

Thinking Social Seminar - Noida



Tata Social Enterprise Challenge (TSEC) – a joint initiative of the Tata group and the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta (IIMC) held the third in the series of student seminars on ‘Thinking Social’ seminar series, organized by IIM Calcutta Innovation Park (IIP), on December 13 2014 at Noida, with the School of Management & Entrepreneurship, Shiv Nadar University, as the host Institution. Fulfilling the main objective of these TSEC “Thinking Social” seminars of connecting youth to social enterprise there was a strong student presence at the TSEC “Thinking Social” seminar in Noida, with many amongst them budding entrepreneurs.

The day-long seminar was attended by almost 100 students from across colleges in NCR. The speakers for the day comprised eminent social entrepreneurs like Ms. Kamini Prakash, Board Member, Pravah and Ms. Meenu Vadera, Director, Sakha Consulting Wings Pvt. Ltd. and Trustee, Azad Foundation who have established their own outstanding ventures in the Indian social entrepreneurship space. They shared their experience as social entrepreneurs with those present and addressed the issues and concerns of the young, budding entrepreneurs in the audience. Distinguished speakers like Prof. Ashok Banerjee, Dean (New Initiatives & External Relations) IIM Calcutta; Mr. Shankar Venkateswaran, Chief, Tata Sustainability Group; Prof. Devi Vijay, IIM Calcutta; Mr. Sameer Chaturvedi, CEO, Jaipur Rugs Foundation and Prof. Shekhar Chaudhuri, Director, School of Management & Entrepreneurship, Shiv Nadar University, addressed the students and introduced them to the concept of social entrepreneurship in a rapidly evolving global economy.

Inaugural Session

The seminar started with the lighting of the lamp by the dignitaries present and an invocation hymn being sung by a student.



After this ceremony **Prof. Ashok Banerjee**, Dean (New Initiatives & External Relations) IIM Calcutta, made his inaugural address where he talked about the functions of IIM Calcutta Innovation Park, highlighting how its functions span across social issues and focus on healthcare, livelihood, education and green energy as the core areas. He said “The primary objective of this event is to create awareness about social entrepreneurship among students with the hope that some of them may pursue this form of entrepreneurship as a career choice”. He said that TSEC Thinking Social seminar aimed to give the participating students the drive and courage to take social action and to create viable businesses, while making sure that the social issues are not compromised. He expressed hope that the students and all others in the audience would learn from the social entrepreneurs present. He told the students that the social entrepreneurs present would offer practical know-how and social entrepreneurship tools, and hoped that this seminar would provide enough inputs to the participants who were interested in starting socially conscious businesses or services that offered solutions to social problems.

Prof. Shekhar Chaudhuri, Director, School of Management & Entrepreneurship, Shiv Nadar University emphasized the need for such seminars to generate awareness about social enterprises and socially conscious businesses and expressed hope that more such seminars would be organised in the future in collaboration with the IIM Calcutta Innovation Park and the Tata Group. He pointed out that in recent years the concept of social entrepreneurship as the tool to achieve socio-economic development had become very popular in the world. He said that more and younger people were now looking to become social entrepreneurs including motivated youth with business acumen who wanted to be

successful in life without compromising on the social values and seminars like this aided in this process.

Technical Session

Moving on to the technical session, **Prof. Devi Vijay** of IIM Calcutta started this session by introducing the audience to the concept of social enterprise and set the trend for the day by sharing with the audience stories about some leading social enterprises. It was a highly interactive session where the audience and the speaker in conjunction tried to arrive at the definition of social entrepreneurship without any organizational or agenda related bias. Prof. Vijay talked about the various models of social entrepreneurship and felt that social entrepreneurship looked towards sustainable development without compromising on the stakeholder value.

After Prof. Vijay's session the social entrepreneurship practitioners took over and they both provoked and motivated the audience with their take on what is social entrepreneurship, leading to a lot of interaction with the audience.

Ms. Kamini Prakash one of the founders of Pravah and presently a board member talked about the genesis of Pravah. She said "In 1992 a wave of violence and rise in communal thinking forced a group of young professionals in their early twenties, to stop observing passively and take action thus leading to the birth of Pravah". As she also looks after Change Looms which is a program for young social entrepreneurs, she shared with the audience their work and talked about forming fruitful partnerships with these young social entrepreneurs in the future. She said "It is very nice to see such endeavours that encourage social entrepreneurship and hope there are more such events in the future." She also shared that there was an urgent need to build youth leadership, if we wanted to bring about sustainable change and create a generation of active, committed and empathetic individuals deeply connected to society and with the skills to intervene effectively.

Presenting a macro level view on Social Entrepreneurship, **Mr. Sameer Chaturvedi** who is the CEO of Jaipur Rugs Foundation talked about the various types of social business enterprises and shared with the audience such examples like "Grameen Danone" and "Jaipur Rugs". He pointed out – "Profit is important to sustain social enterprises, just like any other business but what is important is how the profit is shared." He also explained the complete business model of Jaipur Rugs and made the audience aware about the fact that Jaipur Rugs group is known globally not just for exquisite rugs and other home furnishing products but also for its unique and inclusive business-development model that links grassroots artisans with world markets. This unique model he mentioned was also featured in the *'The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid'*.

Mr. Shankar Venkateswaran, Chief – Tata Sustainability Group talked about the challenges of starting and sustaining social enterprises in his talk about creating a social entrepreneurship ecosystem. He said "I firmly believe some years down the line social and enterprise will no longer be two different words as all businesses will become social enterprises or socially conscious businesses". He also said "As more and more young people get exposed to and inspired by the work of social entrepreneurs in forums like these, the best brains will be applying their minds to problems that really matter – of making the world a better place for all of us." According to him private enterprises were powerful tools for stimulating modernization and investment, but neglected the community, social and environmental costs, while on the other hand public enterprises were useful in allocating public resources and serving the disenfranchised but often at the cost of efficiency and creativity. Only social entrepreneurship promised to combine the energy and discipline of a private enterprise with the inclusiveness and far-sightedness of a public enterprise to attempt

solving social, environmental and economic problems. Mr. Shankar felt that management models and skills that look to blend economic and social priorities and try to balance the triple bottom lines of profit, planet and place would be the only models in existence in the near future.

Ms. Meenu Vadera enlightened the audience about how she became a social entrepreneur and about her latest project 'Women on Wheels' that provided safe transport solutions for women, by women in urban India. She said "This initiative is a disruptive social enterprise as it challenges and disrupts the cultural and social norms by training girls from underprivileged backgrounds to become chauffeurs and becoming the principal bread earners of the families". Her social enterprise focused on providing young women from disadvantaged urban communities with the training and support they needed to navigate the formidable Delhi streets. The organization provided a 4-6 month long training programme that covered everything from self-defense to changing tires said Ms. Vadera. But Sakha is more than just a cab company. As Ms. Vadera explained, "Driving is just an excuse, what we really try to do is break an image and provoke a change in mindsets towards women." "When the women come into the program they are so clearly downtrodden. The training strengthens them, gives them confidence and then they start earning and gain economic power—from an average monthly family income of Rs 3,500 and to an individual salary of Rs 5,000-7,000 per month. They become the principal breadwinners in their families which gives them a huge sense of empowerment." "These silent citizens suddenly find their voices and can be heard", Meenu shared. Although Ms. Vadera feels that Sakha and Azad are still in fledgling stages, these two organizations have undoubtedly already changed many minds, both in the marginalized communities from where they sourced their employees and amongst their customers.

The team from '**Club Aura**', a student led initiative of the Shiv Nadar University shared with the audience their inspiring work on providing remedial education to the children of a nearby village school. What was impressive was - to ensure continuity of the project the students had modelled the project in such a way that every batch effectively passed on the baton to their juniors. They mentioned that the future plan of this initiative was to concentrate on adult education in nearby villages and generate awareness regarding health and hygiene issues, as well as importance of education in the villages.

Concluding on a high note, the TSEC "*Thinking Social*" seminar left the audience enthused by the various stories of transformation and impact, created in society by the speakers for the day. Students like Ankita and Pavas were heard requesting the Director, School of Management & Entrepreneurship, Prof. Shekhar Chaudhuri, to make such events quarterly in the university, as they believed that they had learnt a lot from their interactions with prominent social entrepreneurs at the seminar.

A common sentiment echoed by both the speakers of the day as well as those attending the seminar was that this endeavour by the Tata Group and IIM Calcutta Innovation Park was one of its kind and much needed in today's society. The main take away from this seminar was that School of Management & Entrepreneurship, Shiv Nadar University would be the hub to build a strong network of Social Entrepreneurs towards mutual learning and resource sharing in north India and provide collaboration opportunities to individuals and organizations within the social entrepreneurship ecosystem.