

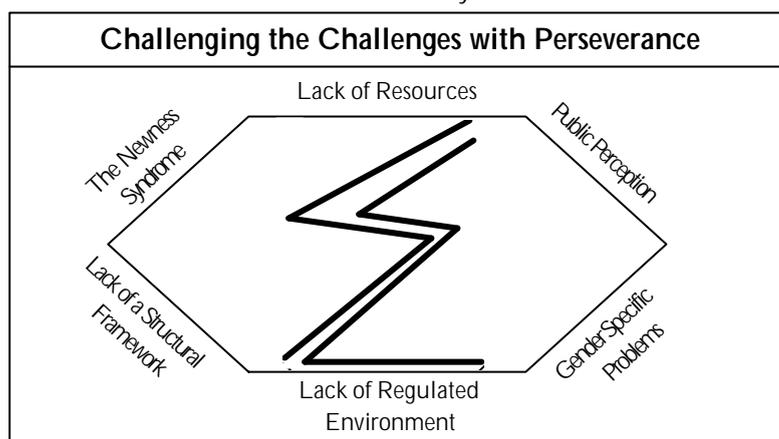
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## Challenging the Challenges with Perseverance

*“Tough times do not last; But Social Entrepreneurs do”. Hurdles and Challenges are quite obvious for Social Entrepreneurs especially in the initial period. However, true Social Entrepreneurs possess the perseverance to withstand amidst tough times and face challenges with a lot of courage. This chapter throws light on the various types of challenges that the Social Entrepreneurs are likely to face in the initial phases.*

**“** Hurdles change. They don't really go away. You have just started something from scratch. You have to really figure it out as to what kind of information you need to gather, and how do you package this information. What are the issues to be looked into and how to make an impact since you started it on a small scale, as a part of another organisation. So it's only grown over a period of time. We weren't sure how far it would go, how far it will be accepted. So there is an uncertainty about it, except that the idea was, we felt, important. And getting people to understand the issue itself and why this was important, that was also something we had to overcome.” That was Ravi Agarwal of Toxics Link referring to the initial times and teething troubles he had to face when he conceptualized the idea

of Toxics Link. Definition of Entrepreneurship is incomplete without challenges being a part of it. Entrepreneurs have a regular interface with hurdles. And when it is a Social Entrepreneur the hurdles only multiply. Social Entrepreneurs work amidst a lot of uncertainty. The factors that contribute to the uncertainty can be discussed as follows:



### The Newness Syndrome

No denying the fact that Social Entrepreneur is a new kid on the block. And this class of entrepreneurs with a different agenda, is passing through a difficult phase characterized by Lack of Clarity and Awareness and Misunderstanding the benchmarks.

Social Entrepreneurs, when come up with an idea, are enthused and boosted with a lot of zeal to change the society. However, at this stage the source of the enthusiasm is only the idea and the intention behind. They do not know the path or approach to translate the idea into reality. Often the budding Social Entrepreneurs face the problem of lack of clarity. While talking about the lack of clarity as one of the teething troubles, Arvind Kejriwal of Parivartan says "There are three or four kinds of problems that we had to face as beginners. First and foremost is we had the idea that corruption is bad and we should do something about that. But we didn't know what is the path. When we

started asking people to come to us, we will get your work done, that is certainly did not prove a viable way to work things out. Hence that was certainly not the path. Later we realized RTI (Right To Information) was the path. But RTI came into existence only after 2years after we started Parivarthan. For quite sometime we were struggling to find out what is the way in which you can tackle corruption." That is an experience with many Social Entrepreneurs who have great ideas and bonafide intentions but not equipped with appropriate medium, strategy, or clarity of approach. In fact, it was gathered from the Social Entrepreneurs during our research that 60-70% of the things (the challenges) lie within the Social Entrepreneurs. Rohit Baluja of IRTE shares "They tend to lose their direction. Because they feel that they are doing something and need immediate recognition. So the whole purpose at that point is lost. Our direction took 16 years now to reach this position." Social Entrepreneurs, constantly face an element of uncertainty, and may take sometime for reaching the desired goals. However, they should not be in anticipation of short term, quick results. And hence should not get upset with the speed of results which emerge over a period of time. Rohit Baluja says "If one has that power to withstand the challenges, overcome the hurdles, and practice perseverance then one becomes a true Social Entrepreneur. And I always believe that one can make a successful Social Entrepreneur if and only if one is happy in himself. The people who get frustrated and unhappy in life and go to social service because they seek quick recognition they are not good SEs."

One more observation according to Kim Alter and Vincent Dawans is that in the wake of drawing inspiration from the practices of business entrepreneurs, the social enterprises have taken bits and pieces and missed the big picture. The emphasis has been on social benefit and the means has not been the business or entrepreneurial approach,

however the integration of the two could not happen adequately. Hence taking this observation as a cue, the Social Entrepreneurs must bear in mind that, though their mission is complex, it must be central and be anchored to all decisions and activities (*Kim Alter and Vincent Dawans-Social Enterprise Reporter*). However, there have been such Social Entrepreneurs who withstood the teething troubles and supported their idea with a firm strategy that translated the idea into huge success. They have proved that a strong will, a ground breaking idea and an innovative approach can really change the world. People like Muhammad Yunus (Grameen Bank), Jeroo Billimoria (Child line), Arvind Kejriwal (Parivarthan) illustrate this.

Challenge, according to Arvind Kerjriwal, is even if you (Social Entrepreneurs) succeeded there is so much criticism within the society. The society was not willing to accept that anything can change. It had given up. So one has to struggle to convince the society to try out for a change. Probably citing examples like, if something could work in a particular case why can't this work for others.

Third is, when you do that there is a reaction from vested interests within the government and outside of it have also been critical on our people.

### **Lack of Resources**

Lack of resources is a common, ubiquitous issue faced by almost all the Social Entrepreneurs in the beginning phase. It is indeed difficult to expect resources to be offered by the authorities, without much of awareness, and clear understanding of Social Entrepreneurs. And hence many Social Entrepreneurs' endeavors face crippling times during the initial stages for want of funds and other resources.

When Dr. Glory Alexander – Asha Foundation, decided to resign from hospital and start up Asha foundation, she had to face a similar

problem. She says “I actually did it only on a faith. I had no money. I didn’t have any means of starting anything and yet I felt so strongly about this issue that I just resigned and started Asha. One of the biggest challenges I faced was, as a doctor we are used to see people waiting to see us. And they wait for us to see you as a patient because you are a doctor; you examine them and tell them what is wrong with them. But in this, once I decided to quit my medical profession and work more in the social sector I was waiting for longtime to see others to raise funds for the organization (Dr. Glory Laughs).” That was quite difficult for Dr. Glory to make that shift from a profession to a voluntary endeavor. However, these resources related teething troubles did not prevent Dr. Glory and her likes from proceeding towards their mission and contribute to the social well-being.

Today Asha foundation is carrying out its fight against the incidence of AIDS in India through timely and adequate instruction, counseling, treatment and care. Asha foundation enjoys strategic alliances with various organizations and hospitals for the successful implementation of their projects. Several of their successful projects that have been yielding the desired results successfully are Life At Crossroads (LAC), Karnataka State AIDS Prevention Society (KSAPS), Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT), Terre Des Hommes (TDH), MILINA, and ASHA’s Training Initiative.

### **Public Perception**

Social Entrepreneurship as discussed earlier is a new jargon, new practice and hence is likely to form various opinions among the people. Lack of clarity in the definition of Social Entrepreneurs adds to the complexity. People may not show their readiness to accept the agenda and the services of Social Entrepreneurs. Many even mistake it to be another political stunt.

Social Entrepreneurs during our research expressed that the target communities will listen to the entrepreneurs, but may not be convinced. Unless they are convinced, the community generally will not endorse their credibility with Social Entrepreneurs. Thus, one of the challenges Social Entrepreneurs generally face to a certain extent is the initial non-cooperation from the public.

And therefore, Social Entrepreneurs have to prove their mettle before the society can accept them. Everyone wants to question why are they interested in this voluntary service. It is a strong mindset that ‘everyone wants to work for entrepreneurial property, money, and other material belongings, so why are these people doing service voluntarily?’ The strong skepticism prevails in the initial period, until the entrepreneur breaks the mindset by proving his passion to serve against all the odds.

Leena Joshi of Rationing Kruti Samiti, while sharing the challenges she faced says, “*What are you going to get out of this?* – is the question every one of us (Social Entrepreneurs) face. It will certainly take some time for people to understand that there are people who are working without any entrepreneurial, political or economic vested interests”. Ms. Joshi says “Environment today is a big challenge. Whatever you are trying to do with people who do not have anything in the society, it is going to be opposed by several classes.” She says “Because the organized sector has moved out of it they are indifferent about the issue.”

Dr. Madhav Chavan of Pratham, endorses a similar view. The main challenge for Dr. Chavan was credibility. People did not believe that an entrepreneur could work on such a large scale for a social cause. When he started, in a city like Mumbai, he started thinking of starting pre-schools in Balwadi (a slum locality in Mumbai) on a large scale. And immediate reaction of people was “There is no space

for slums to live, how are you going to start this". Skepticism was one of the first and foremost severe problems for Dr. Chavan. Because of which neither the government nor the private were willing to take a very keen interest in his vision. They opined that this could not be done. Hence, for Dr. Chavan proving that some work can be done on a large scale was the first challenge. When that was done, people were wondering, that one can do this in Bombay, but can it be done elsewhere? Hence, the streak of skeptic remarks at various stages of the mission is a prominent and unavoidable challenge for the Social Entrepreneurs. Arvind Kejriwal of Parivartan opines "Even if you succeed there is so much criticism within the society. The society was not willing to accept that anything can change. They had given up".

All said and done, none of the above-mentioned Social Entrepreneurs, who have been facing this problem of credibility, have been prevented from accomplishing their missions.

### **Gender Specific Problems**

Managing Women volunteers in country like India is much more difficult than managing men. Hence, another crucial challenge that the Social Entrepreneurs face is managing female volunteers amidst the domestic, social and cultural problems. Though women have been found superior to men on several crucial grounds like integrity, ethics and moral standards, no denying the fact that women have slightly more constraints. For example, they have constraints in travel, domestic issues etc.

While sharing the challenges he faces when managing women volunteers, Rajagopalan of TIDE says "If I have a volunteer, marketing becomes a constraint for them because they cannot travel. Or they can travel only in a place where they can go in morning and come back in the evening. And even considering the condition of the village roads, their marketing can be limited only to 20kms. So, wider access

to markets is not possible for them. The days on which they can produce/work something is also limited as the priorities differ. The first priority is their family. Hence, if there is a festival then that week is gone. They cannot work on an economic enterprise. Similarly, if there is a harvest season all the households including the children go to fields. So the scope of women in India is yet limited.”

Such constraints certainly take the product penetration levels down and spread is low. For example, Rajagopalan of TIDE started with one group, processing cashew in kathergut (a village in Karnataka). It has spread to 4 groups now in a course of 3 years. It clearly says that the product doesn't penetrate at the desired pace. One of the reasons being they (women) don't travel much, hence there is not much spread of awareness and knowledge about the produce. Second thing is sometimes they employ middlemen – a trader or somebody – to market their output and slowly they become dependent on that person. And our efforts in trying to get them to market have not been successful. Those are a few challenges the Social Entrepreneurs are likely to face while executing their idea through the aspiring women Social Entrepreneurs. However, one can always take a leaf from the books of people like Muhammad Yunus (Grameen Bank), Jaswanti Ben Popat (Mahila Gramodyog) whose target segment are exclusively women, yet emerging as exemplary houses of Social Entrepreneurship.

### **Lack of Regulated Environment**

Social Entrepreneurship despite having more 25 years of practice is still in an unorganized pattern. After the proven track record of quarter a century, it is yet to assume a definite shape. After two and a half decades of history, still the aspiring entrepreneurs have to struggle to obtain recognition. The Social Entrepreneurs are not yet provided with the safety cloak, or security that guarantees them of their sustenance in the sector. Because of such a loose environment they

are sometimes taken advantage of. For instance, Dr. Rajat Mitra of Swanchetan is actively involved in offering support to the rape victims says that there are no adequate policies to protect Social Entrepreneurs, which poses a big challenge to them. He shares an experience at his organization that supports his viewpoint, "We had a case of a girl whose family was murdered. She had walked through the therapy came out of it, being a proud survivor. And then we approached a major news channel feeling that it would be wonderful if the story could be shared among the target communities. We talked to the girl and asked her if she is willing to air her agony. The courageous girl said, "yes as I don't want anybody else to go through this." And we felt that it was a very good opportunity so that her story could be heard by millions of other children. And we made it sure that we are present with her, when she is interviewed. We worked out the questionnaire she will be asked. Everything went well. Except one irreparable blunder. We had worked that the media channel would blur her face while telecast. They did not blur her face. Their reason was, they forgot about it. It was traumatic and the girl broke down seeing herself. Now her identity is well known. When we called up the media and asked as to how could they do this when you promised us to blur the face? They said "oh! the person must have forgotten". This is the kind of casualness and lack of professionalism that I am talking about."

After that experience Dr. Mitra decided not to hold interviews with any person whom they have worked with. Even if the person wants to come forward Dr. Mitra would let him/her do it on their own but not through Swanchetan anymore.

Dr. Mitra feels that if those people (the media channel) had known that if they don't blur her face they would be slapped with a fine of Rs.2 lakhs, they would have been certainly careful about it. But they

know that there is no law that would prosecute them. They know that there is no safety cloak that regulates and safeguards Social Entrepreneurs, and thus, impedes their bonafide intentions. Dr. Mitra concerns “We are working in a field where there are not enough safeguards. In the lower courts in Delhi you are threatened and the judge and other people just watch not doing anything. So it’s such a harrowing experience for both victims and anyone like us who comes forward to take care of them.”

That is probably one reason for one, not to take up this field readily and come forward easily. There are indeed no safeguards or direction setting policies, guidelines and regulations that will bring the safety, security and discipline in the arena of Social Entrepreneurship. This is one of the biggest challenges faced by Dr. Mitra and the likes of Dr. Mitra that has been preventing Social Entrepreneurs and compelling the aspirants to think twice before choosing Social Entrepreneurship as a career.

### **Lack of a Structural Framework**

The Social Entrepreneurs feel that there is little room for them to work in. Social Entrepreneurs don’t have a structured institutional framework. Ravi Agarwal of Toxics Link says, “For example, if you want to setup a private company, you just register the company, you go to bank, take a loan, go to business school, can learn all the tools and techniques and you are into the business. Whereas if you want to be a Social Entrepreneur, there is no supporting framework. You have to use the existing inadequate supporting framework and create your *mission* as well as *modus operandi* for these supporting frameworks. Suppose you want to learn skills of Social Entrepreneur, you can’t go to any school. There is no business school, which teaches you principles of Social Entrepreneurship. You need these skills to make a mark.” Mr. Agarwal feels that the society is not geared as yet

to create institutions that support Social Entrepreneurship. While the concept of Business Entrepreneurship is hundreds of years old, Social Entrepreneurship is relatively a new phenomenon. It is also a role where one needs to adhere to a set of values, based on which a Social Entrepreneur will take on the issues crippling the society. It is relatively newer term. More recognition gradually over a period of time will make it an accepted practice.

No denying the fact Social Entrepreneurs are the “Never Say Die” creatures. Hurdles, obstacles or impediments do not bother them. They have been proving their mettle by cruising through all the odds and accomplishing their missions successfully. However, Social Entrepreneurs can be given a bigger arena with required resources, security, policies, guidelines etc. And more importantly the authorities concerned can play a crucial role in bringing about more awareness about Social Entrepreneurs by breaking down the preset notions and mindsets.

***At a glance...***

- Social Entrepreneurs work amidst a lot of uncertainty and challenges.
- The Social Entrepreneurs are passing through a difficult phase characterized by Lack of Clarity and Awareness and Misunderstanding the benchmarks.
- If one has that power to withstand amidst the challenges, overcome the hurdles, and practice perseverance then one becomes a true Social Entrepreneur.
- Lack of resources is another common, ubiquitous concern faced by almost all the Social Entrepreneurs in the beginning phase.
- In addition, lack of clarity in the definition of Social Entrepreneurs adds to the complexity and hence people may not show their readiness to accept the agenda and the services of Social Entrepreneurs. Many even mistake it to be another political stunt.
- Social Entrepreneurship despite having more than 25 years of practice is still in an unorganized pattern without a definite regulatory mechanism, adding further to their list of concerns.
- The Social Entrepreneurs feel that there is little room for them to work in. They don't have a structured institutional framework.
- The above-mentioned issues crippling the Social Entrepreneurs probably offer enough a reason for the authorities concerned to pay their attention towards their bona fide intentions to do the needful.

