

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PYRAMID

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable livelihood for all is the major policy directive of all governments. There are various focused programs on self-employment and skill building programs launched by the Government of India but still, there is a long way to go. The Start-Up buzz in India has helped in assisting ideas (mainly technology based) to become a reality. The number of Unicorns has also increased over a period. It is also a ripe time to focus on differently abled as a target group requiring tremendous effort to bring up to the level of self-employment or become an entrepreneur.

This research paper is an effort to recognize the initiatives towards skill building and self-employment of the differently abled group. For the purpose of this paper, the differently abled entrepreneurship would be referred to as the "Entrepreneurship at the Bottom (base) of the Pyramid" (BOP). It would analyze an exclusive case of an intervention by an NGO based out of Chennai.

This case has been identified based on the merit of intervention, the scope of multiplier effect and innovation at the BOP. Its research significance lies in the fact that such innovations among the BOP shall be easily adopted by other NGOs who in turn can enable the sustainable livelihoods dream to come true for all.

KEYWORDS: *Innovation, Social Entrepreneurship, Differently Abled, Youth Entrepreneurship, Home Bakers*

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INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is recognized as a tool for enhancing economic growth and prosperity (Kuratko, 2005). However, the World Bank estimates that 14.5 percent of the world's population still make less than \$1.25 USD (PPP) per day (Worldbank.org). While economic impoverishment has received a term called the Bottom of Pyramid (Prahalad & Hart, 2002), there is still no conclusive study reckoning with the differently abled as part of the same. The situation of the world's youth, especially those that are differently abled, involves worldwide anxiety as it not only deters economic growth but also makes unfortunate impacts, for example, suicide, social boycott, and depression, etc. Therefore, consideration should be given to seeing how business enterprise and venture bolster programs focused on differently abled youth may be utilized to help.

There is not much literature available on entrepreneurship among the differently abled however there are a few alive "hypotheses" that have caught the attention of business research and academic work. These incorporate primarily "Effectuation Theory" (Sarasvathy, 2009) and the ideas of "Creation Opportunities" (Alvarez and Barney, 2007). These

may be pertinent to understand the development of business enterprise among differently abled youths.

The concept of neighbourhood initiative is not entirely new, but yes with regards to adults with special needs, it is something that is taking shape now. Today, in the social realm, we have so many centres and special schools that cater to the educational needs of children with special needs, however, what is also very important to remember that these children to grow and as they do, so do their parents. Now the problem or the real challenge arises when there is no more school to go to and when the vocational training centres are all full and there is no breathing space for the youngsters. The parents are in a fix as to not knowing what to do with their young adults who are in their late 20s and 30s. That's when we bring in an initiative that doesn't look at a big investment or a large group or infrastructure. That which would be set up at different neighbourhood within the living premises of a parent and thereby have an economic activity set up. It would be pertinent to highlight that irrespective of their income levels, the families could never view the differently abled member as an active income generator.

SAI Bakery is a neighbourhood initiative at Thiruvanmiyur, Chennai, for Adults with Special Needs which aims to provide a Holistic Canopy for Adults with different Neurological Conditions to evolve. It was established on 9th Sept 2013 by Srinivasan who himself suffers from Asperger's syndrome. 7 Adults with Developmental Disabilities and 5 other Women in the Self-Help Module came together to create wonderful delicacies. Most of these families had an annual income ranging between 3-5 Lakhs INR. It started with an investment of Rs 21000 which largely involved fixed costs for buying equipments and machinery. Average sales of Sai Products presently are 6500 per month. It would be little unfair to measure its benefit only in terms of the revenue generated as they encounter challenges every single moment of their existence. Today it prepares and sells over 20 varieties of Cookies, Muffins, and Brownies. The USP being of the items are EGGLESS, MAIDALESS and BUTTERLESS. Another highlight of the venture is that it employs adults with developmental disabilities (cerebral palsy, mental retardation, autism, and multiple disabilities). Each special person's skills are assessed, and the jobs distributed accordingly. Training is provided in the areas of baking and packaging and marketing.

Having created a Facebook page and an account makes them tech savvy and they are updated on what's happening to pertain to the Bakery and the responses of the worldwide audience. Like, it has friends from Mumbai, Delhi, Boston, New Jersey, Sri Lanka, Dubai wanting to buy their cookies. The youngsters have their esteem inflated. Stakeholder engagement and Partnerships opportunities have been created. Corporates have also come forward and helped the individual parent or a few of them to help set up such initiative. Presently MEC Chennai has readily bought the cookies daily and gives orders for Festive occasion

Connect the dots particularly for parents who were invisible or were often suffering as a "Victim" has reckoned this newness in their roles. Often never identified themselves with any individual entity but today find new joy and individuality not just as a special Parent but also as part of promising initiative impacting society at large.

Entrepreneurship and Community development is a method where local members come together to take collective action and create solutions to common problems. The best practices as emerged from above are the following

- **Developing Parents Positive Perspective Towards Children with Special Needs-** Often ignored and viewed as "burdensome" (incapable of being independent) this initiative has pioneered the change in the mindset of caregivers. It uses collaborative efforts to build social cohesion and enhances the positivity among caregivers with continuous inputs.

- **Enhancing Self-Image of Children with Special Needs-** With the creative venture like SAI bakery, the purpose of life gets redefined. It instills the children with a desire to live with dignity, greater confidence, and assured respect. Working towards enhancing their entrepreneurial skills, has been largely contributing towards the enhanced self-image. Continuous discussions, empathetic treatment, creation of an opportunity to explore and create newness in routine has been extremely emphasized through the running of bakery.
- **Building Community (Serial) Entrepreneurs-** Often the rehabilitation programs have been lopsided with inputs through vocational training thereby leading them to become job seekers. This venture initiative has in fact broken this stereotype and has showcased the need for job givers and has projected a rare sight of an entrepreneurial venture / startup.
- **Customization to the Core-** Each member is assessed with the innate strength that he or she possesses, and accordingly relevant tasks are assigned. Hands-on training in the different areas of pre-baking preparation, actual production and marketing have been provided to the members in a timely manner. Such customization was undoubtedly challenging but has worked wonders in creating a suitable teamwork environment and team building spirit amidst all.
- **Social Media Marketing –** A dedicated Facebook page has been created solely to promote the initiative and boost sales. Volunteers readily share content and insider stories of the happenings at the bakery which has helped to build an emotional connect with outside audience/ customers. It also enables to keep the atmosphere lively.

While differently abled youths in general, in the developing countries, have a meagre chance of gaining a job in the formal sector; for many, self-employment is the only alternative. Helping differently abled to secure a livelihood through entrepreneurship can make vital support to poverty reduction and empowerment.

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