



# Talking Volunteerism

A Qualitative Study by Pravah, iVolunteer and Patang Supported by  
The Youth & Civil Society Initiative of Sir Ratan Tata Trust

A background pattern of numerous handprints in various shades of gray, arranged in a circular, sunburst-like pattern. The handprints are of different sizes and orientations, creating a sense of movement and community.

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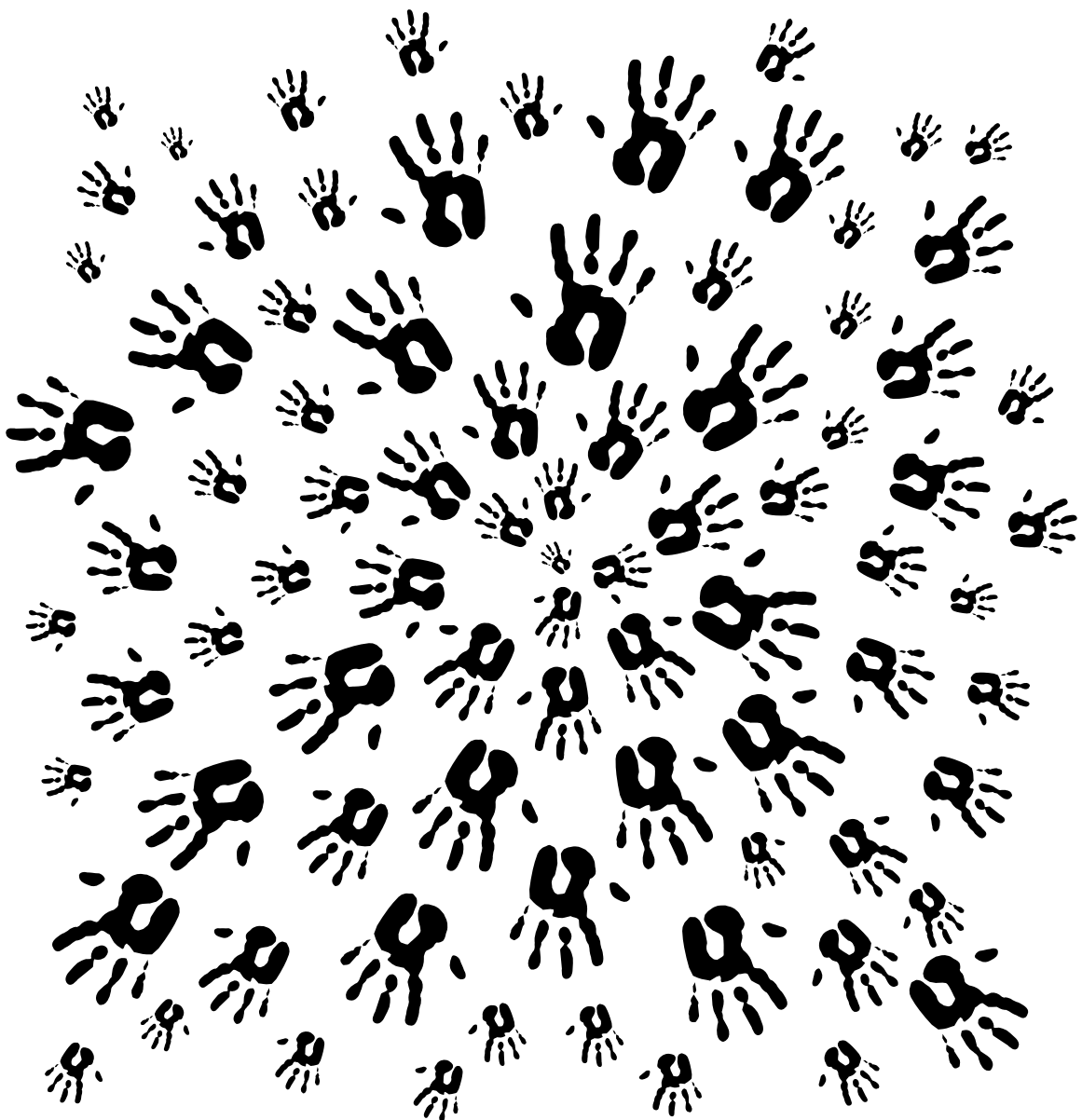
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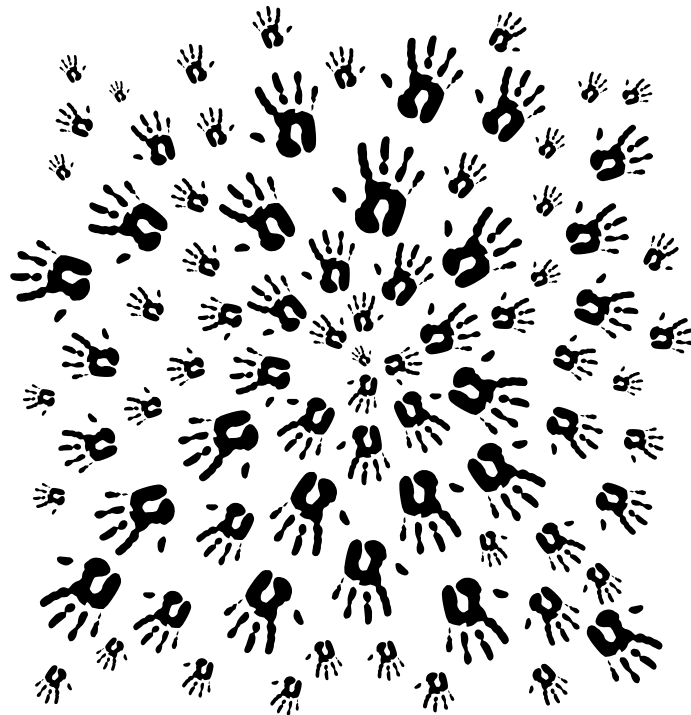
## CONTENTS



<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Part 1: Study Reports</b>	
How Civil Society Organisations are Engaging with Youth Volunteers in Delhi, Mumbai, and Orissa	3
Qualitative Study of Volunteerism Among Youth in Delhi, Mumbai, and Orissa	15
<b>Part 2: Case Studies</b>	
iVolunteer: Promoting Volunteerism	23
Patang: Volunteerism for Youth Development	31
Pravah: From Volunteerism to Active Citizenship	37
SPIC MACAY: Promoting Learning through Work	43
The Youth Parliament: Linking Youth with Society	49
<b>Part 3: Annexure</b>	
Directory of Voluntary Organisations in Delhi, Mumbai and Orissa, which have been a Part of this Study	55



## Introduction



# Invisible Hands

Shaping common futures

*Statistics say that six million people volunteer one billion  
volunteer hours in Canada.*

*Thirty three percent of the citizens in Ireland  
volunteer with civil society organisations.*

Imagine if... 33% of the Indian population, just a percentage of the young people of this country, could be mobilised to volunteer one day a year, we would have 3.3 million person days of active citizenship available. Monetise that at an average of Rs. 500 per day and we suddenly have resources worth Rs. 165 crores available locally to the development sector every year.



As of now we are able to utilise a mere fraction of these resources.

Mostly this waste can be attributed to the lack of a sense of social responsibility of the Indian citizens. However, we believe that it is time the development sector examined itself to identify why young people are not volunteering adequately. Are we, the civil society organisations, geared up to utilise volunteers effectively?

Pravah and iVolunteer are organisations working with youth and volunteerism in India. We encourage and promote volunteering at different levels, places and moments. We seek to improve for the volunteers, the experience, the learnings and the advantages of volunteering. We seek to equip the host organisations to work with volunteers, and through them, benefit the wider community.

It is our belief that youth are the torch-bearers of change with an abundance of courage and conviction, a bit of romanticism and faith in themselves. We often see youth experimenting with their own ideas, challenging beliefs and working towards bringing about change. It is our experience that often just a little support and mentoring transform them into Changemakers.

Youth comprise of a major segment of India's population and we believe it is important that they are connected and exposed to India's developmental challenges. Therefore, we need to understand the aspirations of young people regarding volunteering and community participation within the country's changing societal context – a scenario of increasing competition, manifold opportunities, numerous pre-occupations, the explosion of news and information from the world over.

Worldwide, volunteering is recognised as a powerful tool for involving young people in development issues and for youth development itself. In India, we have little information. We do know that youth volunteering is taking place, but only in pockets. A number of organisations and established programmes are providing volunteering opportunities and exposure to young people. Many young people are also volunteering. However, we do not know enough. We know little about the processes and practices.

In a scenario in which there are young people who want to or even do not want to volunteer and get engaged with development issues, and organisations that could benefit from youth volunteering, we conducted this qualitative research study. Through this, we sought to understand youth volunteer management practices that exist in the sector, understand the aspirations of young people regarding volunteering and community participation, and sought to bridge the gaps, if any, so that youth volunteerism in India matures into a process from which young people, voluntary organisations and the wider community can benefit.

**PART 1**

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STUDY REPORT 1



How Civil Society Organisations are  
Engaging with Youth Volunteers in  
Delhi, Mumbai and Orissa



## **BACKGROUND**

*In order to understand the experience and perceptions of organisations about youth volunteerism and the opportunities that they provide for the same, Pravah anchored a study of non-governmental organisations in Delhi, Mumbai and Orissa. The Delhi part of the study was conducted by Pravah, the Mumbai part of the study was conducted by iVolunteer, and in Orissa, Pravah partnered with Patang to collect the data. In each place, intensive and in-depth interviews were conducted with 25 organisations, making for a total of 75 bodies. Data was collected on the basis of interviews, visits, and in-depth study of organisational literature and publications.*

### **The organisations covered were a combination of:**

- **organisations led by youth (in the 17–30 age group), which**
  - engage volunteers in the 17–25 age group
  - do not engage youth volunteers
- **organisations not led by youth, which**
  - engage volunteers in the 17–25 age group
  - do not engage youth volunteers (these were included in order to understand why some choose not to engage with youth volunteers.)

*The organisations covered for the study work on a wide range of issues, such as policy advocacy, environmental protection, promoting entrepreneurship among young people, creating awareness about social issues through the popular media, assisting survivors of incest, street children, homeless people, mental health issues, drug abuse, communal harmony, youth development, human rights and social justice, gender issues, child rights, community development, advocacy and research, health, classical arts, etc.*

### **The following is an analytical synopsis of this study, which seeks to bring before us information on the following:**

- A•** *The existing volunteer management strategies and practices amongst non-governmental organisations*
- B•** *How non-governmental organisations perceive youth volunteering*
- C•** *Impact of volunteering on the youth volunteers*
- D•** *What needs to be done to promote youth volunteering*



## **A. THE EXISTING VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES AMONGST NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

The key finding from the study is that NGOs are looking at youth volunteerism in various ways. These are largely efforts that are happening in pockets, and there is a need and scope for strengthening the structured volunteer management processes in the sector. Following are the practices and processes that the study shows as existing in the sector already.

1. The study reveals that a number of NGOs recognise the value of volunteerism, and undertake a range of activities to involve volunteers. The nature of involvement of volunteers, of course, depends on the type of NGO and the type of work that they do. However, in general, NGOs engage volunteers as support staff, who come in for limited periods. On the whole it was found that NGOs involve volunteers in the following areas:

- Peer education and training.
- Awareness-generation programmes.
- Research projects.
- Special events.
- Fund raising activities.
- Administrative work.

A very small percentage of the NGOs covered in the study involves volunteers in their core programme work. In Delhi, one organisation involved in counselling runs solely with the support of volunteers, and a few others where volunteers are engaged in programme work. In Mumbai, only two out of the 25 NGOs covered in the study engage volunteers in their core programme work. There also exists a very small number of organisations where volunteers constitute the core staff, or which run entirely with the help of volunteers. In these organisations, volunteers are involved in all activities, ranging from administrative work to core decision making.

2. Most organisations covered in the study could not report accurate data on the number of volunteers they mobilise annually or on annual volunteer turnover, which throws up a gap in the sector's focus on volunteerism.

3. The study revealed that volunteers are recruited in a variety of ways :

- The most common form of recruitment is through word of mouth.
- Another effective method is through contacts in schools and colleges. This is done through contacting principals and teachers, making presentations at lectures and events, putting up posters and pamphlets, stalls and kiosks, and orientation and sensitisation programmes on specific issues.



- Some organisations use targeted advertisements to attract volunteers, especially for specific programmes.
- Other methods of recruitment are special events, plays, the Internet, stalls at corporate offices and college festivals, mailing lists, and press releases.

4. The study showed that most organisations are flexible in their approach to managing youth volunteers and take care that their own issues are not forced down on them. Most of the time they encourage young people to volunteer in the areas they are interested in, e.g., education, communications, films etc. In some cases, organisations also design work assignments around the volunteers' comfort level or convenience. For instance, sometimes when girls are reluctant to work in shelters for the homeless, because they will have to work late at night, or because they are not fluent in the local language, they are assigned different kinds of projects.

5. Most organisations are open to making flexible arrangements with their volunteers. They usually design the volunteering assignments based on the volunteer's skills and the time they are willing to commit.

6. Most organisations that involve youth volunteers, have some methods in place for motivating and retaining volunteers, though the study revealed no standard practices in the social sector in terms of volunteer management. Following are some of the volunteer management practices that are prevalent in the sector:

- Many organisations seek to create challenging work opportunities to attract and retain volunteers.
- Often organisations encourage volunteers to work in areas that interest them the most, whether education, child rights, or environment.
- They match skills, needs, interest, and availability, so that there is a good 'fit' between a volunteer and the project.
- They rely on feedback sessions and constant follow-ups with volunteers to retain them and to make volunteers feel valued.
- They conduct special orientation and training programmes.
- They organise de-stressing exercises and regular meetings where volunteers can share their experiences and feel a sense of bonding with other volunteers.
- They encourage volunteers to work directly with the target group, to visit project sites, to set targets for themselves and to become personally involved in programmes.
- Some organisations assign mentors for volunteers, who can support a volunteer to learn and grow while being involved in an assignment.
- They pay special attention to the volunteer's personality and needs by drawing up individual growth charts and identifying potential areas of work.



- Sometimes a few organisations give volunteers independence and responsibility, sometimes even responsibility for certain aspects of financial management, to engender a sense of pride and ownership for the programme.
- Some ensure that there is space for dialogue, debate, and decision making.

7. On the issue of retention, it was found that most organisations do not make any special effort to retain volunteers who want to leave, which goes on to show that they recognize that young people have many other interests, commitments, responsibilities and demands on their time, attention, and energy. However, most organisations do attempt to retain volunteers by providing a healthy and open atmosphere that will encourage young people to stay. They do this in various ways:

- They encourage open channels of communication between volunteers and management in case of disagreement.
- They adopt a flexible approach to accommodate volunteers' schedules or seek to work out a compromise.
- They try to allay the concerns of parents through workshops, where they explain the nature of voluntary work that their children do.

8. As for recognition, the three key practices that the study revealed are the following:

- Some give opportunities to volunteers to speak in public and represent the organisation.
- Some maintain regular contact with volunteers, even when the volunteer is not involved in any particular project.
- Some publicly recognise the volunteers' contribution through awards, newsletters, letters, and other non-monetary tokens of appreciation.

9. While the study revealed that many organisations engage with youth volunteers and quite successfully, it also revealed that there are others that choose not to work with young people as a matter of policy. This is mostly because they do not know how to manage and allocate work to volunteers. Some recognise that they have to invest time and effort in training volunteers (who they often regard as unskilled), and hence need to have a volunteer coordinator. It is this level of investment and commitment required, which makes them reluctant to set up a structured volunteering programme. Another reason is that some organisations believe in paying people who work for them, and hence do not engage any volunteer. Finally, NGOs also often do not have suitable work or exciting opportunities to offer, and hence lack effective ways of attracting youth volunteers. For instance, some volunteers prefer to work directly in the field with the target group, which is not possible in many organisations.



## **B. PERCEPTIONS ABOUT YOUTH VOUNTEERISM AMONGS NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

1. One of the striking findings is that most of the organisations covered in the study feel that despite various preoccupations and busy schedules, there are many young people who actively engage with social issues, and are willing and able to volunteer their services without incentives, and stated that they involve young volunteers, often in diverse capacities.

2. Most organisations who invest in youth volunteers agree that a number of factors motivate young people to volunteer. These include:

- A sense of identification with the organisation and its mission.
- A clear sense of how they can contribute, or clear role definitions.
- Possibility of being recognised for their efforts.
- Opportunities for personal growth and learning. One NGO involved in counselling feels that it attracts volunteers because it provides special training to them.
- Certain kinds of activities, which are energising and rewarding, e.g., a specific campaign to distribute ration cards in a neighbourhood, or doing a street play for a specific cause.
- Being entrusted with responsibilities. One organisation gives its volunteers responsibilities to manage finances for their project. Another organisation involved in counselling, entrusts it volunteers with considerable responsibility, which, they feel, encourages in them a sense of ownership and identification with both the cause and the organisation.

3. A considerable number of NGOs believe the problem of youth volunteerism lies not so much with the attitude of young people, but rather with a general cynicism about the motives of NGOs, which are often considered a big sham. If the profile of the sector is enhanced, there will be many more young people willing to engage in voluntary work.

4. A number of organisations feel that certain traits mark a 'good volunteer'. These are:

- A sincere 'feel' for the cause.
- An understanding that voluntary work is not charity work, but requires seriousness of purpose.
- Willingness to learn.
- Qualities of leadership, self-motivation, self-initiative, self-discipline, confidence, flexibility, team spirit, curiosity, punctuality.
- Values of commitment and dedication, honesty, sincerity.

Some NGOs, however, are of the opinion that there is no such thing as a good or bad volunteer. All volunteers are good, but it is up to the organisation to figure out how best to engage them in accordance with their skills, interests, and availability. They felt that while most volunteers have certain skill sets, many



others do not, but this does not in any way make them less special. Indeed, it is up to the organisation to create a conducive atmosphere that will encourage volunteers to develop sensitivity and empathy, not pity and disdain, towards others.

5. A number of organisations feel that volunteering is not a priority for today's young people. As reasons for this, they state that this attitude stems partly from their lack of understanding of the needs of the social sector and partly from lack of awareness of the volunteering opportunities available. These organisations also feel that young people today have many other commitments, pressures, and distractions. Many seek the 'good life', and are busy working towards establishing successful careers. Many are also often constrained by problems relating to transportation costs and physical distance. Based on the previous points, they state that young people take up volunteering only when it is 'convenient'.

6. Most organisations acknowledge the contribution of youth volunteers to their work and value the diversity of opinion they bring to the work place. They also acknowledge that young volunteers

- Spread immense enthusiasm, freshness, warmth and energy in the organisation.
- Enrich their programmes through feedback.
- Help them think beyond their work.
- Display a great sense of ownership towards a programme.
- Bring in great diversity within the organisation.

7. Organisations greatly appreciate the initiative, motivation, idealism, vision and romanticism of young volunteers and recognise the ability of young volunteers to relate better to clients such as children and other youth.

8. Although most organisations agree that there are considerable advantages to working with youth volunteers, they also find a number of serious limitations in working with them.

- Young volunteers have a number of genuine problems like exams, physical distance and transportation difficulties, need to earn a living, or parents' objections. These often results in what is perceived to be a 'lack of commitment and continuity' on the part of volunteers.
- Many times, faced with various competing pressures and distractions, young people do not give volunteering high priority, and quit when it is no longer 'convenient'. For example, sometimes young people come for compulsory volunteering (under NSS, for instance) to gain marks and leave once they complete their mandatory hours. For organisations that make considerable investments of time and effort in training volunteers, factors such as these act as constraints.
- Other constraints include the lack of respect or identification on the volunteers' part with the ideology or vision of the NGO, a non-serious attitude, and lack of specific skills or capability.
- Some organisations, however, acknowledge that sometimes young volunteers leave mid-way because of internal factors such as office politics, high or mismatched expectations, lack of partners, corruption, and the donor-driven nature of most NGOs.



### **C. IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING ON YOUTH VOLUNTEERS**

1. The study reveals that youth volunteering has a considerable role to play in strengthening the development sector, since many founders of voluntary organisations revealed that at some stage in their lives they underwent deeply transformational experiences, and in many cases, these happened when they were volunteering.

For some, these transformational experiences were created or facilitated by organisations where they volunteered. These organisations exposed them to social issues, facilitated them to meet role models, participate in campaigns, attend workshops, gain exposure to teachings of influential thinkers and engaged them in personal development exercises (self-awareness and social awareness programmes). Often the organisation also encouraged the start-ups.

Some other founders reported that they underwent a single deeply transformational experience as a volunteer. For instance, a voluntary involvement in theatre and participation in a life-skills and citizenship programme inspired a young man who came to Delhi from a small town, to set up his own organisation to work for the welfare of street children. A group of young people decided to work for peace after visiting Gujarat following the riots in 2004.

2. The study reveals that a number of organisations which take an active interest in engaging with and in understanding the beliefs and ideologies of young volunteers, and intervene in their lives through peer educators programmes, discussion groups, campaigns or life skills training programmes, deeply impact the volunteers and facilitate them to actively take ownership of not only the organisations' beliefs and needs but also of social issues.

3. Volunteering in most cases has a profound and positive effect on individuals. The experience equips them with a deeper understanding of their own worth, increases their confidence, builds their vision, and strengthens their commitment to engage in socially meaningful work.

4. Because they provide exposure to project sites, interaction with target groups, discussions on social issues, and learning from peers, volunteering contributes to a deeper understanding of the needs of the social sector among young people.

5. Volunteering also expands the knowledge base of volunteers, teaches respect for others, and develops sensitivity and empathy.

6. As volunteers learn to appreciate the need for active engagement with the world in which they live, there is a shift in perspective from idealism to realism, from naivety to practicality. In short, voluntary work helps prepare young people to become socially proactive citizens and change makers.

7. Most organisations share stories where volunteering led young people to

- become comfortable talking about issues relating to sexuality, HIV/AIDS etc. after attending workshops,



- further volunteer or take up their summer placements in voluntary organisations,
- start their own initiatives after attending workshops and programmes,
- become confident and committed,
- develop respect for their environment, their city and also for the people who share the space with them. Their experiences in volunteering led them to appreciate the need of actively engaging in protecting it.

#### **D. WHAT VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS NEED TO DO IN ORDER TO PROMOTE YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM**

While one of the striking findings of the study is that, despite their various preoccupations and busy schedules, there are many young people who are willing and able to volunteer their services without incentives, another finding has been that in order for youth volunteerism to reach its potential, a number of gaps need to be addressed. Most voluntary organisations who formed a part of the study agree with the above, and feel that concrete steps need to be taken to attract young people, while keeping in mind that volunteering cannot be viewed in isolation. They also acknowledge the need to create an understanding among young people of the importance of engaging with social issues and recognise the need to emphasise the importance of the volunteers' contributions to a campaign or movement.

Suggestions on a few practical ways to enhance youth volunteerism emerged from the study, which are described below.

##### **Promoting Volunteerism as a Way of Life**

1. If organisations are serious about attracting youth volunteers, they will need to promote volunteering as a way of life among young people. This is a critical aspect, and can be achieved through creating an understanding amongst young people that it is important for them to engage with social issues and building in them the spirit of active citizenship. To achieve this, organisations need to lay more emphasis on contributing to and enriching the lives of young volunteers they engage with, and not just consider them as a 'resource'.

2. If voluntary organisations are to reach out to youth, they need to adopt ways and means that will help young people make a connection with the larger society and also create the right atmosphere for encouraging more young people to volunteer. In this regard, it is important for organisations not to assume that just because a person is a volunteer, s/he is sensitive to the target groups or to social issues. Instead, organisations need to proactively provide opportunities to young people to engage and understand social problems. Exposure to project sites or target groups and social issues are also very effective ways of making young people understand the social sector and its concerns. A number of organisations, which consciously provide exposure to volunteers as part of their induction/orientation processes, feel that this expands their



knowledge base, creates respect for others and helps them develop sensitivity. Besides, exposure to reality helps them shed their inhibitions and gain a greater understanding of social realities.

3. Volunteerism, as the study suggests, is not perceived as a key priority among young people. Sometimes they regard it as an additional task that competes with other activities and commitments (cutting into the time meant for studies, earning a living, socialising, pursuing other interests), and sometimes they see it as something that can be taken up based on 'convenience'. As long as these perceptions are not changed, young people will not see its value or importance, nor understand the positive impact that the experience can have on their lives. Given this reality, organisations will need to take proactive steps to build a sense of ownership and position volunteerism as something that is valued and respected not only by volunteers but also by parents, teachers, and others. One way this can be done is by creating formal spaces in schools, colleges, and other institutions for young people to volunteer. Perhaps once volunteering is well established and systematised in these spaces, it will garner more respect for young volunteers and will simultaneously encourage them to see volunteering in a more positive light.

4. The study suggests that young people are more willing to volunteer when it offers them some value (training, a career in the sector, etc.), or fulfill their desire for recognition (in the form of certificates, letters of recommendation, and other tokens of appreciation). Many organisations also feel that young people today are preoccupied with their studies or career plans, which leaves them with little time to gain a deeper understanding of social issues. As a result they do not desire to work in the social sector. In Delhi, the organisations felt that these challenges could be overcome by :

- Offering opportunities for exposure, recruitment, orientation, training, and skill development (including self-development and social responsibility).
- Focusing on role definition, induction, and placement of volunteers in a structured way.
- Identifying, motivating, and retaining committed volunteers: this could be done through mentoring, reviewing, feedback, and appraisal, as well as through recognition of the volunteers' contribution (non-monetary rewards such as participation in seminars, library membership, certificates).
- Facilitating an attitude change, so that volunteers take their specific commitments seriously, even if these are limited.
- Offering teaching and tutoring support, including in-depth orientation to social issues and building awareness of volunteering opportunities.

### **Building Volunteer Management Capacities in Organisations**

1. As the study reveals, a major challenge in promoting volunteerism lies in the under-capacity of organisations to manage volunteers. Most of the challenges in mobilising, retaining, and sustaining volunteers could be addressed by developing better volunteer management practices within organisations.

To achieve this, organisations could undergo capacity-building workshops on teamwork and volunteer management, technical skills training, fund raising, and establishing an efficient system of sourcing and placing volunteers.

Building the capacity of volunteer coordinators could be another way, which would enable them to design effective workshops and appropriate programmes, to take up sensitive and relevant issues for action, to conceptualise learning from events, activities and issues and to place volunteers in the most suitable positions and projects.

In Delhi, both youth-led and non-youth-led organisations identified the most important capacity-building requirements as follows:

- Ways to offer opportunities for exposure, recruitment, orientation, training, and skill development (including self-development and social responsibility).
- Ways of setting up a structured volunteer programme.
- Ways of identifying, motivating, and retaining committed volunteers.
- Ways of bringing about an attitude change, so that volunteers take their specific commitments seriously, even if these are limited.
- Resource mobilisation and funding support for organisations working with volunteers full time.
- Developing administrative guidance and support systems for volunteer management.

2. While it appears from the study that there are sufficient numbers of young people available for volunteering, it also appears that turnovers are high in the area of youth volunteerism. This means that more volunteers need to be recruited constantly. To do this, organisations need to institute a systematic and planned recruitment process and adopt structured volunteer mobilisation efforts.

3. Almost no organisation covered in the study makes any effort to retain a young volunteer who might want to leave. While this shows respect for the other part of the volunteer's life – which is encouraging, it also shows organisations may not have an ability to request volunteers to continue their association with the organisation or with the cause. Organisations will need to make efforts to proactively retain volunteers within the sector, which can be done by building an attitude of citizenship among volunteers.





One of the organisations in Delhi functions entirely with the support of volunteers, and specifically asks for an intensive commitment of five hours a week for a minimum of 2 years from its volunteers. The nature of involvement of these volunteers clearly goes against the common belief that work cannot be done by young volunteers who are perceived as unskilled, non-serious and uncommitted.

**PART 1**

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STUDY REPORT 2



Qualitative Study of Volunteerism  
among Youth in  
Delhi, Mumbai and Orissa



## **BACKGROUND**

*iVolunteer, the flagship programme of MITRA Technology Foundation aims at creating a volunteering mindset and infrastructure in India to reach out to potential volunteers and make volunteering easy and rewarding. In order to understand more about the views and attitudes of young people regarding volunteering and community service, to understand their needs, motivations and expectations from volunteering, iVolunteer through ICG Consultants Pvt. Ltd. conducted a study in three Indian cities – Delhi, Mumbai and Bhubaneswar. The qualitative study comprised six focus groups (of approximately 50 young people), carefully distributed and constituted to represent both young men and women, a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and volunteers and non-volunteers.*

**The following is an analytical synopsis of this study, which seeks to bring before us the following:**

- A•** Findings: Views and attitudes of young people towards volunteering
- B•** Related findings
- C•** Responses of youth on ideas to promote youth volunteerism
- D•** Recommendations to encourage and nurture youth volunteerism

### **A. FINDINGS: VIEWS AND ATTITUDES OF YOUNG PEOPLE TOWARDS VOLUNTEERING**

1. The study involving the six focus group discussions gave a clear message that many of the young people do not have an understanding about volunteering, which in most cases stems from the fact that they have had no exposure to volunteering in any form at all, no motivation to volunteer and no role models/examples to follow.

Ten percent of respondents who displayed a definite and positive attitude towards volunteering and showed empathy for those less fortunate than themselves, had been exposed to the idea in senior school and college. Their experiences in volunteerism, often undertaken by compulsion or as the easier choice, had nevertheless introduced them to the idea, given them experiences that were critical in cultivating empathy and sensitivity and built a lasting interest in volunteering.

2. The study reveals that the concept of volunteering draws different kinds of responses and attitudes from people with and without volunteering experiences. While respondents with volunteering experiences describe volunteering as admirable, enjoyable, (emotionally) rewarding, beneficial and satisfying, youth with no volunteering experiences do not consider volunteering either admirable or enjoyable, or rewarding or beneficial.

Contrary to the above, however, both volunteers and non-volunteers agree that voluntary work imparts great benefits to one's inner self, engendering feelings of peace, happiness, satisfaction and pride.



3. The study also reveals that most young people are uncomfortable with and skeptical about the idea of working without getting something in return and desire recognition and reward for their efforts. Desired recognition could be in different forms such as certificates, visible acknowledgement of work and successful projects. Young people, through volunteering, also aspire for:

- Personality development, lessons in social skills, social interaction, public speaking and other measures that would boost their confidence and poise.
- Team building activities – outings, excursions, etc.
- Training, entertainment, etc.
- Opportunities for skill improvement, learning.
- Relevant work experience, practical knowledge (project planning, work scheduling).
- Monetary rewards (though it ran the risk of being seen as payment and then drawing comparison with other forms of employment).

Other rewards include the satisfaction of seeing the difference one can make.

4. It was clear from the study that a number of factors and/or perceptions undermine the voluntary impulse of young people today. These include:

- Practical hurdles and genuine economic problems: These include lack of time and inconvenient timings; constraints at home; commuting problems over long distances; concerns about safety, especially for girls; need to compete for jobs in a highly competitive world.
- Difficult to find a 'cultural fit' with an NGO: The absence of a 'personality match' between the volunteer and the NGO staff, or a difference of opinion between volunteer and NGO staff, is a cause for worry.
- Lack of opportunity and understanding: Young people commonly believe that it is easier to donate money than becoming personally involved and giving up their precious free time.
- Negative reaction from family and community: Voluntary work invites discouragement, objections and gossip from family and friends, especially where involvement of young women is concerned. Women in smaller cities in particular, are a target of suspicion, gossip and speculation, especially about their real motives for volunteering.
- Lack of prestige: Voluntary work does not command adequate prestige, either in the job market or in the marriage market. It is often seen as an embarrassing last choice, taken up by those who could not do better.
- Lack of appreciation of the volunteers: Volunteers are not professional social workers, yet they work as hard and as long and with as much dedication and sincerity. Despite this, they do not get the same recognition.



- Dubious reputation of voluntary sector: NGOs are regarded as frauds (they exist only on paper; do no fieldwork, yet get funds; even if they do work sincerely for a cause, they spend very little money on the cause, using most of the funds on maintaining a staff and administrative set-up and on living well).

Besides the above, the study reveals a key obstacle as ignorance. The lack of examples in public life and celebration of voluntary efforts make many respondents apathetic and cynical towards volunteering and makes them question the purpose and effectiveness of voluntary efforts.

5. It becomes clear from the study that volunteerism has a positive impact on developing the perceptions, values and attitudes of young people.

- During the discussion on role models, the values and priorities of those who have volunteered and those who have not, came across from the examples and prerogatives they cited. The non-volunteers largely hankered after success and the attendant benefits of fame and money. Besides citing celebrities and public figures as role models, they professed admiration for individuals known personally to them, who had started with nothing and had succeeded in creating stable and rich lives from modest beginnings and people with multiple talents. On the other hand, youth who had volunteered applauded self-made people who have achieved excellence in their field (Narayan Murthy, Deepak Chopra, Gandhi, Aamir Khan and, closer to home, their own parents). Some admired people who question boundaries, create their own identities and venture into new fields; they also appreciated those who make money without compromising their moral values and those who use their talents for the good of others (Arundhati Roy, Medha Patkar, Jean Dreze, women heading NGOs). The qualities they respected included leadership, passion, dedication, social skills, positive thinking, a sense of humour and simplicity.
- Most youth who have not volunteered, were optimistic about India's emergence as a dominant power. They regarded infrastructural growth (fly overs, roads, shopping malls, the Delhi Metro, electricity, schools) as evidence of progress. Those with volunteering experience, however, expressed concern about the poor without any prompting.

## **B. RELATED FINDINGS**

- Young people worry greatly about finding suitable employment. That is the first priority for all, except a few. Unemployment is a real concern for most.
- The notion of 'making it in a competitive world' seems to be looming large in the horizon of the youth participants of this study. So much so that there were responses such as 'in these competitive times, anyone who wants to help people without any gain for himself is mad. Life is a struggle.' As a result, altruism becomes a suspect and hard work, having focus, being sensible, goal oriented and serious for gaining personal success and popularity become admirable.

- They all have role models and look up to them greatly. The profiles of these role models vary among different focus groups. Overall, two broad generalisations emerge: Youth from the big metros are fascinated by glamour and stardom and Bhubhaneswar youth believe in the values of simple living and hard work.
- A section of youth from big metros is dazzled by the pleasures that money can buy. Dizzy with the excitement at what life has to offer – shopping malls, movies, fun - they display a complete apathy towards issues of poverty and disadvantage.
- Youth of the lower-middle class are largely fascinated with money, glamour, fame, power, recognise that they lack the education, polish and contacts to really break out of their standard of life. To them, the concept of helping others seems ludicrous when they themselves want to be helped. They reveal deep insecurities about trying to succeed in this world.
- Youth from the metros largely agree that poverty is a problem, but say that alleviating poverty is the government's responsibility and is not an insurmountable difficulty. In contrast, respondents in Bhubaneshwar are more acutely aware of poverty and hunger. They point to the need for people development, not merely economic development; they articulate that the rural poor lack education and skills and hence can neither benefit from new opportunities, nor compete in a globalised economy.
- The youth hold two very different views about fighting poverty. While some feel that both social development (government plans and policies) and economic development are required, others feel that to fight poverty, only economic development is required. They feel that the trickle-down effect would take care of the poor people in due course.
- They display a widespread disillusionment and cynicism about the role that the government, NGOs and individuals play in helping the poor. They blame the leaks in the system for making it difficult for services and benefits to reach the poor and do not blame the government entirely for failure to deliver on its promises.
- Regarding the role of individuals in fighting poverty, they largely voice that individuals can only offer sympathy or perform small acts, such as making donations.





## **C. RESPONSES OF YOUTH ON IDEAS TO PROMOTE YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM**

*To promote youth volunteerism, the researchers put before the young people the concept of a 'one stop shop' for young people. This concept is similar to the shopping malls of the present day – a place which will provide a variety of services to the young people who want to engage with the social sector. This mall would provide short and long term opportunities, besides jobs, internships, fellowships etc.*

1. The concept of a mall drew both positive and negative reactions from the volunteers. Some hailed it enthusiastically as a good first step in attracting people to volunteering. While curiosity would draw them in, awareness and experience would help change attitudes. If the mall could successfully match the needs of NGOs with the skills and interests of volunteers, it would allow young people to discover the best option or opportunity.

The idea of the mall also evoked negative reactions. Respondents predicted that the mall would not draw crowds or evoke much interest. Even if people did come out of curiosity, few would actually volunteer because no one will work without an incentive. The mall would only attract the unemployed and the unemployable. Moreover, the mall itself would need to be advertised and promoted, which some respondents believed was contradictory to the spirit of volunteering, something that is supposedly pure and selfless. Hence the mall may provoke initial interest, but this would not necessarily be translated into action.

2. Four options were suggested by the researchers as ways of engaging young people in the social sector. These were Internship, Fellowship, Entrepreneurship and Paid jobs. Following are the reactions of respondents to each of these options:

### **Internship**

Overall, non-volunteers expressed some interest in this as long as the internship was time bound, promised interesting experiences, paid a stipend, awarded certificates and all expenses were covered and facilities provided, including food. Others felt internships were only useful for those who wished to become professional social workers.

### **Entrepreneurship**

Respondents saw this as relevant for those already in the field who had knowledge of NGO work. Others dismissed it as a 'losers' option', suitable only for people who were incapable of surviving in a competitive environment, or for those who had no commitments or practical worries (that is, rich or retired people). It was not considered a practical option for those who had real-life responsibilities and commitments.

### **Fellowship**

Fellowships, it was generally felt, would attract only those who were seriously interested in making a career in this field. Some respondents expressed an interest if it involved a foreign posting, since such an



assignment could enhance one's CV or resume. Fellowships were not seen as being comparable towards working towards a doctoral degree; while a PhD improved one's career prospects, a fellowship offered nothing that promised to improve the future. It was dismissed as being impractical; the two-year commitment was considered too long. Young people with families to support could not take it up, but it could be suitable for older people in the age groups of 30–50 and 50–60. A stipend was essential. Respondents also felt that there should be no compulsion; if one does not like the work, one should be free to leave.

### **Paid Job**

The notion of a paid job aroused some interest among the respondents. But they feared that this option would draw all the unemployed people, or if no qualifications were needed, it would draw all the unemployable (such as retired people or people from rural areas who were desperate for work).

3. Given below are some of the suggestions provided by young people who were part of the focus groups to enhance volunteering among youth:

- Use testimonials by role models to promote volunteerism.
- Award certificates for volunteering that will be recognised by the government when seeking employment.
- Offer training programmes.
- Offer workshops for personality, social skills, and confidence development.
- Place young people in respected and recognised NGOs.
- Match the beliefs of the volunteer and the ideology of the NGO while placing them.

## **D. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENCOURAGE AND NURTURE YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM**

1. Based on the findings, it is clear that the most effective way of encouraging the volunteering idea would be to boost the morale of volunteers. One way of achieving this could be by positioning volunteerism as an opportunity to belong to a peer group engaged in useful work, which is also simultaneously aspiring towards success.

2. It is encouraging that young people who have had the experience, regard volunteering as enjoyable, rewarding and admirable. This suggests that actual on-the-ground experience can influence the attitude and outlook of even non-volunteers. This calls for sustained introduction activities, ideally at the school and college levels, since the sensitisation required for volunteerism can best happen with young minds. Perhaps the solution lies in making participation in such activities compulsory, as it introduces young people to the idea of volunteerism, makes them sensitive and fosters a lasting interest.

3. Since most respondents admitted to feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, it might be effective if volunteering is put forward as an activity which would give young people opportunities for personality



development and confidence building. If young people see that their efforts are successful (e.g., if a child one has been teaching, passes an exam), it is likely that they would continue to volunteer.

4. However, if volunteering were to prove a negative experience, young people will stay away. Deterrents could be failed efforts, being treated badly by supervisors (for example, being reprimanded by a senior), monotonous work, lack of training leading to poor performance and lack of money.

5. There is a lack of role models in public life. Popular culture and the mass media offer few examples that portray volunteerism as necessary, admirable, or interesting. In this context, testimonials and advertisements by role models could be used to promote volunteerism.

Once the seed of volunteerism has been planted, it will need to be nurtured. Organisations can achieve this in the following ways:

- To offer a selection of NGOs that have been screened for honesty, for possessing good people-management skills and which offer to match the volunteers' skills with suitable opportunities.
- To offer on-the-job training, which will boost the volunteers' self-esteem and hence will enhance their chances of career success. NGOs should train its volunteers in life skills, such as personality development and social skills. This is a deeply felt need.
- Training should be imparted through detailed briefing, orientation, support and guidance by sensitive and gentle superiors, who will not crush the fragile egos and confidence of the volunteers. The study reveals that young people suffer from severe performance anxiety. If the volunteering experience could build self-confidence, it would be worth a lot to young people; however, if it damaged their self-confidence, it could be ruinous.
- Young volunteers should be given tangible rewards such as certificates that acknowledge their work and contribution. Non-tangible rewards would include their sense of satisfaction and pride on successfully executing the assigned projects. Hence, in order to nurture volunteerism, volunteers should be given short projects that have a quick turnaround time, that possess a 'feel-good factor' and a fair chance of success. These would lead to 'easy wins' and encourage young volunteers to take on more.
- Another form of reward would be to provide volunteers with uncommon opportunities for fun and learning. These could include team-building activities such as outings and excursions.
- Once the concept of volunteerism takes root and flourishes, a 'volunteers' mall' or an 'exchange' can be created as a space where volunteers and NGOs could come together for mutual benefit.



**PART 2**

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**CASE STUDIES**



How Voluntary Organisations  
Engage with  
Youth Volunteers





## iVolunteer

### Promoting Volunteerism

When Rahul Nainwal and Shalabh Sahai were studying at the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA), in Gujarat, they did a two-month rural internship in Barabanki, in Uttar Pradesh, with the Barabanki Milk Union, their host organisation. They stayed with a local family while studying the village economy and developing a project with the milk union on setting up milk cooperatives. During the internship, Rahul and Shalabh met leading figures in the non-profit and development field, and this interaction influenced their plans for the future.

They wanted to do something different and innovative, having no interest in pursuing regular jobs. In 2000, during the dot com boom, they set up a portal in association with ICICI Bank, with the aim of connecting volunteers with opportunities in the non-profit sector. The idea was to encourage volunteers to contribute in one of three ways—donating money, donating time and buying goods from artisan and community-based groups. Unfortunately, the idea of establishing an online mass market for listing opportunities and placing volunteers automatically did not prove very successful.



Rahul and Shalabh felt that they needed to change their business model. What was required was an on-the-ground presence and a centre model, staffed by one or two individuals in a volunteer centre, working in collaboration with other organisations. This is how iVolunteer was born in 2001.

The mission of iVolunteer is 'to create a volunteering revolution in India to fight poverty and disadvantage'. It seeks to develop a volunteering infrastructure in the country that provides opportunities to anyone who wants to volunteer and creates value for the non-profits and communities where volunteers work. The aim is not to get volunteers into the social sector but to provide them with the right kind of exposure, so that they can then decide what they want to do with their lives.

Today, iVolunteer has four centres (in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Bangalore) and places about 120 volunteers every month with different organisations. These placements are mostly part time, short term (two months) and event based.

iVolunteer primarily networks with about 300 voluntary organisations across India to place volunteers. It also works with a network of funders, corporations, Indian and international developmental organisations, foreign students and volunteers.

### **Profile of Volunteers**

Volunteers come from all walks of life. College students eager to do something challenging and meaningful during the summer holidays, young people working in the BPO industry looking for a respite from the night shift, software engineers and corporate managers driven by a call of their hearts, 'corporate quitters' looking to shift to the voluntary sector, older or retired people looking to make a contribution to society or do something useful and satisfying, NRIs eager to explore their Indian roots, foreigners interested in rural India—iVolunteer has placed them all with various organisations around the country.

Most volunteers are working professionals and hence one-time volunteering has been a mainstay of all local initiatives. The top areas of volunteers' interests are education, civic issues and the environment.

### **Reaching Out to Potential Volunteers**

iVolunteer reaches out to potential volunteers through the Internet and its website, through targeted advertisements, by setting up kiosks at places where young people gather such as cinema halls and college fairs, through word of mouth and through its network of partner organisations. Staff members do whatever they can to get the message out, from making phone calls, following up through email, to going out and talking to people.

People can choose to volunteer on weekends for two or three months. Others prefer to give time on weekday evenings for one or two months.

Potential volunteers are asked to fill out a volunteering relationship form, describing their expectations and motivations and identifying their skills and interests. This information helps in linking them with the



appropriate organisation. iVolunteer makes every effort to match the right volunteer with the right opportunity and continues to do so even when no suitable opportunity is available right away.

Once a suitable organisation has been identified (this could take a week or so), a staff member escorts the volunteer to the place, introduces him or her to the people who work there, explains what the assignment entails and makes sure in other ways that there is a good fit between individual and opportunity. Simultaneously, the host organisation is also asked to fill out a form describing the qualities it seeks in a volunteer. iVolunteer is in constant touch with volunteers, following up over the telephone and through email. At the end of an assignment, both the volunteer and the host organisation are asked to give written feedback assessing their experience.

### **Specific Programmes**

iVolunteer focuses on structured volunteering, which helps in creating, measuring and demonstrating the value of volunteers' contribution to development. It offers various programmes, each designed for a specific purpose.

- The iVolunteer Service Centres promote and facilitate local volunteering that connects a volunteer to a volunteering opportunity that matches his/her skills, interests and availability.
- Employee Volunteering enables corporate employees to volunteer their time and skills for social good. For instance, the Mentoring Programme, run in association with Udayan Care, a home for orphan children, connects the kids with employees in various corporations, who sign up to be mentors for an initial period of six months. The mentors meet the children on a weekly or fortnightly basis and help them with their studies, career plans, personality development and life skills.
- Volunteer Management Workshops seek to enhance the capacity of non-profits to use volunteers effectively in their programmes.
- International Volunteers helps people from outside India to contribute to the country through volunteering.
- iVolunteer Overseas recruits Indians for two-year voluntary assignments in other developing countries, mostly in Asia and Africa.
- India Fellow is essentially a summer rural volunteer internship where young college students spend six weeks working on community development projects and living in the community. India Fellows gain exposure and are sensitised to the realities and challenges of rural development in India, while contributing positively through structured projects. Candidates are selected on the basis of an interview and group discussion and then under go a two-day comprehensive orientation programme.



At the end of their six-week internship, most fellows report not only a transformation in their understanding of rural India but also a fundamental change in their own self-understanding and self-awareness. Here is what two fellows have to say about their experiences:

*Naishad Kati from Mumbai spent six weeks helping children in a little village called Sagroli, in interior Maharashtra. Somehow he survived his first tryst with rural India—searing heat, prolonged power cuts, lack of water, bad food, snakes, sleeping on a khatiya and so on. He describes the experience as 'extremely rewarding on many levels', learning not only the virtue of patience but also gaining a perspective on his own relatively comfortable city life.*

*Samta Arora from Delhi discovered that 'the rural is not as alien as it seems'. Welcoming the opportunity to visit and experience this 'other' face of India, she found 'all fears and apprehensions gone'. She came away with a changed perspective. 'What more can one ask for? My habits have changed, worries have changed, issues have changed, I have changed,' she says.*

### **A Rewarding and Meaningful Experience**

Indeed, most people find the volunteering experience deeply satisfying, reporting that it has made a lasting impression on them. They say that it removes all negativity and brings about a change of heart. Others describe it as a journey of self-discovery and personal fulfilment.

*When Priyanka Sahai, a student and avid photographer, decided to do something constructive during her summer vacation, iVolunteer placed her with Chetna, an NGO working with children and provided a camera. Priyanka loved photographing the kids' smiling faces and came to appreciate their optimism and resilience in the face of hardship. This 'unforgettable experience', she says, has added a different perspective to her thinking.*

*Driven by a strong desire to help those less fortunate than him, Sandeep Dhiman volunteered with two NGOs. At Mobile Crèches, which helps migrant construction workers in Delhi, he raised funds and worked out a primary research and marketing strategy for a new centre proposed to be set up in Saket. At Sumaitri, an organisation devoted to preventing suicide and helping people in despair, he learned to deal with crisis intervention or suicide prevention with empathy and compassion. Sandeep says that these were the most enriching and rewarding personal experiences of his life. He adds, "It is a journey of discovering oneself yet again with every new experience of dealing with the problems, fears and pressures of others. It is a humbling experience to reappraise your own values and ways and learn from those of others. It is about accepting without questioning and surrendering without qualms. It is about understanding and ascertaining once more the very basic things in life."*



Foreign volunteers, including NRIs who want to reconnect to their roots, sometimes choose to extend the volunteering period from two months to six months. Others make it a point to stay in touch with the host organisation and the people with whom they have worked long after completing their stint. For instance, Amit who worked at Manzil in Delhi went back to visit his former students, who were thrilled to see him.

iVolunteer's mission is 'to create ten thousand happy and rewarding volunteering experiences'. It believes that every individual has something to contribute and the potential to make a difference. However, lack of encouragement, knowledge and opportunity often prevent good intentions from being translated into action. iVolunteer works towards overcoming these challenges to create the critical mass of volunteers whose fulfilling experiences will motivate others to join and evolve into a volunteering movement that contributes effectively towards development.

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## Patang

### Volunteerism for Youth Development

Mahanadi, the longest river of Orissa, enters into the Sambalpur district of western Orissa from the north western border, and it is here that the famous Hirakud Multipurpose Dam Project is built. The main town in the district, a bustling commercial centre, is also called Sambalpur, and about 18 kilometres away from this town, is Burla.

Burla as a town grew as a result of the dam, which required many bureaucrats to come and live close to the project site. They were settlers here, not really 'belonging' to the place, and hence with little ownership over the common spaces. Over the past few decades, 3 universities also grew here, making it the primary educational centre of the region, attracting thousands of students from across many states. However, in spite of it all, western Orissa, unlike the eastern part of the same state, is underdeveloped. Indices of the area on poverty, health, education show that this area is losing out.

Young people come here to study, and move out as soon as they finish, leaving nobody to influence the 'common space'. And even if they wish to take ownership, there are no platforms available for young people here to engage in positive social action. Sambalpur in western Orissa holds little for its youth.



Having grown up in Sambalpur, Rita Mishra was aware of these conditions. She had spent many years with Pravah, a Delhi-based NGO, and as the team leader of one of Pravah's youth programmes called SMILE (Students Mobilisation Initiative for Learning through Exposure), she had seen how volunteerism helped numerous young people become socially responsible and proactive citizens, how volunteerism helped them develop ownership over common spaces, how many matured into social changemakers. And she was a strong believer in Pravah's philosophy - as youth are the future leaders and citizens of the country, investing time and effort in them means investing in the development and progress of society as a whole.

So, with her years of experience with youth and the belief that in Orissa, like anywhere else, young people have the potential to change society, and a strong sense to give something back to her native state, Rita took a sabbatical, got a small fellowship support from IGSSS (Indo-Global Social Service Society), packed her bags and left for Orissa in May 2003. Shortly afterwards, Pravah also started supporting Rita's endeavor with another fellowship, and eventually supported her with mentoring and planning organisation development processes.

Rita's idea was to launch a structured intervention, to build social awareness and leadership skills among young people, channelise their energy towards positive social action, and in the process, build a band of changemakers, who would own the common space and contribute to the development of the area. To give shape to her idea, Patang was born – as the first NGO in the area, which focused singularly on youth development and citizenship action. A local organisation named MASS helped Rita tremendously during the start-up phase of her intervention.

Today, Patang is a full fledged non-governmental organisation that works with adolescents and young people in Orissa, and uses volunteerism as its key tool for the purpose of youth development and building youth leadership. Students, mainly from the colleges in Burla, form the base of Patang's volunteers.

### **Engaging with Volunteers**

Patang encourages young people to move out of their comfort zone and protected shells, and engage with the wider society around them in a proactive manner, through volunteering. The aim however, is to transform volunteers from being followers to becoming leaders. Hence, through its work, Patang supports youth volunteers in three ways:

- Developing their personality through meetings and workshops on self-awareness, communication, leadership, and team-building skills.
- Broadening their horizons by facilitating them to volunteer and learn from the community
- Channelising their energy, experiences and skills towards social action to impact positive changes in their environment.

Bhumisuta Sahu, a final year student at NAC College in Burla, is a volunteer who has walked the entire distance with Patang. When she attended a Patang presentation at her college, Bhumi did not understand



what was happening as the discussions and participative ways of working were new to her. But she slowly became a part of the core group of 30–35 volunteers, who came together and initiated social action campaigns on some specific issues. Bhumi and other volunteers worked independently on the Green Burla campaign, mobilised other students to join Patang, organised presentations in colleges, created awareness on a range of issues, contributed to the Patang newsletter, and mobilised local resources for various initiatives. This was how she begun her journey from 'Isolation to Participation', from 'Me to We'.

In general, Patang mobilises/recruits student-volunteers at local colleges through formal presentations, workshops and informal interactions.

A firm believer in the philosophy 'we learn best by doing', and that 'we gain from what we do', Patang promotes youth social action through offering diverse opportunities to its volunteers. Patang organises regular skill-based workshops not only to mobilise volunteers, but to give tools in the hands of a young volunteer to go out and act for change. For instance, after organising a theatre workshop where volunteers are trained in theatre skills, the organisation further supports them to use the new skills to create and perform street plays on social issues. In this way young volunteers actively highlight and generate discussions on a range of social concerns within their communities.

In the group meetings, Patang helps volunteers inform themselves on diverse social issues, identify how it affects their community and develop responses to share this knowledge. Usually Patang puts forward a range of issues affecting their communities for the volunteers to choose from and respond to them through action projects. The organisation also supports volunteers to design the projects in a way that enhances the volunteer's skills, talents, knowledge, and commitment.

To further a volunteer's learning and ability to work for change, Patang collaborates with other youth-oriented and voluntary organisations in and around Orissa, and organises rural visits/placements for 4-5 weeks for volunteers, to provide them with first-hand exposure to important social issues. Volunteers are placed with various NGOs such as those involved in working with communities, displaced by the building of dams or those which look at sustainable development models. They study development programmes, such as seed banks, forest protection committees, health programmes, self-help groups, tribal development projects, watershed management projects, or night schools, that are run by different NGOs. They live with villagers to experience the life of the local people. These placements are as much about the volunteers contributing to these communities as about what they learn from the communities. And when they return, volunteers attend feedback camps, which are organised by Patang to support them assimilate their learnings from their exposures, receive feedback and make plans for future projects arising out of their experiences. The volunteers themselves play a large role in deciding the projects, which could range from helping leprosy patients, setting up women's self-help groups or working with school children. Working in teams being a pre-requisite of volunteering in Patang, each volunteer receives regular feedback in terms of teamwork, participation, and the areas that need further attention.



## **Measuring Success of Volunteerism**

A key success for Patang has been overturning conventional notions about youth potential, which is often measured exclusively by the yardstick of academic achievement. Patang volunteers have actively got out of their limited worlds and claimed a stake over common spaces with complete ownership. They have independently led campaigns on Right to Information, industrial pollution and water shortage. They have promoted eco-friendly festivals such as Eco Visarjan and Eco Diwali, raised funds for blind children by selling handmade greeting cards, collected money for the victims of the December 2004 Tsunami, performed plays on the harmful effects of polythene bags, conducted life skills education workshops for adolescents in schools, coordinated with schools for holding theatre performances for generating awareness, shared their experiences, and therefore the benefits of volunteering in the All India Radio, and contributed articles, poems, and case studies to social newsletters. In the process, some have even travelled 18 kilometres one way on cycle, just to attend a meeting!

Youth aspiration too is getting re-defined slowly in this small pocket in western Orissa, thanks to the efforts of Patang. Not only are Patang volunteers today e-mail savvy and adept at networking, their exposure to the wider world is making the world itself bigger for them. A case in point is Rajesh Meher, a young man from the remote region of Bhawani Patna, who recently underwent a stringent screening process and got selected for a 6 month long international volunteering programme. Instances such as these are of great value to Patang, because these are the ones that will eventually enhance the exposure and aspirations of the young people in Orissa, and eventually have a cascading effect, leading to larger social change.

To the organisation, it is important that many volunteers have overcome their shyness, and now speak or perform confidently in public, and participate actively in discussions. It is equally important that Bhumisuta Sahu, who, after completing her stint as a volunteer now plants trees in the family garden, also avoids the use of polythene, and recycles waste products. The volunteering opportunities and the exposure visits enabled Bhumi to discover her own strengths and abilities and identify her goals in life. Today, she is a part of the Patang team, and is being mentored by Rita to further hone her skills as a social activist.

"Here I got the space to talk to boys, to interact with others, to put forward my ideas, and to discover my talents and skills ... My circle of friends expanded after I became a Patang volunteer. Happiness was the most important thing that was poured into me at this time", says Bhumi. To Patang, this is success, because in this instance volunteerism has contributed to the learning curve of a young person, redefined learning for her, and has influenced her very deeply at the personal level – so much so that the ownership is demonstrated by the personal life choices she has made.

According to Patang however, none of this work could have been possible had the organisation not been successful in winning the trust of the people when it started out. For in Burla, just like in any small town in India, society is traditional and conservative. Hence, even having young men and women together for a group meeting was initially extremely difficult. So the first phase of Patang's journey focused on just one thing – building trust and gaining credibility within the community. Patang invested much energy into this, and



today, successful relationships form the basis on which all of Patang's work rests. The way it is now, a Patang volunteer, whether a young man or a woman, is no longer viewed with suspicion in Burla, even if s/he sits in meetings with people of the opposite gender, travels miles away for a campaign, or even goes out of town for an exposure. It is alright for even young girls to go for rural exposure visits, if the visit is for any of Patang's programmes. Patang feels that through investing in relationships and building a positive image about volunteerism, it is also breaking social stereotypes and gender roles. That is a success for the organisation.

### **Moving Ahead**

In only a few years, Patang established itself as a serious youth volunteering organisation in Orissa. At present, Patang has a direct outreach of 1,000 and an indirect outreach of 10,000. The core group of volunteers is between 30 to 35.

The organisation now plans to consolidate the existing action groups by initiating social action campaigns involving all volunteers and partner organisations.

However, Patang's primary focus continues to remain on promoting, supporting, and building a culture of volunteerism among the youth in western Orissa - a culture which encourages young people to break through the barriers of shyness and self-consciousness, inertia and disinterest, alienation and isolation, and take charge of their own lives as well as of the community in which they live, and effect positive changes in their environment. This is clear from what one of Patang's young volunteers has to say about volunteerism

"In my opinion, the youth should be involved in voluntary work because they are the change agents of the future. If they are guided in a proper way, they can make the right decisions easily... (and) solve lots of problems at their level. Through volunteering we can know about our life and can relate to or associate people with us directly."

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Case study by Durba Ghose  
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## Pravah

### From Volunteerism to Active Citizenship

Pravah's journey began on December 6, 1992, with the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Violent riots followed this incident, resulting in a deep divide between the people. For the founder members of Pravah, it was a moment for deep reflection about a fundamental question - 'What is the purpose of our existence if we can not respond to such conflicts in any significant way?'

This is the story of Pravah. It is not about a lost temple or mosque, but of how a group of young people with jobs and careers decided to take action. It was not easy; although these people had some experience in volunteering, they were not clear how best to move forward on this one. After all, how can a community overcome deep-rooted hatred to construct a new sense of collective identity?

After much deliberation, they began by organising a workshop. Here they invited a diverse group of young people to share their feelings and ideas - about issues of identity, diversity, tolerance and making a difference – and urged them to share these with the very people who were spreading mistrust within the different communities.

The experience helped this group understand that deep-rooted attitudes are difficult to change. They realised that in order to make a real difference, they needed to work more intensively and encourage young people to become better-informed and proactive citizens. Instead of cleaning up the aftermath of social



conflicts, they decided to help prevent them by building in young people the skills that will enable them to claim common spaces and engage positively with conflicts. This eventually led to the birth of Pravah.

### **Facilitating Transformations in Different Ways**

The next step was a series of workshops designed specifically for adolescents called Positive Me. The workshops aimed at helping young people explore and understand violence within and outside themselves as well as develop the skills to address issues for change. At the end of one workshop, one student shared,

*"... I have discovered a whole new way of looking at myself and the world around me. Till we discussed the 1984 riots in this workshop, it was a closed topic at my house. My parents had celebrated when the Sikhs were massacred. My mother had even distributed sweets. For many years, I have known it was wrong, yet never known what to do with the turmoil in me. This workshop has given me the purpose, courage and conviction to at least begin – convince my parents that there was surely another way to think and another way act."*

Personal transformations such as this convinced the founder members that yes, it was possible to facilitate young people to learn about social issues and engage them in direct social action. Volunteerism and exposure became their strategy for teaching personal development and active citizenship. Since then Pravah has facilitated thousands of youth to volunteer through a range of programmes such as SMILE, From Me to We, FUN and Change Looms. Although these programmes target young people from different age groups and profiles, the common thread running through all of them is the journey from self to society. Beginning with self-reflection on personal values, Pravah encourages the young person to think about social issues and take responsibility for building agreement and finding solutions to social conflicts. This process empowers young individuals to take leadership and initiate social change.

One of Pravah's interventions named 'From Me to We' teaches school students to make connections between different aspects of their world and to acknowledge, enhance and celebrate the interdependence in the world around them. Covering a range of topics such as interpersonal skills, leadership styles, appreciating diversity, conflict management and win-win strategies, the programme ends with social action projects to demonstrate the potential that every individual has to influence her/his community and make a positive difference.

*"The journey with Pravah has given me a lot to cherish and learn. When I say 'learn', I mean growing – as a professional, as a citizen, and above all, as an individual. Even if I keep aside the fact that the film club work helped me professionally, other aspects are probably more important – things like trusting others, working together, acknowledging and respecting the other's perspective, rising above our differences of background and even thought."*

- Sushant Arora, SMILE volunteer



Pravah believes that social change stems from the individual. All changemakers experience some turning point in their lives which serves as the driving force toward social change. Through group and individual exposure visits, Pravah's programmes provide young volunteers the opportunities to experience these moments and turn them into learning events. A critical part of this transformation is volunteering and experiencing a world from a different perspective.

*Komal, a student in one of Delhi's better-known schools, went with Pravah on a 7-day FUN camp to Wardha, Maharashtra. A gentle girl, Komal rarely smiled and tended to stay aloof. By the last day of the camp, however, she was actively involved in shramdaan (voluntary work in the community). Her team was busy building a kuccha (temporary) road in the village, a project that involved getting dirty... Not just with dust but also with cow dung.*

*There were some initial protests from the students, but instead of turning away from the task at hand, the same aloof Komal heaved a heavy tasla (basket) of gobar (cow dung) onto her head and got to work. Her gobar-streaked face was filled with joy and laughter as she went about her work; laying the gobar onto the path, levelling it out with her hands, using those same hands to move her hair back from her face and then jumping on the road to press the dung into place. Volunteers had transformed her and made her realise the hard work that goes into building roads, something she had never appreciated before from watching the daily wage laborers toil in the city.*

The FUN camps give urban school students a chance to confront their biases and stereotypes and to appreciate a different way of life through volunteering. Carrying a pot of water from a well or making salt barefoot in the hot desert demonstrate the interconnectedness of rural and urban lives and enable students to appreciate the little things they take for granted back home.

*"At every stage I could feel a change in myself. And today I am changed. I can see that I am a part of the tree whose bearings also consist of those who live far away and are not so well to do."*

*- Ankit, School Student*

The SMILE programme creates opportunities for college students to understand social realities, learn leadership skills and demonstrate active citizenship through volunteering.

*Bidhan Chandra Singh came to Delhi from the Deoghar District of Bihar with a dream of clearing his civil services examination and getting a secure job. However, things took a turn when he discovered Pravah. He signed up for a 10-day workshop where he learned about several social issues and was introduced to street theatre. He describes those 10 days as a rebirth. A shy and introverted*



*person, the supportive environment at Pravah helped him come out of his shell and discover his second voice, one full of 'rhythm and life'.*

*Bidhan's exposure trip with SMILE took him to 'URMUL', an NGO based in Rajasthan. This turned out to be a defining moment in his life as his visit coincided with the kidnapping of Sanjay Ghosh, a key member of URMUL. Moved beyond words by the passion and commitment of the community to their leader and his ideals, Bidhan knew then that he wanted to be part of a movement where one's work went beyond personal benefits to impact instead the entire community.*

*On his return to Delhi, Bidhan decided to forget the civil services examination and instead joined Jamia Millia Islamia University where he earned his Masters in Social Work. All through his student life he continued to volunteer in action projects, events and workshops on various social issues, even joining a team of volunteers who Pravah sent to Chamoli to help the survivors of the earthquake. These experiences helped him to understand himself and his role in society better, build his confidence and develop his professional skills. Today Bidhan is working with Greenpeace, an organisation renowned for its campaigns to protect the environment. The dream with which he came to Delhi is no longer important because he is happy with his life today. And because deep down within, Bidhan knows he is making a positive difference.*

### **Making the Process Work**

What makes this process work? Working with young volunteers requires creative and fun methodologies that engage and challenge them. Also essential is a supportive, informal and encouraging environment where young people feel at ease to express their views and have the space to take ownership and make their own decisions. At the root of Pravah's programmes is the recognition that each young person is unique and benefits from a deep and intensive mentoring relationship.

*Nishi and Anirban started Dhriiti, an organisation working in the field of enterprise development. As participants of Change Looms, a programme for young social entrepreneurs, they were mentored by Pravah so that they could strengthen and develop Dhriiti as an organisation:*

*"More than the structured spaces in Change Looms, it was the informal interactions with Ashraf which really helped. She was able to share her views while giving us the space of doing what we wanted. It gave us the freedom to try it out for ourselves. This approach put us in a comfort zone where we could share, learn from Pravah's experience and analyse the learnings for ourselves*



*before trying it out. The fact that Pravah can understand another point of view without actually interfering with Dhriiti gives us the space that we want. An approach that dictated what is right or wrong would have been difficult for us to accept. Instead the approach adopted was: this is Pravah's experience, this is what we know, you may take it, if you feel it's what Dhriiti needs, otherwise, it's fine too ... it's your call." - Anirban and Nidhi*

And that is exactly Pravah's philosophy:

*We are there to guide you, but the journey is your own.*

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## SPIC MACAY

### Promoting Learning through Work

In 1991, Anshuman Pandey, a first-year student at the Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, saw a simple, nondescript black-and-white flyer on the college notice board announcing a sitar recital by Ustad Shahid Parvez hosted by an organisation called SPIC MACAY (Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture). With no particular interest in Indian classical music, but thinking that the event might



offer something different from the usual college routine, Anshuman turned up at the venue. At the recital, he was told by a woman volunteer from IP College to remove his shoes since it was a *baithak* session. He refused and walked away in a huff, his dignity affronted. A few minutes later he returned with some friends, determined to insist on his right to walk in without removing his shoes. An argument followed, and his embarrassed friends slipped away. Then a volunteer bent down and started taking off Anshuman's shoes. Stunned by this act, Anshuman could not resist and was led by the arm by the woman volunteer to the very front row, directly before the artist. He was now well and truly stuck. The recital lasted two and a half hours. He found the sitar music boring but enjoyed the tabla playing. As he was leaving, the woman volunteer invited him to attend SPIC MACAY's weekly Saturday meetings on the lawns of Lady Irwin College.

Although finding the whole recital 'too heavy', Anshuman went for the meeting impelled by curiosity and the desire to meet new people, especially girls. He hung around, doing nothing much apart from observing the people.

At the second meeting, the founder of SPIC MACAY, Dr Kiran Seth, asked him to become a volunteer. Perhaps Anshuman could get involved with *The Eye*, the SPIC MACAY magazine, or he could be a school-level coordinator, or he could help in organising a state convention, or he could take charge of artiste coordination. SPIC MACAY volunteers had plenty to do, Dr Seth said, so Anshuman could decide where his interest lay.

At the third meeting, Anshuman took up the state-level coordination for the whole of Uttar Pradesh, becoming responsible for handling thirty chapters of SPIC MACAY in the state. He was appointed treasurer, given some money and told to take the train to Lucknow the next day. He had no training, no preparation, no experience, yet he was entrusted with this huge responsibility. As the UP central state coordinator, Anshuman met senior citizens and other notables in Lucknow. He was received by a senior bureaucrat in a car flashing a red light. He stayed at the Chief Secretary's house. He met the director of IIM Lucknow and the VC of Lucknow University. All this attention was a heady feeling for a first-year college student. '*Iss organisation mein dum hai*,' decided Anshuman, impressed by all the *khatirbazi* and importance given to him. As a young volunteer, he recalls, he was attracted by the incentive of meeting important people and accomplished artists, hoping that some of the glamour would rub off on him too. That was his mindset then and those were his expectations.

As Anshuman became increasingly involved with SPIC MACAY as a volunteer, he discovered a whole new world. SPIC MACAY organised thousands of performances and concerts all over India, and soon he met like-minded young people from every corner of the country. He interacted with the living legends of Indian classical music and dance, artists like Ustad Bismillah Khan, Pandit Ravi Shankar and the Dagar Bandhu. He spent time with theatre director Habib Tanvir and film-maker Shyam Benegal. His voluntary work led to a nine-year relationship with Pandit Ravi Shankar, which still continues. He met thousands of



delegates at the annual conventions held in different cities each year. '*I am a Kaamsen, not a Tansen,*' says Anshuman. And it is precisely his *kaam* that the artists appreciated.

### **Recruitment and Orientation**

SPIC MACAY launches its recruitment and orientation programme at the beginning of the college year, in late July–early August. Since there are many clubs competing for student members, it is important to reach out to potential volunteers right at the beginning of the academic year, before they become too busy with other activities and join other organisations. Groups of senior SPIC MACAY volunteers and a few fresh volunteers who are considered responsible (those who have the 'spark') go around the different colleges and meet student union representatives, coordinators and directors of extracurricular activities and principals and professors, seeking their help in spreading the word about their work. They put up posters and notices inviting volunteers to join SPIC MACAY.

Now when Anshuman Pandey goes out to colleges to mobilise volunteers for SPIC MACAY, he is careful not to lecture the students about the glories of Indian culture and civilisation, because in his experience young people do not respond well to this 'heavy stuff' and '*lecturebazi*'. Instead, he recounts anecdotes describing his own interactions with world-famous musicians and dancers and all that he has learned from them during one-on-one encounters. He knows that the narration of one telling and amusing incident in an entertaining and engaging manner is far more effective in recruiting and mobilising volunteers than instructing students about the need to uphold and preserve India's illustrious heritage and patrimony. Young people follow by example. Hence it is very important that they should be inspired and be led by someone who is genuinely passionate and committed to the cause.

At the orientation programme, students are shown a short promotional film on SPIC MACAY, featuring artists and well-wishers who describe their experiences with the organisation. Anshuman, who conceived and helped produce the film, says that he stops the screening at the point when Ustad Bismillah Khan delivers the punch line: '*SPIC MACAY baddi umda cheez hai.*' He then begins interacting with the audience, describing his own negative experience at the very first concert that he attended, the one where he had refused to take off his shoes. He then describes the change in his own attitude and his gradually deepening involvement as a volunteer. He characterises this as having '*crossed the river to the other side*', a metaphor emphasising the transformation in his own understanding of his life's purpose and mission.

Potential volunteers are invited to attend the weekly meetings on the lawns of Lady Irwin College and observe the proceedings before they decide how they wish to contribute. This depends on factors such as the volunteers' level of motivation and commitment, their areas of interest and how much time and effort they are willing to put in. If they are unable to attend meetings regularly for one reason or the other, they can still contribute by making telephone calls or by emailing and working online.



SPIC MACY is a voluntary movement in the true sense. There are only two salaried staff members - a peon and an accountant. Thousands of volunteers in India and abroad keep the movement afloat. There are 180 active chapters in India and 50 chapters abroad. More than 2,000 concerts are held every year in India alone. Since everything is done by student volunteers, there is sometimes a lag in organisational efficiency. For instance, the website is not updated as often as it should. Nevertheless, the voluntary spirit survives and flourishes. The Eye magazine too has been relaunched.

### **The Benefits of Voluntary Work**

SPIC MACAY volunteers graduate to a new level of confidence and maturity as they learn to handle immense responsibilities. They receive valuable experience and on-the-job training while working in the field, interacting with all kinds of people, learning to juggle complicated schedules, overseeing logistical details, negotiating problems, soothing the ruffled feathers of temperamental artists. They hone their organisational skills while coordinating events, networking with volunteers in other states, scheduling the circuits of artists on tours, raising funds and supervising publicity campaigns. They evolve as human beings quickly and gain a higher level of understanding and sensitivity, believes Anshuman.

"A good volunteer is one who understands the meaning of *nishkama karma*, selfless and sincere service without thought of reward or gain", observes Dr Kiran Seth. Of course, this is easier said than done, especially in today's world where young people often expect some form of recognition for their time and effort, perhaps in the form of a certificate or other non-monetary compensation. True volunteerism can be a very rewarding experience, but it is also very difficult to remain committed because few people recognise the intangible returns. Those who do, stay the course. SPIC MACAY volunteers do not receive any feedback on their performance.

Anshuman's voluntary experience has proved useful in the real world. With his experience at SPIC MACAY, he has set up Spandan Communications, an event management company that handles public relations and production, seminars and conferences, motivational camps and entertainment events all over India. He has also launched the popular 'Music in the Park' programme in Delhi, with corporate sponsorship and logistical support from NDMC; Spic Macay arranges for the musicians to perform at these free concerts, which are attended by thousands of music lovers.

### **A Legacy of Volunteerism**

In some cases, SPIC MACAY has influenced three generations of volunteers. Members of the first generation today occupy important positions in society as professors, teachers, diplomats, scientists, bureaucrats and other professionals. They make sure that SPIC MACAY events receive a platform wherever possible, both in India and abroad. Many of the second generation volunteers, who largely belonged to the IITs, now live abroad, and still bear the flag of SPIC MACAY. As volunteers raise families, many encourage



their children to learn Indian classical dance and music. And all of them know that they are always welcome at the Saturday meetings on the lawns of Lady Irwin College to catch up with old friends and lend a helping hand.

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## The Youth Parliament

### Linking Youth with Society

In March 2004, Tarini Barat, a young Delhiite was waiting for her Class XII board exam results. So when two of her friends from Shri Ram School suggested that Tarini attends an introductory meeting of the Youth Parliament, she readily agreed. She was familiar with The Youth Parliament to the extent that these friends of hers were volunteers with the organisation, as was Ishita Chaudhry, a senior at school.

The meeting that Tarini attended was what the Youth Parliament calls 'Regrouping', which is organised by the Facilitative Branch of Youth Parliament to initiate a new project. Participants/volunteers explore different issues that interest them in these meetings. A regrouping can range in size from 10 to 90 volunteers, depending on the nature and size of the project under consideration.

Tarini found Youth Parliament a very warm and welcoming place. The views of newcomers were taken seriously and given respect. Participants were encouraged to express their opinions. People did not seek to impose their views on others. This non-judgmental attitude and positive philosophy appealed to Tarini and she soon became a volunteer and got involved in her first Youth Parliament project, called 'If Looks Could Kill'. The project dealt with the psychological, social and medical effects of stereotypes linked with appearances and young people, an issue that Tarini was deeply interested in. The project sought to understand the psychology behind stereotypes and peer pressure, the role of physical appearance in the



media, law and advertising and the harmful effects of this obsession leading to dangers such as anorexia and even suicide. As a part of the project, volunteers received both in-house training and training from professionals such as counselors, psychologists, doctors, advertising and media people and lawyers. They also undertook simulation exercises and games and mock discussions and conducted pilot projects on specific aspects. Needless to say, Tarini contributed as much to the project as she learned from it.

### **The Vision of The Youth Parliament**

The vision of The Youth Parliament is to bridge the gap between young people and their environment. It operates as a resource base, offering help to young people in creating, developing, designing and executing projects on any subject and through any medium in which they are interested. It provides the materials, skills, training and support for the project, including communication skills, conflict resolution skills and life skills.

The Youth Parliament believes in facilitating young people to engage with one's society and environment. It is open to a whole range of perspectives and opinions, believing that we should have all the information we need to make an informed decision. It seeks to incorporate the interests and passions of volunteers into different projects. The Youth Parliament volunteers don't preach. They provide the space and information necessary for young people to make informed decisions for themselves. Volunteers listen with respect to the ideas that young people propose and provide the necessary space, guidance and resources to turn the dream into a reality.

The Youth Parliament has a strong base of very committed volunteers, ranging in age from 13 to 28, from school students to college graduates. Age is no barrier. It offers opportunities to all people to shine and pursue their interests. The social or economic background of volunteers do not matter. What matters is their commitment to an idea. If a volunteer has an idea for a project, The Youth Parliament will match the volunteer's commitment without compromising on the quality or the spirit of the venture. Do you want to approach the United Nations with a proposal on HIV/AIDS prevention? Do you want to conduct theatre workshops for street children? Are you interested in working in the fields of rehabilitation, medical care, shelter and special education? The Youth Parliament can help in turning your ideas into concrete projects.

Since 2002, The Youth Parliament has supported more than eight hundred young people to work in areas such as:

- Education and development for young people in rural and urban India.
- Substance abuse and the adolescent.
- Corruption at the young citizen's level.
- Gender and sexuality (focusing on issues of rape, child sexual abuse, homosexuality and gender bias).
- Disaster relief and rehabilitation (Tsunami relief work, Kashmir earthquake relief work).



- Community initiatives for underprivileged families in New Delhi.
- Youth voters and the political system.
- Media ethics and social responsibility.
- HIV/AIDS.
- Performing arts (film, photography, music and theatre).
- Peer pressure and its consequences for urban young people.
- Right to Information Act and the legal system.

### **Becoming a Volunteer and an Active Citizen**

After completing the Appearances project, Tarini left Youth Parliament to join college. But she returned only after two months. She had strong reasons for this - her volunteer friends there made it a whole lot of fun, she was familiar with the work of the organisation, she loved the atmosphere and the fact that the Youth Parliament people made efforts to know each other and formed strong personal bonds. She was also deeply interested in the issues that she could work on if she was a volunteer at The Youth Parliament.

Upon rejoining, Tarini worked as the Programme Coordinator, along with two other volunteers, for the Right to Information Programme of The Youth Parliament, which aimed to make the RTI law comprehensible and accessible to young people, to encourage them to engage with the legal and political systems and to understand technical procedures such as voters' registration as part of their rights and duties as citizens. Around this time she also coordinated a project entitled 'Demystifying Homosexuality'. In the process of running multiple projects, Tarini started to learn to handle responsibility. The year was still 2004, and Tarini was a 17 year old, who had just finished school.

Tarini is now a college student. She is also a Programme Coordinator at The Youth Parliament, and is responsible for running and monitoring the progress of the various programmes and projects of the organisation with the help of a team of 16 volunteers. To take this role on, Tarini underwent a three month long training in early 2005, which consisted of learning about the history of The Youth Parliament and its work in the past, understanding the functioning of the different branches, familiarising herself with protocol matters (approaching professionals, handling the press, conducting public relations) and developing her skills as a volunteer trainer and mentor. Today as a part of her job, Tarini gives feedback to volunteers, handles training and resources and locates professionals and support groups as and when the need arises.

### **Volunteering Structure**

The core team of The Youth Parliament consists of 100–150 volunteers, who are organised into departments or branches. Depending on their skills, areas of interest and the medium with which they want to work, Youth Parliament volunteers can choose to be in any of the spaces which are available to them.



- Volunteers interested in developing their communication skills can join the Facilitative Branch.
- Those interested in audiovisual communications can join the Technical Branch, where they can learn about films, presentations, sound and software, that is, communicating through technology rather than words.
- If they want to develop their organisational and management skills, they can join the Administrative Branch. This branch is responsible for the day-to-day running of programmes, projects and initiatives, including publicity, public relations and fundraising.
- If they want to communicate with schoolchildren, they can join V.O.I.C.E.S., The School Project. This branch conducts awareness-based programmes and issue-based projects with schoolchildren on issues that increasingly affect students in urban schools.
- Volunteers interested in the performing and visual arts can join Silhouette. This branch provides artistes and musicians platforms across the city to support their creativity, vision and talent.
- If people are interesting in working with creative ideas and brainstorming, then they can join the Creative Branch.
- Members interested in working with the law and young people, contextualising it and engaging with it are directed to The Right to Information Programme within The Youth Parliament.
- Students who wish to work with information and clarifying opinions, perspectives and ideas join the Research Branch.
- Those who work with connecting young people with their environment, providing them with a platform to interact with professionals and organisations are part of the Access Programme.
- Members of the organisation who work with training young people on communication and information are members of the Trainers Cell.
- Those interested in literary pursuits join The Butterfly Project.

No matter where they place themselves, volunteers at The Youth Parliament get to work on a diverse range of issues, and with a variety of organisations, ranging from UN bodies to State governments, corporations and NGOs.

### **Volunteer Training and Management**

At The Youth Parliament, volunteer training is of two kinds. Volunteers are first trained as facilitators and later, after they have gained enough experience, they are trained as coordinators. The facilitators' training is conducted during open forum workshops on a range of issues. Needless to say, the training is highly interactive, with lots of question and answer sessions, debates and discussions, exercises and games. Volunteers also receive regular feedback throughout a project, both collectively and individually. The coordinator of the Facilitative Branch is responsible for volunteers training and monitoring.



As an organisation, The Youth Parliament makes efforts to understand the competing demands on the time of volunteers and accommodates their needs wherever possible. The organisation reduces the workload of volunteers during exam time so that they can cope with academic pressure, and also offers flexible options, which means one can choose to volunteer full time and part time.

The Youth Parliament also has a realistic understanding about why many people choose to volunteer. Some do so to get certificates and letters of recommendations. This is perfectly fine. Those who want these testimonials can fill out a request form. They are not quizzed about their reasons for volunteering.

### **Endnote**

As Tarini puts it, she is grateful for the 'unparalleled experiences and exposure' provided by The Youth Parliament. She says she is 'truly blessed' for having had the opportunity to work on a wide range of issues - from organising relief for Tsunami victims and the survivors of the Kashmir earthquake - to working with a range of communication media - putting up a play, organising concerts, producing a film and bringing out manuals and newsletters. She has met amazing and wonderful people from all walks of life. Her years with The Youth Parliament have opened her eyes to a world full of possibilities. After graduating from college, Tarini plans to build on her experience as a The Youth Parliament volunteer.

Tarini is just one of the 100-150 young people who are part of the core team of the organisation - those who volunteer to fulfil their dreams, hone their skills and do their bit to positively impact their environment. The experience of The Youth Parliament as an organisation disputes the common notion that young people today are cynical, blasé, lazy, self-centered. To use Tarini's words, 'this is simply not true'. She says that all the young people she knows are very active, involved and interested in the world around them. They are also very talented and are actively engaged in theatre, music and writing. They are innovative and adventurous, bursting with good ideas. Sometimes all they need is a push in the right direction, for someone to show them the way. And that is what The Youth Parliament is here to do - help young people find their way in the world through volunteering.

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\* The Youth Parliament is now known as The YP Foundation.



**PART 3**

**ANNEXURE**



Directory of Voluntary  
Organisations  
in Delhi, Mumbai and Orissa,  
which have been a Part of  
this Study\*

*\* This information was verified and found true at the time of printing.*



Talking Volunteerism

## DELHI

### Action India

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### Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan

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### Association for India's Development (Delhi chapter)

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### Beyond Borders

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### Centre for Civil Society

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### Dhriiti

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### Hope Project

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Mumbai: +91 22 2610 5235  
Bangalore: +91 80 2546 9242  
Chennai: +91 44 2811 2108  
info@ivolunteer.org.in

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Talking Volunteerism

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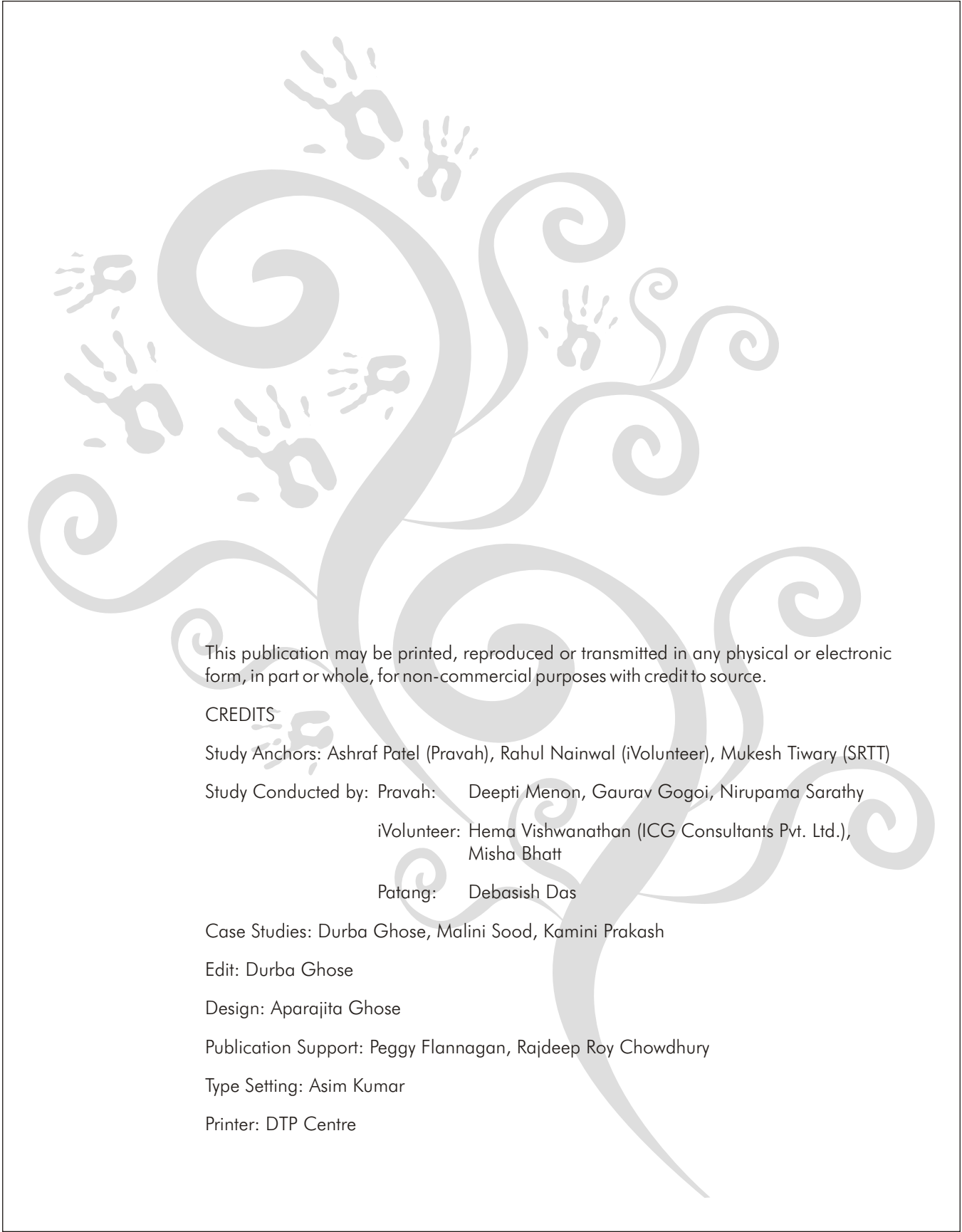
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Adam Smith had said that the invisible hands of society determine the markets. We believe invisible hands of our citizenry shape not only the markets but the entire civil society and our common futures. It is imperative that we in the development sector don't truncate and frustrate their vision and their need to act on civil causes that affect them. We must provide them a platform for impacting common spaces. It is their right and our need.

