

The best reads on development

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Centre for
Social Impact
and Philanthropy

IDR (www.idronline.org) is India's first and largest online journal dedicated to the social sector. We publish cutting-edge ideas, lessons and insights, written by and for experts and practitioners working on social issues.

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Want social change? Give communities more agency



No external force can bring about real change in society. Only the community itself can.

Picture courtesy: UN Women-Caroline Pankert



Ashif Shaikh
Co-founder,
Jan Sahas

There are 650 districts in India. However, most nonprofits work only in a few districts. Given how large our country is, there are only two types of people that can work towards creating change at scale—the communities that are facing the issues first hand, and the government.

The government has not been able to work on issues related to social justice in the last 60 years. Perhaps they think that this is not important enough or there is no political will to do it. So, we at Jan Sahas chose to involve the community.

We realised that if issues around social justice had to be taken to scale, and if we wanted to create deeper impact, we needed to involve the communities affected. If it didn't become the community's own initiative, or if they kept thinking that some civil society organisation or government agency would come and work on their issues, it would never be sustainable.

That's why in 2001 we started a national campaign named Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan (National Campaign for Dignity). Centred around the idea of dignity, this campaign was aimed at mobilising Dalit manual scavengers, all of whom were women. We wanted to empower them to move out of this work and enable them to scale up the programme on their own. We thought that working with manual scavengers would be a good entry point to work on ending exclusion.

We talk about people living in dignity, but most of us understand this as: if we offer wages, we automatically provide dignity. The government also seems to think along the same lines. They offer anywhere between a few thousand rupees to a lakh in the form of various schemes.

But caste-based marginalised communities in our country have faced historical injustice—not just for the last

five-six generations, but for the last 2,500 years. Even if they earn money and stop doing caste-based work, the social stigma never goes away. Even if the person becomes a collector, or starts an enterprise, the discrimination continues.

We need three types of rehabilitation

If people have to come out of caste-based work, they need three types of rehabilitation:

1. Economic or livelihood rehabilitation

In the caste-based work of manual scavenging, the biggest issue is that the oppressor or employer provides them food, clothing, and shelter. In rural India, they get two *rotis* every day, clothes twice a year—during Holi and Diwali—and the panchayat gives them a place to stay. So, in essence, their basic needs of *roti-kapda-makaan* (food-clothing-housing) are taken care of by the person or the institution that employs them. What this means though is that they are unable to negotiate with their employers.

If you are going to get paid in cash for work, you can negotiate. For instance, if the employer says, “I will give you INR 20”, you can say, “No, I will charge INR 50”. But if your life itself is dependent on what they give you, then you can never negotiate.

Therefore, if we have to start changing the way caste is viewed and reinforced, we have to start with economic rehabilitation. If marginalised caste groups get work which pays them in cash, they can negotiate the terms for their wages, working conditions, dignity, and relationships at the workplace. However, this is only step one. The second, and more important one, is social rehabilitation.

2. Social rehabilitation

The government never thinks about this aspect. Under social rehabilitation, if someone gives up their (caste-based) work, they should be given work that factors in the social aspect as well.

For instance in 2013, we appealed to several state governments: we said that when you appoint ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) workers and helpers—positions that do not require an educational background, offer INR 3,000-4,000 monthly salary, and where the employee has to be a woman—give priority to the women from the manual scavenging community. These women could prepare the meals provided under

the ICDS scheme and all children regardless of their caste would eat that food.

This process was started in Uttar Pradesh but many powerful groups forced the state to rescind the order; today it is no longer compulsory. In Madhya Pradesh on the other hand, while there was some struggle to start with, it has now been firmly established in many districts.

The discrimination extends across several government schemes. In many villages, where the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) is being implemented, Dalit communities are given homes in a separate place. They call it a ‘colony’ and it is commonly understood to be land outside the village. However, all the resources such as electricity, water, and *anganwadis* are available only inside the village.

If you want to stop caste-based practices, you cannot work with the excluded people alone. Other related stakeholders have to be held accountable. Like they say in the gender discourse—if you want to end sexual violence, you have to get the male members of the community involved.

3. Political rehabilitation

Being political is not about party politics. It is about the power of representation. If women from excluded communities want to be part of the local panchayat, they should have the space to do so. The problem is that today, they don’t have this space.

For example, we started a campaign with rape survivors, that they should contest elections for the panchayat. As a result of this campaign, 104 women participated in panchayat elections. Almost 50 percent of them won. Many of them contested on unreserved seats. They fought and they won. The idea was for them to challenge the power structure.

In some places we had to work with their family members as well, in some with the society at large. When these excluded women gain power, then at some level, the discrimination stops.

It takes years to break social barriers, even among the marginalised

Jan Sahas works with manual scavengers, rape survivors, and young girls who have been forced into commercial sexual exploitation. One of the biggest challenges we face is that it is very difficult to make

these communities come together. Getting ‘outsiders’ to change their social behaviour requires work at a different level. But even within these disadvantaged groups, people follow discrimination and untouchability practices.

For example, in Bhaurasa, a village in Madhya Pradesh, we had women who had managed to stop doing caste-based work. There were 17 women from the Valmiki community, and 10 from the Hela community. Valmiki is a Dalit Hindu community, while Hela is a Muslim community. It took us three years to bring them together in one place for a meeting.

For two and a half years, we conducted meetings with adults in the community to convince them. Despite that, we failed to change their beliefs. But when we started working with the young—using games and activities—it took almost no time.

One of the games we played was taking one child from the Valmiki community and the other from the Hela—one a Dalit and the other a non-Dalit. We told them that the Dalit child would become non-Dalit for a day, and vice versa.

We observed a big change in behaviour. The children soon realised that what one was doing with another human being was not based on any rationale. There is no rationale for caste discrimination, and that it didn’t make sense to follow this nonsensical practice. The activities brought about a change in the children. They then started convincing their families, and the families changed because of the children’s intervention.

Communities can solve their own problems, all they need are platforms

Most of us in civil society who work with marginalised communities feel that ‘we are going to give them something’, or ‘deliver something’. In reality though, no one really is in a position to deliver anything to the community. What do we really know about the communities? How can we assume leadership on their behalf when we don’t know enough?

Consider the Dignity March where 25,000 rape survivors travelled over 10,000 km and spoke openly in public forums about being raped. Jan Sahas might have coordinated the march, but the idea was not ours.

We were conducting a meeting in a village. There were four rape survivors along with their family members. One of the women said that there had been a conviction in her case, while a second woman said that she was

“What do we really know about the communities? How can we assume leadership on their behalf when we don’t know enough?”

still struggling with her case and was facing many problems. The families were fighting among themselves, and demanding answers from us, saying if one woman’s case was solved, why wasn’t there a judgement yet in the second case?

One of the rape survivors told us, “You don’t explain what the problems are. Let the woman who got the conviction explain to the others what steps need to be taken and how they can bring their own case to a closure.”

When she started explaining, the idea clicked in our minds. Instead of us doing this work—going to each village and talking to all the families about how to fight their cases—what if 1,000 rape survivors came together in one place and travelled all over the country and explained how to get a conviction to other survivors?

Nonprofits should only play the role of facilitators

We can’t be leaders of the manual scavengers, or rape survivors, or communities who are involved in caste-based commercial sexual exploitation. They are their own leaders because they know what that pain has meant in how they live their lives. We cannot even imagine how much power or courage is required to change this situation.

No one else can do it—no Chief Minister or Prime Minister can work as effectively as a rape survivor can work on rape, or manual scavengers can work on their own issues. We need to understand this.

The role of the government or nonprofits is limited in this. We can help create appropriate forums for them, but it is they who will come up with the strategies. During the march, we observed this very clearly: people who’ve been facing oppression and discrimination were ready to take up the struggle, they were ready to find solutions. What they needed was a platform to talk about their issues.

The current strategies which are made by the government or other institutions, rarely involve the affected communities. But no external force can bring about real change in society. Only the community itself can. ■

The missing women in finance



Women comprise a very small proportion of the financial industry workforce, and this has implications on the way female clients use and benefit from financial services.

Picture courtesy: Pixabay



Renana Jhabvala
National Coordinator,
SEWA

The Indian financial landscape is undergoing a dramatic change. India witnessed a surge in bank account ownership during the 2011-2017 period: 80 percent of Indians owned a bank account in 2017—an increase of 45 percentage points from 2011. This surge is primarily attributed to the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY).

This gap needs to be considered against the more general narrative on outcomes for women in India, and progress therein. While there has been a big shift in girls' education in the last decade or so—with more girls enrolling in higher secondary and college education—India's abominably low female labour force participation rates mean that many girls, despite their aspirations, are passing out of schools with no employment prospects.



Sonal Sharma
Urban Land Rights
Coordinator,
SEWA Bharat

However, this push for financial inclusion has not achieved its true objective, which is to ensure that all citizens not only have access to bank accounts, but avail other facilities that come with it—formal credit, insurance, and overdraft, to name a few.

The debate on low female labour force participation and the reasons for it are intensive, and have sparked an entire research industry. However a study¹ we at SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) commissioned as part of the World Bank's Skill India Mission Operation (SIMO) focuses on the possible solutions, one of which is identifying work opportunities available for women in India's financial sector.



Soumya Kapoor Mehta
Development economist

According to the Global Findex database released by the World Bank, roughly one out of two bank accounts in India remain inactive, about twice the average of other developing economies. Worse, the gender gap in these inactive accounts is notable: 54 percent of women account holders report not using their account, as opposed to 43 percent of male account holders.

Can the financial industry be a

prospective employer for the many, now more educated women, seeking work outside their homes?

Why is this a matter of interest? Because evidence shows that women tend to use their bank accounts, and save and borrow more if they are served by female bankers and financial intermediaries.

So, what did we find?

First, female staff comprise a very small proportion of the financial industry workforce. The Bharat Microfinance Report (2017) by Sa-Dhan reveals that the total microfinance workforce in 2017 stood at 89,785 workers. Women comprised only 12 percent of the total workforce and 11 percent of the total field staff.

Our primary study confirmed these dismal numbers on women's employment in the financial sector. Most of the field agents and employees of the financial institutions we interviewed were male. Perhaps the most dramatic example was that of microfinance institutions where we found that while all the clients were women, all the officers in the field were male.

Second, SEWA's own studies suggest that women tend to save and borrow more when they are served by female financial intermediaries.

A basic income pilot conducted by SEWA in the state of Madhya Pradesh in 2011-12 compared the extent of financial inclusion in villages where SEWA operated through its network of *vitya saathis* (female banking correspondents) and villages where SEWA was not present.

It was found that in non-SEWA villages where no basic income was transferred, women held only 24 percent of their savings in financial institutions such as banks and cooperatives (Figure 1). In comparison, in SEWA villages, 64 percent of women's savings were in formal financial institutions.

Other internal studies by SEWA in Bihar and Uttarakhand also show a positive impact of financial intermediaries on women's savings and livelihoods.

Putting these two facts together, it is clear that hiring women as financial intermediaries can serve the dual purpose of increasing women's usage of bank accounts on one hand, and their employment on the other.

The job opportunity for financial intermediaries is tremendous

According to the Reserve Bank of India, of the nearly 460 million basic saving accounts opened in scheduled commercial banks between March 2010 and March 2018, nearly one in every two was opened through business correspondence agents or financial intermediaries. Such is the importance of these agents that the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC) estimates 3.7 million incremental jobs for financial intermediaries between 2016 and 2022.

This leads to three important policy insights:

- Financial intermediaries are capable of carrying out financial functions and are perhaps better than a brick-and-mortar financial institution in reaching out to remote areas owing to their mobility.
- There is ample opportunity for mobile agents to act as representatives of financial institutions.
- The potential for hiring women as such agents is high.

Yet, a report by the Helix Institute of Digital Finance (2015) on the Indian financial agent network finds that of the 2,682 active financial agents surveyed across rural and urban locations, only about 10 percent were women.

If these levels were raised to 30 percent, then of the 3.7 million projected jobs, 1.1 million could be taken up by women financial intermediaries, benefitting women account holders in the process.

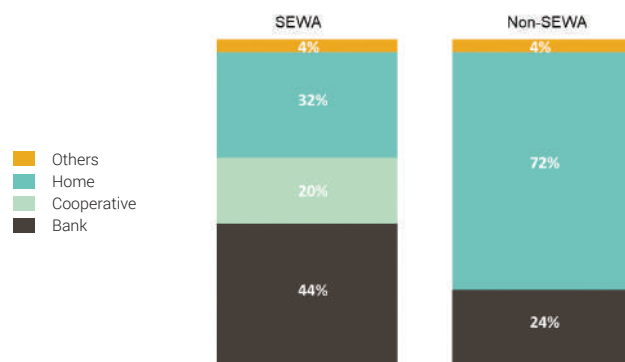


Figure 1: More women put savings in financial institutions in Madhya Pradesh when in touch with a female banking correspondent | Courtesy: SEWA

Women face barriers to entering the financial workforce

- Women are not aware of jobs in the financial sector. There are few counselling centres in schools and colleges that expose girls to jobs in this sector.
- Not many girls and women think of financial institutions as possible employers, and if they do, the government ones are the most coveted.
- Women also feel that they do not have the skills required to make a career in finance; some fear the pressure of targets.
- Constraints on mobility and security present further restrictions, as does the hesitation of seeing no female peers among existing staff.
- A male culture in the sector also serves as a barrier, with male staff more likely to socialise over a drink or work late.
- Managers, on their part, are reluctant to hire women. When asked why there were almost no female staff in his bank, a bank manager emphasised, “*Daudne wala sales officer chahiye*” (We need sales officers who are capable of running).

It is clear that most of the obstacles cited above seem to be related to the socially-determined roles that women have been traditionally assigned. Both men and women view women’s abilities and aspirations through these lenses. This determines why women are either unaware of the opportunities, or are hesitant to enter the field. It also illuminates why managers fail to encourage women to apply, or when they do apply, only assign back office jobs to women.

These barriers call for more awareness campaigns in communities about the importance of employment for women. Equally, some supply-side shifts are needed.

They may include:

- Employing more female financial intermediaries.
- Raising awareness about these jobs, knowledge building, and career counselling.
- Raising awareness among potential employers about the advantages of employing women and what they need to do to attract and retain them.
- Providing financial support to buy laptops, point-of-sale machines, and two-wheeler vehicles for women who wish to become intermediaries.
- Enabling access to technology.
- Examining existing training modules and re-orienting them towards training women as financial intermediaries.

“Evidence shows that women tend to use their bank accounts, and save and borrow more if they are served by female bankers and financial intermediaries.”

At the policy level it requires partnerships between organisations like the NSDC, the Sector Skill Councils, and the Association of Banks to create an ecosystem that works towards employing more women as financial intermediaries.

It also requires collection of gender-disaggregated data by financial institutions on employees, agents, banking correspondents, customer service providers, and other financial intermediaries; and making these figures publicly available to track gender discrepancies in the sector. ■

Sanchita Mitra was a contributing author to the larger study that this article draws on.

Footnotes

- 1 Between August and September 2017, SEWA commissioned a study as part of the World Bank’s SIMO to identify work opportunities available for women in India’s financial sector. The study drew on primary interviews with staff of financial institutions, technology service providers to banks, as well as women themselves across four states in India: Delhi, Bihar, Maharashtra, and Punjab. These were buttressed with desk reviews of other reports and insights from many small area studies that SEWA has been conducting on the obstacles women face to open and use bank accounts, and to access funds should they want to finance any entrepreneurial venture.

How to use your brand to achieve your goals



Meghna Rakshit
Partner and CEO,
Studio Subu

The change nonprofits are working to create often involves a layered solution to complex problems. This requires certain resources: passionate, driven talent, financial support, and strong community relations. In order to get these resources, you need two things: a strong programme (the main focus of most nonprofits) and a strong brand (an intangible asset that nonprofits are often a bit unsure of). A brand is what your user perceives of you, and how they experience your product or service. This perception helps them decide whether they want to engage with you further, so it is critical to create an impression.

In my experience, organisations that don't shy away from building their brand while building their programme are the ones that have mobilised their resources the best. Here are four tips to keep in mind when you embark on your branding journey:

1. Move beyond just your logo

A brand is like a wardrobe. It has a range of elements—colours, fonts, styles, icons, tone, language, and so on—carefully chosen by your designer, from which you can pick what you want to wear and use on any given occasion. Whether you want to dress up for a donor event or dress down for a staff townhall meeting, you can pick what best reflects who you are.

Many nonprofits think that having a logo and a few brand colours is enough to start with. It isn't. You need a wardrobe from the very beginning so that you start building brand familiarity and trust with the outside world. It doesn't need to be as extensive as large corporate brands, but it should be enough that you know instantly what to pull out when you are communicating externally.

Familiarity comes from seeing consistency in your visuals, in your voice, in delivering on your promise. It allows others to know what to expect from you, and gets them to understand how you stand out from other brands. This leads to trust. Which ultimately leads to stronger relationships and partnerships, loyalty, and

funds. In a qualitative study that we ran in 2018, we found that the number one reason for donors to financially support an organisation is trusting the people who run it.

2. Take a stand

In your rush to please everyone for money, don't try to be too many different things for different people. Stand for who you are and how you want to present yourself—playful, young, elegant, or experienced—and then stick to it. Think about what makes you unique and where your biggest strength lies. Your authenticity will be more relatable to a donor than trying to match your personality to theirs. One of the more well-known ways to go about this is by articulating your brand compass—your vision, mission, purpose, values, and objectives.

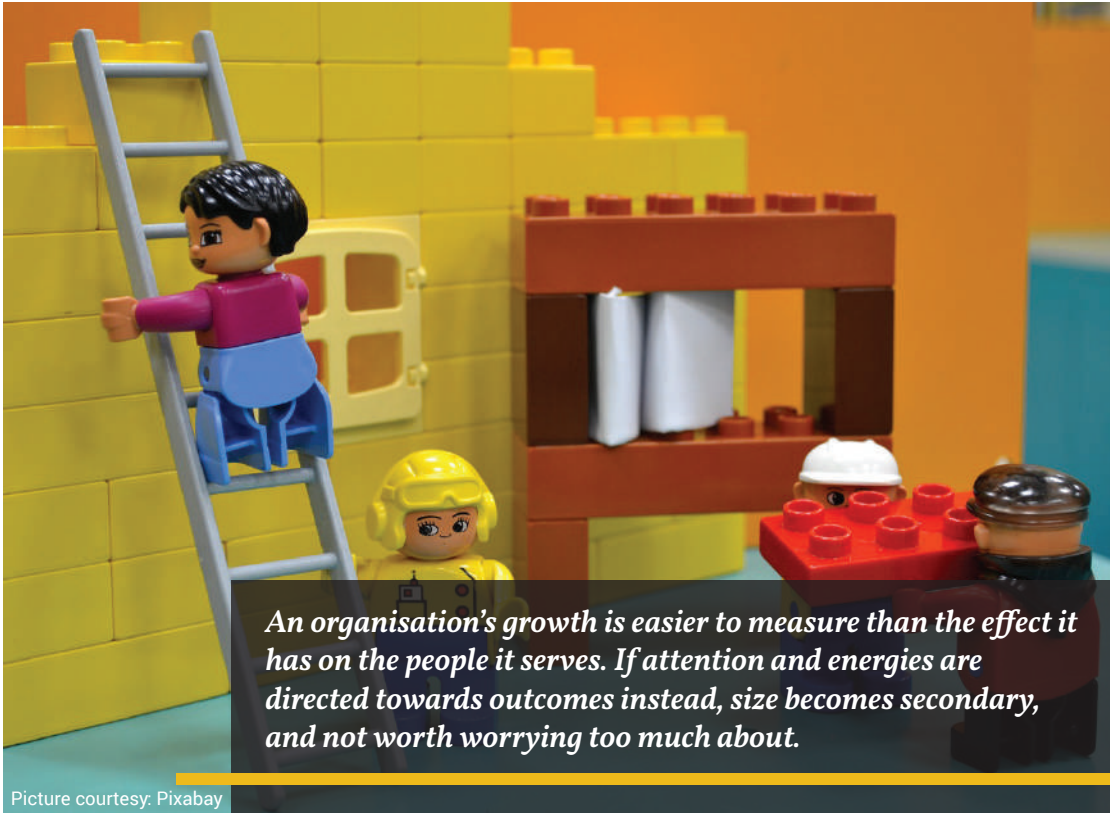
3. Be emotional

The role of your brand is not to explain what you do, but to make people feel who you are. For example, I feel pumped and inspired when I look at Nike ads. This is particularly important for social sector brands because most people make their decision to contribute or participate based on how they feel, more than what they think. Think about what you want others to feel—angry, charged, hopeful, reassured. Use your visual identity, voice, and words to emote your vision and what you are passionate about. It will transfer on to others.

4. Include everyone

Frequently, the leader or leadership team does a thorough job of crafting and creating their organisation's brand. However, it doesn't trickle down to all members of the organisation, and leads to brand confusion and inconsistency. It is important to train your team to use and embrace the brand. In fact, it is even better to involve them in its creation, especially if the team isn't very big. This will increase buy-in and make implementation much easier. Next, create a simple usage guidelines book to help the wider team communicate and represent the brand in one voice. Remember: your brand is only as good as your team is in representing it. ■

Is size the right metric to measure impact?



An organisation's growth is easier to measure than the effect it has on the people it serves. If attention and energies are directed towards outcomes instead, size becomes secondary, and not worth worrying too much about.

Picture courtesy: Pixabay



Arun Maira

Author,
Transforming systems: Why the world needs a new ethical toolkit

When we talk of civil society, we usually think of civil society organisations. And as an organisation, you have to have a form, a leader, and a certain size. You have to talk about how much money you are able to raise and how much you spend. It is how we see entities in the market and the government; and we use the same lenses that they use to look at ourselves and define ourselves in civil society.

But civil society isn't restricted to organisations. There are many ways in which human beings take action to create change. A man on the street who gathers a few people to have a meeting on an issue is also civil society. In most cases though, to be more effective you need more resources and more cooperation, and so you create organisations.

But what is an organisation, and what does it do?

I used to be a consultant and one of the

companies I advised 20 years ago said that they had a strategy but weren't able to get the results of the strategy. The question posed to me was, "How do we organise ourselves to get the results we desire?"

So, I got their senior management in a room and asked them to draw a sketch of the organisation on a piece of paper; they had one minute to do this. When I looked at all the sketches, almost all of them had drawn something like a pyramid—with some kinds of reporting lines, some kind of hierarchical structure.

And that, in essence, is what people think of when they think of an organisation—that it should necessarily have a structure. So, you describe the structures and the reporting relationships—upwards and downwards—and define that as the organisation.

Today, when I ask people the same question, I notice that maybe half will draw something that shows a lot of connection between things—something like a cloud with lots of dots in it—and the other half will still draw the top-down pyramid structure.

The difference is that today I mostly end up asking this question to people who are working on areas related to poverty, rights, dignity, and so on. The other difference is that there are more women in the room answering this question than there were 20 years ago.

The reason I'm highlighting this is that as I spend more time with civil society, I meet more and more leaders who ask the question 'how can we be more effective'? However, many of them have come from the corporate world or have had a management education; which means that they bring in what they learnt and used in their corporate worlds to try and get results in civil society; and the first thing they want to do is 'construct' an organisation.

This is why I do the exercise. To ask people if the solution they are proposing is appropriate for the problem they are attempting to solve; to get them to think deeper and look at things that are not visible to us, and to examine the beliefs that drive us.

It's hard because you are asking someone to fundamentally change how they have thought and behaved for several decades of their working life. It's especially hard if you've been successful in the corporate world. People look up to you and say that you have been so successful; tell us how to organise ourselves so that we can be successful too.

Funders subscribe to this as well. They believe that there are certain organisations who have the potential to scale, but often they are thinking of structure too, when they say this.

But this approach of organisation hasn't worked for so many years in the social field where the challenges are more systemic; why would it work now? Putting more resources into an inappropriate solution will not improve the efficacy of the solution. It has been observed all around the world that the ones who are actually creating social change are the ones immersed in the community, and that you can't scale. It has to be local.

“Putting more resources into an inappropriate solution will not improve the efficacy of the solution.”

The energy of the sector lies with the smaller players

Large nonprofits have as much inertia as large corporations and government organisations; and sometimes maybe even more. And with reason. They take public and donor money, and they need to have more controls, more accounting, which in turn makes them more bureaucratic.

The more energetic part of the sector resides in the smaller organisations, the ones that are immersed in their communities and working on areas that they care about. But they are too small. Does it, and should it, matter that they are so small? If impact is about changing lives, can the size of an organisation be the right metric to evaluate scale?

I have worked as chairperson at a few large international nonprofits and I've seen progress measured by budgets, revenues, and expenditures. The discussion and accountability are focused internally on the organisation's growth, which is easier to measure, rather than on the effect it has had on the people they serve. Instead, if the nonprofit's attention and energies are directed towards outcomes, its size becomes secondary, and not really worth worrying too much about either.

Having less resources makes you agile and innovative

I often use the example of the automobile industry in the US. In the late 1980s, the country was dominated by General Motors, Chrysler, and Ford. Honda, which was a tiny company among the global giants, was the first foreign company to set up a plant in the US, and they were the first ones to build cars that were energy compliant with California state laws. General Motors had the money and the research, but they couldn't do it.

The general belief in the industry, as well as with my management consulting colleagues, at that time, was that to thrive in the auto industry one needed huge resources—for research, for building new models, and to stave off competition that was only getting fiercer by the year. But some of us believed that there was another way to win—one which didn't involve large amounts of resources. Something that entailed passion, energy, and using the little that you had more effectively. Thirty years later, the Big Three were replaced by their smarter, smaller peers.

Today, we see this around us—smaller organisations that are nimble and creative. The problems arise when they start getting bigger. The mindset slowly changes to one that believes that you need more resources to

win; it shifts away from the other energies that you've used to get to this point. But you have to watch out and not play that game; you have to play your game because the big guys can never play your game.

And this is true everywhere—whether in corporates or in nonprofits. As enterprises grow and reach a certain point, they don't know how to manage and coordinate all the things that they have. So, they go and hire a manager. The managers come in with their theory of how to organise and manage at scale, and they dampen all innovation thereafter. We must be careful not to adopt this approach and this thinking in our sector.

Our sector needs millions of tiny points of energy and it needs networks

Is there some way though, that one can be a small organisation and still have outsized impact? Can organisations do something differently to achieve greater impact without becoming big? How can they learn to be a better catalyst? Not a bigger organisation, but a better catalyst. This is not taught in management schools, nor is it the knowledge that management consultants bring to their large corporate clients, or to large nonprofits.

In our sector we've seen several large organisations that have been focused on their own growth and programmes. There are many of those and still the world is not changing.

We are now beginning to see a few people and entities who are saying they want to be different: they want to collaborate with different sorts of nonprofits and different government departments.

The different players in any collaborative will do their own thing because they care about it deeply; as a result, they will also do it well. Hopefully they will also realise that they need many different actors, because unless there are other sorts of competencies in the network than the ones that they have, they cannot have a deep and large system effect.

It is critical to have these multiple points of energy, because then it becomes an organic network—one that is resilient, and is not at the risk of dying if one part of it is killed, because other parts will take over.

The scale will come from the impact that this network will have, and hence, the entity that convenes it should be a catalyst and not a 'leader' at the top. And that is

the hard part. Everyone knows how to be a boss—there is no dearth of books written about this and about strong and visionary leadership. It's all there. But who tells you how to be a catalyst? There are no blueprints for that.

Smaller organisations need different kinds of support to do more

1. Create the structure for a network and not for an organisation

We need the necessary structures of a network, which are different from the structures of an organisation. Unlike an organisation, a network allows people to remain independent; you don't have to do exactly what others are doing; in fact, you probably shouldn't. But there is something to learn and gain from the different partners in the network. So, there must be lateral connections versus the standard top-down structures, to enable learning from others, and to support cooperation, and these must be strengthened.

What flows through the lateral connections is important too. One is knowledge and learning; learning from what others are doing and vice-versa. The role of the centre—the nodal body—is to set up this infrastructure that benefits everyone and enables them to get what they can from each other. The centre in all this cannot be directive; it has to be an enabler.

It must also enrol the various players, asking them to sign up for the cause they all agree upon. Again, this is a service or coordinating activity to enlarge the network. The overarching goal is to enable the various members to have a greater effect, individually by being part of the network, and collectively too.

2. Figure out new models of execution

The biggest challenge occurs once the work starts. We've seen instances where movements arise and people coalesce around ideas and issues and this does intimidate those in power; however, after that, it collapses because the processes to coordinate the work are weak.

“There must be lateral connections versus the standard top-down structures.”

Since we don't have established models for how networks work, once the actual work of producing results starts, we slip back into boss-mode. But this doesn't work. The collective cannot and should not look to one leader for guidance.

Instead everyone does what they have passion for, believe in, and are capable of. They do as much as they need to and can, and that's enough. If many people do this, the world is going to be different, and no one player is at scale. Instead, this whole thing, this movement of systemic change is at scale.

Complex systems change requires a new toolkit. The conventional toolkit taught in business schools, with case studies of successful, large organisations, and its emphasis on efficiency and scale, cannot produce the outcomes the world needs now—of sustainability and social harmony.

Indeed, this approach is causing many of the problems civil society organisations are battling: the imbalance in power between large organisations and common citizens; and the dependency of less-privileged people on the charity of those who have the resources. ■

Humour | Grants, as beverages

If your Tata Trust grant were a beverage, what would it be?



Rachita Vora

Co-founder and Director,
IDR



SEED GRANT

ESPRESSO: It's small gets over in a giffy but also gets you going.



CSR GRANT

PACKAGED MILK: It's a fixed amount and you can't really mess with the expiration date.



UNRESTRICTED GRANT

CHAMPAGNE: It's sophisticated and offered occassionally, but when it is offered, you don't say no.

To read more of our humour,
visit idronline.org/humour/



CAPACITY BUILDING GRANT

WHISKEY: It boosts your self confidence and unearths skills you never knew you had.



TATA TRUST GRANT

CHAI: It's ubiquitous and synonymous with India. (Can you picture development work happening without chai?)*

*We aren't just saying this because Tata Trusts support IDR. ■

GROUND UP

Ground Up is a new initiative at IDR. It features anecdotal, easy-to-consume, multimedia stories, providing insights into how things operate close to the grassroots, within communities, amidst field workers, and inside government offices.

To learn more, visit idronline.org/ground-up/

Does it matter who wins?

MYSORE DISTRICT, KARNATAKA

Native Picture

Run by Arjun Swaminathan, Native Picture is a visual storytelling platform that covers rural and tribal India. Native Picture is a content partner for Ground Up.

"Who will win the elections this time?"

"Please don't bother me, it's very hot and I have a long day ahead. Has it really mattered who wins? Life is the same for us. Please leave, I have work."
Varadanayaka, a farmer in HD Kote, Karnataka. ■



STORIES FROM
20 DISTRICTS
12 STATES

"Main mazdoor hoon"

UDAIPUR DISTRICT, RAJASTHAN

Raghav Mehrotra

Raghav Mehrotra is a development executive at Aajeevika Bureau, a nonprofit organisation working with seasonal migrant labourers in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.

In March 2018, the Supreme Court ordered a social audit of the Building and Other Construction Workers' (BOCW) Welfare Board. During a pilot audit in Salumbar block, Rajasthan, interviewers asked residents what they did for a living. A truck driver, a Rajput homemaker, and a farmer, all had the same response: "Main mazdoor hoon." I am a labourer. For the residents of Salumbar, 'mazdoor'—a term typically used to refer to manual labourers—included people involved in a wide range of jobs.

This form of self-identification is important when considered in the context of BOCW's identity document, colloquially named the 'mazdoor diary'. This is a coveted document because it gives the holder access to INR 8,000 per year for their children's education, INR 55,000 to support their daughter's enterprise or marriage, and up to INR 1.5 lakh to build a *pukka* house. While only construction workers are entitled to the diary, its unofficial name has prompted a large number of self-identifying *mazdoors* to believe that they can claim its benefits.

In Salumbar, through carefully constructed

language that avoids any mention of BOCW or construction work, networks of unofficial agents reinforce the social misconception that the *mazdoor* diary is available to all manual labourers.

Since the labour department is not easily accessible at the panchayat level, these agents are often the only source of information about the Act. Together with local authorities and *e-mitras* (employed by the state to file applications for any of Rajasthan's public programmes), agents can coerce hundreds of ineligible workers into registering for BOCW welfare. Their incentive here is a commission as high as 20 percent per application.

When registered non-construction workers heard about the legitimate eligibility criteria for the *mazdoor* diary, they were confused and disappointed. They felt excluded by the state for a misunderstanding that was never communicated, or perhaps deliberately hidden from them. For those at the margins, BOCW welfare is an opportunity for upward economic mobility. To lose the diary would be to lose this prospect, at least temporarily. ■

Is philanthropy really changing anything?



Scepticism around philanthropy is growing. Here's what philanthropists can do to ensure there is more alignment with what society wants.

Picture courtesy: Rawpixel



Vidya Shah
CEO,
EdelGive Foundation

What does philanthropy in India look like today and what has it managed to do? Is it really changing the world and people's lives? Or is it simply an extension of capitalism and an opportunity for the super-rich to strengthen their stranglehold on economic activity as well as development and social progress?

In India, the CSR guidelines as outlined in the Companies Act 2013, were first met with great distress and protest about an additional, disguised tax being levied on corporations to do what governments needed to do. In the five years since, any corporation worth its salt is producing detailed sustainability reports to attest to its good corporate citizenship.

However, scepticism around philanthropy is growing

Critics like Anand Giridharadas worry that asking philanthropy to solve society's problems means the return of 'unfettered paternalism'. Elizabeth Kolbert asks, "Are today's donor classes solving problems or creating new ones?" and possibly, also answers her own question when she says that, "We live, it is often said, in a new Gilded Age—an era of extravagant wealth and almost as extravagant displays of generosity".

Or perhaps, as David Remnick comments, "Philanthropy isn't only fascinating in itself; it's also a window

into the structure of the contemporary world". There is little trust in, "the man of wealth considering himself the mere trustee and agent for his poor brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer".

This criticism of philanthropy covering for the excesses of business is rather more widespread today than before. In a sense, the pursuit of profit alone, or the doctrine of shareholder primacy at the expense of other stakeholders is under attack; and has been for some time now.

Profit above all else

There is widespread belief that corporations pursue profit and market capitalisation to the exclusion of broader citizenship, whether for their employees or the environment. Personal profit, wealth, and renown seem to take precedence over equitable distribution of wealth.

Large tobacco companies continue to make money off a deadly habit. The pharmaceutical industry has built its fortune on super drugs, which are inaccessible and expensive to those who need them the most. Big banks have paid considerable fines as they acknowledged bad practices and mis-selling. The FMCG industry has been criticised for creating a consumer society, setting aspirations driven by materialistic objects rather than values. And the food industry has been accused of exacerbating the obesity epidemic.

The belief that capitalism is amoral is being deeply questioned. And companies have traditionally countered these increasing questions on perception through sustainability initiatives, marketing campaigns, brandbuilding, and CSR.

The push and pull of governments

Along with this deep mistrust of corporations and their motives, we also know that public trust in government has been steadily declining.

In India, central government expenditure has been falling continuously as a percent of GDP, from 13.34 percent in 2014-15 to 12.77 percent in 2017-18. This has put pressure on public spending and on schemes for the poor.

"The belief that capitalism is amoral is being deeply questioned."

Government departments are also playing an increasing role in directing the behaviour of both civil society and philanthropy by openly pushing and calling for both consultations and financial support for efforts they deem critical. So, while we continue to believe that working with government is important to achieve long-term systems change, the space in which that dialogue can be had is getting smaller.

A deepening of inequalities

The Credit Suisse Global Wealth Handbook shows that the top one percent of India's population share of national wealth grew from 36.8 percent in 2000 to 58.4 percent in 2016. Over the same period, the bottom 10 percent of Indians' wealth fell from 0.1 percent to -0.7 percent.

In the midst of this, the sense of a shrinking civil society is all too pervasive. While funding for social causes has increased steadily, we also have civil society tell us that funder-directed efforts have increased. Operating foundations by philanthropists have also grown.

Because, finally it is the elite that controls the resources when it comes to philanthropy. As Edgar Villanueva, author of the book *Decolonizing Wealth*, puts it: "Philanthropy is top-down, closed-door, and expert-driven."

Villanueva says that funders need to ask three questions: Where did this money come from? Who gets to allocate, manage, and spend it? And, how can we rise above the processes we've created to reach folks who may have different solutions?

These are important questions because, as I was told at a recent gathering, the issues that plagued the sector three decades ago still persist: severe restrictions on unrestricted funding or organisation costs, unrealistic measurement, a short-term orientation, and a band-aid approach to solutions. Most importantly, though, there is a lack of dialogue between stakeholders on solutions.

What can philanthropists do to ensure that there is more alignment with what society wants?

Former RBI governor, Raghuram Rajan, has called for economists across the country to re-think, strengthen, and empower local communities and civil society as a means to more equitable growth. We need to have a similar conversation on new approaches for the philanthropic sector.

So, what can we as philanthropists do to seem more

aligned to the needs of society and be able to contribute more towards the same? Here are some steps:

1. Cultivate humility in programme deliverables

We—particularly funders and donors—are doing a large disservice to society by claiming that we are ‘transforming lives’ and then quantifying that transformation through numbers. This language that we use has led to numerification of an extreme kind—first of the ‘beneficiary’ and then multiplied by five for family size.

Needless to say, there is a huge ring of arrogance attached to this line of thinking.

Who are we to transform lives? Do we seriously believe that this is something we are doing? Using this language suggests that the communities we work for are helpless victims, with no aspirations of their own, instead of the fighters that we know they really are. It is time we understood that transformation is a process that comes from within and is enabled by nudges and triggers. We are not transforming lives, we are merely enabling transformation.

While we at EdelGive too have been guilty of claiming to have transformed lives, I hope to now give this term a quiet burial.

2. Go beyond a one-way assessment of programme delivery

We need to hear a lot more from the communities we serve, and we need to ask to hear from them. In her piece titled *Time for a Three-legged Measurement Stool*, Fay Twersky argues that funders need to go beyond traditional monitoring and evaluation to focus on feedback.

She talks about this feedback as a process, which involves systematically soliciting, listening to, and responding to the experiences of nonprofit participants and customers about their perceptions of a service or product. Twersky reiterates that by listening to customers’ experiences, preferences, and ideas, we can gain insights that will help improve the quality and effectiveness of social programmes.

“It is time we understood that transformation is a process that comes from within and is enabled by nudges and triggers.”

It is this moving away from quantifiable evaluation practices to those which include a two-way dialogue, that can help the funder community raise the bar for their programmes. It is no longer enough to have a one-way assessment of programme delivery.

Monitoring and evaluation can no longer just be a tool to judge the accountability of a programme. It has to go beyond that.

3. Observe systems thinking towards systems change

Finally, we need to understand that all the problems we confront are interconnected and that we therefore need to find interconnected solutions to them. We also need to look beyond the outcome of programmes to strengthen the processes that help bring about these outcomes.

At EdelGive Foundation, we have tried to implement this line of systems thinking across our portfolios, but particularly in education. And it looks as follows: instead of looking at school enrolment numbers (which is what state governments were working on, and what data was being collected around), we looked at a factor that influences enrolment—learning levels in schools. For this, we worked directly with the service provider—the government—towards addressing the issue. We worked with district- and block-level government administrators, headmasters, teachers, and parents, in building a systemic programme for education.

While we, as philanthropists, have a long way to go, I am confident that dialogue and deliberation will pave the way for a much better structure of philanthropy, one which is inclusive and committed to genuine social progress. ■

Rethinking our approaches to disaster relief



The government's response to Cyclone Fani reflects the techno-managerial approach we have towards disaster relief. We need to shift to an approach that takes people's needs into account instead of relying on templatised solutions.

Picture courtesy: Flickr



Liby Johnson

Executive Director,
Gram Vikas

On 3rd May 2019, tropical Cyclone Fani hit the Odisha coast affecting the lives of more than 15 million people. Of these, the largest number of people were affected by failure of basic services—electricity, telephone connectivity, and to a limited extent, road connectivity. People initially feared there being a shortage of essential commodities, or an inordinate rise in prices, but that did not happen. The basic services are expected to be restored for at least three-fourths of the affected population within a month or less. Life will be back to normal for them.

For about a quarter of the affected population, the aftermath of Cyclone Fani will have a much longer effect. There are the people living in the slums of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack cities and the economically less-endowed people in many villages of Puri and Khurda districts, who will have to fight a long battle to restore what they have lost. 'Build Back

Better' is a favourite punchline for those in the disaster response sector, but there are many fault lines emerging that will make this a tough proposition.

The trajectory of disaster response in Odisha

Cyclone Fani is the fifth major natural disaster to affect Odisha in the last five decades; with the 1971 Super Cyclone, the 1999 Super Cyclone, Cyclone Phailin in 2013, and Cyclone Titli in 2018 being the previous four. Of these, Cyclone Titli is not counted by most as a major disaster, given the very localised incidence of its impact. But it must be retained as an important one to understand the impact of climate change and how such events, hitherto limited to 'coastal' areas, are now affecting and leading to disastrous effects on people living in hilly areas. There is so far no preparedness on this score.

The non-government sector, or civil society, has played a very important role in disaster preparedness and response activities in Odisha. Be it the cyclone of 1971 or of 1999, the largest contributions in relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction were from the civil society sector, with aid coming in from several international relief and development organisations. The government played facilitating roles, but in terms of real investments—financial or technical—it lagged way behind. The corporate sector was completely absent in these efforts, save some small humanitarian contributions.

Over the years there has been a perceptible change in terms of disaster preparedness; and the government is deservedly lauded for its role in undertaking effective cyclone monitoring and early warning mechanisms, evacuation of people from targeted areas to secure cyclone shelters, thereby minimising loss of life. The government machinery also pulls together various departments to put basic public infrastructure in place—water supply, electricity, roads, education, and health systems. It reflects a well-honed techno-managerial approach.

The limits of techno-managerial approaches in post-disaster rehabilitation

The change in dynamics of government-non-government relations over the past two decades has had implications in the post-disaster response, and reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts in Odisha. After the 2013 Cyclone Phailin, the Government of Odisha was at the forefront of rehabilitation and reconstruction. The World Bank funded Odisha Disaster Recovery Project was almost entirely a government affair, save some limited involvement of non-governmental organisations in social mobilisation of communities identified for rehabilitation. This has been a very long-drawn process, that is not yet complete.

Rebuilding after disasters such as the cyclones, especially for poorer communities who suffer loss of property and livelihoods, however, requires a different approach—both social and technical. For one, there is need for an enabling mobilisation approach to select beneficiaries. In such disasters, almost everyone in a community is affected, albeit in varying magnitudes. How does one select a few households for a particular benefit? This task is quite difficult to achieve in regular development projects, leave alone when combined with the trauma caused by disaster.

There are cases where priorities of planners and those of the affected people will be in clear conflict. For example, in the case of marine fisher communities, the choice of living nearer to the coast is driven by their primary livelihood activity. Safety concerns will dictate that they be moved further inland, and houses be built where they are less likely to be affected by cyclones in the future. Moving away from the seashore will not be accepted by the people, as it would immediately hamper their daily lives.

Unfortunately, in the government sector, post-disaster rehabilitation or reconstruction work becomes part of the routine, relying on templatised solutions, not taking people's needs into account or enabling processes for capacity building. The results achieved often do not contribute to enhancing the disaster resilience of the people and communities.

It is widely accepted that any reconstruction and rehabilitation effort, after such natural disasters, should result in a quality of life better than what existed prior to the event; and that these results should be available within a reasonable period of time. Non-government organisations, both large national agencies, and smaller local agencies, have repeatedly demonstrated the ability to do this.

South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) is a cooperative federation of marine artisanal fisher people in the southern peninsula of India. After the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, SIFFS undertook reconstruction of habitat in two thickly populated villages in Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu. The SIFFS approach to reconstruction was based on the specific requirements of building safe houses for marine fisher people, and drew lessons from the experiences of nonprofit organisations undertaking owner-driven house reconstruction in Bhuj, after the Gujarat Earthquake of 2000. More than a decade after they were rebuilt, the villages of Tarangambadi and Chinnagudi continue to thrive as human settlements, while many other new settlements in the region remain uninhabited, due to lack of ownership by the 'beneficiaries'. There will always be certain inefficiencies that are part of non-government processes; but when balanced with the much higher effectiveness of the

“There are cases where priorities of planners and those of the affected people will be in clear conflict.”

results, these inefficiencies cost little.

Unfortunately, the mistaking of scale for efficiency—the basic argument with which government has taken the development space away from nonprofits—often results in less effective results. Government of Odisha has declared that it will build back more resilient infrastructure, to withstand future events such as Cyclone Fani. This is commendable, but it is quite clear that the key trigger for this intent is the widespread damage to electricity supply and mobile telephone infrastructure in Bhubaneswar city.

This resilient infrastructure means little for the two sections referred to earlier—people living in urban slums and the less endowed in rural areas—whose losses are far more immediate and real. They have lost shelter, crops, animals, livelihoods assets such as shops, stocks, and equipment. Restoring or rebuilding these requires much more humane and socially-responsible approaches.

Kerala and Odisha: Locating government response in different contexts

The Government's grandstanding in terms of raising resources and the incentives under CSR rules for

“Mistaking scale for efficiency often results in less effective results.”

contributions made to the State Relief Fund, virtually crowds out any non-government effort at rehabilitation and reconstruction. Most likely, the response after the Kerala floods in 2018 is being seen as the blueprint for this grandstanding.

Odisha's development challenges are not the same as that of Kerala, both in terms of ground reality and the resources at the disposal of the state. Historically, the non-government sector has not had much of a development role in Kerala, given the strong local governance structures. The nature of poverty and marginalisation in Odisha—in terms of magnitude, depth, and extent—is also very different from Kerala. It made sense for the Government of Kerala to draw large resources for reconstruction after the 2018 floods. Odisha following in the same lines will not produce similar results. The Government of Odisha should urgently reach out for more collaborative efforts between the government and the non-government sectors. ■

Humour | 'Out-of-office' emails you wish you could send



Akhil Paliath

Development professional

Hey,

Thank you so much for your email. I'm sure it's a really great email. Maybe it's about the sheer joy of the pre-pre-board meeting prep or another brilliant opportunity we have to send another batch of made up data for our donor reports.

Unfortunately, I will not be able to reply to it because I'm busy digging my toes into the sand and finishing my third Piña Colada (attached is a picture as proof).

If you want to get a hold of me, catch a flight to the Andamans, take a seven-hour boat ride, and then trek 12 km till you reach Sam's shack where a trail of pink cocktail umbrellas should lead you to me.

Okthxbye,

Rahul

*Has gotten into B-school so doesn't give a sh*t about his job*

India's most significant innovations have roots in civil society



Picture courtesy: AKRSP (I)

When we look at some of the things we take for granted in India today, there is a common thread to all of them. Every single one. They all originated from civil society.



Apoorva Oza
CEO, Aga Khan
Rural Support
Programme (India)

People hear the word civil society and react differently; and it depends on where they come from. For the business leader, social and environmental concerns are impediments to business. *"Environment ke liye poori project band hojata hai* (Entire projects have to be shut down for the sake of the environment), what about growth, what about the economy?"

I've also been in conversations with some government officers who say, *"Woh kaam chhota karte hain aur credit bahut le lete hain. Kaam toh hum karte hain, paisa toh hamara hai."* (The nonprofits hardly do any work but take all the credit. We are the ones who do the work, the ones who put in the money.)

But nothing is farther from the truth. When

we look at rural India, and look at some of the things we take for granted today—be it women self-help groups (SHGs), ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers, biogas plants, RTI (Right to Information) applications, and so on—there is a common thread to all of them. Every single one. They all originated as innovations in civil society.

Our largest government programmes were born in civil society

1. National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

One of the largest programmes of the government—the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)—is based on women SHGs. And the concept of

an SHG was developed by Aloysius Fernandes and his team at MYRADA.

In the 1970s, MYRADA was working with large primary agriculture cooperative societies (PACS), all of whom seemed to be failing. In some of the geographies however, while the cooperatives had collapsed, there were some villages where small groups were saving and giving credit to each other.

Aloysius and the MYRADA team saw this, identified them as empowered groups that the banks could lend to, gave it form and structure, and took it to NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development).

NABARD realised the value of what MYRADA was helping build, because they themselves were trying to reach out to the poor and their existing institutional portfolio was failing because the cooperatives weren't functioning. They supported MYRADA and then pushed the banks to lend to these groups of poor women who saved regularly.

So, in a sense, the SHG movement was started by MYRADA and to some extent, NABARD. The state was not in the picture at that time.

Then the first SERP (Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty) programme came up in Andhra Pradesh. They used the base created by NABARD and MYRADA and they promoted the SHGs. Because the SERP programme worked, and because the World Bank was funding SERP, when the government created the NRLM, they used the same principles and structures.

Today the NRLM, which rides almost entirely on the SHG infrastructure, is the only large-scale institutional arrangement that the government has to reach out to poor. Every government uses it, regardless of what end of the political spectrum they occupy. It is pro-poor and still has elements of the market—the state can extend its entitlements directly to the people, while also enabling them to be self-reliant by promoting enterprises. But if there hadn't been MYRADA, we probably wouldn't have had the NRLM today.

2. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

India's most talked about government programme—MGNREGA—came about because Jean Drèze and others in civil society drafted it and advocated for it.

“We are seeing a marginalisation of the civil society sector by markets and the government because we haven't told our story well enough.”

The idea of MGNREGA did borrow from an earlier employment guarantee programme that was started in Maharashtra by Mr Vitthal Sakharam Page—chair of the Maharashtra State Legislative Council, and a social activist—who wrote the first draft in 1965. But it was only when several civil society activists fought for it in the early 2000s, that it became something that the central government took seriously and passed into national law.

3. Integrated Water Management Programme (IWMP)

The early work around watershed management was done in Sukhomajri in Haryana. A more integrated approach was later piloted at Ralegan Siddhi by Anna Hazare. This, and the Hiware Bazar model by Popatrao Pawar became models to emulate, and the IWMP guidelines that are in place today are a result of contributions from many nonprofits.

These are just few examples, but the story repeats itself again and again regardless of the sector. Consider these two other examples: one old and one relatively recent.

- **ASHA workers:** The concept of ASHA workers was born in Jamkhed. The Aroles—Dr Mabelle and Dr Raj—started a programme in 1970 which involved semi-literate women delivering home-based care to mothers and newborns. It was taken to scale by the government, and our country now has more than six lakh ASHA workers.
- **108 Service:** The 108 service that everyone lauds as a model of efficiency and scale was started as a service by EMRI—a nonprofit in Andhra Pradesh under the aegis of Satyam Foundation (EMRI was later taken over by the GVK Foundation). It was handed over to the Andhra Pradesh government, and later, other state governments implemented it. Today it runs across 15 states and two union territories.

The list continues—handpumps, participatory rural appraisals, *wadi* programmes, and so on. Essentially, almost any government programme worth its salt came from an innovation or technology developed by civil society. This is not to belittle the role of the state, which

is by far the major development actor, but to emphasise the role of civil society in nation building.

Despite this, we are seeing a marginalisation of the civil society sector by markets and the government because we haven't told our story well enough.

Civil society is too self-effacing

What is the philosophy of civil society? We believe that we will develop solutions which, over time, the community will own, and the state or market will support. When that happens, we believe our work is done.

In a way, it's a very phoenix-like approach—you create and you disband. And you start all over again on some other problem. We don't patent anything; we don't take credit for anything.

Perhaps this is because we know that something as complex as social change requires the contribution of many people—communities, grassroots organisations, the state, funders, and so on. But we have gone to the other extreme. We don't even acknowledge our role in the change; in fact, we undermine it.

When people ask us if we have successfully run a programme, we say, *"Nahi humne toh kuch kiya nahi hai, ye toh sab gaonwalon ne kiya hai"* (No, we didn't do anything, it was the villagers who did everything). And while it might be politically correct to say that we are only the catalysts, and the real work is done by the community, it's not always an accurate representation.

Civil society is more than the catalyst; we are innovators—technical innovators and idea innovators. We take really complex problems and come up with new ways to address them. We do effective work but refuse to take credit for it. And our refusal to take credit only feeds into the government's view point—if the community is doing everything and civil society isn't doing anything, then we will deal with the community directly.

People don't understand our unique proposition

Because we have undermined ourselves, our unique proposition is not known. Our value to society is not only what we do, or how we do it, but also at what cost we do what we do.

"We don't even acknowledge our role in the change; in fact, we undermine it."

Many of us work at ridiculously low costs but we don't document it, and we don't measure it. So, some corporates, who want to work on social programmes, believe that they don't need nonprofits. All they have to do is take the nonprofit's staff and implement it on their own because it seems easy and cheap to do so.

The reality is different. Running a programme is complex. It takes years to build trust. And it requires humility, rigour, and persistence. It requires training, all-weather support, and hand-holding—all things that lead to an enabling ecosystem that a good nonprofit creates.

But some corporates don't know this; they just want to take on the programmes because they believe they can do it better on their own rather than share space with nonprofits. It's we who are at fault because we allowed this to happen.

The assumption is that nonprofits cannot scale

Scale is the new measure of 'success', where others find civil society wanting. Small, local, and specialised civil society organisations are disappearing, and are not considered relevant in this new India which is in a hurry.

If one studies what has worked in the past, one realises that many relatively small organisations have transformed the country. Consider MKSS, a grassroots organisation, which started its work in a small village in Rajasthan, and even at its peak, worked largely in Rajasthan for citizens' right to information. That the RTI Act eventually became one of the most effective legislations by the state to hold itself accountable to its citizens, is a story of how impact is not necessarily a function of size.

We are constantly told by corporates and governments that we can't scale. But then I reflect on what a large corporate that has scaled typically does? They pick one slice of a human being's life, for instance, the fact that people might like to drink cold, sweet water in summer. It is one need—one would think a very unhealthy need but nevertheless a need. And then a multi-billion-dollar soft drink industry gets created around this need. You serve nothing; in fact, you take a poor man's good water and convert it into this sweet water and charge him INR 20 for it. That is your net value addition to society. So that is all you know: to understand one very small slice of a human being's need and address it.

Now compare that to what civil society is trying to do. We are trying to transform the conditions in which human beings live. This is dramatically different from

creating a market for one small need of an individual.

It's easy to scale a product that is unidimensional, serves a very specific micro-need, to which you can throw a ton of resources—money, talent, technology. But can you do it when it involves changing entrenched social norms across all aspects of a person's life and livelihood?

The problem is while we in the sector might know how to do some of this, we don't know how to articulate it and how to measure it. And because we haven't articulated it, we cannot argue for resources, for space, for anything really.

Even if the state hasn't failed, we will always need civil society

Civil society is that critical third pillar of the *samaj-sarkar-bazaar* (society-government-market) triangle. Without it, no society can function. Even in the

“It's easy to scale a product that is unidimensional, but can you do it when it involves changing entrenched social norms?”

most successful countries across the world there will always be people who are marginalised, and issues that are not on government or company radars.

There will always be a human problem which the market will never take up, and the state will not realise either, because it is too buried or too out there in the future. Even in its best form, the government is not designed to look at these things. And countries that have a majoritarian democracy will ignore those who are not a part of their majority. It's a design problem.

So, who will look out for these people, who will help change entrenched social norms, who will build awareness of issues that matter? ■

Continued from page 21

Humour | 'Out-of-office' emails you wish you could send

Hi,

Thanks for reaching out but I'm at a meditation getaway trying to get over my latest nervous breakdown. Now, we don't really have any second line leadership to help you in my absence, but if necessary, you can reach out to our intern, Tanay. He still has three more days before he goes on his soul-searching backpacking trip. After that you're on your own.

Best,
Surbhi
Struggling nonprofit leader

Dear Email Sender,

I'll be on a field mission all of this week trying to justify my grossly inflated salary. The Taj villa I'm staying at does not have the best network connection so please expect a delay in getting a response.

In case it's urgent, reach out to one of the consultants we hire to do all of our work for us.

Regards,
Shobha
International organisation employee

IDR Interviews | Stan Swamy



An activist and humanitarian, Stan tells us how people's movements grow and are sustained in the context of his fight against the displacement and human rights violations faced by Adivasi peoples.



Sneha Philip
Senior Manager,
IDR



Smarinita Shetty
Co-founder and CEO,
IDR

Illustration: Aditya Krishnamurthy

Stan Swamy is an activist, a social worker, and a Jesuit priest who has spent many decades fighting for the rights of Adivasis in Jharkhand. He is a founder member of the Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan, a people's movement against displacement.

In this interview with IDR, Stan discusses the emergence and growth of people's movements, his work with young Adivasi undertrials who are falsely accused of being Naxalites, and the difficult choices that confront young Adivasis today.

What brought you to Jharkhand?

I'm originally from Tamil Nadu and when I became a Jesuit priest, I didn't want to remain in the South; it already has too many priests. I felt that there must be a greater need elsewhere. With the help of some friends, I came to know of the indigenous Adivasi peoples in central India—a place where despite the tremendous natural wealth in the region,

the people were very poor. I was 20 years old at that time and this was all I knew.

I arrived in the district of Singhbhum and was assigned to teach in an Adivasi boys' high school. I wanted to learn more about my students, and so I spent my holidays with them—going from one village to another, meeting people, speaking to them, and getting to know them.

In one such village, I was staying at a student's home during mango season. One morning, we were sitting in their courtyard, under a mango tree, filled with fruits. My student's father pointed to a few branches of the tree and asked him to bring down all the fruits that were ripe. The boy did as he was told, and we enjoyed some of the fruits together. But my attention was drawn to a branch of the tree, which was still laden with ripe mangoes. The boy's father had not

asked him to pluck any fruits from that branch, and I thought that perhaps he had failed to notice it. So, I plucked up some courage, pointed to the branch and said, "There are plenty of ripe fruits on this branch. Why didn't you ask your son to pick those too?" He responded very simply, saying, "Those are fruits for the birds of the air. Nature has given freely, and so, we share freely."

This incident forced me to question my value system. I spent a few more years during my twenties with Adivasis—learning their language, understanding their lives, their economy, and their social setup. I then went abroad for further studies and returned to work at the Indian Social Institute in Bangalore. But I returned to Jharkhand and its Adivasi peoples in 1990.

Could you speak a little about the work you've been doing over the past several years?

I've been involved in the emergence of some of the people's movements that Jharkhand has witnessed over the last few decades. One of the main issues we see is that people are being displaced because they live on lands that are rich in mineral resources.

An Adivasi will say, "*Jaan denge, par zameen nahi denge!*" (I will give up my life, but I will not give up my land). But it isn't enough to say this. So, I have been working with young Adivasis to help them better understand the dynamics of the society we now live in and develop strategies to resist displacement and save their lands.

A related issue is that young people who resist displacement of their land or their villages are accused of being Naxalites or Maoists, and are arrested. Since you can't really rely on the information that is reported in the newspapers, we decided to conduct a study to understand the situation of undertrials in Jharkhand.

We visited 18 districts in the state and spoke to 102 alleged Naxalite undertrials. Ninety-seven percent of our respondents reiterated that they had not committed the crimes attributed to them by the police. Through our study it was evident that in the current system, justice is beyond the means of most of those who have been falsely accused. Once they have been implicated in these cases, the threat of persecution in the form of harassment, intimidation, or re-arrest persists even after accused persons are released on bail. The study also exposed the deliberate misuse of criminal justice procedures to repress alleged Naxalite undertrials in Jharkhand's jails.

We estimate that there are at least 3,000 young

"It isn't just enough to learn about the reality of the situation. You have to act on it."

Adivasis and another 2,000 Dalits languishing in Jharkhand's jails; this is a large number of undertrials for a small state. And it isn't just enough to learn about the reality of the situation. You have to act on it. So, I filed a public interest litigation (PIL) against the Government of Jharkhand in the Jharkhand High Court, demanding speedy trials and information about undertrials in the state. The High Court ordered the state to furnish all the relevant information from each and every jail in Jharkhand in January 2018.

There have been several hearings and each time the state will say that one or two undertrials have been released. But we have not received any of the information that we seek, and this is because the state has much to hide.

Where does the support for these movements come from?

These movements are primarily driven and supported by the community itself. Let me give you an example: in the 1990s, the government wanted to construct two large dams across the Koel and Karo rivers in Ranchi district. This project would have submerged 132 villages, 50,000 acres of agricultural land, and 20,000 acres of forest land. Naturally, people opposed this.

The entire community organised itself under their traditional leadership. They took out massive rallies, walking for hours on end, from village to village, to organise the community against the construction of these dams. They conducted *aam sabhas* (community meetings). But, how do you convey this message when there is no media that can be used? Remember, this was in the 90s.

Well, there's a particular beat of the drum and when one village played this beat, the neighbouring village heard it and repeated the same beat. This was then heard by the next village and within a few hours they had conveyed the message to 70 villages. And the very next day, the community gathered, and each person brought with them *ek mukki chawal, ek rupya paisa* (a handful of rice and one rupee). This is how the movement came together and the community supported itself to resist displacement. They neither asked for nor accepted any financial help from outside.

The movement reached a climax on February 2nd, 2001, when the police opened fire at an *aam sabha* in the village of Tapkara, where 5,000 people had gathered. Eight people were killed and many more were handicapped for life. The state thought that this would frighten the Adivasis into abandoning the movement, but it had the opposite effect—people said, “We’ve shed our blood, there’s nothing more to lose”—and the movement only became stronger.

Are you seeing things changing as a new wave of younger Adivasis come to the fore?

There are many young Adivasis who have been educated and have good jobs, have built a house in Ranchi, and sent their children to English medium schools. But they have severed ties with the villages they come from.

The ones who have stayed behind cannot stand up and resist; if they do, they are put in jail. It’s a difficult choice for them. The young men say, “I cannot bear to stay back in the village and see my land being taken away; but if I resist, I’ll be thrown into jail. Let me instead leave this place, go elsewhere and earn money for my family.”

This leads us to another situation: migration. Many young Adivasis are migrating, especially towards the southern states, and much of this migration is because their land is being taken away from them. Despite the fact that Jharkhand has protective laws that safeguard land rights of the Adivasis such as the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act and the Land Acquisition Act of 2013, there is a great deal of forcible land acquisition taking place.

When the youth stand up against this, they are putting themselves at risk of being arrested and staying in jail for years without a trial.

But the young are still resisting?

When your land and your home are forcibly taken away, are you going to sit quietly? You are definitely going to stand up. There is resistance, but it isn’t organised such that the community as a whole stands by it.

So, we have created the Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan, a people’s movement against displacement, of which I am a founder member. While we have successfully fought some cases through people’s mobilisation, we have also failed in others, because of the brutal repression of the state.

There are others who are doing this too, and leaders have emerged among them. Take the case of Dayamani

“While we have successfully fought some cases through people’s mobilisation, we have also failed in others, because of the brutal repression of the state.”

Barla. She is from the Munda tribe and has played a terrific role in leading the community in the fight for land rights. When ArcelorMittal wanted to set up a steel plant in Gumla-Khunti, the state government wrote off 12,000 acres of land without any consultation with the inhabitants of that land. Dayamani went from village to village, creating awareness about what was happening and leading a campaign against the displacement of Adivasis from their own land.

When ArcelorMittal realised that they could not acquire the land forcibly, they tried other means. Brand new ambulances that were fully equipped and staffed with doctors and nurses started making their way to these villages, offering free services. The community knew exactly why this was happening and sent them packing. This is a very telling move for poor people who are in need of health services. Finally, ArcelorMittal tried to negotiate them down from 12,000 acres to 800 acres, but the people refused to give them an inch of land and eventually they had to leave. ■

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