

Weekend

magazine



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realm of
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Amid grief, a
climb again

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Charmed
by Oman's
beauty





Towards a social innovation

● Sarnga Dharan Nambiar



Finally, are we going to witness its advent here in the Sultanate? Is the nation indeed going to ride the crest of social entrepreneurship wave? Yes, feel experts, who all agree that Oman stands to benefit immensely from social enterprises. And it is also one of the few concepts on which a consensus gentium across segments is possible quite easily, as it involves a healing cause.

Riyada — the public authority for small and medium enterprises development in the Sultanate — contends that the key to unlocking the economic deadlock is social entrepreneurship. Further, the present times, though turbulent and flickering economically, could be the most appropriate to establish a robust national foundation for social entrepreneurship with a strong focus on sustainability.

But social entrepreneurship is not something new to the Sultanate. As rightly noted by Khalid Al Safi Al Haribi, the Deputy CEO of Riyada, Omanis in the past achieved economic diversity on the strength of their heritage. From the acclaimed falaj (irrigation) systems to making clothes made out of recycled materials and community lending





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practices, sustainable social enterprises had been in vogue in the Sultanate for long.

An increasing number of Omani youths are showing keenness to go the social enterprise way in the fields of environment, especially recycling and related sectors. But it all adds up to nothing significant.

And one name that features prominently in the Sultanate's social enterprises sector is Baby Sam Samuel. A humanist, first; and a management consultant, second; Sam wears several hats with élan. Currently pursuing his doctoral programme in entrepreneurship at SRM University, Sam is serving as the general manager of InterTech LLC, and won wide appreciation for implementing a successful turnaround of the company in just a few months. He is also the vice-president of Sultanate's largest volunteer organization Knowledge Oman that provides a strategic platform for social innovation and knowledge-sharing, apart from being a Board member of Indian Schools in Oman.

Beyond these, he is the chief strategist and mentor for Adventz, a leading design house rated among the top three digital consultancy firms in Oman.

As a business consultant, he offers Turnaround Management, Strategic Consultancy & Business Mentoring services. He was the recipient of the Golden Achievement Award for 'Business Consulting' last year at the Global Media Events, Dubai, and also won the Most Valuable Member Award-2013 instituted by Knowledge Oman, the largest volunteer organization in Oman.

In between, he divides his time to mentor a few start-up initiatives as well. At another level, he uses his personal website (www.babysam.biz) as a tool for generating positive ideas in the society and

empowering individuals to realise their dreams.

He is always in the thick of strategising projects across business system integration, consultancy, and turnaround solutions in the ruthlessly competitive corporate world where life is perpetually in the fast lane. But his alter ego never loses the meditative serenity of a compassionate mind.

"Everyone has a humane aspect to his personality. At least a small section of today's youth not only desires change but is capable of acting as agents of change for the betterment of the society they live in," says Sam.

Sam puts his entrepreneurial skills to the best use at Knowledge Oman, especially in designing a national initiative to create and up-skill social entrepreneurs in the country. At the beginning of the current year the organization hosted an open event to enhance public awareness on social entrepreneurship with a series of workshops.

Knowledge Oman has partnered with the international organization, Consult and Coach for a Cause (C3), to design the C3 Social Enterprise Accelerator Programme under which expert coaching and mentoring support is offered to ambitious young entrepreneurs to generate positive and sustainable social impact and to find efficient solutions to varied social issues and challenges through entrepreneurship.

The C3 Social Enterprise Accelerator Programme, which encourages the use of the "Power of Business to Make a Change in the World", supports those who are looking to start own enterprise with a social mission, as well as those who want to incorporate social mission into their current businesses, or those who are ready to take the next step in social entrepreneurship.



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“We at Knowledge Oman help them get the necessary approvals for the business idea and puts them through social enterprise learning sessions and connect them with a mentor who will guide them towards getting the business up and running,” Sam says.

Meanwhile Riyada and Knowledge Oman have collaborated to develop social entrepreneurship towards achieving the goals of social Inclusion.

Another area where he is interested in is tapping the business potential of social media services. With the penetration of internet enabled devices like smartphones, tablets, and laptops, the number of internet users in Oman has risen in the last decade from almost 4% to nearly 70% of the total population.

“Today’s iGeneration is hooked to various social media services like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and LinkedIn. But social media holds great relevance for businesses as it facilitates integration between individuals, community and



organizations. It can empower entrepreneurs, start-ups and small businesses. SMEs can leverage social media services to gain insights into social behavior and mindset of target market, brand awareness, consumer engagement, lead generation and more.

'Crowdsourcing' & 'Distributed thinking' on social media allows people to collectively accomplish a goal. An example of crowdsourcing site that has had a tremendous worldwide impact is the collaborative online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, Sam notes, adding: "The burgeoning social media base in Oman is sure to generate opportunities for businesses to enhance consumer engagement, making social media services a booming business in itself."

Such projects are going to strengthen the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) sector in Oman, whose collective contribution to Oman's GDP stood at just around 20 per cent last year.

"Technological readiness and internet enabled smartphone penetration have aided in the propagation of social media in Oman. At the same time at present social media is mostly used as an entertainment tool, and its immense business potential is yet to be tapped fully. Lack of digital media skills has hindered local businesses from fully exploiting its potential. This presents exciting entrepreneurial opportunities for digital and social media agencies who can offer a range of social media management services. The scope of social media related services is vast both in its diversity and quantity," Sam says.

Sam is also excited about the ICT revolution that is all set to happen in the Sultanate. He is all geared to contribute to its growth. With the ITA working towards facilitating the growth of ICT (and ICT-enabled) businesses thereby providing the basis for a new and invigorated Omani ICT industry and greater entrepreneurial aspiration and spirit throughout the ICT sector in Oman, Sam is fine-tuning his strategies to play it big in the ICT field. "ICT holds immense potential to foster a vibrant entrepreneurial culture in the Sultanate. Especially I'd be focusing on cloud computing, and IT security and audit," he says.

Away from all this, he has set up a charitable trust called Little Hugs towards providing a loving and caring home for abandoned children. "Abandoned by man or by fate," Sam clarified. The land for the project has been identified in the Indian state of Kerala. At the same time, in the Sultanate, he is busy managing the affairs of the Centre for Special Education (as its director-in-charge) that is currently functioning at the Indian School Muscat premises. "I am putting all my efforts into making the Centre a self-sustainable ecosystem," he says. As many as 85 children with

special needs study at the Centre.

Another project he is involved in is called Anjappam, a chain of economy restaurants through which we aim to make available fresh, healthy meals to the marginalised sections of the society at affordable prices. Three such restaurants will open shortly, again in Kerala, his home state. "Anjappam restaurants will function as restaurants only in the day; in the evening they will operate as libraries with a good collection of books, dailies and journals," he elaborated.

Yet another project is an art café in Muscat, where art lovers can discuss and appreciate art over a cup of coffee. But his most immediate assignment is to undertake a high octane public awareness campaign on the importance of organ donation.

