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To DIB or not to DIB



A relatively new approach to development funding, DIBs come with a number of challenges. It's important to understand which contexts and sectors lend themselves to a successful DIB.

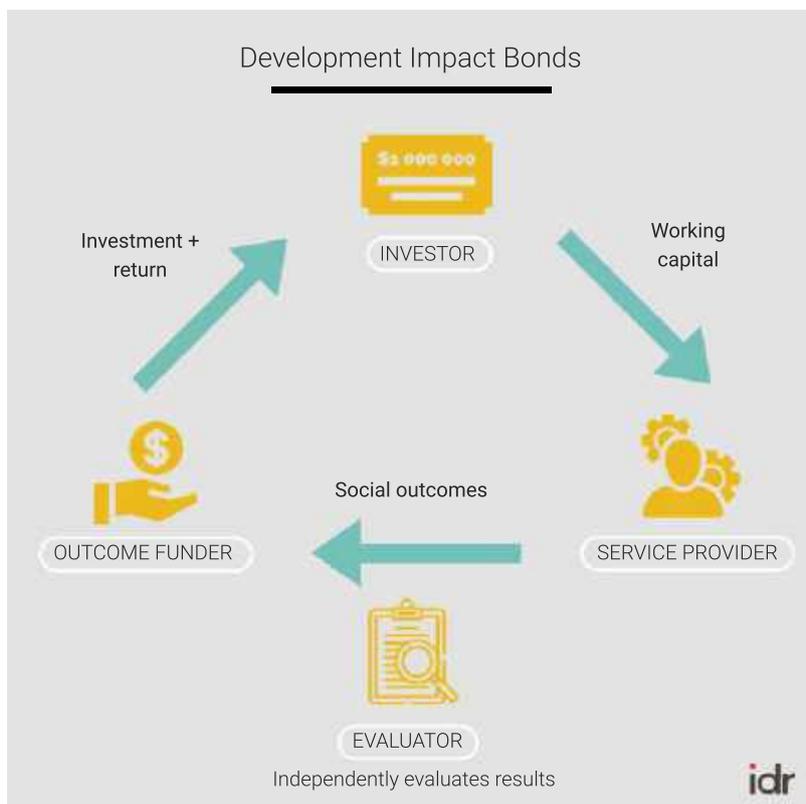
Picture courtesy: Arjun Swaminathan



Vikram Gandhi
Founder,
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Given the increasing buzz around Development Impact Bonds (DIBs)¹ and impact bonds generally—both in India and elsewhere, we have seen and heard about the advantages they bring to the table: a results orientation in funders and nonprofits alike, an alignment in mission amongst them, increased accountability towards achieving outcomes, greater flexibility

in the way money is invested in different aspects of the programme, and generally, more rigour to the whole ecosystem.



An impact bond, for those unfamiliar with it, is a results-based financing instrument, where an investor provides upfront capital to a service provider towards achieving stipulated outcomes. Only if these outcomes are met, are the investors repaid their principal, with some agreed upon interest, by outcome funders.

From the point of view of an outcome payer—the government or a donor—impact bonds minimise financial risk, and encourage more private capital to be used for scaling interventions that show evidence of outcomes.

Overall at an ecosystem level, as the field for impact bonds develops, it will help build an evidence base about which interventions work, and a more detailed understanding around the cost of delivering programmes.

Because DIBs are a relatively new approach vis-à-vis traditional development funding, they also come with a number of challenges. Given how development is understood and implemented in our country today—low outcome orientation, and challenges with governance and accountability—it's critical that we understand which contexts, conditions, and sectors lend themselves to a successful DIB.

“Most government spending is input-based. The mindset shift from inputs to outcomes is critical.”

Challenges associated with impact bonds

1. A DIB can be quite complicated and expensive

The structure of a DIB is complex, given that there are multiple stakeholders involved, each playing a different role, and having varying levels of involvement and investment. DIBs also require a fair amount of effort in just management and oversight, making for high transaction costs. Funds must be spent not only on the intervention and its monitoring and evaluation, but also on managing multiple stakeholders throughout the project, which can span from one year to as long as 10 years.

2. Government departments in India have not yet bought into the concept

The market for impact bonds in India is growing rather quickly with the successful completion of the first DIB by Educate Girls. The year 2018 alone has seen the launch of two new DIBs, Utkrisht and Quality Education India, and the largest endeavour till date—the billion dollar India Education Outcome Fund.

However, unlike developed countries, India faces a significant challenge as the government so far has not supported outcome funding. Globally, of the 134 impact bonds spread across 27 countries, 95 percent have government outcome funders.²

The ideal situation would be one where the government pays for the results achieved because ultimately, there is no match for government funding and scale. But in the absence of considerable evidence—globally and in India—on the effectiveness of DIBs, getting the Indian government on board will take time. This is partly because most government spending today is input-based. Typically, a specific amount of money has to be spent in a specific year based on a pre-determined area of expenditure outlined in the budget.

The mindset shift from inputs to outcomes is critical; but more importantly, if impact bonds are to gain acceptance nationally, a change in policy and budget allocations will be necessary.

In the absence of the government as the outcome funder, trusts, charitable organisations, and development finance institutions have played the role. Even so, we have seen that it can be hard to get them on board as outcome funders.

3. Donors are not entirely comfortable giving up control

This seems counter-intuitive, because one would think that if philanthropists are making grants anyway, why would they not want to just pay for outcomes? But we have noticed that in India and other countries, outcome funders generally want to be more involved with project design, the activities that the service provider (nonprofit) is undertaking, and how the overall project is managed on the ground. This presents challenges in a model that has a complex structure, is designed for unrestricted funding, and is geared towards greater flexibility and innovation in implementation.

So, does India offer an enabling environment for DIBs in the first place?

We believe that like with any approach, there are certain conditions that are more conducive to success, than others. Similarly, DIBs are no silver bullet; they have a greater chance of success when certain conditions are met. From our research globally and in developing countries, we have formed a core hypothesis around when it makes sense to design and implement a DIB.

1. The outcomes should be quantitatively measurable

In an impact bond, risk investors are only repaid upon achievement of a set of outcomes. Thus, given the high stakes, any ambiguity around defining and measuring

a DIB's outcomes would make the effort pointless. For example, an outcome such as 'a change in attitudes among men towards violence against women', while worth achieving, may not be best pursued through a DIB as it is not quantifiable. In the Educate Girls DIB, the two outcomes that were tracked were an increase in numeracy and literacy learning levels measured against the ASER test, and an improvement in girls' school enrolment rates.

Rigorous evaluation of outcomes by a third party becomes critical. Additionally, clearly defining and measuring outcomes helps build the evidence base for which interventions work.

2. There should be a clear distinction between funding inputs and outputs

DIBs bring about an 'outcome orientation' in all stakeholders. Hence, an intervention where there is little difference between funding outcomes and inputs would not work well.

For instance, it makes little sense to invest in a DIB for a vaccination drive, because there is no additional benefit from focusing on outcomes (immunisation) versus the input activity itself (administering a vaccine). In contrast, a DIB that aims to improve learning outcomes might be a better use of funds and time, because there are multiple approaches (or inputs) that could result in better learning outcomes. For example, service providers could focus on training teachers, providing better school infrastructure, increasing community accountability, running remedial learning programmes, or providing ed-tech based supplementary content. This is because concrete evidence on which of these approaches is most effective in improving learning outcomes, is lacking.

DIBs are hence better suited for interventions that offer an opportunity to innovate, especially when the evidence on solutions is absent or unclear.

3. There needs to be some ambiguity or risk in the underlying model, which warrants the need for external capital

However, there should also be a balance between innovation and evidence. Ideally, approaches that have room for innovation are the best candidates for DIBs. This is because DIBs have been designed to bring in a new category of funders—private sector investors looking for risk-adjusted returns—that we don't see with traditional development funding approaches.

Having said that, given that these investors are interested in some financial return, entirely new or disruptive approaches will not work either, as the perceived risk may be too great. But an approach that has some history of success and also offers room for innovation, is often the sweet spot because it justifies the need for risk capital.

There are certain sectors that are better suited than others for an impact bond

An assessment of whether there is an enabling environment for a DIB must also include an evaluation of the specific sector itself—how mature is it, what are the major gaps, how developed is the value chain, and how much evidence exists on outcomes.

Globally, in 2018 alone, 24 new impact bonds have been announced across social welfare, employment, healthcare, and education. Most of these have been in developed nations. Looking at the Indian development landscape, we believe that a few sectors are better ‘primed’ for an impact bond, than others.

The education sector has seen much interest in the impact bond market in India. The India Education Outcome Fund, established to mobilise impact bonds at scale, will be supporting interventions across the education and employment spectrum, from early childhood to primary and secondary school, and school to workforce transition. Both sectors are viable for impact bonds because outcomes can be clearly measured, and there are many approaches with the potential to achieve them.

The health, sanitation, and waste management sectors are also well suited because they offer clearly defined, measurable outcomes.

For instance, in waste management, ‘reduction in the volume of waste going into the landfills’ and ‘an increase in the recycling of reusable materials’ can be achieved by both for-profit and nonprofit service providers.

In the fields of health and sanitation, there have been approximately 13 contracted impact bonds. These have primarily focused on preventive healthcare (hypertension in Canada, diabetes in Israel, maternal and newborn health in the US), and reducing indirect costs of illness such as reduction in sick leave, and reintegration for cancer patients. In India too, Utkrisht was launched to reduce maternal and child mortality by ensuring private hospitals meet the government’s

“It’s critical that we understand which contexts, conditions, and sectors lend themselves to a successful DIB.”

quality accreditation standards. Outcomes such as child mortality can also be achieved through other pathways, for instance by looking at allied sectors such as sanitation, where there are proven links to under-five mortality.

We have often seen that most business models in these sectors have typically not been able to unlock much equity funding. A number of factors—long gestation periods, low margins, difficult operations, and under-developed markets—enhance the risk perception, and reduce the expected return on investment (ROI). DIBs thus offer an alternative model, through which the risk investor’s return is no longer linked to financial return attained by a service provider. Instead, it is tied to the level of social or environmental outcomes achieved.

We are still fairly early on in our journey of using DIBs as a tool for achieving outcomes. Though we have learnings around which sectors and approaches might be better suited for impact bonds, and there seems to be an appetite among donors to participate, we are yet to get the Indian government involved as a partner in this journey. At the very least, DIBs will spark innovation and attract new kinds of capital to this space. And hopefully with time, the Indian government will become an outcome payer too. ■

Disclaimer: Vikram is a founding board member of Social Finance India, which houses The India Education Outcome Fund and the India Impact Fund of Funds.

Aparna Dua and Riya Saxena from Asha Impact Trust contributed to this article.

Footnotes

¹ The difference between a Development Impact Bond (DIB) and Social Impact Bond (SIB) is based on the outcome funder. When the government is the outcome funder, the instrument is referred to as a SIB, alternatively, in a DIB, a private foundation is an outcome funder.

² Data as of 1st January 2019 by Brookings Institute.

Guerrilla advocacy: Lessons for civil society



Drawing from his success as an anti-tobacco activist, Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi of Tata Memorial Hospital talks about the strategic choices one needs to make while advocating with the government, and the ingenuity required to change policy.

Picture courtesy: Flickr

Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi, a head and neck cancer surgeon, specialist from Tata Memorial Hospital, and among India's most resolute anti-tobacco activists, has been fighting for the control, regulation, and prohibition of tobacco products for more than eight years.

Going up against the tobacco industry is no small feat, but Dr Chaturvedi's efforts have been instrumental in the control and usage of tobacco. His powerful campaigns—for example, Voice of Tobacco Victims—have been pivotal to attaining an all-India ban on *gutka* and *paan masala*, along with other regulatory measures.

We had a chance to sit down and talk to Dr Chaturvedi about his unique brand of guerrilla advocacy, which holds important lessons for civil society and what it takes to drive change at a policy level.

Your methods of advocating against tobacco are quite different from the way people usually go about advocacy. Can you tell us more about your approach?

This is a rare public health issue, where the opposing party is stronger and larger. Nobody is going to resist polio or TB campaigns; viruses don't have lobbies. But we started small, and slowly built up the pace. Instead of going up against the tobacco industry directly, we found subversive ways to weaken their hold.

When you are going up against a giant, there is no point in attacking the issue head on. We learnt this in the beginning itself: it's better to fight smaller battles, and get smaller wins.

The most straightforward way to bring about stricter regulation of tobacco products would have been to try and amend the



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Cigarette and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA). But the tobacco lobby knows this, and thus always has an eye on COTPA. What we decided to do instead was to find loopholes through other laws, and bring about change by amending those laws.

One of the clauses in COTPA—which is rarely enforced—says that if someone is smoking in a public place, the incident has to be reported to the nearest police station. Now, say you walk to the police station, report the violation, and then bring the police back to the scene, it is unlikely that the person smoking is still going to be there. And even if they are caught smoking, it's only an INR 200 fine—the amount isn't big enough to be a deterrent for the offender, nor is it incentive enough for the police to come all the way for a 'low-value' misdemeanour.

However, since the tobacco lobby won't allow COTPA to be changed, we looked at the local municipal laws instead. In all cities, there are general conditions that public eateries and restaurants must comply with in order to obtain their licenses. We added a clause to these general conditions stating that smoking in public places is prohibited.

If these establishments had to retain their licenses to operate—a business risk far greater than having to pay an INR 200 fine—the onus of enforcing the prohibition of smoking in public places would now fall on the establishment's manager, and not on the individual smoking. With one single step, we were able to enforce prohibition of smoking in public places.

Similarly, we went down several other avenues that indirectly affected tobacco laws. For example, through the Weights and Measures Act, we managed to get the sale of loose cigarettes prohibited. Through the Ministry of Women and Child Development, we inserted tobacco to Section 77 of the Juvenile Justice Act 2015, which prohibits the sale of alcohol and narcotic drugs to children. We also approached the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, who directed us to the censor board, and now in every cinema hall there are warnings against smoking and tobacco use.

The one thing we learned during this process was that while it's hard to add clauses to existing laws, it is almost impossible to have them removed. So, once we got these amendments added, even lobbies as powerful as tobacco and *gutka* were not able to take them out.

All these small victories added up, and made us feel bold—which led us to make a big move—we took on ITC,

India's largest manufacturer and seller of tobacco products, and filed a PIL (public interest litigation) against them.

75 percent of their profits come from the sale of cigarettes, and we thought we would be able to curb this by filing a PIL, on the grounds that ITC is in violation of COTPA and other laws. But ITC was well-prepared—they had the country's top paid lawyers in their corner, and fought our accusations relentlessly. Taking them head-on made us realise how poorly resourced we are for such battles.

You're responsible for the anti-smoking ads we see before movies, and for the warning labels on cigarette packs. How do you decide on what messaging to use? And who is your target audience?

There is a difference between being made aware, and being awakened

Awareness means telling you that tobacco causes cancer. But everyone already knows this. But what awakens you? What brings you to action? Something that hits you very hard. What we really had to do, was shake people up; we had to 'awaken' them. Only then would they really consider quitting, or getting their loved ones to quit. And a graphic, disturbing clip does exactly that.

We used the testimonial approach paired with hard-hitting visuals, to show people what tobacco could really do. Our clips are screened on TV and in movie theatres, and the fact that people cover their eyes and cringe when our clips are shown is testament to the fact that these clips have an impact.

In a typical cinema hall, there are various demographics that one needs to target at the same time. We needed something that would transcend barriers like age and gender, and impact everyone. If we had to just target young men, for example, we could talk about the link between tobacco and impotence—but that wouldn't work for women or the elderly.

We noticed that rather than targeting smokers themselves, targeting their loved ones was more effective. We wanted to empower the non-smoker; the wife or child of a smoker, for example, could exhort them to stop if they were shown the real consequences of tobacco.

Statistics don't impact people, stories do

When we realised the power of stories, we made tobacco victims the face of our campaign. Our most innovative and successful campaigns was the 'Voices of Tobacco Victims'. We converted a public health issue into a political issue—a women's empowerment issue, a child rights issue, a human rights issue. Here is an industry that kills you for profit.

Once you see tobacco victims, their families, and the suffering, then you see the human aspect of the revenue that tobacco brings, which is often a counterpoint to any anti-tobacco campaign.

Nobody cares about the millions of people who die, but when the story is about this one lady, who lost her husband to tobacco use, people pay attention. She is *the* most powerful advocate against tobacco, not me. When she says that she lost her husband because of systemic failure, and goes in front of a policymaker and says 'my husband died because of your inaction', it's bound to stir them into action.

A large part of the social sector is about advocacy and trying to get policies changed—what are some lessons that we can learn from your experiences with both?

1. Know your subject

The most important thing is to know your subject well. Do your own research. If you are campaigning against something, first check—is there any evidence in any part of the world where it has demonstrated some benefit? Have people before you tried to fight for the same thing? Can you learn from their mistakes? And lastly, think about your ask—is it implementable?

2. Identify the right stakeholder

This is crucial. There's no point going to the Ministry of Health and talking about tax. Or going to the Ministry of Finance and telling them about the effects of tobacco on health. Identifying the right stakeholder, and sufficiently researching them is paramount. Understand the personality and the motivations of the bureaucrat and minister you will be working with, so that when you meet them, you can hit the right chord.

3. The first 30 seconds are everything

If you are not able to connect with a person within the first 30 seconds, you are in trouble. Advocacy often calls for meetings with policymakers—who often have

four phones ringing simultaneously, people walking in and out, and other distractions. To get them to engage with you, and quickly at that, you have to keep their attention on you.

4. One meeting equals one ask

If you go into a meeting with ten different asks, the person you are talking to will most likely latch onto the one that is most suited to them and politically easy to implement; it may not however be the one with the most impact. Therefore, don't ask for several small things—have just one ask, but make sure it is the biggest.

5. One meeting should open the door to more

If this is the last meeting, you are not a good advocate. You have to create an atmosphere where the person wants to keep in touch with you, have a larger conversation. Keeping the door open for more meetings is an essential part of advocacy.

6. Establish connections with the people who matter

Whether it's a personal assistant, executive assistant, or right-hand man, ensuring you have a connection or relationship with this person means you have a contact for future developments.

7. Follow up, follow up, follow up

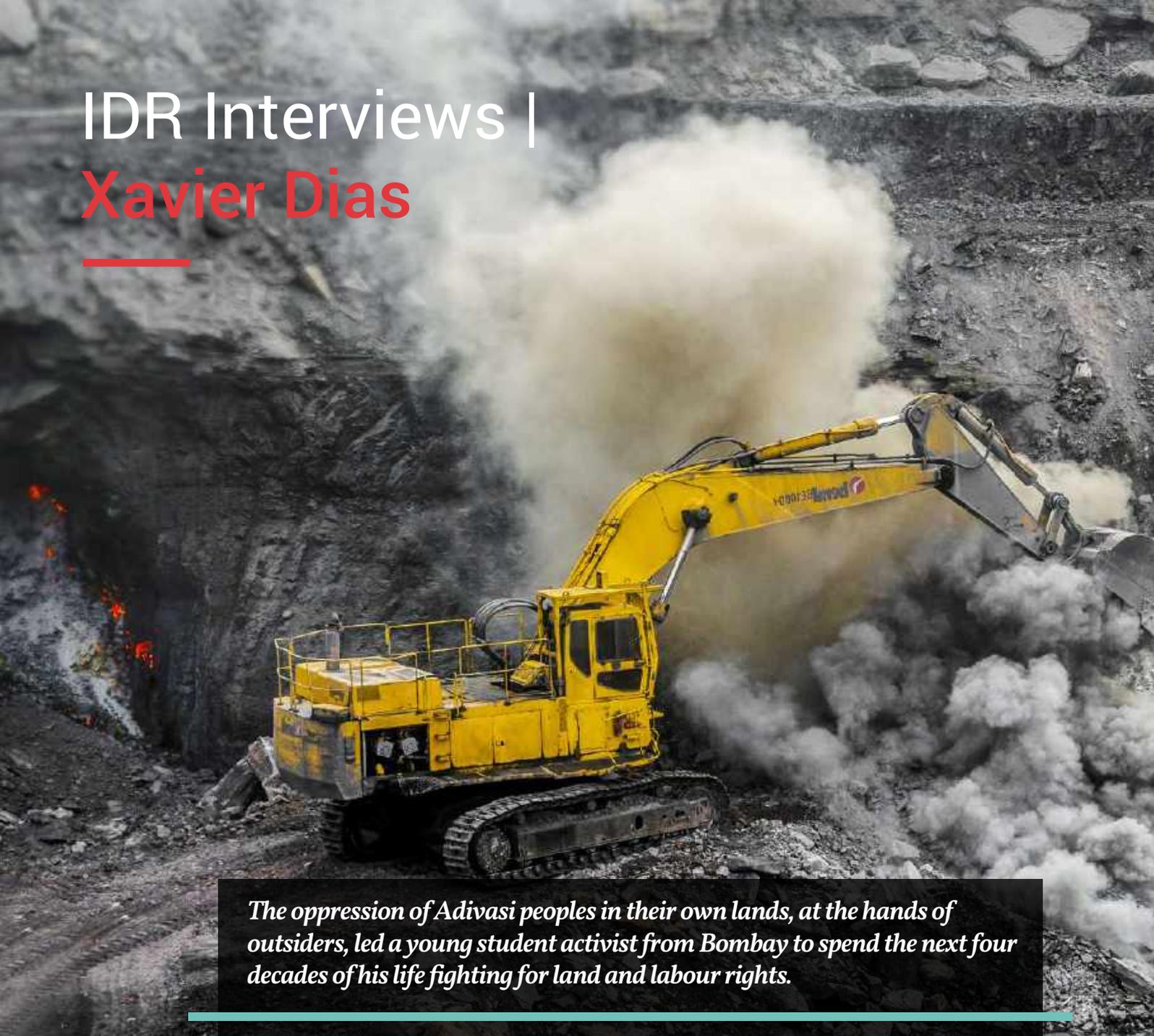
When it comes to advocacy, the initial meeting is only 10 percent of the work, 90 percent is follow up. Everything that we have managed to do required at least a year's worth of complicated follow up. After a meeting, make sure you have a way of contacting them, because especially when it comes to policymakers, you will need to constantly follow up with them.

8. Most importantly, you have to play the long game

The over-arching aim of our advocacy efforts is to make it unattractive for tobacco companies to invest and do business in India. We're currently trying to get tobacco products into a higher tax bracket within the GST Act. Along with disincentivising sales, we want to create an atmosphere such that when companies analyse and assess the costs of doing business in India, entering the market won't be worthwhile. ■

Smarinita Shetty contributed to this article.

IDR Interviews | **Xavier Dias**



The oppression of Adivasi peoples in their own lands, at the hands of outsiders, led a young student activist from Bombay to spend the next four decades of his life fighting for land and labour rights.

Picture courtesy: Wikimedia Commons

Activist, humanitarian, and writer, Xavier Dias is a name familiar to most Adivasis in Jharkhand. An integral part of the Jharkhand statehood movement, he was also a key leader in the fight against uranium mining in the state. At 67, Xavier has spent most of his adult life working closely with Adivasis, helping them secure and safeguard their land, labour, and human rights; and raise their political consciousness.

In this interview with IDR, he discusses his role as an outsider living and working in Jharkhand, shares his perspectives on the nature of development, and reflects on what the future holds for the Adivasi people.

What were some of the early influences in your life?

I grew up in Bombay—I lived in Dadar, in the heart of the textile mills. My father ran a night school for textile mill



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workers and I did my primary schooling with them—I learnt alongside these older, married men.

I came from a completely different community—the Bombay Catholic community—fun-loving and apolitical. They didn't know about the working classes, they didn't know about Dalits and Adivasis; I didn't know anything about them either. But seeing these workers come to class after a hard day's work—it had a big influence on me.

Soon after, I went to university in Bangalore in the late '60s, and I was fortunate enough to join a group of students who were politically very sharp. And left-thinking.

India, in the early '70s, was living 'ship-to-mouth'. The US was sending grain to India; we had to stand in long ration lines. Kerosene was underground and by the time it was 1975, even matchboxes were on the black market. The Naxalite movement was also growing, and there were many global events unfolding at the time—the Bangladesh Liberation War, Mao Tse Tung's barefoot revolution in China, and the Vietnam War—that influenced us.

As students we did our homework: if you were a graduate, you were part of three percent of India's population (India's population was 500 million at that time). If you had a bank account, you were part of the five percent. Knowing this, we told ourselves that we had two options—either join institutions that are against the people, or be with the people.

Many of us decided that we should go and identify with the masses. That gave us our political framework. What was the point of having a job, a car, a wife and two children—would we be happy knowing that the money we got for this had made someone else poor? We were very ambitious, and also very naïve.

After I graduated, I started working with AICUF—a national student organisation, as their National Programme Secretary, travelling to different universities across the country, organising students. I made my way to Jharkhand, which was still South Bihar at that time. I lived in an Adivasi student hostel, where the conditions were terrible. It was overcrowded—three boys sleeping on a bed; there was no access to running water, two meagre meals were provided daily, and they were grossly inadequate—a few grains of rice, some *daal*, and a chilli. The girls' hostel was even worse. They had toilets, but no doors.

Shortly after I arrived, Emergency was declared and many of us went underground. In those days, anyone picked up on charges of activism (or suspected of Maoism) was unlikely to come out alive, so we

“In the 45 years that I've been an activist, I've spent most of my time unlearning and re-learning.”

disappeared into the forests for almost two years. After the Emergency ended, I started working with miners, helping them organise themselves.

Could you tell us more about the situation in the mines?

We were working in small, private mines, with one to two hundred labourers. We discovered that the workers in these mines were actually the original owners of the land where this mining was taking place.

The mining companies were all owned by outsiders—mostly Marwaris, Biharis, or Bengalis. They would come and take a thumb impression of the Adivasi land owner on a blank paper and tell them, “we're giving you a job in the mine”. And since the Adivasi peoples' fields had been destroyed, they were forced to work in these mines in very dangerous conditions. They weren't paid the minimum wage—they received two rupees per day for ten hours of back-breaking and risky work; there were no maternity benefits; and men and women did not receive equal wages.

We also organised labour in the crushing plants, where workers were breathing in silica dust all day long. There was no protective gear provided and many of them died from silicosis. One of these plants employed 27 young Adivasis. In less than 10 years after we started working with them, 26 of these Adivasi workers had died. Not a single one of them reached the age of 30. The one person who survived had left the plant to work at a printing press.

Management reacted by registering cases against us. We used to go in and out of jail; they tried to assassinate us, but we managed to survive. I wasn't alone; there were hundreds of us. From 1977 till today, over 200 people I know or have worked with, were either killed or died of curable diseases. None of them, except one, crossed the age of 45. All were Adivasis.

What motivated you to devote your life to working with Adivasi peoples?

I stayed on in Jharkhand because I fell in love with the people and perhaps more importantly, because they allowed me to stay. I had to learn everything. Unlearn and re-learn. In the 45 years that I've been an activist, I've spent most of my time unlearning and re-learning.

My focus was on labour and land rights. I worked to raise the Adivasi peoples' political consciousness. They are very aware of their 'Adivasiness'. They were already organised, by systems of governance that go back thousands of years, and that are much more evolved than our modern systems of democracy.

My role, as an outsider, was to help the Adivasi peoples connect the problems that they were facing with the outside world, and to use language that they were familiar with to help them understand their rights and the tricks or strategies of their oppressors. I spoke English, which was an added advantage. In anything that we did, we tried to empower their 'Adivasiness'.

The Adivasi peoples are critical to our future. When the future world wants to learn how to live in communities, to live in forests—in a symbiotic relationship with nature, they will look to these communities, if they are still there.

What does development mean to you?

The development that people talk about—our middle and urban classes don't understand what it really means. For them it's: 'the Adivasis are sitting on iron ore, coal, uranium. Why can't they sell their land—it's a win-win situation.' Till now, nobody has become a millionaire by selling their agricultural land or mining on their land.

Imagine that you live in Malviya Nagar, New Delhi. And the government finds gold beneath your land. They will requisition your home and land and give you compensation. You can go to another part of the city and buy a house there. That is called relocation. But what if they gave you a wooden plank, with some Bisleri water, a bundle of money notes and leave you in the middle of the Arabian Sea? That is what displacement looks like for the Adivasi peoples.

They don't have much of a choice; they have to leave their lands and go to the mines or *bastis*. Most of the mining towns don't have sewage treatment plants, and all the sewage is released into the surrounding rivulets and rivers, which in turn are sources of drinking water. The women and children suffer the most—in the millions. And nobody knows. In Bombay electricity is available with the flick of a switch and you take it as a right, as an entitlement. But does anyone think about what it really costs?

Today, the Adivasi peoples have no alternative but to march towards modernity. And as they do so, they will have to decide what they choose to retain or give up. Much of what mainstream society offers them is taking a toll on their health and they face lifestyle diseases, for

“When the future world wants to learn how to live in communities, to live in forests—in a symbiotic relationship with nature, they will look to these communities, if they are still there.”

which they cannot afford the cures. But we cannot decide on their behalf. It is their democratic right to join the mainstream and we cannot stop them from doing so.

The younger generation is migrating to urban areas. There is really nowhere else for them to go. Once they graduate from high school or college, it is very difficult for them to go back to their villages, so they stay on in the towns and cities, often preparing for UPSC and other exams—they call it '*taiyaari*'. But this rarely translates into jobs.

Those that have chosen to stay behind live off their land—it sustains them with food, water, fodder, and fuel. In recent years, some Adivasis have taken to organic farming and mushroom cultivation, and this seems to be a growing trend. Since there are no jobs available, the Adivasi peoples' land plays an important role in their survival.

How would you like to be remembered?

As an individual, I have no desire to be remembered. I want people to remember how we saw the problem and how we tried to tackle it, to understand the history of the problem, and the history of the methods the people used to address it. But as a person, as Xavier Dias, I don't want to be remembered.

I stopped working ten years ago for two reasons primarily: I have a chemical imbalance in my brain caused by radiation—from having worked in the uranium mines over the last several decades. But more importantly, I stopped because I saw that I was no longer needed—the Adivasis are able to lead, manage, and grow the movement on their own. ■

Questioning scale as we know it



Do we really understand scale, and the trade-offs we make in the pursuit of it?

Picture courtesy: Wikimedia Commons

It is a (if not *the*) buzzword in the world of Indian philanthropy; the holy grail that nonprofits must beat a path to if they are to qualify for support; the reason we must all woo the government as a partner. It's almost impossible to find a PowerPoint deck that isn't peppered with the word.

The way India thinks of scale

Building a giant organisation

To many funders, scale appears to automatically imply creating a mammoth organisation that delivers services across the length and breadth of India. This approach



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limits interventions to those that are 'scalable'—essentially, delivery of basic goods and services that are often low-cost, stripped-down versions of their market counterparts. It also assumes a degree of standardisation that leaves little scope for communities or other client groups to contribute to the design of the services. Funders also like this approach because of the lower transaction costs of few, large grants that allow for leaner donor teams. Many funders who draw from the Silicon Valley paradigm of innovation—whose business models seek monopolistic dominance—bring the same world-view to their philanthropy.

Government as the ticket to scale

It appears to now be universally acknowledged in the world of Indian philanthropy that partnerships with government represent the ideal pathway to scale. No private individual or group, it is argued, can begin to aspire to deploy resources—financial and non-financial—to the scale that India's size demands. Adoption of one's model by government is to philanthropy, quipped one donor, what an IPO is to a private sector start-up.

It's not clear to me whether those that operate under this assumption have a plan to ensure that they have the wherewithal to influence government policy. Too many of these theories of change seem to hinge on hope rather than strategy or leverage.

Also, not much is heard about the effects of the growing dependence of the nonprofit sector on government, and the effects that this has on civil society's ability to play its full complement of roles, including holding government to account and safeguarding democratic rights and freedoms.

What is the point of scale?

It is a truism that the scale of India's problems requires solutions of commensurate scale. However, prioritising scale over every other consideration—equity, justice, dignity, even relevance—has innumerable costs.

Not only does that approach tend to ignore the all too real challenges of India's diversity, it also leans towards reducing people to passive consumers of 'development interventions', rather than citizens who have the greatest stake in building their own lives, communities, and futures.

The pursuit of scale also privileges narrowness of focus, ignoring the reality that each issue is usually a

mere symptom of deeper, interconnected factors.

Unsurprising then, that each will achieve sub-optimal outcomes. Finally, this approach leads us to dismiss any solution that seems unamenable to scale on these limited terms.

Alternative pathways to scale

In limiting our thinking to the above two models, we ignore others which have been successful in India and around the world. Each successive approach outlined below requires less central control and lower resources. Apart from the intensity of the need to exercise control, choosing a strategy from among these also depends on what exactly it is one is seeking to scale—organisation, impact, or model.

1. Branching

International nonprofits with many country offices and complex international secretariats exemplify this approach, whose main advantages are standardisation and quality control.

These mammoth organisations too often resemble transnational corporations in their size, complexity, and lack of agility or responsiveness. They are, however, uniquely well-positioned to address global issues that mandate global solutions—climate change, pandemics, migration, tax havens, among others.

2. Affiliation

This allows for a range of approaches, from social franchising to alliances and coalitions.

- **Social franchising:** This model is very similar to its for-profit counterpart pioneered by McDonalds. As in the private sector, social franchising refers to a contractual relationship between a central co-ordinating organisation and multiple independent operators to provide services in a specified area, adhering to an overall blueprint devised by the central organisation. Franchisees benefit from the franchisor's branding, operating processes, training, technology, and expertise. In return, franchisees must conform to agreed systems, processes, reporting norms, and quality standards.

“To many funders, scale appears to automatically imply creating a mammoth organisation.”

• **Alliances and coalitions:** From the battles against AIDS-TB-Malaria, landmines, or CFCs, to those for the rights of women, labour, and LGBTQ people among others, alliances within and across borders have proven that working together, civil society can prevail against daunting opposition. Singularity of purpose, a shared sense of threat, complementary skillsets, the willingness to set aside brand competition and egos as well as a relatively neutral, non-competing convening body all seem to help coalitions and alliances successfully overcome the centripetal forces and ongoing friction that prevent cohesion.

If we are to successfully challenge runaway climate change, rampant populism, gross inequality, and the untrammelled greed that underlies them, we will require collaboration on an unprecedented scale. Despite the potential costs of failing to do so, and the unprecedented means available to connect and collaborate, it still seems more the exception than the rule that we are able to make collaborations work.

3. Dissemination

Theoretically the easiest, dissemination is the least resource-intensive pathway to scale. However, too few organisations seeking scale via this route, design for easy replicability or commit resources to the dissemination effort. One that has is Giving Tuesday.

Conceived to promote giving on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving, right after the spending frenzies of Black Friday and Cyber Monday in the United States, the founders chose to freely share the brand, the model, and their learning to facilitate the spread of the campaign to more than 100 countries. Over USD 300 million has been raised for a wide range of organisations and campaigns in just seven years.

Rethinking our strategies for scale

As India's social sector evolves rapidly, as access to mobile telephony and the internet grow, and as citizens seek to co-create change, it would behoove civil society to re-think its strategies for scale.

"It's only really a movement, if it moves without you."

I've been known to rile nonprofit colleagues by asserting that all the sweeping, transformational change in India over the past several decades has occurred despite nonprofits, not because of them.

"Scale leans towards reducing people to passive consumers of 'development interventions'."

I'm thinking here of the great grassroots mobilisations around the rights to information, food, work, and women's representation in local government. Springing from a deep understanding of communities' needs, built on relationships of trust across the many divides of Indian society, fuelled by the dedication of voluntary activists, often from the communities they serve, these movements operate on shoe-string budgets and, in fact, shun external financial support.

They are not swayed by philanthropic whims or trends, live the values they espouse, and are accountable only to their communities. They understand that substantive, sustainable change is an organic, human, political process, not a technocratic, jargonistic, outsider-driven graft on.

From the movements against colonialism and gender discrimination to movements of and for Dalits and farmers, their pathway to scale is paved with authenticity, empathy, solidarity, and resilience. What is the equivalent of this impact in the world of philanthropy?

Must every social impact initiative necessarily scale?

It is a truism that everything must evolve or die. And equally true that growth for its own sake is the logic of the cancer cell. I know institutions that have served the needs of small, well-defined communities impeccably for decades. These include schools for children with disabilities, enterprises preserving dying crafts, and initiatives focused on the integrated needs of one slum community.

Are these not worthy of support? Is there some magical size of operation that is optimal? Is bigger inevitably better? What trade-offs are worth making in the pursuit of scale? Does the social impact ecosystem not need local organisations, with deep roots in the community, as much as mass-market brands?

An ecosystem for scale

Data from research at Ashoka CSIP, the centre I head, is revealing just how inadequate the investments in the ecosystem for philanthropy and social impact have been. We have no reliable data as a sector on which to base decision-making, or make strategic choices around

scaling, hardly any platforms or networks to share knowledge, build collaboration or fashion norms, and a toxic narrative that seeks to portray nonprofits as ineffective, inefficient, corrupt, or anti-national, which is barely contested.

Most nonprofits operate in survival mode, unable to plan beyond a 12-month horizon, in part due to a regulatory context that penalises sustainability. From legal and financial support, and from software to solidarity, nonprofits have little access to the support they need to grow, innovate, thrive, and play the full complement of roles expected of them in a vibrant democracy.

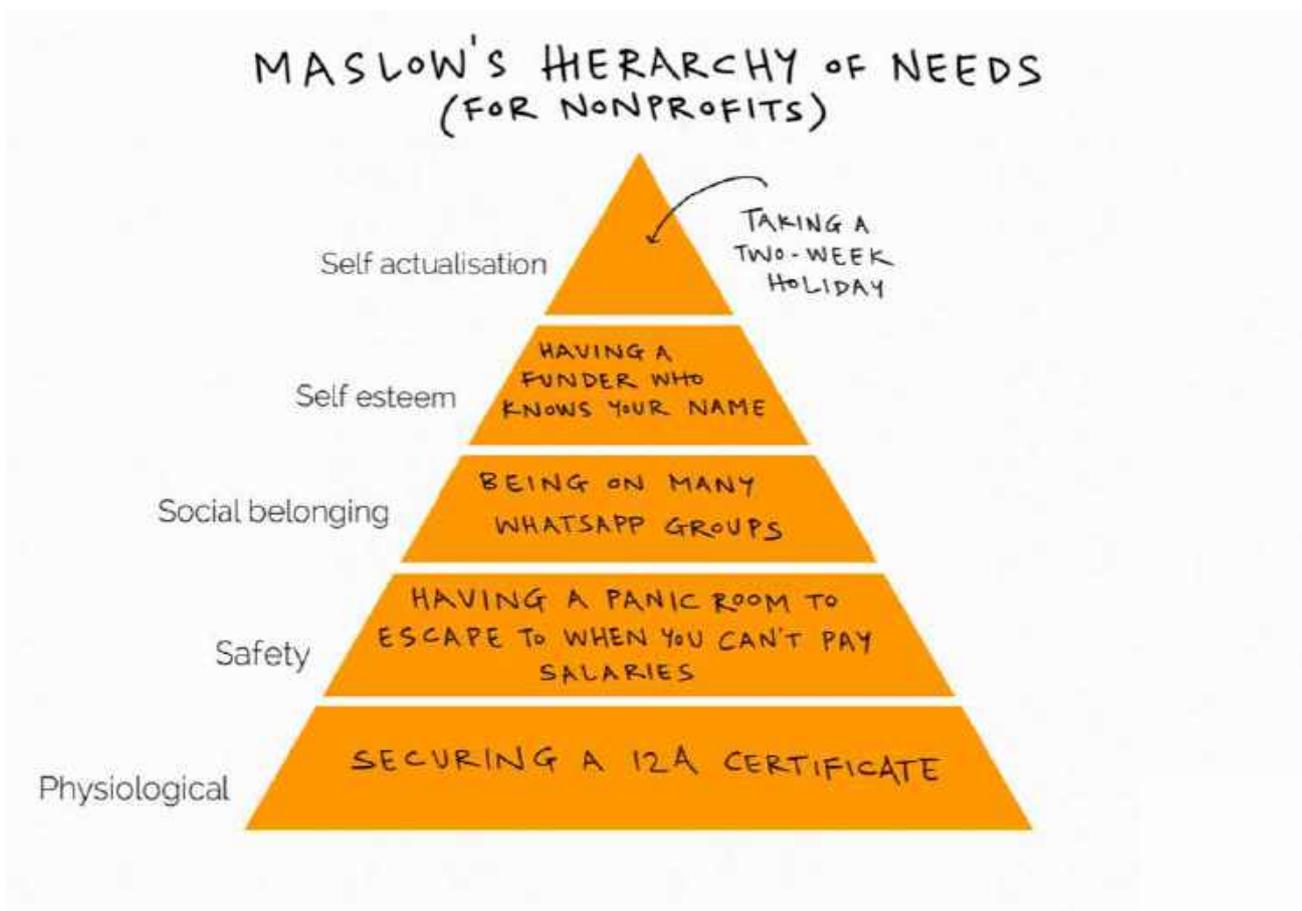
In sum, scale is not intrinsically good or bad, and the blind pursuit of it can do as much harm as good, as we've learned from banks, social media, and any number of other private sector experiences. Growing gargantuan organisations is not the only path to scale. Technology and networks present unprecedented opportunities for scale that we would be remiss to ignore, even as converging global crises demand collaboration at unprecedented scale. Let's be both more ambitious and more thoughtful in our approaches to scale. ■

Disclaimer: Ingrid is Director, Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy (CSIP) at Ashoka University. IDR is produced in partnership with CSIP.

Humour | Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for nonprofits



What would Maslow's famous model look like for nonprofits?



What corporates can learn from nonprofits



Jayant Rastogi
CEO,
Magic Bus

Nonprofits are often expected to be more business-like in their operations, but corporates also stand to learn a lot from them.

After six years of being CEO at Motorola Solutions, when I moved to the development sector, I did so because I thought I would be bringing in some business efficacies and efficiencies, and helping Magic Bus scale. And while that still remains true, there has been a lot that I have had to unlearn as someone who transitioned into this sector.

Having done that, a few lessons stand out—here are some things I think corporates can and should learn from their nonprofit partners.

1. The importance of contextualising projects

Corporates have a tendency to create a product first and then advertise it differently to populations in tier one, two, and three cities; the product doesn't change, only the advertising does.

Nonprofits on the other hand are very aware that every community is different and has differing requirements from an intervention. Organisations therefore take the time to tailor their programmes for the communities they work with—they address specific challenges, involve people from the communities, and contextualise based on geography and cultural norms.

Let me give you an example. At Magic Bus we have a programme where we provide training for girls who want to be employed in non-traditional roles, such as Uber drivers, solar energy mechanics, technicians and so on. But we know that if we move the same programme to a non-metro location—while we will still have girls who want to join the programme—we may not be able to find enough employers who are willing to hire them. This insight, gathered from years of working in rural areas, will inform our decision to add more layers to the intervention should we decide to move it.

We work in 22 states in India and each community we work is different; the geographies they are based in, their cultural norms, expectations, and so on. Because of this, our approaches are different in different regions and very specific to the communities we work with. In Chandrapur for instance, our programme draws upon and is led by youth volunteers from communities. But in Bhandara, while we continue to work with youth leaders, our programme is located in schools. This has meant that the programme has to accommodate itself around school timings, holidays, and sometimes, even teacher absenteeism.

Nonprofits understand the importance of being hyper-local in their programmatic approach as well as the solutions they design. Technology and processes can take you a certain distance, but ultimately, your understanding of the local situation and your ability to work alongside the community to solve identified problems, is what will make your work successful

At a corporate on the other hand, everything is built around maximising profit. Contextualising a product or a service for specific audiences requires customisation, which can take a lot of time and money. Since businesses are profit-driven, they look only at returns. They will not invest in—and it does not make business sense for them to—developing a new product or service if the customer base is small.

“Nonprofits are very aware that every community is different and has differing requirements from an intervention.”

2. The ability to take risks, tweak ongoing projects, and work with limited data

There is often not a lot of up-to-date data available within the development sector. Despite this, nonprofits consistently devise solutions and approaches and work towards their project goals, while tweaking and adjusting their programmes as data becomes available. The absence of data or information doesn't stop them from innovating and taking on big problems to tackle.

Corporates, on the other hand, are highly unlikely to risk moving on a project at all until they have sufficient data on it; this means that sometimes projects never take off.

A great example of this corporate dependency on data is a healthcare technology company that I started several years ago. From the time we had the initial idea, to the time it was ready, we kept adding more and more data and functionality—until it reached a point where we over-designed it; and eventually it never took off!

Corporates need data and information and most often a full-fledged business plan, before they can act. This over-dependence on data for decision-making reduces agility for companies, which in turn might impact how innovative they are.

3. Patience

Social change takes time. And nonprofits are good at working towards that change and not getting deterred by how long it takes. Corporates often expect immediate results for anything they invest in; there is a tendency to be driven by shareholder expectations and quarterly results versus building something that would be profitable—economically, socially and environmentally.

Most corporates are very results-driven—there is always someone looking over your shoulder saying, 'where are the results?'. Especially now, with the technological advancements we've had, the lifecycle for getting these results has become shorter. It took Ola five years to become a billion-dollar company. This is in comparison to companies like General Electric, Godrej or other older companies, all of whom took much longer. Technology has shortened the life cycle of profitability, and of business models; and investors and business leaders alike have little appetite for patience.

“Addressing inter-generational problems and deeply entrenched practices and norms cannot be addressed in a few years, leave alone a few quarters.”

This is in stark contrast to the social sector where one might have to wait three, four, five years to see even incremental change. When I first moved to this sector, my team used to show me impact numbers of five percent improvement here, six percent there—and I wondered, “Is this good enough?” I thought it was really bad. I have learned since, that it is actually good, because one is addressing inter-generational problems and deeply entrenched practices and norms. None of these can be addressed in a few years, leave alone a few quarters.

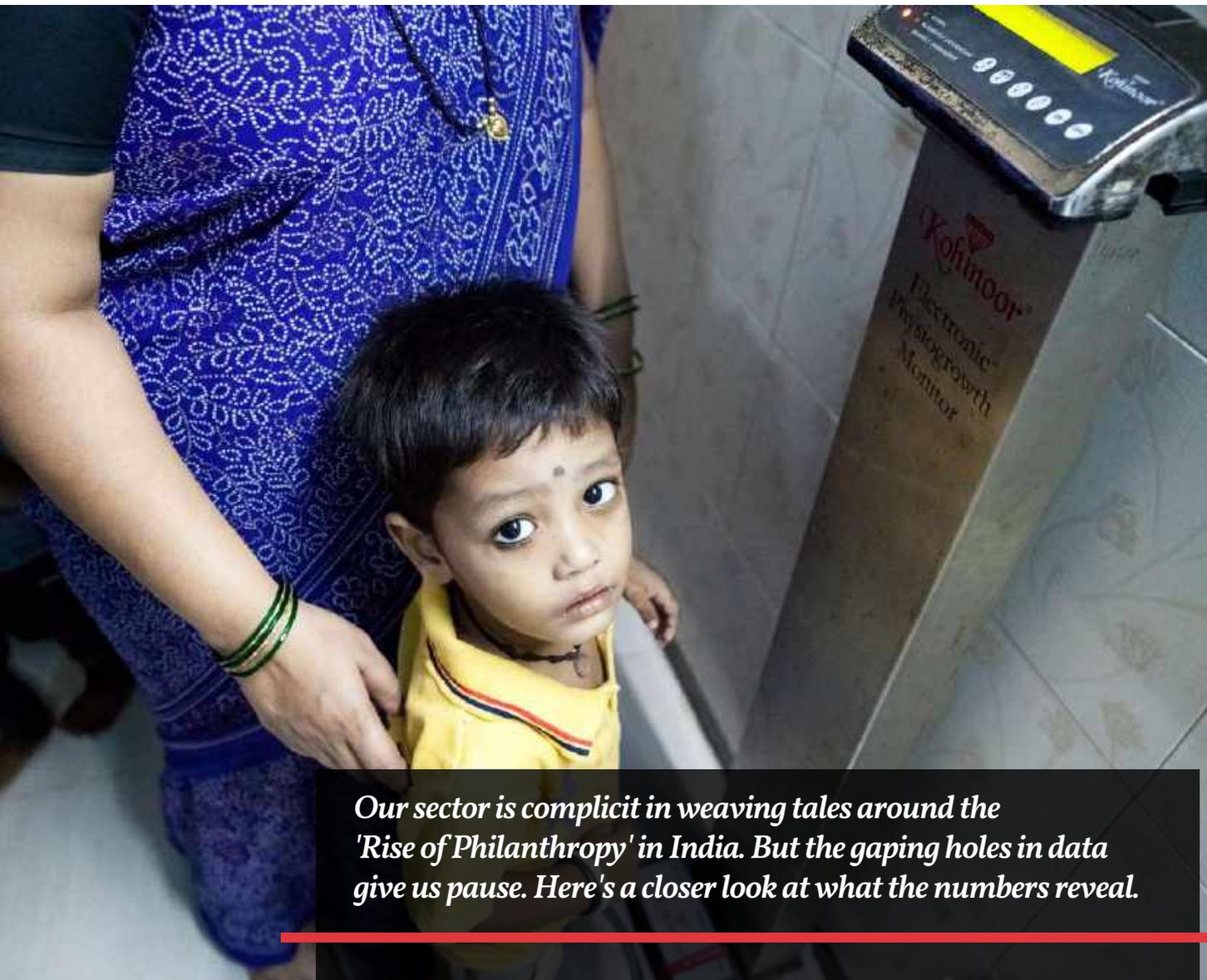
4. Empathetic leadership

Nonprofits lean towards having empathetic leadership, and while some corporates are beginning to adopt this, more can be done.

Post the financial crisis of 2008 it's becoming increasingly popular for the corporate world to demonstrate responsible leadership. More corporates are learning the importance of engaging with the social sector. We find many of our funders wanting time off to understand the sector and encouraging their teams to provide domain expertise to organisations in the sector, in return for building traits of empathy and social responsiveness among their people.

I can definitely say that all this experience has made me a much better person, and hopefully a better CEO. My journey here of successfully carrying big teams through large-scale transformations has yielded phenomenal learnings for me. I wouldn't be lying if I said that I had never managed anything so complex on the other side, despite being in leadership roles for large national and multinational organisations in my earlier avatar. ■

Philanthropy in India is growing: Fact or fiction?



Our sector is complicit in weaving tales around the 'Rise of Philanthropy' in India. But the gaping holes in data give us pause. Here's a closer look at what the numbers reveal.

Picture courtesy: Charlotte Anderson

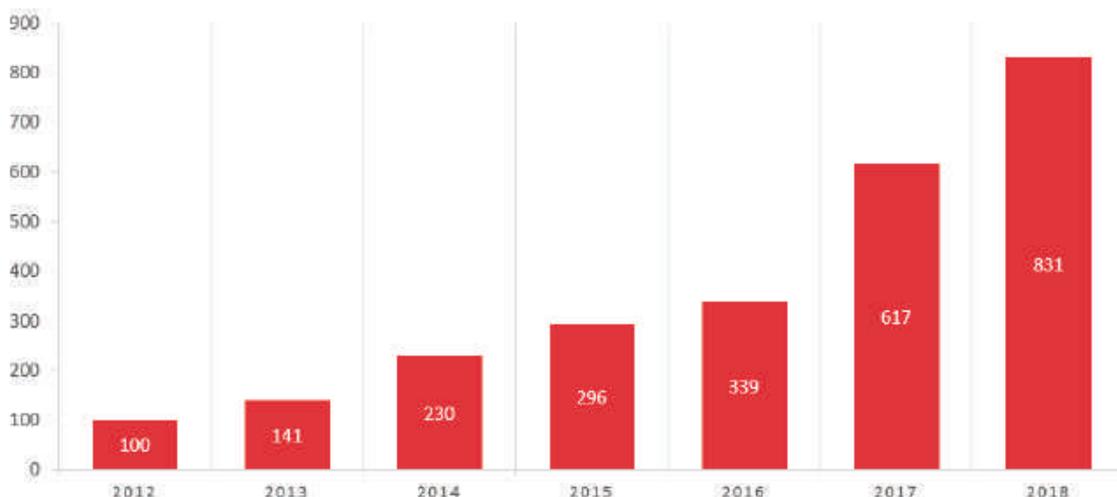
India has no shortage of billionaires. We added 17 new ones in 2017 alone, taking the count up to 101. During the same year, the wealth of this elite group increased by INR 20,91,300 crore—an amount equal to the total budget of the central government in 2017-18.

There is another list that tracks how the rich have fared in India year after year—the Hurun India Rich List which looks at people with a wealth of over INR 1,000 crore. In 2018, 831 individuals made it to this list¹—a 35 percent increase from last year and a jump of 100 percent since 2016. The average wealth on the 2018 list was around INR 5,900 crore.



Smarinita Shetty
Co-founder and Director,
IDR

The number of Indians in the Hurun India Rich List



Source: Hurun India Rich List 2018

When it came to philanthropy though, only 38 men and one woman made it to their annual Hurun Indian Philanthropy List 2018², which looks at Indians who have donated INR 10 crore or more in a 12-month period.

Mukesh Ambani who topped the India Rich List with a net worth of INR 3,71,000 crore was ranked number one on the Philanthropy List as well, having donated INR 437 crore towards education, healthcare, and rural development; the amount donated equals 0.1 percent of his wealth.

This is also the first year Mr Ambani has made it to the top of the Philanthropy List despite having topped the Rich List for the seventh year running.

While the number of Indians giving more than INR 10 crore during the year rose from 27 in 2016 to 39 in 2018, the average donation size actually reduced from INR 86 crore to INR 40 crore.

A snapshot of Indian giving (2013 - 2018)

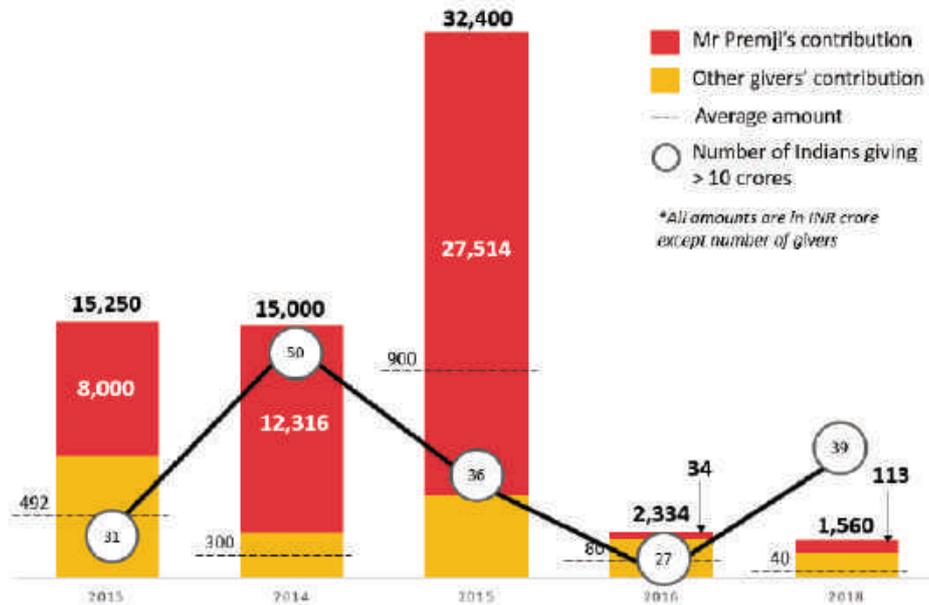
Year	Number of Indians giving > INR 10 crore	Total amount of giving (in crores)	Average donation size (in crores)
2013	31	15,250	492
2014	50	15,000	300
2015	36	32,400	900
2016	27	2,334	86
2018	39	1,560	40

Sources: Hurun India Philanthropy Lists, 2013-2018

*In 2018, Hurun changed the measurement period to Oct-Sep in 2017-18, from the earlier period of measurement, which was Jan-Dec 2016; hence there is no 2017 list.

Mr Azim Premji to the rescue

Over the years, Azim Premji has single-handedly shored up these numbers: he gave INR 8,000 crore in 2013, INR 12,316 crore in 2014 and INR 27,514 crore in 2015. Without his contribution, the data would look as follows:



Sources: Hurun India Philanthropy Lists, 2013-2018

*In 2018, Hurun changed the measurement period to Oct-Sep in 2017-18, from the earlier period of measurement, which was Jan-Dec 2016; hence there is no 2017 list.

The data is eye-opening. Despite its limitations³—it uses CSR data as a proxy for giving and only captures giving over INR 10 crore—it paints a picture that runs contrary to the general perception in the country—that as our people get wealthier, they are likely to become more generous.

To drive home the point: in 2018, while we had 831 men and women whose average wealth was INR 5,900 crore, only 39 of them gave an average of INR 40 crore (or 0.68 percent of their wealth), and most of them did it via their companies.

How we compare against China

When we compare ourselves to China, as we are wont to do with different aspects of our country's performance—be it the rate of economic growth, the state of infrastructure, population and demographics, or even just the number of billionaires—we come off looking even worse.

In 2018, China had 100 philanthropists who gave more than INR 17 crore each year. Of these 13 were women. The average donation amount was INR 230 crore.

How India and China do in comparison to each other

Details	China	India
Number of individuals in Hurun Rich List	1,893	831
Cut-off for making the Rich List	USD 290 Mn	USD 140 Mn
Number of philanthropists	100	39
Cut-off	INR 17 Cr	INR 10 Cr
Favoured cause of philanthropy	Education	Education
Female philanthropists	13	1
Male philanthropists	87	38
Average donation	INR 230 Cr	INR 40 Cr
Average age of philanthropists	55	63

Sources: Hurun India Philanthropy List, Hurun India Rich List, Hurun China Rich List

So, is philanthropy in India really growing?

The Bain India Philanthropy Report 2017 that is so often quoted by everyone who writes about the exponential growth in private philanthropy in India, contains the following data:

“The data paints a picture contrary to the general perception that as our people get wealthier, they are likely to become more generous.”

Breakup of private sector contributions, HNI philanthropy, CSR, and foreign funding

	FY 2011	Share	FY 2016	Share
Philanthropy	6,000	26%	36,000	51%
CSR	7,000	30%	10,500	15%
Foreign	10,000	43%	23,500	34%
Total Private sector	23,000	100%	70,000	100%

Source: Bain India Philanthropy Report 2017

The number that gets everyone excited and optimistic about Indian philanthropy is the INR 36,000 crore contributed by individual philanthropy in 2015-16. It shows a 6X jump from the 2011 data, the highest when compared to others—CSR at 1.5X, foreign funding at 2.4X.

However if one breaks down the INR 36,000 crore in the period April 2015-March 2016, it is highly likely that INR 27,514 crore came from Mr Premji alone;^{4,5} which means that other Indian philanthropists gave just around INR 8,500 crore. When this number is compared to INR 6,000 crore in FY 2011, the jump is more modest at 41 percent and lower than the pace at which CSR and foreign funding grew, during that five-year period.

The question then to ask is: Is the philanthropic market actually growing? Or is it dependent on the same few individuals and foundations who give generously, year after year?

For a country that is estimated to produce 70 new dollar millionaires (people with a net worth of INR 7 crore or above) every single day between 2018 and 2022, the question to ask is what can we do to encourage many of them to become philanthropists?

If you can't measure it, you can't improve it

As a starting point, we need to do more around tracking giving in India at different levels. While Hurun attempts to cover giving by the very rich, research and consulting firm, Sattva, is attempting to track everyday giving by ordinary citizens. We need data on individuals in the vast middle (who earn between INR 50 lakh to 100 crore

annually), and who have the potential to give between INR 1 lakh to INR 5 crore every year.

The last report that came closest to this was the Bain India Philanthropy Report 2015, which surveyed 377 individuals. However, 49.1 percent of these were people who gave between INR 50,000 to INR 1 lakh—still relatively smaller ticket. Since then, their subsequent reports⁶ have been based on data drawn from interviews and surveys with a much smaller sample size of 33-46 ultra-high net worth individuals.

Ashoka University's Centre for Social impact and Philanthropy (CSIP) has made a start by looking to scrape data from large databases (Union Budget documents, Ministry of Home Affairs, Income Tax Department, NGO Darpan, and Ministry of Corporate Affairs) to pull together data on different types of giving. While they have succeeded in compiling and analysing data for foreign funding and CSR, they acknowledge that “Individual giving remains the biggest missing piece in estimating the total volume and value of philanthropic capital in India”.

We need to look beyond 'high net worth' philanthropists

Conversation and media attention around philanthropy in India has tended to focus almost entirely on the ultra-wealthy and CSR. However, the former do not seem to be too keen on giving, while the latter will continue to plod along and grow steadily as mandated by the law.

Maybe it's time to focus on smaller-ticket individual giving, or retail giving. At the moment, the data on this front isn't too encouraging either. According to the World Giving Index⁷ that is released each year by Charities Aid Foundation, India was ranked 124th among 144 countries in 2017; this has been our worst performance in the last five years⁸. We have also consistently been at the bottom of the heap when compared to all our South Asian neighbours.⁹

However, given the attention and money that has been channelled to build high-value philanthropy, as a sector we have done almost nothing to grow the mass-market—the everyday givers. In the US, individuals accounted for 70 percent of all giving.

Just as foundations, the likes of Omidyar Network, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, USAID and others, have invested in intermediary organisations to build the 'strategic' philanthropy market, we need institutions and foundations—who are interested in growing and strengthening domestic philanthropy—to invest in inspiring people to give, building campaigns and awareness around causes, and improving the retail giving infrastructure.

The limited data we have shows that there is almost no link between the growing wealth in our country and the amount people give via philanthropy. And, left to itself, domestic Indian philanthropy—whether retail or high-value—is unlikely to grow in the manner in which we would like it to.

For that to change, we need more data, new strategies, different approaches, and more organisations that can build new giving markets. Without this, we will fail in our attempts to support civil society in the manner that it truly deserves. ■

Footnotes

¹ The Hurun Indian Philanthropy list 2018 ranked all Indians who donated INR 10 crore or more between October 2017-September 2018.

² Wealth calculations are a snapshot as on July 31, 2018, the same date as previous years.

³ To make this list, the Hurun Report surveys 800 of India's most successful entrepreneurs, including those from the Hurun India Rich List, meticulously cross referencing the results with media reports and charitable foundations. The report includes cash and cash equivalents pledged with legally binding commitments for the 12-month period under review. The report also includes donations made by companies in which an individual had a significant share by applying the percentage the individual has of the company on the donations.

⁴ The Bain India Philanthropy Report 2017 does not provide the breakup of the INR 36,000 crore for FY 2016 (April 2015-March 2016); it states: "A large portion of this amount has come from a few established givers who have pledged large sums of their net worth to philanthropy".

⁵ Mr Premji announced his decision to give away an additional 18 percent of his stake in Wipro in July 2015; the Hurun List 2015 that estimated the INR 27,514 crore tracked giving between November 2014 and October 2015.

⁶ The Bain India Philanthropy Report 2017 surveyed 33 individual philanthropists, and Dasra conducted in-depth interviews with 23 philanthropists; the 2018 report was drawn from interviews with 33 philanthropists.

⁷ World Giving Index of global generosity tracks how people across the world give money, volunteer, or help a stranger in need.

⁸ CAF ranking for India was 81 during 2016, 91 during 2015, and 106 during 2014.

⁹ While India is usually on top of the list in terms of sheer numbers (because of the size of the country), it fares poorly in terms of rankings because that is a measure of people giving, as a percentage of the country's population.



There is no single silver bullet that will solve the problem of poverty and inequality in India and therefore, any effort at alleviation will have to, as much as possible, address the root causes of poverty rather than just address the symptoms.

Narendranath Damodaran,
Executive Director, PRADAN



For the social sector, recognising failure early, acknowledging one's personal and institutional role in it, and then embarking on course correction is very critical.

Rohini Nilekani,
Philanthropist



The development discourse in India neglects women



The development narrative homogenises women's experiences and contexts, refuses to delve deeper into their life experiences, and is content to have counted women as participants, beneficiaries, victims, and case studies.

Picture courtesy: Arjun Swaminathan

Nearly three decades ago, I was in conversation with some of the rural women in a remote village on the borders of India and Pakistan, in Kutch. I asked them, "Do you know who Gandhiji was?" My question was met with blank looks. Some nodded hesitantly.

"Who is he?" I asked.

One of the women quickly said, "He's God." Another one thumped her, saying, "He's not God!" A third woman also felt that the characterisation was slightly inflated. She said, "*Nahin nahin, ek fakir tha.*" (He was a saint). Another one quickly added, "*Bahut bada*

aadmi tha." (No no, he was a very big man).

I asked a woman who sat quietly in the corner, what she thought. "*Mujhe itna pata hain, joh bhi the, woh sarkari aadmi nahin the.*" (I know this much, whoever he was, he was not a government person).

And the entire group agreed immediately.

What this lady said, spoke more about herself than about Gandhiji. Speaking entirely from her subjective experience, the response carried with it not so much an accurate identity of



Sushma Iyengar
Founder,
Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan

who Gandhiji was, as much as an accurate representation of her experience with 'sarkars' (governments). With one line, she spoke volumes about why she considered herself outside the circle of development.

This incident offers us some deep learnings about individual women who live on the edges of life. Who represents them? What are they excluded from? And why do they find themselves outside the 'circle of development'?

Let us examine this more closely.

Does the 'development discourse' ignore women?

No. Not today. It certainly does not 'ignore' women.

In fact, the development narrative casts its gaze evenly across a range of women, homogenises experiences and contexts, refuses to delve deeper into women's life experiences, and is content to have counted women as participants, beneficiaries, victims, and case studies. Content to have counted her in, but not necessarily explored the complex socio-political, cultural and economic dynamics that she lives through every day.

Three and a half decades ago, there was an overall lack of consciousness, sensitivity, and understanding of how our well-oiled structures of patriarchy functioned within families, homes, villages, cities, and society at large. Women were indeed ignored. But this very ignorance generated a counter-intuitive process of delving deep into individual experiences, and unpacking patriarchy through them.

It gave birth to new perspectives, a feminist consciousness, reflections on the productive and reproductive roles of women, their practical and strategic needs, the impact of patriarchy on women's individual and collective lives, and their abilities to cope, counter, and resolve.

We believed then, as a sector, as citizens, activists, educators, and researchers that the subjective experience of each gives expression to the experiences of many. So, we delved deep into the lives of individual women, because when you are immersed in one, you are immersed in all, and can understand the collective experience of people.

Two decades later, we have 33 million women who are part of self-help groups (SHGs); 1.3 million women elected representatives in our panchayats. And we also have 20,000 homemakers committing suicide annually;

this is a rate that is significantly higher than that of farmer suicides, which form a big part of our country's developmental and political discourse. I am not diminishing the latter, but let us pause and think about how we balance both of these; how much mind-, media-, and research-space we give each.

Patriarchy rides alongside development

What we see today is not ignorance; it is a stubborn commitment to patriarchy. And at the same time, it is far more complex than just that. It has taken many decades of societal work to replace the values of patriarchy with values of empowerment, and expose the numerous fault lines in our society.

However, we have quickly moved from working on transforming gender power equations to decorating, celebrating, and embellishing the idea of women's empowerment, devoid of its true meaning. And that is the crux of the problem. Today, touting women's empowerment has become a way of expressing solidarity and enhancing one's own credibility and power, of being on the 'right side of gender'. Gender optics, is what I call it.

Let us look at some examples of how women have been excluded from the circle of development and have fallen out of the circle of well-being, self-actualisation, dignity, and self-esteem.

Not long ago, I was in a remote village of Karnataka with a community called the *Kadugullas*. This is a community of herders, who have diversified their livelihoods. Their habitats comprised of reasonably large houses with courtyards and compound walls. Walking through the village, I noticed platforms built outside the compound walls and girls studying, sleeping, or working on them. This struck me as strange; I asked one of them whether they were outside because they were menstruating. She said yes.

These girls were required to sleep there come rain or shine. And while they shared their distress quickly and quietly, they also expressed fear of invoking the wrath of their deity if their families broke this norm. The girls showed me another spot, where pregnant women were required to stay for at least three weeks to a month. However, now things are changing and pregnant women were given shelter sometimes. *Sometimes*.

“The development narrative homogenises experiences and contexts, refuses to delve deeper into women's life experiences.”

This is not a community not 'touched by development'. Their houses are evidence of this, as is their approach to livelihood, and their aspirations. This was a region where development had encircled the community, but had not led to the well-being of its women and girls.

I have seen many such examples across the country. The *Lambadas* in Telangana, for instance, are an agri-pastoral community who had a system of bride price. However, their increasing upward mobility, adoption of commercial agriculture, and growing socio-economic status has also led to the introduction of massive dowries. In fact, these dowries can be far higher than in other communities.

And this story repeats itself across the country. Communities who traditionally lived off the commons—forests, grasslands, or otherwise—used to have more progressive and gender equal relations. In the past 15-20 years (and more starkly in the last 10), the equation has changed, as it has even with the *Rabari* and *Raika* pastoralists of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Even as many tribal, nomadic, and pastoral communities get alienated from their common lands, transit into various forms of settled agriculture, and climb the ladder of mainstream development, the women begin to slip down the ladder of gender justice.

And what do we have to say of all the young girls, old mothers, and traumatised widows in Kashmir, where development has been jettisoned entirely, because of civil strife? Who is talking about the emotional and psychological experiences of individual women in Kashmir? It doesn't even enter our development framework because there is something else happening there that is more important. Kashmir is just one such space; there are many across India.

And in rural India, where we have more than one lakh women panchayat leaders, we still see countless cases of domestic abuse and violence in village after village. These are never taken up by the panchayat, because local governance institutions do not think that violence against women falls within the domain of local governance. These issues are either relegated to the women's mandals, or the legal system, not to the social justice committees of these local governance institutions. Here, we don't even recognise that the well-being of women and girls is a part of governance. Development is, but not this.

The imperative for research and policy

If we were to assess our entire sector, and look at the volume of research on women's issues, we will find that

“Even as communities climb the ladder of mainstream development, the women begin to slip down the ladder of gender justice.”

it focuses either on her reproductive role and her body, or on her economic role as a worker. The rest is eluded.

Moreover, with research, rather than making marginalised women objects of enquiry, shouldn't we be ensuring that they engage as the primary agents of enquiry? Often, they are our respondents. But what are their questions? What are their hypotheses of their own lives? What aspects of their experiences would they like society to understand? These are questions we must ask ourselves, as we design research and write policy. The girl I met on that platform in Karnataka told me this: “Nobody is curious as to why we are living like this.”

Women's lives are deeply impacted by development neglect. Their experiences are often subsumed under the starker and larger neglect of the entire community. Here I am talking merely of research and policy, not programmatic interventions. If we were to listen to women not just as respondents, but also as those asking the questions, our research would become far more located in how they experience development, or the lack of it.

We need to localise the plural experiences of women

The more global our development paradigm becomes, and the more global civil society aspirations become, the more we homogenise many of our terms, and how we view women's experiences. The category of 'women', or even of 'communities', is itself pluralistic. Thus, treating women as a homogenous group will only result in vacuous theorising.

Thus, while there is an impetus to collectivise women and often homogenise experiences for the politics of resistance and advocacy, it is equally critical to localise women's needs, issues, strengths, and perspectives, as a necessary step to reverse this neglect. If grassroots research action and policy is inherently local, then it will be difficult to ignore individual women's perspectives and needs.

In today's India, which celebrates empowerment and progress, if you question development's impact on women, you are anti-development. We don't want to ask the really uncomfortable questions about how



Picture courtesy: Charlotte Anderson

development impacts women's lives, because doing so will divert the gaze from 'development'—a show that we must celebrate to showcase our 'citizenship'—even when it ignores, hurts, or oppresses women.

There is a strong feeling within the sector that taking the focus away from the larger issues of the wider community, and focusing instead on specificities, will take away from the larger questions. Therefore, we subsume, dilute, or neglect the specifics. The more we perpetuate this game, the more deeply we are entrenching patriarchy in our thoughts, beliefs, and action.

If the circle shuts you out, draw a new circle

As a sector, it is time we create a referendum through research and policy, on what women have to say about issues—local, regional, and national. We are so enwrapped in trying to take them to our own definitions of development and empowerment, do we even ask them what they want?

Let us not fool ourselves into believing that we are privy to their conversations. Much is being discussed beyond the safe spaces of SHGs. Our sector is not in those spaces.

We think our spaces are where the bright thinking happens; it actually happens outside them. There are indeed many questions we need to raise on how and why women are watching development pass them by.

We consider ourselves to be in the business of solving complex problems. However, a problem is only a problem, when it's a problem for someone. Therefore, if we are not speaking enough—adequately, expressively, comprehensively—to those who are facing the problem, we are not understanding it.

I shall however, end with an abiding confidence in the power of women who, when they find themselves shut out of the circle of development, invariably draw a new circle around the old one. ■

Adapted from a speech delivered at the VikasAnvesh conference held in Pune in August 2018.

Humour | A new dictionary for nonprofits



1. Pain pint

(n) (phrase)

The drink you get yourself after spending all day trying (and failing) to get around a particularly tricky kink in your programme.

2. Strutegic

(adj)

The air of arrogance with which corporate sector crossovers walk around.

3. Key fake-aways

(n) (phrase)

When you reach the end of writing a report, don't really know how to conclude, and subsequently conjure up catchy-sounding bullet points saying exactly what people want to hear (without any concern as to whether they say anything of substance at all).

4. Passion(r)ate

(adj)

The scale with which a development practitioner's pay is calculated: $p \propto 1/\$$
(where p = passion, $\$$ = salary; and the two are inversely proportional to each other).

5. Workstop

(n)

When you go to a workshop to avoid doing the work you're supposed to be doing.

6. Consulking

(n)

When the advice you give to foundations never gets implemented.

7. Holistic(k) development

(adj) (n)

All-round, multi-level change that sticks around even after the implementing organisation has exited.

8. Elevator snitch

(n) (adj)

Someone who steals your elevator pitch and delivers it better.

9. Leanership

(n)

When budget cuts hit and you hire one person to fill all senior management roles.

10. Egosystem

(n)

When you think that your organisation is at the centre of an intricate system and is pivotal to its growth (when in reality it forms a very tiny, almost insignificant chunk of it).

Collaboration doesn't work. Here's why.



Given the size and complexity of the problems the social sector is trying to solve, the need for collaboration is obvious. Why then, are people not collaborating?

Picture courtesy: Wikimedia Commons

In the abstract, the need, even the imperative, to collaborate is fairly obvious because everyone understands that given the scale and complexity of the problems facing the world, no one player can do everything, or anything, of consequence.

However, despite this understanding, we don't see any real collaboration happening. The question to be asked therefore is—why aren't people collaborating, despite the obvious stated advantages of doing so?

The barriers to collaboration

1. We fail to recognise that we are part of an ecosystem

In all (eco)systems, every transaction has

two sides to it. For example, in the natural world, the most basic transaction is 'eat or be eaten'. For that ecosystem to thrive, there is no need for either the prey or the predator to recognise that they are part of a larger ecosystem; they just have to play their parts and do what they know how to do.

But merely continuing to do what you know, and acting from one's own 'selfish' perspective doesn't lead to a thriving ecosystem in the social sector. If I go about my business and somebody else goes about theirs, it's not an optimal solution, because there is a larger societal goal here.

One understands 'self-interest' when one talks about markets and when they



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fail. However, most social sector systems are not ‘free markets’, and therefore the ‘invisible hand’ does not successfully align self-interest with the larger collective interest.

Participants in our sector must therefore recognise that they are part of this ecosystem, instead of just individuals acting in self-interest. We must realise that there is a great deal of value in our world that money and the economic system don’t capture. And to be able to create a genuine ecosystem that generates this value would require us to be mindful of the fact that we are part of the whole. We cannot just be individual players doing the best we can.

2. There is conflict between competition and collaboration

Once we do recognise that we are part of the larger ecosystem, the next barrier is managing the tension between competition and collaboration—when is it good to think of oneself versus when must one think of the herd and the entire system.

There are new ideas coming into the social sector either in the form of social entrepreneurship or through people crossing over from corporates, most of whom have naïve views on how markets work, and tend to go about business in the same competitive manner they did in their past lives. Unfortunately, that view of the world doesn’t work when the system is complex and inter-dependent, and most of the things that we value about the sector are not monetary.

So, there is competition within a group—between nonprofits for resources, but also between groups—between funders and grantees.

Consider the case of a funder-grantee relationship. The assumption is that the donor will try to drive down costs while the partner nonprofit will try to push them up; they will bargain and come up with an optimal solution—this is a market approach to coming to the right cost of a project.

The question is, is negotiation or bargaining the right way to optimise the costs of a project? Further, given the power dynamics at play between funders and grantees, this negotiation has very little chance of arriving at the optimal solution.

“Though it’s obvious that a collaborative mindset must be brought, acting on this realisation is quite difficult.”

It feels obvious then that a collaborative and a co-creating mindset must be brought to this relationship. However, actually acting on this realisation is quite difficult in the heat of that conversation. Being mindful, at all times, of all the factors at play, is not easy.

Collaboration therefore requires adopting a very conscious mindset; because it’s not a natural state of being for us, and the incentives to work together are never going to be sufficient.

3. There is no vantage point in our ecosystem

There is no place from where you can see the entire ecosystem that you are a part of. You can only see one part of it. As a result, your response to a problem comes only from your point of view, which in turn depends on the location you occupy. It is therefore not a complete view of what’s happening.

It’s important to recognise this: the fact is, you need other people’s points of view to understand the ecosystem in its entirety. Only when you see the system from multiple locations, only when many people come together and share their vision, can you imagine it together.

4. Putting the cart of the ‘how to’ before the horse of the ‘why to’

In our sector today, most conversations have moved to the ‘how-to-collaborate’ mode, a seemingly sensible, practical way of implementing an idea that we all agree upon. On reflection however, it seems to me that the first and possibly a very big barrier to collaboration is that it is a specific mindset that all actors (starting with oneself) should actively and consciously cultivate.

The tools of collaboration, the ‘how-to’—multi-stakeholder dialogues, sustained discussions, working together on projects, developing a shared theory of change, and so on—will start to have traction only if we bring this mindset to the situation.

In conclusion, collaboration is neither ‘natural’ or ‘inevitable’. It is also not primarily a ‘know-how’, a technique or a tool kit. It is, at its heart, a conscious mindset that when cultivated and brought to bear on situations and interactions can leverage the tools we have to deliver actual collaboration. ■



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