



Social Entrepreneurship of Women: Innovation in its Best Form

Dr. Koteswara Raju Penmetsa

Academic Coordinator, Department of Social Work, Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod, Kerala India

Dr. Satyanarayana Katreddi

Reader & Head, Dept. of Social Work, KGRL College (autonomous), 201, Andhra Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship, though theoretically conceived as a veritable product of both heredity and environment of a person, of which one inherits the wherewithal from parental stock that further emanates the vibrancy from the larger social environment in which one is embedded, when the question arises on the primacy of the one over the other, the author finds more cues from the genes than the environs, because, in the opinion of the author the genes unfurl a robust resilience and transmit long legacy of entrepreneurship that stands aloft to the withering of a ravaging social environment, thus sustaining the ordeals and overcoming the hurdles in attaining the eminence as an entrepreneur.

This particular presentation is a portrayal of women of three generations who passionately juxtapose themselves as social entrepreneurs, carved out from the compassionate involvement to bring in the fruits of creativity of capitalism to the attainment of the social goals of socialism, fructifying social entrepreneurship and heralding innovation in its best form, whereby social wealth is generated from within the larger community and distributed to the advantage of the marginalized and vulnerable to ensure growth with inclusiveness, albeit through strong familial lineage of social entrepreneurship.

KEYWORDS :

Introduction:

This is the saga of three generations who were to face all sorts of ordeals to tread a path of social entrepreneurship and their unstinted faith only paved the path for success. While the first generation was represented by Mrs. Saraswathi GORA, wife of Goparaju Rama Chandra Rao an atheist worker of repute, a contemporary and companion of Mahatma Gandhi, popularly known as GORA, for his ardent reform activity in Andhra Pradesh, her daughter Mrs. Chennupati Vidhya denotes the second generation and her daughters Rashmi, Keerti and Deeksha represent the present third generation social entrepreneurs

Coming to their principal contribution, i.e. VASAVYA Mahila Mandali of Vijayawada, (VMM), as the name stands for the promotion of "VA-vasthvikatha, means reality, SA-sanghadrusti, i.e., social responsibility, VYA-vyaktitvam, connoting personality, among women, is in its third generation of ushering reforms worth reckoning in the domain of welfare and development of women and children. Christened in that form by GORA, VMM has been striving, for the last four decades, to promote comprehensive social, economic and political development for women, children and youth in vulnerable situations, thereby empowering communities in Andhra Pradesh to improve their quality of life, and build a better civil society in India. Deriving the impeccable spirit for reform and change impacting on the lives of women and children from the 'Second Generation' torch bearer Smt. Chennupati Vidhya, daughter of GORA, the Third Generation activists, the children of Smt. Chennupati Vidhya and Sri Seshagiri Rao, the sister trio-Rashmi, Dr. Keerti and Dr. Deeksha with their brother Vazeer are now carrying forward the rich legacy of the Gorain era of social change and reform.

VMM works on rights-based, participatory approaches; and engages hundreds of civil society, government, funding agencies and corporate stakeholders to maximize impact. Increases community awareness on the value of education, allow Orphan and Vulnerable Children to access educational opportunities, and sensitize educational institutions on gender issues. It ensures the rights of women and children by promoting their community-based care and protection. VMM promotes the physical and psychosocial health of communities by building knowledge on prevention/care/treatment and thereby increasing demand for services. Builds capacity of government service and delivers quality outreach services. It increases capacity of the Community Based Organizations (CBOs), promotes entrepreneurship and financial sustainability of vulnerable families by educating them on their economic rights and available services, building their vocational skills, providing

them with employment opportunities or access to credit, and developing community support structures. Facilitates the implementation of progressive government policies, and build the capacity of women and children to meaningfully participate in multi-level political processes and to advocate for changes in regressive policies. Thus VMM stands for social resilience and reform, women being at the Centre stage.

VMM is working with a focus on orphan and vulnerable children and it is cross cutting across VMM programs. The target groups among the orphans and vulnerable children are children affected by HIV and AIDS, children living with HIV and AIDS, children from child headed families, children living on the streets, adolescent girls in vulnerable communities and children from trafficking families. Around 30% of children reaching VMM are orphans that lost both parents. They do not have proper adult guidance, unable to continue their education, forced to take the responsibility of the family and are exposed to many vices due to peer pressure. Hence a number of programs are designed to address the needs of these children with a focus on girl child.

The major ongoing programs are Family Centric Home/Community Based HIV/AIDS Care, Support and Treatment Programs with a focus on children; Pediatric Tuberculosis Care and Treatment; Malaria prevention; Sexual and Reproductive Health among adolescents and women; Sexual Health among the Migrant Population; Prevention of Parent to Child Transmission (PPTCT) outreach; Community based Co-ordinated Protection Care & Support Services for Children Affected by HIV/AIDS (CABA); Sanitation, Hygiene and Safe drinking Water; Mobile Health Care for children and women living with HIV; Mobile HIV Testing Unit with a focus to increase testing of children; Swetcha Gora Eye Bank for prevention of blindness by conducting Keratoplasty operation; Promotion of small family norm; Health education in Schools and Communities.

Programs meant for development of women and adolescent girls include: Prevention of violence against women and girls; Education and skill development of girls; Micro credit; Promotion of traditional handicrafts and fine arts; Legal awareness; Education and knowledge building among the adolescents and women; Shelter homes for girls and women in difficult circumstances. VMM focus on building self confidence among women to face the crisis in life and to cope with the situation and to plan for a better life.

All the programs of VMM are rights based. In addition to the above fo-

cused programs, VMM do work for rehabilitation of torture victims by law enforcing agencies, de-silting irrigation tanks and geriatric care through 'grannies clubs' and old age homes. Towards this end VMM is working with a network of 61 partners with 83 project contracts. VMM works with both NGOs and CBOs. VMM partnered with Telugu Network of positive people (TNP+) through 23 District level positive networks in A.P.

The Beginnings and the Accolades:

VASAVYA MAHILA MANDALI (VMM) was established forty years ago with Gandhian ideology as a not for profit secular voluntary organization. Having had its beginnings in the year 1969, VMM focused initially on adult education, of women in particular, as literacy was considered as the pivot for social progress. Amber Charkha for hand weaving of thread from cotton for making clothes was taken up as a means of economic emancipation and social empowerment. The modus operandi was to form Women Groups in the vicinity, transferring skills and literacy and improving their wellbeing. This followed the initiation of lending libraries for women and linkage activities of the women groups with registered cooperative societies.

The initiatives were further consolidated by procurement of milch animals for the women of the groups, supplying milk to milk collection centers and cooperative purchasing of essential commodities. The undercurrent for these initiatives was the capacity building workshops and skill development programs for the women. The celebration of 'International Women's' Year in 1975 came as a shot in the arm with registration of VMM under Societies Registration Act and facilitation of registration of 21 MahilaMandals in Krishna District and also the registration of district level MahilaMandals, perhaps the only one of its kind at that time in the state.

The latter half of seventh decade of the last century at VMM was characterized by creation of a number of extension units like Dress Making Training Centre (DMTC), Vanita Typewriting Institute for Girls, Carpet Weaving, Batik Printing and Cane and Bamboo Training for Girls, Crochet Lace-making and Knitting for Girls and Press Composing and Book Binding, all meant for skill building of women and girls as a means of their economic liberation. Having recognized well the strong relation between nutrition and health and wellbeing of women, Nutrition Education received top priority where the emphasis was on disseminating knowledge on nutrition education with local relevance and cultural appropriateness. In this process VMM brought to people the knowledge of locally available nutritional foods and diets that are equally cost effective so that people have fair access for better nutrition that enhances their wellbeing.

Urbanization, nuclearization of Indian families and the growing engagement of women in economic and social pursuits lead to the creation of new institutions called 'Crèches' to take care of the toddlers in the families of working women and VMM pioneered the same. Along with crèches it also launched on providing nutritious food to malnourished children through the formation of Mothers Committee.

During 8th decade of the previous century VMM started a massive initiative called 'Priyadarshini Working Women's Hostel' which was inaugurated by the then Vice-president of India, Sri R. Venkata Raman. This was made possible from the huge donation made by Sri ChenunpatiSeshagiriRao to encourage Smt.Vidhya to take up women and child welfare programs. The VasavyaNrutyaVihar was also started around the same period to propagate cultural art forms of Andhra Pradesh and to use the same for building social awareness. Gora AbhayaNivas a short stay home for women in need, counselling and legal guidance, vocational training and rehabilitation was also started during the same period. The home was giving training in skill development such as television assembly, garment making, housekeeping, beauty culture, computer training, typewriting and shorthand.

The other major initiatives of this decade were rural sanitation, drinking water, formation of women self-help groups, massive rural housing program with a network of 21 women organizations in Krishna District, credit to SHGs for productive purposes and initiation of Swetcha Gora Eye Bank.

The last decade of the century was an activity of vigorous economic development of women. Micro-credit to Self-Help Groups (SHGs) was

taken us as a movement. As capacity building of SHGs is an inevitable imperative for their success, the same was taken up with vigor by roping in SHGs, smaller NGOs and village level MahilaMandals. An initiative called 'Collection', a marketing center to promote marketing of items produced by SHGs was initiated in this period. Along with this, for the political advancement of women, a series of training programs were organized to encourage women participation in local and state legislative bodies.

The new millennium brought in its wake the new challenges, one of the prominent being the HIV/AIDS pandemic. VMM was one of the pioneering organizations that took up the challenge. It initiated rehabilitation programs for female sex workers by starting Income Generation Programs (IGPs). VMM also conducted a research study on Rehabilitation of Girl Child Prostitutes. It started 'Partnership Sexual Health Project among Street Children in Vijayawada as part of HIV prevention. Parallel to this was the establishment of Vasavya Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (VRCT).

The year 2000 was the year of active engagement in HIV/AIDS front. VMM started 'Community Awareness on HIV/AIDS in Andhra Pradesh' which later on extended to around 10 partner NGOs for 'Home/Community Based Care and Support for HIV/AIDS' with the collaboration of Abbott Laboratories USA. Meanwhile it started the 'Multipurpose Health Workers Training Institute' (MPHW) that was recognized by Government of Andhra Pradesh. It also started its Information, Education and Communication' (IEC) wing which has to its credit more than 60 very valuable works in the area of health, nutrition, education and economic empowerment. It became the co-management agency for Juvenile Home at Vijayawada.

VMM had its prestigious project from World Bank on the study of 'Care and Support for HIV Orphans in Andhra Pradesh. Around the middle of the first decade of the new millennium, VMM was the vortex of activity to contain the HIV pandemic in coastal Andhra Pradesh. It started its 'Krishna Community Health Intervention' program for reduction of five diseases such as HIV, TB, Malaria, Leprosy and Filaria. It also became the co-management agency for two Urban Health Centers in Vijayawada. All through this process the main emphasis of VMM was the creation of 'Community Structures' as a means of making the local people own the programs and thus contributing for the sustainability of the initiatives started with outside funding beyond the project periods. In this process VMM engineered the skill of ushering Corporate Social Responsibility for building human and social capitals along with the creation of physical facilities and services.

Meanwhile VMM started its 'Anganwadi Training Centre' and was 'Lead Partner' for 9 NGOs in Knowledge Building projects. It established two resource centers for empowerment of women and educational support of adolescent girls. VMM became the 'Lead Organization' for Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative of Pediatric Care, Support and Treatment with 47 NGOs/CBOs partners. Also it was the Lead Organization with 5 partner NGOs for the project on Feminization of HIV/AIDS in Sexual and Reproductive Health and contributing for improving the education and health of children and communities in Vijayawada. Moreover, VMM developed Training Modules for the National AIDS Control Organization on Pediatric Counselling in association with World Health Organization. It has undertaken so many capacity building programs to staff working for the Prevention of Parent to Child Transmission (PPTCT) and Outreach Program Staff of Andhra Pradesh.

VMM is the Secondary Recipient for 'CHAHA': Child Centric HIV/AIDS Care and Support program with 6 partners. It constructed the Saraswathi Gora Youth Centre for providing shelter to street youth and promoted the Orphan and Vulnerable Children Network called 'Children Leadership Development Association (CLDA). VMM is working on TB-HIV Co-infection, the most critical aspect of containing the combined menace of TB and HIV. It is also the Lead Partner for Pediatric Dashboard Program with 10 partners and Lead Partner for 3 NGO/CBOs in implementing 'Balasahayoga Program for the care and support of children affected by HIV in households, promotion of testing and treatment for Children Living with HIV/AIDS. It has been facilitating safety nets for food and security of HIV infected and affected and running a Transit Home for Orphan and Vulnerable Children called Children's Village.

Apart from these VMM has Targeted Intervention for HIV Prevention and Care among Migrant Populations in Vijayawada and implementing the Prevention of Parent to Child Transmission outreach program in 15 mandals of Krishna District. It is operating 'MeeNestham' Mobile Integrated Counselling and Testing Centre under Public-Private Partnership and 'Health on Wheels' for providing medical services at the doorsteps of the slum dwellers in Vijayawada. It had participated in the 'Social Development Market Place' organized by the World Bank and organized the 'Asia and Eastern Europe Alliance Regional Blue Sky Meeting. Towards the end of the first decade of the present millennium, VMM was 'Lead Organization' for 2 NOGs for HIV/AIDS Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Program. Presently engaged in assessing the Vulnerability of Children in Krishna District

Is has been associated with universities and educational institutions in 'Knowledge Management'. The other initiative include 'Executive Development Program' with Pepal and INSEAD, Disaster Management, Micro-Enterprise Development Program and Rural Enterprise Development Program (REDP). ManaBhoomi, the community based climate change initiative is gaining momentum.

All through VMM is vigorously striving for facilitating community ownership of programs for their sustainability beyond the project periods.

The Way-forward:

Having had a sojourn for four decades, a significant milestone in the lifecycle of any NGO, because most Indian NGOs were found to have a very short span of life cycle from inception to decadence, with programs that were diverse and vivid, encompassing every conceivable aspect of human life, VMM now looks forward to new areas and domains of imminent contemporary relevance. In that process it is now focusing on spreading the message and activities of Swetcha Gora Eye Bank by associating with similar and likeminded institutions and individuals. One of the thrust areas for future is Mobile Medical and Health Facilities to improve the health conditions

in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh. The capacity building activities will be extended to the village level Workers on Social, Economic, Health, Education, Cultural and Environmental aspects. Further mobilization of Community Action for Care and Support to PLWHA / CAA will be the other priority. The much neglected and scarcely covered area of Geriatric Care – Medical, Legal, Social and Cultural, is on the horizon for the future. Formation of Senior Citizen Clubs for Promotion of Community Participation and Occupational Health and Family related activities with Care and Shelter for Street Children will permeate into the canvass of VMM. Promotion of Scientific Temper through village level women and youth organizations, Pre and Post Marital Counselling Centers and Life Skill Education to the Adolescent Girls will receive heightened attention. Above all promotion of Voluntarism and Political Spirit among youth is going to be the hallmark of VMM's action with communities in future.

Epilogue:

This is the bird's eye view of VMM, spearheaded by zealous women reformers, activists and social entrepreneurs, steeped in social commitment and empathy, which transcended over three generations that shaped the destinies of women in Andhra Pradesh- by women, with women and of women. The gamut of social engagement by these women of three generations is so stupendous in terms of length of service over a little more than the last four decades, breadth in terms of horizontal and vertical expansion and depth as manifested in their deep commitment to the whole realm of their stakeholders. Ushering of different programs by roping in national and international donors is no simple task and one can easily imagine the innumerable impediments that crop up in the process. As postulated in the synopsis, the zeal the women inherited over the generations and the legacy they imbued with them and to posterity have been understood as the driving force that determined their destinies with trust.