

# **RSARNCE Conference on Entrepreneurship as a Social Movement - Engaging Citizens with Institutions for Entrepreneurial Outcomes**

**Jodhpur, India**

**5-7 April 2023**

## **A Summary**

The Indian Institute of Technology Jodhpur (IIT-J) and Jodhpur City Knowledge and Innovation Foundation (JCKIF) in partnership with a social enterprise, Contact Base, Essex Business School of the University of Essex, the Mehrangarh Museum Trust and the International Entrepreneurship Forum, organized a conference titled '*Entrepreneurship as a Social Movement: Engaging Citizens with Institutions for Entrepreneurial Outcomes*' from 5th to 7th April 2023 at Jodhpur Club in IIT Jodhpur campus, under the joint auspices of the Regional Studies Association (UK) Research Network on Citizen Entrepreneurship (RSARNCE), Contact Base and IIT-J. A key objective of the conference was to develop the work done on the RSARNCE Project in the Indian context based on the considerable amount of entrepreneurial citizen engagement taking place through numerous projects on art, culture and sustainability managed by Banglanatakdotcom (Contact Base) in the states of West Bengal, Rajasthan and Goa in India.

The conference was organized as a series of panel discussions, field visit, citizen engagement and related student performances / competitions aligned to the conference theme. Apart from academic researchers, and research students from India and the UK, community representatives and artists participated in the conference. They presented their creative offerings and articulated their aspirations and challenges. Thirty eminent personalities including leading academicians, senior bureaucrats and public planners, members of royalty, representatives from international organizations such as the British Council and the Hungarian Cultural Centre of New Delhi and social entrepreneurs also attended the conference as speakers (eight of them virtually). This document provides an overall summary, including snippets of session-wise discussions that took place in the conference.

More than 500 participants were engaged fully and enthusiastically with the deliberations at the conference. Although most of the participants were from different states of India, at least seven countries (India, UK, South Africa, Germany, France, Hungary and Bangladesh) were represented at the conference.

### **Details of Proceedings**

#### **Day 1 – 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

#### **Session 1: Towards Entrepreneurship as a Social Movement: Ideas for Social and Cultural Change and Sustainability Issues**

Background - The session was designed to focus on the changing landscape of entrepreneurship, economic and social development in India. The discussions threw light on factors, which are critical to initiate and nurture sustainable, culturally rich entrepreneurial ventures that engage citizens in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and how that could initiate a social movement.

Speakers:-

- **HH Gaj Singh II** of Marwar-Jodhpur
- **Prof. Ashok Banerjee** – Director, IIM Udaipur
- **Dr. Harish Hande** – Social Entrepreneur and Founder of SELCO India, Magsaysay Award Winner
- **Ms. Premlata Poonia** - Founder, Hamari Laado

Chair and Facilitator:

- **Prof. Jay Mitra** – Professor of Business Enterprise and Innovation, Essex Business School, University of Essex

Discussions – The discussion started by demystifying the idea of entrepreneurship. Gaj Singh II defined entrepreneurship as the initiative to integrate things and fill up social gaps and challenges by involving local population. His philosophical definition was further expanded by Prof Ashok Banerjee, who defined entrepreneurship in terms of its application. He identified collective ability for problem solving, economic empowerment and creating wealth for the nation as major objectives of entrepreneurship. Premlata Poonia gave context to the applied definition of entrepreneurship as propounded by Prof Banerjee. Coming from a grass-roots organisation and being an entrepreneur herself, Premlata defined entrepreneurship in terms of being entrepreneurial or having the ability to act. She further iterated that it is the social and economic context that nurtures the entrepreneurial capabilities of individuals and groups. Taking Premlata’s definition of embedding entrepreneurship in the social fabric of a community or a region, Dr. Harish Hande expanded it further and conceptualized entrepreneurship in terms of its ability in ushering social change. He viewed entrepreneurship in terms of its transgressive potential in changing the modalities of knowledge and wealth distribution and paving the path for a more equitable society.

After defining entrepreneurship, the discussion progressed to explain the role institutions play in promoting entrepreneurship. Gaj Singh II spoke about how institutions function as catalysts in creating models and support structure for thriving entrepreneurial ventures citing the example of Mehrangarh Museum Trust in providing education for marginalized learners and supporting cultural practitioners through various welfare means. Premlata also stressed on the importance of institutions as key starting points. However, she said that to change existing practices, there is a need to change orientation and socio-behavioural strategies and institutions can help bring that change. The role of civil society as an ideological state apparatus in bringing positive transformation in the entrepreneurial scenario and effective usage of technology in facilitating and steering the change to be inclusive and innovative was discussed at length. Harish Hande spoke about how our vocabulary is exclusive and the need to change existing structures. He highlighted the need for a support ecosystem like risk money for micro-enterprises to thrive and sustain them. The discussion was concluded by Prof. Ashok Banerjee’s inputs, who spoke about the necessity to deglamourize entrepreneurship and see it in terms of execution like providing incentives and mentorship for ideation and optimally using local resources to initiate, nurture and sustain grass-root entrepreneurial ventures.

The session concluded by initiating dialogue on prospective ways to engage citizens to support the cause of entrepreneurship development. In India, entrepreneurship is often seen as a last choice, left for people, who could not fare well in the job market. There is a need to change this perception and view hindrances from the angle of opportunities they create to initiate self-sustaining ventures. The

discussion highlighted how it is imperative to recognize that while not all citizens can be entrepreneurs, there needs to be mutual trust and respect for entrepreneurship and its ability to bring change. This motivation is crucial to sustain and nurture not only entrepreneurial ventures but also cultivate entrepreneurial mindset among citizens. The speakers unanimously agreed in making institutions more inclusive and organically suited to evolve with time so that they can devise mechanisms to involve citizens to support and engage to further the cause of entrepreneurship development.

## **Session 2: Networks, Ecosystems and Cultural Dynamics**

Background - This session focused on existing business and engagement models for sustaining entrepreneurial ventures involving investors who are active in the space of cultural and creative entrepreneurship. The session attempted in identifying the creative entrepreneurial ecosystem of India, focusing on the creative and cultural industries and the underpinning financial networks and cultural dynamics that influence and shape the ecosystem.

Speakers:-

- **Mr. Jonathan Kennedy** - Director Arts, British Council, India
- **Dr. Mariann Erdő** – Director, Hungarian Cultural Centre, Delhi and Cultural Counselor, Embassy of Hungary, Delhi
- **Dr. Prakash Bagri** - Associate Dean - Corporate Engagements & Clinical Associate Professor at Indian School of Business (ISB)
- **Mr. Lloyd Mathias** - Angel Investor and Business Strategist
- **Mr. Shubho Sengupta** – Director, Media and Creative, MyGov India

Chair and Facilitator:

- **Mr. Shantanu Bhanja** – Operating Partner, The Convergence Foundation and Special Advisor to the Chairperson at Ashoka University

Discussions – The discussions highlighted the importance of cultivating entrepreneurial mindsets as a mandatory prerequisite for an ecosystem conducive to supporting entrepreneurial growth. While Dr. Bagri highlighted how the extant setup lacks a robust ecosystem in support of entrepreneurship, he identified public initiatives like Start Up India to address the issue by launching beneficial public policies to support innovative business ventures. Mr. Sengupta highlighted the need to integrate technology in reshaping the entrepreneurial ecosystem. He said that the creative industry is mostly informal and it is the integration of storytelling when positioned as a heritage-sensitive marketing strategy that can secure a market for itself. The discussion highlighted how along with identifying the economic prospects and positioning of entrepreneurial ventures, it is also important to identify that social value of entrepreneurship rests not in individualistic endeavours but on collective action undertaken to address a social issue in collaboration. In this context, Mr. Kennedy highlighted the need for intra and inter communitarian networking and cultivation of both bonding and bridging social capital so that through purposive networking and exchange of knowledge, individual citizens can derive the ability to leverage each other's capabilities. The importance of building global partnerships creating opportunities of exchange was discussed in depth by Dr. Erdő. The need for easy access to finance and setting up more incubation centres to accelerate the growth of entrepreneurial ventures by providing hand holding support at the time of inception was discussed at length by the speakers. The session concluded with Mr. Mathias' advocacy in favour of marrying creative economy with commerce. He

reiterated the need to interpret creative economy and its activities not just in terms of their entertainment value but in terms of their economic potential and how governments can function as enablers in linking the creative economy with financial institutions.

### **Session 3: Tourism and Social Innovation**

Background - This session explored different ideas and practices through which tourism-centred entrepreneurship can be developed as a key instrument to support social innovation involving citizen participation. The key discussions centred on how community-led initiatives can change the tourism landscape and enable responsible and inclusive tourism.

Speakers:-

- **Ms. Rupinder Pannu Brar, IRS** - Principal Commissioner of Income Tax, Mumbai
- **Dr. Lalit K. Panwar, IAS (Retd.)** - Chairperson, Vivekananda Global University and ex-Secretary Tourism, GOI
- **Mr. Vikram Nachna** – Royalty of Jaisalmer and Heritage Tourism Stakeholder

Chair and Facilitator:

- **Mr. Amitava Bhattacharya** - Founder Director, Contact Base

Discussions – The session started by redefining tourism and viewed tourism as beyond hotels and hospitality. Premising on experiential and responsible tourism, the session in its very introduction placed local community at the nucleus of tourism and viewed tourism in terms of its potential in bringing local collective development. Mr. Nachna and Dr. Panwar highlighted Rajasthan’s public efforts in creating various innovative avenues from which tourism can benefit like Luxury Railway Coaches, Palace on Wheels’ customised tourism experience across the state, organizing several fairs on various themes, adventure tourism, incorporating local natural assets like Orans and Geo Cliffs in the tourism map. In juxtaposition, Dr. Brar highlighted the need for the social infrastructure to help direct tourism along responsible and community-led lines. She advocated policies dedicated to build hospitality skills among local communities, enabling women engagement for tourism development and equipping local communities to use local resources to bring local development. Since Rajasthan historically has been the Land of the Royals, where royal architecture and splendour define the essence of the state, ways to mainstream heritage tourism and entrust local communities with managerial responsibilities of heritage tourism were also discussed in the session.

The session concluded by mentioning the black spots from which current tourism scenario of Rajasthan suffers from. Some of the critical points discussed in this context were:- the issues of over-tourism in Rajasthan in some of the popular tourist destinations like the Jaisalmer fort. Jaisalmer fort is the only living fort of India and apart from welcoming huge tourist footfalls, the fort is the home to over 10,000 households. Similar examples of overcrowding of popular tourist destinations coupled with increasing wastage, lack of toilets and sanitation facilities in the villages, distancing local festivals from local community and making these celebrations celebrity-centric were some of the challenges discussed in the session, which are preventing Rajasthan’s tourism to take an inclusive and responsible turn. While these are pressing challenges, the discussion highlighted how optimal involvement of the local community, highlighting their cultural and natural assets and enabling them to take ownership of their

inhabited region are key factors in transforming the current tourism scenario into an inclusive, experiential and responsible one.

## **Day 2 – 6<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

### **Session 1: Technology and Social Mission in Entrepreneurship and Innovation**

Background - This session explored the myriad ways in which technology can be leveraged to enable and strengthen optimal levels of local stakeholder engagement and facilitation of their interests for the cause of entrepreneurship, innovation, economic and social development in India.

Speakers:-

- **Mr. Abhishek Singh, IAS** - Managing Director and CEO, Digital India Corporation and CEO of Karmayogi Bharat
- **Dr. Rajeev Saraf** – CEO, Lepton Software
- **Mr. Joe Fernandes** – Co-Founder and President, IIT-IIT
- **Dr. Sankalp Pratap** – Faculty, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, IIT Jodhpur

Chair and Facilitator:

- **Prof. Santanu Chaudhury** - Director, IIT Jodhpur

Discussions – The discussions in this session focused around four broad aspects:- i) Can technology drive social entrepreneurship, ii) Exploring role of technology in grass-roots innovation, iii) Usage of technology to facilitate artist empowerment, and iv) Removing the exploitative layer through technology.

- i) Can technology drive social entrepreneurship – To address this issue, different speakers from diverse backgrounds shared their experiential insights. Mr. Singh spoke about how technology can be made accessible to grass-root members and how public schemes can be designed to make technology inclusive and equipped to facilitate grass-root empowerment. Mr. Fernandes, who has a background in social entrepreneurship, spoke about the community (water) tank system and how community ownerships of tanks can solve the problem of irrigation in arid regions. On the other hand, Dr. Sankalp Pratap shared his research experience about a local farm venture based out of Jodhpur, who on joining hands with local farmers, along terms profitable for the farmers, successfully doubled his potato produce. These instances not only highlighted the importance of involving local stakeholders in their process of development but also emphasized the role of technology in ensuring and supporting innovation through collective participation.
- ii) Exploring role of technology in grass-root innovation – Ways of integrating technology to further the cause of grass-root innovation was taken up in this segment. The aspect of enterprise playing a crucial role to transform innovators into entrepreneurs was discussed and Dr. Saraf insightfully discussed how technology can be drivers for funding grass-root innovation.
- iii) Usage of technology to facilitate artist empowerment – The instance of Contact Base's ground-level work was shared to highlight the role of micro-entrepreneurship development

in transforming the fate of traditional cultural practices, the practitioners and rural spaces. Additionally, making technology suited to meet rural needs was also raised as a critical concern. Finally, given the fact that the youth are immensely consuming digital content, efforts to make technology inclusive and informative to encourage youth engagement was highlighted.

- iv) Removing the exploitative layer through technology – The concluding segment highlighted a very important aspect – currently production and management of technology is entrusted with elite organizations and institutes, thereby distancing technology from the mass of people. It was revealed that it is not technology but market ownership of technology that exploits citizens and that, therefore, there is a need to reposition social hierarchies and stop the process of underestimating the capacity of grassroots technology ownership and usage.

IDEATHON – The latter part of the session was dedicated to students’ presentation, where three pre-selected student groups presented their idea on how technology can be used to initiate entrepreneurial ventures with a special focus on creative industry. One group presented their idea of an online board game with an educatory motive to promote traditional art, craft and other cultural heritage. The second group presented their design for an e-commerce website which will connect buyers with grass-root creative practitioners and enable co-creation between them for a customized cultural experience. And, finally, the third group presented their idea of a platform dedicated to developing entrepreneurship abilities of children of creative practitioners through capacity and skill building, training and mentorship.

## **Session 2: Public Policy making on Citizen-Focused Entrepreneurship, Economic and Social Development**

Background - This session was dedicated to discussing the ways in which policy formulation on entrepreneurship development can engage citizens and in-turn be inclusive and field-informed. The session discussed on how the process of entrepreneurship development in India can be made inclusive, encouraging enhanced participation of marginalized groups.

Speakers:-

- **Mr. Mukhmeet Singh Bhatia, IAS** - Secretary, Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India
- **Smt Gayatri A Rathore IAS** - Principal Secretary to Government of Rajasthan, in charge of Tourism Department, Art, Literature and Archaeology Department
- **Dr. Jyotsna Jha** - Director, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, Bangalore
- **Dr. Toolika Gupta** – Director, Indian Institute of Crafts and Design (IICD), Jaipur

Chair and Facilitator:

- **Ms. Ananya Bhattacharya** - Director and Co-Founder, Contact Base

Discussions – The session commenced with the objective of exploring ways to maximize the potentials of the creative sector. While Smt. Rathore narrated Rajasthan Tourism departments’ initiatives to promote the cultural offerings and the creative practitioners on multiple forums, she also stressed the importance of shifting public focus from hard to soft components in the context of facilitating entrepreneurship development in the creative sector. Mr. Bhatia, reflecting on building a conducive

entrepreneurial ecosystem, urged the planners to understand the emotions and operations of the field based on which public mandates can be formulated, and which are suited to address local concerns through innovative ventures. Dr. Goopta spoke about the need to integrate specialized courses on entrepreneurship in higher education level so that students get sufficient exposure to translate their passion into enterprises. While all the speakers unanimously agreed on the role of civil society as ideological state apparatus in playing the role of ethical intermediaries and establishing a bridge between grass-root creative practitioners on one hand and market, public planning and other civic bodies on the other, Dr. Jha shed light on how the extant scenario highlights a big gap/divide between the above-mentioned entities. She said that at present policies are formulated to address the concerns of the system and not people and how there is a need to initiate inter-departmental dialogue to facilitate field-informed policies suited to address grass-root concerns. The need to incorporate artists' rights in public mandates along with creating policies dedicated to preserve and promote Indigenous body of knowledge including vernacular architecture were discussed. The session concluded by advocating the incorporation of representatives of grass-roots organisations in the process of policy formulation so that public mandates can be inclusive and suited to address local concerns.

The latter half of the session was dedicated to bringing to the forefront voices of artists and creative practitioners, who have been beneficiaries of the ongoing project "*Strengthening Intangible Cultural Heritage Based Tourism in western Rajasthan*," a collaborative initiative of Dept. of Tourism, Govt. of Rajasthan and UNESCO. How the project activities facilitated safeguarding of the cultural traditions and promoted the rural destinations as cultural tourism hotspots were discussed in detail. Instances of development of micro-enterprises, albeit on a very small scale, among the creative practitioners were highlighted along with discussing the importance of accrediting pride and recognition to art, artists and villagers and its relevance in improving the fate of all the three was displayed. The session concluded with students' participation, where one group showed a visual documentary on the opportunities and plights of several creative practitioners based in and around Jodhpur and a skit showing the operations, strengths and weaknesses of contemporary tourism in Rajasthan.

### **Session 3: Citizen's Entrepreneurship: Research/Data Analytics to Support Entrepreneurship Research, Policy and Practice**

Background - This session was dedicated to unveiling the concept of Citizen Entrepreneurship (CE) drawing from a recent global research project of the Regional Studies Association, UK and led by the University of Essex, involving partners from Germany, India and Poland. CE was the theoretical paradigm of the entire conference and this session, apart from inviting insights from different domain experts, built on the work of Contact Base in India and the University of Kwazulu Natal in South Africa, extended the scope of the concept to regard Entrepreneurship as a putative social movement. The underpinning ideas are drawn from a global R&D project on citizen engagement and citizen entrepreneurship' led by Professor Jay Mitra, Essex Business School, University of Essex, UK. This session highlighted ways of conceptualizing citizen engagement in inclusive entrepreneurship and how citizens can be involved in designing and conducting research with a view to generate a base for addressing SDG goals at the local level through entrepreneurial activism in partnership with the government and the private sector.

Speakers:-

- **Ms. Daniela Carl** - Deputy Chief Executive, Regional Studies Association, UK
- **Prof. Simon Taylor** - University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa
- **Dr. Madhura Dutta** - Director, Contact Base

Chair and Facilitator

- **Prof. Jay Mitra** – Professor of Business Enterprise and Innovation, Essex Business School, University of Essex

Discussions – The session started with the crucial questions – why and how citizens should be engaged in the process of entrepreneurship development. Discussions on authenticity of field data generated from citizens and how such data are reflective of grass-root operations and scenarios were discussed in the beginning. Instances of authentic weather report reliant on citizen submitted data on regional weather conditions were cited as examples in this regard. Four types of entrepreneurships, namely, business, social, public and community-led, were discussed and demarcated from each other. The session brought forward a very crucial aspect – citizen’s engagement and entrepreneurship do not vouch for every individual citizen to start entrepreneurial business or social enterprises. Instead, involving citizens to identify opportunities of mobilizing local resources and optimising agencies to support grass-root innovation through entrepreneurial ventures happens to be the premise of citizen’s entrepreneurship. In this session, Ms. Carl shared with the audience the Regional Studies Association’s focus of eco development and how development in its focus must engage concerns about community and ecology. Dr. Dutta discussed Contact Base’s works and how the organizations’ flagship initiative, Art for Life was renamed from Art for Livelihood because promotion and safeguarding of traditional cultural pursuits and practitioners has an impact that extends well beyond economic satisfaction and contributes to enhancing the pride of the practitioners and accrediting them with the identity of ‘artists.’ Prof Taylor spoke on how it is required to understand and acknowledge the enormous grass-roots impact social enterprises create and the need for networking to permeate the contribution of this impact in bringing concrete change on a holistic axis. The session concluded with poster presentations from students’ groups displaying the potential of local resources, be it natural, cultural and human assets in being drivers of change.

### **Day 3: Field trip covering Barnawa Jageer and Salawas**

Around one hundred people, including the speakers/delegates and faculties and students of IIT Jodhpur and other institutions visited two villages, one music and one craft village of western Rajasthan. They visited the villages of Barnawa Jageer, Langa music village in Barmer district and Salawas, Durrie village in Jodhpur district. The visitors interacted with the creative practitioners, got acquainted with the creative offerings of the villages. While the conference, in its two days, brainstormed several ideas conducive to the creation and growth of micro-enterprises in the creative sector, the field trip enabled the participants to make the critical link between theory, reflection and practice.

### **Concluding Observations**

This unique and highly successful conference, probably the first of its kind in India, opened possibilities for developing and establishing CE as both a concept and a tool for a new, innovative form of citizen engagement with a wider concept and practice of new venture creation. The bringing together of academic researchers, public policy representatives, business practitioners, grassroots organisations, students and members from the wider community, the conference displayed a major strand of the CE project, namely the need to germinate collective, inclusive, and holistic approaches to entrepreneurship as a vehicle for economic and social development. It is anticipated that this conference is likely to lead



to further developments in joint research and development projects between Indian institutions and the partners of the RSARNCE project.

Sneha Bhattacharya (Contact Base) and Jay Mitra (University of Essex, UK)

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