



A golden time for social techno-preneurs in India

Dr. Madanmohan Rao

THERE are more entrepreneurs in India today than at any other time in history, and many are focusing not just on technology and business domains but also social and political empowerment.

"The shift from innovation to actualisation is becoming more and more important, not only for big corporate sector companies but for small traders, tiny manufacturers (including lone home-based workers), street vendors and farm labour. Indian civil society can play a key role in making India a garden of many blooms," according to SEWA founder Ela Bhatt.

Rita and Umesh Anand, in their book "Inventive Indians," have documented many of these examples of social entrepreneurship. The balance for emerging economies to strike is between scale and sustainability – many of these can be further enhanced with the use of ICTs.

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sorbed in their immediate local objectives that they would prefer to leave issues of national awareness and policy to others in the innovation ecosystem.

Business and social entrepreneurship can be accelerated in India via more involvement of educational institutes, ICT companies, social investors, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Some of the academic institutes such as IIM-B have been nurturing startups in their entrepreneurship centres, but the cases are few and far between and more educational institutes need to address entrepreneurship, according to V. Sridhar, author of "The Telecom Revolution in India."

Niche areas such as e-education and e-healthcare are areas with lots of potential. "It is time for unleashing the power of mobile broadband to the masses including low-cost Internet Telephony – an operators' nightmare as voice will become almost free," Sridhar cautions. Telecom is becoming more and more software centric. In today's era, content and applications are the important drivers for adoption.

Sridhar identifies notable digital players in India

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EXPERT VOICE

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Table 1: Profiles and Achievements of Social Innovations

Innovator/ Organisation	Activities	Impacts	Success Factors / Takeaways
Devi Shetty, Narayana Hrudalaya, Bangalore	Affordable cardiac surgery through clinics; Asia Heart Foundation	Extending quality healthcare to poorer communities	Tiered payment slabs for patients; innovative use of IT; alliances with pharma companies
Darshan Shankar, FRLHT	Promotion of ayurveda as part of integrated holistic healthcare	Bridging Indian and Western medicine; professionalisation of local healing	Use of IT to build databases of indigenous herbs; partnering with 'kitchen gardens'
Harivansh, Prabhat Khabar	Creating an independent citizen voice in news media	Exposing government corruption	Carving out an independent role for entrepreneurial journalists
Chetan Maini, Rewa Electric Car	Manufacturing energy-efficient cars	Promotion of clean electric cars, reduction of urban pollution	Partnering with green-friendly companies and cities
Anil Ranai, Janhit Foundation	Organic farming in Uttar Pradesh	Improved agricultural yields, less dependence on chemicals	Capacity building, study visits, certification, market linkages for farmers
Dhrubajyoti Ghosh, engineer-ecologist, Kolkata	Sewage treatment in ponds to create fisheries	Wetland conservation, livelihood for locals	Effective pond design, use of local water plants, involvement of local communities

such as OnMobile and IMI Mobile (VAS), Hungama and IndiaGames (digital entertainment) and Flipkart (e-commerce). Start-ups should not just focus on building a web site but look at customers' pain points in totality and provide an integrated solution. Lots of government services need the help

and support of start-ups to digitally enable them, opening up huge opportunities, advises Sridhar.

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