GLOBAL RESEARCH ANALYSIS

GLOBAL RESEARCH ANALYSIS

ISSN No 2277 - 8160

listed & Indexed with
International ISSN Directory, Paris



Multi-Subject Journal

Volume : 1 | Issue : 3 | August 2012 | ₹ 250/-

ISSN No 2277 - 8160

GLOBAL RESEARCH ANALYSIS

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Volume : 1 | Issue : 3 | Aug 2012 • ISSN No 2277 - 8160



Research Paper

Economics

Social Entrepreneurship Initiatives In India

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper is an exploratory study on social entrepreneurship initiatives in India. The study explores the concept and meaning, definitions, characteristics and roles of social entrepreneurship. It undertakes a comprehensive literature review of the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship. The study also tries to capture the innovative efforts being taken towards this process in India by investigating the contributions and social impact of social entrepreneurial models in India. The study concludes that despite being a well-known term historically, there is lack of a universal definition of social entrepreneurship and the biggest challenge is the quantification of the parameters of this concept. The paper suggests that corporate social responsibility can be one of the many tools to support the process of social entrepreneurship in India.

KEYWORDS: social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneur, social enterprise, social entrepreneurship initiatives,

1.Introduction

The present research paper is an exploratory study on social entrepreneurship initiatives in India. This paper is a tribute to the race of social entrepreneurs in the country who are taking steps and moving forward towards the objective of creating more facilities, higher growth, development and better lives for the masses. The aim of social entrepreneurs is to further the social and environmental goals with the aim of creating social returns. Their focus and dream is to bring a revolution in their own spheres and at their own levels, touching the lives of so many in need.

The idea of social entrepreneurship is not new. There have been evidences of social entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurship throughout history. However, it became popular only the nineties onwards. The historical examples or cases of 'classic social entrepreneurship' includes Florence Nightingale (founder of the first nursing school and developer of modern nursing practices), Robert Owen (founder of the cooperative movement) and Vinoba Bhave (founder of India's Land Gift Movement). These leaders in social entrepreneurship have apparently inspired shoals of the younger lot.

We find social entrepreneurs in every diverse field with activities ranging from education and skill creation, livelihood generation, agriculture, healthcare, water and sanitation, human rights, renewable energy, disaster management, civic engagement, economic development responsible tourism, and more. Yet, there is a convergence in their missions to change the world to create a better future for generations to come. There are veterans who started work long before they were even recognised as social entrepreneurs. Among the elders are the revolutionary Ela Bhatt of Sewa, Nelson Mandela formed a group of global leaders, Ashok Khosla of Development Alternatives is a global think-tank on development challenges and Bunker Roy is helping conflict-torn Afghanistan with renewable energy solutions.

The objective of the study is to understand the meaning and characteristics or role of social entrepreneurship; map the social entrepreneurship practices across India; and discuss the challenges and future opportunities for growth of social entrepreneurship in the country. The paper has been divided into five sections. The present section is the introduction of the subject area followed by definition and characteristics of social entrepreneurship in the second section. The third section elaborates upon the literature review pertaining to different meanings and perspectives of social entrepreneurship. Section four presents a list of innovative efforts in the process of social entrepreneurship in India. The last section five concludes the study.

2. Definition and Characteristics of Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurs are visionary individuals with creative solutions for solving some of the world's most perplexing social problems. These people have the ability to identify the problem, develop a way to change the system, and disseminate the ideas so that entire societies work together to raise themselves above crisis.

The Skoll Foundation for social entrepreneurship rightly states that "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, marginalization, environmental deterioration and accompanying loss of human dignity".

Social entrepreneurs are drivers of change. Together with institutions, networks, and communities, social entrepreneurs create solutions that are efficient, sustainable, transparent, and have measurable impact. In order to fulfil the objectives of social entrepreneurship, a social enterprise must be accompanied by certain features:

- Ø Sociality: a context, process and/or set of outputs that are for public benefit.
- Ø Innovation: the creation of new ideas and models that address social or environmental issues. This can be manifested in three ways - a new product or service (institutional innovation); the use of existing goods and services in new, more socially productive ways (incremental innovation); and/or the reframing of norms to redefine social problems and suggest new solutions (disruptive innovation).
- Ø Market Orientation: the performance-driven, competitive, outlook that drives greater accountability and co-operation across sectors. Market-orientation can include anything from conventional competitive markets to the exchange of social and/or environmental value. [Skoll Centre for social entrepreneurship]

Social entrepreneurs may be individuals or groups driven by an emotional desire to address some of the major social and economic problems. The seeds of their significant and diverse contributions yield fruits to the communities and societies for times to come. The interest in social entrepreneurs stems from their role in addressing critical social problems and the dedication they show in improving the well-being of society (Zahra et al., 2008). Different definitions and characteristics of the terms social entrepreneur and social entrepreneurship are presented in Table 1 below.

'Table 1 about here'

Table 1
Definitions and Characteristics of Social Entrepreneur/ Entrepreneurship

Source	Definition	Core Characteristics
Bornstein (1998)	A social entrepreneur is a path breaker with a powerful new idea who combines visionary and real-world problem-solving creativity, has a strong ethical fiber, and is totally possessed by his or her vision for change.	§ Mission leader § Persistent
Thompson et al. (2000)	Social entrepreneurs are people who realize where there is an opportunity to satisfy some unmet need that the state welfare system will not or cannot meet, and who gather together the necessary resources (generally people, often volunteers, money, and premises) and use these to "make a difference".	§ Emotionally charged § Social value creator
Dees (1998)	Social entrepreneurs play the role of change agents in the social sector by: § Adopting a mission to create and sustain social value § Recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission; § Engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning; § Acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand; § Exhibiting a heightened sense of accountability to the constituencies served for the outcomes created.	§ Change agent § Highly accountable § Dedicated § Socially alert
Brinckerhoff (2009)	A social entrepreneur is someone who takes reasonable risk on behalf of the people their organization serves.	§ Opinion leader
Leadbeater (1997)	Social entrepreneurs are entrepreneurial, innovative, and "transformatory" individuals who are also: leaders, storytellers, people managers, visionary opportunists and alliance builders. They recognize a social problem and organize, create, and manage a venture to make social change.	§ Manager § Leader
Zahra et al. (2008)	Social entrepreneurship encompasses the activities and processes undertaken to discover, define, and exploit opportunities in order to enhance social wealth by creating new ventures or managing existing organizations in an innovative manner.	§ Innovator § Initiative taker § Opportunity alert
Ashoka (2012)	Social entrepreneurs are individuals with innovative solutions to society's most pressing social problems […] They are both visionaries and ultimate realists, concerned with the practical implementation of their vision above all else.	§ Visionary § Committed

Source: Abu-Saifan (2012)

After a review of the variety of definitions of social entrepreneur/entrepreneurship, we propose the following definition for Social Entrepreneur:

"The social entrepreneur is a visionary individual with entrepreneurial abilities, motivated by a larger social mission to make changes and create social values, implement innovative solutions with an objective to solve social problems and provide social equity and environmental sustainability to the underprivileged and deprived".

3. Meanings and Perspectives of Social Entrepreneurship: Literature Review

The widespread literature on social entrepreneurship reveals that the concept of social entrepreneurship is viewed in different ways by different people and researchers. The concept varies between different definitions. Definitions of social entrepreneurship refer to a behaviour or process; those of social entrepreneurs focus on the founder of the initiative and social enterprise definitions relate to the tangible outcomes of social entrepreneurship (Theron, 2011).

The research on social entrepreneurship presents mixed views on the subject. According to Jamison (2006), the notion of social entrepreneurship can be applied to non-profit, for profit as well as government activity, the final aim being to increase the net positive externalities of the business venture. In terms of nonprofits and for-profits, social enterprise is conceptualized as occurring along a continuum of organizational settings [Alter (2006), Jamison (2006)].

A group of researchers refer to social entrepreneurship as not-for-profit initiatives in search of alternative funding strategies, or management schemes to create social value [Austin et al. (2003); Boschee (1998)]. On the other hand, Sagawa and Segal (2000); and Waddock (1988) explain social entrepreneurship as a socially responsible practice of commercial business engaged in cross-border partnerships. Alvord et al. (2004) have a different perspective to the understanding of social entrepreneurship, as a means to alleviate social problems and catalyze social transformation.

Shane, Locke and Collins (2003) and Nicholls (2005) highlight the importance of 'motivation' as the driving force behind the initiatives of social entrepreneurship. Wolk (2007) emphasises that social entrepreneurship shares many attributes with small business entrepreneurs as they display the same kind of innovation, serve as a vehicle for job creation and contribute to economic growth. Nevertheless, the most important difference between a social entrepreneur and a business entrepreneur is that a social entrepreneur is driven by the force to gift vital life enhancing contributions to the world; while a business entrepreneur aims towards making millions [Elkington and Hartigan (2008), Dorado and Haettich (2004)].

Mair and Marti (2006) and Perrini (2006) differ in their views on social entrepreneurship from a different perspective. The former perceive social entrepreneurship as a process of social change while Perrini adds that it is concerned with the process of change along with the creation of new value (Braun, 2009).

The pursuit of a clear and comprehensive definition of social entrepreneurship does not end here. Despite a series of efforts made towards establishing a complete and ideal understanding of the concept of social entrepreneurship; we still do not have a complete picture of the phenomenon which calls for the need to fill up the gaps in conceptual clarity and theory.

'Table 2 about here'

Table 2
A Snapshot of the Phenomenon of Social Entrepreneurship

Phenomenon under study	Description	Key Author
Community entrepreneurship	The community is the entrepreneurial actor and beneficiary. E.g., a village engaging in fair trade coffee farming and selling.	(Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Johannisson & Nilsson 1989)
Social change agents	Individuals who alter public perceptions about (specific) social issues. Examples range from John Elkington, the founder of Sustainability, to Bono, of the group U2.	(Waddock & Post, 1991; Drayton, 2002)
Institutional entrepreneurs	Individuals or organizations that alter social arrangements and the institutional fabric hampering development.	(Mair & Marti, 2009; Marti & Mair, 2009)
Social ventures	Business ventures that provide a product or service that creates social or environmental benefit, such as the production and distribution of biodegradable water bottles.	(Dorado, 2006; Sharir & Lerner, 2006)
Entrepreneurial not-profit organizations	NFPs that engage in commercial activities to create an income stream and enhance financial sustainability.	(Fowler, 2000; Frumkin, 2002)

Social enterprise	Organizational forms following principles of cooperatives.	(Borzaga & Defourny, 2001)
Social innovation	Innovation understood broadly and including processes and technology for the social good.	(Alvord et al., 2004; Phills et al., 2008)

Source: Mair (2010)

Social entrepreneurship is an emerging phenomenon of the citizen sector. There is a lot of focus on this sector and initiatives being taken. It is only since the reforms of the nineties that this sector has attracted so much attention in theory and practice. There is a variety of perspectives among researchers in this direction resulting into lack of a common definition of social entrepreneur.

4. Social Entrepreneurship Innovations in India

We are presenting here a list of social entrepreneurship initiatives carried out in India in their respective field of work, their contributions and social impact.

'Table 3 about here'

Table 3
Initiatives of Social Entrepreneurship in India

Social Entrepreneurship Initiatives (Field of Work)	Contribution	Social Impact
Aajeevika Bureau (Economic Development)	Micro finance and training to seasonal workers. Aajeevika model is working in 8 states of the country.	More than 50,000 ultra-poor seasonal migrants have directly accessed the Bureau's services, which has registered 50-80% growth in their incomes.
All India Society for Electronics & Computer Technology [AISECT] (Education & Economic Development)	ICT based education in rural India that has opened up new opportunities for entrepreneurship and employment.	It has created a network of 8000 rural education entrepreneurs who run profitable AISECT franchise centres in some of the most backward districts of India to benefit more than 1 million rural youth in their local eco-systems.
Life Spring Hospitals (Health Care)	Maternity hospitals that provide quality and affordable healthcare services to women from low-income groups.	It has safely delivered more than 7000 healthy babies, quality care and treatment to 100,000 outpatient cases.
Vaatsalya Healthcare Solutions Private Ltd (Health Care)	Provide primary and secondary healthcare services which are accessible and affordable to middle and low-income families in Tier II and Tier III towns in India.	The network serves 300,000 customers every year.
Industree Crafts Foundation [MOTHEREARTH] (Economic Development & Education)	Trains craftsmen and collects products manufactured by them.	Over 10,000 artisans living below the poverty line from 10 different Indian states have been able to improve their economic life.
Husk Power Systems (Economic Development & Environment)	Cost-effective technology that converts bio-mass waste into electricity.	HPS currently runs 80 power plants that supply electricity to more than 200,000 individuals in 350 villages (a majority of which are off-grid) in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh; enabling small businesses, especially rice mills, to generate additional income.
Waterlife India (Health Care & Economic Development)	Green and cost-effective water treatment technologies that give safe drinking water.	Waterlife has set up 1,300 community water systems in 6 Indian states that have the highest levels of water contamination.
Conserve (Economic Development & Environment & Health Care)	Recycles plastic waste and provides employment for rag pickers.	It employs around 300 workers and involves them in all aspects of the business, allowing them to build equity and learn useful skills and thus help in economic development and in keeping environment clean.
BASIX (Economic Development)	Provide services such as Financial Inclusion Services, Agricultural/ Business Development Services & Institutional Development Services to rural poor households under one umbrella.	It is working with over a 3.5 million customers, over 90% being rural poor households and about 10% urban slum dwellers. It has a staff of over 10,000 of which 80 percent are based in small towns and villages. It works in 17 Indian states.
Orb Energy (Economic Development & Environment)	Affordable and renewable energy for off-grid households in India through solar home systems.	Orb currently operates 90 branches in four Indian states; it has installed approximately 25,000 solar systems.
Drishtee (Economic Development)	Low-cost, direct delivery rural supply chain network of locally-owned, franchised kiosks.	It has created significant cost and time savings for villagers and an effective channel for enterprises to sell products and services. It has a strong presence in three states and more than 14,000 entrepreneurs are currently registered in the network.
SELCO (Economic Development & Environment)	Provides sustainable energy solutions and services to under-served households and businesses.	It employs about 170 employees and has been able to successfully empower individuals to run their businesses without dependence on fuel based products for lighting.
Vision Spring (Health Care & Economic Development)	Provides cost-effective eye glasses.	Clear vision is critical for continued worker productivity; especially for the artisans, tailors, mechanics, and many others across rural communities doing detailed oriented work. It has sold more than 360,000 eyeglasses, across four continents and eleven countries.
Water Health International [WHI] (Health Care & Economic Development)	Provide Safe Drinking water at affordable prices.	WHI has 500 water systems; with over 500,000 low-income individuals who purchase safe water on a recurring basis. WHI's innovative technology is being used in countries including the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Mexico.
Gramalaya Urban & Rural Development Initiatives & Network [GUARDIAN] (Health Care)	Microfinance institution (MFI) engaged in micro lending to households to purchase individual water and sanitation assets.	It has extended more than 13,000 loans and currently manages a portfolio of 8,000 active borrowers with a 99.99% repayment rate.

No matter whether the contributions are big or small, we have simply tried to bring fore the efforts of the very few among the huge family of social role players in the country. The list is only representative of the magnificent work being done by social entrepreneurs in India. Nonetheless, there are scores of social entrepreneurs who merit being here. We have attempted to present a diversity of activities undertaken by social entrepreneurs in the fields of education and skill creation, empowerment, agriculture, healthcare, water and sanitation, energy solutions, environment and economic development.

5. Conclusions and the Way Forward

Social entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurship are popular terms today but they can be traced back to history. This treatise is a tribute to this 'phenomenon of social entrepreneurship in the making' and salutes the countless efforts of the many visible social entrepreneurs and also the lesser known ones who are continuously striving to bring change for the better in the lives of so many. In that sense, social entrepreneurship is not an isolated phenomenon but an integral part of a social system.

Social entrepreneurship has attracted attention of academicians and researchers but there is lack of a common bounded definition. The existing literature reveals many contrasts and commonalities across definitions. Social entrepreneurship has flourished significantly at the practical level, but not very well at the theoretical level. One of the biggest challenges is to assess the performance and impact of this phe-

nomenon in different spheres of its application. In fact, it is the quantification of social performance which hinders this process. Hence, an in-depth conceptual and empirical study is essential for establishing an inclusive picture of social entrepreneurship in literature. We believe that corporate social responsibility is one of the many tools to support the process of social entrepreneurship. It can bring substantial benefits both from the support of the corporate and from their social impact, and these cannot be neglected.

The size and the diversity in the Indian sub-continent in terms of geographical magnitude, regions, languages, cultures and ethnicity seems to significantly influence the practice of social entrepreneurship in the country. India offers enormous opportunities for social ventures as it is virtually impossible for one single venture to make a substantial direct social impact. Moreover, the needs of the large BoP (bottom of pyramid) population have to be addressed urgently and call for vital contributions from social entrepreneurs. With this objective in sight, we need a chain of young motivated Indians wishing to promote social entrepreneurship in the country. Also, there is a need for our social entrepreneurs to diversify from the traditional areas of operation and rise above the usual challenges of an unpredictable and ever-changing environment that characterizes our sub-continent. Developing robust social enterprises is the key to India's social and economic development.

This paper ends with the hope that many more selfless-visionary individuals may join this tribe of social entrepreneurs and achievers of social values and returns. There are many whose contribution we have failed to address here and still, they may be working silently, ushering in unsettling innovations in the social space oblivious to their constraints and doing well as they are. All the same, it is not the destination but the journey that counts.

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