

# A Case Study of Social Entrepreneurship Practices of Rajagiri outREACH

THEME: Social Entrepreneurship Practices in Social Work Settings

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## **ABSTRACT**

**RAJAGIRI outREACH**, a neighborhood social work programme started by the students of the social work education, is now a prominent social work agency in India. They are very popular not only with their service oriented activities but also with the social entrepreneurial activities like eco-shop, solar shop etc. The main purpose of this case study is to identify the role of a social work agency like **RAJAGIRI outREACH** in the promotion of social entrepreneurs and how they intervene in larger issues like energy conservation. It also tries to find out the major issues that these agencies face in setting up such business enterprises and how they allocate the profit of this business into other developmental and service projects. Their main role as a social entrepreneur is to bring about social change and a remedy to the social problem. It also lights up such an area like energy conservation and promotion of other natural source of energy and greener environment, which most of the social work agencies do not directly indulge in. The study also tries to impart new innovative threads or model of social entrepreneurship for other social work settings. The study is

mainly conducted by reviewing various articles on roles of social work settings in social entrepreneurial activities, conducting organizational study in the RAJAGIRI outREACH and discussing with various officials in social entrepreneurship agencies. The central theme of the paper is to find out how a social work agency can be a role model to set up a social enterprise providing solutions to the energy issues and environment degradation

**KEYWORDS:** Energy conservation, Social entrepreneurship, Social enterprise, RAJAGIRI outREACH, Social work agencies

## **INTRODUCTION**

Social entrepreneurship is the work of a social entrepreneur. A social entrepreneur is someone who recognizes a social problem and uses entrepreneurial principles to organize, create, and manage a venture to make a planned social change (Verma, 2009). Social Entrepreneurs are individuals often described as curious, risk taking, visionary, creative and optimistic. They take off in new directions, explore hidden recourses, realize innovative ideas, and use creativity to find solutions to diverse problems (Venkatapathy, K, & Devi, 2010). The main aim of social entrepreneurship as well as social enterprise is to promote social and environmental goals. These enterprises are for more-than-profit motive (Verma, 2009).

### **Social Entrepreneurship and NGOs**

NGOs are the integral part of the living society in addition to being the change-makers. It makes wonderful magic in the life of vulnerable, in the areas where variety of social problems still exists; these NGOs have the awareness about clear facts on the problems that our current societies face. The main task of a social work agency through social entrepreneurship is to recognize when and where a part of the society is stuck and to provide new ways to get it unstuck. (Mazer, 2009)

The role of international as well as national Non-Governmental Organizations has also changed dramatically, becoming much influential and entrepreneurial in recent years. Increasingly these NGOs have moved from being small-scale pressure groups to functioning as the operational division of multi lateral aid programmes. (Verma, 2009) Unlike traditional NGOs, these NGOs make a significant role in the development and

protection of the community. These NGOs primarily seek to generate social value rather than profits (Venkatapathy, K, & Devi, 2010). There is an unprecedented wave of growth in social entrepreneurship globally over the last ten years. These Social entrepreneurs are also bringing about systematic change by influencing social behavior for the good on a global scale. (Verma, 2009)

### **Social Entrepreneurship in Social Work Agencies**

The more popular Social Entrepreneurship has become, the more diverse is the types of ventures grouped under the heading of “social entrepreneurship”. As a result, the term is now a bit vague and difficult to define in relation to an agency background. However, it is mandatory to bring about an apparent relationship between social enterprise and social work agency.

The main objectives are:

- It must go hand in hand with the vision and mission of the social work agency.
- It should come about naturally from a perceived need of clients or a gap in the market and it should also be creative and a solution to any problem of the society.
- Profit can occur, but it should not be the primary motivation. The profit gained through the enterprise can further be used for development or as recourse to the problem of the society.

### **Benefits through Social Entrepreneurship for Social Work Agencies**

As stated earlier Social Work Agencies is the change making agents. So through the social entrepreneurial activities the agencies can make:

- A Financial sustainability and autonomy that can further lead to the developmental projects;
- Reduction in costs of already-provided services, improved client service and targeting of those who value the service;
- A stronger connection to the local economy, they create and sustain new social values, recognize and pursue opportunities in service, also can take bold steps towards the social problem.

Apart from these through the social entrepreneurs, the social work agencies can create new jobs, improve the living standards, inventing new products and services, nurture the democratic processes etc. The impact and potential of social entrepreneurship depend on its ability to engage with the problem of the most needed group in the community through innovative ideas. (Venkatapathy, K, & Devi, 2010).

### **RAJAGIRI outREACH as a Change Agent**

RAJAGIRI *outREACH*, the acronym of Rajagiri Educational Alternatives and Community Health (*outREACH*) Service Society, a neighborhood Social Work programme started by the students of the Social Work education, is now a prominent Social Work Agency in India. It is the professional service wing of Rajagiri College of Social Sciences with the mission to facilitate comprehensive and integrated development of individuals to effectively function as social beings imbued with righteousness and courage of conviction. They are very popular not only with their service-oriented activities but also with the social entrepreneurial activities such as eco-shop, solar shop and the rest. From its few years of work, Rajagiri OutREACH has helped transform the living conditions of various target groups in the various project areas, all over Kerala. RAJAGIRI *outREACH* extends assistance to all people, regardless of their religious beliefs, gender, race or ethnic background. It has made clear, trendsetting, innovative ideas in the field of social entrepreneurial practices also.

### **Role of outREACH in Social Entrepreneurship practices**

The major social entrepreneurial practices of Rajagiri outREACH is focused on natural resource management and protection of the resources and the environment. The major social enterprises that the outREACH has initiated are:

#### **Aditya Solar shop (*‘Utilizing Alternative Sources of Energy’*)**

The Aditya Solar shop functions as a sale-cum-service centre for various government subsidized, Ministry of Non-Conventional and Renewable Energy (MNRE) certified, household equipments powered by solar energy. With support from the MNRE Govt. of India, Aditya promotes and assists in establishing solar home lighting units, solar street

lights, solar torches, CFL, solar water heaters, solar caps etc. the shop also gives proper follow-ups for their products.

### **Water recharging units (*'A Link between Nature and Society'*)**

Under this initiative, outREACH with the help of JALANIDHI project and Council for Advance of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), established an enterprise for the water recharging units which include sale of rain harvesting and underground water recharging equipments and models, water-shed management by building trenches, gully plugging, percolation tanks, and tree plantation etc. Through this initiative, outREACH was able to solve the water-related problems of Perumatti Gram-panchayth by arranging drinking water facilities for 1360 households in Perumatti and for 910 households in Varavoor panchayath in Thrissur district of Kerala. Besides, by this enterprise outREACH has also obtained contract for building of 900 units of rainwater harvesting tanks for houses ,hostels, canteens, and hospitals with the provision of maintenance, servicing and technical assistance.

### **Waste management (*'Income Generation through Managing Waste'*)**

OutREACH oversees and initiated an enterprise, which constructs and sells fixed, portable biogas plants and installs vermin compost units on a minimal rate to advocate rural technology propagation. Under this social enterprise, outREACH focuses on generation of biogas, via treatment of wastes and conservation of the LPG, promotion of vermin-compost etc. Thus far the enterprise has been able to finish construction of nearly 500 units of biogas plants of varying capacities, two waste segregation units, and seventy household pits.

### **Eco shop (*Promoting Eco-Friendly Products*)**

The eco shop is another business/social entrepreneurial practice that promotes sale of eco friendly products like organic food items, herbal medicines, organic manure, natural cosmetics, and also landscaping of Medicinal and Herbal gardens in community centre's and college campuses. Through this project, the agency has set-up landscaping in gardens of homes, colleges, etc by using herbal and medicinal plants, in reasonable rates.

The Natural Resource management project wing of Rajagiri outREACH (BHOOMIKA) manages all these social entrepreneurship. Through these projects, outREACH tries to solve the problems of overuse of natural resources and protection of the same. Our natural resources, specifically Water- the once abundant resource have neared the margin of scarcity. Co-existence of man and environment as well as preservation and management of natural resources, without hampering ecological balance are unavoidable for the existence of life on earth. Rainwater harvesting practices are sustainable, economically feasible and at the same time eco-friendly.

In addition, outREACH earns a good amount of income/profit through these initiatives, which are further allocated into advanced development of the same projects, or into awareness generation programmes such awareness classes, seminars etc. This profit is allocated into various other social service activities as well. It requires a good number of workers for the implementation of these projects. Furthermore, by training the local community, Self Help Groups for the same, Rajagiri outREACH empowers a community.

Therefore, as stated earlier this Social Work Agency leads an innovative path in the social entrepreneurial practices that any other agency can follow and reproduce into any other field of social work settings that leads into a creative solution to many major social evils/problem (Rajagiri outREACH, 2015).

### **Beneficiary Testimonials of Rajagiri outREACH**

Here are some of the testimonials of the beneficiaries of the Social Enterprises of Rajagiri outREACH.

“It’s really a blessing that outREACH has given us. Through the rainwater-harvesting tank, it provided a solution to our long lasted problem of water scarcity in a cheaper rate along with subsidies. It also provided employment opportunities for the local people such as construction workers etc.”

In addition, some beneficiaries of the Aditya shop said that there is a much difference in the electricity bill and that it has provided a secure hassle free environment.

Along with the beneficiary statements, the Project Head of Bhoomika- “the social entrepreneurial wing” of Rajagiri outREACH commented that it also provides a good

income to the agency which is later invested in the many other projects. Through this Bhoomika initiative, outREACH can involve in the community organization in an effective manner. It increases the trust of outREACH among the community and increases the participation of community people in a much productive way.

## CONCLUSION

A social work agency has a definite role in the field of social entrepreneurship as a change agent, catalyst and the role of a magician to make colors to the life of people. What is more, these NGOs make new steps as the time passes (JOSEPH, 2013). Through this social entrepreneurship model, Rajagiri outREACH has more fund raising strategies and has slowly become an evolutionary process in making the lives and solving the problems of the society. Bhoomika acts as a tool for the development process of the community through its social entrepreneurial practices as a model to the other social work settings.

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