

# Empowering TIMES



April 2012

## Editor's DESK



Dear Reader,

It is our great pleasure to share with you that we have completed two years of Empowering Times. We would like to thank you all for the wonderful journey so far; hope we will continue to share knowledge for a long time to come!

To celebrate the second anniversary, we wanted to do something different. As we had featured NGOs in our **Standing Ovation** section of Empowering Times, we thought, for the special edition we would speak to the people behind these benign organisations. So we asked three questions to the founders of the NGOs and the responses have become part of the **Mind Share** section of the annual edition. I am confident it will be an insightful read!

In **Thinking Aloud** this month, Aarti Madhusudan, founder of Governance Counts, an initiative that helps NGOs strengthen the functioning of their Boards, shares with us her thoughts about social service and NGOs in India. She says that human suffering often becomes a source of lengthy conversations, but when it comes to actual action to alleviate the situation, there are very few hands which reach out genuinely. It is not only about donating money or a thing, what is required is the sustenance of efforts.

She says that in spite of a presence of nearly three million NGOs in India, there is a deficit of trust among the general populace. But the situation is not all that grim; there are many organisations that are putting in relentless efforts to make life easier for the less-privileged. She believes that if the picture has to change, each one of us should devote some time and skills on a regular basis and be the change that you want to see!

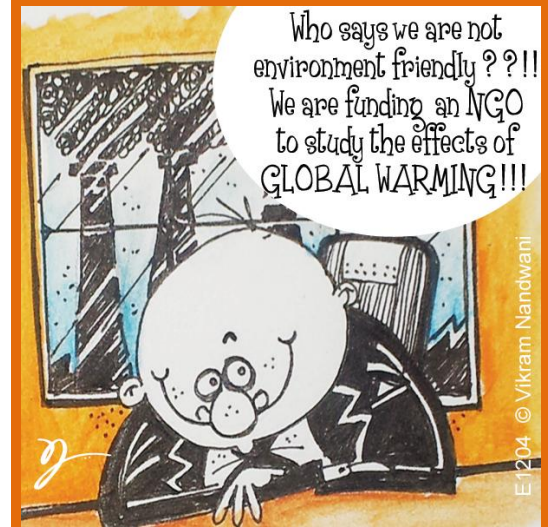
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**Thinking Aloud:** Be the change you want to see! - **Aarti Madhusudan**

**Mind Share:** Founders of various NGOs sharing their thoughts

### Figures of Speech

By Vikram Nandwani



In **Mind Share** we present to you the responses of the founders of eight NGOs which had been featured over the last twelve issues of Empowering Times. The founders have responded to questions like, what was the trigger to lay the founding stone of their organisation and what is their vision for it? But answers to the question, what will it take to move to the higher level, has elicited answers with some common threads. Most of the founders believe that if more people come to the fore and put in time and effort on a regular basis, NGOs will be able to do far more than what they are doing right now.

In **Figures of Speech**, Vikram presents a 'socially aware' businessman.

As always, we value your opinion, so do let us know how you liked this issue. To visit our previous issues you can visit the Resources section on the website or simply [Click Here](#). You can also follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Linked In](#) & [Google+](#).



## Be the Change you want to see! - Aarti Madhusudan

*As a young man was walking down the road, hurriedly going to work, his eyes fell upon a very poor woman on the street, ill clad, old, tired and hungry. He was moved by the sight, he looked earnestly at the sky and asked 'God, why don't you do something to help her?' To his amazement, a voice answered, 'I did - I made you'.*

I am not sure where I have heard this story before, but it was a while ago and the message in it has sort of become one of my personal dogmas, almost, since. Growing up and living in several parts of India, I have not been a stranger to what ails our nation and its people - there is suffering, poverty, hunger, corruption, so much of it around us, that it has ended up offering great conversation potential, and lent itself to a certain general apathy almost in most of us. We see it in the newspapers, on radio, on television and most of us cluck in sympathy, some quickly surf and move on to watch 'more interesting' stuff - serials, sports or news. We DO however, sit up and watch and follow stories of huge catastrophes with great interest and enthusiasm and often respond to requests for help as well. However, it needs a tragedy of the magnitude caused by a disaster to get our attention and focus on DOING what we can. Money pours in, things are donated, people offer their time; I've been intrigued by this actually. Why is that the hungry child at the traffic signal or a young woman being raped or a destitute man off the road cease to grab our attention? I've been told in response to my intrigue that it's a belief that these people's needs are supposed to be met by the government or is the work of NGOs in the city. The government and people have lost faith in NGOs, most are skeptical about their integrity and ability to handle situations professionally, so they stay away from participating with these bodies on bringing about a change that they would all welcome.

Well, let me focus a little on the latter response. Having worked in and with NGOs fairly closely over the past decade in various capacities, I have come to learn a few things about them:

- Most are founded and run by people with great conviction and passion. These are usually people who have the commitment and the determination to bring about a change.

- Many of these organisations do a fairly decent job of providing services to those that need them, while they continue to be challenged with how they will raise the support needed to do a good job.
- A majority of them are perceived as lacking professional competence required to function optimally, scale or sustain their efforts.
- There is an increasing trend among many NGOs, the desire to be able to be more professionally run. They want to have better systems, processes, policies; all of which costs money. If you want a resource who has the capability, he/she might be unaffordable for the NGO.
- The fact, though, is that most NGOs usually do not need such competencies 24/7, as a corporate might - they will not need a marketing person, a HR person or a communications person all the time, they will however need all of these competencies at varying degrees and for varying lengths of time, which will help them be far more effective and efficient in the way that they work and therefore the change that will be possible.

Now having described the problem and the context as it were, I'd like to leave you with some ideas of how you can be engaged.

Over the past few years, there has been a growing trend amongst corporate professionals to want to 'give back' yet, most end up cutting a cheque to a cause as a gesture. While this is equally valuable to an NGO, what's perhaps a lot more useful are the time and skills an individual can share in a sustained manner to enable the organisation to become more effective and efficient.

Whiteboard India, an initiative set up with iVolunteer, India's largest volunteering agency strives to provide NGOs in a city, access to high quality pro bono professional expertise across various functions such as marketing, finance, HR, communications, using technology. The program is now active in six locations across India - Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune and Delhi. The initiative works quite simply. It is constituted as a panel of people with diverse skills that meets once in six weeks, usually on a weekend morning for three to four hours. Two NGOs are invited to make a presentation of their work and their challenges. Members on the panel, volunteer to help meet those challenges by offering their time and expertise. For example, someone might volunteer to help with a strategic planning process for the top management of the NGO, another with setting up financial systems, or creating a HR policy, or helping with designing a communication strategy and so on. Outcomes have been interesting, panelists have roped in their own contacts and networks where they have been unable among the group to address a specific issue being faced by the NGO, some have joined these organisations on their legal boards, a couple have even quit their corporate jobs and moved on to the sector to work full time.

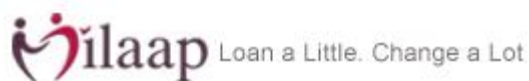
There are nearly three million NGOs in India. Granted that only a moderate proportion of these will seriously be doing good work, that's a large enough number in itself. Yet, we don't see the change of the kind that should have been possible. Clearly, help is needed! This is your opportunity to reach out and extend it. If you can commit the time, share your expertise and in the process meet and learn from some very passionate change makers, some of whom have been featured in this newsletter over the past year, then write in to us.

*Be the change you want to see!*

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Empowering  
TIMES



**Founder(s): Sourabh Sharma, Anoj Viswanathan, Mayukh Choudhury**

Featured in ET: December 2011

### **1. What specific event/incident led you to form this organisation?**

The idea for Milaap was born when Anoj saw what a difference solar lighting made to underprivileged households in Orissa while working at SKS Microfinance. He realised that one of the main reasons such products failed to make a bigger impact was because loans were unavailable at low interest rates. He teamed up with Sourabh Sharma (who having sold the product of his first start-up was looking to build a consumer-facing internet start-up for social impact) and Mayukh Choudhury (who was trying to build loan programs for small scale retailers and kirana shop owners selling lighting products in rural Uttar Pradesh) and decided to start Milaap in June 2010.

### **2. What is your vision for the organisation?**

We hope to make essential services accessible to all. If basics like clean drinking water and sanitation are taken care of, a lot more time and energy is freed up and it paves the way for real progress. As for lenders, our aim is to make giving a part of people's everyday life. Currently it's only the rich, or the very socially conscious who think of charity. By creating a model where small amounts can be loaned out, we want more everyday individuals to be a part of giving as well. Our goal is to redefine the way people think about charitable giving, not a one-time write-off but make it ubiquitous and part of our everyday activities, making it more engaging beyond financial transactions.

### **3. What according to you will help you accentuate to the next level in your efforts for the society?**

We aim to do this by making it effortless to lend to Milaap - be it while eating out at a restaurant or shopping online, people will be able to lend at the click of a button or a checkbox. This is how it will help us take it to the next level in making a difference to society.



**Founder(s): Sanghamitra Bose**

Featured in ET: November 2011

### **1. What specific event/incident led you to form this organisation?**

It is the growing sense of unease with the glaring inequality that is evident in our society that made me feel that I as an individual have to do something to address this. The plight of the children who loiter in the streets ragged, malnourished, out of school and uncared for prompted me to start the initiative in a small way. I started by calling some of the children from a neighbouring slum to my home, giving them a different option of spending their time, teaching them basic life skills and encouraging them to read and write. That first step led to 50 children crowding my living room daily, for nearly a year, eager to learn and adapt to a different life style. To give shape to the aspiration of those children and others like them Sshrishti was registered as a trust in December 2003.

### **2. What is your vision for the organisation?**

The vision of the organisation is to address all inequities that exist in our society with special focus on the education of the underprivileged children. India's growth story depends on the holistic development of the large number of children and youth who form the major bulk of India's population. It is therefore essential that they receive quality education, adequate nutrition and a chance to realise their potential. Sshrishti's vision is to create an organisation which has the reach and capability to fulfil this need.

### **3. What according to you will help you accentuate to the next level in your efforts for the society?**

Basically, NGOs like ours are filling the gaps in the education system left by the government's effort to enforce the RTE and the high-end private educational institutes catering to the affluent. One of the challenges faced by small NGOs is the constant shortage of funds. The financial insecurity is a great deterrent in having long term plans for effective service delivery. It would make it easy to accentuate to the next level if the government created a transparent system by which they offered long term sustainability to our efforts.



**Founder(s): Dr. Meenakshi Nair**

Featured in ET: July 2011

### **1. What specific event/incident led you to form this organisation?**

On being invited by Arpana Trust, an NGO working for slum dwellers, to conduct a program on career guidance, I realised that the biggest problem faced by under privileged youth was that of vocational training opportunities which would help them develop relevant skills and begin earning a livelihood. They struggled to complete high school only to find that they had no skills that organised industry valued. It was at this time that the idea of forming ETASHA to train disadvantaged youth with high school education for employment in the organised sector came into being.

### **2. What is your vision for the organisation?**

Our vision is for 'every young Indian to be employable, have self-worth and lead a dignified and productive life' and that is what drives all of us at ETASHA. We want ETASHA to bring quality, industry-relevant training and placement to as many under privileged communities as we can reach. We have doubled our reach every year since we began training and we would like many more young people to develop their employability skills, receive vocational training and join the organised sector.

### **3. What according to you will help you accentuate to the next level in your efforts for the society?**

We are increasingly working with more corporates, vocational training providers and NGO partners to attain reach in and far beyond Delhi. Our operational models are highly scalable and we are quickly able to replicate our success in training and placing young people into organised sector roles anywhere in the country where there are jobs available. We're currently working with corporates such as Rinox Kauffmann and Nippon Paints to train and place young people into their companies; we partner NGOs such as Amar Jyoti, Casp-Plan and provide soft skills training for several government ITIs. Effective partnership between industry, NGOs and vocational training providers is crucial.



**Founder(s): Mridula Das, Nafisa Khambata and Radiya Gohil**

Featured in ET: April 2011

### **1. What specific event/incident led you to form this organisation?**

Mridula was inspired by her visits to special units in the course of her college studies. She graduated to work in the Hospitality sector but soon realised that it was not for her and that wanted to work with special people. Nafisa has a brother with Down's Syndrome and after college decided to pursue this field of work. As for myself, I have a sister, 2 years younger, with Cerebral Palsy and throughout the growing up years I was involved in her care, education and training. During college I volunteered at her school and later joined them as a teacher. After 2 years I went to England to get further training, specifically for young adults and adults.

### **2. What is your vision for the organisation?**

We started Prayatna to fill a lacuna in the existing system which was geared towards the academic areas and repetitive vocational work like book binding, agarbatti making, etc. At Prayatna, we have an overall developmental program. We have no admission criteria and work with people ranging in ages from 3 to 46 years. We have students with different abilities and challenges.

### **3. What according to you will help you accentuate to the next level in your efforts for the society?**

To take Prayatna's services to more people, especially in the areas where these services are difficult to get is our vision. We aim to continue our work and create competitive and confident youngsters with a place in society. Thru our work we want to sensitise society to accept special people in all walks of life.



**Founder(s): Dr. Usha Pillai**

Featured in ET: September 2011

**1. What specific event/incident led you to form this organisation?**

While working with an NGO which provides long-term sponsorship support to poor children to help them continue studies, the incidence of case closure due to the child dropping-out of school motivated me to undertake a PhD study on the reasons of school drop-out, NGO & government interventions to tackle the problem and the perception of parents and teachers on the available interventions. IDEA originated from the findings of the study.

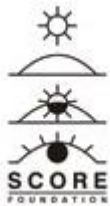
**2. What is your vision for the organisation?**

Every child gets an opportunity to complete studies through a holistic and individualised approach.

**3. What according to you will help you accentuate to the next level in your efforts for the society?**

IDEA's holistic and individualised approach to deal with the problem of school drop-out is working well and we would like to replicate this model in many localities.

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**Founder(s): George Abraham**

Featured in ET: February 2012

**1. What specific event/incident led you to form this organisation?**

When I visited a blind school in 1989, I was shocked at the lack of commitment, accountability and quality of services offered to the blind and visually impaired. There was very low expectation from the blind kids and I suddenly realised how fortunate I was. I had good education and wonderful opportunities. It was a realisation that most people felt that blind people were lesser beings who needed to be looked after. This perception was reinforced when I started promoting cricket for the blind across the country and had the opportunity to meet more blind youth and their family members and people running organisations for the blind. I also noticed that there were a few blind persons who did get the opportunity and had made it in professions like law, HR, PR, travel, teaching, CA and so on.

This is what prompts me to say that "Blindness is not the real problem, it is the mind-set". Blind people are as much a resource for our country as anyone else. So we need to invest in them rather than thinking of merely providing for them. Their needs and expectations should be a part of the mainstream, right from day one. Score Foundation's Eyeway, aims to influence perceptions, perspectives and in the process life with blindness.

**2. What is your vision for the organisation?**

Our vision/mission is to take up all projects that help realise personal independence, economic self-reliance and social inclusion of every blind and visually impaired person in the country. We believe that knowledge has the power to change mind-sets and in the process influence policy, decisions, choices and attitudes. It also helps the thinking process and results in new ideas and new ways of approaching issues.

Our work that involves research, awareness building and advocacy and in future training and employability related projects endeavours to change the perceived status of blind people from being mere people to be looked after, to people who are an integral part of the Indian economy.

**3. What according to you will help you accentuate to the next level in your efforts for the society?**

- Quality human resource
- Consistent assured funding
- A strategic plan for sustenance



**Founder(s): Jaishankar, Suresh Kumar and Sumanth Madhav**

Featured in ET: June 2011

**1. What specific event/incident led you to form this organisation?**

Not one, but many incidents where innocent wildlife were lost mainly due to ignorance.

**2. What is your vision for the organisation?**

Being an Enabler of sustainable conservation of wildlife and nature in India through:

- Nature and wildlife education and awareness by bringing public participation in conservation
- Create wildlife rescue network
- Establishing wildlife rehabilitation centers

**3. What according to you will help you accentuate to the next level in your efforts for the society?**

- Dedicated volunteers, contacts who are interested in the cause of wildlife conservation
- Support to acquire some equipment, staff, etc. to spread out our work to various forest fringe areas



**Founder(s): Ayyanar E, Harishankar N and Dr. Prahalathan KK**

Featured in ET: January 2012

**1. What specific event/incident led you to form this organisation?**

It started off with a small yearning to do something for the nation. A bunch of youngsters volunteered to teach children at an orphanage. The experience was an eye-opener to us about the status of the education system in the country. This motivated us to start Bhumi on August 15, 2006.

**2. What is your vision for the organisation?**

Bhumi aims to help build a more influential, equal and socially conscious society. We intend to achieve this by providing quality education to the under-privileged, a platform for socially conscious youth to contribute to the nation's inclusive progress and to mould them into tomorrow's leaders.

**3. What according to you will help you accentuate to the next level in your efforts for the society?**

- Like-minded youngsters willing to spend a few hours in a week either teaching or mentoring and committing to the cause for at least a year
- Youth with the focus and drive to take the cause to other cities by engaging in the initial phase of establishing a chapter
- Financial support to manage our educational and non-educational programmes from both individuals and corporate (starting with a nominal amount of Rs.100 per month)

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