

Highlights of EDGE 2018

On October 24th, EdelGive Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Edelweiss Group of companies flagged off its annual three-day conference, EDGE, on the theme **Leadership – A key vector for change**. EDGE 2018 brought together the funding fraternity and the NGOs on a common engagement platform and facilitated conversations on fostering partnerships for collective impact.

The inaugural day of EDGE 2018 was hosted at Hotel St. Regis in Mumbai and commenced with Edelweiss Group's Chairman, Rashesh Shah and EdelGive CEO, Vidya Shah welcoming the guests and acknowledging the opportunity inherent in the day, towards fortifying the philanthropic ecosystem.

Rashesh Shah, emphasised on collaboration between the corporate and non-profit sector for exponential results. "The corporate sector is in the spotlight and as Edelweiss we have evolved from our focus on shareholder capitalism to stakeholder capitalism. Similarly, expectations of accountability, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness are also being made of the NGOs and social enterprises. Both the sectors can learn best practices from each other. The opportunity of social change will become scalable only if it is shared with more beneficiaries; and in doing so, happier will be the outcome," he shared.

Vidya Shah contextualised EdelGive's approach to collaboration within the emerging needs for transformative solutions that deliver scale, over incremental growth. "We do have a lot to achieve very quickly before the SDG deadline of 2030. Today, if we have to solve the numerous large challenges facing us, we need transformative thinking; solutions that will serve us at scale. And since we are also dealing with broken systems, the failure of governments and markets to address these challenges, we also need collaborative solutions. The role of leadership in aiding, encouraging transformative thinking cannot be underestimated. Leaders can through their passion, vision and foresight bring multiple stakeholders together – governments, funders, nonprofits and communities – to find collaborative and sustainable solutions at scale. The difference between transformation and incremental improvement is precisely this – a better past versus a different future," she emphasised.

The day saw three engaging panels steered by leaders in different sectors who represent different yet effective approaches in philanthropy.

Uncharted Territories was a conversation with leaders who have built institutions to drive critical social change in issues that previously lacked visibility and action. Veteran journalist Shekhar Gupta of ThePrint moderated the conversation between stalwart social entrepreneurs Chetna Sinha of Mann Deshi Foundation, Anshu Gupta of Goonj, Aditya Natraj of Kaivalya Education Foundation (KEF) and Osama Manzar of Digital Empowerment Foundation.

“Never provide poor solutions for poor people,” opined Chetna Sinha, who pioneered the Mann Deshi Bank with member capital, which now has a working capital of INR 200 crores. She emphasised on “listening” to the people one wants to influence positive change for; by enabling short term solutions that make their immediate life easier, while working to scale the programs long-term.

Aditya Natraj who spearheads KEF’s innovative approach in working with Government systems as a means to scale shared, “Education is the crux for national growth. Education which should be secular, democratic and inclusive. This would need to be integrated at the school level itself as that’s where children learn, observe and imbibe these values of equity and inclusion. This sensitivity cannot brought in at a later stage of one’s life, it needs to be built when the child is in school.”

Anshu Gupta emphasised on the dignity in development in the context of Goonj’s work and described how collaboration and cohesive functioning can lead to the desired outcomes. “At Goonj, we have created a system of collaboration, logistics and transfer of goods. This ensures that the necessary kind of aid is available and effective, when disaster strikes,” he shared.

Osama Manzar stressed on information deprivation being the cause of India’s poverty. “The information available or created is controlled predominantly by the media. Information technology is accessible to all and if leveraged, technology can empower. For example, #metoo wouldn’t have happened without the availability and reach of social media,” he opined.

The second panel of the day introduced the **Influencers**; strong leaders from different sectors who have come together to lend their voice and visibility to critical issues in women’s empowerment. Along with Vidya, Archana Chandra, CEO Jai Vakeel Foundation, Niranjana Rajadhyaksha, former journalist and Research Director, IDFC Institution and Uma Chatterjee who leads Sanjog, an NGO working for the rights of survivors of trafficking discussed the need to have a systemic and structured focus to promoting the cause of gender justice, with Amitabh Behar CEO, Oxfam India.

“The idea is to have a disparate group of people who can bring different thoughts and add value to the work in women empowerment; that diverse approaches can be collectivised to create large-scale, long-term changes,” shared Vidya while explaining the rationale of bringing together the motley group of Influencers.

Archana Chandra emphasised on the importance of both the head and heart driving interventions and on the power of collaboration. “A holistic solution and the role of each stakeholder to contribute to the big picture is important to address issues. As a Foundation we have invested in research on the causes of abuse and it is evident from the data that the attitudes of patriarchy imbibed by both boys and girls during childhood are precursors to their susceptibility to abuse or be abused. For example, children see violence against their mothers and sisters within their families. They view it as normal and as adults condone it. Based on similar findings we would like to bring together various stakeholders to work together in a co-created framework for change,” she added.

Uma Chatterjee while reminiscing of her foray into psychosocial counselling for survivors of trafficking described how women from various walks of life in the Indian context face similar challenges. The contexts differ and so do the endings of their life stories, “Together, all our personal stories should have a similar, safer and happier ending. This (#metoo) is the tipping point. Take a stand, be involved,” she reiterated.

Niranjan Rajadhyaksha acknowledged that in India unequal opportunities given to women vis-à-vis their male counterparts need to be addressed if the country has to progress. “The future of the country is tied up with the future of 50% of its population. Any initiative targeting growth should factor this dynamic in,” he shared.

In ***Building on Personal Brands***, Ashish Dhawan, founder Central Square Foundation, Nandita Das known for her cinematic work and opinions on social issues and Milind Soman who has been driving the women’s fitness movement Pinkathon spoke with famed marketing strategy leader Rama Bijapurkar. The group discussed how they have used their identity and networks to build conversations and support for critical issues that moved them.

“Philanthropy is about return of money and return of effort,” opined Ashish Dhawan emphasising on the importance of a strategic roadmap to change. “You need a big vision, need to be clear who your audience is and what are you trying to accomplish,” he said.

Nandita Das emphasised that for her, “the journey rather than the end is more important. Or rather, the journey is my destination. I am much more a *journey* person and less goal oriented. I did not “do” anything to create a brand and work towards it. I believe we all should operate with a social conscience, on what is right or wrong. That has the potential to bring about change.”

Milind Soman attributed Pinkathon’s success to a “great opportunity” being leveraged. “I see myself as an explorer, I didn’t have one dream but have reached here by exploring and experimenting with different things.

The day also saw grassroots leaders who inspire us share their stories in EDGE Talks – emotional sessions which mapped their journey from passion to institutionalised action through NGOs they built; NGOs whom we feel proud to partner with.

Daljit Mirchandani of Gyan Prakash Foundation shared ‘his principles’, “Study the system. Working with the Government will bring about sustainable change. NGOs need to innovate but within the system. Let the system be the carrier of change. Carve out a budget and fund your innovation. We must be outcome-driven with a focus on quality, speed and costs. Don’t lose focus. You require agility, tenacity and resilience for impact.”

Balkrishna S of Vrutti described how it operationalised its vision of ensuring improved livelihoods for farmers. “We need to think of farmers as entrepreneurs. Our Enterprise Facilitation Centre benefits farmers in three ways: Through diversification, we are increasing income, reducing costs and improving resilience of farmers.”

Dr. Benazir Baig of Raza Educational and Welfare Society spoke of multi-dimensional approach to community development that leveraged education and livelihoods for sustainable change. “We realised that educating children alone wasn’t a solution to poverty. We also empowered their mothers to be independent enough to work. This curbed child labour as children didn’t need to skip school to work and the family income didn’t suffer,” she shared.

Jameela Nishat of Shaheen spoke about the vulnerabilities faced by women and girls from minority communities in Hyderabad that often leads to a vortex of violence and abuse that leaves the girls physically and emotionally broken. “It is important for women and girls to grow emotionally resilient, beyond physical strength,” she emphasised in the context of Shaheen’s work. The organisation works to empower the women and girls of minority communities in Hyderabad to speak up against exploitation.

The first day of EDGE concluded with rich insights on the successes and solutions in philanthropy made possible by effective leadership who engineered solutions driven by the needs of the people who would benefit from it.

The second and third days of EDGE were hosted at Fountainhead - Edelweiss’s Leadership Centre at Alibaug and facilitated vibrant interactions between representatives of the funding fraternity and NGOs. Three conversations in the context of interventions in women empowerment, livelihoods and education were facilitated between functionaries of corporate and NGO project management teams who reflected on the value emerging from working together and discussed the challenges they each face while funding/implementing social change projects.

In ***Measurement challenges in women empowerment programs***, the group shared perspectives on the different elements in measurement, prioritising elements that may and should be measured, opportunities and challenges in evolving standardised metrics and the agenda that drives measurement.

The session on ***Donor diversification for livelihoods programs*** yielded perspectives on priorities that drive investments into livelihoods programmes and discussed multi-dimensional views on variables that drive effectiveness – be it through an increase in income, inclusion or empowering communities for sustainability.

In ***Working with the Government: Gains and Pains***, the group discussed the opportunities and challenges inherent in partnering with the Government. The group deliberated on examples and strategies that have been successful in doing so, the roles of all the players involved if such a programme has to succeed and other fascinating alternatives that are optimal.

The sessions were designed as a dialogue and offered a space for multiple views to emerge, and facilitated sharing of feedback between the different players in the philanthropy landscape; who are all working towards a common end, yet encounter different challenges while working together.

EDGE 2018, concluded with rich insights gained through immensely interesting and insightful conversations and EdelGive will strive to sustain and scale the momentum that the conference mobilised.