

SHIV

Charu 00:00

Hi, Shiv. Welcome to Mrigashira. Thank you for making the time to talk to us today. I'm going to start by asking you to tell us a little about your journey and what you do at the catalyst foundation.

Shiv 01:01

Hey, it's great to be here. Thank you for including me in your podcast, and always a joy to talk to people of the similar wavelength, doing similar things in the social sectors. I began my journey in social development joining a cooperative oil seeds cooperative called kinetic oil seeds Federation started out in systems and planning because I'm a techie by training and also MBA from instead of rural management. And then on catalyst Foundation, and the catalyst group really started off in 1994. It's been an interesting 28 year old journey, where I'm the co-founder along with Raghunathan, my friend, philosopher, mentor, guide and colleague. Yeah, we've been in the social sphere, you know, trying many things failing many times, but succeeding a few times in, I would say, largely in the sectors of livelihoods, health and climate change.

Charu 02:05

You know, there's this old saying, if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far go together. So clearly, collaboration is one of the single biggest drivers of growth and more so in the social sector. And I believe you have put together a full manual on the power of collaborations, what would be your topmost tips for leveraging collaboration, especially between the social and the corporate sector?

Shiv 02:33

I don't know whether everybody will agree with that, you know, African proverb that if you want to go far go together. Some would actually argue saying that, if you want to go far go alone. But if you want to go to the right place, go together, that's what I would, you know, adapted to saying. Yeah I think and if you want to be joyous, and actually go deeper go together. So yes, our journey of collaboration, again, like an on social development is a lot of discovery. But definitely, we saw ourselves as an organization for a long time. And we understood the difference between an organization an institution is truly being sector facing, right, not necessarily boundaries by your own organization, and its rules and its structure. And when once you open your mind, to a more institutional format, as much a vague it sounds, then you are actually not looking at only your success through your own lens, but actually looking at the community's success or the partner success, and that's where the journey gets really interesting. Because when your metrics is candy metrics, like how many staff you have any offices, what's your turnover? I call it candy because it's truly candy. It is nice, easy to consume easy to burn, but for truly not useful. But if you want some, you know, a corny side of it, if you want a millet indicator, right, then how much of money have you added to the community's pockets. How much of the partner success have you been able to contribute to so that's what drives us. And once we walk started walking down this journey partnership is automatic, it's not partnership on how I can do better it's about partnership of how the partner and that outcome in the social sector can be better. So that's, that's been the philosophy behind some of our approaches.

Charu 04:37

Okay, so but, you know, when it comes to the corporate specifically, they always fall short. And you know, very interestingly what you mentioned about it, you're in the space of realm of livelihood and climate change, and you've been championing the cause of circular economy and cooler stuff. Where can the corporate sector come together to collaborate with the capitalists foundation. See, firstly, I,

Shiv 05:03

See, firstly, I and my colleague Raghu and the anti capitalist group believes in a couple of broad philosophies, you know, the, to us the commitment of the sorry, the commitment of facilitators who work on social development. The reach on power of the state, and the dynamism and entrepreneurship of the private sector, right, are all three very critical elements in success of social development programs. And therefore, I wouldn't say private sector fall short of does better, because there are examples for both and then that's true for government. And that's true for the civil society, too. There are some startling examples and they're fantastic failures, so the way I look at it is private sector has a phenomenal role to play. And it's extremely dynamic, you know, driven with its own purpose, it can be profit making, not necessarily a problem that I see. But profit making at what cost is always the question, right. And therefore, if private sector, energy, dynamism and entrepreneurship and innovation is tapped into, to solving social problems, that is one pathway and I think there are some great examples like, you know, I can share with you like the Apollo tires when they opened clinics for the truck drivers, who at one point in time had a very high prevalence of HIV, it was a classic case. And today, I'm told that many of the drivers prefer JK ties, because they knew this company cared for them so that's one way to look at it. Another way to look at it is companies like a tell who are connecting people all the time, or waterphone, or many other telecom companies, they actually are delivering social work, because they're connecting people through low cost data and connectivity. But can they do that in a different way? And they particularly help marginalization reduce people who are vulnerable become better? I think that's a question for them to look at, in my business model. How can I address some of the needs of these communities? So these are two broad pathways I've seen and some great examples of those exist.

Charu 07:27

No, absolutely. I think the point you make about reaching power, the state and private sector is a beautiful point. And yes, I mean, companies have actually gone down and understood what are the problems at, you know, at the grassroots and have come up with programs together with organizations like you to solve that particular problem? I think those are truly are committed to the social good. I'm going to ask offshoot of that question is going to be like nonprofits, they need funding, but they also need programming and strong networks to maximize their impact. So how can communicators and social and enterprise platforms like catalyst group or other nonprofits working at the grassroots, collaborate for better awareness and impact? A lot of it is happening? Yes. And you have given some examples. But there is a lot to be desired. What are the gaps? Where can they do better?

Shiv 08:38

This is something you know, we've struggled with ourselves, and we continue to struggle with and I put divided into four areas, fundamentally, at a behavioral level, and capacity level, there are challenges. social sector, particularly actors who've been around doing this kind of deep work, are very coy about communication, It's a lot of middle class values. I shouldn't be talking about my work. It's, it's not humble. It's not something I should do. Others talk about it that's okay. Right. I can I put it as kindness probably

that's not the right word to choose. It's humility, which drives them to do what they do, but it also comes in the way of communication right and therefore, there's a lot of reluctance and that I'm telling you that that existed with me also for a long time and probably still exists in some level. You know, why am I talking about my work? You know, isn't it very adequate. The second big challenge is actual capability to communicate, we are very, in many senses. Social Sector is inward looking, it's busy. It's got very little funding, it's undercapitalized severely, and therefore we are all scrambling for getting things done. What was to be done yesterday and therefore building investing sufficiently in capabilities of communication, and actually building it out a strategic area is actually quite a V lacking that so that is where now what is the opportunity for communicators to come in here to understand this, first of all, that this quietness and capability challenge exists, not just judged the social sector, that it doesn't know how to communicate, but understand that there are barriers to communication, which includes our own sense of self when it comes to communication. Now, what are the two ways in which communicators can engage one is, I think social sector needs to communicate with its own audience much better it with the people that we seek to make their lives better. And it's not just stopping using the word beneficiary and starting using the word catalyst. It's much more than that, right? Communities have the right to know, what we do, why we do how we do it, and we need to communicate to do better design programs for the communities. So there is a communication upward to the communities and as a communication downwards to donors and policymakers and others. And I think, you know, both areas request support.

Charu 11:17

This makes me think about the fact that, you know, it's not about being immodest, or not being humble if you were to talk about your work, but it's more about spreading awareness, because we've seen in the last few years, the more people are taught coming forward and talking. You have it's like a chain, you have more people joining that, right. So yes, I think there are a lot of opportunities, and there are things people one needs to do together. And you've made a very interesting point that communicators need to understand the challenges, the barriers and, and be a little more conscious about those things. So some of the challenges faced by nonprofits are pretty much similar to those faced by startups around access to capital and funding, talent acquisition and retention as well as proving their competitive advantage. Yet, they do not seem to get the same level of support, both from the government and the private sector. So how are you addressing some of these challenges?

Shiv 12:26

I will jump into that, answering that question, Charu, because you used a very crucial word that you keep hearing social sector, right, lack of awareness. If it may, with your permission, dwell on it for a couple of minutes. A couple of seconds.

Charu 12:42

Yeah, no, no, please.

Shiv 12:43

I think, you know, I, you know, there's there is a banning culture now. So I would propose banning the word awareness. I don't think people are not aware. People know about certain things not know about certain thing. That is not actually the question here is you know generally, we tend to urbanites particularly tend to say, oh, people lack awareness. That's why they don't use toilet. So they don't, they don't use,

you know, mentioned hygiene products. That's not true. Most of the time is not awareness, which actually leads to behavior change. So there is a causal link problem there, awareness alone, that you can you need to wear a helmet, it will save your life does not necessarily mean people wear helmets you know, there is a severe poverty among many, you know, social sector, funders and people who are in the power structure on the higher level policymakers to keep saying people like awareness. To me, I would say the person saying that lacks the awareness, and the patience to understand the context in which the person is behaving in a certain place. So yes, in some cases, there may be a lack of knowledge, because usually, in my opinion, that's not the biggest challenge. Knowledge can be easily provided. But awareness does not change behavior. awareness does not create change and that's something I just want to talk with you because I know your audience is a lot of communicators, and they need to be very careful when they use this word awareness. Are they aware? That other person is actually lacking awareness? Yeah. So sorry about that.

Charu 14:26

No, you're right. I think this makes sense. Yeah.

Shiv 14:31

Now coming to why in startups get so much of attention, and when the problems as you rightly said, look similar. I think there is a sexiness about startups, like Shark tanks, you know, somebody saying, Oh, I can drill a tunnel in one day, or, you know, I have this magic solution to, you know, cure diabetes. I think there is a natural attraction in today's world for quick fixes. And startups seem to appeal to that. Quick Fix extremely well. And it's about, you know, magical quick solutions for problems right? Now that's okay. I mean, some problems do get solved through startups, whether it's swiggy, for example, you know, the fact that you want to eat where you want to eat is a great startup idea. But not all startups in social sector work the same way, because here we are dealing with complex problems, be everybody wants, what you call an elevator pitch. And my colleague Raghu puts it across nicely. If you have only two minutes to listen to the problem, have a child who is unable to go to school and why I don't think my time is worth it, to explain it to you give me 20 minutes so that you can get educated on the problem and the solutions, right. So complex problems are not very easy for people to understand. And sob stories put people off and social sector sometimes can be blamed for that. And that's how sometimes money is being raised right by showing a crying child or a cancer patient. So there is very little patience to look at the complex problems, patiently understand it, and then solve it. I mean, this is classic, there are lots of donors who say, Oh, why are people peeing in the road? Little Bill toilets. Now, how many of those toilets really work? Now look at what Philip did the person is from the community of toilet cleaners. And he built a social enterprise, which has now scaled across the country, and has toilets which are maintained, and which, which are water and other facilities are not right. And that's the big difference. I think social sector requires patience. Because of the complex problems, you're solving and long term problems, and it's not as sexy as a startup is.

Charu 16:49

More people need to come together and think that way. So your last question is, I mean, ha tips you want to share, especially for the communication photography, especially for marketers, how they could collaborate better to be able to take, take some of this to the audiences out there.

Shiv 17:20

Thanks, Sarah, I think, again, thanks for this opportunity. I think it's, you know, this is a world I would love to communicate to more. Let's, let's step back and look at what's happening around us the media business model has collapsed and that has led to the entire you know, what PDF folks used to be called as the fourth sector. Sector, I'm sorry. Losing the sector? Yes, I think the fourth sector, and the third sector was actually civil societies. And, to me, the fourth sector collapses is a tragedy. Because independent voices need to give independent views even about the social sector projects, not just government or politics, or economics. I think that vacuum is also an opportunity. As you know, news, laundry and many others are trying to reinvent the whole media space, through independent reporting, and, and also ground of funding for the switcher, which by the way, is also societies also operated through donations, individual donations. I think, interestingly, media is moving down civil society route and, and therefore, my sense of an opportunity, which I've been reasonably good in spotting is the fact that communities can actually be now journalists, and the media, both the mainstream media and others need to readjust their methodologies, because today, a mobile phone has become a powerful medium of journalism and therefore, storytelling, proofing some of the some of the realities on the ground, providing alternative perspectives, and actually allowing the viewer to take decisions, I think, is the crying need of the HR. And I think there are there are millions of youth and back, you know, women and men out there who need a network through which they can start telling their story and we need a cogent pipeline of amazing communicators like you to put it all together in a platform. So that, you know, it's all newsworthy in that sense, not just bad news, yeah so I think there's a beautiful opportunity waiting to happen and I'm seeing some bubbling ideas in that sphere. And I do hope you and some of them people listening to this are already doing something about this.

Charu 20:04

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts on Mrigashira Very interesting points. And I think we need to together collaborate and imbibe some of that and take it to the ground. Thanks a lot pleasure having you share on Mrigashira

Shiv 20:21

Thank you chatter. It's very, very rare opportunity that I get to talk to communicators who I feel have been underleveraged in the social sector. Thanks for this opportunity. And I do hope through your channel, I can talk to more people who'd love to collab with us and with both of us. Thank you