Prospects and Problems of Social Entrepreneurship in North East India

5.1. Introduction

Serving the people at the bottom of the pyramid demands a different kind of vision and a mission-like approach on the part of the protagonists in the arena, which is the hallmark of social entrepreneurs. It is heartening to discover these attributes in the social entrepreneurs of the organisations selected for the current research study. Even though social Entrepreneurship is in its infancy in the North eastern region, the study has found ample evidence for the potential of social entrepreneurship for problem solving among the marginalized population in the area covered by the study.

5.2. Prospects of Social Entrepreneurship

It emerges from the study of the social entrepreneurship organisations in the North East region of India, that these creative and dynamic entrepreneurs and their way of solving certain pressing problems of society have the potential for creating lasting values in terms of social capital in the lives of individuals and society in general. In identifying and meeting unfulfilled social needs, these entrepreneurs showed great amount of innovativeness and entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship has the focus on removing the evils of society like poverty, squalor and disease. Social Entrepreneurs attempt to remedy these evils in diverse ways and using different strategies of social innovation which constitutes the answer to tackle the vast range of social problems. In this process transformation of society becomes the ultimate goal of any social entrepreneurship venture.

5.2.1. Choice for persons with Will-Power and Determination to change the Status-quo

Social Entrepreneurship is only for persons of energetic determination and dynamic will-power. Will-power, defined as a deep
personal attachment to an intention, is the power that moves an individual to take concrete action, even in the face of seeming difficulties and challenges that run counter to one’s intention. The study has shown that there are persons in North East India with such willpower and motivation to create and sustain solutions to social problems of the region.

5.2.2. Opportunity for Personal Welfare and Social Transformation

In the fields of opportunity for personal welfare and education, job creation, employability building, income generation, and over-all transformation of society and its constituents, Social Entrepreneurship brings benefits that are amenable to measurements in quantitative terms. The social transformation that is brought about is always for the benefit of the sections of society which are disadvantaged and marginalized, be it physically, mentally, or socially.

5.2.3. Integration of Marginalised Groups

Integration of the marginalized groups into the mainstream of society, through education, income generation and better living facilities, certainly enhances the welfare of society in which they live. The exclusion of the disadvantaged groups by the elitist mindsets diminishes as they acquire a new standard of life and become aware of greater personal dignity due to the intervention of the social entrepreneur and his/her initiatives. Taking TheANT as a case in point, the entire Bodo community benefitted from the empowerment of women as a result of training and the development of market strategies suited to their native capabilities in handloom weaving. Similar is the case of the FSHC beneficiaries, where the deaf and dumb children are inserted into mainstream education and job training which enable them to earn an income on their own. The success of this strategy is evidenced by the ownership of businesses by these same beneficiaries.

A significant contribution of social entrepreneurship in the field of social capital formation is the advancement and development of social entrepreneurship itself in society. This is achieved through the process of
finding viable and innovative solutions to social problems by enterprising individuals who get their inspiration for the same from established social entrepreneurs in the field who become paradigms for society at large.

5.2.4. Viable Option for Achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDG)

The eight variables enumerated in the MDG of the United Nations as part of its ambitious global development vision form the target objectives of many social entrepreneurs. The study has found that the social entrepreneurs targeted the marginalized population and attempted to solve their problems in an entrepreneurial way. Income generation skills for poverty stricken people, health promotion and care of the sick, education and training for poor youth, skills training for employability building are some of the strategies utilised by the social entrepreneurs of the study. A reasonable conclusion that may be arrived at from the current study is that social entrepreneurs and their organisations are better options and more suited for addressing the issues involved in achieving the MDG. Local, state and central governments, non-governmental organisations and even multinational corporations have undertaken various projects to address the MDGs, albeit in traditional ways, yet the marginalized sections of society have not benefited noticeably from their efforts. Rich advantages of synergy can be reaped if planners and government agencies can join hands with social entrepreneurs in the north east region of India for effective implementation of developmental projects, because these entrepreneurs have proved their mettle by successfully identifying and addressing effectively the needs of the marginalized population of the area of study.

Some examples of government collaborating with the social entrepreneurs are DBI and ACRD, two of the nine organisations which were the units of study in the present research. DBI has networking with governments at various levels for promoting the cause of employment of youth. It collaborates with the government of Assam in National Rural Health Mission’s initiatives to reach health benefits to remote areas of the state.
ACRD works in collaboration with the state government by promoting women groups for income generation.

5.2.5. Excellent Mobilisers of Social Capital

Social Capital Creation, by way of networking with diverse groups, is a major contribution of social entrepreneurs. The cause for which they stand and actively work is attractive as well as challenging. This enables like-minded persons and organisations to join hands and engage in bringing solutions to problems faced by the marginalized and disadvantaged sections of the population. Social entrepreneurship brings people together in partnership to address certain problems which may be difficult for one person or one organisation to handle.

5.2.6. Creation of Services which otherwise would not have existed

For people with disabilities, long term unemployed, poor and marginalized, Social Entrepreneurship is a boon as it creates services to these sections of the population. Education of the deaf children and preventive care for their families is a service which was created by FSHC. It would not have come into existence, had it not been for FSHC’s efforts to improve the quality of life of deaf children. The innate talent of the Bodo people for weaving clothes is brought to full bloom by the organisation, TheANT that champions their cause. Using market strategy, the beneficiaries of TheANT are able to work on their talent for weaving clothes and earn their livelihood. This has improved their quality of life with improved education, better housing and other facilities and an improved standard of life.

5.2.7. Collaborative Partnership with Governments

Social Entrepreneurship addresses those problems that governments of the country/state want to address, but lack the will/effort to effectively do it. There is great scope for the government to collaborate with the social entrepreneurs in a coordinated way for better impact and scaling of their
activities. Social Entrepreneurship can be models of change, and progress in a sustainable way for the society, which the governments can adopt.

Poverty is one major problem all the governments want to eradicate; social entrepreneurs address this issue quite effectively with their income generating and employment building strategies. Governments can adopt these models for the benefit of the nation and its people. If government and social entrepreneurs can work in strategic partnership, enormous social benefit will result for the people.

5.3. Problems of Social Entrepreneurship

It is often difficult to collect samples representative of the diverse strategies and methods in the social entrepreneurship organisations. As such case studies are the viable means to study and articulate the innovative ways of effecting change in the society. The case studies of organisations can help highlight the strengths and potential of social entrepreneurs and the challenges they encounter as they work their way up to meet their goals. A generalization is often difficult as each individual case is different and the potential of each organisation is unique.

5.3.1. Financial Sustainability

Access to resources is a major factor that either promotes or deters the person’s intentions to create social value. Creating a sustainable organisation by overcoming funding constraints is a major challenge before all the social entrepreneurs. In the study the researcher found that majority of the organisations were operating with a capital constraint. Raising required finances was identified as a difficult task that many faced. Funding strategies and resource models needed to be developed for effective fulfillment of the mission.
5.3.2. Organisational Effectiveness

Maintenance of personnel within the organisation is another major hurdle faced by the social entrepreneurs. Another problem faced by the social entrepreneurs is developing and leveraging valuable capabilities that can garner resources for the fulfillment of the social mission.

5.3.3. Leadership and team building

Succession Planning for effective leadership over a long term has been a neglected area for social entrepreneurship organisations. In all the organisations studied, there were the first line leaders/founders who still held the reins of the organisations. A second line of leadership is important to bring up for the continuity of the change process.

A Systematic way of analyzing the impact and contribution of social entrepreneurship should be built up for effective scaling and accounting for the value of social entrepreneurship.

References:

1 Prahlad C K. The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid