



## INFORMATION SHARING & CAPACITY BUILDING

### Background

“<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will again visit next month the three States from which the highest number of farmers’ suicides were reported — Vidarbha in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The visit found the **progress to be tardy** by these States in implementing the Rs. 17,000 crore Farmers’ Rehabilitation Package announced by the Centre for 31 districts in these States.” **Why does this happen? In simple language its like the Government – central and state – and the people, don’t talk to one another..**

Does this not make us wonder how and why India, a country known for its ability to provide call centre support to the globe, back office advice to industry at large, in addition to its citizens being innovators and inventors of all kinds of google, yahoo, etc. etc. and channels of communication. Yet in this country there appears to be this amazing communication gap? India is a country which is 60% agrarian and the communication with the farmers is “tardy”...what’s going on?

India has a 65% share of the global offshore market and a 46% share of global business process offshoring (BPO) industry. This was made possible by an unparalleled export performance with an average growth rate of 28% over a decade. Fortunately, only 10% of the potentially addressable global IT/ITES market has been realized. The remaining 90% of a global potential market of approximately \$300 billion still remains to be realized.

One can sympathise and appreciate a country which does not have these competencies resulting in its people reaching such extreme steps...but why can’t we give some of our time and attention to remove this communication gap. The Centre has released the funds, the State – hopefully – has received the funds...but its farmers are committing suicide because of almost **no progress in watershed development, rainwater harvesting and micro-irrigation projects.**

Let’s recognise that the blame game has to stop only because it will get us no further. In fact with each suicide it sets us back as a country in so many ways emotionally, psychologically, on the human front...who is going to take care of those farm families now?

We need to use the technologies available, information communication technologies (ICT) to close this communication gap. We need to provide our own farmers with what we

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<sup>1</sup> Farmers’ suicides: PM to visit 3 States by Gargi Parsai

provide other countries and for what we are paid for by other countries. And we need to provide them this support in a very competent and able manner, a manner which demonstrates not only to the farmer but to every Indian...that it is an amazing future that awaits them as Indians. Let's think about support to our own market.

To say that this is the job of the A, B or C will also not lead us forward...lets us understand what needs to be done-

- **Build capacity of our farmers/villagers** to enable them to access the support that the Government – Central and State – have made available to them.
- **Use the technologies of communicating between and among our farmers and villages.**

This can be done very effectively using the simplest of communication methods the **Community Radio**. All our farmers have radios and all of them can understand if they are explained how and why the problems they face are not insurmountable. With agricultural technologies available within our very own agricultural universities we can help and support farmers who have such problems.

Other ICT tools can be applied as well, viz. **mobile telephones** whose application density is increasing with every month. These are just two ICT tools to which we can restrict this paper to. A much wider range of communication tools exist, and this is common knowledge.

**Building the Capacity** of our Farmers and indeed the whole rural panchayat is being progressively done, but this needs to be speeded up. India cannot afford to lose one farmer or for that matter one Indian life. All are unique and precious and can contribute amazingly to the progress of the country as a whole.

## Reality Bites

And this can be done in almost every field – health, education, sanitation, water conservation, pollution control the list is endless and is limited only by our very own imagination. Indians are imaginative people and can add to this in a very real way. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have enabled various information or content to be placed over internet in order to share it all over the world, thus opening the doors for content globalisation.

**Health:** Hyderabad, June 18: Telemedicine has become mobile. While conducting endoscope on a patient in Chaparevula village of Nandyal mandal Kurnool district from the mobile hospital of Asian Institute of Gastroenterology (AIG), gastroenterologist Rakesh reached his senior colleague D. Nageshwar Reddy in Hyderabad to discuss the case in just a few clicks. Dr. Reddy was able to watch the deep interior of the patient's duodenum and intestines. It became possible through mobile telemedicine.

Chennai-based Space Hospitals, which provides the telemedicine facility by networking referral hospitals, introduced the novel mobile telemedicine facility last month. Yashoda Hospitals and the AIG of Hyderabad have taken the facility, says Vinayak Venkatesh, general manager (operations), Space Hospitals.

Explaining its working, he says a van or an ambulance is fitted with very small aperture terminal (V-Sat) and is connected to a 'black box' which is connected to diagnostic equipment. Videoconferencing facility is connected to the system through virtual private network. Mobile telemedicine provides access to super-specialists for those conducting

medical camps in remote villages. Space Hospitals has so far connected 67 centres across the country. Big names like Leelavathi Hospitals, Asian Heart Institute and Tata Memorial Cancer Institute in Mumbai, Yashoda, AIG, KIMS, Rainbow, Bollineni, Sigma and other such hospitals in Hyderabad and a host of other tertiary level referral hospitals are available on the network, says Mr. Venkatesh.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Monday, 18 June 2008

### **Human Life: The Boy Who Saved Thousands of Lives<sup>3</sup>**

It was a day like any other in a busy hospital. Among dozens of incidents of joy and fear, a small boy was brought in, dying from a road accident. When the end came, one of the nurses took a deep breath and did what her job required her to do: She asked the boy's parents if they would donate his organs. Their reply was sharp and clear, an emphatic refusal, pain mixed with anger at having been asked such a crass question at the worst moment of their lives.

"I understood how they felt," the nurse told me later. "The bottom had fallen out of their world." But all she could think of was that on the third floor of that same hospital another little boy, of much the same age and with a mother and father very much like these was also dying that night - because the heart that could have saved him didn't arrive. I often think of that little boy and how close he came to making it. I also know how his parents felt: my own seven-year-old son, Nicholas, was shot by highway robbers six years ago while we were on vacation in southern Italy and, when the doctors told us there was no hope, I still remember vividly wondering how I would ever get through all the years ahead without him. Maggie, my wife, and I, however, did donate his organs to seven very sick Italians, some of whom would certainly be dead by now, and we have never for a moment regretted the decision. After living in the shadow of death, some of them for years, all seven are back in the mainstream.

What we thought was a purely private act took Italy by storm: the president and prime minister both asked to meet us privately, letters poured in by the hundreds. We've been given honours in Nicholas' name that previously went to some of the world's greatest humanitarians and scholars. Today's front-page story, however, is often almost forgotten tomorrow as some new tragedy comes along to take its place. Unless we do something to etch this story in the people's minds, I thought at the time, it will have no permanent effect on their actions, and thousands will continue to die every year because organ donation rates fall short of need in virtually every country in the world.

And so, having been a daily newspaper writer much of my life, I did what comes naturally: I wrote. And wrote. And wrote. At first for the obvious places: medical journals, parents' magazines, newspaper features, then for the less obvious: the scouting magazine, Italian newspapers, newsletters, then further afield still: a Dutch magazine, a travel magazine, the weekly paper of the town where I was born in England. I faxed and e-mailed and telephoned editors, feature writers and syndicated columnists. I got up at 2:00 a.m. to talk to European editors or stayed up until midnight to call Australia. Maggie and I crisscrossed this country talking to audiences of every imaginable kind, and everywhere I went I called on the local newspaper and television stations.

There were many rebuffs, but there were many achievements, too. Better yet, writers all over the world picked up the story from our words and wrote memorable pieces of their own. To think of just one: virtually every overseas edition of *Reader's Digest* led off with Nicholas' story, and we have a collection of clippings in Chinese, Portuguese, Swedish and twenty other languages. A television movie, *Nicholas' Gift*, starring Jamie Lee Curtis, picked up many of the sentences I had written. And recently I wrote a book *The Nicholas Effect*, which, though much of it was written through a veil of tears, shows how his example has saved literally thousands of lives.

Nicholas was a remarkable little boy - gentle, imaginative and, yes, wise - and we all expected him to do great things. When he died, all those expectations seemed to have died

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<sup>3</sup> The Boy Who Saved Thousands of Lives By Reg Green, Chicken Soup for the Soul.

with him. But in the end, as the words written and spoken about him found their way to the four corners of the world, he did more than we could possibly have foreseen. More even than saving lives, **his brief innocent life sent an electric charge through the human spirit, reminding us all of the preciousness of life and hence the importance of living up, rather than down, to it.**

And similar examples could be provided ad nauseum...but what is the lesson one learns from the foregoing...the **power of communication...information communication technology...holds the key to amazing results and also to success through appropriate application.**

### **If Every Indian could...**

Just support another Indian who needs help in which ever way one feels comfortable. Never feel that your support is too small/ insignificant and would hardly make a difference. If one sees something going wrong...don't turn your head aside. It will happen to you one day, and someone else who could make a difference to you, will turn aside. Lets learn from Nicholas the importance of living up, rather than down.

#### **COUNTRY FIRST**

If a citizen does not oppose injustice and crime, then he is encouraging it  
– **Shiv Khera..**  
from one concerned Indian to another

**Conclusion:** The Government is us...the power of the people would help in the improving the governance of the country...farmers would not commit suicide, infant and maternal mortality rates would come down, food would not get rotten in Government godowns while our tribals/urban pavement dwellers continue to die of starvation.

A startling fact was shared with me recently: only 9% of Indians complete their secondary education...and with just this percentage we have achieved what we have globally. This percentage of Indians are extremely privileged.

**Bill Gates on inequities and privileges...** further highlights our immediate responsibility.

<sup>4</sup> But taking a serious look back ... I do have one big regret. I left Harvard with no real awareness of the awful inequities in the world – the appalling disparities of health, and wealth, and opportunity that condemn millions of people to lives of despair. I learned a lot here at Harvard about new ideas in economics and politics. I got great exposure to the advances being made in the sciences.

But **humanity's greatest advances are not in its discoveries – but in how those discoveries are applied to reduce inequity.** Whether through democracy, strong public education, quality health care, or broad economic opportunity – reducing inequity is the highest human achievement.

In this age of accelerating technology - 9% of Indians are able to know more about the world's inequities than the Indians before you or the other Indians who live around us. Should we continue to allow so many young people to be cheated out of educational

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<sup>4</sup> Remarks of Bill Gates, Harvard Commencement, (Text as prepared for delivery)

opportunities here in India? Does this need to take decades to find out and do something about it? Think about how we can finally take on these inequities, and solve them.

Imagine, just for the sake of discussion, that you had a few hours a week to give to a cause – and you wanted to spend that time where it would have the greatest impact in saving and improving lives. Where would you give it? Indians need to give of their time and share their expertise...no money is needed. I believe there is enough around.

If the millions of children dying could be saved by the Indian pharma business making it a priority to discover and deliver the medicines to save them. Why does this not happen? For just a few hours of an interested mother/nurse time there are interventions that could save lives that are just being lost because the medicines weren't being delivered.

If we believe that every life has equal value, how can we accept that some lives are seen as worth saving and others are not.

## Steps Ahead

Lets begin our work asking ourselves "How could we let these farmers die?" The answer is simple, and harsh. The farmers died because they had no power in the market and no voice in the system. But you and I have both.

We can make market forces work better for the poor if we can develop a more inclusive system – if we can stretch the reach of market forces so that more people can make a profit, or at least make a living, serving people who are suffering from the worst inequities. We also can press central and state governments in the country to spend and be more accountable in ways that better reflect the values and needs of the people.

If we can find approaches that meet the needs of the poor in ways that generate profits for business and votes for our politicians, we will have found a sustainable way to reduce inequity in the India. And why not through this example? This task is open-ended. It can never be finished. But a conscious effort to answer this challenge will change India assuredly.

I am optimistic that we can do this, but there are sceptics who claim there is no hope. They say: "Inequity has been with us since the beginning, and will be with us till the end – because people just ... don't ... care." I completely disagree. I believe we Indians have more caring than we know what to do with.

All of us at one time or another have been touched by human tragedies that broke our hearts, and yet we did nothing – not because we didn't care, but because we didn't know what to do. If we had known how to help, we would have acted. **The barrier to change is not too little caring; it is too much complexity.**

Bill Gates goes on to clarify ...to convert caring into action, we need to see a problem, see a solution, and see the impact. But complexity blocks all three steps. Even with the advent of the Internet and 24-hour news, it is still a complex enterprise to get people to truly see the problems. When an airplane crashes, it makes big news. Officials immediately call a press conference. They promise to investigate, determine the cause, and prevent similar crashes in the future. But if the officials were brutally honest, they would say: "Of all the people in the country who died today from preventable causes, one half of one percent of them were on this plane. Let's determine to do everything possible to solve the problem that took the lives of the one half of one percent." The bigger problem is not the plane crash, but the millions of preventable deaths.

## **We can do it if we do it together**

We don't read much about farmers dying. This is nothing new. So it stays in the background, where it's easier to ignore. But even when we do see it or read about it, it's difficult to keep our eyes on the problem. It's hard to look at suffering if the situation is so complex that we don't know how to help. And so we look away. Lets really see a problem, which is the first step; we come to the second step: cutting through the complexity to find a solution.

Finding solutions is essential if we want to make the most of our caring. If we have clear and proven answers anytime an organization / individual asks "How can I help?" then we can get action – and we can make sure that none of the caring in the world is wasted. But complexity makes it hard to mark a path of action for everyone who cares — and that makes it hard for their caring to matter.

Pursuing this kind of a goal starts the four-step cycle again. This is the pattern. **The crucial thing is to never stop thinking and working – and never to surrender to complexity and quit. The final step – after seeing the problem and finding an approach – is to measure the impact of your work and share your successes and failures so that others learn from your efforts.**

But to inspire people to participate, you have to show more than numbers; you have to convey the human impact of the work – so people can feel what saving a life means to the families affected. The defining and ongoing innovations of this age – biotechnology, the computer, the Internet – give us an opportunity we've never had before to end extreme poverty and end death from preventable disease. The emergence of low-cost personal computers gave rise to a powerful network that has transformed opportunities for learning and communicating.

The magical thing about this network is not just that it collapses distance and makes everyone your neighbour. It also dramatically increases the number of brilliant minds we can have working together on the same problem – and that scales up the rate of innovation to a staggering degree.

But at the same time, for every person in India who has access to this technology, much more than half the people don't. That means many creative minds are left out of this discussion - smart people with practical intelligence and relevant experience who don't have the technology to hone their talents or contribute their ideas to the solution. Smart people are not only professors, IAS officers or doctorates...they are more often than not simple housewives, people on the job at all levels, panchayat members, children...

We need as many people as possible to have access to this technology, because these advances are triggering a revolution in what human beings can do for one another. They are making it possible not just for central and state governments, but for universities, corporations, smaller organizations, and even individuals to see problems, see approaches, and measure the impact of their efforts to address the hunger, poverty, and desperation.

**"From those to whom much is given, much is expected."**

If every Indian could take on an issue – a complex problem, a deep inequity, and just see it as a challenge and do what he/she can to lessen and ultimately remove it. If we make it the focus of our career, that would be phenomenal. But you don't really have to do that to make an impact. For a few hours every week, you can use the growing power of the Internet to get informed, find others with the same interests, see the barriers, and find ways to cut through them.

**What a phenomenal opportunity and what a glorious challenge...lets do it together.**

**Veronica Peris**

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