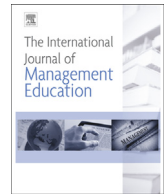


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## Research notes

# Dynamic curriculum development on social entrepreneurship – A case study of TISS

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## ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship as a field in academia is fast gaining popularity and attention due to the realized need for trained professionals for social problem solving. This is also a field in which practice has moved far ahead of academia and research, which was lately noticed by the academics. This article discusses about the teaching model on social entrepreneurship developed by Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) which has pioneered many such innovative programs. The Program on social entrepreneurship has been successfully running since 2007. The paper proposes that the learning model and the process developed at TISS can be adopted by other universities and educational institutions in developing curriculum befitting to the needs of the society.

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A leading *Ashoka* fellow Fabio Rosso, who developed an innovative system for delivering electricity to people in rural Brazil, was once asked why he did what he did. The response was ‘I am trying to build a little part of the world in which I would like to live’ (Bornstein, 2007, p. 239). There are many such social leaders across the globe who exploit resources and opportunities locally available, to address social problems at grassroots level. People like Rosso lead new kinds of institutions that are built up on sustainable philosophy. The new forms of organisations which are known as social enterprises are well positioned to adopt both innovation and entrepreneurship within an organisational set up (Thompson & Doherty, 2006). As a result, today social entrepreneurship has become one of the major approaches related strongly to societal development and empowerment.

## 1. Background

Social entrepreneurship is about identifying social problems, addressing them with innovative approaches, using entrepreneurial methods to make long lasting, sustainable and impactful solutions (Mulgan 2007, Zeyen et al. 2012). Social entrepreneurs initiate social ventures that work with communities which are affected by social problems (Defourny & Nyssens, 2008). While, a section of researchers argue that entrepreneurial approaches are crucial to foster social entrepreneurship (Alter, 2002; Haugh & Tracey, 2004; Nicholls, 2006), others emphasize that adopting entrepreneurial approaches are not a pre-condition, but employing social innovations are key (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004; Bornstein, 2007; Cohen, 1995; Dees, 1998; Kramer, 2005; Leadbeater, 1997; Mulgan, 2007). However, there is a strong agreement amongst scholars that unlike

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business entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship's central theme is 'people and their problems' rather than 'profit generation' (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2003).

After Mohammad Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize, the field of social entrepreneurship has attained wider attention, resulting in many social workers in India identifying themselves as social entrepreneurs, followed by academic institutions taking up academic programs for studying the practices. In fact, social entrepreneurship as an academic subject in India is strongly influenced by the West. Alvares (2011) believes that scholastic and academic work in India has long been influenced by euro-western centric approaches. However, given its strong presence in practice, social entrepreneurship in India could possibly provide insights and hence valuable content for academic and scholarly growth. We believe that the social entrepreneurship Masters' program developed at TISS in India which has taken inspiration from many such practices could influence other academic institutions to adopt social entrepreneurship in their curriculum. Hence, the processes and methodologies adopted since inception of the Program offer insights to understand the context of curriculum development and its growth. This article thus, i) aims to understand the processes and methodologies adopted by Masters' program in social entrepreneurship at TISS, and ii) offers modalities to develop social entrepreneurship as a strong academic and research subject in India.

## 2. Social entrepreneurship in education

The credit to promote social entrepreneurship as an area of social development goes to Ashoka ([www.ashoka.org](http://www.ashoka.org)), whose fellowship and support inspires social innovations across the globe. Further it promotes the field in academia through Ashoka U, which "catalyses social innovation in higher education through a global network of entrepreneurial students, faculty and community leaders" (<http://ashokau.org/about/what-we-do/>). The other well known support to social entrepreneurship education has been offered since 1993 by Harvard Business School through its social enterprise initiative. Much prior to that, the Program for Non-Profit Organizations offered by Yale University has also contributed for its growth. In recent times, the credit for nurturing the field within the third sector should be credited to the Center for Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship in Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, Yale University School of Management, Babson College, Sterling College and Hass School of Business (Mars and Garrison, 2009). In addition, regional research institutions and universities have developed research and training programs such as EMES European Research Network, the Social Enterprise Knowledge Network (SEKN) formed by Latin American Business School and the Harvard Business School which have guided the growth of social entrepreneurship education and research in regions where they operate (Defourny & Nyssens, 2008).

In India, the practice of social entrepreneurship has been in existence for many centuries, at least after independence from the colonial rule it has been visible. For example, the works of Vinobha Bhave,<sup>1</sup> Vegese Kurian<sup>2</sup> and Kailash Satyarthi<sup>3</sup> are to name a few, which are pioneered in the field. However, academia took serious notice of it much later. As a result, Indian academic institutions (though very limited in number) while engaging in teaching and research, borrowed most of the theories developed by western scholars which were largely based on the concepts and phenomenon underpinned in a western context. Indian universities and research institutions, perhaps failed to capture the significance and contributions of the grassroots social innovation. However, it is relevant not to ignore a few institutions which pioneered the design and implementation of academic and scholarly programs in the areas of social change, social innovation and social entrepreneurship.

Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai, is one such university which considered social entrepreneurship as an academic field for developing a master's program and to undertake research. The program aims to train a 'professional cadre' of social entrepreneurs, who are expected to solve most pressing social problems. Due to its significant contribution for the promotion of social entrepreneurship academia, practice and research, within a short time, TISS became one of the leading institutions for social entrepreneurship learning in India.

## 3. Social entrepreneurship program at TISS

After considerable efforts, TISS in 2007 launched Master of Arts in Social Entrepreneurship as a two year – four semesters Program at its Mumbai campus. The first cohort was of 14 students, which has subsequently increased to 30. Since beginning of the Program, many graduates have launched their own social ventures.

The Program has a deep philosophical orientation, which has guided its plans and activities. The core team responsible to administer the Program continuously questioned the purpose and the desired outcomes and made the necessary changes. It was realized and appreciated that entrepreneurial thinking and decision making processes are equally critical for the Program. The Program structure was redesigned in such a way that major focus was made on 'effectual logic' (entrepreneurial decision making logic which is substantially different from managerial decision making framework MBO – Management By Objective, also called 'causal logic'). As successful entrepreneurs practice both the logics, while making

<sup>1</sup> Known as *Acharya* (teacher), Vinoba Bhave is familiar in modern India for his land donation movement.

<sup>2</sup> Known as the 'Father of the White Revolution', Dr. Kurien is the man behind 'Operation flood' which has helped India to transform as the world's largest milk producer from that of a milk-deficient nation.

<sup>3</sup> The recent noble laureate, Kailash Satyarthi is a child right activist and the founder of GoodWeave International (Formerly known as Rug Mark), who has influenced global law on protecting the rights of the children.

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