

Conversations Today

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

The ecological state is becoming more and more dis-balanced each day due to technical and industrial advancements as well as population explosion. There are a lot of changes happening due to interaction between human society and the environment itself.

Environmental issues affect our health and lifestyle to a great extent. If the air we breathe, the water we drink and the soil which produces our crops, vegetables and fruits, all become more and more impure, then our chances of good health and longevity will become very less. Therefore, there is an urgent need to conserve and protect the environment, develop forests and conserve wildlife. Industries should be responsive to environmental protection measures and cooperate with the regulatory agencies in their endeavour to implement environmental safe-guards.

The natural environment plays a vital role in ensuring the survival of present and future generations. We should laud the environmental activists who have been spreading awareness through various programmes across our country.

Our cover story this month features Pipal tree, an organization that works towards sustainable development model centered on climate justice, environmental rights, gender sensitivity and participatory democracy. It is only with collective thinking we will be able to restore balance in our environment.

—Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

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Untying the Knots



Often, we have the feeling that we are stuck or immobilized. Something happens within that keeps us away from experiencing joy, bliss and freedom. This story beautifully illustrates how we are capable of experiencing liberation and yet are caught in our own ways of doing, which are the “knots”. Even in trying to untangle, we deepen our stuckness.

Once when Gautama the Buddha came to teach his disciples, he was carrying a beautiful silk handkerchief in his hands. Thousands of disciples were surprised to see such an article in the Buddha’s hand.

When the Buddha addressed the gathering he asked “what do you see?” and they said, a beautiful silk handkerchief. Then slowly the Buddha started to put knots on the handkerchief, one after another, until he put 5 knots. Then he asked whether it was the same handkerchief. His disciples answered that it was the same handkerchief, yet different, as it was in knots now.

The Buddha said that is what I want you to understand. You are all Buddha but you cannot see the silken fine fabric because you are in knots.

I am like the same handkerchief but without knots.

Then he went on to pull the handkerchief from both sides and asked whether the knots would open this way. His disciples said that this way the knots will in fact tighten and become more difficult to open.

Then the Buddha asked, why do you then try to open your knots by pulling? You are making it more complicated. He then further asked that if he needed to open these knots, what was needed to be done?

A monk answered that he would come close, observe and try to understand how the knots were formed. And if one saw how they were formed, one would be able to undo them.

Then Buddha said that is right and ended the sermon saying this is all he wanted to teach them. He closed by saying they needed to meditate upon their own knots.

Meditating on the knots helps us see what the knots are made of. These knots are doubts, resentment, fear, repressed anger, judgments, all of which keep us withdrawn and cautious and away from life. With this awareness we can find ways of dissolving the knots, not by pulling it but by paying attention to it.

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.

Dreams of a Superior Society

In 2002-03, when a group of friends decided to get together and “do something,” “to help out the needy,” they didn’t start out with a grand plan. They were merely looking for ways to be of use to the underprivileged people they saw around them. There was something of an urge that pulled their young minds towards thinking about people other than themselves. When asked “What was it that compelled you to do any social service at all?” one of them tells us that it wasn’t any one thing. “It” doesn’t have a label. “It just is,” says Vani Bhaskar, Co-Founder of Uthishta Foundation, “I don’t really know that there was anything specific that led us to this.” The simplicity of this answer belies the deep sense of commitment behind it.

Starting young and early

Vani Bhaskar and her friends, decided to give back to society, and devoted themselves as volunteers at various children’s homes around Bengaluru city. They soon established a Trust, “Reclaim India” and worked on projects for rescuing and educating child labourers. They soon found themselves working with children hanging around construction sites, where immigrant labourers slave away during the day, unable to send their children to any type of school. “We set up what we called the ‘Museum School’, an informal Balwadi type school, near these construction sites. We could afford a dedicated teacher and an ayah for these children, for about a year,” says Vani.

After that first year, as Vani and her friends graduated and began their own careers, they ended up in different places, some within India and some abroad. They managed to keep up some, if not all, of their work with friends from abroad, sponsoring and ideating, friends in India pitching in with physically continuing to volunteer at different NGOs. During this time, they spent weekends volunteering with children who ran away from their homes. Seeing that these children would need some counseling and rehabilitation, Vani and her friends trained themselves under professionals and found sponsors for such children’s education. Understandably, career and personal responsibilities soon take over one’s lives, and Vani and friends’ aim to “Reclaim India” was put on hold.

Vani went on to do an MBA at the prestigious Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India (ICFAI), Hyderabad and pursued a 15-year long career in Investment Banking, working with some of the top Indian multinational corporations. Her passion soon beckoned her home however, to pursue a larger dream, a more (in her own words) selfless pursuit, and she found herself a partner in one of her childhood friends who had been with her all along the way. As recently as late last year, Vani Bhaskar and her friend Bhavani Sundari Balasundaram got together and decided



that they would pursue their social service in a more systematic and long-lasting manner.

Learning from past inadequacies

“Both Bhavani and I found ourselves thinking a great deal about how to start all over again. Should we revive the ‘Reclaim India Trust’? We had run this without putting any system in place. For instance, we didn’t have an operating bank account for the Trust and gave away sponsorship funds through personal cheques. We hadn’t properly documented any of our activities in the past. We sought help to understand the nitty-gritties of running this Trust and soon learnt that it would take a great deal of paperwork to revive it. So, Bhavani and I resolved to set up an altogether new organization,” she says.

“We needed to identify the issues we would like to work on. Should we focus on education? If so, should we start with early education programs? How about skill-development for youth or women’s empowerment or agriculture? We were teeming with ideas and I found myself unable to focus on any one issue over the others,” says Vani, “And that is when CSIM came in as a huge game-changer.”

While her friend Bhavani pursued her PhD in the Nutrition and Dietetics field with a leading organization in Chennai, Vani pursued the certificate course in Social Entrepreneurship at CSIM, Bengaluru. She says that the sheer range of exercises conducted by CSIM, broadened her thinking and gave her a real sense of direction. “I began to take a more pragmatic approach to my ideals,” says Vani, “I understood that in order to do justice to a cause, I would have to narrow my focus down to one or two issues that I could then research upon and

fully immerse myself in.”

At CSIM, Vani says she learnt the importance of networking, mobilizing funds through formal channels, to put up specific services for the target-groups that we want to work with, as also to set concrete and realistic goals for ourselves to attain in a reasonable period of time. “I wanted to learn from my past mistakes and to do better with my new venture, and CSIM has given me a whole lot of guidance in that direction”, she says.

Challenging, exciting times

In January of 2018, Vani Bhaskar and Bhavani Sundari Balasundaram registered a new company “Uthishta Foundation”. The duo wanted to carry forward the essence of ‘Reclaim India’ but now with renewed enthusiasm, shared knowledge and newly gained insight. “I look at underprivileged youth and think about the lack of opportunity. I can’t help but wonder, if some of the random acts of misbehavior of youth that is highlighted in the news, could be attributed to their inaccessibility to training and education directed at their growth. In other words, if the youth in question had been engaged in training and equipping themselves for their future, would they even have the time to take to the streets?”

With that thought, Vani and Bhavani have set out their primary mission – training underprivileged youth in vocational skills and helping with their placements in the job-market. “If one generation of an impoverished family finds a job, it might help their entire family to rise above poverty. At least that is our hope, with the individuals we work with,” she says. In February, Uthishta Foundation conducted a soft-skills training program at a Girls’ Home in

Bengaluru, for girls who are about to enter the job market. Communication Skills and Interviewing Skills were imparted to girls in the final year of college. Another computer-skills training program was conducted for a group of boys at a government college.

Uthishta Foundation is working towards building an industry-interface such that an on-going program may be established for the eventual placement of all the youth who undergo Uthishta’s training programs. “What is the job-market today? What is the scope of the digital space in terms of employing skilled youth? Would an increase in online sales versus offline retail lead to a boom in the packaging and delivery side of business? Should we be looking at training people for the logistics sector? Or would it be more sensible to train youth in actually creating digital content and try their hand at marketing their products and services online? Maybe the future lies in opening up the digital market to traditional cottage industries? These are some of the questions that come up during our research”, she says.

“There is no doubt that the road ahead is going to be full of challenges and roadblocks. Even as we speak, I’m struggling with the setting up of our bank accounts at a nationalized bank. The processes seem long and arduous, and because of the very nature of these banks, the time taken to complete a single step seems endless. Yet, we want to do the right thing”, she says.

With no staff to help them out with their everyday chores for the foundation, Vani is finding her own schedule busier than ever. “Attending to my two kids aged seven and five, juggling my other responsibilities along with those of Uthishta are a challenge at the moment,” she grins, in a matter-of-fact way. It seems she wouldn’t have it any other way. “When I had a full-time job, I had a lot of money but felt empty from within. Now, having quit my well-paying employment, I find myself running around to find the funds needed to run Uthishta Foundation, but it’s oh-so-fulfilling!” she insists.

In a reflective tone, she says that she feels a greater sense of responsibility with her new venture. I frequently asks myself: “Am I doing things right? Am I thinking right?” This self introspection while refreshing to hear in a world of self-important and over-confident individuals, is important and a great stamp of an individual’s ability to grow; and with them, their ideas and the beneficiaries of those ideas.

“We do want to reclaim India, by re-programming the youth towards their own development, by helping reduce poverty, by carrying forward the notion that productive engagement will lead to a responsible, conscientious society,” she signs off.

—Archanaa Ramesh

Leader & Leadership Matters...

6. Planning and Organizing: The discipline factor



Meaning of Planned and Organized – The Leader is organized and systematic in achieving his/her goals. (LOI, www.discoverself.com). The dictionary meaning of Planning refers to being systematic in making plans and organizing tasks. Being organized means able to plan activities efficiently; arranging things in systematic way. The synonyms are coordinated, catalogued, classified, group and so on. The antonym is disarrange, scatter, confuse, disorder and so on.

Discipline has two components; Planning and organized way of functioning; Prioritizing with high sense of timing. Planning comes before prioritizing. Planning also comes before organizing. ‘Plans are nothing; planning is everything’ –Dwight D. Eisenhower

While everything in the task may be in order, if planning is not there, all moves into disorder. Leaders plan; but efficiency is achieved through planning and organized way of executing the tasks while achieving the goals. Plans are different from planning. Planning is a process. It is a sequential organized systematic thoughts and actions that would finally lead to achieving the goals. As Benjamin Franklin puts it, ‘By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.’ Planning and organizing, therefore are key attributes in the journey of excellence for a Leader. Most of the time a disciplinarian is connected with Military or Defense domain. But planning and organizing is essential in every domain. It acts like the banks of a river steering the flow and the speed in the direction that is most appropriate.

To discuss the benefits and implications of planning and organizing, we found Smt. Pushkala Parasuraman the most appropriate to talk to. She is the High school Coordinator and Senior teacher at Kumaran Children’s Home (CBSE) Bangalore. A dynamic, active, assertive lady who can juggle maximum tasks in a day to ensure the smooth functioning of academic and non-academic classes through the year. Her work includes

- looking into the academic timetable
- ensuring work allotment to teachers
- liaison with vendors who provide non-academic classes
- acting as interface between teachers-students – parents
- handling relationship and performance issues amongst teachers and students
- handling crisis and everyday issues for students and teachers
- placement of classes and changes if any on a day to day basis
- act as a sounding board for the management

Most of her work stands on the strength of planning and organizing capacity.

Madam Pushkala, Can you tell us what the attribute ‘Planning and Organizing’ means to you?

“Planning comes before organizing for me. I need to know all that needs to be done first. Planning is putting things in a proper manner in accordance to the context. Listing them, classifying them and knowing what is important and what can be deferred. The tasks become simple and doable if there is proper planning and organizing.”

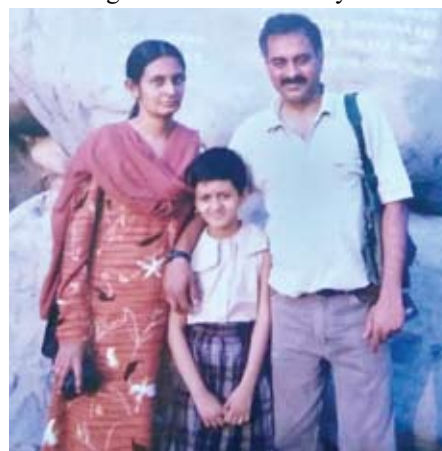
How did you learn to do planning? Is it genetically endowed or a learnt behaviour?

Pushkala gives one of the most affable smiles and says, “I don’t know about genetically endowed. It sure was a ‘no choice’ learning for me. My Dad and his mom, my

Grandmother were two authoritarians in the family. They were called ‘the Hitler’. Discipline was inculcated right from childhood. Most people mistake discipline with rigidity. Actually, they both were never rigid. They were very liberal having lived in the British Era. I had a lot of freedom to do many things, but all within the discipline allowed by them. I was the eldest child and therefore expected to follow the family discipline. At a very young age I had to also take over the household chores and help my dad. I had to cook, clean the house, study in college, take care of all work and if I was not planned it wouldn’t have been possible. Added to this, my husband worked for the Army and therefore the discipline at home continued even after marriage. My husband expected a wife who could blend with the Army life and his need for things to be prim and proper and I had it already in my blood. My husband has taught me that discipline includes safety. Whenever I plan anything I automatically look into the safety dimensions too. His neatness in folding clothes and packing is at times unmatched.”

At work, how did you take on being the coordinator? Was it your choice or did your competence get you the role?

Pushkala was interestingly a parent who joined school as a third grade teacher along with her daughter. She had moved to Bangalore and everything in school was new. She moved to be a senior high school teacher along with the 3rd grade students year after year. There is happiness and gratitude in her voice when she says, “Madam Vyjayanthi and Roopa were my Gurus in helping me learn to be a coordinator. My ability to do timetable and manage resources effectively comes from



them. Vyjayanthi recognized me as the person who could be trained to do coordination and she made me help her in jobs other than teaching. I used to observe and make notes on how they efficiently managed the timetable and organized the teachers. When she had to take a break from work, I automatically took over.”

What is the most crucial parts of the planning and organizing attribute according to you?

Pushkala opines that having all the

information on hand prior to planning is one of the most crucial aspects of planning. Many times the information available will be incomplete and planning activity has to be done which calls for expertise in drawing assumptive inferences. Always having plan B ready is essential she says. Developing the plan B based on incomplete information makes the activity of planning challenging.

Organizing is more challenging than planning. A coordinator is expected to provide ready solutions to problems that people bring to their notice. Utilizing the resources available efficiently is a critical part of organizing. “There are times suddenly a bandh is announced and school has to be closed without prior notice. This creates a crisis, handling which with available resources is the challenging part of organizing,” She adds, “Technical issues can be handled but it is the human issues that makes it challenging. School administration and coordination is essentially people management. Therefore, planning and organizing is essentially related to people and I cannot forget the people element in anything that I do.”

What aspects do you keep in mind to be an efficient planner?

Pushkala has pointed out very important aspects that has made her an efficient planner. Some of them are –

- To be a learner first. Whatever the number of years, there is learning every year with every new issue that emerges.
- Not to take anything for granted. Be ready to continuously work by connecting to the context and making things appropriate.
- Know that information will not come full and in readymade format. It has to be drawn and understood properly.
- Never to forget planning is actually implementation too. Not just an idea. It has to be actionable and appealing to all.
- Note down the mistakes and ensure it is not repeated. This makes planning better every time.
- Think through long term and clarify questions in advance. Any doubts left unattended will leave space for bad planning.
- A win-win ‘proposition is the key to both efficient planning and organizing. All people concerned should be happy at the final implementation of a plan.
- Be aware of all bias and conclusions that can interfere in planning and organizing.
- Enjoy the coordination work and not feel it as a drudgery.
- Be open to criticism and make note of all the loopholes pointed out. Planning gets better when loopholes and shortcomings are well thought before execution.
- Ability to listen and memory are two corner stones for planning

Pushkala, tell me the key aspects you keep in mind when you organize and ensure smooth coordination?

“Remove the ‘I’ first and then all works better. Organizing can never happen without people and so there cannot be what I want to do. It is all about what needs to be done. I am only organizing what is already there should be the attitude.” She lists more aspects like

- Take support from people and learn to delegate
- Give others space to share their thoughts and ideas while organizing
- Tap the strengths of others and know their weaknesses before allocating the work
- Panic is a strict ‘no no’ and getting stressed makes a poor organizer. There would be several panic moments but to stay calm and accept those to find ways to deal will go a long way in organizing.
- Believe in oneself first and connect to the context
- Having a high presence of mind is essential for organizing

Through planning and organizing you are an interface to many stakeholders in school. How do you manage to juggle it all?

“Every day I am faced with many dilemmas and challenges when multi stake holders are involved. I cannot take



sides to resolve issues, be it teachers or students or parents or management. Everyone who comes into my room is seeking solution and I have to welcome them and make them feel they are respected and listened to. I have to go deeper into the context and find out what works best for all. I also do not see them as a problem. I accept the issue and then try to seek answers. Communication is key for organizing. Respect for all people and assertiveness enables me to enforce some discipline and rules in people. The idea is not to impress people but to do what is appropriate. The idea is not for all people to like you but to appreciate the outcome. I also know that I have to be the conscious keeper of the school vision and values for the management. The most essential element for me to do the job is to have freedom and trust of the Superiors. I have plenty of it here in school. There is least interference and a high extent of trust in me which makes me do my work and take decisions without hesitation.”

Lastly what would be your wisdom words for Leaders with regard to planning?

“Having worked in school context for a number of years, I have realized that planning and organizing are not jobs that can be done alone. Collaboration and friendship are vital in nay work to be done as per the plan and remain happy in spite of some failures.”



The act of planning and organizing is integral to every space and discipline is integral to every Leader. The discipline has to become internal and self-driven before it can be institutionalized. Leader plays a large role in ensuring discipline is adhered to and maintained.

While planning may be important, prioritizing is equally and more important in implementation of the plan. If time is missed all good intentions are missed. The natural progression therefore is to understand PRIORITIZATION / TIME SENSE as the next attribute for a Leader.

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath

Time Sense



The doctor's waiting room was crowded. An elderly gentleman who had been waiting for almost an hour, said to the receptionist, “I cannot wait any longer, would you kindly give me an appointment for another day?”

One woman in the crowd whispered to the other, “He must be at least eighty years old. What sort of urgent business can he have that he cannot afford to wait?” The man who overheard the remark, said, “I am eighty-seven years old, lady, which is precisely why I cannot afford to waste a single minute of the precious time I am left with.”

Explicit Learning

- Our life is bound to end and thus the time with us is limited.
- The disciplined do not waste a minute on unimportant things.
- We have wasted enough time in our life, at least now let's wake up.

Introspective Learning

- What is the nature of ‘Time’?
- How much do I value my time?
- How do I become more time sensitive?

SUSTAINABILITY, INCLUSIVITY, DEVELOPMENT



A sustainable development model centred on climate justice, environmental rights, gender sensitivity and participatory democracy is what Pipal Tree is all about.

Founded by Siddhartha in 1984, Pipal Tree is today a hub for social and ecological innovators across the world. “Humans are today ‘advancing’ at the cost of humanity itself. While industry has made our lives easier it has done so by putting our very survival at stake, through its overuse of nonrenewable resources. In considering the earth as a boundless resource and exploiting the land ceaselessly we have brought much harm upon ourselves. Climate change will force many communities to become climate refugees. The prevailing global system is only adding to the problems we already face by promoting a homogenous culture of production and consumption,” says Siddhartha.

Over the years, Pipal Tree has focused its efforts on developing leadership among adivasi women and small and marginal farmers, promoting local food systems with an emphasis on dry land food crops like millets, ensuring access to quality education for adivasi children, motivating cultural and religious traditions to be socially and ecologically engaged, and working with university students and professors to create awareness of sustainable development practices. “Every thing we do begin with and involves dialogue,” says Shabin Paul, Executive Trustee and Coordinator at Pipal Tree. “We do this through workshops and conferences held in our campus, Fireflies, at Bangalore and through our rural field programmes based in H.D Kote Taluk of Mysore district, Karnataka,” says Shabin.

Pipal Tree’s annual international conference, The

Fireflies Dialogues, explores sustainable dimensions of cultures and religions that foster sustainable futures. Its campus, known as Fireflies Intercultural Centre, is also an art village with socially conscious sculptures, paintings, stained glass and metal work. “Our Art at Fireflies is an attempt to re-interpret myths and symbols, religious or otherwise, along social and ecological lines,” says Shabin. “Each of the art pieces at Fireflies has a story to tell, and speaks of our philosophy and vision, that every human being has the potential to become more caring and centred, integrally connected to other human beings and the earth.”

Working towards social and environmental justice is atop Pipal Tree’s list of priorities, as is empowering adivasis, women, small and marginal farmers. A key requirement to making Pipal Tree’s work, count, lies in the sensitization of mainstream communities on the impact of climate change. “It is high-time the notion of ‘good life’ changed, and we move towards embracing a more holistic understanding of life on this planet,” says Shabin. “There is little awareness in the country that climate change will progressively reduce food production, particularly in relation to rice and wheat.” Effective adaptation is something Pipal Tree helps the rural population, with. “Emphasis on millet cultivation will contribute to food security as well as intensify dry-land agriculture, which represents 65% percent of the agricultural surface in India. So one of the major things as part of adaptation we have to do in India is a shift from rice to millets,” says Shabin. “Since millets can largely be cultivated without chemical fertilisers, they represent an important contribution to reducing carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide emissions from agriculture.”

In the past several years, Pipal Tree has initiated awareness on self-reliance for food, revival of millet-based farming, and a campaign for introduction of millets in public distribution. The campaign saw its



result when in 2014 the Chief Minister of Karnataka, Mr.Siddaramaiah, announced that millets would be introduced in the Public Distribution System in a systematic and structured basis for the first time in India. Lakhs of farmers in the driest parts of Karnataka thus received a bonanza, with the procurement price going up and their efforts and labour finally being recognised and rewarded. “Millets will improve the general health of the population as they are rich in protein, fibre, calcium and other minerals,” says Shabin.

Promoting sustainable agronomic practices is another goal that the organization has set for itself in its work among the small and marginal farmers. “Small and marginal farmers are extremely vulnerable to the changes in the natural environment since their livelihood is dependent mostly on the yield from the small land holding. While meeting food requirement of the household, they also need to ensure that sufficient income is generated from the land to meet their economic needs. Hence the challenge lies in the effective utilisation of the available land while maintaining the productivity of the land,” says Shabin.

Its next focus area is to do with Adivasi community: Adivasis constitute 10% of the population at its field programme at HD Kote. “Displaced from the forest, for over twenty years, the adivasis have struggled to push government to give them land through mass struggles. Eventually about 30% of them got land, but the vast majority is still landless. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 is not being implemented in its spirit and the government is dragging its feet.” Pipal Tree has thus helped mobilize efforts to get this community its due. “Our education programme on ‘environment, gender and health’ reaches out to about 1000 adivasi children from 25 tribal hamlets. The educational programmes among these children are focused on the need to negotiate between “critical modernity” and “critical tradition” to contend with social challenges”

There are concerns that need addressing too: “the socio-economic and political marginalisation of adivasi communities further lowers their adaptive capacity. The resources that would have helped improve the resilience of these communities are often not being obtained due to various reasons including lack of knowledge,” says Shabin. “A strong and functioning interface needs to be built for systematic and coordinated efforts from all stakeholders.” The next challenge: Adivasi children. “Ashram schools and the one-room one-teacher village schools meant for them are inefficient. Lack of qualified teachers, high teacher-student ratio, and a curriculum that doesn’t factor in their cultural values and traditional knowledge/learning system are the challenges here.” Shabin points to the large number of adivasi children drop out of the schools before completing elementary schooling. “These children then become vulnerable to child labour, alcohol abuse or child marriage. This vicious cycle of poverty and marginalisation needs to be broken in order for their socio-economic and political empowerment.”

ARE SOCIAL ENTERPRISES CREATING WHITE ELEPHANTS?

Legend has it that the King of Siam once gave rare albino elephants to courtiers who had displeased him, that they might be ruined by the animals' upkeep costs.

These days, the term 'white elephant' more often refers to an extravagant but useless gift that cannot be easily disposed of or serves little purpose, or perhaps a beautiful but functionless building that nobody visits....

A few weeks ago, I spoke at a conference for social enterprise organisations. I work in local government, so I talked about how commissioners of public services are increasingly looking for the 'social value' which a business in the social economy might bring. I was followed by three speakers from the private sector, all of whom had committed to 'buy social' and include social enterprises in their supply chains. A group of local social enterprises spoke about their good work and the social impact that they were creating through activities ranging from support for people with mental health problems, disabled young people being able to visit the beach, to training for families to eat healthily and take more exercise.

All valuable and necessary goals in local communities.

After the conference, one of my private sector colleagues confided in me that he was struggling to purchase from social enterprises because they just didn't sell the things that his company needed to buy... And I thought about my own experience of public sector commissioning and how few of our contracts are placed directly with social enterprises (despite my employer having put a great deal of effort into trying to do so).

So, what is going wrong? Why are some social enterprises more successful than others?

Although the private and public sectors often want to buy goods and services from organisations with a social purpose, perhaps they can't directly buy the social value or social impact that those organisations are keen to sell? Buyers want to purchase a product and get the social value 'added'?

Maybe the social enterprises that ARE successful have found a way to sell products which by their very nature create social impact? Maybe they understand their market as well as their social value?

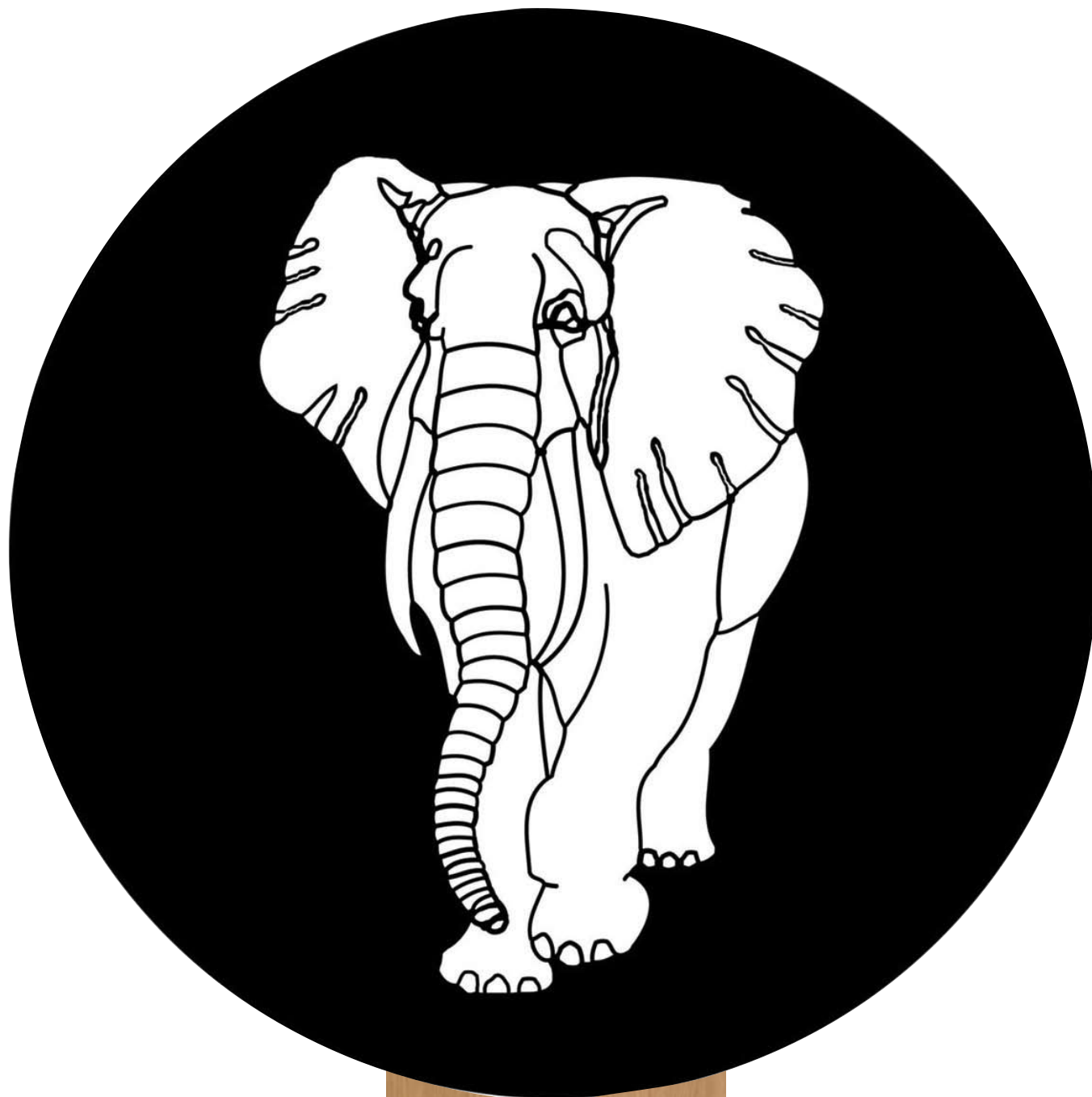
NMC Design and Print is an enterprise linked to the Neuro Muscular Centre in Winsford, Cheshire. NMC has used its social accounting <http://www.nmcentre.com/nmc/about-us/social-accounts/> to engage with its market and create a commercially successful social enterprise providing a Design and Print service run by, and employing, designers with muscular dystrophy.

The products that they are selling include graphic design, other digital

services and printing. The 'social value' comes with the fact that people with muscular dystrophy, who would otherwise struggle to find employment, provide these services.

NMC knows and engages with its market, understands its social value and has expanded rapidly.

See Detail is a company that makes the best use of the skills of the staff to provide services that are exceptional and rewarding for everyone. In addition, they provide autism awareness training to the companies and organisations that they work with, and finally they are lifting people out of the, so-called benefits trap, and making a real contribution to society both in terms of wealth generation and in innovation and creativity. See Detail's main business is software testing which people on the autistic spectrum are ideally suited. Both NMC Design and Print and



See Detail have managed to combine their business model and their social impact to create a commercially successful social enterprise. They have 'packaged' their social value for their own specific market. Sadly, many 'social

enterprises' that I come across have not managed to do that. Instead, social value dominates their purpose. This might be too specific or on too small a scale to be beneficial to prospective customers and the 'enterprise' ceases to be viable. A 'beast' is created which is valuable to a discrete group and often outwardly impressive but which is impossible to sustain and not really wanted by those with the means to pay for it.

So, my 'take-away' messages to social enterprises everywhere are; don't create white elephants, when dull looking, grey beasts are often stronger and more successful;

use tools like social accounting and audit to engage with your market, and be very careful in the presence of Kings....

—Anne Lythgoe
Vice Chair, SAN, UK

Haven of Hope



Be it street children, mentally challenged, HIV infected, old men or women, irrespective of caste, creed or faith—Sister Lucy Kurien's homes welcomes them all. Maher (meaning mother's home) was founded in 1997 to provide assistance to children, men and undertakes community development programs in various villages near Vadhu Budruk in central western India. Maher has been granted 'Consultative Status' by the United Nations that allows it to participate in the work of the United Nations.

In rural India, women are facing rigid caste distinction, religious segregation, and poverty. Maher is a ray of hope for such women and offers a profound beacon of practical and inspiring solutions that are grounded in compassion and service.

"I witnessed a horrifying incident wherein a man burned alive his pregnant wife. This incident disturbed me and it was then I decided to start a home for the downtrodden, especially abused women and children," says Sister Kurien, who belongs to the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod.

Maher has 38 short-stay and long-stay homes in the Indian states of Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Kerala and houses over 900 children, 85 men and over 350 destitute women. The children at Maher receive schooling, tutoring, nutrition, and meditation. More than 1000 Maher youth are enrolled in colleges and many have earned undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Talking about the most important concern in establishing an NGO, Sister Kurien says, "Our Indian society is still



gripped by corruption scandals. At Maher, we ensure not to pay a bribe, and we never will!"

At one instance, when Maher refused to pay a bribe in order to obtain a permit, the local officials visited Maher's home and pressurized them. "We showed them our premises. They liked our project but wanted a bribe to approve our permit. When the officials quoted a figure, I led them into our main hall where many women were busy producing crafts and cooking, and the children were busy in their study circles. I told them, "For that sum of money, I have to put out four women and six children back onto the street." Astonished and incensed, the officials swiftly left the place. Later, within three weeks we got our permit," says Sister Kurien.

Maher works on the philosophy of having faith in all religions and working for establishing harmony and peace around the world. They have conducted

performances and health and education initiatives.

Maher's focus is to empower, engage and elevate women to an amazing network that inspires and grows each other's efforts. The normal stay at Maher is 3 months, and the women are trained in vocational skills such as handicrafts and tailoring, enabling them to develop technical capacity, entrepreneurship, and business skills so that they can earn an income after they leave Maher.

In efforts to salvage the life of the destitute and underprivileged, Maher has facilitated many marriages. "Weddings at Maher are an institution and a continuing source of delight and joy for every Maherite. We are happy that weddings at Maher reached their 100th mark last month. I believe restoring the marital and the family bond is probably the last stage of rehabilitation and I am happy that Maher did it for 100 of its women," says Sister Kurien.

When talking about her observe in the philanthropy space, she added, "I would love to see many more people come forward and truly commit themselves to the vital work of building communities of healing and love. Not just in India but everywhere!"

In recognition of Sister Kurien's services, Pranab Mukherjee, the thirteenth Indian President awarded Sister Kurien with the Nari Shakti (women empowerment) award 2015 on the occasion of International Women's Day.

—Mandira Srivastava



many peace camps in the United States of America, India, and Africa and does not receive any aid from Church or other religious institutions.

Maher's board, staff, and residents belong to varied religions—Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam. Their community building programs include self-help groups, kindergarten schools, village libraries, street theatre

Frontlines of a water fight

Join the water fight happening in Cambodian villages.



Watching him work today, you would never imagine Seur Seang was once a bundle of nerves speaking with villagers in rural Siem Reap.

But on his first village visit representing Water for Cambodia (WFC), “the sweat come out”, he says with a laugh.

“The first time when I went to the field, I was not fluent how to talk with the villager, I feel not so good.”

But after years working on the frontlines of the fight to give Cambodians access to clean water, the monitoring and evaluation official has become a pro. He’s now not only able to find out villagers’ needs when it comes to access to water, he’s also earned their trust and respect.

This means that when Seur tells villagers how to sustainably maintain their biosand water filters or shares hygiene tips in handling the water, they listen.

The 33-year-old has been instrumental in helping non-profit WFC to build, install and maintain more than 12,000 biosand water filters, mostly in the rural areas around Siem Reap.

Seur knows well that there is still much to do, though, because around six million of his countrymen continue to live without access to improved water facilities.

It’s why he welcomes the help of volunteers from all over the world.

“When I work with volunteers we can...install more filters per day,” he says.

For the volunteers, experiencing first-hand how difficult it is for the villagers to access clean water often leaves a deep impression.

Lee Song Yong volunteered through the Singapore International Foundation with six colleagues. He spent five days building and installing 20 water filters with WFC, an experience he found “genuinely humbling”.

“Many of us have had experience living in kampongs (villages) and may have personally been to Siem Reap, but this was still insufficient to prepare us for the living conditions we witnessed. With April being the dry season, some villagers had to travel well over 3km just to fetch water we wouldn’t even want to wash our hands with, not to mention drinking it unboiled and unfiltered.”

He and his teammates were so fired up by their experience that when they got back to their financial advisory firm in Singapore, they rallied their colleagues in a fundraising effort for an additional 100 filters at US\$50 each.

And their colleagues didn’t disappoint, contributing enough for 274 filters so that 1,644 people could have clean water.

Eric Guerin, WFC’s director of operations, said his team was encouraged by the volunteers and their colleagues.

“Not only are the volunteers donating their own money to support the project, they are also becoming the best ambassadors. By passionately sharing their experiences, relatives, friends and colleagues are motivated to become part of the adventure in their own way,” he said.

Part of the adventure and part of the fight, to give everyone a chance to drink clean water.

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

Much to do

You can help!

- Sign up as a volunteer for Water for Life in Siem Reap (http://www.sif.org.sg/siv/vacancy_details.php?id=14)
- Learn more about Water for Cambodia (<https://www.waterforcambodia.org/>)
- Find out other volunteer opportunities with the Singapore International Foundation (<http://www.sif.org.sg/siv/vacancies.php>)

Master Class in Social Accounting & Audit



SAN, India organized a Master Class in Social Accounting and Audit in Bengaluru from 31st May to 2nd June 2018 at School of Ancient Wisdom, Devanahalli. This training programme oriented the participants on the concepts of Social Accounting and Audit and provided them with insights on social impact reporting. Sessions included theoretical and practical skills followed by one to one mentoring.

16 Participants from varied sectors—corporate employees, CSR consultants, NGOs, and freelance consultants enrolled for this programme. The resource persons were Mrs. Latha Suresh, Dr. Archana Pillai, Ms. Marie Banu, Ms. Vatsala Ravi, and Ms. Nazneen Mistri—Social Auditors from Social Audit Network, India.

The objective of such Social Accounting and Audit Master Classes is to initiate a group of practitioners into the science and art of SAA. It ensures that participants are well versed with the principles underpinning the process as well as solutions to the practical challenges that arise out of undertaking SAA in Social enterprises and CSR projects.

If you wish to become a Social Auditor, please write to info@san-india.org or call 9282205123.



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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“Access to credit is the key link for economic growth.”

John Alex shares with Marie Banu about Equitas and its programmes



John Alex serves as Group Head-Social Initiatives- Equitas Small Finance Bank & Programme Director of Equitas Development Initiatives Trust. He started his career as a Gazetted Officer in Tamil Nadu Government and served as Extension Officer (Agri) & Block Development Officer in North Arcot District, Tamil Nadu from 1979 to 1983. He worked for about 26 years with Indian Overseas Bank and took his voluntary retirement as Chief Manager.

He joined the Equitas management team in 2008 and conceptualized and set up the team for Social Initiatives with a

clear focus to address a larger spectrum of requirements of small clients. The major focus was in the field of health, education, skill development, food security, placement for unemployed youth, and an inclusive model for persons with disability & trans gender community.

In an exclusive interview, John Alex shares with Marie Banu about Equitas and its programmes.

Can you tell us about Equitas, it's philosophy and services?

Equitas was founded in 2007 and

provided microfinance to women's groups based on the Grameen bank model. Our core philosophy is to provide financial inclusion for the unbanked income groups in a fair and Transparent manner. We focus on serving those who are not effectively serviced by the formal financial sector and to improve their quality of life.

We presently serve over three million clients under this segment which constitutes to one percent of Indian households. After we obtained the licence as a Small Finance (Scheduled Commercial) Bank in Sept 2016, our Product offerings has expanded. We now offer Savings, Deposits, Remittances, all types of loans, customized payment solutions/ digital solutions, FASTTAGs, Internet banking, Mobile banking, Wallet, Payment gate way solutions, Pension products, Mutual funds, PMS, and Life & General Insurance. Our vision is to serve five percent of Indian Households by 2025.

Equitas has grown phenomenally, reaching out to 2.5 million active borrowers within 9 years. We now have operations in 7 States with over 400 branches and 12,600 staff members.

What recognition has Equitas received for its programmes?

Equitas microfinance program has been acclaimed by many international agencies. mTransparency, a global initiative to promote transparency of MFIs has recognised Equitas as the most transparent MFI in respect of the rate of interest charged by them. Harvard Business School has written two case studies on Equitas process and technology innovations. CRISIL has consistently given Equitas the highest rating.

We have been rated by CRISIL under their Corporate Governance rating and we have received a Level 2 rating (on a scale of 1 to 8, 1 being best). There are only 6 other corporates in India who are rated Level 1.

In addition to being invited to present the case study on the Equitas model of Ecosystem in many National & International forums, I cherish the award conferred on Equitas at the UNO, Vienna in February 2017 as it is the most coveted for the Equitas Model of reaching out to over 20,000 women with disabilities, out of which over 4,000 are visually impaired.

What is the role of micro-finance in women empowerment?

Access to credit is the key link for economic growth, especially for women who belong to the low-income segment. Thanks to Nobel Laureate Dr Mohamed Yunus and his Grameen Bank model, the group borrowing concept helps women access credit.

I remember, during my initial days at Equitas, when a single mother with two daughters approached us for a loan of 10,000 rupees in order to buy a sewing machine. She was confident to use her skill as a tailor and earn for her family. This is the power of woman!

I believe that if you lend a small amount of money to a woman within a framework, it creates a social pressure for her to repay the loan with interest and over time, she works her way out of poverty.

About Equitas Development Initiatives Trust?

As a mark of our commitment to ensure comprehensive development of our customer communities, we launched Equitas Development Initiatives Trust (EDIT), a not-for-profit organisation, in Feb 2008.

Equitas contributes 5 percent of its annual profits to EDIT. EDIT focuses on education and community development in areas where Equitas customers who belong to low-income groups reside. We plan to address a larger spectrum of requirements—schools for members' children, health care, placement for the unemployed youth, and vocational training—for our members.

In what ways can NGOs associate with EDIT to jointly implement your CSR programmes?

At Equitas, we strongly believe in partnerships. This has been the key for the scale with which we have reached, probably the highest amongst corporates in the world. We work with hospitals, NGOs, State & Central Government agencies, and Rotary Club, Lions Club, etc.

We work with BPL women led families in slums and we will continue to work with them. We welcome organisations to partner with us. I strongly believe in the saying: “What you can, I can’t; what I can, you can’t. But, together we can bring in better transformation.”

You have been involved in other charities as well. Which of the social issues are you passionate about?

I am actively involved as Trustee of Exnora International, an environment club and use this opportunity to talk about hazards of global warming and how women can play a major role in mitigating the ill-effects.

I am also a Trustee of a Special adoption home in Chennai.

My passion lies in creating opportunities and instilling behavior change for transformation among the underprivileged women. They don't need freebies or charity, but opportunities.