
SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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ABSTRACT

Social Entrepreneur is a person who establishes an enterprise with the aim of solving social problems or effecting social change (Oxford dictionary). Rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs try to find innovative solutions to solve the social problems by changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to take new leaps. This paper gives some concept on social entrepreneurship, and also examines case studies of Sulabh International and Arvind Eye which are social entrepreneurs, working tirelessly to change lives of millions of Indians leading to sustainable development.

Keywords: *Social Entrepreneur, Government, Business, Sustainable Development*

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR

Social Entrepreneur is a person who establishes an enterprise with the aim of solving social problems or effecting social change (Oxford dictionary).

According to some, the term applies to any out-of-the-box effort that focuses exclusively on solving societal problems, be they social, educational, economic, or environmental. Others view social entrepreneurship from the perspective of establishing a social enterprise that will introduce an innovative approach to deal with a social problem. Based on the all inclusive first definition, reformers who lead a movement for a social cause would be categorized as social entrepreneurs. This group would include historic figures like Suzan B. Anthony, who fought for the rights of women; Vinoba Bhave, who called for the redistribution of land to help poor Indians; Jean Monnet, who led the rebuilding of the French economy after World War II; and John Woolman, who led U.S. Quakers to free their slaves. (www.Ashoka.org) Martin and Osberg (2007) follow the narrower definition of social entrepreneurship that will be followed in this study. They see the word "social" simply as a modifier of the term "entrepreneurship". Accordingly, "social entrepreneurship" is a form of entrepreneurship that has a great deal in common with "business entrepreneurship". What this modifier does is reflect some adjustment in mission, approach, and orientation. As a result, social entrepreneurship can be distinguished by having three components: (1) an ability to identify a stable but inherently unjust equilibrium that causes the exclusion, marginalization, or suffering of a segment of humanity", (2) an ability to identify an opportunity in this unjust equilibrium and develop a social value proposition, and (3) willingness to take action in order to forge "a new, stable equilibrium that releases rapped potential or alleviates the suffering of the targeted group. . .and even the society at large."

Historical Examples of Leading Social Entrepreneurs: (www.Ashoka.org)

- **Susan B. Anthony (U.S.):** Fought for Women's Rights in the United States, including the right to control property and helped spearhead adoption of the 19th amendment.
- **Vinoba Bhave (India):** Founder and leader of the Land Gift Movement, he caused the redistribution of more than 7,000,000 acres of land to aid India's untouchables and landless.

- **Dr. Maria Montessori (Italy):** Developed the Montessori approach to early childhood education.
- **Florence Nightingale (U.K.):** Founder of modern nursing, she established the first school for nurses and fought to improve hospital conditions.
- **Margaret Sanger (U.S.):** Founder of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, she led the movement for family planning efforts around the world.
- **John Muir (U.S.):** Naturalist and conservationist, he established the National Park System and helped found The Sierra Club.
- **Jean Monnet (France):** Responsible for the reconstruction of the French economy following World War II, including the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The ECSC and the European Common Market were direct precursors of the European Union.

CHALLENGE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Consumerism is on rise in entire world. People consume goods in excess without realizing its long term effect on the planet and on ourselves. Some scholars argue that consumerism is beneficial for the economy on the long run, however the fact is that too much consumption leads only to destruction of natural resources. Consuming more means extracting more raw materials from our natural resources. By that, we will only destroy most of our natural resources.

By changing our views and actions we can preserve what is left while sustaining ourselves. Sustainability means configuring civilization and human activity so that society, its members and its economies are able to meet their needs and express their greatest potential in the present, while preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems, planning and acting for the ability to maintain these ideals for future generations. Sustainable development as a concept, practice and an alternative for the existing economic order was proposed by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), in 1987. According to the committee, 'sustainable development is the kind of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED 1987).

According to U.N. Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Report 1998 there is a vast disparity between developed countries like USA and European countries vis-s vis developing countries with respect to spending priorities. Table 1 gives some illustrations in the comparison.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Social entrepreneurship is the activity developed by individuals or groups of people to create, sustain, distribute and/or disseminate social or environmental value in innovative ways through enterprise operations, which could be either a social enterprise, non-profit, private or public institution.(Granados et.al.,2011)

Social entrepreneurs have innovative and sustainable solutions to society's most pressing social problems. They are ambitious and persistent, tackling major social issues and offering new ideas for wide-scale change. Rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs find what is not working and solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to take new leaps. Social entrepreneurs often seem to be possessed by their ideas, committing their lives

to changing the direction of their field. They are both visionaries and ultimate realists, concerned with the practical implementation of their vision above everything else.

Social entrepreneurship is a new model for charitable sector. It is based on desire to make world a better place to live .But its approach to solving problems is different from traditional charitable organizations or CSR initiatives by corporate.

Social Entrepreneurship cannot be confused with charity. While charity reflects the donor's compassion for humankind and is measured in terms of the generosity of donations to the less fortunate, social entrepreneurship reflects more than the good intentions of its practitioners, who are not merely driven by compassion, but are also compelled by a desire for social change. Often, charitable organizations survive at the mercy of their donors whose contributions vary with the economic climate. A nonprofits organization that practices social entrepreneurship, on the other hand, relies less on donor funds because it creates social programs that are meant to be self-sustaining. Social entrepreneurs manage donor contributions in an effective manner, investing in social ventures which can in turn generate their own revenues to sustain themselves.(Granados et.al.,2011)

In other words, while charity uses donor funds to buy food to ease the poor's hunger, albeit only temporarily, social entrepreneurship uses its funds to make a lasting social impact, creating instructional programs that teach the poor how to grow their own food so that they can take care of themselves in the long run. In a world of scarce resources, it is no longer enough to simply donate out of good intentions. Greg Dees (2001) emphasizes the need for people to value the social impact that their donations actually have. Social entrepreneurship is about innovative, market-oriented approaches underpinned by a passion for social equity and environmental sustainability. Ultimately, social entrepreneurship is aimed at transformational systems change that tackles the root causes of poverty. Just as entrepreneurs change the face of business, social entrepreneurs act as the change agents for the society, seizing opportunities others miss and improving systems, inventing new approaches and creating solutions to change the society for better. Social entrepreneurs are individuals with innovative solutions to society's most pressing social problems.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS AS CHANGE AGENTS

Just as entrepreneurs change the face of business, social entrepreneurs act as the change agents for society, seizing opportunities others miss and improving systems, inventing new approaches, and creating solutions to change society for the better. While a business entrepreneur might create entirely new industries, a social entrepreneur comes up with new solutions to social problems and then implements them on a large scale. Unlike business entrepreneurs who are motivated by profits, however, social entrepreneurs are motivated to improve society. But social entrepreneurs are just as innovative and change-oriented as their business counterparts, always searching for new and better ways to solve the problems that plague society.

CASE STUDIES

To understand the term social entrepreneurship better ,two Indian case studies are presented in this section

Sulabh International : social entrepreneurship for better waste management /sanitation
“THE TOILET IS A TOOL OF SOCIAL CHANGE,” --- Bindeshwar Pathak.

Over a span of four decades Bindeshwar Pathak has advanced his vision for a safe, just, and dignified India through the introduction of dramatically improved sanitation. His project, Sulabh International, is improving India's sanitation, weakening the caste system, and helping those in the "untouchable" caste move into safer, more dignified jobs. Bindeshwar's systems are supported by municipal and user fees.

The United Nations estimates that 6 billion of the world's 7 billion people have mobile phones, but 2.5 billion people are still without sanitation, and around 1.1 billion practice open defecation. More than half of the 2.5 billion people without sanitation live in India or China. (UN estimates year 2012).

An estimated 650 million of India's poorest citizens lack access to basic hygienic toilets; open defecation toilets are still common. This results in diseases such as cholera, diarrhea, dysentery, typhoid, infectious hepatitis, and hookworm. Studies show that more than 50 types of infections can be transmitted from human excrement, which causes or contributes to approximately 80 percent of disease in developing countries. Disposal of human excrement causes significant environmental degradation as well. This is big challenge for Government of India since sanitation is a basic need of human beings .

When Bindeshwar started his work 40 years ago, he saw that sanitation offered a leverage point in matters both obvious and profound: Health, livelihoods, environment, social cohesion, and rights—particularly as pertains to the millions of India's "untouchable" caste. Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, a non-profit body founded in 1970 by Bindeshwar Pathak, provides sanitation solution to the population deprived of the same .They have so far constructed 1.2 million household toilets and 8,000 public toilets. It maintains the public toilets, with the help of 60,000 associate members, on a pay-and-use basis, without putting a burden on the government exchequer.

Sulabh literally means 'easy' -this \$48 billion social enterprise has expanded its network internationally .It has branches in developing countries like Bhutan and Afganistan .Besides this ,many countries like Nepal, Indonesia, Kenya,South Africa,Ethiopia, Uganda have also sought guidance and consultancy from Sulabh International.

"Sulabh' has developed an unique ecofriendly cheaper toilet technology .This is not only a way of human waste management but also becomes source of renewable energy .Bogas produced in this system is a 'Green'-sustainable solution to waste management as well as energy production.

Dr.Pathak was borne in a high caste –brahmin family in Bihar .He was inspired by thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, who fought for rights of 'Untouchable'whome he fondly called "harijan'(God's own people) in his early age.Dr.Pathak started his work with objective of improving quality of life of scavengers in year 1970.Further part of his program included rehabilitation of scavengers and integrating them in society in a respectful manner.

Dr. Pathak has developed unique cost efficient ,sustainable technique for constructing toilets. However he has not patented this technology, since he wants as many people from across the world to get benefit of this technology –for improved sanitation and waste management.

Aravind Eye Care Hospitals: social entrepreneurship for better health care

Mission : TO ELIMINATE NEEDLESS BLINDNESS

Founded in India in 1977 by a visionary Ophthalmologist and social entrepreneur, Dr. Govindeppa Venkataswamy, who also came to be known as Dr. V, these hospitals have saved the vision of 2.4 million poor Indians over a 30-year period. Dr. V's vision was to set up a largely free eye care system to help in eradicating needless blindness in India, a country in which over 2 million people lose their eye sight annually, mostly due to Cataract.

The primary goal of Arvind Eye Care system (AECS) is the elimination of needless blindness by providing compassionate and high quality eye care for all. Lions Aravind Institute of Community Ophthalmology (LAICO), Aravind's consulting wing aims to promote improved management practices in eye care worldwide through training and capacity building. Research activities at Aravind are committed to finding new ways to reduce the burden of blindness. The manufacturing arm of Aravind – Aurolab too contributes to the organisation's mission by making high quality ophthalmic products affordable and accessible worldwide.

In the early 70's, the prevalence of blindness in India was around 1.5 per cent and 80 per cent of India's population was rural, while almost all of the country's medical services were in the urban areas. There were several barriers for the rural population to access the services. Low awareness and limited affordability combined with a lack of human resources made it difficult to provide sustainable, quality services. In a developing country like India, the government alone cannot meet the health needs of all owing to a number of challenges like the growing population, inadequate infrastructure, low per capita income, aging population, diseases in epidemic proportions and illiteracy. Realising this, Dr Venkataswamy wished to establish an alternate healthcare model that could supplement the efforts of the government and also be self supporting. Following his retirement in 1976, he established the GOVEL Trust under which Aravind Eye Hospitals were founded.

To realize this vision, he: (1) designed an eye care and surgical procedure that resembles an assembly line in order to maximize the number of patients to be treated, (2) reduced the cost per surgery by keeping the operating rooms open for performing surgeries 24 hours per day, (3) trained nurses to perform pre-op and post-op care in order to free doctors to perform the maximum number of surgeries, (4) offered free eye care for poor who made up two thirds of his patients, (5) initiated a training program to help doctors and entrepreneurs to establish and run similar systems, and (6) instituted a research program for continuous improvement that would benefit the patients. Referring to his vision and innovative system that he set up to serve the largest number of patients, Dr. V once stated that "he wanted to market good eye-sight to the world the way McDonald's sells hamburgers." (Wikipedia. 2010, August 7, p.1) Arvind eye care hospital operates on a systems that enhance efficiency, reliability, value, market expectation, and consistency in the services provide just similar to McDonald's .

CONCLUSION

In recent years, social entrepreneurship has emerged as a popular term used by politicians, businesspeople and institutions alike to describe businesses that give back to society, such as entrepreneurial activities aiming to improve social value as well as business benefits. Social entrepreneurship, therefore, becomes a mechanism for reconciling these disparities in wealth, opportunity, educational access and environmental issues. The central contribution of this paper is clarification of concept of social entrepreneurship in general and understanding the

concept in Indian context in particular. With increasing consumerism–sustainability is key concern across the world. Social entrepreneurs have innovative and sustainable solutions to society's most pressing social problems. Rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs find what is not working and solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to take new leaps. Social entrepreneurs often seem to be possessed by their ideas, committing their lives to changing the direction of their field.

In Indian context Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, has initiated low cost sustainable sanitation system to resolve ,waste management and health care issues of millions of Indians. His social enterprise ,Sulabh International has crossed boundaries of the country and is helping people in other developing countries too.

Arvind eye care hospital founded by Dr. Govindeppa Venkataswamy, in 1977 has a mission of eliminating needless blindness .They provide low cost efficient eye care for patients . Arvind eye care hospital operates on a systems that enhance efficiency, reliability, value, market expectation, and consistency in the services provided in eye care sector.

Apart from the above two cases there are many more in India and rest of world who are working tirelessly for betterment of society without any expectation .To conclude ,in years to come social entrepreneurship promises to provide sustainable solutions to most of social issues.

Table 1 : Spending priorities between developing countries and developed countries : comparative studies (UN Report)

Amount of money needed each year to provide reproductive health to women in developing countries	\$12 billion
Amount of money spent in Europe and US on perfumes each year	\$12billion
Amount of money spent each year to provide water and sanitation for people in developing countries annually	\$9 billion
Amount of money spent in cosmetics in U.S. annually	\$8billion
Amount of money spent each year to provide basic health and nutrition needs for people in developing countries annually	\$13 billion
Amount of money spent on pet food in Europe and U.S.	\$17 billion
Amount of money spent each year to provide basic education for people in developing countries annually	\$6 billion
Amount of money spent on militaries worldwide	\$780 billion
combined wealth of world's richest 225 people	\$1 trillion
combined annual income of world' poorest 2.5 billion people	\$1trillion

Source: U.N. Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 1998* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pages 30 -37

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