

UNSUNG BEACONS

Volume XI

Stories of people for whom humanity matters



A compilation of articles featured in
Conversations Today 2020

Centre for Social Initiative & Management

Unsung Beacons

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*Stories of people for
whom humanity matters*

*A compilation of articles featured in
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FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I introduce *Unsung Beacons* Volume 11, the second edition of an initiative by the Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) to recognize and celebrate the work of unsung heroes who have made significant contributions to society in their own unique ways.



In today's world, where we are faced with numerous challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and social inequality, it is heartening to see individuals and organizations stepping up to create a positive impact. However, not all of these efforts receive the recognition they deserve. There are many people who work tirelessly behind the scenes, often without any fanfare or acknowledgement, to bring about change in their communities. It is these unsung heroes who are the focus of *Unsung Beacons* Volume 11.

This volume features the stories of individuals who have made a difference in various fields such as education, healthcare, environment, and social justice. Through their work, they have inspired others and brought about positive change in their communities. Their stories are a testament to the power of individual action and the difference that one person can make.

CSIM has been at the forefront of promoting social entrepreneurship and innovation in India for over two decades. Through its programs and initiatives, CSIM has helped numerous individuals and organizations to create sustainable solutions to social problems. *Unsung Beacons* is one such initiative that aims to bring attention to the work of those who are often overlooked in the mainstream media.

The stories in this volume are not only inspiring but also provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of working in the social sector. They highlight the importance of perseverance, collaboration, and innovation in creating lasting social impact. The stories also demonstrate the power of empathy and compassion in driving change.

As we navigate through these challenging times, it is more important than ever to recognize and support those who are working to create a better world. The stories in *Unsung Beacons Volume 11* serve as a reminder of the incredible potential that lies within each of us to make a positive difference in the world.

I commend CSIM for its commitment to promoting social innovation and for recognizing the work of these unsung heroes. They come from all kinds of backgrounds- transgenders, senior police leaders, administrators, social workers, trainers and so on. I hope that the stories in this volume will inspire readers to take action in their own communities and to support those who are working to create a better world.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the individuals featured in this volume for their dedication and commitment to social change. Your stories are an inspiration to us all, and I hope that they will continue to inspire others for generations to come.

Dr. Prateep V Philip IPS (Retd.)
Former DGP CBCID

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bringing a book to life is a collaborative effort that involves the dedication, support, and contributions of numerous individuals and organizations. As we present *Unsung Beacons Vol. 11*, a tribute to the remarkable work of social workers, social entrepreneurs, and philanthropists in India, I express my heartfelt gratitude to those who have made this endeavour possible.



First and foremost, I extend my deepest appreciation to the non-profit organisations whose vision, commitment, and unwavering support have been instrumental in the creation of this book. Their tireless efforts to promote social justice and empower communities have served as an inspiration to us all. I am grateful for their trust in Conversations Today team to document their compelling stories and for their collaboration throughout this journey.

To the social entrepreneurs and philanthropists who graciously shared their experiences and insights, I offer my sincerest thanks. Your dedication to improving the lives of others and your unwavering belief in the power of compassion and action have shaped this book into a testament of hope and inspiration. It is through your stories that readers will find guidance, inspiration, and the motivation to effect positive change in their own communities.

I would like to express my gratitude to the individuals who gave me time to conduct the interviews for the Inspiring Personalities section and for meticulously signing off their articles. Your dedication to the cause and passion for social justice shine through in every word.

To the team of writers, designer and editors who worked tirelessly behind the scenes, I extend my heartfelt thanks. A special thanks to my Co-editor Mrs. Latra Suresh whose meticulous attention to detail,

expertise, and unwavering commitment to excellence have ensured that this book is a testament to the professionalism and dedication of all involved.

Writing a book on social issues is a labour of love that requires support, understanding, and encouragement from those closest to us. As I present this book, dedicated to shedding light on critical social issues, I am filled with gratitude for the unwavering support of my family.

To my parents, thank you for instilling in me the values of compassion, empathy, and social responsibility from an early age. Your unwavering belief in my abilities and your constant encouragement have been the driving force behind this endeavour. Your love and support have been a constant source of inspiration throughout this journey.

To my sons Shakthi and Surya, thank you for your understanding and flexibility. Your ability to adapt to the demands of this project and your encouragement along the way have been a constant source of joy. Your innocent perspectives on social issues have reminded me of the importance of the work I am undertaking.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the readers of this book. Your curiosity, open-mindedness, and willingness to explore the narratives within these pages inspire my team. It is our hope that this collection of stories will ignite a spark within you, motivating you to take action, contribute to positive change, and champion the cause of social justice.

Together, we can build a more equitable and just society, where the tireless work of social workers, social entrepreneurs, and philanthropists is celebrated and embraced.

With deep appreciation and gratitude,

Marie Banu Rodriguez
Chief Editor – Conversations Today
Director CSIM | Director, SAN UK

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ALUMNI TALK

1. Mr. Chaturvedi

A Certain Cure



We may have to start with a change in our own mindsets. The kinds of diseases are overwhelming and therefore people’s anxiety and irrational beliefs must be handled with awareness. Swastava Cancer Care has been trying to do this in the context of cancer care.

One significant change in a family ecosystem that has extended to larger society is the notion of good health. The consequent behavioural changes and adoption of new habits related to fitness are laying a stronger foundation for the next generation. At this juncture, it is imperative to look into factors that either contribute to or become an impediment to early diagnosis and recovery from life threatening diseases. “We may have to start with a change in our own mindsets. The kinds of diseases are overwhelming and therefore people’s anxiety and irrational beliefs must be handled with awareness. Swastava Cancer Care has been trying to do this in the context of cancer care,” says Dr Vasudev Chaturvedi, Founder Secretary of Swastava Cancer Care in Hyderabad, Telangana.

Swastava Cancer Care ‘emerged out of pain of a group of people’ who were either directly or indirectly affected by cancer. “Our life experiences and the loss of dear ones not only forced us to promote early diagnosis but also come to terms with the fact that cancer is curable. We had to say it aloud to ourselves first. We didn’t want to see others paying the price we did in order to learn this,” says an emotional Vasudev, who lost his wife to Ovarian Cancer. Surviving Colon Cancer, he himself is a standing example to the promise of cancer cure.

Vasudev’s successful career in hospital management took on a new phase when he learned about his disease. He is both proud and content that his disease never changed his personality. “I was always a workaholic. I just couldn’t let surgery and chemotherapy affect my efficiency at work. It gave me the motivation to remain organised and committed. Having lost my wife, all these occupations helped cope with the need for companionship, but never made up for what I missed in my life. I wanted to do as much as I can to stop others from going through what I did,” shares this poignant sexagenarian.

Founded in 2016, Vasudev and team at Swastava Cancer Cure gave a serious thought to women above 30 years of age as they felt that women’s health was not an immediate priority in rural families. High rate of prevalence of cancer among Telangana women was also a caveat that forced them to look into women and the cancers they were vulnerable to. “Whether we accept or not, we all know the treatment given to women’s health in all social classes,” laments Vasudev, who feels that women are the most denied community within families.

Awareness is a key component of Swastava Cancer Care’s field presence and intervention. Reaching out to remote

rural areas where people hardly know anything about cancer was an urgent need because unless aware, they consulted doctors only in final stages where no medical help could promise recovery. “Cancer is curable. We cannot let them die because of their ignorance. It is a responsibility to create awareness and we are on to it,” he says with commitment. Vasudev explains that three forms of cancer are more prevalent among Telangana women – cervical, oral and breast cancer. “When educated people do not know about self-examination of breasts, what can we expect from uneducated masses? We have a huge responsibility,” he insists.

Supported by its network of hospitals and medical colleges, Swastava Cancer Care has established itself as a bridge that connects people needing treatment and the source of treatment. Awareness campaign in the villages is soon followed by a screening camp where tests are administered. Based on the results women are advised further diagnostics and medical treatment is offered at hospitals that are associated with the organisation. On an average, Vasudev says that six to seven percent cases are suspected in every camp of which two percent are proven to be suffering from one form of cancer.

Awareness is a holistic process and timely diagnosis is only one end to it. There are other significant outcomes and the team’s intention is to reach the young and empower them with correct information. Educating our youngsters about substance abuse, menstrual and sexual hygiene is as critical as educating them about food and nutrition. “We must nudge their behaviour towards good health as early as possible. Their diversions and temptations need to be put in perspective so that they can make their right choice,” he says.

Swastava Cancer Care is now promoting the concept of ‘no tobacco school’ where the entire school administration takes an oath to prevent tobacco reaching their premises. This effort received a new impetus when the Government of Telangana decided to collaborate with Swastava Cancer Care to organise awareness programmes in Government Higher Secondary Schools in Hyderabad and Sangareddy districts. “This is a big recognition for us! Building cancer ambassadors in every school, training teachers who can take the message forward to future batches will certainly reach out to a large student population. Such collaborations strengthen our resolve to widen our horizon and reiterate our responsibility,” he shares.

The Swastava team also takes efforts to present its work and perspective at significant gatherings like the SAARC Federation of Oncologists’ Conference in Bhutan and NCC camps in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. They feel that every platform is a promise to let people know the value of prevention, early diagnosis and available treatments. Their commitment has taken them to more than 95 villages in 12 districts of Telangana where they have organised 2042 awareness sessions covering 14,962 children, youth and women. Screening camps in 21 villages have benefitted more than 400 women.

“It all began when I hardly knew anything about management of non-profit organisations. I recently completed the yearlong programme on Social Entrepreneurship and NGO Management from CSIM Hyderabad. Before the course I was ashamed of asking for help. I wrote tenders and earned so much personally but building resources for a cause proved to be difficult. I have now gained the confidence to seek help for my cause. I have learnt the modalities of fund raising. I have built a network of like-minded doctors and

entrepreneurs. We all know the value of marching together for a cause,” shares Vasudev.

He feels that all these efforts are focused on the reach their resources promised. A crucial step forward can come from the state or central government by introducing vaccines to prevent cervical cancer in girls/women. “It must be given in two shots in a gap of two months before girls reach 18 years of age. Unaffordable for the masses, only government’s intervention can make the difference and save our next generation from cervical cancer. We know the imminent threat and the solution too. Is it not wise that we do what we can?” he quips, adding that the responsibility is on all our shoulders.

Shammuga Priya.T

2. Mr. S.Chezhan

Abilities and Rights



Judiciary and democracy are two sides of the same coin. One without the other is impossible and they both share a unique bond as custodians of a country's constitution, keeping alive the faith in the promise of a just, welfare society. In India, there are many cases where fundamental rights and statutory rights have been reinstated with the help of judiciary. Every such case involves skillful evidence building and an active citizenry that voices its concerns and fears. With judicial instruments, citizens have relentlessly attempted to claim their rights. Mr. S.Chezhan's story (Founder of We Can Social Trust in Thiruvannamalai district) can tell us the impact of such efforts and the long term benefits it can bestow on the social status of a community that has been longing for opportunities to prove their capabilities.

Coming from Kadaladi village in Thiruvannamalai district, Chezhan himself is a victim of lack of awareness in

rural areas. “I lost my vision due to Glaucoma at the age of 15. Lack of awareness did not allow early diagnosis and thereafter I had to study in a blind school,” he says. With a Master’s degree, M Phil and B Ed in History, his interest in competitive exams grew day by day. As the three percent reservation for differently abled candidates in Civil Services were not being properly implemented, he could not succeed. “A decade ago, if you had asked about the qualification of any differently abled person, lottery ticket seller, you would have learnt the loss of social capital that the non-implementation of this reservation has led to,” laments Chezhan.

With a ban on such vocations which needed no or minimum investment, livelihoods of differently abled persons were taken away without the promise of alternatives. In such a premise, he believes, claiming statutory rights was the most certain way to enable opportunities for the differently abled. Armed with judicial instruments like the Right to Information Act, Chezhan began his journey of public interest litigations, raising concerns in almost every realm where promised opportunities were never provided. His first PIL in 2007 questioned the extent of implementation of reservation for differently abled in the group one cadre of Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) examination. “This case is still going on. The judgement favoured appointments in the Group Four cadre in 2012 and led to the appointment of 6000 differently abled candidates. I won the case in High Court to claim reservations in Group One cadre, but the Government of Tamil Nadu has appealed for review by the Supreme Court,” explains Chezhan, hopeful of a favourable judgement. “When this is the only option I have, I better be prepared with all my homework and stay hopeful,” he smiles.

Chezhan founded 'We Can Social Trust' in 2006 to fight for the rights of the differently abled and enable livelihood opportunities in formal and informal settings. Skill training programmes like tailoring, weaving, computer education, cycle repair and others have helped him constantly engage with talent and demand, strengthening his resolve to help the differently abled live a dignified life. "We have trained more than 2000 rural women in tailoring and weaving alone. Their self-employment ventures are an incredible source of motivation. Their transition from workers in garment factories to being self-employed, from handlooms to power looms, have time and again reinforced my faith in building our country's social capital. Only this can earn them the representation in all formal forums," says Chezhan.

His interest in social work and association with Loyola College got him introduced to CSIM and Chezhan feels that it happened at just the right time for him. Apart from learning the modalities in operating a Trust, it is the new contacts and interaction with people from different walks of life that helped him visualise the potential of building social capital from the bottom of the pyramid. "What we do is important to us. At CSIM I saw why my efforts and success where important for others too. The sense of common good was in the air and the fact that I am a part of all the collective effort made me feel humble and significant," says Chezhan, who also won the Sadguru Gnanananda National Fellowship Awards offered by Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani.

Working as a teacher, Chezhan's homework is now focused on gathering information about implementation of reservations for differently abled in LIC and banking sectors. Thereafter a PIL to ensure its implementation is definitely on the cards. "Institutional help like

bank loans is still a distant dream for the differently abled. Therefore, the opportunities promised through reservations are of tremendous importance to my community. If this was implemented in full spirit, all differently abled persons who are educated will definitely be employed. Only this can motivate others to complete their studies without giving up in despair,” he remarks.

Shanmuga Priya .T

3. Ms. Haripriya Bathula

Read Aloud



Children’s holistic development is not only a comprehensive process in itself, but also educative in nature to every keen observer. Their associations with sounds and eventually words, their description of everyday things, their response to others’ descriptions, their assessment of their ability to perform different activities and a set of many other co-related factors not only take them towards their growth milestones, but also lay the foundation for their personalities. “As adults, there are some fundamental habits we must cultivate as early as possible so that it becomes a part of their personalities. I strongly vote for reading here,” says Ms. Haripriya Bathula, Founder of The Bookshelf – Library and Learning Centre in Hyderabad.

With regular aspirations about higher education and dedication, she successfully completed her MS in Biological Sciences from the National University of Singapore. “I dreamt of a secure life like any middle-class student did. But sometimes, your degrees and your pursuit are totally unrelated,” laughs Haripriya, who became

passionate about reading and development of literary skills in children. It was during her post-graduation days in Singapore that she got exposed to libraries and the culture of reading. “Libraries were as big as malls and every single person I came across was a member in some library. The culture of reading regularly surprised me. It opened my understanding of literature and cast a strong influence on my observations and decisions thereafter,” she recalls.

Back home after studies Haripriya was shocked to observe her niece’s addiction to video games. “Children spent more time with gadgets. I wondered why my three-year-old niece wasn’t reading anything? My niece’s response to this came in as a bigger shock. She didn’t know that she could read books that were available at home,” she says.

While Haripriya tried to understand the gravity of the response, she just began to read out to her niece every night, with no intent or expectation in her mind. “I felt the urge to make a start somehow. The process opened up my thoughts on children who liked reading ,but never knew what they could read,” she adds.

Within two years, her niece began to read regularly. The success prompted her to try the same with another niece. “It is never too late to start reading aloud to children,” insists Haripriya, who by now has started her homework about establishing a library, exclusively for children. “I felt a strong drive to take this idea forward, for in the long term, I wanted to see reading as part of every child’s routine,” she says, fully aware of the responsibility in her hand. Two factors, she believed, were the key to realising this dream – access to a wide range of books and the guidance to choose the right book for every child. She wanted her library to let children explore the world of literature and therefore,

she had to do something more than just provide a good collection of books.

After all the groundwork, ‘The Book Shelf’ library was established in August 2016 for children and young adults, with a collection of 1500 books. “Running a library for children is a big challenge,” admits Haripriya, who also introduced read aloud, storytelling and puppetry sessions in the library. She facilitated creative writing, public speaking and formation of book clubs. Representing the library at various events, Haripriya became a renowned storyteller and a resource person at different institutions. Summer Literature camps in the library and celebration of popular literary characters like ‘The Gruffalo’ added more value to her story telling events that soon catered to children with mental disabilities as well. Her library presently boasts a collection of 8000 books.

“All the challenges I face disappear when I see children eagerly interacting with me about what book they could read next. Their approach and their specific questions reassure that it was all worth the effort,” says Haripriya who loves being with children. However, her thoughts began to shed light on underprivileged children who had no access to books or libraries. She organised read aloud and storytelling sessions in government schools and also in association with other non-government organisations, but felt that for wider and stronger impact, a well thought out plan was necessary. “Unless I learnt to organise my efforts outside the library, my library might end up as a biased intervention,” she worries.

By reading culture, Haripriya refers to a habit that cuts across all class differences, allowing the children to share and listen to different perspectives. “This is essential to bring them up as thinking adults. So, I need to do more and

move out of the comfort of my library,” says Haripriya, who feels that CSIM happened to her at just the right time. “Devising programmes with a measurable impact was necessary and CSIM not only guided me but prepared me to visualise my activities on a different scale. I began to dream of community libraries where children and their illiterate parents read aloud and attend storytelling sessions too. That is the magic of language and literature,” says Haripriya.

Shanmuga Priya.T

4. Mr Iyyappan Subramaniam

Abandoned to Adopt



The streets in our society form a unique intersection of lives and classes. They are home to millions, young and old, abled disabled, orphaned or otherwise. While reasons are a plenty, landing on the streets inevitably makes this population extremely vulnerable and are readily exploited for many reasons including cheap labour. Children in particular, are exposed to every kind of danger and deadly habits, ensuring that they don't lead a secure life that a child living with family may experience. Abandonment deprives a child of all his fundamental rights. "In case of mentally challenged and abandoned children, they go through a big cycle of insecurity and mistrust that they are scarred for life. We strive to rescue and rehabilitate such children because their lives matter and are in no way lesser humans," says Mr. Iyyappan Subramaniam, Founder of Sri Arunodayam Trust in Chennai.

Iyyappan was always interested in the holistic rehabilitation of differently abled persons and therefore pursued a Diploma on the subject soon after finishing school. "The course was an eye opener. It prompted me to see beneath the ice. There

was no dedicated institutional care for abandoned, mentally challenged children. In 2003, I launched a Home with one child, in a rented house in Kolathur, Chennai. All I had was a strong inner drive. I wasn't aware of the challenges but was sure that these could not be excuses," he says emotionally.

Iyyappan's subject knowledge and the new experience with inmates compelled him to prepare himself to institutionalise a sustainable effort. "I had to equip myself but had no clue about how or where I would do it. I came to know about CSIM from a friend in 2003. CSIM not only honed my skills, but also prepared me to foresee future of these special children," he shares.

"Planning and vision are fundamental to any institution. To me, they mean the future of special children. Exposure and guidance from experts who shared their struggles and their experiences helped me shape my work. One incredible management lesson that I will always remember and share with others too is – it is never too late to go back to the drawing table. As long as you are able to see your own pitfalls, you will be able to handle any obstacle. All these learnings kept driving me to think about what would happen in the lives of these special children and that introspection led me to plan better for the institution," says Iyyappan, underscoring the long term dependence and responsibility that comes in with every rescued child.

2009 was a big milestone for Sri Arunodayam as their first institutional grant came through to fund all their interventions. At once, Iyyappan focused on strengthening his human resources to make sure that qualified therapists were available.

As children grew older and were able to learn new skills, Sri Arunodayam gave room for vocational training. Prayatna,

the vocational training centre for children above 18 years was established in 2012. From paper bags to sling bags, shopping bags, candles and others, a range of products were attempted with enthusiasm. “All these skills came in very helpful during the Covid pandemic. Our children stitched 10,000 reusable cloth masks and distributed them among the poor, old and abandoned people on the streets who could not afford to buy them. This was a big achievement for us! We believe that timely care and opportunities is all that we need to turn these special challenged individuals productive,” says Iyyappan.

Sri Arunodayam presently shelters 115 children and has employed 50 full-time staff. A home for boys was inaugurated in 2011 with a capacity of housing 80 boys and another home for girls is under construction at Korattur Village, Kallikuppam.

“In our 10th year our boys’ home was established and the girls’ home will come up in our 20th year. We follow organic planning exercises periodically to decide on our next interventions and internally evaluate compliance, achievements and concerns. I owe it to CSIM for making me realise the importance of governance in NGOs and meticulous planning, irrespective of the size and impact of any programme. Besides this, donor support is our back bone. Engaging and retaining donors is an expertise and my training at CSIM helped me in this area as well. CSIM taught me everything from the scratch and I also followed suit. The result is an efficient team at Sri Arunodayam that dreams together for the future of our special children,” he says proudly.

With all this work, is Iyappan content? He declines instantly. “The issue of abandonment is on the rise, in spite of increasing awareness. Providing institutional care for

special children throughout their lives is not easy. While we certainly intend to work on after-care; employment and community reintegration is impossible without a responsive society,” worries Iyyappan.

Having seen the children learn every new skill (from distinguishing right from left), personal care and vocational skills, he feels that adapting to differences is a one-sided responsibility, completely borne by the mentally challenged children.

“I look forward to the day when society as a whole comes forward to adapt and accommodate the needs and abilities of differently abled persons.”

Shanmuga Priya.T

5. Mr Louis Selva Kumar

The Virtue of Patience



Substance abuse is more a social concern than a medical one as it completely disturbs the primary support system of an individual – the family. Addicts need help, sustained support to enable them come over the addiction physically and mentally. Every such story of struggle with self and the resultant victory is incredible and needs telling aloud to reassure that recovery is definitely possible and all one needs is determination to tread this path. Mr. Louis Selva Kumar, Founder of V Can Foundation in Chennai believed so too.

Kumar's journey of de-addiction from alcohol took almost thirteen years. His recovery and relapse in between taught him two valuable lessons. "An addict misses out on beautiful family moments which has the potential to strengthen his personality. Addiction distances one from his own good self, affecting his personality and therefore self-confidence. I have been through both the situations. Trust me, it hurts when you recover and you would not want another man go through this. Which is why I decided to help others recover from alcohol addiction," says Kumar.

As a young Chennai boy, dropping out of school did not affect Kumar as his diploma in welding and other technical trainings gave him the liberty to take up multiple jobs. He worked with the telephone department and also tried a couple of small business ventures. All such endeavors came to a halt due to his alcohol addiction. His wife's death led to relapse from the first episode of recovery. "The second episode is even more challenging because your body doesn't cooperate like it did before as your determination has taken a beating and you fail to see why you must give up," he admits. However, Kumar feels lucky to have succeeded the second time too, thanks to the peer support that backed him and the timely professional assistance.

Kumar knew that such situations are not likely for all. Therefore, he decided to establish a de-addiction centre with all-round services. "No matter where you stand, life ahead is completely yours and in your hands. I was taught so too and wanted to take this message to others addicts," he adds.

V Can Foundation was initiated in 2012 as a full-fledged de-addiction centre with a capacity of 45 inmates. A strong team of volunteering doctors is the centre's biggest strength. The three-month treatment offered in the centre is tailor made to suit every individual's requirement and focuses on physical, mental and spiritual components equally. "For those whose health has deteriorated, we take more time. There is also another extreme where families want to get rid of those addicts with severe health issues because they are clueless about how they can help or adapt to their needs. In such cases, we cannot promise cure or recovery but can certainly provide support. Having seen cases of every kind and extreme, we are prepared to handle any emergency and do not give up even when patients and their families do," assures Kumar.

Kumar learnt about CSIM from his mentor and was convinced that their training was much needed for his growth. “The experience and interactions at CSIM taught me the real value of patience. I realized it was the lack of patience that had led me to addiction. Social workers like me need to practice patience as a virtue. We need to work out all odds in order to see the change we envisage to unfold before our eyes. Else, it would be difficult for me to accept challenging situations at work,” he says.

Of over 1,000 cases from V Can centre, there were four deaths – in cases where families could not accept the reality. Only after the post mortem reports arrived, they accepted the truth. “Such a predicament is not because of lack of trust in us. Rather, it implies lack of awareness. Addicts may look good and healthy from outside, but nobody can see or understand what they are from inside,” he explains.

It has been nine years now and Kumar feels that time waits for nobody. He quickly adds that patience always teaches the value of time. “These two values from CSIM have not only helped my work, they have enhanced my personality and changed my perspective towards life and work. I now see myself as a responsible social being and am trying to find ways to inculcate the same thought in my patients.

No matter what we dream of, everything starts from an individual. The attention and importance we give to this realization will decide the fate of our endeavours,” says Kumar who was acknowledged for his work as the Best Social Worker by Globe International in 2008.

Shanmuga Priya. T

6. Ms. K.Maanu,

Trans Identity



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 enroll 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

7. Ms, Mallika Valluru

The Promise of Digital Infrastructure



Education is the face of every civilisation. It lays the foundation for aspirations and future, and in the process also influences pedagogy in such a way that learning becomes more engaging for both teachers and students. Use of various methods and tools have their share of influence on the evolution of pedagogy but an incredibly significant influence comes from the use of technology. “Rightly so because every teacher is different and so is every student. Having been students, we all have felt gaps in the system. We all, at some point, wished for some changes that could have made learning much easier and more interesting. Technology can help bring alive small and significant changes,” assures Ms. Mallika Valluru, Co-Founder of Radius Edutech, a startup based in Hyderabad.

Coming from a software background, Mallika has always been interested in education and intrigued by the logistics of introducing small and significant changes in the system. When she did her specialisation in Social Impact Strategy from University of Pennsylvania, her focus fell on the introduction of scientific concepts in a

graded manner. “Concepts can be explained differently for different age groups, gradually widening the scope of association. I would have loved that as a student,” she smiles, adding that she first thought of establishing a science lab that would allow students to learn science concepts practically.

She quickly dropped the idea because labs she felt, weren’t classrooms and were visited only periodically. Her exploration of alternatives led her to think of a tool or medium that children could lay hands on and use. “What if children get to have a tool that allowed them to imagine concepts in different scenarios?” says an excited Mallika.

Interactive Simulations answered all her questions and Mallika strongly believed that enabling virtual learning through interactive simulations was not only aspirational but also need of the hour. “We must allow children to imagine. Animated experiments will help them try same experiment on a concept, say frequency for example, in different scenarios, all at the comfort of their classroom. In so doing, we are in no way, not in the least possible way, trying to reduce the role of teachers. Interactive simulations help teachers visualise lesson plans and also evaluate the level of students’ absorption. And therefore, they can adapt their methodology to suit the level of students’ needs,” says Mallika.

Radius Edutech was established in 2018, incubated by the WE HUB, the only state-run platform for women entrepreneurs by the Government of Telangana. The company offers a range of products that include interactive touch boards, televisions, projectors, along with a comprehensive Learning Management System (LMS). Having designed the curriculum herself, Mallika feels

that the STEM based class, which is a weekly lab class by teachers is very promising. Radius Edutech manufactures its products domestically in Hyderabad, providing its share of local employment opportunities.

Radius Edutech's video conferencing platform – Octa, has been a huge success recently. Thanks to the lockdown due to Corona, there has been an increased emphasis on the use of video conferencing. Working on low bandwidth, Octa is an encrypted, secure alternative to all other platforms currently available. With a dedicated team to enable teachers use this platform, the company has seen a surge in its users. "We use Octa for faculty development as well. Our usage demonstrates how privacy concerns are addressed and the efficacy of giving worksheets and online assessments. For us, this lockdown has been a blessing in a disguise," smiles Mallika. To ensure privacy and content security, the team plans to introduce local hosting post the lockdown, unlike the common cloud hosting used by other platforms.

Having reached 14 schools in Hyderabad, Radius Edutech is all set to go pan India and more than 10 countries across the globe. "This is a huge feat for us but challenges are always there. Adaptation is still a problem, especially with language teachers who were never exposed to use of technology in their classes. Continuous training and hand-holding has made the difference and we reassure those teachers are the enablers. Digital infrastructure is an additional aid in their hands, adding to their efficiency," she asserts. With penetration of technology in education becoming a reality, Mallika hopes to customise her products for women skill training in the future.

A software engineer turned entrepreneur, Mallika feels that CSIM gave her the energy to do what she loved to do. "Peer

influence and the ensuing positive energy is a very strong motivating force. At CSIM, I saw people who did what they loved and also succeeded in their pursuits. They were able to see the change they once visualised. Being amidst them gave me the confidence. I was inspired to study Social Impact Strategy,” she says, still in awe of the energy she felt at CSIM. “Passion has no age barriers and there is no better place to realise this than CSIM,” she adds.

Shanmuga Priya.T

8. Mr. Manna Egambaram

Farm Lives



Love for nature and passion for farming together have inspired individuals from different walks of life to venture into organic farming. They all look up to mentors who have demonstrated that nature and its cyclic systems are more efficient in adapting to modern requirements. “All we need to give them is space, some room for thought, introspection and execution. Nature finds its way. We only have to overcome the obstacles,” says Mr. Manna Egambaram, who takes pride in being known as the son of a farmer.

Born in Senji, Villupuram, Egambaram grew watching his father struggling with farm loans and low crop yields. Farmer suicides, on the other hand, bothered him much as most of the adults who lost their lives were farmers he knew well. “Why is agriculture, the profession closest to nature, unpredictable and unsustainable? Where are things going wrong? Why do farmers give up?” he wondered.

Egambaram dropped out of College not only due to the dis-interest he had in city life, but for the reason that he was in love with farming and wanted to pursue agriculture. “My heart is here, in our farms. I was associated with Nammazhvar’s ‘Uyir Suzhal Naduvom Trust’. The 16 years I spent with this renowned organic farming champion not only inspired me, but also made me realise the magnitude of responsibility

I was going to handle very soon,” he adds.

He was trained by Nammazhvar in organic farming and now he is into training many farmers across different states in India in this farming technique. Egambaram engages in building model farms through participatory learning signifying his approach, which is relatable and reliable. He adopts Participation Learning and Action methods to explore local herbs and materials to prepare plant and soil tonics, pest repellants, and food for microorganisms in the soil. Egambaram has also worked with Government departments to promote organic farming among farmers in the State. Under his leadership, his team curated the practical training module for the course on Rural Development Science in Arulanandar Arts College, Madurai, Tamil Nadu.

As Egambaram grew popular, his work in the farms of noted civil servants recognised the leader in him and soon he began to teach organic farming to be as a way of life.

During his early years as an organic farmer, he learnt about CSIM from a friend and is still glad that he made the decision to join CSIM. “I dropped out of Polytechnic because I wanted to live as a farmer. I consciously tried to disconnect from city life as I had my own faulty assumptions. CSIM taught me how cities and villages constituted a whole. I began to see the city village

interface for what it is and the opportunity it promised for farmers like me. I learnt to see the goodness on all sides and this inspired me to explore farming from a local perspective. I now proudly advocate locally made farm materials fertilizers and pest repellants. I learnt how to promote cultivation of traditional crop varieties,” shares Egambaram, quickly adding that CSIM helped him understand marketing from a social perspective.

An important aspect of Egambaram’s trainings is the intergenerational workshops in community halls where age-old, sustainable land and water use systems are discussed. Facilitating the same, he feels it is important for farmers also to evolve organically. Soon, he helped trainees focus on local crop varieties that had interesting characteristics. For example, Tahabrikshan is a rice variety from Manipur that helps in treating cancer. He cultivated this crop in his farms and also taught the technicalities to 80 other farmers. “That is how the chain grows,” he says. Sandikar, is another variety native to Ramanathapuram district in Tamil Nadu that helps build immunity and can grow in dry, drought prone areas. “Traditional crops also give more pasture for farm animals. They personify co-existence. There is a lot about tolerance and adaptation that we can learn from plants. All we need are the eyes to see them,” says Egambaram.

Egambaram’s passion and work not only inspires other farmers but compels one to question why organic farming is not the common norm. He assures that organic farming will be our future and he will do everything possible in his capacity to make this transition smooth and worthy.

Terrace and kitchen gardens administered by women and children is an incredible testimony to this transition already in place. Compost pits that recycle wet waste from kitchen

not only give manure but also show the value of reducing waste. His movement ‘Pasumai Iyarkai Vivasaya Iyakkam’ has been demonstrating the strength behind cultivation of native crops through organic methods using local materials on his 34-acres farm. “The idea is to show how everything in nature is cyclic and an embodiment of interdependence. We must respect the requirements of plants and fields. Once this mutual bond is in place there will not be any exploitation of resources from any side. Good health is plant and soil’s right too,” he insists.

Shanmuga Priya.T

9. Mr. Moraji Desai

A Better Tomorrow for Slum Children



Significant proportion of children from the down-trodden segment of India who are enrolled in government schools fail to complete their school education. Dropping out of school is not a new challenge, but that has multiple underlying reasons behind it. Most common reasons being financial constraints, illiterate parents, puberty in girls, early marriage, distraction with peers, etc.

While many organisations aim to bring notable changes in this area, lack of experience on how to guide and motivate the children who drop out of school remains a challenge.

However, a few NGOs have skillfully handled this issue and have moved on to be role models for others. One such organisation is ‘Turning Point Educational Trust’ founded by Moraji Desai in 2008 that focuses on promotion of quality education among children in slums in Chennai.

When asked what motivated him to focus on this segment of the population, he says: “During 1995- 1998 I studied at Loyola College, Chennai, and enrolled in All India Catholic University Federation (AICUF). It was through AICUF that I started working part time in ‘Nesakkaram’, an organization which promoted education awareness in the slums in collaboration with the police. I also worked for a while with ‘CHOLAI’ an organization that worked with at-risk children in Thiruvannamiyur. This, was the turning point in my life.”

“I have a passion to work for the cause of children hence continued to work in the slum areas for a couple of years until tsunami hit the sub-continent in 2004. As tsunami heightened the proliferation of slums and poverty, I began to grow increasingly concerned about the future of the children who dwelt in them,” he adds.

In the earlier days, Moraji found it difficult to deal with children from different backgrounds and bring about positive changes in their lives. It was during that time he joined the four-month Certificate Course in Social Entrepreneurship at CSIM.

“Running an NGO comes with its own share of difficulties. Several issues arise during the functioning of the NGO, like providing training for children, handling the problems they face in their home front, motivating them to continue their school education, etc. Even though we try to fix most of it on our own, we need guidance for some to help solve them,” he says.

“I have learnt some of the most valuable lessons pertaining to running of an NGO from CSIM’s course. I learnt the skills required to run an organisation in a successful and sustainable manner, and how to cater to the needs of

children. CSIM also made my identify like-minded people in various institutions who work for the welfare of children and their education journey,” says Moraji.

Turning Point Educational Trust conducted regular motivation sessions and kept children engaged and focused. The team was capacitated in handling unexpected problems while dealing with slum children.

Currently, Turning Point Educational Trust works in five slums in Chennai and identifies children who need educational assistance. Regular activities – spoken English classes, healthcare tips to manage the COVID situation, painting, story-telling and personality development classes– are conducted to keep kids engaged throughout the week.

Many children lack motivation and interest to attend school regularly and study. Hence, extra attention is given to such children so that they remain focused and do not drop-out of school.

Moraji says, “I attribute the success of my programmes and the change I was able to bring among the slum children to CSIM. Their experienced faculty, subject experts, and the exposure visits made me manage my NGO efficiently.”

He adds saying, “Our team continues to face challenges in enrolling girl-children dropouts, counselling adolescent children, etc. Thankfully, the dropout rates have decreased to a large extent now. Further, with the help of Government officials and Police officers, especially Shri. V. Balakrishnan IPS, Joint Commissioner of Police, Chennai, we have enrolled 18 of our children in Colleges.”

Currently, Turning Point has 20 staff members who are engaged in COVID relief work. They also conduct daily

online classes on motivation, and skill development. “Most children are not interested in education, so we need to plan regular classes and interactive competitions to keep them engaged during the lockdown,” says Moraji.

“Until date, we have managed to help 500 children. We work in 5 slums in Chennai, but there are many more children who need help and guidance to build a good life for themselves. Our dream is to continue helping children and reach out to more children living in other slums in Chennai,” he signs off.

Aatika Kouser

10. Mr. G Senthil Kumar,

Care and Well-Being



Health is a state of physical, psychological and social well-being. The evolution of health care in a developing country like India clearly underscores all the intimidating factors that define health as a social outcome. This is undeniable in the case of tertiary diseases like Cancer and HIV/AIDS. “I started my work when there was little attention given to children affected by HIV infected parents or family members. The disease completely shattered families’ socio-economic support systems. I genuinely felt the need to protect next generation from the social consequences of this dangerous disease,” says Mr. G Senthil Kumar, Founder of CHILD Trust in Chennai.

Senthil graduated in Rural Development Science and spent a lot of time with farmers while engaging in part-time jobs. Interested in serving them, he made an earnest effort in understanding their lives and cycles of farm production. Wanting to do more, he pursued his Masters in Social Work. Soon after, he came to Chennai to find a job, but

an advertisement from CSIM in a local daily changed his life for the better. “I had not even imagined social entrepreneurship then and I was intrigued. CSIM opened a new world of opportunities for me by making me realise the challenges and changing roles of a social worker,” he recalls.

“I came from a completely different background yet learned to be enterprising. The faculty at CSIM make sure that you begin to see the social value in everything you do. Now when I look back at what I do, I see it as a reflection of what I learnt at CSIM,” says Senthil.

His experience in tele-counselling for HIV positive patients (and their families) and association with an NGO working for street children exposed him to the social aspects of health. “I personally saw how social taboos easily eliminated the needy from the social system. I also saw how stigma worked at a family level and affected every prospect of their family members. Here, stigma is not only about the disease but also about the way it spreads. Being HIV positive casts a heavy weight on their identities and all that they were or could become was over shadowed by this new identity of being infected or affected persons. Let us not even delve into gender discrimination yet. I often wonder if we, as a society, have got used to leaving out and ignoring the needy,” shares Senthil.

Completely aware of the transformation in medical treatment available for the disease, he was disheartened to see children (infected and affected) giving up their aspirations. He feels that lack of awareness and misinformation change the very course of their lives. “They suddenly lose their right to a normal childhood only because their parent or family member carried the disease,” he laments.

Senthil founded the CHILD Trust to protect the rights of these children and provide for all their fundamental needs and education. CHILD's home for HIV affected children was established in 2005 in a rented house with only three children. As resources grew and more support came in, Senthil and team gradually built their own space. Today, the Home can accommodate over thirty boys and ensures their well-being.

The residential centre caters to every need – basic amenities, health, education, extra-curricular activities, sports, evening classes, computer classes and life skills education. Senthil wants to make sure that these children get as much voice in their choices as would happen if they lived with their families. “More than 20 boys have passed out and are working in big companies. Their achievement and independence inspire us to continue,” he says. After almost 10 years, CHILD decided to focus on girl children as well.

CLAPS project was initiated in 2016 to provide computer classes for children studying in government and government aided schools. Benefitting more than 900 children in the secondary level, this project has helped CHILD widen its base to reach out to more children in need.

ISAG – ‘I Support A Girl’ project was initiated in 2015 to bring together donors and girl children on a one-to-one basis. Each donor gets to support the specific needs of one girl child identified by CHILD. A baseline survey in 2015 estimated around 2000 girls in Thiruvallur district were either infected by HIV or affected or completely abandoned due to the disease.

With donor support, CHILD is slowly increasing the number of girls under its care. Currently 120 girls are supported

under this project. “The donors know which girl child they are supporting; hence their contribution also becomes specific. All bills like school fee and medical expenses are paid through cheques and CHILD’s transparent system of accounting to donors make them take special interest in every child’s specific needs. We facilitate, and we do that efficiently,” adds Senthil.

Shanmuga Priya. T

11. Mr Shankar Matam

Remodelling Rehabilitation for the Differently Abled



Social welfare is a very comprehensive term often understood within a specific context. “That is the reason behind the range of programmes and services that civil society strives to offer different groups of beneficiaries. It allows us to focus on needs at a micro level and resolve challenges from a local perspective,” says Mr. Shankar Matam, Founder and Director of Sahara Social Development Organisation in Telangana. Having been on both sides of providing and receiving social welfare, his work experience strongly urges the need to bring the last citizens to the fore. “Putting the last first, as Robert Chambers said,” he smiles.

Coming from a farmer family in Wadagama village (Sangareddy District), Shankar was well aware of the gap between resources and aspirations. “I studied in a Government Social Welfare Residential School. Unable to pursue Medicine, I decided to pursue my graduation in Physiotherapy. I started practice soon after but was hit by a striking reality that physiotherapy was just one block

in the maze of rehabilitation for the differently abled. There were both minor and chronic issues that demanded different levels of attention – physically, socially and psychologically. Several incidents pushed me to look further, raising many questions,” says Shankar, who gradually understood that disability rehabilitation was not only clinical and therapeutic, but also a function of social and economic factors. “Hence the need to remove every barrier and promote community participation,” he adds.

Shankar personally feels that transport is a big barrier that prevents differently abled from accessing many services. Closely followed by financial barriers, these two sets of factors almost dictate the level of professional help any differently abled individual is able to access. “The consequent unavailability of therapists in remote areas further adds to the woes,” he laments. While trying to figure out the family of factors that determine the welfare of differently abled, Shankar also realised that medicines and specialists were available only in specific hospitals.

Having listed down all relevant indicators, Shankar came up with a model to address every concern that has so far kept the differently abled from accessing professional services.

A significant strategy to promote complete rehabilitation of differently abled was to educate mothers as rehabilitation activists (MARA). “MARA was our first programme a key step forward because mothers were the best source of information to enlighten us about community level barriers, to resolve them and most importantly, they become an interface allowing us to identify the differently abled and convince parents to access medical help without giving in to wrong social assumptions or irrational beliefs,” explains Shankar. Equipping himself with two Master’s Degrees - in Public Health and Psychology – did not suffice. He admits

that his experience with mothers was eye opening, urging him to focus on building social and human capital at the community level. “Mothers were battling different barriers at the family level. In the beginning we trained 2500 mothers living in four districts of Telangana. A social audit revealed that only 21 mothers out of every 100 actually practiced the exercises that were taught at the rehabilitation centre. Although this was a disappointment, it helped us look into the need for skilled interventions on a daily basis. The more we understood, the more challenging it became and I was persistent,” he reassures.

Then came the Sahara Disability Rehabilitation Centre where mothers were enrolled in a residential rehabilitation programme with their children but this proved to be a complete failure as mothers’ attention was forced to remain with one child. Training and consultation were scheduled for fifteen days in the first month and two days every month thereafter, for every beneficiary. “This also yielded very limited success because mothers were not only responsible for their differently abled child, but also for their other children and routine household chores. Inviting them to the centre was like adding more responsibilities on their shoulders,” he adds. Taking his lessons from the first two programmes seriously, Shankar founded Primary Rehabilitation Centre in 2015 to address all the aforesaid barriers at a micro level. The regular medical camps in villages took experts to the people and introduction of electric autos removed transport barriers and ensured regular follow ups. With the help of a government scheme (Prime Minister Bharateeya Jan Aushadi Kendra), generic medicines were also made available at the village level.

With 13 centres in 3 districts of Telangana – Hyderabad, Sangareddy and Mahboobnagar, a structured programme was introduced to ensure continuous monitoring of every

child throughout the year. A singular point of contact where mothers were educated at the time of their child's consultation visits proved to be an acceptable approach from all sides. With transport services also introduced, this proved to be a very successful model.

From a grassroot worker who has been trying tirelessly to connect the dots pertaining to complete and successful rehabilitation of differently abled, Shankar has grown to be a reputed resource person in this field. "My education enabled me to ask the right questions. My questions helped me to connect the dots. CSIM happened just at the right time, encouraging me to put back those dots within the larger frame of social welfare. CSIM helped me use my domain expertise to build the local context into a model that can evolve organically, embracing new responsibilities and challenges," shares Shankar, who is a noted Member of the Advisory Board for Disability Rehabilitation to Government of Telangana.

Shanmuga Priya.T

12. Ms Viji

Acceptance and Abuse



Gender as a social construct is yet to be fully understood. As a society that is continuing to find its stand between equality and individuality, gender comes across as an intriguing identity. How important is this discussion? Rather, how sensitive are we in noticing the interaction between such social constructs? “Neither of the questions matter to trans-women like me until the day we face our reality. What really matters is awareness and only awareness can push you to a rational decision. We live between acceptance and abuse,” says Ms. Viji, Founder of Anbu Trust in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu.

Awareness, she insists, is the reason she feels positive about herself. “When you realize you are different, a kind you don’t know about, a kind you don’t want to be, what do you do? Delude, run away? I was blessed. It was my father’s awareness that made me feel positive about myself and that gender is no more than a label. He kept telling me that labels morph as societies evolve and that, what should

really matter is my ability to think and act independently,” says Viji.

Hailing from a small village (Muramban village in Tuticorin), even before she could come to terms with her reality, changes in her body language invited criticism and abuse. “My parents were hurt. My relatives berated my presence. I had suicidal thoughts. My father eventually stood by me and motivated to complete my studies in spite of all these hardships. His love laid the foundation for my self-respect,” she says.

After completing graduation in English Literature, Viji came to Chennai in search of employment. Having faced abuse in every place she went, Viji learnt to move on with the dose of acceptance from few friends and mentors. She worked as a peer educator and field worker with many non-profit organizations. With experience, her aspirations also grew and Viji resolved to become a role model for other trans-women who were forced to accept the way of life that deranged their individualities. “Why were they taken into sex work? Why shouldn’t they live a normal life like any other adult in this society? Why can’t we be seen in respectable jobs and positions? Why is this so difficult?,” she asks emotionally.

Her work at South India Positive Network led her to pursue studying Social Work but due to issues in her certificates she was guided to do the PG Diploma in Social Initiative and Management at CSIM. “It was at CSIM that I learnt to map reality, ideas and solutions at different levels. I was able to put all my field experience into context. I am now able to guide many Trusts in networking and auditing. CSIM made me a resource person in a short period. I also pursued my own dream project,” says Viji who was the first trans-woman to work with Madras Diocese Society. In her

capacity as Project Manager, she travelled across India and found that many trans-women were from South India. Then on, she nurtured the dream of playing an instrumental role in reuniting them with their families.

Viji established the Anbu Trust in 2007 to support abandoned children, women and trans-women. One of the most significant contributions of the Trust is to help trans-women procure proper identity documents and therefore be able to access government welfare schemes.

Today, more than 90 percent of trans-women in Tuticorin live with their families. Counselling by Viji and her father, this is a feat she is very proud of because she strongly feels that no institution can replace or take over the role of a family. Her successful marriage and the journey of her four adopted daughters (trans-women) not only inspire others but also testify that bonding, relationships and aspirations are beyond norms and constructs.

She also worked with the Trans-Women Welfare Department, Government of Tamil Nadu and used the opportunity to spread awareness about the physical, mental and health issues of trans-women. She became the first Lok Adalat member in 2012 and with legal aid being an essential part of her work, Viji felt the need to study Law. After a lot of challenges, Andhra University accepted her admission. Here again she went through abuse but never gave up until completing her course. Soon after the course, she registered with Tamil Nadu and Puducherry Bar Council and started practicing at the Madurai High Court.

A lawyer, educator, counsellor, editor and mother – Viji has done complete justice to all her roles and has also prepared her daughters to do so. Countering challenges and abuse at every turn, Viji, going by her father's words, had

chosen to rely on acceptance and self-respect. “The journey between acceptance and abuse in the lives of trans-women is not unpredictable, but certainly very hard to pull through without a strong support system. I wish every family becomes one for their children like my family did. I owe all my success to my father who made me look beyond,” remarks Viji.

Shanmuga Priya.T

INSPIRING CONVERSATIONS

1. Shri. P. Aravindhan – IPS

“Education is the Most Powerful Tool for Social Change.”



Shri. Aravindhan IPS is an Indian Police Service Officer of the 2010 batch belonging to the Tamil Nadu cadre. He holds an engineering degree in computer science from BITS, Pilani. He won the sword of honour for being the ‘Best Outdoor Probationer’ at the National Police Academy. Tamil Nadu cadre won this award after 34 years through Aravindhan. During this tenure as the Deputy commissioner of Police – T.Nagar Chennai, he installed the FaceTagr app on the phones of 500 Police personnel in T.Nagar police district. This Mobile App is a first kind of initiative in the Tamil Nadu police department and helps to scan the faces of suspects and search for them in a database of known offenders.

Aravindhan is also a motivational speaker and an avid fitness enthusiast.

In an exclusive interview Shri. Aravindhan IPS tells Marie Banu about how he uses technology in his work.

What inspired you to join Indian Police Service?

While I was pursuing my Computer Science Engineering at BITS, I realised my passion to get into a job that would connect me with people directly. I was also inspired by the tsunami relief programmes undertaken by various government agencies including that of the District Collector in my native place Cuddalore.

Can you share your experience tackling the community clashes in Virudhunagar while you served as Superintendent of Police?

Virudhunagar has a history of communal violence. In 1996, there were communal undertones in many hamlets and villages.

I found that in most of the cases youngsters belonging to the age group of 18-24 were influenced by the communal and caste outfits to suit their personal gains. Hence, we introduced various community policing initiatives. I also involved the youth in sports activities and weaned them away from the caste outfits.

On the other hand, I also re-opened long pending criminal cases against the active rowdies and brought them to trial. On the run up to the assembly elections in 2016, we identified sensitive villages and trouble mongers. The trouble mongers were bound down under various provisions of The Code Of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), and their activities were closely monitored. We witnessed a visible change in terms of reduction in number of communal clashes. Similarly, we clamped down on illegal sand mining which was a predominant source of income for the rowdies in this district.

Having rejected a corporate job and shifting to civil services out of passion to serve the society, can you tell us which of the social issues you are passionate about?

As civil servants, we can be an agent of social change. The constitution provides equal education to all. But in many villages, especially in Thiruvallur District, child marriages still happen and dreams of young girls are nipped at a very early age. Education is the most powerful tool for social change. My passion lies in children and I focus on social issues like child marriage, education for all, etc. which when addressed ensures empowerment of the marginalised sections of our society.

We have introduced Student Police Cadet (SPCs or Kutti police as we say colloquially) in all Government schools In Thiruvallur District and have enrolled 20 students from each school. The students are taught basic traffic rules, child rights, and awareness on sexual abuse. These SPCs serve as eyes and ears of the police in the villages.

We have also setup vigilance committee at village level which constitute the Panchayat President, ward members, local school headmaster or teacher, and respectable villagers along with a police officer. Issues such as child marriage, school drop-outs, drug abuse, sexual harassment, etc. are immediately brought to our attention through these village vigilance committees.

What is the outcome of the face recognition app you developed to track criminals?

Facetagr, the face-recognition mobile app was developed in 2017 and this application has helped police officials to identify and catch criminals in the state.

Once the scanned face is tracked, the database of the app lists out every known detail about the offender - from their background to previous criminal records - along with names of police stations where cases were lodged or pending against the person. We have a database of 60,000 criminals along with their background stored in this app.

The app has been installed on all the police officer's mobile phones and is user friendly. Any policeman with limited knowledge of mobile phones can use this app effectively.

The application has helped Chennai police to resolve many pending cases. Facetagr has been installed in most patrol vehicles and helps police verify credentials of any suspect detained at any location in the city.

The Chennai City Police has presented the app before the National crime records bureau (NCRB) who are now taking steps to implement the face recognition technology nation-wide.

What other plans do you have to use technology in your work?

While I was working as Deputy Commissioner of Police in Chennai, I conceptualised another application DIGICOP along with Shri. Shashank Sai, IPS (presently DC Mylapore) and developed it with Think Infinity, a company. This app was useful in reducing the incidence of mobile snatching cases in Chennai and we were able to recover many stolen and lost mobile phones.

The Koyambedu vegetable market was shifted to Thirumazhisai temporarily due to an increase in COVID cases. In order to maintain social distancing among the vendors, I introduced a device IRIS (Instant responder to

improve social distancing). This device was installed in three crowded shops in the market and was very helpful in tracking social distancing violations. This IRIS device has been appreciated by many, including the Honourable Chief minister of Tamil Nadu.

Any interesting case in your career so far?

I had to investigate a sensational case of kidnapping as Superintendent of Police, of Virudhunagar. A twelfth-standard topper was kidnapped from her home two days after the results. The accused managed to lure her family claiming that he is a press reporter and that he came to arrange financial assistance for the family. Through extensive analysis of CCTV footage and by setting up informants, we were able to rescue the girl safely within 48 hours of abduction.

Also, I had the experience of working with Greater Chennai Corporation in implementing the pedestrian plaza in Pondy Bazaar when I served as Deputy commissioner of Police (Traffic division). The trials were conducted successfully and the pedestrian plaza is now one of the major centers of attraction in Chennai city

Your advice for IPS aspirants?

My advice to all civil service aspirants is to focus on fundamentals. It might even take two or three attempts to clear the examination, but if you focus on strengthening your basics and fundamentals the prelims and main examination will be a cake walk. The civil service provides a large canvas for you to innovate and implement novel ideas in all fields. It is one of the few careers where you are given a leadership role at a very young age. Therefore, youngsters should definitely consider this as a career option and become a part of the nation building.

2. Dr. Balaji Srinivasagopalan – IFS

“Post COVID-19, We Need Development that is Equitable and Sustainable.”



Dr. Balaji Srinivasagopalan is the Former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Government of Tamil Nadu. As the Director of Environment, he was instrumental in launching of the National Green Corps (NGC) in Tamil Nadu Schools and implementation of CRZ regulations in coastal areas of the state. He led Care Earth’s research team that worked to augment green cover in Greater Chennai Corporation.

Dr. Balaji is currently the FAO, Rome’s Regional Forestry Expert and, Chairman, ABS Committee of the National Biodiversity Authority, Government of India. He also serves as Care Earth Trust’s Scientific Advisor. He guides the Trust’s efforts to reconcile conservation and livelihood issues in the Moyar Landscape, specifically working to support enterprises in Sathyamangalam.

***In an exclusive interview, Dr. Balaji Srinivasagopalan
IFS talks with Marie Banu about the impact of
COVID-19 on biodiversity.***

About your interest in IFS and interesting postings?

I belong to the 1981 batch of Indian Forest Service (IFS). I had interest in greenery and plants during my childhood and then pursued my masters in Botany. Before joining the service, I was not very much aware of the variety of work the Indian Forest Service offers, but and after my exposure to diverse forests in East India, North India, South India, and J&K during training, I found it to be an amazing career. Looking back, I have put in more than 35 years of service with satisfaction and a sense of achievement. I always cherish memories of working in the beautiful district of The Nilgiris, as the District Forest Officer (DFO) initially and later as the Managing Director of TANTEA, the largest public sector tea company in Coonoor providing decent livelihood for about 5000 Sri Lankan repatriates. One of my challenging assignments was as the DFO Sathyamangalam when we had to encounter the elusive sandalwood smuggler, Veerappan.

Can you tell us about your tenure in Sathyamangalam?

I served as the DFO Sathyamangalam during 1987-90. Forests of Kollegal and Chamrajnagar forest divisions on Karnataka and Sathyamangalam, Erode and Dharmapuri divisions on Tamil Nadu side are inter connected. Veerappan was familiar with interior forest routes over 25 Square Km in this stretch and had access to the tribal hamlets. One of my able Range officers, V.Chidambaram was shot dead by Veerappan on July14,1987.

From then on, we were chasing Veerappan. I had an excellent forest striking force lead by a committed Forest Range

officer C Badrasamy. In one such encounters our team seized a record quantity of 17 tonnes of sandalwood at Makkampalayam. It was a challenging period for our team, but our staff was motivated and we dealt with the situation quite well. Veerapan was elusive but due to our vigilance he didn't venture again into Sathyamangalam division during my tenure.

Your experience with Tamil Nadu Agriculture University (TNAU) and your research work?

I was Dean (Forestry) in Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, Coimbatore from 1995 to 2000. This was also one of the most rewarding periods as I completed my PhD under the most distinguished father of green revolution, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan. During my tenure, the Forest College and Research Institute, Mettupalayam did exceedingly well in education and research and attained numero uno position among forest colleges in the country.

I am proud to say that over 60 of my students got in IFS during this period and serving different states with distinction. I had an excellent team of Scientists involved in 32 national and international research projects. My Thesis was on the impact of people's participation in enhancing the Biodiversity of forests in terms of flora, birds and butterflies. My findings were later published as a book in 2003 titled 'Joint Forest Management for Biodiversity enhancement'.

Later in 2010, when I became the Chief Conservator of Forests and Project Director of Tamil Nadu Afforestation Project, I ensured that such biodiversity monitoring was undertaken in project sites.

Has biodiversity gained positive impact due to COVID-19?

Yes. There is some improvement due to COVID-19 lockdown. Perhaps this will give us a bench mark on the level of water and air quality that could be attained, when there is no human interference. The air quality has now improved substantially across the globe – in Wuhan and also in Delhi. This is because there was no traffic, no industrial activity and no smoke from the agricultural fields. Delhi air is cleaner with 80% reduction of its normal pollution level before lockdown as per the data available.

In Chennai, the air quality shows improvement with less SPM (suspended particulate matter) and oxides of Nitrogen levels. The COVID-19 lockdown period has given a respite to people living in T Nagar, Royapuram and Tondiarpet areas from usual air and noise pollution. The Adyar and Cooum rivers as well as the beaches have also turned cleaner. We should bear in our mind to keep our neighbourhood clean and desist from polluting our waterbodies.

After all, the human beings are the main culprits in polluting the environment. When their movement is not there, the nature is able to heal itself and looks much healthier and happier.

What are the challenges you think would remain post COVID-19?

There are challenges in all sectors - social, economic and environment. It may take some time to get back to normalcy – could be six months to one year or more. In our urge to speed up economic growth, we should not adopt methods that will pollute the environment. Industries especially thermal power plants and Cement industries to reduce their

carbon emission and adopt much more cleaner processes. Tamil Nadu is a leader in both wind as well as solar energy. We produce more than 8,500 megawatt of power and we can feel proud that 50 percent of our energy requirement at present is met through wind and solar power. This augurs well for environment and should be further augmented.

Economy will develop after this recession. Post COVID-19, development may focus on job led growth in areas such as organic agriculture, value addition of agriculture and forestry products, promoting MSME, scaling up service industries in tier II cities, infrastructure development and Real estate development. GDP is important but it is not the only thing. Sustainable development should be our approach, and it should lead to better livelihoods for people. We need to grow, but not at the cost of sustainable development. As you know, economic growth and development are not one and the same. Development takes into account the social consideration and equity aspect. We need development that is equitable and sustainable. In this way, we will grow without compromising the ability of the future generations to grow.

What are your suggestions for people post COVID-19?

Every one of us should have environmental consciousness and reduce our carbon footprint. At individual level, we should reduce consumption and follow our ancient wisdom of reuse and recycle so that Earth's resources are optimally utilized. We should also be conscious of energy consumption in our homes. We can reduce energy consumption by choosing energy efficient equipment and solar water heaters. This will bring down our individual electricity bill and prove to be good for the country and environment.

Similarly, I would consider mainstreaming environmental considerations in industries, transportation, and real estate to reduce their carbon foot print as this is essential for the post COVID-19 sustainable economic development.

In our anxiety to develop fast we should not sacrifice our environment. Let us green our mind before greening our land. As COVID-19 lockdown has seriously impacted poorer sections of the society, any development initiative aimed at coming out of this recession should be equitable and environmentally sustainable.

What Franklin Delano Roosevelt said in 1944 is relevant even today: “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

3. Shri. V. Balakrishnan – IPS

“I Consider Social Media as a Very Good Medium Not Only for the Public But also for the Police Officials.”



Shri. V. Balakrishnan IPS presently serves as Joint Commissioner of Police, North Zone, Greater Chennai City. He has over 17 years of experience in Law and Order and other subjects of policing. With the prestigious Chevening scholarship, he completed his Post Graduation Human Rights from University College of London and with ICAR fellowship he pursued MSc Agriculture from Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi.

During his stint as Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mylapore, he was the Chief Negotiating Officer in the Jallikattu protest movement in 2017. He also ensured rescue and rehabilitation of people from slum areas in Kotturpuram in Adyar river during the unprecedented flood in Chennai.

Balakrishnan's interest lies in fighting crime against women and children, rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents and cybercrimes.

In an exclusive interview, Shri V. Balakrishnan IPS shares with Marie Banu his passion for issues affecting women and children.

About the Police Boys Clubs and Policy Girls Clubs you launched in Trichy schools?

When I joined as DIG of Trichy, I had five districts under my command: Trichy, Pudukottai, Karur, Ariyalur and Perambalur. Although Trichy is a city, the rest of the delta region and the districts surrounding Trichy are essentially rural.

We analysed the problems in the area and identified issues related to women and children. One of the strategies we adopted to address these issues was to launch Police Boys Clubs and Police Girls clubs. In fact, it was conceived initially to have these Clubs at College level. We even conducted a meeting for the College Principals in all the five districts and started the Clubs in few colleges too.

The statistics and the analysis of ten years of crime data revealed that the focus should be on school-going children. The problem starts when the child is at the age of 13-14 and therefore there is no point in addressing the issue at the College level where their ideas are already crystallised. This led us to launch the Police Boys Clubs and Police Girls Clubs in schools.

For the Pilot project, we chose five schools in each district based on the under-age marriages that were reported. We initially called it child marriage, but it conveyed a different

meaning. Basically, it is teenage marriage i.e., before they attain the legal age for marriage. Our concern was not love marriage per se, but to tell the children to postpone their decision until they complete their Collegiate education.

We found that early exposure to social media was one of the reasons for under-age marriages. Through the Police Boys Clubs and Police Girls clubs we created awareness on cybercrimes and promoted safe usage of social media. Now, with the COVID scenario children have access to internet due to the online classes. When we look at it in hindsight, it was a good decision.

We selected five students from eighth, ninth, and tenth standard and these 15 students were trained by experts. We called them Ambassadors of Child Security; our messengers. When they observed signs of children getting into relationships, they counselled them, took up the issue with their teachers and parents, and ensured that stringent actions were not taken.

We took it up as a research project and are now coming up with a report to understand the effectiveness of the Clubs. The findings would lead to replication in other areas.

The impact of evidenced based policing with regard to crime against women?

Evidenced based policing is a popular concept world over. But this has not been used in cases on crime against women in our country. We analysed 75,000 cases [on crimes against women] that occurred over the last 10 years and plotted them on a GIS map to identify the hotspots in each area.

Under the current set up, the crime against women is dealt by the All Women Police Stations. For each DSP Sub Division

there is an All Women Police Station and in Trichy we have five of them. In each of these jurisdictions, we found five hotspots, hence introduced a Special Police Beat. It was more focused on prevention rather than reaction because the damage is already done when an incident happens in cases related to crimes against women.

The women police officers visit the villages and identify factors which are conducive for crime against women. This was done after a lot of deliberations and field studies. I have personally interacted with the village women and discussed issues they faced at home and outside. We were able to instill a sense of security in them.

We realised the need for improved follow up systems to being carried out for victims. Hence, we volunteered to conduct a ‘Family day’ at our Police Station every month. We invited families who had lodged complaints in the last six months to come and share their experiences so that other families can benefit. The intention was to ensure that they are living happy. We also invited Gynecologists on this occasion. This was because there were many cases of suicide among women being reported for the reason that they could not conceive and were harassed and stigmatised in their community.

Your effort to include Transgenders in Police Home guards in Madurai?

In 2014, before the Supreme Court pronounced that Transgenders should also be considered for Government jobs, we included them in the Police Home Guards. In fact, we were looking for solutions to find a legal source of income for them, especially for those who were involved in sexual crimes. This idea came up, as there was no bar on

recruiting Home Guards in any service. It was basically a mindset, and we tried it out.

As it was a new initiative, I saw that the initial teething issues were sorted out. After I got transferred, it continued for a while and then died out. Fortunately, the Supreme Court Judgement now makes them eligible for recruitment in Government jobs.

Is the present media (including social media) a bane or boon for policing?

I was in Indian Information Service and worked for Press Information Bureau for a while. I had close interactions with the top journalists in Delhi and have maintained a friendly relationship with the media from the beginning. According to me, whenever there is a problem with the authorities and the media, it is due to the failure to understand each other's compulsions.

Media want to take the information to the public first while the authorities have a protocol to follow before they communicate to the public.

The problem with social media is that there is no time tag or credibility check attached. It is an extension of freedom of expression although there are constitutional limitations in certain areas. We cannot discredit the entire social media just because some people are misusing it. Social media gives lot of power to the common man and when one uses it liberally, we should try to inculcate a sense of responsibility in citizens. Curtailing the freedom in social media is not a solution.

Recently, there was a news item about Kasimedu fishing harbour, but the picture shown was a file photo –which

was taken before the incident happened. Unwittingly, they ended up in sensationalising the entire issue. A sense of responsibility is therefore essential while reporting.

I consider social media as a very good medium not only for the public but also for the police officials. This is the fastest medium now, faster than 24x7 news channels. When news with videos are posted, the credibility increases. Sometimes, the videos are also edited and projected out of context. Readers should not be judgmental and jump to conclusions. They should verify the facts and the source of information.

As a police officer, social media has been extremely useful for me as I am able to communicate with the public. Also, the media persons take a cue from my posts and if it is a news of interest, they collect more details.

4. Shri PWC Davidar – IAS

“Work Life Balance is Easier Said than Done.”



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.

5. Shri. S. Davidson Devasirvatham – IPS

“Those Who Have a Passion to be Part of Nation Building and Have an Attitude and Desire to Serve the People Should Join the Civil Services.”



Shri. S. Davidson Devasirvatham is a 1995 batch IPS officer in Tamil Nadu cadre. He presently serves as ADGP – Technical Services. Prior to this, he held the position of Police commissioner of Madurai city and as Inspector General of Police, West Zone in Tamil Nadu.

In an exclusive interview, Shri Davidson Devasirvatham IPS shares with Marie Banu his journey as an IPS officer.

What was your inspiration to join Indian Police Service?

I joined Loyola College at Chennai and pursued my under graduation degree in History. One of my uncles noticing my interest in current national and international affairs and social sciences motivated me to pursue the civil services examinations.

I was active in both NCC and Volleyball at college. Seeing the bright prospects in NCC, I focused only on NCC and was selected as the Best Cadet in the state. I was adjudged the second best cadet in the NCC Republic Day camp, 1988 at New Delhi and was sent for a Youth Exchange Programme to Alberta in Canada for three months. As part of this programme, I also spent three months along with a Canadian team in a village near Coimbatore in Tamilnadu. My outlook completely changed and my personality skills were sharpened during this time.

After graduating in History from Loyola college, I joined for Master's Degree in Sociology at JNU, New Delhi as I had already planned to take History and Sociology as my optional papers for the Civil Services Examination. In 1991, I made my first attempt in the Civil Services Examination while I was pursuing MPhil. I cleared the preliminary examination and discontinued my MPhil course and made up my mind to pursue only Civil Services and not academics.

I returned to Chennai and wrote the Mains examinations. I missed the Mains cut off by three marks and got very dejected on seeing the results. I did not qualify the mains in the second attempt too! Then, I decided to take a year off. My father advised me to take up a job and attempt the civil service examination again later. I wrote the Staff Selection Commission Exam for Central Excise and Customs and Income Tax and I got a job in Central Excise, Tuticorin as Inspector.

I joined duties and started preparing for my third attempt. This time, I was selected and got into Indian Police Service. It was a big relief as I was passionate to join the Civil Services and to serve the people.

Your initial days as an IPS officer?

I was trained in Dharmapuri and my first posting was as Subdivisional Police officer at Paramakudi. Paramakudi sub division was vulnerable to caste riots. My focus was on restoring normalcy in riot affected areas and to ensure that riots do not erupt again. It required a lot of vigil, continuous patrolling to villages, and quickly solving community issues.

When the Coimbatore bomb blast took place, I was asked if I was willing to join the new team of officers there, and I concurred. In May 1998, I joined as Assistant Commissioner of Police and later in 1999, I got promoted as Deputy Commissioner of Police, Law & Order Coimbatore City.

After the blast and a series of incidents that had happened in late 80's and early 90's, the city had gone through a lot of turmoil. Hence, our job was mainly to restore normalcy and ensure communal harmony.

Mr.K. Radhakrishnan IPS of 1983 batch was then the Commissioner of Police. He handpicked a team to work towards this mission. Mr.Kannappan IPS and myself along with other officers joined the team and worked for over two years. It was a fantastic learning experience to see the way in which Mr. Radhakrishnan and Mr. Kannappan were handling the different situations in policing as I was a greenhorn in the service, with just six months as an independent officer.

In 2000, when Cuddalore witnessed a lot of caste and political violence I was posted as District Superintendent of Police (DSP). I joined with a lot of anxiety as I was not familiar with the terrain and much of the issues here. Now, I would say that it has been the best tenure in my entire 25

years of service as it involved a lot of interaction with the public at the village level.

There was lot of positive policing as well as aggressive policing, because we had to be firm and bold on many occasions when people were mindless in committing violence, arson, assaulting people, and all that. We also took prompt and immediate action after registration of cases, and arrested a record number of people who were indulging in violence. In two years time, the district completely transformed and we could also put an end to the liquor issue and also the road roko culture which was very prominent here.

About your stint with Intelligence Department?

I have always considered myself to be a field oriented officer, and never thought I would get an opportunity to work in the Intelligence department. I have done about four tenures in the Intelligence department. After my Cuddalore posting, I joined as SP, Special Branch in Intelligence wing, and later as SP in Q branch. I also served as DIG Intelligence, and as IG Intelligence in 2015. It was a great opportunity to have served in different capacities in the intelligence department.

Though, it's more of a desk job, it is tough as it requires a lot of alertness and sharp thinking capabilities. You need to keep your eyes and ears open for information and intelligence; communicate faster to the police authorities and government. It is a difficult job, and we have done a lot of interesting operations in terms of busting small terror modules; catching rocket launchers; and handling the LTTE accused. This gave me an excellent exposure to understand and study the internal security situation.

Your experience as Zonal Director of Narcotic Control Bureau?

The Narcotic Control Bureau is a fantastic organisation that came into being in the late 80's. Originally, it was under the Ministry of Finance, Department of Revenue. When I joined, it was completely brought under the Ministry of Home Affairs. I was posted as the Zonal Director in Chennai, looking after the four southern states and Union Territory of Puducherry and Lakshadweep. So, you get to do a lot of operations against domestic and international drug trafficking and act against the traffickers –from collecting intelligence, registering cases, investigating and prosecuting them. I had this composite policing opportunity for five years, and even travelled to other countries to attend international seminars and conferences.

I attended a training organised by the Drug Enforcement Administration, United States for about 3 weeks in Florida and also few conferences organised by the UN. This gave me an international exposure about how drug trafficking is happening across the world and how the countries are responding to this global problem. Having served in a UN peacekeeping mission in Kosovo during 2003-2004, this tenure in NCB also gave me a good exposure to international policing organisations.

In your current portfolio as ADGP – Technical Services, what are your plans to augment usage of technology in crime prevention?

I took charge of this department in July 2020, and there are a lot of projects which are going on, mostly with installation of CCTV camera in all police stations. We have also been procuring drones for surveillance and public order

management. This project is being done in partnership with Anna University and is nearing the stage of completion.

We have been working on communication technology for police officers in the field, mostly to do with wireless communication (conversion from analog communication to digital communication). We are also procuring body-worn cameras for police personnel who are deployed in field and have been standardising all the equipment in the police stations and also district units.

Over the years, we have been procuring a lot of equipment and gadgets to enhance policing capabilities. Now, we are looking into areas that have shortage and need our intervention so that it would enhance our investigation skills. This could be cyber-related, security-related, audio-visual or road safety equipment etc.

Your advice for aspiring civil servants?

It is a dream to begin with. Once you feel that dream, it is essential that you feel the burning desire and urge to fulfil that dream. This is priority number one!

Secondly, the number of hours we spend on studying a book differs from person to person. Some may take less time to study, but understand faster. I belong to a category that understands very slowly, as I get distracted very fast. Hence, I required 12 to 16 hours of study in a day. My friends who were academically good and focused on studies used to spend around 7 to 8 hours per day to prepare for the examination.

So, it all depends on the quality and extent of your reading and writing abilities, because this exam is all about reading, writing skills and analytical abilities. One needs to have an

in-depth study of the syllabus and previous years question papers to understand the pattern of the examination. It's also important to indulge in both extensive and intensive reading on each topic prescribed in the syllabus and gain maximum knowledge about each topic.

There are many opportunities outside Civil Services today in both public and private sector. However, for those who have a passion to be part of nation building and have an attitude and desire to serve the people should aim at joining the Civil Services.

6. Lakshmi Naryananan

“It is the Responsibility of the Society to Identify and Recognise the Potential of Each Individual and Provide the Path for Them to Grow.”



Shri. Lakshmi Narayanan is the Co-Founder and Emeritus Vice Chairman of Cognizant Technology Solutions. He holds a BSc and MS in Science and Electronics from Bangalore University and a Post-Graduate Management Diploma from Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.

Narayanan has played a leading role in the global information technology industry for more than 25 years, managing divisions and business units in Europe, India and the United States. Since co-founding Cognizant Technologies twenty five years ago, he has been instrumental in formulating

the company's strategy and building and managing the organization on a high growth trajectory.

He founded Cognizant Foundation, one of the CSR arms of Cognizant, was on the board of the National Skill Development Corporation, as a representative of NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) and served as Chairman of NASSCOM. He is also the founder member of United Way of Chennai and a philanthropist.

In an exclusive interview Shri Lakshmi Naryananan shares with Marie Banu his message for future leaders.

Can you tell us about the Sembakkam lake renovation project?

The Nature Conservation(TNC), a global group has taken Sembakkam Lake in Chennai for restoration and ensuring that the community participates and takes ownership once the water body is cleaned up and connected with other lakes in the area.

TNC approached Mr. Ram Shriram in the Bay area, who always wanted to do something for the city as he grew up here. He is one of the earliest investors in Google and wanted to contribute towards rebuilding societies and general upkeep of Chennai City. He offered to fund the million US dollars project half-way, with matching contribution from others.

The TNC team, Care Earth and the Chennai City Connect team took six months to contact various experts and learnt that we have to work with the Corporation to get the necessary approvals for lake restoration. We associated with the Hydrology Department in IIT, water experts and sewage

experts, to put together a sustainable master plan. We knew there will be challenges in working with the Corporation and local government officials. But fortunately, thanks to the support of the local community, TNC and Care Earth made headway in getting the necessary approvals.

Encouraged by the methodology adapted for sustainable water body restoration, Cognizant made a substantial contribution to the project, because of which TNC managed a financial closure and the project is underway. While the project planning was underway, Mr. Ranganath NK of Grundfos, who has always taken special interest in the city's development, pitched in and contributed over 1.50 crore rupees. Thus, it is a Grundfos, Cognizant, Ram Shriram project and hopes to serve as a model for sustainable development.

The key aspect of this project is to encourage community ownership. This is the largest lake restoration project, and the work and dedication of the IIT staff and students are phenomenal. Particular mention has to be made of the passion and tireless effort of Mr. Vaidhyalingam Pughazhendi an Hydrology expert, Dr Indumathi Nambi of IIT Madras and others in caring for the resources and environment. We want to see students who have studied social entrepreneurship or college students who are living in and around the Sembakkam area to play a voluntary role in protecting and preserving the lake.

For being a people's person, in spotting talent, nurturing and empowering it, what is your thrust area now?

My thrust area now is to work with entrepreneurs, particularly those who are fresh out of colleges, offer seed fund, develop those ideas, and make them entrepreneurs so that they are successful. A few of them have failed,

but that is okay. I tell them, ‘As entrepreneurs don’t copy another idea, as it is already there. Look at those that will be ‘high-growth areas’ in the next ten years.’ It could be electric vehicles; battery technology or renewable energy; technology and communication (5G); genetics, healthcare, healthcare devices; space, aviation, aerospace, drones, etc. There is no point for students studying in colleges looking at industries that may reach the end of the road or intelligently automated out.

Education is moving away from regular school education to additional education that will prepare the children for future through new technologies such as robotics. For instance, a startup company SP Robotics engages in teaching school children robotics, artificial intelligence and machine learning. All that is required are hardware kits, training for the school children to make them curious and ask questions and learn by experimenting.

Whether it is commercial entrepreneurship or social entrepreneurship - I don’t want to get stuck with definitions. If it is going to help somebody, advantaged or disadvantaged, let us do it! Think 100 times before telling someone don’t do it. Don’t blink your eyelid to say, ‘do it’. Encourage people to keep doing - whether it is social or not. I would like to see young minds dream big and realise their full potential fearlessly, by thinking a lot less about the past, except for its lessons and devote far more to the present and the future and the opportunities it offers.

About United Way of Chennai’s focus areas?

United Way of Chennai focuses more on helping the cause of disability for its CSR work, by providing livelihood opportunities for the disabled people. The focus is on innovative solutions. In IIT, there is a Centre for Assistive

Devices funded by Mr. TT Jagannathan of (Prestige company) that supports those who are mentally agile, but physically challenged. United Way of Chennai encourages this centre that makes devices that are far more comfortable for challenged people.

For instance, a company Neo Motion founded by IITians, has come up with assistive devices that enables greater mobility to challenged people, with minimal external assistance.

Ms. Sowmya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist, WHO, and daughter of Shri. M.S. Swaminathan has connected the person in WHO, who is responsible for assistive devices, with IIT Madras so that some of their work can be taken to other countries as well. She is interested in the Global Application of ideas and particularly concerned about people affected by war in Middle Eastern countries. If there is some way we can solve the problem and come up with low cost ways of manufacturing these devices and export them using our country's support, it would be great.

Your message for future leaders?

I am seeing school children as well as college students who have many great ideas and high potential that anytime we don't provide them with an avenue for their potential to be realized by themselves, it is a wasted potential. This is something I saw early enough in Cognizant.

In first three years, we were a small group of people and nobody knew about Cognizant. In the early days of Cognizant, we had to compete with established companies for talent, often without success. But the team worked passionately to develop each and every one who were alright to find a place in a startup like Cognizant, because

they had the aspiration and the energy to make a difference. In fact, these are the people, who are still in Cognizant, who have built the company.

Each one has a certain potential and an interest. If we are able to understand it and provide them an avenue and autonomy and set a larger purpose then they are able to contribute brilliantly.

My wife used to work with Madras Dyslexia Association, and help children with learning disabilities and she used to tell me stories about how dyslexic children have succeeded enormously in the creative sphere. This has been another learning. Families and schools have to spend time and effort to understand the strength and aspirations of young minds and guide them to pursue their passion with character, integrity and effort. It is the responsibility of the society to identify the potential of each individual, to recognize, and provide the path for them to be responsible and grow.

7. Dr. Madhukar Gupta – IAS

“If You are Aware About Your Own Inexperience and Inadequacies, You Will be Successful.”



Dr. Madhukar Gupta is an Electrical Engineer, MBA and law graduate. He was selected as a Mason Fellow by Harvard for a Master’s in Public Administration. The Government of India sent him for a Master’s in Public Policy at Maxwell, Syracuse. He has been awarded a PhD in Economics in 2010. He is presently Additional Secretary, Ministry of Public Enterprises and Heavy Industries.

Dr. Gupta focused on Public Policy in US and China with experts on economic growth, public sector management, infrastructure, corporate finance and development at Harvard, MIT, Syracuse, Maryland, Cornell and Fletcher School. He has won many National Awards from NPC

and NABARD. Indian and international Universities have hosted him as a visiting faculty and scholar, including BITS where he has been adjunct faculty for more than 20 years. Dr. Gupta has presented professional papers in nearly three dozen countries.

In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, Dr. Madhukar Gupta IAS talks about the present trends in Corporate Social Responsibility in India.

Please share your experience on International training program on DFFT (Domestic Funding of Foreign Training).

When I joined the Government of Tamil Nadu in 1986, the Collector of Chengalpet who was based in Kancheevaram asked me to oversee the work in a village for three weeks as part of my training. The basic idea was to understand the village life in Tamil Nadu and see how it is different from villages across India.

After two weeks, the Collector asked me what I had learnt from the village exposure visits. I told him that Engineering and MBA has given me critical financial and analytical tools, but to learn about India I will have to start from scratch as I did not know much. He replied saying, “If you are aware about your own inexperience and inadequacies, you will be successful. If you think that you already know enough, you are possibly wrong.”

I worked with UN for a year and realized that a lot of things have already happened in India, which I was not really aware of. For instance, when the British were in India, 100 thousand Britishers were managing 300 million Indian people. As the number was less, a handful of District Collectors were

invariably British. However, a lot had changed in the world thereafter and we need to learn from it.

What were the key lessons you learnt during the training period?

One of the lessons that I learnt during my training in Tamil Nadu was in management of water deficit areas. 60% of India is water deficient. If you see the onset of famines areas of Tamil Nadu, you will find Palmyra leaves turning yellow. Droughts and water scarcity were explained vividly and even today the State Government and Government of India depend on these old famine management systems.

Other countries have taken initiatives to manage water scarcity at country levels which includes offering entitlements at household levels. In fact, 50% of the states in the US have drought management mitigation plans. The world has moved on and there was a lot to learn from other countries. I had more questions than answers about the way the world functioned.

When I returned from the UNDP, I applied to universities across the world to learn more on development. Eventually, I was selected by the best universities teaching public policy and development, including Harvard. I focused on the US and China in a short span of time.

I studied the health policy in the US and realised that it cannot be followed in India as they have more resources for health management programs. If programs have to be laid out in India, they have to be more cost effective as we have issues like high growth rate, maternal mortality and child mortality.

You have been managing CSR policies in its maturity phase after its launch phase. What is the trend of CSR implementation among PSUs?

The difference between the public sector and private sector is that public sector exists for the greater good of the society. The bottom line, as far as the functioning of the public sector is concerned is to make reasonable profits and also, at the same time look after the greater good of society.

When the CSR ACT was rolled out in 2013 (with effective from 2014), most of the PSU companies had no idea on the compliance issues as their CSR programs were coordinated through their implementation agencies.

India became the first country in the world to mandate CSR by legislation. Once anything is mandated by law, we don't have a choice. All PSU'S had to follow the law. Government could have levied a tax and used this tax or cess in the manner in which they would have wanted to, but they didn't do that. Our government's basic objective was to leverage the capacities and competencies of corporations, public as well as private for the greater good of society.

It took a while for companies to understand the ACT because their core businesses were different and they did not have the expertise in this area. Many companies who were not engaging in CSR prior to 2014, hired experts or they had to learn from others. The first three years was a learning phase. Things are getting better now. Companies are clearer about what they have to do and what not to do.

Since the initial learning was in the traditional sectors, obviously the focus was on education or on health. Now, you can see a change in the CSR expenditure relevant to sectors specified under schedule VII of the ACT. Corporate

are now focusing on restoration of heritage, art and culture, sports, incubation of new technologies, environment conservation, etc.

Continuous efforts are being made to ensure that CSR spending is done right throughout the country. There is a provision for pooling of resources. Basically, if more than one company will come together, they can act as a force multiplier. So, every company, every entity has its own sense when they come together, their forces get multiplied.

How do you compare CSR implementation in PSU's with that of private sector?

About 50 PSU's are exceeding the desired 2%. PSU's are not driven by the profit motive and in some ways they are doing even better than the private sector. At the same time, private sector is learning very fast so things are improving in this sector as well. Initially, some private companies who were not spending the 2% have realised that they have to spend this amount.

8. Shri. Prasanth Nair – IAS

“A Compassionate Approach is a Path to Better Quality of Life.”



Prasanth Nair is a civil servant and member of the Indian Administrative Service. He graduated with in Law from the University of Kerala. In 2007, he was selected to the Indian Administrative Service (4th rank all-India) and borne on the Kerala cadre. He has served in various capacities in various sectors including Tourism, Taxation, Roads, Water supply, Skill Development etc. He headed two World Bank Projects, viz. Jalanidhi and Kerala State Transport Project.

Presently, he serves as Managing Director of Kerala Shipping & Inland Navigation Corporation(KSINC). He is also the Managing Director of Kerala Irrigation

Infrastructure Development Corporation (KIIDC). He graduated with in Law from the University of Kerala.

As District Magistrate in Kozhikode District of Kerala he earned the moniker of ‘Collector Bro’ for his citizen friendly and participative approach in governance. He initiated ‘Operation Sulaimani’ to eradicate hunger under the umbrella project named ‘Compassionate Kozhikode’. Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin chose it as one of the 50 inspirational projects from around the world. Digital Empowerment Foundation and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation selected it for the social media for empowerment (SM4E) award.

Prasanth is considered as a pioneer in using social media for governance in India. Even now, Collector Kozhikode Facebook page is the most followed District Administration page in India.

In an exclusive interview, Shri Prashant IAS shares with Marie Banu the initiatives he had launched during his tenure as District Collector of Kozhikode.

What motivated you to join Indian Administrative Service?

When I was around 10 years old, I had accompanied my mother to meet the Principal of the Government Medical College at Thiruvananthapuram as she had to get a service related issue solved. I can recall even today the arrogance I saw on the Principal’s face. He never acknowledged my mother’s presence in his room and she had to go through a lot of bureaucratic processes to resolve the issue. This led us to the office of the Health Secretary in the Secretariat. What I witnessed here was quite different. There was a cheerful bearded gentleman who seemed quite powerful, yet courteous and generous towards us.

When I asked my mother who this gentleman was, she said that he was a civil servant and did what a civil servant was supposed to do. I turned back to look at the name board and I saw 'IAS' written after his name. This incident inspired me to become an IAS officer.

You are known as Collector Bro. How did you get this moniker?

I don't know. It came naturally. These days I'm surprised if someone doesn't call me bro. I don't insist on people addressing me as 'Sir'. It feels good to see my chauffeur or my gunman call me bro. I feel good.

Generally, in India, saying 'Sir' to express 'official' respect has been set as a divine rule.

But, I took a conscious decision to break it. There's a different language in social media and I noticed more bonding when people started responding the same way to my Facebook posts. Quite amusingly, the moniker, "Collector Bro" was coined through these various FB exchanges, when people started addressing me as 'Bro' instead of 'Sir'. The name stuck.

It was a great learning experience for me to work in an environment where you consider each other member as your equal and not seeking to desperately prove at every moment that you are the boss every time. As a junior IAS Officer, I headed two World Bank Projects where we all addressed each other by first name and no sky fell upon us.

What are your thoughts on humour in work culture?

Good humour is the best medicine to beat dullness at work. Not only does this open up doors for cordiality and

directness in an organisational structure, but it also helps dissolve the hierarchical gap that has always remained between higher and lower echelons.

Breaking the hierarchical divide, using humour as a tool, has been one of my fundamental obsessions. This I believe, has enabled people working in my team, irrespective of their position, to feel free to pitch in their ideas and offer suggestions without feeling scared or apprehensive of rejection.

Not only have I received some of the best feedback and advice through this process, but I have also observed that our workspaces showcased better productivity and happier staffs.

Not being scared of failure is tough in government because you have no incentive for innovation, but plenty of penalties for even bonafide mistakes. Taking up initiatives as a team makes the risk seem lighter and having open informal channels of feedback communication makes failure less probable. Humour even helps the team take failure in the chin. This could be cited as another instance of how approachability and friendly work culture can do the spadework for innovative and effective output.

For India to have an enhanced work culture that rises above dense and rigid working environments and pave the way for a friendlier atmosphere and satisfied employees, the first step for organisations and its management is to break barriers between its echelons by encourage collective participation. Every voice has to be heard and acknowledged. We need to understand and attune the language of administrative communication according to the popular culture and ethos of the mass. Creativity should be unleashed and innovation

should be encouraged. Humour and informality should be in the air.

Any memorable incident during your stint as Collector of Kozhikode?

A week into taking charge as District Collector, I visited the Government Mental Health Centre at Kuthiravattam. In the middle of a prosperous city, there is an asylum where people are deprived of everything and are not anyone's priority. Most of them are abandoned. Their food menu was something that was decided way back in 1975. The staple diet was a soup made of broken wheat, which wasn't particularly very tasty.

There are two groups of people, who have no control over the kind of food they get to eat — the prisoners and the mentally ill. While the former can raise their voices and put their demands across, the latter can't even imagine doing so. This was very depressing.

It was at this point in time I launched the Compassionate Kozhikode project. After that, the situation improved tremendously.

Can you tell us about the initiatives you launched as District Collector of Kozhikode?

We should realise that we have a fair share of tensions and violence in our society, many of which wouldn't have happened had we placed ourselves in the shoes of the other person. Therefore, a compassionate approach is a path to better quality of life. This was the idea behind launching 'Compassionate Kozhikode'. We realised that there are people in Kozhikode who are willing to give and there are many who really need help. We acted only as a facilitator.

This initiative is all about attitude. It's about the culture of sharing; sharing for the betterment of people and places. Compassionate Kozhikode serves as a platform to celebrate the lives of people and to bring together like minded persons who can create a holistic destination out of Kozhikode. One of the projects is 'Operation Sulaimani' that is coordinated in association with the hotels and restaurants and provides food to the needy in mental health centre institutions, children's home, old age homes and palliative care centres.

Compassionate Keralam is an extension of this project. It is about bringing volunteers together. During the floods, it was the youngsters who came together quite organically through social media. During the crisis, there was a lot of work that had to be done like collating the SOS, duplicating it and compiling. But they did it through something as simple as spreadsheet and slack. This was very impressive. We have offered scholarships to 25,000 children and a lot has to be done still. We aren't collecting money here, but people are helping each other. This requires a lot of effort.

In 2015, we launched the official Facebook page for the District Collector, Kozhikode. It was one of the first official social media engagements of that nature and we could establish it as the preferred mode of communication by citizens to sort out their problems -whether suggesting an idea or marking a protest.

These were some of the key initiatives that I had launched.

9. Mr. Sam Daniel

“There Should be No Colouring of News. You Report as It is And Let the People be the Judge.”



Sam Daniel, an award winning senior television journalist and news anchor is a household name in India and the diaspora, for credible, unbiased and ethical television news reporting. A seasoned Television Journalist with proven leadership and twenty years of reporting experience across seven countries with the premier NDTV 24 X 7 (New Delhi Television Ltd), he presently heads the bureau in Chennai. He also reports widely on NDTV’s digital and new media platform.

Sam Daniel was the first to report from ground zero when the Tsunami struck India’s Nagapattinam and has also reported from the US and European countries. He has interviewed a range of national and international leaders,

sports champions, celebrities and newsmakers; and has addressed a Ted X meet and mentored around 50 budding journalists.

A British Chevening Scholar, International Visitor Leadership Programme Alumnus, The Media Project Fellow, and Rotary International's Group Study Exchange Scholar, he has also been chosen for several international fellowships in the US, UK, Germany, Belgium, Holland and Nepal. He is the recipient of the Excellence Leadership Award - Electronic Media in 2015 and recently won the "Global Tamils Media Icon Award".

An Alumnus of the premier Madras Christian College and University of Westminster he has a five year experience in teaching English and Journalism in colleges as well.

In an exclusive interview, Sam Daniel shares with Marie Banu his views on responsible journalism.

How do you define responsible journalism?

It is very subjective as everyone may have their own definition in terms of what responsible journalism would mean to them. But I go by what is very conservative or what we call as old school of Journalism. The major task is to be a watch dog, to point out the mistakes, to alert government and expose things that are going wrong- not just huge scams or corruption cases, but also ordinary things that affect the common person. For instance, reporting on issues faced by people while getting a license or registering at the employment exchange. Such reports may not bring about immediate change though, but it would keep the issues on the spot light and bring about changes in the long run.

The role of a journalist varies or depends on the kind of media house you work for – whether it is a local neighborhood newspaper or a regional channel or national or international media. The news for a regional channel may not be news for a national channel every day. Likewise, what the national media looks at may not be interesting for regional media. There is a change in perspectives.

A journo should ask himself: “What is my contribution through my news report to my community, to my state, and to my country? “Am I serving as a watch dog? Is my work, in any way, relevant to the community who is watching this or reading this? Am I working towards a better tomorrow?” If he or she is able to answer these questions positively, then I think largely it could be termed as responsible.

I always feel that a journalist need not always be critical or reporting only on bad news. By this, you are projecting a lopsided view of the society and people may think that there is nothing good happening in our country, which is also not correct. A responsible journalist should balance his report in such a way that he or she is able to also provide insights into the good things that are happening in the community. It can be about a social service or an achievement by an unsung hero or work done by a group of volunteers, etc. These are called inspiring stories and would actually motivate a lot of people. There is no point complaining that things are bad. Your profile could change when you cover much of ‘hard’ stories’ or ‘investigative stories’, as we call and you may become a popular reporter as a journalist. But you may not be accurately reflecting on the ground realities if you do not talk about the good things as well. It is important that you strike a balance between these two. While it is important to bring the power to account, ask tough questions and expose the wrong things; we need to also show that there

are good things happening around us and there is hope in the community.

What is the code of conduct that every journalist and media house should adopt?

Of course, a journalist ought to have a code of conduct. I always look at it at two different ways - personal level and profession level. At the professional level, a journalist ought to be seen as a balanced, neutral and objective person in all scenarios. One may belong to a particular religion or a community but that should never be a reason to exaggerate or downplay an issue. He or she should be a thorough professional and personal likes or dislikes should not have any space in one's reports. This is very important.

In this era of social media, verification of news is crucial because everybody has access to information. Gone are the days when people relied on newspapers or television alone for news. Everybody gets news on their social media. Of this huge inflow of information, what is accurate? Large number of people are also consciously peddling with fake news, and pushing inaccurate information to suit their agenda. It has become an industry. It could be a political party which would spread a particular narrative to make people think differently about them and build an opinion or it could be a private company which is doing something bad but trying to project itself in good light.

A journalist is required to report accurate and verified information, and that is very important. There is a lot of competition in the media. When A channel flashes a news, other reporters and other channels are under pressure to immediately report on that. Chances are that if you don't do your due diligence and toe the line, you may go terribly wrong. In our channel, every report ought to be verified by

two credible sources, otherwise the news will not go on air. This way we ruling out 90% probability of things getting reported wrongly. The second aspect is about balancing. For example, the opposition party levies a serious allegation against the Chief Minister or against the ruling government. As a responsible journalist, you can argue to flash this news first and take response from the other party later. But it would be perfect to quickly check with the other side on what they have to say and then give a complete report. Otherwise, it may appear as you favouring one particular side of the story and not bothering to get verified or at least getting response from the other side.

Thirdly, your accuracy should not fall victim of flashing the news first. It's okay to flash the news five minutes later after you have done the due diligence correctly. This makes you build reputation and credibility for yourself as well as for the media house you work for. Speed should not be at the cost of accuracy. Lastly, there should be no colouring of news; you report as it is; and let the people be the Judge as they are quite intelligent. Also, give a variety of views and not one perspective alone because we are in a way contributing to the process of opinion building in the country. People pay money to view a news channel or read a newspaper as they want to get different perspectives about a particular issue and take a well-informed decision or build a well-informed opinion. So, it is just not enough to talk about the government perspective. You should also mention about what the opposition party, activists, and experts have to say.

This is the era of the social media and the journalist has his personal space here. It is very important that a journalist is seen to be neutral, objective and very balanced, else people could build a wrong opinion and it could affect the way they read your report and your integrity.

Please share your experience at the Chevening South Asia program?

This scholarship is highly rated among journalists and the training was at University of Westminster in London. 12 of us got selected – from India, Pakistan and few other South Asian countries were selected in 2012. The focus was on good governance, accountability and transparency. I was lucky to work with two channels as part of my placement - Channel 4 and ITV.

In terms of technology, Indian channels like NDTV are much far ahead. What I found useful was the levels of accountability, transparency and good governance the country was looking at. This helped me as a journalist to raise the bar in my reportage and gain new perspectives and ask more tough questions.

Your advice for young journos?

The space for journos in mainstream media is reducing now, for two reasons. One is the technology taking over with time. Secondly, the impact of economic slowdown and now the pandemic.

Young journalists are required to be good in multi-tasking; report on camera, write for the web, shoot the video, if required, and edit as well. New media is the future and may be in 5 to 10 years' time we may not have these many news channels. People would watch much of the news online either on their phone or computers. You ought to be talented for the format required for the new media.

You should be apt at 360-degree reporting. The same TV news should be rewritten for the web, the same story ought to be told in a few words on twitter and in a paragraph in Facebook.

The technology has made it simple and there are many specialized journalism schools like the Asian School of Journalism in Chennai, Symbiosis in Pune and Manipal Academy in Karnataka. Most of these media houses prefer from these institutions as they are close to the industry's norms. It is good to have a good portfolio developed during the graduation period. Writing good stories for local newspapers and college magazines or on social media would show people your work and would help at the time of your job interview. Create opportunity to showcase your talents.

We find the youngsters not reading much. Unless you read, you would not have a wide perspective. You should make sure that you read at least two newspapers thoroughly so that unconsciously all these news come handy when you ask questions. Even when you travel, use the time to read a newspaper or listen to the radio. You should be well informed, and there is no compromise on this.

10. Dr. Santhosh Babu – IAS

“Charity Literally Begins at Home, and We Need to Help Our Artisans First.”



Dr. Santhosh Babu is a Medical Doctor turned Indian Administrative Service (IAS) Officer of the 1995 batch, of the Tamil Nadu cadre. He is an alumnus of the Government Medical College, Trivandrum. He is also a Chevening Gurukul Scholar from the London School of Economics and Political Science and an LKY Fellow and MPM Degree holder from the National University of Singapore and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

His abiding passion has been to transform governance within his jurisdiction to world-class levels, using modern management practices and tools that information technology provides. He has about 250 plus transformational initiatives and innovations to his credit, including installing ERP driven “anytime, anywhere” Government offices, developing and implementing numerous web based application software, establishing India’s first Rural BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) units etc.

A few recognitions have come his way, like The Best Collector Award of the Government of Tamil Nadu for child labour eradication. In 2017, Poompuhar won the National e-Governance Award and the Skoch Smart Governance Platinum Award under his leadership.

He has spoken at numerous fora including TEDx IIT Chennai, TEDx Hindustan University Chennai and TEDx SVCE Chennai. His best moment so far has been when, the former President of India Dr.APJ Abdul Kalam, quoted his work under the heading “Committed Leadership” in his speech on the occasion of the 7th National Civil Services Day, 21st April 2012, at New Delhi.

He is currently the Principal Secretary/CMD, the Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Corporation. Earlier, he was the Principal Secretary to Government, Information Technology Department.

In an exclusive interview, Santhosh Babu shares with Marie Banu his initiatives for empowering artisans in Tamil Nadu.

What are the challenges the artisans face and what measures are being planned to address them?

We have seven production centres and 15 showrooms. Unfortunately, we had to lock them all down due to Covid. There are about 80 artisans who work with us directly, and are paid on a monthly basis. It is the 70 thousand plus artisan families outside in the unorganised sector, who are facing challenges in marketing their products as no one would want to buy their products at this point in time. The State Government is now working on a package for them and once that is done, we shall ensure that all these families are offered support.

While there are many artisans who are well off, many of them are poor and depend on the sale of their products to meet their day-to-day needs. They sell their products at cost plus a percentage. Those artisans who market their products through Poompuhar make a decent profit. But those who do so through middlemen, stand to lose.

Poompuhar is a completely online organisation. Every aspect of administration, marketing, design and production, are online. This helps the artisan indirectly, in a big way. We will be shortly launching India's first Virtual Reality Handicrafts Showroom.

Do you think it is the right time we introduce Fairtrade concept into our system?

Yes. I am also in touch with Mr. Panchaksharam of Fair Trade India on this. We need to ensure that the artisans get the right price for their product. We are only a 130-people organisation and hence need the time and the skills to understand and implement the concept in order to help our artisans.

Obviously a market also may require middlemen, but it is they who make most of the money. It is precisely to get over this problem that we have created an e-Repository for Artisans, www.tnartisaan.com; about 20,000 artisans have registered themselves on this portal. Once registered, the artisan can enter the portal using his mobile number as ID and OTP as password. He/she can upload good quality, preferably high density photographs of their products and keep changing it. We have linked our e-Commerce site www.tnpoompuhar.org to this site so that people across the world can buy products made by Tamil Nadu artisans. The world is their market and they can have a better price than before!

Most of the artisans are illiterate and do not own a smartphone. Some upload their own pictures instead of their product picture. My biggest challenge has been to promote the site and educate the artisans on how to make use of it to their advantage. We would welcome the support of the NGO sector in achieving this.

What are the traits of a good leader?

My philosophy of leadership is concisely written down in my personal website www.santhoshbabu.org.

Leadership is tested only during times of crisis. The current pandemic has seen many leaders disappearing and many emerging out of nowhere. For me, a leader is one who is the first to come into crisis and the last to go out of the crisis.

The only resource God has given to every human being irrespective of differences, is “time”. The 24-hour capsule that constitutes a day has to be budgeted so that we have time for everything and everybody. A leader will not waste the time of others.

He is good listener, an enabler and one who allows people go grow. He empowers people and makes them realize their potential. He shares his power and builds confidence and self-esteem. He does not hurt anyone with his words, deeds, look or thought.

Essentially, all people are the same. It is the circumstances that makes them different. We need to understand the value of each person and be non-judgmental. Then, we will have a different perspective to dealing with people and ensure that they come out with their best.

What is your philosophy of giving back to society?

According to me, there are only 2 phases in our life. One, when you are a taker, that is when you are not on your economic feet. You take love, affection, money, ideas, thoughts etc. from your near and dear. You are being prepared to become a giver. Once you are on your economic feet, you will realize that 90% of your waking time is actually spent for others. Actually, our life is meant to serve others. If you can take the “me” out of the self and start thinking about the living conditions of our less fortunate brethren, then we also manage to take the stress out of us. Being self-less and stress-less together.

When this lockdown is finally lifted, and our planet is up and about, we can also contribute in our own small ways to our poor artisans, by buying their products and embellishing our homes. My request is, kindly patronize our artisans, before thinking of buying that item from abroad. Poompuhar will be at your service on this. By buying a lamp or keeping a Tanjore or Kalamkari painting or a bronze idol, we are actually helping an indigent artisan. This should be a purposeful thought and we should be aware of it. Thus, charity literally begins at home!

About the recent Fight Corona IDEathon and its plans?

I was part of the Grand Jury of the “Fight CORONA IDEathon” promoted by Forge, a Coimbatore based Incubator, recently. We had 5000 plus entries of students, educators and innovators and professionals and startups. It was a completely online exercise, for the participants as well as for the jury. This is probably the first time that a completely online hackathon has been conceived and it was a huge hit and an instant success!

What I realized during the jury process via Zoom with my co-jury members and the participants, was the amazing

thought process of our young students, on how they can contribute to fight this deadly pandemic in their own ways. There were some extremely brilliant thoughts. Technology is a tool that can offer solutions to most of our problems. We should unleash the intellectual potential of our creative young people, to think world class and with a scientific bend of mind.

I have joined with 3 other like-minded individuals, to develop a Covid health related app, that we think will have a huge impact. The app is fully developed. We are currently awaiting the approval from Google Playstore for its installation.

11. Smt. Srekala Bharath – Dancer

“I Have Always Believed in Three D’s –Determination, Dedication and Devotion.”



A prominent disciple of erstwhile Bharatanatyam luminary Guru K. J. Sarasa, Smt. Srekala Bharath is a passionate dancer, ingenious choreographer and an inspirational teacher. An ‘A Grade’ Doordarshan artiste, Smt. Srekala Bharath is a dedicated and vibrant Bharatanatyam exponent who has been performing in the concert circuits in India.

Her creative journey as an artiste has taken her to 32 countries for staging countless moments of her unique interpretation of the divine art of Bharatanatyam. In 1999, she established Thejas School of Performing Arts in Chennai and has presented papers on dance and its expression and innovations with relevance to contemporary time in India and overseas.

In an interview, Smt. Srekala Bharath shares with Marie Banu her passion for Bharatanatyam.

Your early years as a Bharatanatyam dancer?

Like any other family, where they would want their children to learn art, my parents Smt. Indira and Shri. C. R. Krishnammachari enrolled me in my respected Guru K. J. Sarasa's Dance school in February 1969, which was in our neighbourhood. Thus began my *Thaiyathai Adavu* with my Guru K. J. Sarasa. It was my Guru who tapped my talent and identified my passion for Bharatanatyam, because at a young age of 7 years any child wouldn't know whether he/she would take up this art as a profession or not. In 1971, my Guru told my parents that I am ready for Salanga Pooja. Then, I had my Arangetram on 22nd May 1972. Dance has always been my passion and prayers.

In August 1979, I got married when I was 18 years old to Sri. K. Bharath Kumar who was a South Zone opening bowler and presently a committee member of the state cricket senior selection. Also, a very good friend of my elder brother Sri. Krish Srikanth, former captain of the Indian cricket team.

My mother-in-law, Smt. Jayakrishnan, a reputed Carnatic musician and my father-in-law Sri. M.R. Krishnan, a lawyer by profession were pillars of encouragement after my marriage. In fact, my mother-in-law has accompanied on vocals for few of my early performances.

I was also selected at the Talent Promotion Concerts conducted by Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram, and performed in four cities.

The awards and appreciation you hold close to your heart?

From 1986, I started getting recognitions as a dancer and my first award ‘Nadana Mamani 1995’ was conferred by Kartik Fine Arts in 1996. It was such a lovely feeling on receiving the first award from Kartik Fine Arts, because any award and recognition is a pat on our back to do better, and our responsibility grows. From then on, I was climbing the ladder of success by the grace of God and my Guru’s blessings.

As of now, I have been to 30 countries for dance performances, out of which 11 countries were sponsored by Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the rest were private tours.

In 1998, I received the coveted ‘Kalaimamani Award’ which was conferred by the Government of Tamil Nadu. So far, I have received around 32 awards, including the ‘International award of Bharata Rathnam’ from Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka; House of Commons recognition from Toronto, Canada; as well as from the World Dance Congress, Athens, Greece.

I was also conferred Senior Fellowship by the Department of Culture, Government of India and have submitted a research project on Innovations in Bharatanatyam and adapting them in dance dramas. It feels good to know that I am a Cultural Ambassador from India to spread the divine art of Bharatanatyam across the globe.

According to you, what are the key values a dancer should have?

Bharatanatyam being a divine art teaches us discipline and we also learn a lot about our Hindu mythology as all the dance items revolve around Gods and Goddesses.

I have always believed in three D's –Determination, Dedication and Devotion. These three D's will definitely take you far in your chosen career, especially in a performing art like Bharatanatyam. The fourth 'D' is destiny, which is God's blessings. I call this as 'luck'. As dancers, we realise God more than the singers because we get into the character. So, if we take care of all these 4 D's, every talent will shine.

As a passionate dancer and a devoted teacher, what are your views of present day students?

When we teach children, we learn a lot. I take much pleasure in teaching and I have been telling my students that while I am a sweet aunty, I am also a very strict teacher! Despite children been given a lot of school and college work, they do find time to learn art, especially Bharatanatyam, which imbibes a culture of discipline.

I have been the summer school teacher for Bharathiya Vidya Bhavan in London which was another beautiful experience. Many children out there are talented and the way in which they admire our tradition is remarkable.

In fact, all students today adhere to their Guru's teachings which is a very good trend.

About Thejas - your Dance School?

I established Thejas School of Performing Arts (TSPA) in October 1999 in Chennai. As a teacher, I am committed to the exceptional development of my students enabling them to evolve as artistes while they share my creative journey at my school Thejas, and at the same time carving a niche for themselves. Through my solo and group thematic productions I am very happy that I have delved into many themes other than my margam.

I have been with my Guru for 30 years from 1969 to 1999, and with her blessings became an independent dancer and started my own Bharatanatyam school. Until now, I have trained over 425 students, some of whom are now in USA, UK, Canada and Australia.

Last year, we celebrated 20 years of Thejas and 50 years of my dancing career. On this occasion, we launched a coffee table book 'YATRA' the journey of my dance from 1969 to 2019 – as a Dancer, Teacher, and Choreographer.

When I decided to launch this book, I was overwhelmed by the support from my family, dancers, Gurus, colleagues, and everyone whom I got in touch with. I was moved by their love and respect to me. I feel truly blessed!

We at Thejas conducted the 11th edition of Thejas Bala Natyotsav giving dance opportunities to extremely talented classical dancers in the age group of 8 to 12 years. It was a huge success and just for 9 slots we received 140 applications online!

We have been conducting this festival since 2009 in auditoriums. This year, due to the pandemic, we had to conduct it online.

Has Bharatanatyam online classes been effective?

Apparently, I have been teaching Bharatanatyam online since 2009. I conduct classes through Skype and now through Zoom. In fact, I still have a student from Detroit, Michigan, visiting Chennai every year to perform at the Margazhi Utsav, music and dance season in the month of December. I still remember Smt. Y.G. Parthasarathy of Bharat Kalachar being impressed with our online classes.

Her feedback and many such reviews were published in leading newspapers and magazines.

I am thrilled that the advancement in technology is helping us to stay through this divine art of Bharatanatyam despite the trying times of the COVID pandemic.

Is there a growing demand for Bharatanatyam in western countries?

Yes, I have received a lot of invitations from western countries. I have toured for solo as well as group dance performances to Japan, USA, Canada, South Africa, and 28 other countries.

Wherever I have gone, people have been very receptive to our dance – be it their own citizens or non-resident Indians – they will come in large numbers to witness our performances.

Let me tell you, the best ever audience is in France. Of course, France is known for their rich cultural heritage. In 2003, I performed at the Museum theatre which is beautiful and much tastefully done. The audience were seated on the aisle and I performed along with my student as *Guru-Sishya parampara*. I had a French translator as I narrated the dance items in English. The performance was for almost three hours and the audience sat through the entire show.

The way in which the French people admired our dancing, jewellery, and spoke to us after the show is memorable.

12. Dr.Sumathi Narayanan

**President of Creative Communication and
Management Centre**



**“There is no value in leaving one relationship to
build another.”**

Dr.Sumathi Narayanan, President of Creative Communication and Management Center, Chennai- a Center for Personal and Professional Excellence has been in the field of training and development for over four decades and counselling services for two decades.

An ardent learner, she is a powerful speaker, trainer and leader. She enjoys conducting her workshops and her strength lies in innovating and customizing programs to suit organization’s culture and needs. Her mission in life is to share Life Skills to the lesser privileged students or institutes serving them. She strongly believes in helping

people develop and realize their potential. It is with this goal she is a counselor for the past one and a half decade as this has become her life's calling.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. Sumathi Naryanan shares with Marie Banu her thoughts on the progression in the family system.

About your education and exposure to training?

I come from a very humble background. My father worked with USIS and my mother was a homemaker. When my father took a voluntary retirement, we moved to Chennai in May 1972. I got exposed to training as a learner in spoken English to public speaking skills. These skills are not taught in schools or colleges. During my childhood, my father used to conduct the Public Speaking programmes and we used to assist him in preparing the workshop materials as we used stencils then. I used to wonder what these Public Speaking programmes were as I could see the participants very confident/different after the 10-week programme.

I did my UG in Home Science at SIET Women's college. My family wanted me to get married when I was 18, but I was determined to pursue my higher education. Every woman has the right to choose what she wants. So, I convinced my parents and in-laws to allow me to continue my education. It was this decision that changed my destiny. I continued my graduation in Home Science and completed my Master's degree in 1978. My husband and my mother in law and were very supportive and encouraged me through.

I believe that if you want your family to support you, you need to do your bit first. Pay attention to your relationships, else you're going to mess it up. Having people to love and

care for you is what matters. All our goals need to be aligned with our total life, otherwise it becomes an isolation, in silos.

Your thoughts on the present generation youth mindsets and their priorities today?

Today's youth are insecure and immature in their relationships. Many relationships are breaking-up as the girl does not want to live with her in-laws in the same house. I have come across several such cases. I ask the girl: "You want the boy without his parents, but you don't mind benefiting from the education his parents gave?"

They do not see the value of having a relationship. You want to have your space, ask for it. Do not demand to sever relationships. If your spouse can do that, he can do it to you too! There is no value in leaving one relationship to build another.

Everybody agrees that one loses freedom after marriage. They don't see the love and the commitment that comes with it. It's all about Facebook posts and the number of likes and comments.

About the progression in family system over the years?

I have seen the family system progression over the last 40 years. The joint family has its own advantages and disadvantages. The advantage - there was protection; the disadvantage - there was no individual right.

Today, Indian youngsters (all over the world) want their parents to support them and take care of their children. Now, when you want to build relationships, you should realise their worth as well.

When we are getting older, we need to yield for certain things that our children want and also put our foot down at times. Similarly, we need to allow them to do what they want and express what is not acceptable to us. It is their life!

India has to learn a lot. We do not allow an individual to decide or differ from a group. I see a lot of young girls confused about: ‘where do I draw a line?’

From being a Trainer to becoming a Counselor.

I have been a trainer for the past 40 years. I equip myself by updating my knowledge and did my PhD in the middle of my life. I didn’t want to be a counselor for a long time as that was not the space I intended to be in. As I progressed in life, many people approached me with their problems and I used to refer them to other counselors. I then realised the need for counsellors and started equipping myself with the necessary knowledge and skills. Now, I have both the trainer as well as the counselor role in me.

Recently, I completed the Australian Counseling Association certification which qualified me to become a professional Supervisor as well as assist young counselors in their career. All these helped me to interact with people at different levels.

As a trainer in hundreds of organizations and thousands of people with whom I have interacted, I talk about the individual taking responsibility for their own progress and overcoming mental blocks.

Any challenges you faced as a Counselor?

Every client who approach me for counseling have their own challenges. Perhaps, I can say that when I address a new type of a problem, my ability is extended and I equip myself even more. My challenge is in updating, upgrading, and making sure that I am doing my best to every one of my clients in every session. So, that is a big challenge.

Many parents don't understand their children. This is the reason we have counselors in many progressive schools. I am a student of human development and remember reading a quote: "Home is a place where we come and lick our wounds so that we can feel healed and go back to the world again." But, for many children, who do not have freedom of expression in their home, it is a place where they get wounded. I have found this to happen in cases when either of their parents or both were not loving, affectionate, and expressive.

So, in the family structure, there is a dysfunctionality that needs to be addressed. It would be ideal to call all the family members and counsel them, but not all have the luxury of visiting a family therapist.

Your view of Work Life Balance?

I would rather call it 'in LIFE, you balance with work – LBW'. Work brings an imbalance because of physical absence and time duration. It affects every other aspect, for instance, you don't have family time and health regimen.

In India, the workplace has no respect for one's personal life and personal time. So, they think it is okay to ask somebody to stay back after 6 PM and make them work for more. the logic is that they will have to work from 9 to 6 because you are off on Saturday. But, how many companies are willing to provide 5-day week for their employees?

Even companies who have overseas offices and have branches in India or vice-versa have different timings for their staff in each country. As Indian staff are insecure, they will yield to whatever the company demands from them and even work extra hours.

Can you tell us about Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP)?

NLP is not just a technique. It is a way of life; an approach to life and understanding. You always have a better choice. NLP teaches that life is about choices. Take the Covid situation for instance. You can feel bad for being arrested at home or take full advantage of the situation and utilize it for personal development, indulging in a hobby, taking online courses or talking with family members. NLP proposes that you can always choose to be happy without a reason. All our past experiences, which disturbs us, can be re-programmed. We can make sure that we are in the present and we can programme ourselves to succeed in future. In a nutshell, NLP is the understanding of how we have structured experience in our mind and how it is impacting us. It is about modeling excellence and a very powerful tool to make people more competent and realising their full potential.

NGO PROFILE

1. Aaradhya Foundation

New Skills for Continuous Growth



Ever since the lockdown began, sufferings and hardships of migrant workers have haunted the country. It highlighted several issues and how they faced the brunt of an unequal society.

Migrant workers go to different states looking out for jobs due to lack of employment options where they lived. Life as a migrant worker is not easy. They are overloaded with work, not paid enough and are discriminated amongst local workers.

To generate employment and scope for livelihood, Dr. Moumita Ghosh Bhattacharya, CEO of Aaradhya Foundation aims to train the women and youth in several courses to make them independent and develop skills that can help them find work locally.

Aaradhya Foundation, based out of Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal took genesis in 2010 which emphasized on

skill development, digital literacy, bringing awareness on social issues,

and focussing on school drop-outs in Jalpaiguri, Kalimpong, Darjeeling districts and Indo Bhutan Border.

Dr.Moumita, during her PhD Studies interacted with the locals of the village and identified the reason for the drop-outs. Most children were first generation learners and didn't have family support and guidance on the importance of schooling. Children whose families were Below Poverty Line (BPL) drop out at 4th and 5th grade to join their parents in farming or taking up menial jobs to fend for their family. This came as a shock to Dr.Moumita that children at such a tender age have to shoulder such a huge responsibility and lose out on education. Hence, she made this as one of the main aims of Aaradhya Foundation. The training programs provided by the foundation includes tie up with NIELIT(National Institute of Electronics & Information Technology), Vocational Training, Soft skills, Basic Computer coaching, Handicrafts Training for Government Homes of Jalpaiguri District in Association with District Child Protection Unit, Tailoring classes, etc. This training runs along the Indo-Bhutan border by identifying youth who have the potential and talent to master in technology.

Considering the unemployment of the youth in North Bengal and the estimate of employment in the Electronics industry to grow phenomenally, Aaradhya Foundation is promoting the Central Government scheme for Skill Development in ESDM for Digital India for people of age 18-35. This programme focuses on students/ unemployed youth, ITI, Diploma, Non-engineering graduates, etc. to increase their employability to work in 'Manufacturing' and 'Service support' functions. Some of the students who

completed this course are now self-employed, and run their own repair centres for Electronic devices.

Sharing the success journey of female beneficiaries trained by Aaradhya Foundation, Dr.Moumita says, “Ten of our beneficiaries trained in tailoring course are currently self-employed and have formed their Self Help Groups with our organisations support. They stitch Kurtis, Palazzos, Blouses, Petticoats etc.”

“Using the computer skills effectively, Pushpajit and his batch- mates, trained under us in ‘Computer hardware’ are now self- employed as Computer hardware technicians, and also being the sole bread winner of their respective families. This has helped them pave paths for growing in the technology driven world,”. ,” she adds.

Over the years, Aaradhya Foundation has been a part of Remedial Coaching for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled tribe and the Minorities. These children are mostly wards of Tea Garden labourers.

Mr. Ajoy Roy, an eminent member of the Foundation, and former KLO (Kamtapuri Liberation Organization) activist has been a huge support to motivate these children towards attaining Remedial and Spoken English classes. Mr. Ajoy Roy was imprisoned for more than 4 years during the Kamtapuri Movement (1980s- 90s). Since inception Aaradhya Foundation has paved the path towards mainstreaming KLO leaders like Mr. Ajoy Roy and currently he owns his Bought- Leaf business Aaradhya Foundation has established bridge course centres and campaigns through village development centres, partnered with other organisations to generate awareness on Women Empowerment and Anti- Human trafficking.

The COVID Pandemic has put life on halt for everyone, and has led to the worst unemployment rate in 45 years. With lakhs of people losing jobs around the country, this phase hit the migrant workers the hardest. Dr. Moumita says, “During the initial days of lockdown, we provided people with dry ration kits and essential supplies to families who couldn’t afford. With the present unemployment issue, they have no future plans as to how to sustain. So as an organisation, we decided to step into organic farming and provide them with a long-term sustainable goal.”

The foundation acquired 4 acres of barren land from local families to cultivate organic farming. This gave an opportunity for the locals to work in their own state and stay close to their families. A crop when planted, usually yields fruits in a year or two, and the cycle runs for 20-25 years. This provides the locals with a steady income through organic farming.

Adding to the future plans of the organisation, Dr.Moumita says, “Our main aim is to make people self-sufficient and economically independent. Organic farming provides a platform for the locals here. If this proves to be a success, we plan to expand the land area for organic farming and increase the yield in the coming years.

Dr.Moumita sighed off by saying, “For women empowerment, we want to hire young women in tailoring units for mass production of clothes so that they have a permanent job. We plan to build a market chain and keep these women employed all year round. It is very important that women are also independent and confident to stand up on their own leading to decision making ability.”

Aatika Kouser

2. Akshaya Trust

A Place to Call Home



Isolation is an unfortunate reality of old age. It takes a toll on a person's physical and mental wellbeing. A 2011 study by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (GOI) found that the size of the elderly population (aged 60 years and above) in India is growing at a great pace and is taking up a higher share of the total population of the country. While 85% of the elderly are currently supported by their immediate family members, that still leaves out a fairly large no. of elderly who are financially insecure, living in sub-par conditions, and in considerable distress. Sadly, destitution is a possibility for some of the elderly today. Akshaya Trust, a Chennai based NGO runs homes for the elderly in three different locations in Chennai- Mudichur, Pallikaranai and Valasaravakkam. The organization was started in 2001 by G. Gopalan, an entrepreneur with a keen eye for environmental consciousness as well as other social-issues.

Upon successfully selling his eco-friendly water-treatment business to an MNC, Gopalan decided to dedicate his life to the care of the elderly.

Starting with just one elderly person, Akshaya Trust now is home to 120 residents across its three homes. Residents live here free of cost, as the organization is financially supported by individual donors. The homes are all equipped with comfortable furnishings and recreational facilities. Aside from having healthy, nutritious food and a neat, dormitory-style space to live in, the residents also have access to a TV, audio system, newspapers, magazines and other recreational devices.

Shanthi Raghupati of Akshaya Trust says, “We are very particular about creating a family-like atmosphere at our homes. We want all of our residents to be well looked after and happy. We have cooks who make wholesome meals, house-keeping staff to do the cleaning and care-givers for those who are sick and/or bed-ridden”. Doctors make regular visits to the homes to check up on the health of the residents. A physiotherapy lab has been built to take care of their motor-movements. The trust is working towards building a palliative care unit for the seriously ill residents. The local Lions Club also regularly conducts medical camps here.

Occasionally, some residents might have a courtesy visit from their family members. These are sporadic, says Shanthi. However, there is no dearth of volunteers who visit the elderly and spend quality time with them. They organize games, music, and engage in conversations with the residents. Many visitors choose to spend their birthdays or anniversaries at the homes, sharing food and entertainment with the residents. While the trust depends on donations from its well-wishers, it is the time and effort spent having one-on-one interactions with the residents that prove most effective, in keeping them in good spirits.

Shanthi explains that the trust has a well thought out process for the residents who pass away. She says that the

trust gets in touch with the family of the deceased, observes their specific religious customs and in most cases, even takes up the responsibility of completing the final rites of the deceased.

Often Akshaya Trust receives new residents who either do not have children to look after them, or have been abandoned by their families/relatives in their old age. Some of them are as young 60+ years old, while some others arrive here at the grand old age of 90 years and above. They come in with great distress and a sense of hopelessness. For Kamala, a septuagenarian, her own relatives refused to share their home with her. She came into the home saying that she wanted to die. However, at Akshaya Trust she not only found that she was not alone, but also developed friendships with people her age. She now leads a much better quality of life than she would have, at her family home.

The positive impact that Akshaya Trust making reaps rewards in the most wholesome and unusual ways. Last year, Kutti Ammal, an 86 year-old flower vendor in Chennai, decided to donate her lifetime savings of INR 90,000/- to Akshaya Trust. Having nobody to call her own, she had been living in one of the homes run by the trust for the past three years. Moved by the work of the organization, she decided to give away her hard-earned wealth and pay it forward.

Apart from the old age homes, the organization also runs a financial assistance program for underprivileged youth. Sponsorships are given out to select individuals to pursue schooling or college education. These beneficiaries are also provided with soft skill courses which helps them develop time-management, public-speaking and personal-effectiveness skills. Each beneficiary is encouraged to give back to the organization either by way of repaying

through small instalments or by helping another deserving candidate in their personal capacity. Founder Gopalan believes, “When one person supports another, it leads to a chain of growth that benefits a large number of people in the long run”.

The effects of the ongoing pandemic is painfully visible for this organization. Says Shanthi, “Due to the pandemic, visitors have stopped visiting our homes, for obvious reasons. The supports that our elderly would normally get, are now reduced as well. For instance, we have strict restrictions on how many people can visit our homes. We used to have volunteers who would serve food with special care to our residents. Now we have had to stop that temporarily. Our hope is that this situation will improve, soon”.

Plans are currently underway for a fourth home to be opened in Chennai, sometime soon. Shanthi says that a bigger facility with a capacity to house 500 residents and above, is being planned to be constructed outside of Chennai. This will help them manage the increasing demand in recent times.

Akshaya Trust wishes to expand its services to persons with disabilities. Helping people with blindness, physical and development disabilities is on the cards in the near future. At present however, they are fully focused on helping the elderly overcome the adversities of ageing, one individual at a time.

Archanaa Ramesh

3. Aram Porul

Being Current and Culturally Relevant

In the past decade there has been a huge NGO sector boom in India. According to some estimates, there are over 69,000 NGOs in operation in the state of Tamil Nadu alone. The vast majority of these are run locally, under tight budgetary and human resource constraints. These are usually founded by people who, while passionate about their chosen causes, do not necessarily come with prior experience in running an organization.

Keeping an ear to the floor

Often, the terms Change Management, People Development, Impact Assessment, Fundraising, Digital Media Presence, etc. can sound too corporate-like and more importantly, as though it takes time away from the simple “problem-identification” and “problem-solving” binary that organizations have undertaken to do. Typically, a smaller, more locally entrenched organization simply does not prioritize these internal management items over its need to “serve”. As a result, there is an enormous disparity in funding and other resource allocations, with the “cream of the crop” NGOs getting the most, leaving the smaller ones scrambling for basic sustenance.

Realizing that organizational development comes at a steep cost to many of these well-meaning organizations, HR leader Prasanna and Communications expert Srividhya founded Aram Porul. A former head of HR in a leading corporate who also headed its CSR wing, Prasanna combines his corporate acumen along with his firm belief in Gandhian principles into his work at Aram Porul.

Srividhya on the other hand, comes with rich experience in branding, PR, advertising and communication, having also been involved in volunteering with various organisations. The couple worked alongside one another at a renowned NGO networking federation in Tamil Nadu prior to starting off on their own.

Organizational Development as a priority

The name “Aram Porul” comes from an ancient Tamil moniker for “virtue and wealth”, two of the foundational principles for living a wholesome life. “Organizations spend very less time on organizational development,” says Prasanna. “They need the support of professionals who can offer a combination of corporate expertise, development sector understanding, affordable pricing and geographical understanding. Most of the NGO-consulting firms are based out of Delhi, Bombay and Bangalore. There is a gap in their understanding of Tamil Nadu’s geography, language, cultural and political conditions. The unique challenges and aspirations of this society need to be understood from its own lens,” he says. It is this lacuna that Aram Porul is trying to fill.

Through their services, namely “Meiporul”- Consulting Services, “Esaivu”- Human Resource Development, “Pugazh”- Marketing and Branding Communication, “Ookam”- Training Programs, “Arivu”- Research and “Seyal”- Program Implementation, Aram Porul helps organizations find the missing components to successfully fulfilling their mission. Currently their clientele comprises of a mix of NGOs, Social Enterprises, CSR wings of Corporate firms and the Government agencies.

Says Prasanna, “We have a flexible business model. We work with organisations sometimes on a project basis,

ranging from helping them with one time funding proposal or one event, or with one fiscal-period's accounting work. We also have long-term, retainer relationships with some other clients. With the latter, we provide end-to-end services, helping them develop entire programs and strategies."

Some of the more memorable projects they have undertaken include the launching of an online fundraising platform for the participants of the fundraising mega-event "Battle of the Buffet", held annually in Chennai by Chennai Mission and its event partners. "As you can imagine, NGOs are used to cash and cheque donations and were reluctant to get onboard with this idea of going fully online to receive donations. It took a lot of convincing and help with technology to persuade them. With three months of training for the Battle of the Buffet, the NGOs were finally able to see the fruits of their labour. They were now truly global in terms of fundraising capacity. There is now more transparency and credibility to their work. It is nice to have been able to play a small part in that," says a visibly satisfied Prasanna.

When asked what is the most gratifying aspect of his work, he says, "Any change big or small, that we are able to bring for our clients, can be rewarding." Aram Porul engages in a variety of Personal Effectiveness training programs and Women Empowerment initiatives. One of their signature programs is a four-day annual Women's Leadership Retreat for women leaders in the NGO sector. A group of 12-15 women leaders of NGOs are invited to this retreat, independent of their families, to get a brief respite from all their routine responsibilities and to simply rejuvenate themselves. Prasanna reckons that the retreat is a way for these leaders to disengage from routine roles of "caregiver", both for family and society. During these four days, the focus is on themselves alone. "We conduct exercises that help them develop a deep understanding of self. Added

alongside are wholesome fun and entertainment- time spent ‘chilling-out’, travelling, trekking, shopping, sight-seeing and so on,” says Prasanna. “Transformation, both at the individual level as well as at a large-scale, is its own reward,” he adds.

Changing strategies for changing times

As COVID-19 continues to eat into the economy, CSR funding is drying up everywhere. Aram Porul is focused on developing CSR strategies that go well beyond monetary help. “Social distancing norms will affect the way programs, training and learning sessions are conducted. Monitoring and reporting methodologies will also change significantly. We are currently holding talks with our various stakeholders to design and offer solutions that will address the above needs” says Prasanna.

Aside from this, ‘Aram Dialogue’ sessions are being held regularly, with the participation of NGOs, activists, volunteers and donors to share and reflect on the various challenges and opportunities that they face. In their latest Aram Dialogue held last month, in collaboration with Bhumi, 30 participants working in education, health, special needs, geriatric care, livelihoods, relief and rehabilitation were in attendance. It is part of their “COVID - 19 Relief Vs. Reality” series.

“We will continue to be a credible partner to NGOs, corporates, other organizations and individuals who want to create social impact” says Prasanna as he signs off.

Archanaa Ramesh

4. Cheer

Brightening Lives



“The unselfish effort to bring cheer to others will be the beginning of a happier life for ourselves.” – Helen Keller. In keeping with this quote, a group of like-minded individuals got together and established Cheer- an umbrella organization that is working towards “common goals for the society as a whole”. Led by social workers, advocates, HR professionals and people from diverse sectors, Cheer was formally registered as a society on in 2011 after months of extensive field work and research. The organization over the years has been engaging audiences with unique sensitivity and awareness programs. Speaking with Mr. Gopi, Project Manager, we find that Cheer has a longstanding partnership with some of the most marginalized individuals - homeless transgendered persons and rural children.

A campaign for the social and economic rehabilitation of transgender persons was kickstarted with the launch of

a PSA. ‘Sadhayai Meeri’, a music video, illustrating the lives of transgender persons from their birth into a loving family to their adulthood, by when the expectations of their families and society become too different from their gender identity. The video mirrors how we as a society have an influential role in the choices transgendered people make. With the video campaign Cheer garnered public support towards integrating transgender persons in workplaces and institutions to pursue their career aspirations.

In the future, Cheer intends to train and help transgender persons acquire employment, primarily in food kiosks, housekeeping services and in any other sectors that fit their skill, interests and/or education. Selected beneficiaries will receive intensive training and counselling from professionals in their fields of interest before they are assigned responsibilities. Those who choose to be entrepreneurs will be appraised monthly for a term of one year and based on their performance and commitment, additional responsibilities will be provided. At the end of the appraisal term, the successful candidates will be fully equipped to control their businesses, independent of Cheer. Recently, Cheer has started a shelter home for members of the transgender community. Cheer hopes to minimize the apathy and intolerance that society bears towards this vulnerable section of our population. “You can instead, help them lead a better life. You can give them the choice of leading a self-reliant and dignified life,” says Mr. Gopi.

The second project is the establishment of Rural Learning Centres (RLCs) for children in two villages in interior Tamil Nadu. These RLC’s provide a holistic environment for the children to learn, retain concepts and avoid dropping out from school. Each year Cheer conducts a two to four week summer camp where children are engaged in activities on topics ranging from arts, sports, photography, martial

arts, handicrafts, community development to environment preservation. Excursions are organized to places of historic interest, cottage industries, the zoo or to a movie. As part of its community mobilization work, in 2019, Cheer organized interactive sessions on waste management, building emotional quotient, team building and leadership skills.

RLCs has a well-equipped library and reading space, where children are trained in using computer applications, implementing realistic environmental projects in their locality, vocational skill development, sports etc. with the help of local trainers. “We are proud to share that for many children in the neighborhood, the RLCs have become the go-to place to spend their spare time. We celebrated the third anniversary of the Rural Learning Centre at Katrampatti. The RLCs are fully functional on weekends and weekday evenings. Resource persons have been appointed and are directed by the Cheer board to conduct regular activities for children. We see a marked improvement in the skills and learning capacities of children, although they are not evaluated by formal methodologies yet” says Mr. Gopi.

In 2002, the State of Tamil Nadu enacted ‘The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Smoking and Spitting Act’. Awareness around the issue is still lacking. Cheer organized a road campaign to publicize this law. Around 40 volunteers occupied 10 signals in South Chennai during peak hours, carrying the message that smoking and spitting in public places were offences that would attract penalties. With four colourful human silhouette boards, the volunteers marched before the stop lines during red signals drawing the attention of passers-by. While some were aware of the law, many wondered if it was or if it could ever be enforced effectively.

Cheer is involved in raising awareness on current social issues through puppet shows, debates, discussions, workshops and camps for various organizations, corporate, educational or social. Cheer has performed puppet shows on topics such as: Child Sexual Abuse, Breast and Cervical Cancer, HIV Prevention, Road Safety & First Aid, Prevention of Dengue Fever, Child and Bonded Labour, Alcoholism, Women Empowerment and Waste Management.

As a novel attempt, Cheer NGO organized Socio Fest, a “cultural” event aimed at bringing people together for fun, frolic and competition while tackling social issues. Senior public service officials and veteran human rights activists spoke at the festival, inspiring the audience to conduct their own lives with a sense of social responsibility.

Recounting their successes so far, Mr. Gopi says, “We have successfully placed some of our Transgender clients in employment and some others to pursue vocational training that leads to a job. Mx. Gopika is a successful Sculptor; Mx. Afrin completed her Diploma in Cosmetology at VLCC; Mx. Anusha is an Accountant and Administrative staff; Mx. Anjana Devi is an HR Recruiter at a leading company; Mx. Arunarani runs a Food Kiosk at Adyar and Mx. Anu who is a Beauty Therapist at a popular beauty salon.”

Running this entrepreneurship/educational project for transgender persons can be quite challenging, in terms of scale. It requires long-term commitment from the beneficiaries and is therefore a slow yet steady development process. The organization currently has a single mobile kiosk that is leased out to individual entrepreneurs on a rotating basis, provided they employ transgendered persons to run the kiosk.

Challenges with their other projects include finding qualified managers for the RLCs, identifying donors for various projects, transportation and accommodation for resource persons who help out with the RLCs and so on.

“We hope to gain more public support and commitment from beneficiaries to further implement the project” says Mr. Gopi, adding that, “our vision is to have an equal, compassionate and tolerant society, and justice for all”.

Archanaa Ramesh

5. Maathiyosi

Collective Efforts to Uplift Individuals



The collective power to influence social change can bring positive transformations to the society in the long term. No society has ever remained the same, and focus should be on change being constant. Helping out people even in the smallest possible way can go a long way, and at this day and age. The world needs it!

Bringing constructive changes to the society is not easy. It requires teamwork and collective efforts by every individual in terms of investing time, funds and planning.

Maathiyosi is an organisation started by a group of friends in 2013, who wanted to bring change to the society by helping out people who were in financial difficulty. The aim of the organisation was to take part in the progress of the society by improving the lives of the poor and the needy (Including differently abled, widows, elderly, and socially and economically backward people).

Maathiyosi has a team of 75 members, out of which 25 members donate every month, while the others contribute as and when it is possible. Since 2013, Maathiyosi identified NGO's that were in need of funds and supported orphanages for children with books and clothes.

An annual newsletter narrating the year-long activities carried out by the organisation are shared with their close friends and family. By word of mouth, the team identifies individuals who needed support for their medical treatment, payment of school and college fees, and other personal needs.

From offering assistance to NGO's, their focus slowly shifted to transforming and bringing complete change at an individual level, so that he/she can build a good life with it. They also got personally involved with the beneficiary through regular follow-up and provided them with the support they needed.

Augustin, Founder of Maathiyosi, says, "We started out as a group of friends in college to bring a change to individuals so that they make something good of themselves. Over time, our circle increased in size and so did the contributions. We try to make the best use of it by helping those who ask for help. We feel focussing on one person and catering to their requirements completely is more tangible rather than offering support to a group of people."

Maathiyosi played an active part in 'Child Rescue Operations' where children below 14 years were employed in small shops, eateries and households. The team would gather data on child labourers, and along with Child Helpline officials rescued children. They would carry out this mission on every second Saturday of the month. Based on the decision of Child Welfare Committee, children were

either sent back to their parents or taken care in Rescue homes (Boys home in Royapuram and Girls home in Kilpauk).

The organisation also takes part in blood donation and organ donation camps coordinated by the government (rather than the ones run by private hospitals). The idea behind this thought is that the poor find it more difficult to have access to blood when they need it. Maathiyosi website has details of their blood donors, so that people can directly get in touch with them.

Maathiyosi also actively volunteered during Chennai floods in 2015 by providing rice and groceries to affected families that was worth over 5 Lakhs rupees. They also provided coconut saplings and groundnut seeds to villagers who lost their crops due to the Gaja Cyclone.

The organisation have also assisted in providing infrastructure for schools. For instance, a new block in Thiruvalluvar Primary School, Chengalpettu , a small brick house for a single lady in Cuddalore, etc. They also supported construction of huts, obtaining identity cards for Irular communities in order to have access to government schemes.

Mathiyosi concentrated on specific medical requests that they received and also sponsored an auto rickshaw for Karunai Ullangal Trust, an NGO started by Mr. Arul benefitting orphans and old aged people in Chennai.

COVID-19 pandemic has put life to a halt, hence making it difficult to afford even basic necessities. Since April 2020, Mathiyosi team have been raising funds to support the disadvantaged people by distributing groceries and daily essentials.

Augustin says, “We are trying to help people as much as possible. We have distributed basic necessities like rice and groceries to families worth 7 lakh rupees to those who have lost their livelihood due to the lockdown. I would like to Thank Ramesh (Unique One Gym), Sylvester Mathew (Advocate), Arockia Raj (Chidambaram), J Prabhakar (Ennanglain Sangamam –NDSO) for their remarkable field work, volunteer support and encouragement. Our aim is to help Individuals or group of people who are in need. We also wish to offer support to emergency and trauma care patients for their medical treatment as well,” he signs off.

Aatika Kouser

6. Protsahan

Enough is Enough!



Women are better off today, but still far from being equal to men. Some women have a lot of access to rights, and opportunities to education, work options, healthcare facilities. But, this is not consistent. Even today, millions of women worldwide are subjected to violence and mental abuse. With constant debate and awareness, and a widely spoken topic everywhere, violence against women is now well recognised as a public health problem and human rights violation.

To ensure that adolescent girls living in extreme circumstances of adversity and violence have a safe space to grow and learn, Protsahan, an organisation based out of Delhi, took genesis in 2010 with a mission to save children from the point of extreme abuse. The organisation works with children, specifically with girls from underserved communities at high risk of abuse of any kind or direct survivors. Their aim is to give these children a beautiful childhood and equip them with education, life skills, and

entrepreneurial skills thereby empowering them to be agents of change.

Sonal Kapoor, Founder of Protsahan came up with this idea after her personal encounter with a woman who had six daughters and was pregnant with her seventh child. On being asked about her circumstances, the woman narrated that she was ready to strangle her new born if it was a girl again, and spoke of sending her 8-year-old daughter to a brothel to fend for the family. Sonal was shocked hearing this and within an hour, she came up with the idea of starting a unique creative school. In three weeks' time, she conducted a feasibility study in the area, and started Protsahan a one-room creative arts and design school in one of the darkest slums in New Delhi.

Sonal quit her job and ventured into an altogether different world of helping out traumatised children using the creativity that she previously used in the advertising and communications industry for something more profoundly important.

In the earlier days of the organisation, Sonal went door-to-door in the urban slums of West Delhi, the same place where she had met the mother of six children, and asked parents to send their daughters to Protsahan to study.

From a one-room center reaching out to 19 girls in the slums, Protsahan has now reached out to over 400 girl children through two centers (Learning Center and Digital Resource Center) in the slums of West Delhi. The organisation has produced many information and education resources over the decade that are available to organizations and educators across the country to help them address the issues of child protection and child abuse in classrooms, at home, and

ensure that no child has to undergo the trauma of abuse and feel isolated at any point in time.

Protsahan functions in a unique way of designing, implementing, and advocating the interventions with the goal of not just talking about abuse but to have a far more significant impact than traditional methods of action and advocacy. So, every step they take, every campaign they run, and every child they reach out to is with the intention of leaving a lasting impact. They follow the HEART Principle (Healing, Education, Art, Recovery, & Technology) and use this model as a tool to help bring children out of their shells, and lead them into a healthy learning environment. Together, these five pillars ignite the spark of interest in young children rescued from vulnerable and abusive circumstances. By using innovative and hands on approaches to teaching them social and educational skills, the children start learning and adapting these skills sub-consciously, while having fun.

Protsahan adopts a ten-month-long bridge course and once a child completes the basic training, he/she is enrolled in a government school in 4th or 5th grade directly. While attending the Government school the child can choose to continue to attend Protsahan classes and learn Madhubani and Warli art, Bharatnatyam, film making, DSLR Photography, theatre arts, computers, etc.

Since inception, Protsahan has rescued and successfully mainstreamed 980 girls into formal schools by focussing holistically on their education, healthcare and justice aspect. Over the years, they have brought in awareness on social issues like child marriage, girls' access to toilets and safe menstrual hygiene management practices, child sexual abuse, UNHRC and child rights, and gender violence. Protsahan's National Child Protection Programme

partnered with different NGOs and worked on spreading awareness on child abuse, child marriage, child trafficking, child sexual abuse, mental abuse, etc. So far, they have reached out to 68,000 plus children by adopting a hub and spoke model.

Adding to the future plans of the organisation, Sonal says: “The next phase of plans involves partnerships with CSOs, government bodies, CSRs to make the cause of fighting Child Abuse the focal point. We are already reaching out to Parliamentarians, National Human Rights Commission, multilateral organisations, UN and SAARC bodies and receiving great reciprocation and interest to build a strong movement for children in our country. By 2030, we plan to have at least 100 partner organizations, 5,000 child rights ambassadors and over one crore children impacted directly.”

In the present day pandemic, Protsahan was able to support families of more than 6000 girls in 39 different slum communities in West Delhi to tide over the hardships faced by daily wage workers brought on by the precautionary lockdown measures.

Aatika Kouser

7. Rural Health Care Foundation Rural Health Care Foundation

Making Rural Healthcare a Reality



Living with a terminal illness is one of the most dreaded predicaments one might find themselves in. It comes as no surprise then that survivors of degenerative and/or terminal illnesses are some of the most generous donors and advocates for research and medical assistance to people going through something similar.

Arun Nevatia's fight with cancer started when he was only 10, but he wouldn't let it come in the way of becoming a successful businessman, well into his forties. His family's plentiful financial resources ensured that Arun got very the best of care. What's better, his family was acutely aware of their position of privilege. That financial constraints among the underprivileged communities make it almost impossible to seek medical help, was a realization that led Arun, his

brother Anant and their family to start Rural Health Care Foundation (RHCF) in the year 2009 in their home state of West Bengal.

Nearly 69% of Indian population resides in rural areas, with access to only 3% of all medical professionals. These are dangerously low odds to live by. Due to the lack of sound medical systems, there is a high prevalence of fake medics or quacks, as they are commonly known. Dependence on the advice of quacks can mislead innocents into medical complications.

In response to all of this, after a successful pilot in Mayapur, in Nadia District of West Bengal, they (Arun, his wife Falguni and Anant) set up RHCF with the aim of establishing affordable health clinics in remote areas. The 12 rural centres are located in areas lacking proper medical facilities within a 50 km radius. Each centre is equipped with General Medicine, Optometry, Dentistry and Homeopathy departments. Each one also has a pharmacy with about 200 kinds of generic medicines. Patients are provided with medical consultation for Rs. 90 and free one-week supply of medications. Low cost spectacles are available and free Cataract and Pterygium surgeries are also undertaken, in collaboration with Rotary Eye Hospitals. Patients incur only their own travelling expenses. RHCF also has five urban centres to serve low-income communities residing in cities.

Asif, a 61-year old man was brought to RHCF with a severe case of arthritis. Bedridden, he was initially brought to the centre in a van. With a monthly income of just about Rs. 6000, it was difficult for him to seek medical attention at city hospitals. His treatment and low-cost medication at RHCF led him to become more and more mobile over a period of time. Today, he rides a bicycle to his nearest centre, just 4 kms away from his home, for his regular checkups and medications.

To date, RHCF has treated over 24 lakh patients and is consistently recognized for its healthcare excellence, leadership and social innovation through several prestigious awards at the national and international level. Arun's success story was published in the UN Volunteers Book in 2012. A case study on RHCF was published by Harvard Business School in 2013. More recently, in 2019, Falguni was given the "Times Women Hero" award for her outstanding service, among other accolades.

RHCF provides learning opportunities for students in Ivy league universities. As part of the Global Social Entrepreneurship/India Programme 2017-2018 organized by Yale University, a team of four Yale students partnered up with RHCF to work on an enterprise development project. RHCF also has special consultative status with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

What is the secret to their excellence? RHCF's Communications Manager Krishna says, "Quality of care is as important to us as affordability. We have developed an innovative, scalable and replicable service-delivery model. We follow a Standard Operating Procedure (S.O.P.) for every aspect of our work. We are "asset-light", in that our centres operate in rented properties. This enables us to relocate from a low-footfall area to an area of greater need, with ease and without high financial loss. All our operations are computerized and on cloud. We are also consistently improving performance evaluation and monitoring mechanisms to ensure quality treatment for patients and smooth functioning of the centres. To maximize the impact of donation on our communities we limit administrative cost to 10% of project cost. Charging a nominal consultation-fee of Rs. 90 helps reduce our dependency on donors. It also helps us attain sustainability."

That said, there are other systemic challenges in providing low-cost healthcare. Doctors are often unwilling to practice in remote rural areas. Currently there is a shortage of doctors in the entire state of West Bengal. The rising cost of medicine is another challenge. RHCF rises up to these challenges in a few different ways. Says Krishna, “We have a policy in place for scouting and recruiting experienced and qualified doctors and staff who are both subject matter experts as also willing and passionate about working with our communities. Since travelling to remote rural areas can be difficult, food and accommodation arrangements are made for our staff in the same building as our centres. We also hire support staff (over 30 at present) from within the communities we serve. We mostly procure generic medicines and use our stock judiciously.”

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, RHCF centres have had to be suspended temporarily. Krishna says, “In order to keep our patients as well as our staff safe, we have to abide by the lockdown. Even before the lockdown was announced however, our teams had carried awareness messages to our communities on how to keep safe and stop the spread. Over 13,000 Soaps and 6,300 masks have been distributed so far, with more being supplied currently. We are monitoring the situation very closely.” RHCF in partnership with Kolkata Gives Foundation has been arranging masks and reliable month-long food supplies to 10,000 people.

Currently serving over 500 villages, RHCF is looking to expand into several more communities in need of medical care, with the goal of reaching 100 centres in the near future.

Seven years since he passed, Arun Nevatia’s vision for accessible health care in remote rural areas, lives on.

Archanaa Ramesh

8. Salaam Bombay Foundation

Productive Children, Functioning Adults



Every day in India, 5,500 adolescents try tobacco for the first time. That is 19,80,000 minors in just a year's time. We all know that there is going to be a second and a third time, with a high likelihood of continued use. While it might seem that this alarming statistic indicates a high prevalence of smoking, the bigger culprit is chewable tobacco, consumed in the form of gutka, khaini, mawa and mishri, to name a few. Gutka, sold in flashy plastic sachets for merely Rs. 5 in just about every street-side stall, is easy for kids to buy at will and even to hide their habit for a long time until they are addicted. Though banned in many states now, gutka can still be found in others. A hunger suppressant, continued tobacco use leads to malnourishment, sub-optimal brain development and poor academic outcomes. It is one of the leading reasons why children tend to drop out of schooling.

It was this chilling realisation that led Padmini Somani to set up Salaam Bombay Foundation- an organisation that helps

children, especially those in economically disadvantageous situations, to live tobacco-free lives. She started her journey in 2002, working with children in Mumbai slums. She set out to empower children to make the right choices for their health, education and livelihood by committing them to stay in school.

“Many think that tobacco-use is the problem, but it is just a symptom and one of the triggers of secondary school dropout.” says Dipanwita, the Communications Manager of Salaam Bombay Foundation, “Living in poverty and desolation can amplify the addiction and put kids in a vicious cycle of self-destruction. Our programmes are a response to the various triggers of secondary school dropouts.”

Salaam Bombay Foundation works within the existing government school system. They do not run their own schools but approach the government to conduct their programmes in municipal and government-aided schools. The In-School Preventive Health Programme is present in Mumbai, Jaipur, Kolkata, Pune and Bengaluru, to engage children in tobacco control, leadership and good nutrition. The programme is delivered through trained facilitators who use child-friendly, age appropriate teaching methods such as role play, interactive games and storytelling. Government teachers are also sensitised to the issue of tobacco abuse and trained to deliver these modules, so that they might branch out and carry the message forward in remote areas.

The National Skill Development Corporation through its accredited partners provides a certificate in vocational skills, to students in the Salaam Bombay Vocational Skill Development Programme. Aarifa learnt threading, waxing, mehndi application and hair styling through this programme. Creating exquisite mehndi motifs, her reputation as a

hardworking, focussed and talented beautician makes her the go-to person for make-up during any festivities in her locality. She is also a regular teaching assistant at the academy.

Salaam Bombay's Academy of the Arts, Sports Academy and Media Academy provide a three-year intensive programme each. When Saakshi enrolled into the Theatre programme, she was not sure what it would mean for her future. Living in an 11-member family in a small hut, she was quiet and mostly kept to herself. At the academy, she learnt all about facial expressions, body language, improvisation and voice modulation. In her very first performance at the National Centre for the performing arts (NCPA), she won the best actress award. That motivated her to keep going, in spite of opposition at home and competition outside. Sakshi has been featured in the local newspapers since and she also auditions for movie roles from time to time.

There are several other stories of children going through massive transformation with just a little handholding and lots of skill development. Samirul Shaikh, a once shy, diffident child, enrolled in the cricket academy and underwent professional training in the sport. "Cricket led him on a pathway to self-discovery", says Dipanwita. Along with great bowling skills, Samirul's innate qualities of leadership, discipline, focus and time management also came to be realized. One time he was given the task of assisting 21 students from the under-14 age group, to travel across the city for their matches. Not only did he ensure his team's safety in the crowded local trains of Mumbai, but kept all the parents updated about their whereabouts, every step of the way. When asked what he would like to be when he grows up, he says, "I would like to be a cricket coach, a bike repairs person or an English tutor, whichever works

best for me, but most of all, I want to become a good human being.” Profound words indeed.

What are some of the challenges Salaam Bombay faces today? “Attracting and retaining skilled personnel has been one of our biggest challenges. Even when you do find professionally qualified people, our focus doesn’t rank high in their list of global problems” says Dipanwita, ruefully. Second comes the challenge of getting the general public, the potential donors, to understand the severity of the problem. “India is the oral cancer capital of the world. A whopping 86% of oral cancer cases are related to tobacco. Showing the problem to be the epidemic that it is, has been a real challenge” she says. “Our academies attract great teaching talent and all these coaches are remunerated by the Foundation. Students do not have to spend a penny. This comes at a huge cost to the Foundation. Despite growing research on the importance of arts, sports and alternate courses like media, we constantly find ourselves having to prove their role in the holistic development of the child. We also need the co-operation of corporates to place our alumni in paid internships so they may practice the skills they have learnt. Since our adolescents are less than 18 years of age, a lot of effort is spent towards educating potential supporters and assuring them that no law is being violated and that they’re as well as the adolescents’ interests are well protected”.

Salaam Bombay has had a deep impact on its communities. It has been found that 92% of the alumni since 2012-13 are still pursuing age appropriate education. Additionally, the full-year school attendance in 2017-18 of Salaam Bombay adolescents was 85% against merely 72% for those outside the programme.

Salaam Bombay is passionately lobbying for better implementation of the COTPA (Cigarette and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003). Higher taxes, bland packaging, stricter fines and more awareness campaigns are what will bring about long term change, at a systemic level. They are currently working on forming a tight network of stakeholders that encourages sharing of best practices in the fight against tobacco, and are expanding their presence in the cities they are already operating in.

When discussing plans for the future, Dipanwita says, “Salaam Bombay believes that a child in school has a future. We hope to continue to equip them with tools to say ‘no’ to the triggers and ‘yes’ to the chances of improving their health, education and livelihoods so that they might move towards brighter futures.”

Archanaa Ramesh

9. Save Life Foundation

Making Indian Roads Safe for All



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 democratised 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

10. St. Jude India Child Care Centres

Care for the Caretaker



Driven by rigorous volunteer support and generous contributions, St Judes centres' layouts made sure that families had their personal space too

Poverty and health expenditure have an intricate relationship where one impacts the other significantly. When poor take a call to get themselves treated for a disease, there are many things they forego. “It is a tough call for them. They must compromise on livelihood, taking care of other children or elders in the family. They are compelled to go through this and the ensuing disturbance in family’s economy. There is a lot they have to decide about,” says Mr. Anil Nair, CEO of St. Jude India Child Care Centres, Mumbai.

In case of a tertiary disease like cancer, where there is recurring expenditure for a few years, the family gives

up on their right to a decent living. “Paediatric cancer is affecting the poorer families even more. While treatment in itself is a big burden for them, managing care takers’ stay and food during the treatment period is a challenge. Families that are unable to manage this, eventually give up. I am sure we have lost many children due to this socio-economic predicament,” laments Nair, who is unable to accept such compromises on children’s right to life.

The founders of St. Jude India Child Care Centres, Mrs. and Mr. Kaviratne were moved by such scenes outside Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai and decided to help parents with comfortable stay during the course of their children’s treatment. “If safe and hygienic place of stay can ensure completion of treatment why not provide it to them?,” say the founders who launched the initiative in 2006, in a small rented space to accommodate eight families. As oncologists noticed the difference this effort made on the children’s treatment, some doctors offered a building to the Centre to set up space to accommodate 41 families.

Driven by rigorous volunteer support and generous contributions, St Judes centres’ layouts made sure that families had their personal space too. However, all this did not come easily. Anil Nair recalls the effort that was needed to persuade families to live in their centres. “Families took time to understand that the centre was trying to provide them a home away from their homes. Doctors’ references were a big game changer and that helped counter all their qualms. Although free space and rations are offered, issues around toilet usage, kitchen routine, and restrictions on consumption of alcohol/cigarettes were a challenge,” he admits.

While all the standard operating procedures began to show a positive influence on children’s health, the team evaluated

the genuine need for such an effort. Increasing incidence of cancer among children, specifically poor children, reiterated the relevance of this effort and need for expansion of centres in other cities too. An important reason for the success of this model is an open outlook where they chose to set up units in spaces offered and building capacities of other like-minded organisations to also engage in this activity. “This was, in every sense, a new strategy for us. As we replicate and expand, partnering with smaller organisations saves a lot of our time and ensures that the objective is never sidelined due to lopsided focus on space,” says Anil Nair.

As families came from different locations and backgrounds, the founders took a serious call on staff well-being too. “It could be emotionally draining for the staff to go through difficult conversations in every unit and get them used to the protocols here. Therefore, we made Counsellors available to support both staff as well as inmates. As recovering children also stay in these protected units, it led to reduced vulnerability to other life-threatening infections which otherwise they were prone to while dwelling on the pavements,” he adds.

All these concerns are more valid in a pandemic situation where the centre left no stone unturned in ensuring safety of the children and their families. “We stocked up supplies to ensure steady availability, followed strict hygiene protocols, prohibited visitors and volunteers, and arranged transport facilities for essential staff and families who were returning home after treatment. We also dispatched medicines to families living in villages and suggested that they stayed indoors for the safety of their children.

All education activities and counselling sessions were delivered online to reduce all possible risks of succumbing

to the virus. Every child's life saved makes our effort worth," says a contented Anil Nair.

The team has successfully established and replicated this model in nine cities, with a capacity to house 475 families across 38 centres. "Raising funds for our work is like running on a treadmill. We must keep going on because there is a growing need and it is bound to increase in the coming years. This is why working with smaller organisations with local reach seems a viable approach," he says.

Shanmuga Priya. T

11. Uma Educational and Technical Society

Building up Abilities



According to a 2018 survey by the National Statistical Office (a wing of the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, GOI), currently 2.2% of India's population are disabled. This demographic is usually the worst affected in terms of access to education, access to early intervention, job-opportunities and general quality of life. In rural areas these challenges are even more amplified. This is a very diverse population with needs differing based on the minute specifics of their medical conditions, geographic location and a few other factors as well. Given these challenges, there are few organizations that have built up the necessary strengths, in terms of training, education and infrastructure, to provide holistic programs for persons with disability. Today we explore one such organization- Uma Educational and Technical Society (UETS) India.

UETS, based in the East Godavari District (Kakinada), Andhra Pradesh, was founded in 1988, with the mission to provide a barrier-free and comprehensive rehabilitation

for persons with disabilities and their families. Mr. S.P. Reddy, the founder and Executive Director of UETS says that he had felt the need to serve people with disabilities, developmental disabilities in particular, since his childhood. “I had struggled a lot myself during my childhood,” he says, “I had to travel a distance of 6 kms to the nearest school every day. However, I distinctly remember a mentally retarded girl in my neighborhood, who was routinely ill-treated by her family who was unable to get her proper medical care. This left a lasting impression on me. In my youth, I was so inspired by the Quotes of Swamy Vivekananda that I decided to serve this marginal section of society in any way I could.”

Armed with a Post-graduate degree in Rehabilitation Psychology, Mr. Reddy launched UETS along with ‘Uma Manovikasa Kendram’, a residential school for children with intellectual disabilities. Having started it with just nine children, he has since developed the organization into something of a multi-disciplinary behemoth that covers a wide variety of PWD needs all over the East Godavari District, some other regions of Andhra, as well as a couple of union territories. There is a special school for children with intellectual disabilities in Kakinada with a sub-center for early intervention in L.B.Nagar, Kakinada. There are also a few different early intervention and day-care centres.

UETS runs a workshop for the fabrication and fittings of appliances and aids, a group home named ‘GHARAUNDA’, a deaf-blind centre, a special education training centre, and a community-based rehabilitation project. Aside from this, UETS also runs a project for the Integration of the Child Protection Scheme in Yanam in collaboration with Childline 1098, and a Target HIV/AIDS Intervention Project for Migrant Communities in the East Godavari District.

UETS provides vocational training for disabled youth to help them gain access to jobs. Their two-year diploma programs in Special Education (with different specialisations) are recognized by the Rehabilitation Council of India. UETS is also a recognized study centre for Bachelor of Special Education (Mental Retardation) - a distance learning program offered by the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad.

UETS has received several accolades over the years, gaining national and international recognition for its work. It is sustained by the support of State and Central governments, leading philanthropists, grants, and income generation programs.

Vadaparthi Veere Durga, who has moderate intellectual disability with a few behavioral issues such as hyperactivity and underdeveloped social skills, joined the residential school in 2016. After just one year he showed significant improvement in his social skills, learning to read, write and speak, understanding others and being able to conduct many of his self-care chores such as buttoning his own shirt every day. His confidence swelled up to the extent that he now participates in all of the school's cultural events.

Another notable example is 21 year old Koteshwara Rao. Intellectually disabled, he was put through the individualised education program of UETS. He was taught personal, language, academic and pre-vocation skills. He is currently obtaining his education through the NIOS Open Schooling system. He is learning to make paper plates as well as gardening. He is also learning to handle money, to identify traffic signals and some basic computer skills. All of these will help him become independent and ready for work in the near future.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, UETS has been providing relief for persons with disabilities in the form of monthly rations and financial aid. Thati Sivanarayana Dora is one such recipient. A cashew nut farmer with locomotor disability, Siva lost his job at a local nursery due to the pandemic in February this year. He says, “When UETS announced the Rs. 10,000 COVID-relief fund, I felt like it was a boon. With this money I bought a motor, pipes, seeds and a few other things and have started agriculture in the few cents of land my family owns.” This fund was jointly offered by UETS and Andheri Trust, Tiruchirappalli.

The story of Kottedda Devi is slightly different. A tailor and the lone breadwinner of her family, Kottedda Devi struggles to provide the basics for her ailing husband and her two young children. A few months ago, she was diagnosed with kidney problems that forced her to stop working altogether. The pandemic made the bad situation worse. She was granted Rs. 5000 as COVID-relief fund. “For me, the one month’s ration and the relief money is a god-send. Else I cannot imagine what hardships my children would have had to go through, during this difficult time,” she says expressing her sincere gratitude to UETS, Kakinada and GiveIndia Foundation, Mumbai.

What are some of the challenges that UETS faces today? Says Mr. Reddy, “Currently we are having a scarcity of funds. Although we have received grants in aid from the government, there has lately been a great delay in sanctioning those funds. Additionally, wherever we have to make matching contributions, we find ourselves falling short sometimes, thus making us ineligible to avail the grants even.”

However, Mr. Reddy is positive that in time, his organization will be able to make a full financial recovery and continue on their mission.

12. Vanavil

Uncovering the Hidden Spectrum of Oppression



The tragedy of the 2004 Tsunami that hit the southern coast of India is not one that is likely to be forgotten by an entire generation that lived through it. Thousands of lives were lost, and tens of thousands of families were rendered homeless. Revathi, a film-maker with a background in journalism, was one of the first responders at Nagapattinam district. She started volunteering with the retrieval of the dead bodies amid debris. Subsequently, she continued doing relief work in the region when she was met by a child, begging on the streets. Wondering why in the times of relief and restoration children were still begging, she ventured to see where this child lived. That is how she came upon the Adiyan and Narikuravar communities (nomadic tribes) that were still outside the reach of relief workers, marginalized beyond belief. The Adiyan community, better known as the *Boom Boom Mattukkaar* community, had taken to begging as their traditional vocation, a curse of Lord Venketeshwara of Tiruppathi. It was a given in this community that every

child born would be initiated into begging as soon as they could walk. Revathi could not stand to see the children wasting away in malnutrition and illiteracy and so decided to put the children through school.

Says she, “Vanavil was started as a response to the conditions of the children from these nomadic tribal communities in Nagapattinam district. The young child I met, Lakshmi, was very malnourished and all our attempts to protect her failed; she succumbed to malnutrition.” The grief of losing Lakshmi solidified Revathi’s resolve to find a way out for these communities from their vicious cycle of poverty. She explains, “We realized that most of the *Boom Boom Maatukarar* children and women were begging because they were unable to claim any kind of social security due to not having any government issued identity documents – be it Public Distribution System (PDS) rice or other sustenance benefits. The absence of community certificates meant the children had no access to education either. In order to bridge some of these gaps we started Vanavil as a semi residential school in 2005. In a way these circumstances shaped our mission - Child Protection | Ending Malnutrition | Creative Education.”

Vanavil today runs a nursery and primary school, a children’s home, after-school centres in six villages, a higher education support program and a training centre for employability skills in Nagapattinam. While the school, home and after school programs are focused on the children from the nomadic tribal communities, the training centre is open to all under-privileged youngsters of Nagapattinam.

Over the past decade or so of Vanavil’s existence, the organization has evolved, from addressing the emergency needs of a disempowered community in a Tsunami-stricken area, to steering the community toward sustainable progress.

While recounting the journey, Revathi says, “In the initial stages it was a disaster fighting exercise. We were caught up in just getting food to the children and keeping them away from begging. Early on we realised that an exciting and engaging education model can help us sustain the changes we wanted to bring about in the community. So, despite many difficulties we built the Vanavil educational model with a lot of emphasis on arts and performance and experiential learning.” Revathi’s passion for film making and her artistic creativity enables her to come up with truly unconventional ideas to keep the children’s critical thinking, sense of wonder and inquisitiveness alive. Through practical projects, she engages her young learners to keep their focus in learning, which, by all accounts is a tough thing to do, given the many oppressive distractions their community is prone to. As for nutrition, she’s quick to add, “We supplemented this education model with a robust nutritional program and health support for our kids. A decade after the creation of Vanavil we decided to share the learnings and create impact in other villages where the *Boom Boom Maatukarar* - Adiyans live, through our after school centres.”

Speaking of some of the major turnarounds along the way, Revathi recounts, “In the initial days when Vanavil was still an experiment, we held a mothers meeting to convince the women from the community to send their children to school. A young mother called Chellammal told me, ‘we are cursed to beg. This is a tradition handed to us. Please don’t waste your life and try educating our children. It won’t happen.’ Today the eldest daughter of Chellammal, P. Sudha who was begging at that time of Tsunami has finished her engineering degree. I’m very glad and proud to inform you that she has secured a job as a software tester in the same IT company she was interning at.”

Sudha, Lakshmi and many other kids who joined Vanavil as 10-year-olds with no formal education have worked hard with Vanavil and have proven to their community that every child can learn and achieve far more than was previously considered possible. Also, Vanavil is helping the young people who have graduated or in college to form a group who can take the community forward.

Vanavil continues to face challenges today. “A very big challenge is the fact that we work from a very backward district that is remote from the urban centres,” Says Revathi, adding that, “This means that we do not attract CSR funding or volunteers. Another challenge is that it is extremely difficult to obtain Community Certificates for our students.”

When asked of her vision for Vanavil, Revathi is ready with a long list of action plans. Chiefly, she explains, “We want to develop a strong educational and nutritional support model for the after school centres and develop the educational capabilities of these children. We want to document and replicate our model in other districts. We are also planning to work on livelihood options, along with awareness programs on gender and health issues for women so that they can get out of the begging practice once and for all.” Into a bold new decade, may we usher some bold new strides of progress.

Archanaa Ramesh

TRENDSETTERS

1. Abhinavgram

Working Towards a Better Tomorrow



In today's world, to make substantial difference in the society or community, it requires social evolution where the people make a significant switch in the existing norms or process to bring the necessary change. However, to ensure the modifications on the development, personal involvement and efforts are needed, individually and as a community also.

Thiruppathi Perumal, was born in Kavundampatti Village in Dindigul which was under developed until the last decade. He attended school in a neighbouring village which had basic infrastructure. He cycled 10 kms every day to attend school which left him wondering why his village didn't have buses and high school facilities for children while the others had. After completing school, he came to Chennai to pursue his bachelor's degree, where he choose a foundation subject in Rural development. That is when he got the idea to bring about change and development in his village and make it a model village.

With the help of the teaching faculty in college, he conducted a survey in Kavundampatti to collect data on the possible changes that can be brought about in several aspects. He identified several issues that required immediate attention and discussed the issues with the people of the village, and submitted a petition stating their requirement and all the schemes that had not been implemented there, to the government office and registered Ministries along with their signatures of all the people.

Later, Thiruppathi, along with his school friends were concerned about the development of the village, and formed a Youth parliament that works to improve the condition and transform to a self-sustainable village and generate work. He then started an organisation called Abhinavgram in 2015, which functions out of Kolli Hills with the aim of identifying and providing self-sufficient and sustainable solutions to the most backward villages of Tamil Nadu. It is associated with experienced social work professionals who identify villages through a rigorous and exhaustive process consisting of focus group discussions and plans. The members of the organisation also included the elders of the village, to voice out their opinions and give advice.

Their main aim was to improve the school system, health facilities, infrastructure, livelihood and agriculture. Soon after, with the constant effort of the organisation and the government schemes being implemented, buses were introduced, toilets were built in the houses that didn't have the facility, electricity was provided in all houses and regular follow up services were set up, drinking water taps were set in all streets and road facilities were improved.

In terms of medical facilities, they introduced the safe delivery kit authorised by WHO for infection free delivery,

which in the last 3 years has helped 1282 women deliver babies free of infection.

The organisation also started a kinder garden school and included activities for children to keep them engaged and bring awareness of education. With most middle- aged people of the village migrating for jobs to neighbouring states due to low employment around the village, children are left with grandparents who do not follow up much with the children's education, and the dropout rates started increasing. Hence, to change the norm, tuition centres were also set up to keep them motivated.

Agriculture is one of the main aspect of Abhivangram Society's vision and the main occupation of the village, but that required work only 4- 5 months a year, hence the people had nothing much to do rest of the year. Thiruppathi, along with Professionals with knowledge of organic farming, introduced the concept of organic farming. The method of sustainable farming was taught to farmers following the Nammalvar method, which is to do farming without the use of chemicals and pesticides. 18 farmer groups were formed, with each group consisting of about 15-25 members, which led to about 400 locals being employed in organic farming. The idea behind the Nammalvar method was, “ double the yield and triple the income”.

They also focussed on women empowerment, by identifying most underdeveloped villages, and taught women in making finished goods and food products from locally available raw materials. Many women were trained in pickle making from organically grown ginger, pepper, onion, garlic etc., and supply them to the markets. This gave them an earnings of about Rs. 200 per day.

Thiruppathi says, “Many villagers are school drop outs and do not have the knowledge of saving and banking. Only after the concept of organic farming was introduced, many opened bank accounts since payments were made through cheques. We educated them on banking systems, as it helps them save more money”.

He added, “Coffee is in abundance here, so we along the help of coffee board of India purchased machines that fasten the process, and require less physical effort has resulted in farmers making 20-30% extra profit than what they were making earlier”. Overall in the last few years, the village has achieved an income earning of Rs. 18,00,000 above the selling price and it has been generated because of direct selling of the coffee.

Abhinavagram over the years has brought about significant progress to the village in several aspects which has made living conditions amicable. Their focus for the future is agriculture and to generate employment locally to make the locals independent and self-sufficient. “... we worked really hard to bring these changes and we hope to make more progress and bringing about a positive change”, says Thiruppathi.

Aatika Kouser

2. Apnalaya

Force for Change



The relationship between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and socio- economic scenario exist locally, nationally and internationally. Since India is a large country, both demographically and geographically, it is difficult for the Government alone to uplift the poor and the financially unstable segment of people, and support the impoverished sections of the society.

For decades now, NGOs have contributed greatly in helping Indian communities overcoming deprivation and have access to basic necessities and rights.

Apnalaya, an NGO based out of Mumbai works with the urban poor and enables access to basic services, healthcare, education and livelihoods. The organisation focuses on ensuring provision of civic entitlements through advocacy and lobbying with the government.

Apnalaya came into existence in 1973 by Tom Holland - the then Australian Consul General in Mumbai. The organisation's aim was to create a sustainable community and tackle the problem of urban poverty. It began its operations by launching a day care facility for children of construction labourers and worked in the area of healthcare, food security, primary education and civic amenities in four different locations in Mumbai.

Apnalaya's vision is 'Empowered People – Sustainable Communities'. It works to enable people to help themselves, enhancing their capacities to demand their own rights and respond to civic and social issues through engagement with government institutions and decision-makers. Their focus is to bring about change through three verticals - Health & Disability, Education & Livelihoods and Citizenship & Advocacy.

Apnalaya adopts a multi-dimensional approach, where they work with individuals and help them gain access to basic needs and basic services (water, electricity, sanitation), healthcare, education and livelihood opportunities. The organisation works towards empowering the communities to help themselves, by imparting civic education, building a group of community volunteers, and organising people into Civic Action Groups. They also advocate with the government on key issues faced by the urban poor, and provides consultation, liaison with like-minded organisations, and creates awareness through the media for improved provision of civic amenities and services.

Between 2000-2010, most of Apnalaya's programmes that were no longer necessary were handed over to the community and other NGOs as they decided to mainly focus on development of Shivaji Nagar and M East Ward areas.

Arun Kumar, CEO of Apnalaya says, “Since its inception, Apnalaya has worked in various areas for over 27 years. Our work was focused in Shivaji Nagar and we went from being purely an implementing organisation to one that works on research and advocacy as well. We also developed a community care approach which involved capacity building of individuals for availing basic entitlements like ration card, pan card and birth certificates.”

In the recent times, Apnalaya took a call to locate the work in the larger ambit of Urban Poor in a much more pronounced way. This path was chosen to encounter the challenge and invite the urban poor to participate in their own development. It led to transforming from a needs-based NGO to an NGO that works towards helping communities become sustainable.

Many women with children quit their jobs and those who get the opportunity to work find it difficult since they have no family members to look after them. Shenaz, a young woman, got a job as a house help and had to tie her one-and-a-half-year-old daughter to the bedpost and lock her in the house to go to work as there was no one to take care of her. Many working mothers had similar problems pertaining to jobs. When Apnalaya came to know of this situation, they started Community Childcare Centres (CCC), a unique model to empower mothers to work, while keeping their children safe during their absence and generating opportunities for employment within the community.

Until now, 125 women have been trained to run CCCs by Apnalaya. As a result, 230 mothers like Shenaz can now leave their child in a safe place while they work. Women who run the CCCs are the eyes and ears of Apnalaya in the community. They have been trained by Apnalaya to prevent

issues such as violence and abuse and identify people who are in need of medical and financial assistance.

Sharing a proud moment for Apnalaya, Arun says, “Nazreen, 16-year-old volunteer of our organisation was nominated for International Children’s Peace Prize 2020! This award is presented annually to promote children’s rights and better the situation of vulnerable children. She is the second girl in the last four years to be nominated for this award.”

Since 2016, Apnalaya has trained around 850 grassroot leaders. The trained team members deliver the training programme and facilitate community leaders to form Civic Action Groups, each with a local focus, engaged with their immediate community to identify issues affecting their day to day lives.

The CAGs have initiated 265 civic actions since 2017 with 216 being completed, and benefitting 13,448 families in Shivaji Nagar.

Through Apnalaya’s Health & Disability programme, they also work towards improving health seeking behaviour for adolescents and adults especially pregnant and lactating women, amongst other interventions.

Shivaji Nagar was severely impacted by the lockdown. Since 24th March, Apnalaya worked hard to provide relief to the people of Shivaji Nagar and adjacent areas. In over five months of COVID-19 relief work, Apnalaya helped 2.3 lakh individuals and provided curative and preventive material support.

Signing off, Arun says, “Shivaji Nagar is directly adjacent to Deonar, Asia’s oldest and second largest open landfill. They consist of relocated pavement dwellers, migrants from

the rural areas struggling with poverty and unemployment, and living hand-to-mouth without basic amenities or social entitlements. Over the years, Apnalaya has managed to bring significant impact in different parts of Mumbai. Our future plans include helping out people of Shivaji Nagar in all possible ways to make it a better locality for people and focus on upliftment of the people to secure their future.”

Aatika Kouser

3. AROH Foundation

Bridging the Gap



Founded in 2001 by Neelam Gupta, AROH Foundation has presence in 18 states and has impacted nearly five lakh lives until date. Its mission is simple: a world where people live in dignity, security and equal opportunities for all. How does it go about achieving this? By providing assistance to the underprivileged, weak and poor, and by exhorting communities in rural and semi-rural areas to develop life skills, economic skills and socio-cultural skills and thereby turning self-reliant. So, in a nutshell, AROH seeks out an equitable society where all humans coexist with dignity.

The NGO lists out core values ranging from building lasting relationships, upholding ethical standards and nurturing a culture of learning. It values opportunity and responsibility towards making a difference. “We believe that education is

the most powerful driver of development and is one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty and improving health, gender equality, peace and economic stability,” says Neelam, “The gender discrimination in the less privileged sections of the society in the education sector is not hidden behind any curtain. Mostly, girls of such families neither get a platform in gaining knowledge and developing life skills nor do they have access to resources.”

AROH has thus worked on improving the three most important pillars of education — access, retention and quality in Government schools in the States of Delhi, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya and Uttar Pradesh — covering more than one lakh children in schools. To address the gender gap and educate children of rag-pickers and rickshaw-pullers, it initiated NFE (Non-Formal Education) in 2008, with the support of a PSU.

“The Foundation started with non-formal education of 100 children residing in slums near the Foundation’s head office in NOIDA,” recalls Neelam, “Mobilising these children was quite challenging as the parents were nomadic and did not have proof of citizenship. They migrated from rural areas in search of opportunities and saw their children as a source of income and denied them education.”

Eventually, AROH convinced them and admitted 100 children from the streets to school. “Soon we opened another 10 NFE centres with strength of 500 children and identified Educators, who belong from the same community,” says Neelam. Soon enough, the model expanded to 250 NFE centres with 50,000 children in five years, across five districts in Delhi-NCR.

AROH’s intervention RISE has drastically brought down numbers of school dropouts. “With capacity-building

workshops and training, teachers were to impart syllabus in an easy and interactive manner, so that academically weaker children could be on par with their counterparts in regular schools,” says Neelam. Over 3,000 children were benefited by this.

Soon enough, the Foundation discovered that the increased level of dropouts mainly comprising girls in upper-primary classes was due dilapidated classrooms and poor infrastructure, with no sanitation and water facilities. “We worked closely with the government to improve the infrastructural needs of government schools, secured CSR grants and were able to renovate basic amenities,” says Neelam, “This increased attendance and reduced the dropout rate.”

In two years, 200 schools benefited from increased infrastructural activity, along the lines of repair and renovation, smart classrooms, installation of swings and slides, sports material, setting up of libraries, water and sanitation facilities.

“Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and lack of livelihood opportunities remain some of the biggest challenges in the way of education for all. Parents who are less privileged and are not able to meet their ends, always see their children as an earning hand and engage them in economic activities,” says Neelam, “The girl child is at a greater disadvantage as they remain out-of-school to do household chores or to take care of younger siblings while parents go out to work. The girls often accompany their mothers when they go to work as domestic help or at construction sites.”

To tackle some of these problems, AROH decided to look at the aspect of access to schools. “While primary schools are generally available in every village, there is only one

middle school every five kilometres, and one secondary school every 10 kilometres,” says Neelam, “This impairs access since children are not able to travel these distances.” Poor infrastructure and lack of toilets has only worsened the problem.

Education inequality is another problem area. “According to a survey report by ASER, more than 50 percent of Class Five students attending rural schools are not capable of reading a second-standard textbook, and cannot solve basic math questions,” she points out. It’s simple: performances of rural children are lower than that of those in city schools, thanks to unequal distribution of resources, infrastructure, transportation, funding, teachers and libraries. Not only has AROH tried to bridge this gap but has also supported the mothers of school-going children with skilling in order to ensure economic stability.

“Most of our projects have been hailed as role models by associated and concerned stakeholders owing to their design, reliability, scalability and sustainability,” says Neelam. Projects like Padho aur Badho and RISE (Remedial Innovation in School Education) have carved a niche for themselves in terms of success. “Some of our programmes have been running for the past 12 years, having improved the learning outcomes of more than 50,000 children so far,” she adds.

The Holistic Rural Development Program (HRDP) is another project that has worked well for AROH. “Driven by the development needs at the village level, we have been strengthening the grassroots through integrated and holistic development in village communities,” says Neelam, “This project transformed the lives of over two lakh families in Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya and Uttar Pradesh.” In all, 52 villages received a facelift with interventions in education,

skill development, women empowerment, environment, health and sanitation, renewable energy, agricultural and non-agriculture-based skilling, rural enterprises and strengthening of village level institutions.

“In line with our vision, our goal is to empower vulnerable and rural communities through education and skill development and to cover a population of 20 lakh underprivileged persons by the year 2025,” says Neelam.

In keeping with this plan, social transformation of the poor and marginalized is AROH’s mission. “With an unprecedented calamity, like COVID-19 hitting us, our priority now is to help poor and marginalised communities cope up with this daunting challenge,” says Neelam, “The crisis is threatening education, livelihoods and general health and well-being of people. AROH Foundation is standing as one of the frontline agencies to provide help and relief to communities, especially those who are covered under our projects.”

4. Child in Need Institute

Like Mother, Like Child



CINI has worked in an integrated manner by way of providing knowledge and skills to women, children and adolescents to access existing government services in nutrition, health, education and protection through a “rights-based approach”

Since 1974, Child in Need Institute (CINI), a registered not-for-profit organisation, has been working in urban slums and villages. It began with these settlements along the outskirts of Kolkata. “In the beginning, we were working with children and women who had malnutrition, and as a result of that, high incidence of gastro-intestinal diseases such as diarrhoea and chest infections leading to death in children during infancy and early childhood,” says Samir, “The situation has improved over the last few decades with implementation of government sponsored Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and access to early treatment at local government and private healthcare services.”

A lot has changed since 1974. The overall improvement in socio-economic conditions, improved literacy, improvements in transport and communication infrastructure and overall development have been some of these factors. As a result, nutrition and health indicators are in a much better place, today. “In 2020, the nutrition and health indicators are better and CINI has worked extensively with the government in adding value to ongoing programmes, training of front line government and NGO workers over the last four decades,” says Samir.

But the journey to getting here has been far from easy. In fact, challenges ranged from winning over the trust of local villagers to picking the right team to get the job done. “Overcoming the suspicion of local villagers as we were outsiders who came from the city, and subsequently winning their confidence was our first major challenge,” says Samir, “Another big factor that we had to contend with was the process of selecting and training our first health workers.” This was especially crucial since it was among that this group that Samir had to pick from those who would be acceptable and thus play a crucial role in building a network of strong local self-help groups of women. These groups would in turn go a long way in spreading messages on preventive measures that are required to maintain good health and nutrition. “Furthermore, assisting them to access local services from government such as schools, hospitals/health centres and government homes also improved their confidence,” says Samir, “Our work with the poor also attracted many national and international donors to support our work over the decades.”

Although several improvements have come into place in the last five decades ago, some statistics remain. “India still harbours the largest numbers of malnourished children and adolescent girls in the world,” says Samir, “Both boys and girls from poor families drop out of school between the

ages of 14 and 16 — the girls get married off early and give birth to low birth weight children who continue to remain this way throughout their lifecycle, perpetuating the vicious cycle of malnutrition related deaths.”

Samir’s team at CINI has worked in an integrated manner by way of providing knowledge and skills to women, children and adolescents to access existing government services in nutrition, health, education and protection through what Samir calls a “rights-based approach”. He adds: “we call this the CINI Method.”

By way of these strategies, pregnant women are provided nutrition and healthcare services during the term of their pregnancy. “When it comes to children, this care is especially provided during the first two years of life, when their mental and physical growth is fastest,” he says. This is part of CINI’s “1,000-day approach” in government sponsored ICDS and ASHA programmes, where the organization works closely with front line workers. “CINI has also formulated a low cost nutritious supplement known as CINI Nutrimix which is now supplied to both government and NGO run child care centres,” Samir adds, “Parents are motivated to keep children in school, delay marriage and not to send them out to work as domestic child labour or be trafficked.”

Over time, through a number of projects with women and children as the target group, the organization has grown in reach and numbers. A large part of the work CINI does is also centred on community participation, and isn’t just restricted to health and nutrition. Another project that has drawn praise from several quarters is CINI’s ‘Adopt a Mother, Save a Child’ programme, which has laid focus on safe pregnancies for better motherhood and attended deliveries. Keeping children in school, preventing early marriage, trafficking and various forms of physical and

sexual abuse, re-uniting run away and missing children with their families are some of the other areas where CINI has strived to bring about change and succeeded rather well.

Through these efforts, the fact remains that India has robust policies in place by way of the National and State Plan of Action for Children. “There are government programmes being implemented all over India as part of national programmes to empower women and adolescents,” says Samir, “Particularly in West Bengal, there is the Kannyashree programme to provide cash incentives, bicycles if they remain in school, not get married early and later pursue higher education. Unfortunately poor implementation is a major problem.”

To bridge this gap and ensure adequate and appropriate implementation, CINI is working closely with the governments in the centre and state to improve access and utility of these services. The organization has worked closely with elected bodies like Panchayats in villages, and urban local bodies in urban settings in order to improve the reach and quality of these services. “Finally, the game-changer will be to improve budgetary allocations to health, nutrition, education and protection services as has been done in other Asian countries, which in turn has dramatically improved the lives of children and women,” says Samir.

In terms of targets and expansion, CINI has set itself a geographical focus through its “look east” policy. The idea is to serve deprived children and women in east and North East India through a rights-based approach. “CINI is already present in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Assam and Odisha,” says Samir, “Within the next decade, all efforts will be made to reach out to other states such as Sikkim, Tripura, Arunachal, Mizoram and Nagaland, as we begin working closely with respective state governments to improve nutrition, health, education and protection of vulnerable children and women.”

5. D'Seva Foundation

For the Betterment of the Society



The profession of social work is an ever- evolving and dynamic process in which an individual/ organisation must keep up with changing social values and cultures. It requires personal attention and high levels of commitment to those who want to bring about a notable difference in the lives of individuals and society as a whole.

One such individual is Dr. I. Veeraraja from Madurai, who single-handedly started D'Seva Foundation in 2018. His aim was to help those in need in all possible ways - by offering services, assisting the elderly and those in difficulty, taking up government projects that include social work and hosting awareness programmes.

The core target of the organisation was to ameliorate the life of differently- abled children, senior citizens, orphans and folk artists. The 'D' in D'Seva stands for different kinds of people and differently-abled, while seva means service. Veeraraja says, "I grew up in a simple household and lived

a humble childhood. My father worked for 6 months in a year. He saved money to pay my one-year school fees, so I know how difficult it is for parents who cannot afford to meet their child's education expenses. My aim is to help children and provide them with good education."

Since inception, D'Seva, has conducted several awareness programmes and district rallies on importance of education with differently-abled children and special educators. They also coordinated with the District Differently-abled Welfare offices and conducted events at district levels where free artificial limbs and scooters were donated.

Due to of lack of education, many were not aware of the government schemes that favoured special children. Therefore, public awareness programs on Government schemes were conducted so that people in need can ask for help. "We have been trying our best to educate the caretakers of special children about nutrition, immunisation programmes, disaster management and safety, right to education and disability Act," says Veeraraja. D'Seva also focuses on uplifting the lives of folk dancers and theatre artists by identifying those in financial difficulty and supporting them with food and basic essentials. The aim is to build a life with theatre and dance for the folk artists.

They also offer training programs, and 4,000 folk dancers have benefited till date. "With training, these folk artists can perform in events and weddings and becomes a source of income for them. My father worked as a folk dancer earlier and I know the hard work that is required for a good performance. It seems easy but with the heavy costume and hours of rigorous training, the art of dancing is not very appreciated. That is why we wanted to help folk artists in every possible way," he says.

Veeraraja sought support from an NRI and coordinated distribution of essential food supplies to folk artists. In the last 2 years he has reached out to 543 artists.

D'Seva also started free tuition centres for children and employed 3 tutors. This was because they identified children of construction workers, masons and auto drivers who couldn't afford to pay fees in regular tuition centres. In spite of objections from other tuition centres, Veeraraja continued with his efforts and focused on giving quality education. His efforts proved to be fruitful with most students securing above 80% in their examinations. This also resulted in students moving from paid tuition centres to D'Seva's tuition centre.

For children who have been sent back home due to non-payment of school fees, Veeraraja has taken special efforts in explaining the situation to the school authorities and convinced them to re-enrol them.

Veeraraja, having done his masters in Social work, has addressed students of several colleges on importance of education, Life skills and also given motivational talks as well. He met two other Social workers, Soundarya and Roshini who worked at the HIV Centre who encouraged him to start an NGO. That's how D'SEVA came into being. He was also awarded a Doctorate in a University in Chennai, and recognised as International Star Icon, Best Social Worker, and received an award 'Best Event Coordinator' in "Naan Veezhven Endru Ninathayo."

"We wish to help as many people as we can in all possible ways. For example, a person could not identify a blood donor due to Covid as people were afraid to come to the hospital and donate. I spread the word around and managed

to find a donor. Social work could be as simple as that,” says Veeraraja.

“Due to financial crisis situation in the present time, we are unable to offer much help. But, organisations can still take up simple programs and help the needy. Without any guidance, I have come this far and want to continue doing the same,” he signs off.

Aatika Kouser

6. Dr. Reddy's Foundation

Moving With the Times



Dr Reddy's Foundation (DRF) was established in 1996 with the aim of enabling young and disadvantaged youth, access “quality education” and “employability skills” to realise their potential. Over the last couple of decades, DRF's skilling programmes have impacted over 3.8 lakh youth. It began with the design of one of the earliest short-term placement-linked skilling models – known as Livelihoods Advancement Business School (LABS), which in turn expanded to other parts of the country with support from the Ministry of Rural Development, state governments and development agencies. Later, the programme was replicated in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Vietnam.

“The value-add of these skilling projects was recognised, and in 2010 the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and later, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) initiated similar skilling programmes across the country,” says Pranav Kumar Choudhary, Director Operations, GROW “The launch of the

Skill India Mission in 2015 further underlined the need to provide skills to young people and address unemployment. This also launched a plethora of free skilling programmes, which emphasised more on quantity or enrolment numbers, rather than the quality of training.”

The Foundation, however, continued to intensify quality of programmes. After a year of research which included primary and secondary data, and after engaging with hundreds of students, alumni, community members, employers and peer skilling agencies from seventy cities, it distilled inputs to shift from traditional domain-based skilling to core employability and technical skills.

“Now with unemployment becoming one of the biggest issues, DRF’s skilling is more relevant than ever,” he says, “With trainings that focus on Foundational skills for entry-level jobs and technical skills that are aligned to market needs, DRF is optimistic that it will be able to support young people to find their feet in a changing market or opt for self-employment.”

But times are changing, and what was important in ’96 may not be relevant in 2020. While DRF focuses on education & livelihoods, new approaches have been added to its portfolio. This has been done in the hope to keep pace with social and development issues. “Apart from ensuring the earlier programmes have new components and value-adds to keep pace with present needs — a good example is the shift from LABS to GROW in the livelihood skilling sector,” says Pranav, “Several new programmes like Aritra, which in partnership with IIM Bangalore, addresses the leadership gap in the development sector; MITRA works with farmers to build a lead farmer community to help farmers access agri-scientists and establish last-mile connectivity.”

In the last 20 years, DRF has focused on skilling and education. Internal evaluations based on research and market trends, however, highlighted the need for change and soon GROW was born. “Now in the COVID-19 scenario, DRF recognises the need to leverage digital platforms and so shifted gears to include digital classes in addition to the classroom model,” he says, “Similarly, DRF’s skilling modules for persons with disability (GROW PwD) is not just the largest skilling model for persons with disability in the country, but also among the very few, to offer digital courses for persons with disability by a not-for-profit.”

The Foundation’s MITRA programme is not limited to building a platform for farmers to resolve last minute connectivity issues but also, to link them with agri-scientists so that transfer of knowledge and hand-holding during crisis is available to address farmers’ needs.

“Our Sakshat programme supports girls from underprivileged backgrounds, is the only scholarship in the country, which offers mentorship to students by directly connecting them with some of the lead scientists in the country so that the girls are motivated to become scientists and researchers,” says Pranav. Another big contribution by DRF is Aritra. Designed in collaboration with IIM Bangalore, the programme has trained a hundred development sector workers to become visionaries, spearhead policies and address development needs.

“Our programmes have stood the test of time and a testimony to this is number of lives DRF has impacted,” Pranav says, “We have impacted 7.68 lakh young people, while another 2.4 million have benefitted indirectly.” DRF’s numbers are a testimony to its work. The Foundation recognises that addressing complex social problems has to be a collaborative effort.

To achieve this, DRF has worked with stakeholders to find solutions. Each of its programmes are “pressure tested”

and piloted before donors are invited to support the project. Unlike the routine practice of rolling out projects based on donor preferences, DRF has been open-minded, neutral and transparent, and is guided by the collective problem inquiry model, which in turn ensures programmes are need-based and sustainable in outcomes and financial viability. These programmes are scalable and ensure that communities benefit from it.

“We work across the country and have centres in 19 States,” says Pranav, “Expansion plans are need-based and while health and environment are two domains that have a high priority, the immediate focus is on expanding digital skilling for young people (including those with disabilities) diversifying healthcare skilling and agri-programmes to additional states with the help of partnership.”

It goes without saying that DRF’s priority now is to urgently address issues surrounding COVID-19, and keep pace with evolving needs. In line with the Foundations drive to be agile, learn, design and execute, DRF has shifted gears to factor in the “new normal”. In keeping with this, the Foundation has developed a COVID-19 Response Strategy, disseminated to ensure staff and stakeholders are on the same page. “Apart from emphasising on safety and well-being, all programmes have factored in new needs by ensuring online delivery models, which was possible because digitalization of programmes was in the pipeline and the team only had to advance the datelines to make it operational,” says Pranav

Recently the Foundation launched Project Samhita, to train community members on combating COVID-19. It hopes to impact 5,000 people in remote communities. In addition, DRF’s High Quality Healthcare Skilling Programme plans to include a component on infectious disease management as a value-add to present-day training.

7. Fairtrade

Enabling a Sustainable Planet



The devastation that climate change has unleashed on the already vulnerable small holder farming across the developing world, especially in India, is well documented. The crisis is too deep and it hurts women first - worst and hardest.

In the last decade I took Gandhian inspired walk across the world and particularly in India, in the Western Ghats – from the seashore of Bay of Bengal to the Blue Mountains of Ooty – walking along the plains of Tamil Nadu.

In all these walks I have spoken about the critical role of Fairtrade that goes a long way in supporting Adaptation to climate; recovering from Market injustices and providing sustainability for agriculture through Fairtrade.

I have now taken 3 crore steps and have met more than 340,000 people telling this story and influencing consumers, business, policy makers, schools and colleges.

I do my walks to demonstrate the urgency and the sufferings but do it with a message of hope, promise and possibilities that are real. Indeed, my next walk like all its previous ones are timed when world leaders meet for the Conference of parties (COP). At the time of COP 26, I am planning to walk from London to Glasgow and yet again my storyline is the same –“Fair trade offers a great and practical way for all”.

Fairtrade- enables sustainable planet. It transforms business which has only for-profit motive into agents of transformative and sustainable business.

Schools and colleges become front line agents of sustainable economy by talking about sustainable consumers who facilitate a fair agrarian landscape and also questioning: “Who made my food, clothes and things I use?” during the Fairtrade week organised in the country during November each year. In 2019, more than 13,000 school children participated, someone buys a Fairtrade cotton shirt every two minutes in India. That is the change happening in our country over the last 4 years.

Consumers are becoming powerful instruments of change in providing a way that is fair; sustainable and wholesome.

Every chocolate or Chikki that you chew; every t-shirt you buy; every cup of coffee or tea you drink will no longer contain elements of poverty and suffering. Instead, it will eliminate child labour; unfair wage and unhealthy condition to workers; reduce poisoning of the agriculture and provide a decent livelihood to farmers. In short, it is a fair economy that is sustainable.

From Airports to super markets in Metros – fair trade products are being sold in India and there are more than 2 lakh fair trade consumers in action.

For more fair-trade consumerism, we need every household; ward; Panchayat; towns and cities to be a fair-trade place. We urge you to join the global movement of creating Fairtrade towns.

Are you ready Chennai? Let us walk/talk and make a City that is fair.

Pushpanath Krishnamurthy

www.gopushgo.co.uk

<http://fairtradeindia.org/>

8. FORD INDIA

Ford's CSR Journey in India: Beyond Cheques and Charity



Ever since its foray into the Indian market, in the mid-1990s, the Ford Motor Company has stood out as a prime example of an automobile giant, leveraging the massive market for automobiles in India. In so far as that potential is concerned, the company has dug in deep into the manufacturing framework of the country, even as Ford's cars have the 'Made in India' stamped on them. What isn't as well-known about Ford and its Indian sojourn however, is its deep commitment to corporate social responsibility, specifically in states of Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.

"The biggest inspiration behind our efforts has been Ford's decades-old legacy of building strong communities wherever we do business," says Gazal Raina, Lead, Corporate Social Responsibility, Ford Motor Company, "From the beginning of our operations in India, the endeavour of all our projects has been towards empowering communities in areas related to Education, Health & Safety, Environment and Women Empowerment, with a strong focus on employee-volunteering and engagement."

Broadly, Ford has laid focus on three categories when it comes to CSR: education, women's empowerment and primary healthcare. But by its own admission, the company's focus is on 'enhancing school education', largely because it wants to use improve the Teaching-Learning process at schools for children, and create what Ford describes as a "future-ready world". It is the key to making lives for children and young adults better, thereby creating social change and building sustainable communities. All Ford projects are in rural and urban geographies that aim to provide holistic education to children studying in government-run schools.

Ford partners with multiple NGOs to create a social intervention model to address identified gaps in academics, health nutrition, infrastructure, teacher-training, learning methodology and girl-child education across primary and Secondary schools. It is heartening to see that the program has impacted the lives of children, especially girl children, across 50 government schools in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Gurgaon today. But the company's initiatives don't end here.

Ford's Women empowerment initiatives are conducted with the aim to allow girls create opportunities for a better future. Ford manages to pull this off by honing the talent of young girls, knowledge, skills and scholarships included, which in turn helps build confidence. Supporting their families and encouraging schools to provide a more nurturing environment helps a great deal. Ford employees also provide mentoring to the girls, helping them to tackle challenges and keeping them motivated. The program is currently running in Tamil Nadu.

While education and women empowerment are no doubt, two of Ford's strongest pillars, the company has also seen intervention in other areas that continue to remain

ever so important. Ford Driving Skill for Life or Cartesy program on Road Safety has educated more than 50,000 drivers about the importance of being safe while driving since 2009. Their employee and public service campaigns focus on improving road safety through making essential behavioral changes in drivers and pedestrians.

While a number of these initiatives have gone on to become the backbone of Ford's corporate social responsibility in India, they have all come with a fair share of challenges. Over the years, challenges like selecting the right partner identifying the scale of intervention, and identifying areas that require the most attention are some of the bigger challenges that the company has had to contend with. Finding projects that are sustainable and aim to create a long-term impact for the people, planet and communities is also a constant effort that Ford hope to get better at. Their endeavor is to empower than just merely fund.

Along the years, Ford has notched up many a milestone while working in each of these areas. On Community Life, Ford has been supporting a primary health care centre, Sanjeevi, in Chennai for 19 years. This programme has provided medical care to more than six lakh people in surrounding villages. Aside of medical care, the project has resulted in awareness camps courtesy of the primary healthcare centre, which has helped with community outreach. Ford's volunteers have actively participated in each of these camps.

Not to be forgotten, Ford's Digital Literacy programme, launched way back in 2007 has helped strengthen its resolve to provide access to computers and computer skills to thousands of youth who have been devoid of basic infrastructure and access to the same. The program has empowered close to 10 lakh people from diverse

communities across India and beyond — like in Sri Lanka — from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, by providing technology that is accessible and affordable.

Reiterating its commitment to holistic corporate social responsibility, Ford believes it is committed to more than just “cheques and charity”. “Whether we are providing scholarships for girls who aspire to study further or improve access for quality education and infrastructure or helping communities rebuild themselves in the wake of natural disasters, we aim to help people in need and strengthen communities to make people’s lives better,” says Gazal.

While public-private partnerships are crucial to doing quality CSR, the fact remains that a majority of Ford’s projects are carried out independently but with government support on the approval front. As the space of community work evolves, Ford ensures the model to be perfect for sustenance. This will also give companies the opportunity to do more across the spectrum.

Ford’s big CSR goal is to help make people’s lives better. Like its business, where Ford aspires to create more future ready vehicles for the world, the company wants to focus on not just solving the current societal challenges but participating in predicting what can create a better world. However, this has to be done in line with the changing times. The enthusiasm of the Millennial generation is creating a new movement toward social entrepreneurship. Millennials want to invest time and money in causes they can personally lead or be involved in. They want to take on age-old problems in new ways. That is where Ford looks to expand beyond, to find new ways and new areas to make an impact.

9. Information and Communication Technology

Technology

Leading Change in Uncertain Times



Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become an integral part of society and is here to stay. Although mobile phones and internet access have reached into the remote corners of the country, there is still a huge gap in how people access necessary information. Recognising this, Change Initiatives, a Kolkata-based NGO have designed their programmes around widening access and training in ICT tools, with a gender-equity focus. We spoke with Suryatirtha Ray, Co-founder of Change Initiatives to learn more about their work.

Ray and his wife, Jhumpa Ghosh, started Change Initiatives in the year 2002. With him being a media professional and her being a community-mobilizer, they resolved to take technology to the grassroots and build solutions to the most pressing problems of the day. Says Ray, “18 years ago it became very apparent that everyone must know to use computers, else they would fall to the back of the line

in terms of opportunities. Today there is so much digital content available, we feel that everyone should be able to access it.”

In the early years, with the support of UNESCO, Change Initiatives established three ICT centres in rural West Bengal, in the North 24 Parganas district. There they trained local women to search for and gather information on health and livelihoods. They developed a local information network whereby the women would be able to access the computers and internet services for free at these centres, and in turn go back to their communities and disseminate information so obtained. This project turned out to be hugely successful, winning the top prize at the World Summit on the Information Society held at Geneva. Their work was also cited by the prestigious media arts competition, Prix Ars Electronica.

Next was a multi-stakeholder project called Tele-support which involved two-way knowledge sharing through the internet between farmers in Kerala and West Bengal and agricultural experts and knowledge hubs in the India, UK and the Netherlands. The project was supported by the European Union. Change Initiatives also did a project called More and Better ICT-based enterprises in collaboration with the University of Manchester with the support of DFID — in which ICT-based enterprises for women were incubated. A Government of India project called K-yan in collaboration with ILFS Education & Technology Services was also launched. “K-yan is a computer with an inbuilt-monitor that allows learning content be shown magnified on any large surface such as village wall. K-yan is used in more than 200 schools in West Bengal and Assam. Entrepreneurship development programmes and training for BSNL Gram Seva Kendras in West Bengal and Sikkim was also coordinated,” says Ray.

“Overtime, we realized that something had to be done for the recurring issues in the communities we were working with,” says Ray. Things that came up were: after-school support and remedial classes for school children in Nadia District, located 65-70 kms away from Kolkata. “These children were severely lacking in access to extra-curricular activities such as dance, music and drama, so such sessions were also held in these villages to help nurture their creativity. An interesting project we did was ‘School In a Bus’ with the Sarva Shiksha Mission where a passenger bus was turned into a mobile classroom and taken to five slums in West Bengal. In addition, we did lots of environment awareness programmes against use of plastic bags of less than 40-micron thinness, sound pollution during Diwali, disaster management workshops in schools, campaign against Ganga pollution,” he adds.

Four years ago, in accordance with the National Digital Literacy Mission, and in partnership with Cap Gemini, a Digital Inclusion training programme was begun. In the slum areas surrounding Kolkata, Change Initiatives conducted a 20-hour digital literacy training on how to access social media (Facebook, WhatsApp) and e-services such as booking railway tickets, filling out job applications, college admissions online along with writing e-mails. The training also encompassed mobile literacy on how to use apps and how to communicate through WhatsApp including one’s business needs. More than 5,000 individuals were trained in digital literacy through this program. Change Initiatives was even recognized by Cap Gemini with an award for Fastest Implementation of a Development Programme. The programme runs on a Hub-And-Spoke Model, where a main center offers training to various community institutions such as schools, clubs, municipalities etc.

The most recent programme of Change Initiatives is “Women In Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Studies have shown women taking up courses in STEM subjects not pursuing their studies at post graduate level or taking up STEM careers because of societal pressures which consider STEM careers as too demanding for women who will also have to run a family. This despite the fact STEM careers offers a higher pay than other professions. Together with the American Centre of Kolkata, Change Initiatives has designed a mentorship program for women STEM students of local colleges. The students are handpicked through a rigorous selection process over a two-month period. They are then mentored by experts on career pathways, leadership development, gender and reliance,” says Ray.

“There are two kinds of speakers at our programmes,” explains Ray, “Those who are very well established and highly successful, and those who have just started out. While the former can be inspiring to our students, the latter provide a sort of peer-to-peer connect that is so important. This program has since expanded to cover colleges in Guwahati as well, besides Kolkata,” he adds.

Due to the pandemic, initially the Digital Literacy Centre in Kolkata had to be closed, and the Women in STEM programme in Guwahati had to be put off for some time. However, the organization quickly rose to the occasion and started distributing relief materials across six districts in West Bengal and to 15,000 people.

Ray says, “In West Bengal the challenges of the lockdown intensified after the devastating cyclone Amphan. The amount of destruction caused by this cyclone is unprecedented. Most significantly, several million trees have been uprooted all around West Bengal, particularly

the mangrove forests of Sunderbans which is a global bio-diversity hotspot. We will plant 50,000 saplings by October with geo-tagging. In our Covid-relief work we have reached out to some of the more marginalized groups in society, including sex workers and LGBT community. An online drama festival was organized in the US and the proceeds were used to meet the needs of theatre staff who found themselves out of work during the pandemic.”

Due to their relief work, Change Initiatives has gained more visibility in recent times. Ray says that there have been some silver linings to this pandemic situation. Our STEM sessions with the Guwahati students are going on in full swing through the webinar route. We are hopeful things will improve by the end of the year and we will be in a position to do some sessions in the Guwahati colleges. The goodwill that we have generated through our relief work means many local communities have invited us to set up digital learning centres. We plan to set up 4-5 centres. We have already set up one centre in South 24 Parganas where the classes are taking place observing full social distancing protocols. We are hopeful of our Kolkata main centre opening up after the Durga Pujas in October.

When asked what are some of their key-takeaways in their journey so far and what his vision for the future is, Ray says, “There has been a lot of learning especially in the past five to six years for us. We are taking an evidence-based approach to poverty-alleviation, and applying Behavioral Economics theories to finding solutions. We see ourselves implementing projects at a huge but sustainable scale. We are currently a grant-based organization. We would like to become more entrepreneurial, with a risk-return framework.”

Archanaa Ramesh

10. Isha Vidhya

Grow to Learn



Poverty has been the one big impediment that the Indian growth story has been afflicted with despite major progress in the last couple of decades. However things are set to change, especially given that rural education, empowerment and contribution to the country's development are areas that are seeing much focus since some time now.

“Most children in rural areas can only afford Government run schools”, says Prabhu Loganathan, Senior Fund Raising Coordinator, Isha Vidhya. “With these schools lacking basic facilities, facing teacher shortage, having unmotivated or frequently absent teachers and a pedagogy heavily focused on exams through rote memorisation (rather than learning), even those who eventually make it through twelve years of school, lack basic skills, making it difficult for them to seek gainful employment or pursue higher education.”

In fact, the 2019 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) revealed several unenviable realities of the nation's education system: it said that 68 % of rural students in Class 3 in Tamil Nadu are unable to read text books at the required level. It also revealed that 66 % of these students cannot perform double-digit addition, and 81%, double-digit subtraction.

Thankfully, most of that is set to change in the context of Isha Vidhya's initiatives in academics. "Isha Vidhya's English medium schools open the door for rural children to prepare for higher studies and to join the workforce," he says adding that "The holistic, activity-based approach of Isha Vidhya's educational system nurtures children's development beyond just academics, ensuring that students realize their full potential and learn in a joyful manner."

In a nutshell, Isha Vidhya provides to children from rural areas, high quality school education, affording or accessing which, would be impossible on their own. The organization is also making commendable progress in upgrading teaching methodologies in Government run schools, having adopted close to thirty-four of them in Coimbatore, Tirupur, Salem and Kanchipuram districts.

Various initiatives have been started to improve the quality of education in these schools. The Government has created the school infrastructure. Isha Vidhya's experience can be leveraged to transform the methodology and teaching environment in these schools. This includes hiring of extra teaching hands to help slow learners who constitute nearly 20 to 25 percent of the total strength of a class.

These teachers are trained and equipped with learning aids, worksheets, etc. The classes happen simultaneously with the main classes and are held in extra classrooms or

corridors, thus helping the slow learners learn at their own pace and get mainstreamed over a period of time.

A programme titled ‘Special English’, a language intervention (more commonly and fondly called ‘Magic English’) has been designed to teach English more effectively, and is supported by and implemented in each school. This program is extended to all children of classes 6 to 8 and will help them become confident in English comprehension, reading and speaking.

A child’s holistic development through sports, yoga, arts, craft, health and environmental education, along with career guidance programmes, results in a school experience that is interesting and fully engaging. Above all, it impacts multiple variables crucial for all-round development in the formative years, and facilitates the natural blossoming of potential.

“Even nominal fees are too much for some rural families. Recognizing this challenge, Isha Vidhya provides scholarships which cover students’ tuition fee, notebooks and textbooks,” says Prabhu, “This empowers children who would otherwise only be able to study in Government run schools, to get high quality education in Isha Vidhya schools.”

An Isha Vidhya programme that has won acclaim from far and wide, is its Scholarship initiative. Scholarships and fee subsidies are provided to deserving students, selected through a comprehensive allocation process that makes sure that only students truly in need receive this help. Sponsors are matched with specific students and receive regular updates with photographs, letters and progress reports. The sponsor is encouraged to support a student through the entire tenure of education at Isha Vidhya.

The NGO has sought contributions from citizens to be able to continue making quality education available to students from rural India. Today there are ten rural schools in the districts of Coimbatore, Erode, Nagercoil, Tuticorin, Villupuram, Salem, Cuddalore, Dharmapuri and Karur in Tamil Nadu, and in the Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh. The first seven schools currently have classes from Kindergarten to Class 12, while the Chittoor School, which started in June 2012, and Dharmapuri, which started in 2013-14, have classes from LKG to Classes 10 and 11 respectively. Karur School, which started in June 2019, has classes from LKG to Class 6. The schools have a total of 8,523 students, many of who are first-generation learners from financially disadvantaged homes. About 60 percent are supported on full scholarship, while the remaining pay a nominal fee.

As part of its expansion strategy, Isha Vidhya is looking to boost its presence in other districts within Tamil Nadu, subject to funds coming through and being allotted for capital expenditure and corpus fund for scholarship support for 10 years, which several corporate entities and philanthropists can commit to. There is no plan as of now to open schools in other states, due to limited bandwidth.

“Despite the success of increased enrolment in Govt. schools, we see absence of quality education in the villages,” says Prabhu, “We are hardly seeing progress in this area, nor is there any progress towards digital learning.” However, given the current challenge with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, that could soon change too, especially given the focus on digital learning. “Post COVID-19, there will be more focus on digital learning, and we should be equipped to provide infrastructure like student tablets with internet connections, to cope with the situation,” says Prabhu, “We continue looking forward to forging new partnerships.”

11. Jaipur Rugs Foundation

The Artisan's Touch



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.

12. Lotus Petal Foundation

Adapting to Excel



Since its inception, Lotus Petal Foundation has benefited the lives of 12,000 children and other people through various programs. The Sahyog Project has undoubtedly been one of the foundation's most successful ones till date. The organization has taken up the initiative of adopting government schools and giving their facilities an updatation. "Under Project Sahyog we upgrade the infrastructure of government schools in terms of classrooms, toilets, drinking water, lights, fans, computer labs, STEM labs and provide teachers based on the teaching gaps of the students. We also deploy permanent housekeeping staff," says Kushal Raj Chakravorty – Founder & Managing Trustee Lotus Petal Foundation, "We have adopted two government middle schools in Haryana. We plan to extend this programme to over a hundred schools. This will have an impact on over 10,000 students, in total."

The onset of the pandemic forced Lotus Petal Foundation to adapt, and adapt well. "The pandemic came as a serious

disruption to the academic and extracurricular activities of Lotus Petal. Being a non-profit we were especially taken aback by the situation. However, we had invested in technological advancements by way of a digital learning platform for students which we had started using three years ago, which we then remodeled to an online learning platform,” says the founder of the organization.

What ensued was a challenging transformation from textbooks to digital learning platforms. While the transition was particularly grueling on those running the show, generous aid from donors helped ease the burden on Lotus Petal Foundation.

“Although difficult, we transitioned the entire academic set up to the online platform. Seeking help from our donors, we supplied our children with tablets, refurbished laptops and desktops,” Kushal adds, “We provided data packs and headphones. Today, we have reached a point in our school where classes, workshops, seminars are all held with regularity online. We have also conducted inter-house competitions and various celebrations online with great success.”

Lotus Petal Foundation’s ability to go digital has been aided by the foresight to invest into technology at earlier times.

“In 2016 we partnered with the Government’s National Digital Literacy Mission. All the rules mandated by them were followed in our efforts towards digital literacy,” says Kushal. “Over 1000 people have benefitted from the efforts of Lotus Petal and are now digitally literate. In the current circumstances it is more important than ever to have at least basic digital knowledge, in this way, our partnership has been extremely fruitful.”

Given the circumstances the organization has been confronted with, it comes as no surprise that Lotus Petal Foundation has attached a high value to health and wellbeing. Hence, the pre-existing project focused on boosting basic health and immunity was more valuable than ever.

“Arogya Wellness is the programme which measures the health status of our children. The objective of this programme is to create a foundation of basic health and immunity. Under Aarogya, we provide freshly cooked breakfast and lunch every day. Also, students learn to grow their own food, make a compost pit and understand the nuances of gardening through the in-house urban farm. This creates an interest in nutrition and enables them to make better food choices,” explains Kushal.

The organization maintains a detailed list of the health parameters of each child. Kushal conveys “Benefits of the food and nutrition programmes have been evident with slow but steady improvement in the nutritional status of the children, regular checkups by a doctor who would visit the campus for a weekly OPD were a norm. Now, with the pandemic raging, the health parameters are chronicled online. Under our nutrition and food programmes, we have served 6.66 lakh meals till date.”

Providing relief during COVID-19 is high on the priority list of Lotus Petal Foundation. “Our short-term goals are all aspects of relief work during the pandemic. In this crisis we started our community feeding programme, helped migrant workers in nearby areas and distributed PPE kits to various hospitals.”

“Retention of students was the goal behind the transition to online school so that our children’s education remains uninterrupted,” says Kushal, “We are assisting with our

programmes like Blue Khoj where we provide jobs to the parents of our school children who lost their job during this pandemic. This will help them rebuild their households which have been detrimentally affected by the pandemic.”

There are long-term goals too like the plan to achieve transformation in the lives of children through education, equal opportunity and exemplary academics. “Not to forget nutritious meals, free healthcare and skill development to the children of the urban poor in India,” adds Kushal, “Provision of an ecosystem for people all across the world to contribute towards the cause of education with their skills, time and money is equally important.”

At the end of it all, the organization is aiming to build new modules of education and skill development, even as it hopes to expand its beneficiary base by ten-fold. This could help Lotus Petal Foundation reach as many children as possible, which could well end up being a glowing testament to the work it has done.

13. Mantra for change and Suriya Foundation

Unsung Heroes- Volunteers Helps Frontline Workers and Downtrodden.



The COVID-19 preventive lockdown has put a halt to the normal routine and changed the life of every individual in the country. While the intention of the lockdown is to fight the unprecedented pandemic, it has in many ways lead to unending number of problems to the underprivileged, daily wage workers and migrant labourers. Families belonging to economically weaker sections of society are struggling to fend for themselves and even to have access to one square meal a day. Mantra4change and Suriya Foundation, based in Bengaluru, have worked individually in addressing the issue of poor quality of education.

Mantra4change

Mantra4change has a team size of 44 and partnered with 88 schools. Their aim is to improve and introduce innovative methods of education in every school. They have also partnered with non-profits like Teach for India and Advait foundation.

Mantra4change is a well-funded organisation, and the funds were majorly used in improving education and teaching facilities until COVID-19. When the organisation learnt about the distress and hardship the poor were facing due to the lockdown, Mantra4change decided to use their resources to help those in need.

Suriya Foundation

Suriya Foundation focuses on providing quality education to the poor and needy in Bengaluru. They also assist visually-challenged children who otherwise find it difficult to cope in normal method of schooling.

Puneeth, Co- Founder of Surya Foundation along with 30 volunteers, Indian Red Cross society and other Government agencies volunteered during COVID- 19 lockdown to support the vulnerable.

The Beginning

When Puneet shared photos of his volunteering work with Suriya Foundation, they offered to jointly coordinate the COVID-19 relief efforts. Since then, both Mantra4change and Suriya Foundation have been actively helping the vulnerable resolve the issues they were facing during the lockdown period.

Mantra4change started out as a 30-member volunteer group. They joined the war room set up by DIPR (Department of Information and Public Relation) to plan out the process, along with Suriya foundation.

During lockdown 1.0, when all the economic activities came to a standstill, affecting the poorer section of our society, which includes daily wage labourers, auto drivers

and factory workers who were dependent on their day-to-day income for survival.

Volunteering

Mantra4change focused on providing food grains and ration kits to stranded labourers and their families who were not covered under India's Public distribution System (PDS). With the help of Government and corporation officials, they also identified families who needed immediate supply of basic essentials like food and water. They also supported COVID-19 designated hospitals, quarantine centres, isolation wards and frontline warriors by supplying necessary medical equipment, PPE kits, sanitizers, Infrared thermometers and masks.

At a point, when the entire police force was working tirelessly for the proper implementation of the lockdown, the volunteers lent a helping hand to hospitals and assisted in distribution of relief materials.

In due time, Mantra4change became volunteers of the government, and obtained permission to move across Karnataka to distribute essential supplies to people living in interior parts of the state, where supply of basic products had been cut off.

They tied up with the local authorities in setting up of isolation wards, where they contributed beds, masks and other items that were provided by the government.

In lockdown 3.0, migrant workers who were stranded all over the country were allowed to finally travel back to their home towns by the Shramik trains arranged by the Railway ministry with the Government order. The process

of identifying migrant labourers and registering them involved lot of paper work and was time consuming.

Puneet and his volunteers assisted Mantra4change and also arranged food and water for the labourers who had to travel for one and a half days.

Puneeth says, “We have to continue doing what we have been doing so far, even after the lockdown is lifted, as COVID-19 cases are increasing day by day. The economy is also going down, and with many people hospitalised and increase in requirement for beds, we will have to keep helping out hospitals and quarantine centres.”

Currently, part of Home Quarantine squad, formed by the Corporation of Bengaluru, are setting up COVID care centres by converting wedding halls provided by the government into a complete hospital infrastructure.

Puneeth adds, “We have 61 volunteers now and are doing our best. We have now started with contactless testing of patients, to make the COVID-19 testing process safer. We are also refurnishing the hospital in Anekal so that residents in that district can get proper treatment. We hope to continue volunteering and helping people.”

Aatika Kouser

14. Pranyas Development Foundation

Mission: Woman and Child



Child development is a key pillar of human resource development, and Pranyas for one believes that it is the domain that “holds that key to the future.” Therein lies the organization’s aim to educate and groom children into good human beings, supporting them until they start earning so as to enable them to support their families.

“By providing necessary resources to underprivileged kids, to be able to complete like a normal kid and chase their dreams, we are shaping our future,” says Rahul Sharma, Founder-Director, Pranyas. The road to this approach however, has been quite painstaking even as it involved a great deal of study and research. “We conducted various surveys in various cities to get to know the exact problem on which we have to work on,” Rahul adds, “Even when we finalized to work on child development we continued our regular surveys to pinpoint the root cause of the problem.”

Through this study, the one conclusion that the team at Pranyas chanced upon was that child development and women empowerment had to go hand in hand. “We

conducted surveys to understand issues that a girl routinely faces,” says Rahul, “We did this survey among different age groups and different work cultures and regions.”

One of the main issues that cropped up was that of sexual harassment. The team is working on a seven-phase model that will go LIVE in due course. However, through its child development project, Pranyas has benefited 300 children through career counselling camps in Bilaspur and Indore, 500 through awareness and medical camps across Delhi, Gwalior, Bangalore and Mumbai to name a few cities, and 239 children across the country thanks to Pranyas shouldering the responsibility of their education.

Nearly 400 girls and women were benefited through awareness and medical camps across Delhi and Gwalior, 50 of whom benefited thanks to legal aid. Pranyas’ HOPE model has brought it the most success. “HOPE is an initiative designed for children having fewer opportunities like financial strain, lack of resources, and is motivated towards education,” says Rahul, “In this programme, we form a group of 20 people and that group will take responsibility for the child’s education and his/her amenities. This model is designed to aim for the amount which does not affect anyone’s livelihood but can start the education of one kid when collected at a single place.”

A donation of Rs 100 per month enables an individual to shoulder a child’s educational responsibilities, post-which they receive details of the children and their family that are being sponsored. These numbers have only grown — from 21 children in 2018-19 to 208 children and counting in 2020-21.

“Through this initiative, we take complete educational responsibility of kids whose

Families don't educate their female children," says Rahul, "Families often get their kids into child labour educational expenses or because families are deceased or are simply just poor." However, Pranyas through the initiative and a contribution of Rs 100 per donor takes care of school fees, stationery and uniform expenses and medical check-ups for a child, among other initiatives. This includes mentoring and extracurricular activities too. "During the Lockdown and due to the ongoing pandemic, many underprivileged people faced possible homelessness since their homeowners began asking them to vacate their houses," says Rahul, "Daily wage earners lost their jobs and were unable to pay up. We at Pranyas formed a team of lawyers and worked on such complaints and tried to provide as much relief as we could."

But that's not all that the organization is doing to fight COVID-19. "In our ongoing and upcoming nationwide fight against Coronavirus, we are distributing 10,000 PPE kits to doctors across India, and 5,000 masks and face shields to frontline warriors across India," he adds.

This initiative has slowly but surely begun garnering support of eight IIMs, seven IITs, 2 BITS and three prestigious colleges, according to Rahul. "The uniqueness of this initiative is that for the first time in history, social clubs of many IITs and IIMs are supporting a common cause and taking unanimous effort."

Some of Pranyas' short term goals include targeting to adopt 35 slums, and take complete responsibility of nearly 30,000 children, and set up a library in 50 slums or villages by the end of 2022. This will be flanked by the organization's efforts to build an on-ground legal support system for women in 50 cities, to fight sexual harassment by the end of 2022.

The more ambitious and long-term goals of Pranyas are more impressive. “We are targeting to take complete educational responsibility of nearly one million children across the globe by the end of 2030,” says Rahul, “We also hope to build an on-ground legal system for women in 10 countries, to fight sexual harassment by 2030.”

The NGO will also launch a women safety device by the end of 2025, so as to ensure that women stay safe from any form of sexual harassment at the workplace, home, educational institution, public spaces and public transport.

15. Rotary in India

A Hundred Years and Counting!



It was Mahatma Gandhi who once said that “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” Service organisations have for long played a very supportive role in helping Governments enable people to uplift themselves in a variety of ways. One of the oldest service organisations in the world is the Rotary .

And it was roughly a 100 years ago that International Organization Rotary came to India with the first club in Calcutta. The Rotary club of Calcutta started in Sept 1919, received its charter on 1st Jan 1920. It was organised by R J Coombes, an Englishman introduced to Rotary while on a business trip to Michigan. It had all white members until 1921 when the first Indian member was admitted.

At its inception it was the only Rotary club between the English Channel and the South China Sea with two others in Asia -Manila and Shanghai being installed a few months

later but having to suspend operations due to the World War II and other reasons.

The Rotary movement was incidentally founded by a young law graduate of the Iowa Law school named Paul Harris who was feeling lonely and bereft of like-minded friends for company in the USA's second largest city of Chicago (fourteen years before that). This prompted him to get three of his clients to meet with him and together they brainstormed and mooted the idea of a club where they could meet with one another in friendship and service.

One of the reasons the movement was called Rotary was because in the early years they met by turns in each other's place of work. The initial four grew to 200 in three years and from America it spread to Canada, Ireland, England and Scotland. It officially acquired the "International" tag in 1922. Incidentally during World War II Rotarians in England held a conference on education and cultural exchange and sowed the seeds for UNESCO.

Harking back to India and Calcutta where Rotary's initial footprint was marked - from Calcutta the Rotary movement spread to other parts of India like Lahore, Bombay and Madras. The Rotary Club of Bombay and Madras (port cities) was founded due to the initiative of the inveterate traveler and Rotarian James Wheeler Davidson(Jim Davidson) and his travelogue writer wife Lillian author of "Making new friends" almost a decade after the Rotary club of Calcutta. Davidson was earlier a reporter for the New York Herald. Apart from being part of an expedition to the North Pole he had covered wars as a reporter and clocked many miles to establish Rotary clubs between Europe and Asia.

It was also Jim Davidson who encouraged clubs to include among their members local leaders and not have only

expats in its fold. (Membership in a Rotary club is always by invitation.)

From stoutly opposing the entry of women until the late 1980s the Rotary movement now boasts of approximately 10% women members. This is apart from the Inner Wheel for the lady spouses of male Rotarians. In addition there are Interact clubs for school students and Rotaract clubs for college students and community based ones which strengthen the hands of Rotary members.

Rotary has wonderful systems in place for its administration and efficient running -not to forget many admirable lessons to offer for service organisations. Its official mottoes “Service above self” and “He who profits most who serves best” are pithy slogans that can serve as a guide post for all those engaged in welfare and service work.

It’s Four-way test – a crisp four- point touch stone which reads “Of all the things we say and do - Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?” is a litmus test that people from all walks of life can apply to each of their actions.

From the first rest room project (called comfort stations back then) to working to eradicate debilitating diseases like polio and measles and pitching in during calamities like floods, earthquakes, tsunamis and creating awareness about road safety, child sexual abuse, malnutrition, avoidable blindness , environment protection and the like , Rotary’s service projects run the entire gamut and cover a wide swathe that includes education, health and environment among other areas. In recent times the organisation has worked in partnership with NGOs and social entrepreneurs who have a good connect with the local populace and supported them

with funding and by providing infrastructure for many socially relevant projects . It has certainly been a win-win for both.

For an organisation to survive 100 years in a country like ours is no mean feat. And Indian Rotarians have also occupied high offices at the International level - Nitish Laharry the Calcutta club's first Indian Secretary went on to become the first Indian to hold office as Rotary International President followed by others like Raja Saboo, Kalyan Banerjee and K.R.Ravindran.

Today there are over 3000 Rotary clubs across the length and breadth of India doing significant work. That the organisation has stood the test of time, embraced change and adapted itself to a changing world is truly remarkable.

When service is the motive this perhaps becomes a little easier.

Sudha Umashanker

16. Runner's High

Running for a Cause



People around the world are not active enough and Indians more so. Insufficient physical activity is a risk factor for non- communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer, stroke, cardio vascular diseases and obesity. With nearly 60% of the world population between age group 18 and 60, the inadequate physical activity puts the health of the majority at great risk.

Runner's High is a Bangalore based organisation started over a decade ago by Santhosh Padmanabhan with the goal of bringing running and fitness sport to everyone in the community irrespective of their background, and to help them reach their true potential through sports.

Education for children is perceived in a narrow fashion as academics and specialised technical training that's not hands-on. Hence to break the trend and open everyone's mind to a different perspective, Runner's High began with the aim to open up a different world of learning for the child by the alternate method of running and sports, which breaks

the notion of restricted area, physically or mentally where the child should learn.

Santhosh was always enthusiastic about athletics, and practiced long distance running during his school days. He completed engineering at National Institute of Technology, Warangal and went to the US for masters. He volunteered for Asha for Education in the US and during his breaks used to visit the NGO partners in India. As he got more involved and understood the ground realities, their fund raising efforts in the US needed more impetus. The team decided to raise funds by running marathons and that's when he got involved in long distance running again and this time for a cause.

In 2008, Santhosh returned back to India for good. Thulir (Post School Learning Centre) was an initiative in a tribal village in Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu that he had fundraised for many years. Thulir helped the local children who were struggling with the normal curriculum, failed in exams and dropped out of schools. During his many visits to Thulir, he realized the children had immense talent and enthusiasm. He felt physical activity could be a potent way of educating and building their self- esteem, but he felt most Indian schools hardly have any space for sports. So he decided to leverage his expertise in running and passion for education of the disadvantaged. He started training children from various disadvantaged backgrounds and initiatives. He realized that in order to sustain his initiatives financial income was necessary and the idea of coaching people aspiring to run long distances for a fee came about. This is how Runner's High came into being. Runner's High functions as a social enterprise with volunteers from the community coming forward to support all initiatives. The community adopts running as part of their life. They initially join for personal benefits of health and fitness, and soon realise there is a larger

meaning to their running and community. The runners contribute time, efforts and money towards the charitable initiatives. They have runners as young as 4 years and up to the age of 80, and 10000+ runners since its inception. In 2013, they started a training program for children and staff at Shristi Special Academy, Bangalore. The participants included children with autism, Downs syndrome, mental retardation, Physiotherapists, Special Educators and parents trained under the guidance of Runner's High. The group started training with small distances and getting used to the new physical activity. After the training, the Special Educators and Physiotherapists saw significant changes in the confidence levels, social interaction and self-expression. The program was then expanded to many more special schools in Bengaluru.

Santhosh says, "My experience in working with these different schools enabled me to crystallize better my ideas about teaching and learning, as I was getting more involved with the curriculum of these schools". He also started coaching children in Snehadaan, an NGO that provides shelter, education and medical care to children and people with HIV, and at Ananya - an initiative that works with urban poor and disadvantaged, he became a teacher, handling many roles.

The volunteers at Runner's High also got involved in various activities in these schools, some volunteered as teachers, helped in running of schools, Doctors conducted free health check-ups, and some developed life skill programs to prepare the children for the professional world. While some gave entrepreneurship lessons to the youth so that they could later start their own business.

Most members contribute money to help these schools. Some have spent time with the children and contributed

through skills and passions, finding it to be a fulfilling experience for both runners and the children.

Over the years, Runner's High has come a long way with children trained by them representing Karnataka, and later India in the Special Olympics. The children trained by Runners High are now confident adults, continuing their running and have taken up careers as physical fitness coaches, life skill instructors, gym trainers, dancers and karate instructors, etc.

Santhosh added, "We need to accept that we are currently in an environmental and socio-cultural crisis. Wherever possible we should strive to do less harm to the environment, constantly re-evaluating and improving our processes and systems. Our actions should strive to improve the well-being of every individual in the community and assist in their quest for realizing their true potential - be it in terms of health, education or any experience in life. As part of this effort we all have to start with our own well-being and fitness. Starting from the food we eat, learning where it comes from, supporting our farmers, being physically active, ensuring proper health care systems with a focus on prevention, ensuring proper disposal of our waste and its effects on us – All of these are aspects that we can bring a change in. We need to change and also create awareness and convince more of our community. We should never shy away from that responsibility."

Aatika Kouser

17. Sakhi for life

Customising Care



Society and its norms prepare an individual to plan his or her life after retirement. Such thoughts have built a strong foundation for insurance business. However, families are seldom prepared or groomed to plan their growth with their ageing members. Liberalisation, urbanisation, increased job opportunities for men and women have had a lasting impact on the care for elderly, who are left to take care of themselves. “While young, couples may aspire to do many things in old age. But the fact is, ageing also brings in natural degeneration of bodily functions and pertinent challenges are a real concern. Elders need support round the clock and this responsibility has, traditionally, rested with their children,” says Ms. Suchint Murali, Co-Founder of Sakhi4life in Chennai.

Personal experiences forced Suchint to think about elderly parents, whose children for different reasons, did not live with them. “I began to seriously think about elders whose children have migrated to different places due to job

demands. Can someone provide the complete spectrum of services this heterogeneous population requires? I was enthused by the need for such an enterprise and the market potential,” she remarks. Suchint left her 28 years long corporate career to do something different. For the passionate driver she is, Suchint also tried to register with Uber to drive women and children to workplaces and schools. “My parents’ health issues and the introspection thereafter led me to work on Sakhi4life,” she adds.

Sakhi4life was incorporated as a company in December 2019 and today the client base consists of 30 customers, most of whom are over 80 years of age. Sakhi4life provides a wide range of services to help the elderly feel safe, connected, supported and empowered. “Empowerment is a very strong feeling, especially in old age. With little support, when they are able to do what they wish to do, they feel delighted. Many families are unable to provide this little support for elders,” says Suchint. The spectrum of services offered by Sakhi4life include health care assistance (diagnosis, home nursing, delivering medicines, record maintenance, managing doctor appointments, pick up and drop services for hospital appointments, etc.), daily care (installations and repairs, arranging domestic help, routine grocery/provision shopping, training in use of internet and smart devices, laundry services, pest control, etc.), payment care (paying utility bills and managing medical emergency fund), emergency care assistance (medical and non-medical), leisure care (organising family events, library/temple visits, other wellness activities as desired) and other care services like banking, property management, religious needs, passport/visa/ticketing services, etc.

Quite comprehensive it sounds. “All for the sake of our clients. We wish to support them with anything they need. One of our clients was unable to comprehend the fraud with duplicate share certificates for his shares in a company. His son lived

abroad, and we attended to that. Elderly is a heterogeneous population and we better be prepared to handle every type of their need. We also have clients who just need some company to talk to over a walk. Our counsellors fill the shoes. By doing so we do not intend to replace any family member. The idea is to make things easier for elders. We have another client who suffers from dementia. The time that our counsellor spends with her is the only time during the day her daughter gets to manage household work and her kid's study," shares Suchint.

So how easy has it been for her clients to accept Sakhi4life? She smiles wryly. Suchint understands that trust is a very critical factor here. Old age is difficult and accepting this is a necessary precursor to be able to consider such services. While children of elders feel happy that Sakhi4life is here, elders do not accept them easily. "While some feel grateful for our presence, there are also others who do not relate to our services yet. We literally take over the house in some cases. We understand it is a big step for families, but the reality is, we are at your service. We are just a call away whenever you need us," she assures, adding that her office in Alwarpet is equipped to handle calls 24 by 7.

Suchint also feels that the trust factor is the reason why newspaper commercials may not help them in reaching out to a wider clientele, in spite of the huge untapped market in the city. Online marketing worked for them as friends and family shared their details with others whom they felt might benefit from Sakhi4life's services. Such references soon followed by references by clients and that made a lot of difference. "Service users are the best medium to market our services and they do so without being told to do so. This chain of communication happens only because there is need. There are elders out there who need support of Sakhi4life. We are just a call away," she smiles reassuringly.

18. Sarthak Prayas

Towards a Better Future



Education is one of the important parts of a child's life to live with happiness and prosperity since it empowers minds that conceive good thoughts and ideas

Our mission is to create the largest human chain of emergency blood donors in India and open a hundred centers for remedial education and ten homes for the aged in North India by 2023.

Not unlike most other NGOs, Sarthak Prayas started in 2003 with the aim of uplifting the underprivileged. Over the course of time, the organization's focus and priorities have evolved and changed with the times. Today, Sarthak Prayas is focused on building a network of blood donors, has prioritized providing quality education to children from slums, shelter the abandoned and care for the environment.

“It has been our plan and part of our mission to build the largest human chain of voluntary blood donors who are

ready to donate blood in emergency,” says Harsh Arora, Founder, Sarthak Prayas, “Our mission is that nobody should die because of shortage of blood. To provide good-quality education to slum kids and build their foundation strong has been another pillar of our mission since we wish to make these children on par with current learning standard with good moral values, personality and education.”

Providing a safe and secure home to needy and abandoned senior citizens and spreading awareness about environment education and ensuring protection of environment through plantation activities have been other activities that Sarthak Prayas has embarked on.

“We have kick-started the distribution of monthly ration to more than 1,000 senior citizens up until date and have extended this to more than 5,000 families during the pandemic,” says Harsh, “Running a free home for the aged in the last five years has also created a positive impact in the lives of our elderly.”

Through all these initiatives, it's the organization's Blood-Donation campaign that has truly stood out as its most significant work, yet. “We receive approximate 200 calls every month for blood help from needy patients & hospitals,” says Harsh, “For the last 17 years we have impacted more than 40,000 people in need of blood.”

While education has also been a key activity at Sarthak Prayas, the fact that Sarthak Prayas has created a difference in the lives of over 2,000 children by providing quality education to them, is worthy of mention. The NGO is now contemplating prospects of expansion across the country, especially in line with its mission to build a network of blood donors and expand its presence of homes for the aged. “Our mission is to create the largest human chain

of emergency blood donors in India and open a hundred centers for remedial education and ten homes for the aged in North India by 2023,” says Harsh. Up until date, the organization has helped over 100 elderly people in need of shelter.

According to its website, Sarthak Prayas runs remedial education centers where students from government schools attend classes every day to improve their knowledge. They also impart life skills and teach them how to deal with real life situations. The organization runs many centers in Delhi/NCR with 40 students studying in each center. Since the children are from an impoverished background, the organization also supplements their nutrition with packed food every day after the class. In addition to this, as part of recreation for the children, the centers also celebrate children’s birthdays every month. During the celebrations, children cut cake and the teachers distribute gifts. Each day students attend sessions for approximately 90 minutes. “As per the RTE act of Govt, no child will fail till Class eight. Most of these students are first-generation learners, with their parents struggling for their daily meals and are mostly uneducated,” says Harsh, “Remedial Education builds their foundation, provide moral values, hygiene, personality classes along with basic education for their overall growth and development. This will further help in reducing the drop-out rate from government schools in long term.”

Sarthak Prayas has acknowledged that education is one of the important parts of a child’s life to live with happiness and prosperity since it empowers minds that conceive good thoughts and ideas. It helps students to analyse and take life decisions.

The organization concedes that the quality of education has decreased in some schools over time. Hence, the need

to empower those children who are still getting education from these institutes and are from economically backward class is more relevant now than ever before. In line with this requirement, the NGO has launched its 'Build A Foundation' programme towards the improvement of education.

Sarthak Prayas began this mission by imparting education to less-fortunate children of Class two to class five, from urban slums around NCR. The organization teaches students who are already a part of government schools, and provides them life education skills, situational skills, moral values, hygiene and personality development. The organization gives children the opportunity to enhance awareness, creativity and confidence.

As far as goals are concerned, Sarthak Prayas has its priorities ironed out: "To create largest Human Chain of emergency blood donors in India, open a hundred remedial education Centres across north India, and have our own place to open and run 10 Old Age Homes in North India," says Harsh.

With its priorities and goals clearly defined, there's no second-guessing that Sarthak Prayas has its future charted out and will only go from strength to strength towards achieving what it has set out to do.

19. Sukhibava

The New Normal in Menstrual Health



One of the major challenges brought about by the COVID-19 lockdown, in its initial stages, was the breakdown in supply chains. As a result of this — despite several promises that supply of essential commodities would continue — several essentials failed to reach their destinations. Given the already abysmal awareness surrounding menstrual hygiene in rural pockets, the lockdown worsened the supply of sanitary pads and contraceptives suffered during the lockdown.

“In the initial phase (of the lockdown), there were critical issues around access to sanitary pads and contraceptives,” says Dilip Kumar Pattubala, co-founder of Sukhibava, “Even today, millions of adolescent girls who were accessing sanitary pads at government schools do not have access. Coupled with the fear of going to hospitals to seek healthcare and clinics within communities staying shut owing to availability of doctors, women have not been able to access healthcare facilities.”

For six years now, Sukhibava has helped thousands of women gain access to healthcare and sanitary products. However, the pandemic has made its work a lot more challenging. “The impact of the global health crisis has been widespread and a recent UNICEF report¹ highlights the heightened adversity faced by women and girls during this time,” says Dilip, “Building on global research, our team conducted a remote assessment to evaluate the impact COVID-19 has had on women and girls across urban poor communities in India. Our analysis identified key challenges specific to women’s health, in particular menstrual and sexual reproductive health.”

One of the major challenges was sexual reproductive health, which have worsened owing to clinical resources being diverted to treating COVID-19 and healthcare facilities limiting services or closing altogether. “To add to this, women are refraining from visiting health facilities due to fears about COVID-19 exposure or due to movement restrictions,” says Dilip, “For every three months that restrictions continue, assuming high levels of disruption, up to two million additional women are at risk of developing sexual reproductive health issues.”

Then, there’s the issue of menstrual health and hygiene. “The report highlighted that disrupted access to menstrual hygiene materials has been a challenge, particularly disposable menstrual hygiene materials that require monthly replenishment,” says Dilip, “Limited access to critical information related to menstruation or women’s health due to disruption in routine health services and increased stigma around menstruation during limited space and movement for menstruating women were also apparent.”

One of the downsides to the lockdown and the stress on supply chains, Dilip says is simply the fact that a sizeable

majority of women in far-flung villages switched to pieces of cloth as alternatives to sanitary pads. “However, most of these women are not aware on the right way to use a piece of cloth,” he says, “The consequences of this are increased RTIs and UTIs.”

The issue has assumed mammoth significance today since pre-COVID only a sparse 36 percent of women all over India had access to safe menstrual hygiene products. There is no data to indicate how much worse this statistic has got after the pandemic, owing to the interruption in supply chains.

However, to address the issue on a war-footing, the Sukhibava team resigned its existing grassroots intervention programme to address the requirements of women from a menstrual hygiene standpoint, in a post-COVID scenario. “We identified four key solutions and developed the emergency helpline ‘Hello Saheli’ to bring them together,” says Dilip.

The team designed an IVR-based menstrual and reproductive health education module which saw 24 contextualized audio clips that shares awareness surrounding MHH and SRH issues, health practices and conversations. “Through Hello Saheli, women can opt-in to receive a call each day or twice a week to hear all 24 clips over a number of weeks,” says Dilip. The module is accessible in two languages (Hindi & Kannada) via audio recordings in order to overcome literacy barriers.

The Sukhibava team also set up a menstrual and reproductive health helpline. “Contextual and credible information on understanding period irregularities, period pain management, nutrition, hygienic practices with available materials and more were available on the helpline which

also doubled up as a safe space that could be accessed at the caller's discretion where they can maintain anonymity," says Dilip, "Our helpline assistants speak three local languages — Hindi, Tamil and Kannada."

Through free tele-gynaecology services the helpline assistants from Sukhibava were able to connect callers to an accredited healthcare professional and facilitate a tele-health consultation to address key clinical concerns. This also helped encourage women and girls to prioritise their health in spite of COVID-19 constraints.

What the team knew all too well was that without awareness over positive gender roles, most of these initiatives would go to waste. "The key to promoting positive gender roles within an urban poor context is to understand how to share and manage stress," says Dilip, "Our IVR audio clips are tailored towards men to acknowledge the stress and uncertainty they are experiencing during the COVID-19 crisis while raising awareness about the largely invisible stress that women and girls are experiencing."

Today, in the words of Dilip, 'Hello Saheli' strives to create a space of "trust and confidentiality to encourage men to be vulnerable about stressors in their life." The initiative has also identified non-violent way to resolve conflict and reflect on the relevance and importance of strong relationships during a pandemic. "It also helps as a great tool to provide gender counselling and support men and women in their journey to understanding how men can support women and girl's health and wellbeing," says Dilip.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sukhibava's sole goal has been to ensure there are reduced consequences of COVID-19 has only goal is to only ensure there are reduced consequences of COVID on the lives of women and girls in

marginalised communities across India. “We are working towards reaching out to over a lakh women next year,” says Dilip.

Despite many significant steps towards better awareness surrounding reproductive health and menstrual hygiene, Dilip believes India still has a long way to go. “The momentum has picked up over the last five years we might need another 10 years of collective work to even introduce solutions that are sustainable yet impactful,” he signs off.

20. Swasthya Swaraj

Right to Health



Inequality in access to good quality health care is grave injustice, and those like Dr Aquinas Edassery Executive Director of Swasthya Swaraj in Odisha, find it extremely disturbing.

The place of birth and community discriminates a child in many ways in our country. Nobody can know this better than the tribal population living in remotest pockets of Odisha. Here, teenage mothers die during child birth, under nourished children lack healthcare and remain vulnerable to all diseases and every poor child falls prey to health issues. Most of the houses had a child suffering from Severe Acute Malnutrition, and women, who always feed on leftover food after men consume, are inevitably under nourished and therefore unable to breast feed their children.

“Poverty is a vicious cycle—that is what we all read and get to learn from others’ experience. But, living in poverty is a totally different game. Seeing how this cycle keeps poor from what they need the most, takes away a part of yourself

that wants to feel blessed with what you have. Living with the tribal people here, I have learnt what helplessness can actually mean. Every day I wonder why it is difficult for us to recognise communities that need our services. For every patient I treated in the hospital I knew there were hundred or more who needed this attention. The more I thought about such needy people, the more determined I was to move to remote pockets. P.Sainath's book 'Everybody loves a good drought' drove me to move to Kalahandi district in Odisha," shares Aquinas.

Following her inner call, Dr. Aquinas moved to Odisha and what followed thereafter was a culmination of efforts that yearned to acknowledge the right to health of people. "It was 2014 and our vehicle was the first four-wheeler the community had ever seen. Despair and distrust—both were there. We had to make our way into the community and we are glad we did not give up," she says, underlining the improvement in community's general health and falling maternal and infant mortality rates.

From her experience in Rural Karnataka, Aquinas was clear that building hi-tech, well-equipped hospitals was not the answer to address tribals right to health. Rather, it creates dependency and people will always look up for external help. She therefore decided to think beyond establishment of health centres and empower communities to understand health holistically. This, she felt, was the best way forward.

After two years of exploring Kalahandi while working in JSS and Bilaspur in Chattisgarh, Aquinas founded Swasthya Swaraj Society in 2014. Two primary health care centres with facilities available round the clock and a well-equipped laboratory were established and the team ensured to adhere to an evidence based approach in order to study future needs for prompt action. "We put in all our efforts to

build a strong team of resident doctors and quality facilities that could be accessed whenever needed. But, we knew this was not the end. Having known the terrain, literacy levels and lack of awareness among people, we did not wait for people to come to the hospital; instead we went to them. We organised extension clinics in ten hard to reach locations where pregnant women and under-five children from 6-8 villages could come and get themselves treated. That is how we got an opportunity to understand the local population's perception of good health, which primarily relied on their understanding of rural economy. For them, more children meant more hands at work. Hence, women and child health both needed immediate attention. Our visits were crucial as their hospital visits depended not on urgency, but solely on male members' wage calendar," explains Aquinas diligently.

Community Empowerment is an integral part of Swasthya Swaraj's efforts. Swasthya Sathis are illiterate tribal women who are trained to observe health parameters and warning signs in a community. They not only detect, communicate and educate communities but also act as an interface between communities and government health assistants –ASHAs (Accredited Social Health Activist) and Anganwadi workers. "Educated girls and boys were also trained in administering deliveries and organising medical camps in far-stretched villages. As locals, they knew the place and people better and allowed the community to see the result of their involvement in such efforts. They learn to participate, irrespective of their literacy or income levels. They overcame the misconceptions they used to have about health workers and understood the importance to remain healthy as a community. With this mindset, hospitals become relevant for them," she admits.

An important aspect of Swasthya Swaraj's success is its team – more than 50 percent belong to the local PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group). This inspired adolescent girls and young parents who aspire to educate their children further. Further, the Health Promoting Schools programme that runs in 15 government schools is trying to bridge the disconnect between schools and parents. "With people recognising the value of hospitals and schools they began to access them. Such community endeavor is what we all dream to see everywhere," smiles Aquinas.

Shanmuga Priya.T

21. The American India Foundation's

Shoulder to Shoulder



It is common knowledge by now that several children in India are at a natural disadvantage owing to the circumstances of their birth. After all, lesser fortunate families are part of a social structure fraught with injustice and continued prejudice. Founded in 2001, as an initiative by President Bill Clinton following a suggestion from Prime Minister Vajpayee, AIF has impacted 6.7 millions of India's poor through "high-impact interventions in health, education and livelihoods."

"The American India Foundation's (AIF) education programs ensure that children in neglected regions and under-resourced schools have access to high-quality educational opportunities and gain critical life skills alongside 21st century knowledge to prepare them for success in today's globalised world," says Mathew Joseph, India Country Director at AIF.

The last 15 years have seen the organisation's 'Learning and Migration Program' (LAMP) work with children from

migrating communities. The organisation says that 139 million people migrate from villages every year in search of labor, which in turn uproots families for months and places them in hazardous work sites like salt pans, brick kilns, and sugar plantations. “Many migrant children, due to lack of parental education never enter school at all,” says Mathew, “For those who do, migration often results in drop-outs.”

AIF’s LAMP module works with such children providing access to education, also strengthening community ownership of education through school governance. “A recent external evaluation found that there was 2.6 times improvement in science scores and 2.8 times improvement in math scores of children studying under the LAMP program. Over half a million children in 2,279 villages across 13 states of India have benefitted from LAMP,” says Mathew.

The organisation has used its Digital Equalizer (DE) program to leverage technology and erase the existing digital divide. “This makes schools dynamic places to teach and learn through collaborative, project-based learning,” says Mathew, “An independent study found 66% increase in students classroom engagement, along with 96% teachers integrating ICT in their lesson plans.” The organisation reports over four million children equipped with STEM learning experiences in 15,000 schools nationwide.

With 320 million school children without access to the physical school premises thanks to COVID-19, an entire generation has education on an indefinite pause. The effect has been more devastating for vulnerable children. “In Odisha, LAMP is operating a bicycle mobile library, which means that children in remote villages can continue to access books through the pandemic,” says Mathew, “Across Uttarakhand, DE is using technology to support teachers, parents, and students in government schools.”

AIF works with the public and private sector to create inclusive and sustainable livelihoods with a long-term goal of equalising the informal and formal sectors to provide opportunities for everyone. AIF's Market Aligned Skills Training (MAST) program provides underprivileged youth with skills training and access to formal employment opportunities. Its Ability Based Livelihoods Empowerment (ABLE) program prepares differently abled people for the job market.

"Candidates in AIF's livelihoods programs are given both technical and soft skills training as well as life skills to navigate everyday challenges," says Mathew, "Through MAST and ABLE, over 140,000 marginalised youth and women have received skills training to be economically productive." As of today, AIF is working to rebuild lives post-COVID, and ensure the wellbeing of internal-migrant communities in India. "We're doing this through a multi-stakeholder-coordinated mechanism for their inclusion and integration," says Mathew.

While maternal mortality rates in India are high, the mortality rate for children born to these mothers is also a worrisome statistic. "For women in remote, isolated villages, knowing and accessing healthcare can be a matter of survival," says Mathew, "Designed to reduce maternal and child mortality in rural, impoverished areas, AIF's Maternal and Newborn Survival Initiative (MANSI) utilises a public-private partnership model to provide preventive, promotive and curative care for both mothers and newborns." MANSI has served 172,000 pregnant women and 134,000 newborns across 3,389 villages.

MANSI's frontline community health workers have been spreading awareness on COVID-19 including mask-wearing, hand hygiene and mask-wearing. "The influx of

migrant workers returning home from different parts of the country has also added to the quantum of work handled by ASHAs,” says Mathew.

AIF’s radius of impact lies in education, health, and livelihoods — the three basic needs of the poor. “As a secular and apolitical platform, our strategy is to demonstrate proof of concept and work with local governments, authorities and the private sector to scale up,” says Mathew

AIF has sent 500 candidates on a 10-month-long service-oriented fellowship to work with the most disadvantaged sections of society. This has built a constituency that has become a collection of ambassadors of a strong partnership between the US and India. With offices in New York and California, twelve chapters across the US, and India operations headquartered in Delhi NCR, AIF’s impact is felt in 26 Indian states. The organisation is now looking to double its impact in the next five years, reaching more than 10 million Indian lives.

“We will continue to focus on education, health and livelihoods in its mission to improve the lives of India’s underprivileged, with a focus on women, children, and youth,” says Mathew, “However, we also recognise that COVID-19 has resulted in large-scale livelihood destruction and reverse migration leading to hunger, mass malnutrition, indebtedness, loss of assets, higher morbidity and mortality, prolonged unemployment and poor-quality livelihoods.”

The focus now is to rebuild lives of migrant workers and vulnerable communities based a few objectives:

ensure immediate and urgent needs of migrant communities are served ensure that migrant workers, including those who had stayed back in cities and those returning, receive

rehabilitation make reliable data and analysis available for better evidence-based planning for migrant communities maximise impact of government programs to address short, medium and long-term needs of migrant communities through technical assistance to state governments

It is common knowledge that COVID-19 is unlikely to turn into a one-time battle to win. “As we can see in other countries, there would be one or more cycles of infections going up and down. So, keeping people’s attention to their safety and needs is a long-term challenge,” says Mathew, “Migrants who have moved back to villages, are now returning to cities without social security. If another lockdown occurs, it will affect them the same manner. Building their resilience to future shocks is very important and is challenging considering the large numbers of migrants.”

AIF is aware that funding for COVID-19 is likely to reduce, considering that most donors have already spent a bulk of their funds on emergency relief. “Rebuilding lives will be a long-term initiative and needs sustained financial support for at least two to three years,” says Mathew.

22. Victory Sports Foundation

The Right to Play



Over the years, we have been acquainted by several rights that were not enshrined as fundamental rights in the Indian constitution, but soon became part and parcel of everyday life. The Right to Information (RTI) is one of them; the Right to Education (RTE) soon joined that list. However, when SK Thanigai Velan founded Victory Sports Foundation in 2007, his idea was simple: the Right to Play should also be top priority for the children of the country. There was just one problem that continues to make sporadic appearances today: affordability.

“Affordability is one of the major impediments to a child’s right to play. Many talented and aspiring wards never get a chance to prove their ability because many sports have become the prerogative of the affluent,” says Thanigai Velan, “Sports as a culture should reach all deserving and capable aspirants in India.”

From unavailability of open spaces to general physical upkeep and socio-economic parameters within the country, there were many other factors contributing towards poor progress of sports among the children and youth in India. “In our city, most of the public grounds are utilized for dumping garbage, vehicle maintenance, metro-rail projects and parking lots,” says Thanigai Velan, “Children, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds like those from slums, for instance, are unable to come out and play.”

Then, there’s the age old grouse with Indian education — that the school system in India is obsessed with rotary learning and traditional curriculum, with no focus on sport. “Most Government schools focus only on academic progress,” Thanigai Velan adds, “They under-utilize playgrounds available to them. Schools do not even spend a thousand rupees per month towards sport and recreation.” He also points out that even if corporation playgrounds exist, they suffer from lack of maintenance, and are overcrowded with adults intruding on spaces meant for children to play. “Children wanting to play or learn other sports do not even get access to these facilities,” Thanigai Velan says.

Then, there’s the other extreme — that of government-owned sports infrastructure being available only to professional sportspersons representing individual districts or states, and not members of the general public. “These facilities do not encourage normal people to make use of them, and are partial to only national-level players, in some cases, by letting them make use of them.”

It was this long list of grouses with the system, which caused Thanigai Velan to start Victory Sports Foundation, which believes in providing opportunities. “Our vision is simple,” Thanigai Velan says, “We create space for sports in slums, village schools and communities, we employ

certified coaches to train children in these communities and government schools free of charge, we maintain grounds and provide sports equipment, we work with various government and social bodies to improve the existing situation.”

However, this doesn’t end here. Victory Sports Foundation also identifies deserving government schools and communities from the point of view of sports enablement, provides coaches to these institutions on a regular basis, monitors day-to-day activity through qualified expert teams, carries out a period assessment of participating athletes, creates many playing opportunities for these children free of charge, engages these children in various community activities and social schemes to inculcate a sense of “social consciousness”, and finally grooms them to become disciplined, honest and responsible citizens through regular and structured life-skill sessions using professional volunteers.

“Our goals include reaching health and education to as many children as possible, especially those deprived of it, creating space for encouraging gender equality, creating conscious and engaging in environmentally relevant projects using its members, extending sports and social training to generate livelihood,” says Thanigai Velan.

Victory Sports Foundation is known for its holistic approach to social wellbeing. “Sports is a great vehicle to drive, in order to embark on this journey,” he adds. Some of the organization’s major projects are Play For Health, Sports For All, Play for India, and Sports 4 Girls. The organization presently focuses on football and athletic, but hopes to foray into boxing and other sports. Its operations are spread over five districts: Chennai, Thiruvallur, Thiruvanamalai, Thirupathur and Krishnagiri.

Thanigai Velan firmly believes encouraging sport is a great employment-driver too. “Most of our coaches have been our trainees. They are now qualified and certified,” he says, “We have been a platform for many of our alumni to clear disagrees such as B PEd and take on careers in physical training at schools we are associated with, or even schools of their own choosing.”

Many of Victory Sports Foundation’s trainees find employment in premier sports teams across the country, with some members having participated and won national and international-level competitions, and going on to secure employment through sports quotas at government-owned enterprises. “We also support our members through scholarships, in order to make their college education happen, thereby leading them on the path of other career opportunities,” says Thanigai Velan.

There’s no doubt that over the last decade and a half, Victory Sports Foundation has taken a giant leap towards building a healthier world for children and youth, thanks to its almost obsessive focus on sports and building infrastructure surrounding the same. By way of this focus and goal, the organization has also provided employment opportunities for many a youth, even as it has helped win laurels through sporting success.

Should this dream and vision continue, there’s every indication that a new India can and will be born, where every child grows up knowing they have the right to play, and where sports can and will become an integral part of school curriculum.

INSIGHTS

We all know that ‘Necessity leads to Invention’ and ‘Fittest Survives’. COVID-19, subsequent lockdowns, and global tensions in trade and border proved to be a catalyst for Indian agriculture and industry in particular. Indian government took steps which were pending since ages, and it may take a decade to perceive desired outcomes. But we have started working in right direction. On one hand rural sector is one of the neglected sectors when compared to other large GDP contributors and on the other hand global tensions left us to concentrate more on local consumption and production, leaving no other option to look upon producers, local enterprises and rural economy.

Government took proactive and calculated decisions to handle an issue which it never faced before and successfully minimised its losses. It took several steps to make supplies of essential commodities uninterrupted, which helped balancing the demand supply matrix between urban and rural markets. Leaving initial incidents and supply chain ruptures, we were able to get milk, vegetables, eggs, meat, fruits, etc. at our door steps. Urban centres have seen crash in price of commodity, while metropolitan and satellite cities have seen price surge in essential commodities; the main reason being length of supply chain. Long supply chains faced more issues as compared to short supply chains, farmers and commodity producers took an intelligent decision and chose short supply chains to sell their produce, which minimised their losses and managed their cash flows, thereby fuelling the local rural economy.

COVID-19 struck India at the time of harvest and just before sowing of next crop. Some of the steps taken by government during this pandemic (in particular) to tackle disrupted markets and agri-ecosystem are:

The Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion & Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020.

This ordinance will allow farmers to sell their produce to any trader throughout the country, helping them get best price for their produce. It is also useful for small and medium enterprises to purchase commodities directly from the producers. The step will curb profits made by middlemen and other unions in local Mandis, securing incremental income for the producer.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020

This allows farmers to get into futures agreement with purchasers and minimise losses related to any unavoidable sudden shock due to climate, accident, pest attack etc. Futures are financial instruments which help producers/sellers to book their expected future market price, and purchasers to book commodity price in isolation with external market forces in real time. Futures are useful for farmers to minimize their losses. This Act protects farmers' interest to engage in trade with any agri-business firms, processors, wholesalers, exporters or large retailers for sales of their produce.

Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955 Amendment Ordinance

This amendment removed stock limits for farmers and traders on cereals, pulses, oilseeds, onions and potatoes to encourage infrastructure related investments in agriculture. The ordinance made agricultural markets more responsive to forces of demand and supply and in future will encourage investment in agri-infra specially storage for improved inventory management of agricultural produce.

COVID-19 surprised us all and provided stakeholders a Social Laboratory to test, learn and implement innovative

ideas. Pandemic coincided with harvest of Rabi (winter) crop and subsequent sowing of Kharif crop. In particular, lockdown brought challenges to Indian agriculture system; these are mainly related to shortage of labour, equipment's, supply chains and fragmented demand. We expected worse than ever situation, mainly due to pandemic situation, subsequent lockdowns, global tensions, trust deficit and lack of experience in handling similar issues in past. Initially, due to government announcements and improper market information households decided to secure themselves from future shocks and started storing grains. Afterwards, bumper production of cereals and oilseeds faced issues related to high-priced labour and delayed arrival in markets.

Pandemic left no choice for large enterprises (based on agriculture) than to innovate or optimally utilize available resources and infrastructure. For instance, ITC used 'E-Choupal' platform to procure agri-commodities, Government launched 'Kisan Rath' app to support farmers and transporters in locating each other, some agri start-ups delivered fresh vegetables and fruits, future group optimally utilized its already existing supply chain during this tough times, Haryana State's horticulture department brought together nearly 81 FPCs to aggregate member farmers' vegetables and fruits and sell them to end consumers.

We all know that COVID-19 crisis is temporary and problems in Indian agriculture ecosystem are not new, but this pandemic has reinstated the need of inclusive policy on rural development with agriculture and rural population at its core. In the long term, this pandemic will definitely be seen as a turning point for positive changes in the Indian agriculture space, including strong supply chains and establishment of agri-enterprises in rural and semi-urban areas.

Post COVID scenario calls for some more steps to reboot the sector, ensure its stability and growth in coming time. They are:

- Improve procurement of produce
- Access to real-time market price
- Use of IT for better supply chains
- Manage labour demand and supply
- Create safety nets for semi-skilled and skilled migrant workers
- Access to capital and credit for farmers and agriculture related SMEs
- Development of diversified local food systems
- Prepare for future shocks related to climate change

We have to admit that COVID-19 gave us an opportunity to reset things in right directions. Stakeholders should innovate and test new ideas and innovative solutions in this real-life social lab. Business environment need to see this time of redesigning and restructuring. Ideas may fail, but we should learn from these failures, something or the other will work and that will help sector to grow many folds.

Dr. Agyeya Tripathi

2. Covid-19 Affect on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises



MSME sector in India is the second largest employment generator after agriculture, and contribute to almost half to our overall export. This sector acts as a breeding ground for entrepreneurs and innovators;

including considerable support in strengthening business ecosystem, policy advocacy, streamlining supply chain mechanism, etc.

The estimated number of MSMEs in India is 63 million and employs 110 million individuals. Indian MSMEs produce more than 6,000 products for local and global consumption; it also plays an important role in local and global value chain systems. According to DGCIS data, the value of MSME related products in India is USD 147,390.08 million and contributed to 48.56% of total export during 2017- 2018. MSMEs are exposed to higher level of integration with

global value and supply chains and play a critical role in global trade systems.

Data from 2019 shows that this industry contributed 29% to overall GDP; which is more than agriculture (15.96%) and less than services (54.4%). Contribution of Agriculture sector in Indian economy is much higher than world's average (6.4%). Contribution of Industry and Services sector is lower than world's average 30% for Industry sector and 63% for Services sector.

Various reports, researches and surveys have proved that this sector acts as a catalyst for socio-economic development of the country. All this becomes more important with our Government's new mission of achieving USD 5 Trillion economy target by 2025. With this target, the role of MSME sector is going play an important role, with expected contribution to GDP above 50% mark. The potential of Indian MSME sector is still untapped and that is one of the reasons why government policies are now more convergent towards building resilient ecosystems.

Challenges Faced by MSME Sector During Pandemic April 2020

The announcement of country wide lockdown dragged MSME owners, employers and external stakeholders in unexpected times, where no one had experience to handle this kind of situation. At one point of time, economist and market experts expected that more than half of enterprises will shut down if lockdown persist for more than 6 weeks. Extended lockdown had negative impact on supply of finished goods, procurement of raw material and availability of employees to work in production and supply processes. All this have impacted cash flows of an enterprise, whether large or small. During April to June 2020, this sector faced

cash outflow challenges related to debt repayments, wages/salaries, statutory dues, etc. All this with zero to minimal cash inflow and pulling enterprises into state of deep cash crunch, with ambiguity on business recoup in near future.

June 2020

Survey reports have shown that disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted MSMEs earnings by 20% to 50%, and micro and small enterprises faced the maximum heat, mainly due to liquidity crunch during lockdown. Enterprises in essential commodity business were better off in terms of interrupted but predictable cash flows. Some enterprises innovated their ways by shifting focus from non-essential commodities towards essential commodities; like production of hand sanitizers and toiletries, PPE kits, reusable masks, etc. and were able to survive in these tough times. MSMEs present in remote areas also faced lots of difficulties due to interrupted supply chain systems and intra-state lockdown provisions.

It is not only the enterprise which faced challenges; even consumers were left with lower disposable income. This sector is also facing shortage of skilled and unskilled labour, due to local quarantine rules, red zone areas, social distancing and reverse migration. All these had negative cascading effect over consumption as well as expenditure. Many enterprises laid-off their workers because of inability to pay salaries, vacated their offices due to recurring expenses and halted their production due to lack of orders.

Ambiguity in future trade and bouncing back to ‘new normal’ is keeping financial institutions at bay for extending financial lending or to cover potential risk. This all-round uncertainty needed a push by government, to boost market confidence and bring back regular cash flow in economy.

Steps Taken By Government

COVID-19 pandemic brought mixed news for growing economies like India, where crisis and opportunities struck together. Economic slowdown along with border tensions, had again dragged us to focus back on self-sustainable values, the ‘Swadeshi’ dream. Increasing trade deficit with China was one of the major trigger for some long-term strategic decisions taken by Government of India.

The Mission Atmanirbhar Bharat was launched by Shri. Narendra Modi, Hon’ble Prime Minister of India, in May 2020, to address two burning issues simultaneously; one being boost to MSMEs and the other to be less dependent upon foreign nations for purchase of raw and semi-finished goods, including China. This mission is one more step towards making India a bigger and more important part of the global economy. The mission was launched with a special policy amendment and financial package to boost MSME sector.

Broad changes were brought in the form of changing definition of MSME, allowing FDI in defence, increase in private sector participation, market linkage of local products and digitization of processes. Out of 15 relief measures declared under this package, 6 were entirely focussed to empower MSMEs. These 6 measures are:

- Definition level change for MSME – After the launch of Atmanirbhar Bharat mission, manufacturing and service units are also accommodated within MSME ambit. The new definition segregated MSMEs on the basis of investment and turnover. Units with investment up to Rs 1 crore and turnover of Rs 5 crores (micro-unit), investment up to Rs 10 crores and turnover of Rs 50

crores (small unit) and investment up to Rs. 20 crores and a turnover of Rs 100 crore (medium unit).

- Credit and Finance Scheme – Government allocated Rs. 3,00,000 crores for providing collateral free loans to MSMEs. Here, Government will act as guarantor and no guarantor fee will be charged. Banks and NBFCs were directed to lend at least 20% of their credit portfolio to MSMEs, with 4-year tenure and 12 months moratorium period on principal payments. Enterprises with up to Rs 25 crore outstanding credit and Rs 100 crore turnover are eligible for taking these loans.
- Allocating Fund of Funds for Equity Participation – Government created a corpus of Rs. 10,000 crore (to be further increased to Rs. 50,000 crore) to support MSMEs in exposure to equity markets. This step is expected to support MSMEs in lowering down their cost of capital through equity investment.
- Relief in Non-Performing Asset – The economic downturn effected more than 2 lakh MSMEs, possessing NPAs. Government has allotted Rs. 20,000 crores as subordinated debt to support these entities, this amount is expected to be used as equity support.
- Clearing off dues to MSMEs – Towards releasing liquidity pressure, government decided to clear all pending payments to MSMEs within 45 days of announcement made. This step will be further supported by strengthening digital payments and digital market initiatives.
- Disallowing Global Tenders - Emphasising more on boosting local MSMEs, government had disallowed any foreign company to participate in government tenders up to Rs 200 crores. This move is in convergence with ‘Make in India’ initiative.

Way Forward

Global Chief Economist at Dun & Bradstreet, Mr. Arun Singh mentioned that recovery of MSME sector may take 7 to 8 months. Recovery time is dependent on sector of operations; like online education, telecommunication, gaming and digital space need less time if innovations are accepted among consumers. While sectors like FMCG, automobile, retail, real-estate, jewellery, etc. might take longer than expected. Other sectors related to supply chain and storage might also take 3 to 4 quarters to bounce back to full scale.

Ministry of MSME is taking steps towards making these enterprises global and improving the overall business environment, by making it more conducive and transparent for all stakeholders. The herculean task of achieving USD 5 trillion economy is not possible without increased participation of MSME sector. The sector also hold answer to critical questions like unemployment, local economy development, fiscal deficit, trade balance, financial sector development, SDG alignment and so on. Private sector engagement in various bottlenecks of value chain and supply chain system is critical for success of various policies announced by the government.

Enterprises in India are facing issues related to procurement of raw material, credit need, market linkages, quality, standardization, pricing, business turn-around time, lobbying and many more. New steps taken by government are expected to act as a catalyst for the sector, not only to come out of pandemic related shocks but also to get prepare for brighter future.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi

3. COVID 19 Effects on Microfinance



The pandemic and its multi-pronged effects are no more a secret topic for any country around the globe. This article focuses on COVID-19 effect on microfinance sector in India.

Medical experts brought in an effective solution to contain this pandemic; that is voluntary Social Distancing further leading to complete Lock Down where situation is beyond self-discipline. Microfinance sector also got hit by this pandemic and is facing another big crisis after 2010 AP amendment bill and 2016's demonetisation. Small and micro loans serve large segment of population running small and micro enterprises mostly in unorganised livelihood domains. These financial institutions play a key role between commercial lending institutions ready to take moderate risk for better returns and clients who are in need of non-collateralised loans to finance their livelihood activity.

Latest report published by MFIN, shows that as on the sector caters 3.22 crore clients with gross loan portfolio of Rs. 74,371 crore. This converts to average loan amount of Rs 22,000 plus for all active accounts, which shows 6% YoY increase. The sector holds a strong position, when

it comes to return on investment in monetary and social returns. The amount of money deployed in this industry reaches out huge number of customers, with sustainable and traceable livelihood options and making it more impactful for social scientists and for financial investors. The reports also mention that the industry received Rs. 42,140 crore as debt and Rs. 16,140 crore as equity which is 33% higher (respectively under both categories) than previous year, showing increase in demand of loans and increase in trust from lenders.

Microfinance industry works on a crude principle of ‘Close Contact, Trust and Financing Sustainable Livelihoods’. On one hand it fuels micro and small enterprises; while on other hand generates employment opportunities in unorganized and organized sector. It is estimated that even during pandemic this sector employs more than 2 lakh individuals working at field level, organizing virtual meeting with clients and resolving their queries related to business sustainability, finances, convergence of government support and even personal health management related to COVID-19. Other than internal employment, the sector gives employment and entrepreneurial opportunity to almost all those who take loan i.e. 3.22 crore individuals. In other words each income generating loan given is for changing the life of all family members, an average of five.

Complete lockdown brought halt to almost every business, but worst affected were those with small or no reserves and operate in high liquid model. Most micro and small businesses are impacted except the ones engaged in activities coming under essential goods and services as announced by government from time to time.

Diminishing earning capacity of MFI clients is now becoming threat to MFI existence, although government is

trying to smooth out its operations through rescheduling of loans. MFIs have their own debt obligations and liquidity needs; post pandemic scenario is certainly going to put pressure on sector with surge in demand for more income generating loans and more gestation period. The scenario is building for new mergers and acquisition in the sector with lots of financial restructuring.

Affected cash flows of business enterprises in turn affected their microfinance service providers and hence the commercial banks at higher level. Unemployment in unorganised sector surpassed all levels till date, affecting migrants in big cities, enterprise owners in cities and towns, rural entrepreneurs and semi/skilled labour all across the MSME ecosystem.

Microfinance providers are expected to face serious liquidity crunch during COVID-19, gap between revenue and operational expenditures are increasing with depleting reserves. This shrinking liquidity may not create problem for large MFIs or those with strong stable backup, but is sufficient to haunt small and mid-size MFIs. MFIs with stable financing, well-established technology platforms and strong hold on communities have higher probability to survive during and after this pandemic. Criticality of microfinance operations is not limited to this sector only; slowly it will start effecting large financiers of these MFIs including commercial banks (private and public), donors and investors.

Reserve Bank of India in past three months took various steps for easing out liquidity in the sector, the steps taken include:

Special package of Rs. 50,000 crore targeted for mid to small sized microfinance companies

The reduction of reverse repo, gave banks options to utilize their funds for lending and hence increasing the liquidity in the system

The special 90 day moratorium on NPA classification also helped in postponement of asset classification, reducing the risk in overall system.

A special refinance ability has been provided to apex institutions like NABARD, SIDBI and NHB also allowed financial institutions to take risk and provide funds for on lending.

Most of these announcements from RBI are focussed on commercial banks and remained vague for MFIs and its customers in particular. COVID-19 is expected to show far-reaching effect on sustainable income generation activities and individual household who took loan and are dependent upon running of their micro to medium sized enterprises.

Post COVID-19 the sector is expected to see rise in loan demands, as individuals need to re-establish their livelihoods and bring back life to their old normalcy. The steps taken by Government of India through fiscal and monetary policies in past few years and specially during this pandemic are expected to take care of these short to medium term shocks in Indian microfinance sector.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi

4. Covid-19 Affect on Poverty



Poverty can be defined as a state of in which an individual or community is deprived of basic necessities essential for minimal living standard. Poverty may look simple, but is a complex subject, mainly due to its numerous dependent variables. In general, poverty is seen as a relative measure using standard poverty line set by World Bank, different countries see their percentage of population below set poverty line and decided about their economic wellbeing. All development programs try to design and implement programs/projects to pull communities above specific poverty line. These poverty lines are finalised on the basis of average cost of essential resources required by an individual (adult), it can also be represented in terms of income per day by an individual or household. The international poverty line, currently set at \$1.90 a day (Rs. 150 per day), is the universal standard for measuring global poverty line. This line helps measure the number of individuals living in extreme poverty and helps compare poverty levels among

countries, larger the population percentage below this line indicates higher inequality and non-inclusive development of country.

Records show that during last twenty five years, number of people living below poverty line has come down by substantial number, but rising inequality, global debt, non-inclusive growth and now this pandemic made a visible dent to many achievements boasted by international development community. The fact that development agencies, governments and communities were not ready for pandemic or any other similar event is now well accepted. Only between 2015 and 2017, number of people living below poverty line has been reduced from 741 million to 689 million. Although number looks fine, but rate of poverty reduction kept on decreasing during past few years. All these numbers together indicate that achieving SDG goal of bring poverty below 3% by 2030 is already at risk, even before the start of pandemic. New estimates from PSPR2020 show that pandemic may add 88 to 115 million individuals below US\$ 1.90-a-day mark.

Other poverty lines added by WB in 2018 at US\$3.20 (for lower middle income economies) and US\$5.50 (for upper middle income economies) also give greater insights in assessing resilience level of development efforts in handling Covid-19 or other similar condition. Developing economies have reported loss of jobs in urban centres and increase in number of urban poor; affecting the overall inequality and hence hampering inclusive growth efforts.

Status of Global Poverty During COVID-19 Pandemic

Poverty is multi-dimensional and need a sustainable and inclusive approach to handle the situation in developing economies, especially in Africa and South Asia where

development indexes are low in comparison to global averages. During pandemic countries have observed sudden operational stagnation of development projects related to health, education, infrastructure, finance, trade and so on; bring development outcomes back to where it started and in worse cases even below the point of reference. Middle East and North Africa have also seen increase in extreme poverty rate, reasons being conflicts in some countries. Development policies and recommendations rely on quality of data being collected, in past few years large resources have been provisioned by international development agencies and governments to bring quality data for better analysis. The pandemic left little room for conducting field survey and measure real-time impact; leaving development practitioners, government think tanks and development agencies blind on quality of data. Poor data quality leads to less efficient policies and hence agencies remain clueless on how to handle the current and post pandemic situations.

Way Forward

Governments around the world have taken best possible measures to contain effects of pandemic, although in most of the cases those remained insufficient. Countries with best health service infrastructure and the ones with tattered primary health facility (mostly dependent upon donations and kind giving) were treated at par with this crisis. We have seen largest medical work force struggling to attend Corona cases and most expensive research labs relentlessly working to find vaccine for past 9 months.

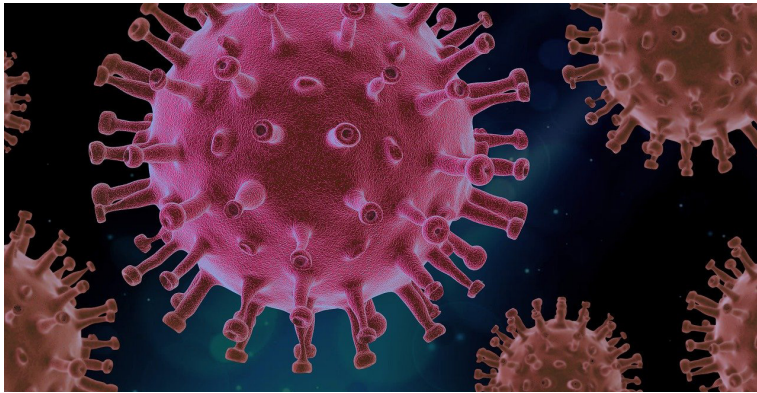
Covid-19 made us realised that positive returns of planned development efforts cannot withhold similar global catastrophe. Climate change is next big issue, capable enough to ingest positive outcomes of MDGs and SDGs till

date. Development agencies and governments around the world need to understand and literally mean true sense of Growth and Shared Prosperity. Bringing large population data sets on real time analytical platform can be one of the potential solutions, as it entails high probability of better data collection and more effective crisis management. This also holds true for better design of public policies.

At the end, we must admit that better solutions can be designed only when we define our problems strategically.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi

5. COVID Effect on Social Development



Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan in these dark days when COVID-19 Pandemic is embracing the whole world, gives a ray of hope to all. Role of Jawan is played by all policemen, paramilitary forces and volunteers who are supporting administrative responsibilities and making LOCKDOWN decision effective in our country. The role of Kisan is important as a producer, supporting our countrywide kitchens and supporting regular supplies from farm to fork in real sense. Role of Vigyan (Science) is at the core of this Pandemic, doctors, nurses, support staff and health extension individuals (SHG members, crew members of airlines, etc.) are at the forefront to deal with this deadly virus.

Without getting into the details, what COVID-19 is and how it started or became pandemic, this article will focus more on virus effect on social sector, some positives, our strengths, some lessons to be learnt and some weakness to work upon.

On 22nd March 2020, our Honorable Prime Minister. Shri Narendra Modi called for 14-hour voluntary public

curfew (Janta-Curfew), after two days on 24th March a 21-day lockdown was announced, when confirmed cases of Corona virus infected individuals reached approximately 550 in the country. This decision brought country at stand still, no one planned for this. In one stroke large segment of society became helpless, and those in vulnerable state, including daily wage laborers, migrants, maid-servants and individuals working in operations department of any company, became vulnerable.

COVID-19 pandemic brought whole world to an uncertain but equal state. The living condition of all became similar in some sense; including living with minimal resources, traveling less, more time at home with family, keeping distance with your neighbors, etc. and made most of us socially equal. It is expected that in short term this all will hold similar impact on many, but situation may change to large extent with each passing day in long term. As economy cannot stand still for long time, it should walk if not allowed to run. Imagine a situation when farmers are not able to harvest their crops in April, due to non-availability of migrant labor.

Researchers are expecting that uncertainty about normalization will negatively affect economic growth, where sharp decline can be observed from start of second quarter in 2020. Sectors dependent upon travel, labor and entertainment can expect loss in short term. Lock down of public transportation will affect tourism, oil & gas, aviation & maritime and hospitality industry. Social distancing will affect manufacturing unit engaged in producing non-essential items, labor dependent organized & unorganized sectors, construction & real estate and other essential services in semi-urban and urban areas. Domestic demand will see a slow down due to decrease in purchasing power and job loss in various sectors as mentioned above. Other

sectors like cement, steel & iron will see slow down due to non-availability of labor for construction and buyers of property during this period, effecting production and hence the man power required in factories producing raw material for real estate.

Some studies have come out with list of sectors which will gain during this pandemic and named those as winners, including agriculture, e-commerce, ICT, personal & healthcare, food processing & retail and medical supply & services. On the other hand, sectors facing negative sign during these tough times are tourism & leisure, airline & maritime, automobiles, construction & real estate, manufacturing, financial services, education and oil & gas. Well this observation is only based on demand and supply theory of economics, leaving out the other internal and external factors.

Let's have a close look at some livelihood options and sectors.

Agriculture Sector

The time when lockdown was imposed in India, farmers were about to harvest their crops. This crop in field today is our food in coming months. Social distancing triggered reverse migration in states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh. Large farmers who are commercial producer of crops are facing issues related to non-availability of labors to harvest their field, those having mechanized options do have some edge but they also require labor at some point in grading, sorting, packaging etc.

As per government statement, India's reserve for agriculture produce is sufficient enough to feed the whole country; but for how long and what if proper measures are not devised

to properly harvest and store the current standing crops? Small farmers who do not have mechanized farming are not facing competition of labor availability from other farmers in their area, which is expected to increase labor cost and hence the overall cost of produce. Marginal farmers on the other side, have lot of opportunities nearby and are able to convert their physical strength into economic resources, despite social distancing. Landless labourers who work on other farms for their livelihood, get their income in the form of share of produce or cash. Other than large farmers, who enjoy better market linkages, the rest are facing challenges in getting better price for their produce. While the cost of production is now going up, farmers are not able to negotiate with their wholesale purchasers. Having said so, government decision to allow farm machine movements, produce movements, purchase of produce at farm by wholesalers, etc. are commendable.

Another area of concern is lease and rent of large and medium sized agri-machines used for harvesting, sorting, packaging and transporting of agri-produce. Due to non-availability of labors in various states, the demand of these machines is expected to rise, with increase in its rent and transferring this cost to production. The number of these machines with government department, private owners and brokers are not sufficient enough to cater to the need of any district or state as a whole. Large and medium farmers may reduce their loss by hiring these machines at higher prices, but what is the prospective plan for small farmers and those living in remote areas, where providing these machines is not a cost effective option?

One more issue faced by agriculture today is limited availability of storage facility at local level. Small and landless farmers are equipped with storage facility at household level, as they do it every year for their own

consumption. Medium and large farmers are not used to store their produce at local level, as in most of the cases the responsibility lies with the purchaser.

Situation is positive for farmers who came together in recent times and became part of mainstream institution; or started a Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) or built their market linkages and developed infrastructure at local level. FPCs are at cutting edge as they are facing this crisis in a collective and more united way; this makes the negative impact less effective to each household, sharing the loss and risks in this difficult time.

There is one more segment which remains unnoticed, those who came back from towns and cities, working as a construction workers, in factories as labors, in urban homes as domestic servants and in other unorganized sectors. They come under the category of skilled and semi-skilled workers; their expectations of income are high and they have some savings to sustain their families in this critical situation. Steps taken by Government to support these migrant workers in host and native states are also providing relief, but awareness and literacy level plays an important role in this area. Government's safety nets are weak, in some cases these are not present, and enough measures are required to handle these migrant workers in an efficient way.

Microfinance

In last section we have understood the issues faced by farmers themselves, so the income remains badly affected by this pandemic, which will definitely slow down or bring negative growth in rural financing sector. In this section, I want to emphasize more on the finance sector itself.

NBFCs, MFIs, Cooperative banks and other rural financial institutions have large agriculture portfolios with them. These institution works on a model called ‘Hub and Spoke Model’ or business correspondent (BC) and business facilitator (BF), where physical branch office is not established at each and every place. Large financial institutions appoint BCs to expand rural portfolio. The operations of these financial institutions involve a critical role played by their field staff, sometimes named as field loan officer, livelihood support assistant, field executive, etc. In standard terms these individuals are those who provide banking and financial services at door step, called business facilitators. Financial services include opening of account, consumption loan, small term loan, individual loans, remittance service, insurance products, recurring saving scheme, fixed deposit scheme, etc. depending upon the legal status of financial service provider or the business correspondent agency.

COVID-19 brought in social distancing, where field staffs are facing issues in collecting loan repayments from door-to-door and at group level. In the absence of group meeting, group leaders and other members have postponed their weekly and monthly meetings. Term loans taken from financial institutions with an obligation of weekly, fortnightly or monthly repayment are now facing risks. Households have taken loan for income generating activity, whether agriculture, agri-allied or other activity in unorganized sector. Lockdown made things standstill with no scope of income generation for these debtors. Although the step taken by government to feed daily wage/income earner through established Public Distribution System is commendable, this requires more precision to avoid hoarding of cereals, rice and other free items at each household level.

Reserve Bank of India on 27th March’20 announced ‘Three-month Moratorium on EMIs for all term loans during March 1

to May 31' will be offered after lockdown. This announcement gave liberty to banks and financial institutions to extend three months moratorium to its customer, subject to request of individual borrower. Some banks who are lenders to MFIs are still in ambiguity, whether or not this moratorium period is applicable to MFIs themselves, and if it is not applicable to institution, then the question is how to keep MFIs carry on its operations. A plea was made in Supreme Court during the third week of lockdown, mentioning the long term effect of COVID-19 pandemic and it's after-effect on jobs, income generation activity, agriculture, small businesses, etc. It was represented by financial institutions having large portfolio in rural and semi-urban sector, on-lenders for large financial institutions and those who possess less liquidity. These institutions have asked for a separate package to fund their operations with three more months of moratorium period, as the client base is relatively more affected from this crisis.

Adding to this, microfinance sector in India have already faced crisis in 2010 and is now again facing similar or even worse situation, unless proper policy from Central Government or effective corrective action is taken by Reserve Bank of India. Microfinance customers in many cases have seen the waive-off strategy from state governments in crisis situation, institutions need to take special measure for not letting this happen.

Rural Enterprises

The present government have taken various steps to trigger rural development, most importantly promotion of rural SMEs and Rural Entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs and their enterprises have taken credit from government under various schemes for establishing, transforming or expanding their businesses. Rural enterprises are dependent on rural areas for natural resources available within the community, which

gets added value when sold in urban or semi-urban market. This value chain in broader terms convert the natural resources into economic resources, giving opportunity to rural households, vendors and market players to earn more improve their living conditions, completing the circle of rural prosperity. The COVID-19 brought in critical issues on both sides of the value chain– the supply side and the demand side. Lockdown if imposed longer, the chances of failing out of these small rural enterprises are higher.

Rural enterprises need regular labor, timely supply of raw materials, standard quality of production, retailers and transporters for operations at production level. On the other hand, they also require customers to purchase the products or services produced, and with increasing uncertainty demand is expected to see a sharp decline. This will affect all value chain enablers, including middlemen, retailers, whole-sellers, suppliers etc. The situation will be different for enterprises involved in production of essential items.

Entrepreneurs of any scale have received some relief from government's financial department in the form of increased moratorium period, but liquidity crunch will affect wage earners and salaried employees, giving sharp increase in unemployment rates.

Role of Civil Societies Organizations (CSOs) & Volunteers

Despite negativity, there is a silver lining for a sector which will make the country stronger and make its own place much relevant in coming years. The government machinery can make a policy, administration department can implement the policy and make sure that systems should run to help the needy, but who is going to work on field? One cannot imagine the solution without civil society organizations and volunteers.

A large responsibility of local administration, social cohesion and development is not possible without support from this fourth and very important pillar of society, the other three being The Executive, The Legislative and The Judiciary. Also, social sector plays an important role in association of resources with the benefits underlying beneath, bringing private and public sector together for the benefit of the underprivileged section of society.

COVID-19 crisis requires large number of resources to be deployed for its prevention, protection and cure. Neither resources with large private institutions, nor the manpower available with large public institution is enough to handle this crisis situation. The way out is involvement of CSOs in a planned and effective way.

Recently we have seen that SHG members are producing masks, FPCs are inviting large companies to buy produce from local office at village level, several SMEs are producing toilet cleaners, sanitizers, liquid soaps and other essential items, innovative entrepreneurs are coming out with low cost ventilators, etc. Private sector organizations are now diverting their funds for effective management of this crisis.

The crisis brought together all the three sectors together again with more focused deliverables and objectives. To make India a stronger country we should learn managing its human resources. Post COVID-19, government must promote volunteering at private sector organizations, capacity building of CSOs/volunteers in disaster management, individual mapping with livelihood and location, SME mapping with primary and secondary production line, special status for CSOs at the time of crisis and better resource mapping with the help of technology.

Dr. AgyeyaTrippathi

6. Covid-19 Affect on Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable Development Goals



In the year 2000, leaders of 189 countries came together to solve the global issue of extreme poverty (population living below USD 1.25 per day) in all its form. It was then decided that till 2015 eight predetermined goals, named as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), will achieve targeted results. In 2015, United Nations reviewed MDGs and all stakeholders decided to take things forward in new and much detailed form. In 2015, Eight MDGs got extended to Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These

goals in the year 2000 and then in 2015 were conceived and implemented to bring common focus for all development works around the globe, this step helped in channelizing financial and non-financial resources to specific geographies.

Learning's from MDGs helped in finalizing SDGs and brought in sustainability at the core of development agenda. Most development programs were found non-sustainable after funding for the same got stopped, also development agencies were not thinking coherently in terms of making the program sustainable after drying up of funding resources. SDGs certainly helped development ecosystem partners to focus deliberately on sustainability, monitoring, evaluation and impact of the programs to much larger extent than ever before. Development programs are designed keeping in mind certain risks and assumptions, but before the year 2020 no one thought about pandemic risk to this global extent. Covid-19 brought a crisis situation in development world, throwing us back in days similar to great depression and the two world wars in past.

Status of SDGs During COVID-19 Pandemic

The targets for SDGs were planned to be achieved in specified timeline i.e. 2030, and certainly after COVID-19 everyone is now susceptible about it. This pandemic affected development programs at local, national and global level. Development agencies have shifted their focus more on handling pandemic, leaving immediate development outputs on next priority. Governments and donor organizations have struggled hard to restructure their expense budgets, where COVID – 19 took a toll and received more than expected funds. Different countries and specified regions within legal boundaries have different development needs, pandemic exposed under-skin wounds and have shown the real pain points.

It has been observed that some SDGs have directly taken the maximum brunt of the situation, while some others are yet to see the after effect of this pandemic. For instance SDG-3, i.e. “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” got derailed in most of the countries due to excess pressure on health infrastructure and human resources on one hand and managing social distance on the other. In many countries, disruption in health services brought halt to programs related to mandatory vaccination, screening of critical diseases, family planning, eye care related programs, etc.; pushing all efforts back by almost a decade.

Estimates show that Covid-19 will pull in additional 710 crore individuals living under extreme poverty conditions (SDG-1), this could be the indirect result of global financial slowdown or may be recession, still the debate is on. Income inequality, i.e. SDG-10 is another area of concern for many, vulnerable section of society is now more vulnerable than pre-covid situation. Pandemic also effected supply chains, logistics and production of essential goods including agriculture; this effected SDG-2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture) and stakeholders in the overall value chains including producers, labours and transporters working in rural areas.

Adding to these pandemic related issues is political tensions among super powers, which may lead to less or interrupted cooperation of developed nations towards achieving pre-determined SDGs by 2030. This also means that funding cooperation may see some criticality in coming days, or there may be a shift in geographies as per the funding priority on case to case or may be affinity basis. This also effects SDG-16 and SDG-17 which relates to “promote peace and safety” and “strengthening international partnerships”

respectively. According to UN Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, “Everything we do during and after this crisis must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face.”

Steps Taken During Pandemic

Report released by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation titled “We’ve been set back about 25 years in about 25 weeks,” tells the macro and micro socio-economic growth stories around the world. Pandemic might have left some countries, but financial pandemic will surely reach all in coming months. This expected upcoming economic crisis will not leave any vulnerable section of society, with skewed positive correlation between vulnerability and pandemic’s ill effect.

Governments, civil society organizations and international development agencies have come together to fight this pandemic in most cohesive and coherent way. Government and civil societies channelize funds and other resources for creating temporary health infrastructure, supply/distribution of essential goods, payments for labours and petty traders, income support to producers and farmers, increased moratorium period for small business owners (specially MFI clients) and private sector employees, this list is just indicative and have different face depending upon the socio-economic profile of country and its population.

International policy makers are taking these post-pandemic scenarios as testing ground for potentially larger issues related to climate change. Environmental scientists and many others have shared their views on various global forums about this kind of pandemic due to unrestricted

deforestation, wild life trade and diseases that can be communicated from animals to humans. The situation calls for a more focussed and action oriented efforts from international community.

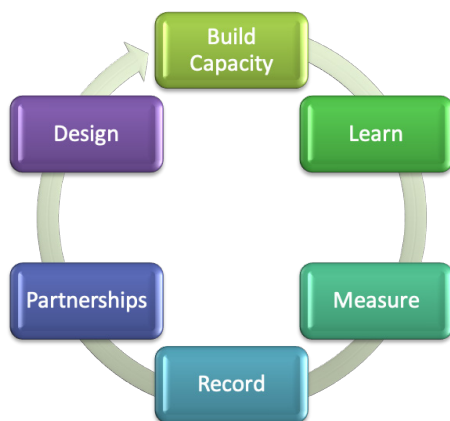
Way Forward

Looking at the width and depth of this pandemic and its immediate to long term after effects, think tanks and policy makers are now paying more attention to data gathering, analysis and using the same for policy advocacy. Globally, economists and statisticians are working hard to set up convenient and user friendly systems of data collection, this is to ensure the operational continuity of ongoing programs and plan for the future policy initiatives. Pandemic has affected development programs in a hard way, more than that monitoring and evaluation of projects is now going to be nightmare, not only for next cycle of funding, but also to ensure that right amount of funds get allocated for hard pressing issues.

International community should come forward to invest in data collection systems, its analysis and using the same for designing better projects and optimizing resources to achieve equitable inclusive growth.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi

7. 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 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

8. Water Governance – Inclusive Development Aspects



A Sixth two-day foundation day symposium was conducted on 13th & 14th February'20 by DMI Patna, in collaboration with UNICEF on a very alarming topic of today's world; Water Governance – Issues and Challenges. The topic gets more relevance when we are witnessing shift in climate all around the globe, leaving no community and country unaffected. The attendees were senior bureaucrats, academicians, civil society organizations, action research fellows, upcoming PG students in development management and young professionals of social development organizations.

The chief guest for this symposium was Shri Rajendra Singh, an Indian water conservationist and environmentalist from Alwar district, Rajasthan in India. Also known as “Waterman of India”, he won the Magsaysay Award in 2001 and Stockholm Water Prize in 2015. He runs an NGO called ‘Tarun Bharat Sangh’ (TBS), which was founded in 1975 and is one of the members of the National Ganga River Basin Authority

(NGRBA) which was set up in 2009, by the Government of India as an empowered planning, financing, monitoring and coordinating authority for the Ganges (Ganga), in exercise of the powers conferred under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. In the UK Shri Gajendra Singh is a founder member of an NGO called the Flow Partnership which aims to counter the negative effects of soil erosion and flooding.

He vibrantly brought out the philosophy of BHAGWAN – ‘Bha’ Shows Bhoomi (Mother earth), ‘Ga’ shows Gagan (Sky), ‘Wa’ shows Vaayu (Air) and ‘Na’ shows Neer (Water). He further explained that water is core for any climate, as it affects all types of life, local ecosystem, climate and even economic condition of any place. Further he added that today we treat water as a free infinite commodity, may be because we were told that 70% of earth’s surface is covered with water, leaving the fact that only 2.5% is drinkable, out of which only 1% is easily accessible. In essence, only 0.007% of the planet’s water is available to fuel and feed its 6.8 billion people. We see water as a cyclical form of natural resource, which as a process is infinite in nature. But, we do not consider growing population while assessing the situation of potable water which remains constant throughout, as the competition for drinking water is increasing each year. One more aspect that we missed in our classroom learning was the understanding of the inter-dependability of rain, pollution and population.

UN-Water accepted that water is major influencing factor for climate change in any place. It also plays an important role in demography and socio-economic development of people living in the ecosystem. All ancient civilizations were evolved, developed and strengthened in and around river valley systems. Water helps in developing a conducive ecosystem for any form of life systems and helps in its growth through other support mechanisms. In these two days, I saw

water in its various Avatar. Availability of water table and its distance from earth's crust determine the vegetation of any place, availability of river and structure of land around it can help us determine the size of population; availability of water and agriculture land around it can give us an understanding of its population, prosperity and food habits; and water when combined with the kind of soil, distance from equator and other physical features give us an understanding of types of crops and prosperity of people living there.

I got to know some important facts in these two days.

According to WHO, increasing temperatures on the planet and more variable rainfalls are expected to reduce crop yields in many tropical developing regions, where food security is already a problem.

UN in 2018 stated that more than 2 billion people live in countries experiencing high water stress. The situation will likely worsen as population and the demand for water grow, and as the effects of climate change intensify.

According to UNCCD, with the existing climate change scenario, by 2030, water scarcity in some arid and semi-arid places will displace between 24 million and 700 million people.

FAO envisages that by the 2080, land unsuitable for agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa will die due to severe climate, and soil or terrain constraints may increase by 30 to 60 million hectares.

UNICEF in 2019 said that climate change will have its most direct impact on child survival through three direct channels: changing disease environments, greater food insecurity, and threats to water and sanitation.

UNICEF in 2017 estimated that by 2040, one in four of the world's children under 18 – some 600 million in all – will be living in areas of extremely high-water stress.

WEF in 2015 said that scientists, farmers and the business community consider variability, casted as 'extreme weather events', as one of the most likely production risks over the next ten years.

Looking at the trend, humans have proved to be inefficient water users. (The average hamburger takes 2,400 liters, or 630 gallons, of water to produce, and many water-intensive crops, such as cotton, are grown in arid regions.). According to the United Nations, water use has grown at more than twice the rate of population increase in the last century. By 2025, an estimated 1.8 billion people will live in areas plagued by water scarcity, with two-thirds of the world's population living in water-stressed regions as a result of use, growth, and climate change. The challenge we now face as we head into the future is how to effectively conserve, manage, and distribute the water we have.

Some solutions can be reconsidered, which we left in the race of becoming a modern society:

1. Wash a tub-full clothes only, to make optimal use of water
2. Use small tanks with western toilets, to flush out less water
3. Plant more trees
4. Revive wells, ponds, small water structures and lakes
5. Conserve waste water coming out of water purifier
6. Use solution/s to bring up underground water table

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi



"I commend CSIM for its commitment to promoting social innovation and for recognizing the work of these unsung heroes. They come from all kinds of backgrounds- transgenders, senior police leaders, administrators, social workers, trainers and so on. I hope that the stories in this volume will inspire readers to take action in their own communities and to support those who are working to create a better world."

Dr. Prateep V Philip IPS (Retd.)
Former DGP CBCID



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