institutions and other trust-run schools catering to the underprivileged across Tamil Nadu. “We now have an extended advisory team with highly accomplished leaders passionate in education and selfless service to underprivileged. Sri Ganapathi, a prolific educationist, also Chief editor of a popular magazine, Thendral and Sri V L Subramanian, a key leader in Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vahini, a movement that focuses on integral education are both now part of our advisory team. We have invested in a dedicated team of professionals to lead our efforts in content development and

implementation” says Rajashree.

Today, KOR sessions have become part of the regular curriculum in every school that that has successfully come on board. KOR team has hand-held these schools for three months before ensuring some degree of self-reliance. “KOR is two hours per week,” Rajashree says, “To drive consistency in implementation and to accelerate outcomes, we are also developing a teacher’s handbook which would provide detailed guidance on how to plan KOR sessions and conduct various activities that are appropriate to the learning level of children.”



Sharp intake of breath.....’ that’ll cost you a pretty penny’.

Those of us who have at various times in life owned older cars will appreciate immediately the unwelcome tones of a garage mechanic delivering his verdict on that elusive ‘knocking sound’.

For 10 years I’ve led an organisation committed to annually completing the Social Accounting and Audit cycle. Every year we have published our Social Accounts in an attractive, professionally produced form.

I am a Social Accounting and Audit enthusiast. I make no apology! No sooner does a network colleague or contact from the charitable or social enterprise sector start to reflect on their challenges around funding, outcome measures, and the demanding competitive environment, then they walk straight into my slightly evangelistic pitch!

The responses I get when I’ve waffled on for a while about how brilliant Social Accounting and Audit is and the incredible transformational impact it has had on my own organisation, ranges from: “tell me more, that sounds good”, to; “sharp intake of breath.....that must cost a pretty penny?” And if not the latter then something along the lines of; “We’re just so busy at the moment we haven’t got the time to even think about those lovely add-ons like measuring social impact”.

I think most people will realise that over a 10 year period a charity like ours will have had some extremely busy times and have often been tempted to play the “we’re just too busy” card! But we never have. Why?

At the risk of slipping this blog into the style of a Ronnie Corbett monologue and going backwards more than forwards..... I need to set the scene a bit.

The Neuro Muscular Centre (NMC) is the charity I work for. We’re a medium sized charity with a regional focus but national UK-wide reach. We are the Centre of Excellence for People with Muscular Dystrophy and their families. We provide a wide range of treatment, advice, and training services along with carer’s breaks. As well as this, the jewel in our crown, is providing supported employment in a graphic design and print social enterprise.

In 2015 we won the GSK IMPACT Award. This recognises the best small/medium charities working in the Health and Wellbeing sector. We won partly because we so effectively and consistently measure and assess the impact of our work. Back in 2005 NMC was like so many others in our sector. We relied on case studies and pen pictures to evidence that we made a positive difference to a few people. But we had nothing to show the scale of the impact we made for lots of people.



Meanwhile back at the Car Mechanics with my 1974 Vauxhall Viva and the sharp intake of breath; “if you want my advice mate, it’ll cost you a pretty penny if you don’t measure Social Impact!” Never mind the couple of person-weeks it takes to produce them and never mind the £1200 Social Audit fee. These are tiny (but significant of course) investments in the life cycle of vibrant small and medium sized charities and social enterprises. The payback from Social Accounting and Audit is huge.

The investment in time? “2 weeks you say?” Yes around 2 person-weeks are spent in total each year to produce the draft of our Social Accounts – the stage at which we’re audited. This investment of time is shared between a number of people in the team and so is not onerous.

This investment gets easier every year as Social Accounting gets increasingly embedded in the soul and culture of the organisation. Things that begin as chores become the normal way of working. The whole team, and indeed our service users, begin to think about measuring impact automatically, NOT because we

have to do it for a feedback return for a funder or contract partner, but because we want to do it.

Social Accounting and Audit puts our organisation in the driving seat in the relationships we have with our funders and contract partners. We have powerful feedback and measured impact information instantly to hand. We use it to make our funding applications stronger and more impactful than those who still rely on case studies. We use the analysis and data that we’ve produced to provide updates and feedback.

Here’s my knockout question(s).....

- Do you ever have to go and hurriedly ask people for feedback in order to complete a feedback report for a funder with a tight deadline? How many times a year does this happen? Is that unplanned activity disruptive and mired with duplicated effort?
- Does that 2 person-week investment still seem like an onerous commitment that you couldn’t possibly justify?

If the mechanic had mentioned a £1200 bill to fix my Viva then I know what I’d have done! But the £1200 fee for the Social Audit is not a reason to consider changing your vehicle.

The Social Audit is a day packed with influencing opportunities, diagnostics, recognition and endorsement that will not only remove that worrying knocking sound but will turn your old Viva into a much more rounded, accomplished, economical and environmentally sensitive organisation.

It will be one of the most important events in the life of your organisation. You and your team will enjoy it, be stimulated and informed by it. The sense of achievement and reflection that will flow from it will outweigh EVEN the pleasure you got from the plushiest furry dice you ever bought for your Viva.

—Matthew Lanham
Chief Executive
Neuromuscular Centre
& Chair - SAN, UK

Bridging gaps in teaching and learning

Education for all is a stupendous task in our country. In order to reach out to all children and ensure their fundamental right, multiple players have been encouraged to support the system of education delivery. Accessibility, affordability, equity and quality are the values that underlie every such effort. However, in this ecosystem of education planning, one must realise that layers of efforts are required to ensure that learning actually happens at all levels. There are various reports that enumerate the learning gaps that get accumulated from primary classes. Research also points to a disappointing skill acquisition in our graduates, questioning their employability in the world market. While skill gap and employability have become the parameters of discussion on the quality of education offered today, Grass Root Foundation, an NGO based in Chennai digs deeper into that one aspect of education delivery that can start the chain of impact at all levels – ‘learning’, rather learning to learn.

Mr Emmanuel Herur, Founder Trustee of Grass Root Foundation is basically a textile technologist who has held various positions in his forty years of experience. During his days with the manufacturing companies, he realised that the graduates hired were not able to perform the tasks expected from them. In an effort to learn the cause and ways of addressing the same, he decided to experiment with locally available labour. “Two things I observed. Rural youth are definitely talented but needed a platform to learn and perform. Efforts must be channelized in training them efficiently. Secondly, the ability to apply subject knowledge to different cases was poor in most of the new recruits I had come across. They were not able to apply the same principle to two different scenarios. Everything had to be taught to fresh graduates. Their communication skills were also poor. Over time I learnt that this was not the case with one or two cohorts,” explains Emmanuel.

With experience, training young students for application orientation became his passion. In 2013, Emmanuel Co-founded Grass Root Foundation along with his three friends and looked at strategies that can have a positive influence on the learning levels of children. Grass Root Foundation started working with the families at Slum Clearance Board Houses in Purasaiwalkam. They trained women in financial literacy so that they could run small enterprises and participate in household decision making. However, after a year of intervention, they felt that this may not help reaching out to children. Dialogues with stakeholders and engagements with other organisations emphasised that the root cause of learning



gaps was ineffective teaching and learning. “We looked at cohorts entering into teacher training institutions and realised that they were students who had passed with minimum marks. Having travelled extensively, I realised it was the same situation everywhere in our country.

In 2015, I did a basic programme in communication skills for the students in a teacher training college. Their language skills were very poor and they showed improvement by the end of the programme, but this is just the beginning. We have a long way to go,” he asserts.

Emmanuel laments that learning levels is neither a concern for students nor is it for the teachers. He says: “Their ‘keep going on’ attitude disturbs me. It cannot be the basis of the knowledge capital we all dream of. Neither can rote learning be.” In such a predicament, his team believed that improving the quality of teaching/learning can make a big difference from an early stage itself. Unless children were habituated to learning by concepts and principles, knowledge of application cannot be developed. “We must also acknowledge that this is no marathon job. There is no quick solution in this aspect of education,” says Emmanuel, adding that the idea of learning must be understood differently.

Grass Root Foundation adopted the model of concept learning and prepared modules for classes six to eight. The team decided to work with schools as this promised consistent attendance, unlike in



the communities, where children were distracted easily. Teachers are trained by Grass Root Foundation to teach concepts through stories and activities, after which, children are equipped to answer the fundamental 5W-1H questions. These learnings are discussed in a group and one representative comes forward to present their answers. The entire session is planned to allow a four-fold learning process that addresses reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. As Grass Root Foundation was strategising the implementation of its model, it also got an opportunity to implement the STEM (Science-Technology-Engineering-Mathematics) programme of an international NGO for students of class eight, in five schools across Chennai. “All these were girls’ schools that catered to poor strata of society and had no smart class provision. Also, only one section followed English medium instruction in these schools. With the management also eager to improve children’s performance in Science and Maths, one cohort with strength of twenty girls was chosen from each of the five schools. After the two years long programme, there was no follow up or a plan to revive the sessions for students who had passed to the next

level. Grass Root Foundation decided to proceed in this space left by the STEM programme,” adds Emmanuel.

Their intervention started as an after school programme in Bentinck School, teaching Science, English and Mathematics to twenty students of class seven. Students were chosen after a preliminary assessment of parents’ socio-economic background, interest in girls’ education and their willingness to let them work in the industry. Factors like students’ interest in education and teachers’ inputs on their attitude in class room were also weighed in the selection process. A base evaluation was used to assess their learning levels. They could clear class three portions, but not one subject in class four. After one year of Grass Root Foundation intervention, the end-line showed a better picture – the girls were now able to clear portions of class five, but not six. “So, we were making an improvement. We had begun to bridge the gap in learning,” he smiles.

This year, Grass Root Foundation expanded its programme to classes six, seven and eight. In 2018-2019, class nine will also be covered. As the girls pass from each class, they go through the programme over a consistent period of four years. As the team plans to reach out to more schools in the next year, state government’s circular to extend the day by one more period has come as a big blow to Grass Root Foundation. This circular came as a blessing in disguise, allowing the team to address quality of teaching.

Having understood the gaps in teaching, Grass Root Foundation was in a better position to strategise its model to impact quality of teaching as well. The team has approached St. Christopher’s College of Education to train and engage first year B.Ed students in teaching the target group.

It is a very complementary approach. By the time these graduates were ready to pass out, their communication skills will improve and they would have got practical experience in delivering concept based lessons to children. And Grass Root Foundation, will have a pool of teachers ready to deliver its model to the school students. In line with its plans for expansion, Grass Root Foundation has formed a committee with school Headmistresses and Principals of teacher training institutions to work out a plan wherein the after school programme can continue unaffected. “We are exploring the option of bringing in unemployed B.Ed graduates into the programme. They can undergo training in the morning hours and go to teach in the schools in the afternoon. Our internal monitoring and continuous improvement systems will enable us to achieve the desired results,” says a confident Emmanuel.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Do you judge when you see a child on the floor, screaming?

Unless we're directly involved, we see autism from a distance. We see it without clarity, distinction, or form.

As a team, we knew that going into the production *Falling*, we would be entering an entirely new world. We did as much research as we could. We spoke with many parents, siblings, and coaches of individuals with autism.

One parent told me that what she needed more than anything in the world was respite.

A moment of relief from the challenges of raising a child with autism. It's something many parents with autistic children need.

We spent time at St. Andrew's Autism Center interacting as much as we were able to with adults who had autism. It's one of the few places that does offer some respite to the parents. But there is a limit to what they can do. About one-in-a-hundred people in Singapore fall into the spectrum of autism. One percent. It may not sound like a large number, until you start to break it down.

According to the Autism Resource Center in Singapore there are 50,000 Singaporeans with autism. Most of them, almost 38,000, are adults. With figures like these, there isn't always room at St. Andrew's to provide respite to all those families. What will this mean for the thousands of others without families to care for them?

Like the spectrum of autism, the solutions to the growing challenge of autism will be equally wide and varied. No single institution can solve it, there will be no singular approach that will work, and just like the parents, we as a society, need to prove ourselves strong enough, brave enough, and loving enough to open our eyes, minds, and hearts to the special ones amongst us.

It is easy to look at the behaviour of the autistic and immediately think the worst of them, to judge. One parent I spoke to ended up making cards to hand out to passers-by as they "tsk tsk"-ed their way past her son as he had a meltdown — usually caused by the overstimulation of crowds or loud noises. The card simply informed them that he was autistic and asked for their understanding.

The biggest worry these parents have is about how their autistic child will cope after they're gone. Who will take care of them? Who will "love someone who is difficult to love"?

I feel our understanding, as a people, as a society, has to grow in order for there to be a place for the autistic in our world.

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



SROI Practitioner Training



A practitioner training on Social Return on Investment (SROI) was organised by SAN-India on 9th and 10th of January, 2018 at IDCR Hall, Loyola College, Chennai.

SROI is a form of stakeholder-driven evaluation blended with cost-benefit analysis tailored to social purposes. It provides the story of how change is being created and places a monetary value on that change, and compares it with the costs of inputs required to achieve it. The resource person for this training programme was Dr. Adam Richards of Social Value, UK.

The Program oriented the participants on SROI skills, Step-by-step introduction to the SROI process, Principles underpinning SROI, Calculating the SROI ratio and examples on how an organisation can use SROI to increase impact. Over 26 participants enrolled for this programme and were all certified by Social Value, UK as SROI practitioners.

In case you are interested to attend a similar programme, please write to socialaudittraining@gmail.com



CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND MANAGEMENT

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani. It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship.

CSIM offers **training and consultancy to social enterprises** – for-profits and non-profits – to facilitate them to apply successful business

practices and yet retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives.

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

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

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“The value is in the eye of the stakeholder.”

Dr. Adam Richards shares with **Marie Banu** about **Social Value, UK.**

Dr Adam Richards is an accredited Social Value and SROI practitioner and trainer, and has delivered training to individuals and organisations across the world. He joined SVUK in 2016 as Senior Researcher on the European Commission project SPRINT to apply the principles of social value to long-term care for frail older people across 11 European states. Before joining SVUK he lectured at universities for over 10 years and has a PhD from Liverpool John Moores University researching the legitimising effects of SROI in a social enterprise.

Adam has worked with a number of social enterprises to help them better understand, measure and manage their social impacts. He is also a member of SVUK's UK Council and acts as a critical friend to the FRC Group, as part of their Social Value Sub-Committee.

In an exclusive interview Dr. Adam Richards shares with Marie Banu about Social Value, UK.

Can you tell us about Social Value, UK?

We are an organisation that changes the way the world looks at 'Value'. We believe that for far too long, organisations have been focusing only on financial value and that has led to social and economic inequality and increase in environmental degradation. We want to change that!

We believe that accounting for value, in a much broader context, allows us to make decisions that takes into account 'value' in a holistic sense.

Social Value UK is part of Social Value International which has members in over 40 countries and networks in over 20 countries. We are a membership organisation and are looking forward to have India join our family. We have strong networks that have been in existence for a number of years such as the UK, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and looking forward to new editions Greece, South African and Spain. It is great to do work in an international context.

We deliver training in Social Value (Social Return on Investment) in a range of nations. I recently spent some time in Thailand and now in India at the moment.

What is Social Return on Investment (SROI)?

People often talk about SROI as a tool or a technique, and I disagree with that. It is a framework of seven principles—involve stakeholders; understand what changes; value the things that matter; only include what is material; do not over-claim; be transparent; and verify the result.

What is fundamental is that we involve stakeholders to understand what has changed and we value those changes. SROI is that framework that allows us, which we believe, to — Measure, manage and maximise social value.



Photo: Vinu Priya

When we talk about social value, we are talking fundamentally about how important the change is to people's lives. The value is in the eye of the stakeholder. If you understand the value from the perspective of those people who are affected by change, or rather by the activities, or those who are likely to be affected — then you can make the decisions in a more meaningful way. Listen to the voices of people so that they have a representation in the decision making process.

I would say that SROI is a framework that provides consistency and flexibility at a global level. SROI in one organisation need not have to be the same as in another. It has the flexibility to adapt to certain circumstances or a particular project. We may use focus group technique in one, and in another use a creative method while conversing with younger children or parents. You can adapt it in the way you need it. It is the principles that create the consistent framework for application for everyone.

Do you think SROI methodology would maximise the NGOs impact?

Absolutely! The idea of Social Value has a broad conception of values. We talk about the economic, social, and environmental values forming the social value. It is about talking to the people who matter most.

NGOs and Social Enterprises around the world work towards empowering people. I believe that SROI adds to that empowerment. Actually, by NGOs asking the people, giving them a voice, and giving them the power to influence decision making is in itself an empowering exercise.

I think all socially oriented organisations should look at maximising their impacts with people. Alternatively, what we are saying is that, within your resources — do the best you can; change people's lives as effectively as possible. Why would you not want to maximise the positive changes you make in people's lives?

At times, we create unintended negative changes in people's lives. Our activities do not always work for everybody. They do not work as effectively for some people. The biggest challenge is in acknowledging that.

I have seen this in my work. For instance, I have worked with Furniture Resource Centre (frcgroup.co.uk) at Liverpool. The organisation changes people's lives. They take people from unemployment or precarious employment towards sustainable employment. But, not everybody succeeds! We need to think about that. The reality is that some people felt even worse after they joined our organisation. Think about people for whom it does not work and think about their situation. Are they in the same situations they were before?

We have a moral duty to say how we can reduce or eliminate negative changes. It is not just increasing the positives, but also reducing or eliminating any negative impact that it might produce in people's lives. It is only by understanding these two issues, can we really start moving beyond simply measuring. Measuring is easy, maximising is a challenge!

What are the similarities and differences in Social Audit Network and Social Value, UK?

I think there are more similarities than

differences. Probably the only fundamental difference is the idea of using values, in terms of financial proxies by Social Value UK.

So, Ten years ago, when Social Value UK started as Social Return on Investment Network, we exclusively spoke about value in a financial sense. We were talking about value using the language of money. When Social Value UK evolved, we don't just talk about financial perspective, but about value from the eye of the stakeholder that does not have to be in a monetary sense.

We want to quantify the value so that we can put things in order of importance. As soon as you know a person experiences three changes and one is more important than the other two, our ability to gain insight has improved. We can start to focus where the stakeholder gains more value from. We can start to make decisions and focus on those areas where we can increase the positive changes in people's lives; we can start to be able to compare one way of running a project to another.

I think that Social Audit Network UK and Social Value UK will both agree that these are the core ideals of our organisations. I am extremely happy that these two organisations are going to work together in India. We both share a philosophy that our approaches will help organisations improve people's lives. That is what drives both our organisations, and its members.

Have you experienced challenges in implementing your SROI framework globally?

Yes, there has been challenges but we are growing in acceptance. There has been really positive changes. We have been in existence for about ten years now, and have seen a real movement. Social Value and Social Return on Investment is used by organisations for sciences as well as in all sectors including public bodies, social enterprises, and private sector organisations as well.

One of the greatest challenge is organisations understanding that the 'value' is not just by measuring. It is not just a one-off annual exercise where you measure the social value. It is about making social innovation, making changes in your organisation, and continuing to work towards making changes that will bring about changes in people's lives. When organisations see this, they will start to move from doing activities as an exercise, to imbedding it in their organisation, within their culture and system.

We do have social legislations in the UK. We have a Social Value Act which is in existence since 2013 and that requires public bodies and local legislations to literally consider having social value in certain commissioning activities in services. We hope that legislation evolves.