

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Life in India has changed dramatically as the world's second-most populous country grapples with the coronavirus outbreak. A decade ago, it was Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)-CoronaVirus (CoV) and now it is SARS-CoV-2. Would a rose by another name smell as sweet?

The coronavirus COVID-19 is affecting 179 countries and territories around the world. Tackling the pandemic will require a new, collective way of thinking about public health and society as a whole. Our approach has grown from scrutinising airport arrivals and evacuating citizens from affected areas to sizeable shutdowns of public space and mass activities.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged India's 1.3 billion citizens to put themselves under self-curfew on 22 March 2020 to protect themselves from the coronavirus, hours after the government announced it was barring all international flights from landing in the country for a week starting March 22, 2020.

You've heard it a million times by now, and you'll hear it a million more, but the best way to lower your risk of contracting Covid-19 (or pass it on to someone else) is to wash your hands after you cough, sneeze, touch your face, use the restroom, or are about to leave one place for another.

To be sure: the coronavirus isn't the Black Death. The vast majority of the people who get it recover. However, it's a lot worse than the flu, even if it's not as widespread. We don't know just how widespread the coronavirus will eventually become. We also don't know what the long-term effects will be.

We have made important progress against infectious diseases, but studies reveal that our way of life has become an even greater threat to our health. It is now time to reshape the way we think about health.

Let's rethink together!

Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

STOP PONDERING, START PROTOTYPING TRANSFORMATION IN YOUR LIFE



I came across the concept of Theory U which proposes creation of a prototype by reaching a point in the problem solving journey stated as “nothingness”. Nothingness is attained through an open mind- letting go judgments; open heart- letting go cynicism & building connection and open will- letting go fears. And interestingly the point of nothingness also signifies essence- a distilled presence, after letting go judgements, cynicism and fear and the presence of openness, trust and courage.

As I was grasping this concept intellectually, I came across an audio description of nothingness and the narrator referred to nothing as no thing. It struck me when we say no thing, the experience of letting go is far more “visual” and literally lands as not a thing remains. Not a thing to me, signifies elimination of everything that would be an interference- biases, assumptions, unpleasant

emotions of anger, resentment, fear which have the potential to come in the journey of creating a prototype. When these things are removed, what we intend to create takes birth from a place of purity.

Would this approach to prototyping be applicable to life as well? What if I want to prototype transformation in my life? Say I want to transform my habit of being passive and become assertive and cultivate a firm presence. Reaching a place of no thing would mean letting go my belief around “I am not good enough” which keeps me in a place of passiveness. It would mean letting go anxiousness and fear that would emerge in my body as I begin my experiments with speaking up and becoming assertive. The choice of prototyping gives a step up opportunity to each one of us to embrace transformation. Such an approach opens up the possibility of designing our life!

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.

TRANS IDENTITY

Transwomen are more vocal about their identity and their needs.

Identity is a very personal association. The society's labels, biased acceptance, and irrational criticism continues to affect the basic rights of minority communities. "It is an emotional journey to come to terms with our identity personally and a traumatic one to pass by as a transwoman. It is not enough if I say I am a woman. My documents are not of any value. I am reduced to the judgement any pair of eyes makes of me," says an emotional K. Maanu, Founder and Director of Vaanavil Foundation in Chennai. Recalling her journey and the challenges she faced, Maanu is not only proud of her achievements but is even more ambitious about her future pursuits.

At the age of 39 years, Maanu has come a long way in fighting for the rights of her community. "It truly is a very long journey. I took time to figure out the disconnect I began to feel with boys in my school. While in class 7, I was scared of play hours as I felt unsure of myself and kept questioning where I belonged. In spite of this internal struggle, I somehow managed to complete class 12," says Maanu with a huge sigh. By now, she was clear that she was a transwoman and decided to move in with members of her community. "I was scared of being rejected by my family. So even before discussing with them I decided to run away from my home. I preferred running away than being humiliated by my own family members. This is what most transwomen do. Fear of rejection, hatred, abuse and taboos influence our decisions. Awareness alone cannot change this situation. It is important to understand gender from a human perspective," she points out.

With motivation from other transwomen, Maanu continued her higher education and developed interest in media and journalism. "I was busy in my life but missed my family very much. Ten years after leaving home, I spoke to my mother one day. It took a lot of courage to make that phone call in spite of the confidence I gained from living with my community members. Being a transwoman doesn't change the fact that I was born in my family. All the thoughts in my mind came to a halt when my mother accepted me. I was surprised! My family's



support further encouraged me to pursue my goals," says Maanu, explaining the shock she felt in that conversation. "Family is the first social unit that must come to terms with the identity of transgender. It makes a lot of difference," she adds.

Maanu established the Vaanavil Foundation in 2011 to organise programmes and activities that not only helped transwomen grow as individuals but also build their identity as a part of this wider society, that is trying to get rid of all forms of discrimination. Writing workshops, cultural programmes, awareness workshops in schools and colleges and many other programmes are organised to create an interface between transwomen and larger society, where each can see the other from a different lens to critically understand their identity, needs and struggles. "The widespread discussion on the Trans Bill 2019 reiterated our faith in our actions. I am glad that we are moving forward," smiles Maanu.

Alongside the activities of Vaanavil Foundation, Maanu also worked as a news reader with Sathyam television. Her involvement in four documentary films and counselling strengthened her resolve to work for the rights of transwomen. Maanu's work as Transgender Rights Association's Programme Manager helped her get in touch with other activists, advocates and change makers. "That is how I met Jeeva amma and on her recommendation I decided to enrol in CSIM's Social Entrepreneurship training programme. Every interaction that followed has been a gift to me, teaching me how every thought reaches the child, parent and adult in us. Understanding human transactions is a scientific art and CSIM taught me how to use this art in communicating the needs of my community," says Maanu, who has also worked with Tamil Nadu State AIDS Control Society.

Coming from a generation of transwomen who have found work opportunities in different sectors, Maanu

finds this as an important recognition that can build her community's collective voice. "My family accepted me, and this is a blessing. I would like to see this happen in other families too," she says, quickly adding that it is no less than an uphill task.

Transwomen are more vocal about their identity and their needs. We are now at a juncture where specific rights of transwomen need to be discussed and written about, otherwise the existing patterns of discrimination will never allow such awareness to penetrate our society. Maanu is particularly concerned about transwomen's right to healthcare and their vulnerability to sexual violence. "I do agree that things have changed for the better now yet there is unfinished business that needs the support of a collective voice and an institutional response from the government," she asserts.

Shanmuga Priya. T



The learning journey continues

Bittersweet. That is how Abdullah Sarwari describes the moment he departed Indonesia for Canada.

“I was leaving all these memories, all these good people, and all these experiences behind, at a place that has given me so much... and at the same time taken away so much from me,” he says.

Spending years of his life in limbo as a refugee is something Abdullah is painfully familiar with.

“[But] instead of cursing the darkness, my older sister and I decided to light a candle, and become active members of our community,” he says.

When Our Better World (OBW) first told Refugee Learning Center’s (RLC’s) story in June 2019, Abdullah was helping the initiative he co-founded in 2015 as its principal. Run by refugees, for refugees, RLC is an educational space providing free classes to refugee children and adults.

The centre became a lifeline not just for the community, but for Abdullah and his fellow volunteers. Stranded while awaiting resettlement, many fall into hopelessness and are vulnerable to mental health issues.

RLC’s classes are an empowering antidote to this helplessness, allowing students and volunteers to use their

RLC’s classes are an empowering antidote to this helplessness, allowing students and volunteers to use their abilities in a meaningful way.

abilities in a meaningful way. They also prepare refugees for a fresh start in their resettlement countries.

For Abdullah, that dream has come true. Last November, he and his family resettled in Vancouver, Canada.

From braving the first chill of winter, to having his own bank account, the months since have been life-transforming. After a three-week stay at a welcome centre, Abdullah and his family have moved into their new home.

“Within two weeks, we have access to more facilities, resources and rights than we had in Indonesia,” Abdullah says.

In Indonesia, the baton has passed to new principal Sikandar Ali, who served as RLC’s IT manager since its beginnings.

“I hope that we will do our best for the future,” Sikandar says.

RLC now has over 300 students, ranging in age from six to 60 years old. Leading the charge for awareness and advocacy for a transitory community often forgotten, the centre has become a success story.

After OBW told the story of RLC as part of its Refugee Series, offers to help streamed in with 276 volunteers signing up to teach or contribute their skills. It was the most the centre ever saw.

“We used to receive almost no volunteer sign-ups. But by the end of the [OBW] campaign we had more than 100 sign-ups,” Abdullah says.

“That was very surprising, and it made us feel amazing.”

The centre was also able to achieve their fundraising goal of US\$6,600 and meet their crowdfunding target to fund one year of rent and expenses. Such donations help ensure the sustainability of RLC, which began operations with scarce resources the team scraped together — the centre did not even have a bell.

The duty of informing teachers that each class was over fell on Abdullah. A trivial

responsibility to most, but a simple act that gave him newfound purpose.

Today, he’s proud to tell anyone that his maiden task at RLC was to be the school bell. “Yes,” Abdullah laughs. “Not ring the bell, but be the bell.”

RINGING IN NEW CHAPTERS

Sikandar clearly remembers Abdullah’s ‘school bell’ days.

“We have an electric bell now,” he happily updates.

Like Abdullah, Sikandar is from the Afghan tribe of Hazara. Sharing a familiar story of persecution, he fled ethnic and religious conflict in Karachi, Pakistan, arriving in Indonesia six years ago. Separated from his family, in a foreign country without basic rights, he spent his first year alone and directionless.

“I faced many problems. I stayed at home all day without going outside,” he recalls.

A friend introduced Sikandar to Abdullah, who told him about the RLC and how he could contribute his knowledge and skills. Having completed IT and computer courses in Pakistan, Sikandar leapt at the chance to volunteer.

“I was doing nothing except eat and

sleep. I wanted to do something active in the community," he says.

Preparations for the new school year are underway, and Sikandar and his team are busy drawing up lesson plans and timetables.

Besides core classes like English and Bahasa Indonesia, and continuing the GED (General Education Development) Programme, the centre also started basic computer classes for children and youth. "Some don't even know how to turn the laptop on," Sikandar says.

Students are taught basic IT and word processing skills. Working off donated laptops, up to three students share one device. The course is showing good progress, with plans to expand into areas like programming and Internet safety — once there is volunteer support.

Carpentry workshops are also on the wishlist when funding permits. Students will gain skills while staying productive, making furniture for the classrooms.

The team is reviewing the volunteers who signed up after watching OBW's story. They will reach out to those with skill sets RLC needs.

Faced with an uncertain future himself, Sikandar holds out hope of resettling in a country permanently. For now, his work at RLC keeps him going.

"I'm doing my best for the community, the children's future. It makes me happy that I can do something for humanity," he says. "Maybe I cannot continue my studies, but [the children] will be [able] to continue their studies when they arrive in their second or third country. This is the one thing that motivates me."

A BOLD WISH

For Abdullah, the tide has turned on a life marked with adversity — from UNHCR offering him a job as an interpreter, to TEDx inviting him to speak in Ubud, to his resettlement in Canada.

"It proved to me that if you want something, there's nothing that's impossible," he says.

Despite being resettled thousands of



miles away, Abdullah continues to play an advisory role at RLC. When asked about his hopes for the centre's future, Abdullah's answer is bold and unexpected.

"It is my hope that there are no more refugees, and no more need of RLC or other refugee-led schools," he says.

Meanwhile, he hopes RLC continues to provide free education to those who need it, for as long as possible.

"At the end of the day, our lives can be similar to yours," Abdullah says. "All we need is the chance,

the opportunity, to prove who we are, and what we can do."

ABOUT REFUGEE LEARNING CENTER

Refugee Learning Center is a school set up by refugees, for refugees. Based in Puncak, Indonesia, the school is run by refugee volunteers, and offers basic education classes for children and youth, and skills classes for adults. From just 35 students at its inception, it now has over 300 refugee students as of January 2020.

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



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS). 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, visit 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 ARTISAN’S TOUCH



These traditional crafts are an embodiment of the cultural and historical identity of India.



The focus of the Jaipur Rugs Foundation (JRF) is to create a society where equality, justice and peace prevail. The route to achieving that is through socio-economic development, and that’s exactly what the foundation has been doing since 2004.

“The Jaipur Rugs Foundation was established in 2004 with the insurgent mission to serve as a social innovator promoting the cause of artisans [especially women] by providing them with job opportunities resulting in an uplifted rural society,” says the organization’s founder, NK Chaudhary, “Through the social programs run by the foundation we have been able to touch 1,29,200 lives and provide livelihood to artisans in 600 villages, spread across five states.” He adds: “We have created 40,000 jobs directly and indirectly and empowered 41,605 rural women. Under our healthcare program we have covered 28,287 people by providing access to healthcare.”

Through these sustainability programs, the organisation has turned craft into a tool for change and it is working hard to reach several UN development goals: no poverty, gender equality, decent work and economic growth and responsible consumption and production.

Today, over 10 million craftspeople are part of India’s handicraft industry. These traditional crafts are an embodiment of the cultural and historical identity of India. However, mechanised mass production is endangering the trade.

The foundation’s purpose is aligned to global sustainability development goals and it strives to create a sustainable market-based solution for the disempowered craftsmen and women. The problem however is that many factors continue to persist in ensuring that those in poverty remain that way. This has especially gained emphasis in

a country largely dependent on agriculture, whose limitations has led to people looking for other sources of livelihood. This comes in the form of jobs in the construction industry, for instance, which result in large-scale migration.

What JRF does and does rather well is to focus attention on ideas and solutions of “social value”. The foundation has reached out to the grassroots, to initiate dialogue and provide opportunities to become skilled artisans. This in turn has resulted in rural men and women gaining a sustainable livelihood and creating a domino effect of social development.

A vital part of socio economic development is financial independence. Keeping that in mind JRF has been helping artisans access formal banking. Locally accessible banking services (conventional as well as innovative) are identified and artisans are connected with these institutions. The organisation also assists artisans with basic knowledge and skills to save money to shape a brighter future for their families.

JRF also organises various demand-driven health camps in rural areas, in partnership with local healthcare providers. The primary objective is to provide basic health education to the artisans and their communities and motivate them to lead a healthy lifestyle. Free medication and referrals to specialty hospitals for major illnesses are also a part of JRF’s mandate.

“Access to healthcare is one of the biggest challenges faced in rural areas. The Jaipur Rugs Foundation organises regular health camps and eye check-up programs for artisans and their communities and these camps are open to everyone in the area,” says Chaudhary, “By focusing on improving people’s health and well-being JRF is able to ensure their uninterrupted access

to opportunities that they need to uplift their life.”

Through these measures the organisation has taken a gigantic leap in improving the overall socio-economic condition of the weavers and have provided a great deal of social upliftment to the community. One of the best ways of doing this is to introduce several social innovations that have worked wonders in the geographies that Jaipur Rugs Foundation currently has presence in. Currently present in five states – Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand, JRF is supported by a core team of development professionals and field functionaries. In addition, interns and volunteers from premier academic institutions are involved in spearheading various activities undertaken by the foundation.

As a futuristic goal, the foundation is providing artisans with marketable skills and leadership attributes with the aim to develop an entrepreneurial mindset among them. Inevitably, one or two women emerge with leadership qualities that are recognised and nurtured. “The Jaipur Rugs Foundation aims to touch the lives of 65000 artisans by 2025, we hope to upskill talented women weavers and artisans by then,” Chaudhary signs off.

Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

Mr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, an English research scholar of Oxford University, brought a letter of introduction from Mr. Brunton and arrived on a visit.

He was tired after his journey and required rest. He is quite accustomed to Indian ways of living, having visited this country several times. He has learned the Tibetan language and helped in the translation of the "Book of the Dead" and the "Life of Milarepa", the greatest of Tibetan Yogis, and a third book on the "Tibetan Secret Doctrines."

In the afternoon he began to ask a few questions. They related to Yoga.

He wanted to know if it was right to kill animals such as tigers, deer, etc., and use the skin for Yoga posture (asana).
M.: The mind is the tiger or the deer.

D.: If everything be illusion, then one can take lives?

M.: To whom is illusion? Find that out! In fact everyone is a "killer of the Self" (atmahan) every moment of his life.

D.: Which posture (asana) is the best?

M.: Any asana, possibly sukha asana (easy posture or the half-Buddha position). But that is immaterial for jnana, the Path of Knowledge.

D.: Does posture indicate the temperament?

M.: Yes.

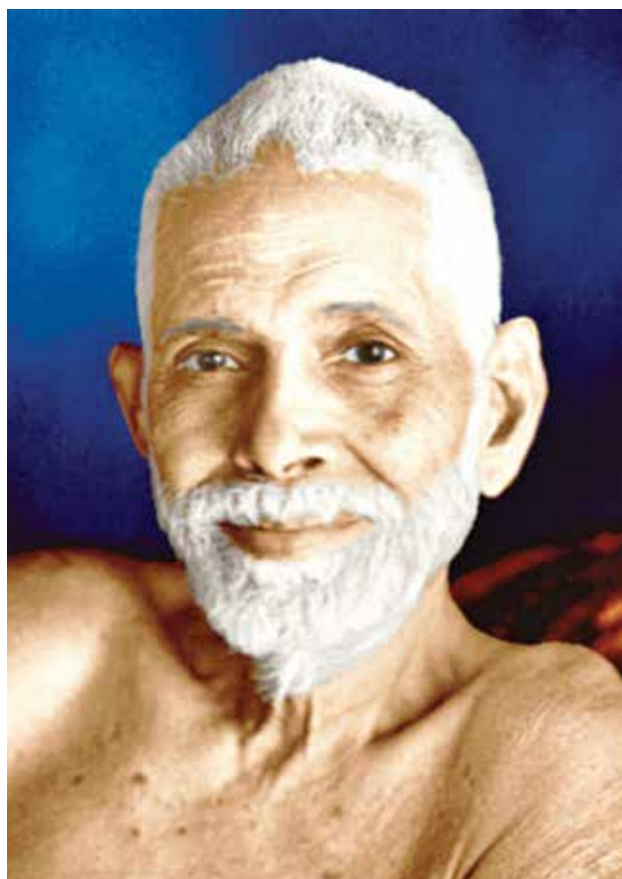
D.: What are the properties and effects of the tiger's skin, wool, or deer-skin, etc.?

M.: Some have found them out and related them in Yoga books. They correspond to conductors and non-conductors of magnetism, etc. But it is all immaterial for the Path of Knowledge (Jnana Marga).

Posture really means location and steadfastness in the Self. It is internal. The others refer to external positions.

D.: Which time is most suitable for meditation?

M.: What is time?



D.: Tell me what it is!

M.: Time is only an idea. There is only the Reality Whatever you think it is, it looks like that. If you call it time, it is time. If you call it existence, it is existence, and so on. After calling it time, you divide it into days and nights, months, years,

hours, minutes, etc. Time is immaterial for the Path of Knowledge. But some of these rules and discipline are good for beginners.

D.: What is Jnana Marga?

M.: Concentration of the mind is in a way common to both Knowledge and Yoga. Yoga aims at union of the individual with the universal, the Reality. This Reality cannot be new. It must exist even now, and it does exist.

Therefore the Path of Knowledge tries to find out how viyoga (separation) came about. The separation is from the Reality only.

D.: What is illusion?

M.: To whom is the illusion? Find it out. Then illusion will vanish.

Generally people want to know about illusion and do not examine to whom it is. It is foolish. Illusion is outside and unknown. But the seeker is considered to be known and is inside. Find out what is immediate, intimate, instead of trying to find out what is distant and unknown.

D.: Does Maharshi advise any physical posture for the Europeans?

M.: It may be advisable. However, it must be clearly understood that meditation is not prohibited in the absence of asanas, or prescribed times, or any accessories of the kind.

D.: Does Maharshi have any particular method to impart to the Europeans in particular?

M.: It is according to the mental equipment of the individual. There is indeed no hard and fast rule.

Mr. Evans-Wentz began to ask questions, mostly relating to Yoga preliminaries, for all of which Maharshi replied that they are aids to Yoga, which is itself an aid to Self-realisation, the goal of all.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharishi

Openness



A Zen master received a university professor who came inquire about Zen.

The master served tea, filling his visitor's cup to the brim and continued pouring.

The Professor watched him until he no longer could restrain himself. "It is full. No more will go in!"

"Like this cup," the Master said, "You are full of your won opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

 Explicit Learning

- A. Our learning is directly proportional to the extent of our openness.
- B. A closed mind hardly lets anything enter.
- C. Our knowing should not stop us from 'knowing'.

 Introspective Learning

- A. What is the nature of 'Openness'?
- B. What prevents me from being open?
- C. How do I become open ?

Making Indian Roads Safe for All



SLF has created new road safety systems and processes and nurtured existing ones to improve road safety

India has one of the world's worst road safety records. While India accounts for 2% of all motor vehicles around the world, the country is responsible for a whopping 11% of all road accident deaths. Each year, nearly 150,000 people lose their lives to accidents in India. What is truly tragic about this is a large share of these deaths occur, not merely due to haphazard driving, but because of a few different things: negligence- bystanders are afraid to extend help for fear of being penalized for their actions; lack of rapid trauma care- the unavailability of rapid first aid and emergency care within the first (a.k.a. golden) hour of the crash and; weak enforcement of the law- be it with respect to driving in the right lanes, wearing helmets or seatbelts respectively, honouring the speed limit and other road safety rules, the ability to track down offenders and so on. Added to this, flawed road engineering, which increases the risk of road accidents making some stretches of roads and highways, more prone to accidents than others.

It is exactly a combination of all the above that took the life of 16-year old Shivam, a Kanpur resident in 2008. The teenager was hit and abandoned by the offender, with bystanders watching, afraid to help. After almost 45 minutes of trying to seek help, he passed away by the roadside. This had a deep gnawing effect on his cousin Piyush Tewari, who went on to found the Save Life Foundation in the year 2008. Piyush Tewari is a multi-sector leader who has been building and scaling government, corporate and social enterprises for the past 15 years and counting. The tragic loss of his cousin Shivam moved Tewari to study the scale of road accidents, deaths and injuries in the country and to understand the need for better awareness, safety, trauma care and policy changes. What started as a personal effort to understand the larger systemic lapses and structural flaws, soon turned into a social movement that has made great strides in effecting changes at the macro level, to make preventable deaths



and injuries from road accidents, a thing of the past.

SLF today operates in 10 states and union territories, with a head office in New Delhi and a second office in Mumbai. SLF has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with various State Governments including the Government of Maharashtra, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh for improving the status of road safety in these States. Their Mumbai team works closely with the Government of Maharashtra on reducing fatalities to near zero levels on the Mumbai Pune Expressway and old Mumbai Pune Highway. Over the past 11 years, SLF has taken on the 5Es approach: Enactment, Enforcement, Engineering, Emergency Care and Education/Engagement, to address the issue of road safety all over the country. SLF has been instrumental in bringing about the Good Samaritan Law, establishment of projects that transform crash-prone stretches of roads and highways into "Zero Fatality Corridors", training of over 14000 police personnel and 8000 drivers across the country in emergency medical care techniques and good driving practices. SLF firmly believes in a data driven evidence-based

approach to the road safety crisis. They advocate for Forensic Crash Investigations to better understand the causes of risks and injuries.

How did SLF achieve so much in so little time? We wondered. Road safety as a paradigm shift has taken a long time coming, in India. However, Tewari explains with an example, "Road crashes and the resultant deaths have been thought of as being inevitable due to the increasing traffic count. SLF's Zero Fatality Corridor (ZFC) initiative on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway (MPEW) has proven this thinking wrong by reducing deaths on the deadly stretch by 43% since 2016, i.e., from 151 in 2016 to 86 in 2019. This number is significant considering the fact that road crash deaths have increased in the rest of the country over the same period. SLF's consistent partnership with the Government of Maharashtra has resulted in a tremendous change in the attitude of various State Government Departments towards road safety issues in the State. SLF has created new road safety systems and processes and nurtured existing ones to improve road safety on the 94.4 km stretch." He says this has been possible only due to decisive leadership

during review meetings, consistent cooperation of all stakeholders, and the importance placed on up-to-date data to steer enforcement strategies.

The challenges that SLF faces are largely in terms of the various state governments co-opting the Good Samaritan Law and other implementation strategies. Delays are inevitable when dealing with the government. On the other hand, access to reliable data is one of the biggest challenges faced. The collection, consolidation and verification of data is a laborious process that takes up a significant chunk of time. Thirdly, as a not-for-profit organization, planning sustainable financing remains yet another challenge for SLF.

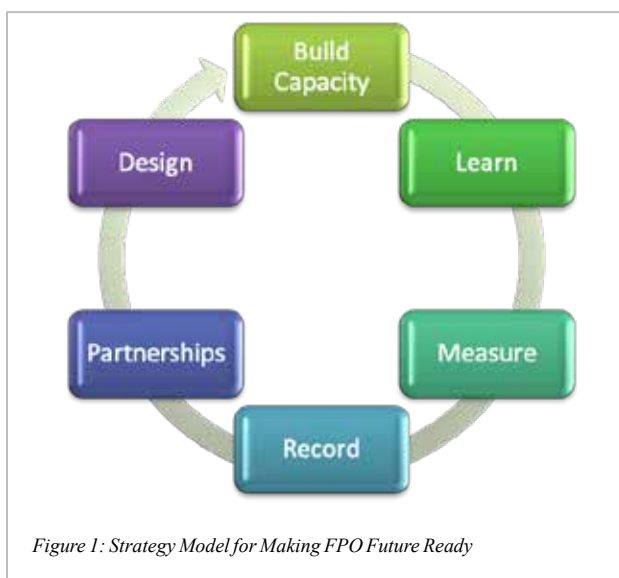
What is the road ahead for SLF? Children under 14 years of age, considered as 'vulnerable road users' are more prone to road crash injuries than the average adult. Through better implementation of the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act of 2019, SLF wants to improve school-zone safety for young road users. A standard protocol for conducting scientific crash investigation after a crash is needed. Timely access to emergency care within the critical first hour after a crash, needs to be strengthened. The Good Samaritan Law needs to be made more visible to public. Trauma Registry Systems are yet to be established in hospitals for treatments to be more effective. The road crash reporting structure needs to be democratized and be effective at the lowest levels, such that no crash goes undetected. Finally, media and community insensitivity towards the road safety pandemic needs to be replaced with proactive participation. "What India now needs, in terms of the next policy goal, is an overarching framework that will support the creation of systems that ensure every individual's right to emergency care," says Tewari. That would certainly help make road safety more equitable.

Archanaa Ramesh

FARMER PRODUCER ORGANIZATION – WAY FORWARD TO SUCCEED

My Last Article in November Issue of Conversations on FPO talked more about the scope and challenges faced by FPOs. In the FPO series this is our second article, focusing upon policy, ecosystem and structural changes to help institutions achieve the conceived objective and benefits.

With all given circumstances, governments are banking upon FPOs to achieve their target of “Doubling Farmers’ Income”. Government, NBFCs, civil societies and other financial institutions have invested in FPOs, looking at its future role in rural development. FPOs have potential to act as a catalyst of change in economic system of our country. FPOs can perform as expected, only when its management systems, governance and capital structure are strong. Other external factors like infrastructure development, market and financial accessibility, credit affordability, efficient commodity pricing mechanism etc. need to be managed by government at equitable pace. Here are few steps which can make a difference in medium to long term.



The circular model suggested in figure 1 shows steps from internal management FPO towards external management. It starts with building capacity of the FPO board members and other institutional leaders to learn management practices and best agricultural practices. Learning on their own, is step in evolution of FPO, carrying importance in becoming self-reliant. Measuring and recording data points is another step in making FPO more transparent and ready for giving trend, this also play an important role in future strategy building. Partnerships is another important step to make FPOs sustainable in long run, linkages with wholesale purchasers, suppliers, financial institutions, transporters, storage facility help in taking FPOs to next level. Design step will help in changing the strategy of FPO when it goes from initial growth stage to next stage and so on, at all stages the need of FPOs will change.

Here are some steps (based on the model mentioned in fig. 1) to be taken by different stakeholders for making FPOs future ready.

Step 1 – Regular capacity building of FPO board members and other key appointments on Management Practices

Board members of FPOs in most of the cases are coming from farming background, head of village committees, or holder of other leadership positions within the village or at Gram Panchayat level. Some places where capacity building of board members is very important includes; villages where local leadership is weak, large number of small holder farmers are present, villages which are very



remote, middlemen is in very strong position, mix livelihood opportunities are available, etc. Board Members and Committees guide organizations to take better steps for future growth. Successful FPOs are those, where leadership is strong, externally hired CEO is able to perform his/her duties with utmost loyalty and ethics. In many cases it has been found that agri-graduates from villages and local

communities are hired to perform duties of CEO of FPO, the strategy is good for institution building, but board needs to understand that the role of CEO and keep this position out of clutches of local politics.

Board members need regular capacity building upon good management practices and help them develop their business and MIS skills.

Step 2 – To come out with standardized scoring method of FPO; including financial, management, social and environmental score

Today there is no standard format across the sector to score FPOs, method changes with implementation or supporting organizations. It has been observed that financial institutions do not have separate appraisal technique for FPOs, which is seen as a crucial issue. Policy makers need to understand the critical factors attached FPOs; it requires unique appraisal process as neither it is perfect commercial private limited organization nor it is completely a social enterprise, it is a blend of commercial and social institution. Appraisal score may undergo change and treat FPO as a commercial organization after 5 to 7 years, but currently the appraisal needs to be different. Financial institutions are bit confused, as they are not able to do scoring based on the financial and social parameters. Currently financial institutions are focusing more on the balance sheet size, but leaving social and environmental parameters is a wrong.

A standard set of scoring model is required for FPOs in different phase for helping financial institutions, private agencies, CSR agencies and other stakeholders to understand the correct picture of institution before giving resources.

Step 3 – Converging rural, agriculture and farmer development policies with FPOs

In India, we form policy for many issues, and forget to converge those at project level. There is a program/scheme level clarity regarding FPOs in New Delhi, but the same needs to come down at village level. There are many policies which can be converged at FPOs for supporting it initially and help these institutions take the next step in future. Institutions like NABCONS, SFAC, agriculture department can come together on matters related to FPO and help each other to take stock of resources, risks, bottlenecks etc.

Step 4 – Improvement of risk management systems in FPO

FPOs are in dire need of gearing up its data related management systems, all that happens in field, market, storage area, and in meetings should be recorded properly. This is going to be of great help in finding the trends of activities happening in any FPO, which is going to be the key for success in future. Many FPOs are either not recording this data, or data recorded is not correct. FPO management do not understand the importance of data recording and do not have any knowledge about data analysis in deciding future strategy. May be, at FPO level recording of data in correct manner for data analysis is possible after some time, but it can be strictly guided by policies and standard operating procedures at higher levels. A standard MIS solution is required to be pushed by the government and other implementing agencies.

Some steps have been taken by different agencies; but it need more scientific and user friendly approach. Auditors and CEOs of FPO need to be guided on their MIS related duties, with strict actions on error and fudged data.

Step 5 – Suggest capital structure of FPO in different phase, and support it in financial linkages

The financial and operational structure of FPO cannot remain same throughout its life cycle, like any other organization, FPO also require structural changes to cope up with growth pattern. A close look at core design of FPO have place for local innovation, but policy does not support innovation. The life cycle of FPO need several local level innovation and partnerships to make it sustainable in medium to long run. Suggested capital structure for FPO is working well in some cases, but in most of the cases it has been found that FPO falls back as an institution, as soon as the monetary support from government or any other agency is stopped. Capital structure is also holding hands of financial institution, as there is always a chance of loan waiver due to political pressure.

Capital structure of FPO need to be flexible, a blended financial solution with increased accountability of implementing agency and management board.



Step 6 – Intra FPO learning and development platform to be started

There is a need of creating a local platform for learning from each other's mistakes and success, currently FPOs are learning from other distant FPO or may be cooperative in some other state, which is mostly irrelevant. In fact there seems to be a competition between implementing partners in one area, they don't want to share information with other FPOs/implementing agencies in the same area. Implementing agencies do not understand that FPOs objective is larger and cannot be confined to agency's internal interest. The need of learning platform is very high, a step towards it is eNAM. Government through eNAM is expecting to change a lot, but local agencies need to come forward and start using it for local level knowledge sharing. FPOs are local organizations with global outreach, it needs to learn from local first and act towards achieving global standards.

A state-level or district level knowledge forum need to be formed for FPOs, which should be guided under the agriculture department or relevant capable government bodies.

Step 7 – Increase role of FPO in social development activities

FPOs are created out of local community in village, where one livelihood activity is predominant; it may be agriculture, fishing, horticulture etc. All producer groups come together and form FPO. Keeping this background in mind, we also need to identify the common social problems in the community. Generally in my experience I have seen that all farmers, fishermen, other producers face similar social problems, as they hail from one place. To increase the accountability of FPO and make it one hybrid service institution, there is a need to define its social role. This step might help FPOs in becoming socially responsible institution, which makes them more transparent and socially accountable.

FPOs are failing because members do not think beyond their produce, aggregation and profits. It is very much required that social responsiveness should be attached to these institutions from evolution phase.

Step 8 – Integrating role of FPOs in strengthening rural entrepreneurial ecosystem

We should not treat FPO as single institution, it may trigger the evolution of various other small and medium size institutions. The overall rural ecosystem requires an overhaul, which act as catalyst and evolve new Rural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem to nurture more and more rural entrepreneurs. FPOs can play more substantive role in rural development, for which the idea is being conceived.



Policy makers, government departments, DMs, BDOs, agri-extension officers, civil societies, etc. all need to understand the large canvas of rural development before understanding FPO.

Step 9 – Link FPO with nearby agriculture university and management institute

FPOs need regular guidance and capacity building, best practices, other technical inputs related to weather, genetically modified seeds, etc.; these all and many more are beyond the capacity of implementing agencies, FPO themselves and other government departments. It is good to link agriculture universities, management institutions, agriculture department in government, and other knowledge institutions with the government. This should be seen as two way solution, knowledge institutions are keen for action research studies, to better analyze the success and failure factors, data directly from farmers can help them and policy makers in long run. While, farmers need regular capacity building in business management, MIS, production practices and technicality of production.

These above mentioned steps are guided towards developing FPO as center of integrated development institution for rural population, especially producers. These steps will increase their capacity to consume more capital and help it in playing an important role in economic development.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi,
with support from Mr. Hemant Tiwari

“Work life balance is easier said than done.”

PWC Davidar IAS shares with Marie Banu the initiatives he launched during his tenure in Civil Service and his thoughts on work-life balance.

Shri PWC Davidar is a retired IAS Officer. He served as former Additional Chief Secretary, Transport; Principal Secretary, Information and Technology; Special Secretary Health and Family Welfare & Director TNHSP, Tamil Nadu; Commissioner, Corporation of Chennai; Commissioner, Corporation of Madurai; District Collector, Vellore; besides several others. His assignments ranged from hard core Administration and Management to that of Public policy formulation and implementation.

In an exclusive interview, Davidar IAS shares with Marie Banu the initiatives he launched during his tenure in Civil Service and his thoughts on work life balance.

What was your inspiration to join Civil Services?

I did my schooling at Madras Christian College High School; Under Graduate Degree in Commerce and Master's degree in Public Administration at Madras Christian College in Tambaram, Chennai. While at MCC, I had a lot of exposure. We had a leprosy clinic, blood donation campaigns, and several activities that helped us look at life ahead. The institution gave a lot of importance for extracurricular activities which broad based my learning here. After a short break, I worked as an Asst Professor at MCC for nearly five years teaching Political Science.

Right from my college days, I wanted to be involved in making an impact on people who are less privileged. Although there are several thousands of NGOs, I wanted to do my bit. As part of my Master's degree, I did a project on the Block Development Office, Padappai. That's when I realized the kind of influence and position a District Collector had. This triggered my interest in Civil Services and on exploring I found that IAS had a huge influence on developmental matters. I realised that government service would help me go a long way in fulfilling my desire to serve the needy and I spent a lot of time preparing for the civil service examination.

You were instrumental in deriving the state level government policy for organ donation. Tell us about this.

Yes, and there is a small story to that. There was a girl whom I met in a get-together in 2002. She was suffering from liver and kidney disease and needed a 'double' transplant – both liver and kidney. I had no exposure to organ transplant issues until then. When she

asked for help, I contacted the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital in Chennai. The hospital found a patient who was brain dead and the family was willing to donate his organs. But, the tissue match was not satisfactory and the organs harvested in Government General Hospital were transplanted in few patients who were admitted in other hospitals.

This triggered a bit of controversy at the department. I realized that there was no policy framework to facilitate the organ transplant process – from government hospitals to private hospitals and vice-versa – as the entire hospital sector existed in silos. The systems were not in place with regard to declaration of brain dead and sharing of organs from deceased donors.

I began to get more interested in this issue, and I did obtain information from other countries on their organ transplant policies and processes. The best part was to be able to connect to the MOHAN foundation that had been struggling with this issue for over 10 years and the NNOS which was also involved in developing public policy in this space.

In 2006, when I was posted in the Health Department, Mr. Subburaj (Health Secretary) and the Chief Minister's office encouraged me to look deeper into this issue. A very fair and transparent system was derived after a lot of consultations with government and private transplant hospitals. You can see that from 2008, a lot of Government Orders were issued regarding organ donation. We then received a lot of enquiries and delegations from other States to understand the systems that we followed. Foreign teams have also visited Chennai to understand how to develop such a program.

I enjoyed working with MOHAN Foundation and NNOS who were motivated and interested as they covered up with a lot of expertise that was required. Even today, I continue to be involved with Mohan Foundation and support them for the work they do. I am happy to note that Tamil Nadu is the number one state cadaver organ donation in the country and continues to play a guiding role to States that want to have a sustainable program. Today, other states are also pushing ahead and making organ donation happen.

Can you share your achievements while serving at Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu?

I did two stints in this portfolio; the first one in 1994-1995 was exciting as I was asked to locate space and set four stadiums in place for the South Asian games 1995.

I had to do a tender from scratch for four stadiums, Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium, the Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium, SDAT Tennis stadium and the Aquatic complex in Velacherry and get the work completed within a span of less than a year.

During my second stint in 2000, where I remained for four years, I promoted a lot of public-private partnerships like the Squash academy, Dolphin swimming academy and the Table Tennis Academy which have produced results on a national level.

Your views on how to handle issues related to Violence against women?

Violence against women is due to several reasons. If you look at someone who has a history of beating his wife, invariably you will find that there are deep issues within the man where he has sold himself out completely to the deep end. He needs to set himself right. He needs help to resolve the garbage in his system and only then can he recognize and treat his wife normally and not look at her as an object or commodity. You can't resolve the issue by just working on the psychological makeup of the man.

I believe that any man who indulges in violence against women – his wife or anyone in the opposite sex – has problem with his sense of identity. I believe that in order to address this fundamental psychological problem, he has to undergo counseling and therapy. Most of all, I believe that man and woman are made in the image of God and we need to understand and respect that. This will definitely lead us to saying 'No' to violence against women.

About work-life balance and your advice for parents?

Work-life balance is to recognise that one needs to work to sustain the family and fulfil life's ambitions while at the same time not getting carried

away with the periodic push of adrenalin to be seen as an achiever at the cost of the family.

Work life balance is easier said than done. When you start your career, you are kind of pushing very hard. Promotions depend on how you work and you can't be strict on your timings. To add to that, the time you spend on social media and other distractions is a challenge.

My wife is a psychiatrist and does a lot of counseling. We are now married for over 30 years and are conducting marriage enrichment seminars for the last 20 years. We have three sons, who are now grown up. Our older son works in Daimler as Senior Manager in the Supply Chain Department and is married to a fashion designer. The second son is a doctor and works at SIMS at Vadapalani in Chennai and the younger son is handling content partnerships for YouTube in Tamil Nadu. We spent a lot of time with them while they grew up although both of us were busy in our own profession. We also made sure that at every given point in time our children never felt neglected. We have done a lot of traveling together and spend a lot of time in together in prayer.

There are formative years, when the children are young and need a lot of emotional and other forms of support. Being unavailable at such times can lead to irreparable damage and bring in a permanent gulf between you and the children. Bridging that gap is difficult. You will need to determine the length to which you want your career or business to grow at the cost of time spent with your spouse and both of you with your children.

As the children grow up into their final years in school or college they will be more independent and will come to you only if they have the confidence that you mean well for them. That belief is built in their minds in the formative years. We have to choose what we really want and not feel pushed by the waves or work pressure.

