

Poverty in the Eyes of a Social Entrepreneur

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Abstract

Whenever society is stuck or has an opportunity to seize a new opportunity; it needs an entrepreneur to see the opportunity, and then, indeed, the new pattern all across society. We need such entrepreneurial leadership at least as much in education and human rights as we do in communications and hotels. This is the work of social entrepreneurs.

– Bill Drayton

Founder of Ashoka: Innovators for the Public

Daily bread is an integral part of human life without which survival on earth is impossible. There are people who die as destitutes. Those starving children begging out of hunger draws the attention of those Social Workers who are visionaries of a better tomorrow. Such Social Workers are good Social Entrepreneurs in the sense that they brings out solutions for the pressing social issues in society. This paper is conceptual analysis by nature that concentrates on the eradication of poverty to an extent. Moreover, it dares to highlight how Social Entrepreneurship can be implemented effectively in the midst of devastating challenges, in the contemporary scenario.

Keywords: poverty, motivation, entrepreneurship, mission, empowerment, vision, development, risk, opportunity.

Defining Poverty

“Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one’s food or a job to earn one’s living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on a marginal or fragile environment, without access to clean water or sanitation.” (UN, 1998)

In India, poverty is often defined as the inability to secure the minimum consumption requirements for life, health and efficiency on account of insufficient income or assets. Poverty has different faces which vary from place to place and from time to time. In simple words, poverty is being hungry and not being able to have food, poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor, not being able to go to school, and not knowing how to read or write. Poverty is fear of the future, poverty is getting food once in a day, poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by polluted water, and poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.

“Poverty is a broad front. It is about income levels. It is about food security. It is about quality of life. It is about asset bases. It is about human resource capacities. It is about vulnerabilities and coping. It is about gender inequalities. It is about human security. (...) It is each of these and all these together.” (IMF, 2005) According to World Health Organization (WHO), every second person on earth lives on less than US\$ 2 per day in spite of more than 60 years of global economic growth. In India, the current rural poverty line is Rs.32 whereas the urban poverty line is Rs. 47 per day. This material poverty usually goes along with a lack of access to basic amenities such as daily bread, healthcare, education, etc. People who live in poverty are often more vulnerable to challenges such as environmental degradation and the loss of habitat due to climatic change or volatile food prices in the light of global economic growth.

Emerging Social Entrepreneurship

Social Entrepreneurship is a mission aimed at the empowerment of those weaker sections in the society. A social entrepreneur often considers the challenges, threats, tragic situations, etc in his or her surroundings as an opportunity to employ an innovative idea with the objective of bringing an upward social change. Hence, the social entrepreneur can be often referred to as an agent of change. Moreover, all these seem to be a factor of motivation for those innovators who often foresee the development as well as welfare of the society. “Innovation is more than having new ideas: it includes the process of successfully introducing them or making things happen in a new way. It turns ideas into useful, practicable and commercial products or services.” (Adair, 2007, p.13) As every other entrepreneur does, a social entrepreneur too must mobilize funds and resources, and bear the risk which is an inevitable part of the process for accomplishing the goals. Apart, from other entrepreneurs a social entrepreneur must explore and identify the necessary and available

resources from within the individuals, community or society and utilize the resources with the cooperation of the individuals, community or society for their own benefit, welfare or development. Unlike a business project we cannot estimate or expect a specific time period for attaining an expected outcome for we are dealing with human beings who are emotional beings. The dignity of the individual is being enhanced which is a prime concern while addressing any issue, problem or grievance redress.

A social entrepreneur who looks into extreme poverty must address its three dimensional aspects namely – income poverty, human development and social exclusion. The primary objective of social entrepreneurship is the eradication of social exclusions and social stigma favouring human development rather than profit making. ”The eradication of extreme poverty is a global challenge but begins on a local level by ensuring the poor to satisfy their needs. Social Workers are often the ones advocating and supporting the poorest in their local communities.” (IFSW, 2014)

Muhammad Yunus, a Bangladeshi economist and social entrepreneur opines charity and donation as a means to overcome poverty as conveyed by Kerstin Maria Humberg in her paper named ‘Poverty Reduction through Social Business? Lessons learned from Grameen Joint Ventures in Bangladesh.’ But, in a social work point of view mere charity and donation is against the professional ethics because it creates prolonged dependency thereby ruining the individual’s abilities and capabilities to attain his or her own self goals. The individual self must be respected as well as encouraged in order to empower him to take up responsibilities and set goals for himself. Hence, the social entrepreneur acts as a facilitator who enables one to find a livelihood or make a decision himself. Catharsis or ventilation of feelings and emotions too is a part which must be facilitated in order to enhance improved productivity and creativity. Moreover, the social entrepreneur must ensure that the individuals, community or society is able to take up challenges and threats themselves even after the termination of the professional rapport with the social entrepreneur. Thus, the concept of sustainability, which is the capacity to endure, is to be employed while a Social Worker tends to exercise entrepreneurial traits.

Home for the Homeless and Livelihood for the Destitute: A Realizable Model

“Poverty is the worst form of violence.” Mahatma Gandhi

Poverty is the worst traumatizing situation which people often urge to escape. Poverty severely wounds and wrecks the human dignity, which is integrity of psychological and emotional traits, deeply. Dwelling in unhygienic premises, over crowdedness, inadequacy of proper light and water, polluted atmosphere and surroundings, etc damages the human resource hard, which in turn becomes a severe threat to the society. One of the Japanese proverbs, “I would rather teach one hundred men to take one step forward than teach one man to take a hundred steps” emphasizes on the effective employment of entrepreneurial techniques for the benefit of the individuals, community or society as a whole.

People sleeping in streets, children eating the waste particles from the garbage bins near multi cuisine restaurants in the city, the impoverished, people who are unable to win a meal at least once a day, etc too must be brought under a roof providing hope and better dreams of tomorrow. The absolute poor, impotent poor as well as the destitute is to be the only focus of this shelter home. These traumatized and extremely depressed people as well as children are to be emotionally strengthened and motivated by using the methods of Social Work effectively. In the case of people with high rejection to their own life, greater Social Work intervention is necessary to overcome the psychological and attitudinal barriers.

A shelter home which is appropriately named and licensed as an SHG (Self Help Group) often requires large sum of money to meet the day to day life expenditure as well as maintenance of the building. Loans can be availed from the concerned banks or other financial institutions. In case, a collateral security is demanded, the social entrepreneur can attempt to bear the risk himself. The social entrepreneur in turn gets more motivated with this element of risk and tends to inspire those residing in the shelter home. Let “Earn high, Dream high, Reach high” be the motto of the shelter home of hope.

In the current scenario of food consumption, society demands nutritious vegetables and fruits from the nature, which are part of a balanced diet. This demand can be supplied to a greater extent. A piece of land can be utilized to cultivate vegetables and fruits for the domestic use as well as for sale in the market. Rain water harvesting can be done as an effective means for irrigating the vegetable garden. Also, a biogas plant too can be implemented with the organic waste materials for it generates electricity and functions as an alternate fuel for cooking gas. Moreover, the biogas slurry can benefit the cultivations as an efficient fertilizer. Quail egg farming on a small scale can be made use for the domestic purposes as well as for sale. Products from quail egg such as quail egg pickle, etc too can be marketed and an income source can be maintained. In the long run various micro enterprises or cottage industries such as weaving clothes (hand loom), etc can be established.

The children in the shelter home must be provided with education by making use of the income of the shelter home. The hidden talents of the children need to be explored and developed. The children must be taught to use the leisure time creatively such as providing extra – curricular classes for art and craft, drawing and painting, etc. Moreover, training in instrumental music can be provided for those interested ones and later an orchestra team may be formed. The children in the orchestra team, when they attain their teen years they can go for different programmes in different places.

A small exhibition along with sales can be conducted with all the art and craft, drawings and paintings, etc the children have prepared. This exhibition seems to be an encouragement for the young talents rather than mere technique of fund raising. The money gained from the exhibition can be deposited in a savings bank account to meet the future financial needs of the children. Those children who excel in academics must be persuaded for higher education whereas those who are disinterested in academic activities must be taught to earn a livelihood by marketing their talents creatively. Organizing life skills, personality development, leadership skills and other orientation programmes for the children too can enrich moulding and setting destinations as well as goals for them.

The above mentioned shelter home may begin with a single individual or two. But, in the long run it tends to grow gradually into a big social enterprise where people find their livelihood thereby helping themselves. This would be our suggestion for sustainability if that could be concluded thus.

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