

“What is Community Philanthropy?” Podcast Series



Transcript of Episode 2

Terry: Hello and welcome to this ‘What is community philanthropy?’ podcast series. This is part two. In part one, we met Renji Joseph. He explained that despite the challenges of this highly marginalized community, they were able to unlock innovative actions in healthcare and education, relying only on their own ideas and resources. The emergence of community philanthropy in this way led them to want to do more, and that's where the problems started.

Trying to attract finances through the usual channels proved not only difficult but impossible and eventually turned them back on their own resources – wealthier members of their own community. But getting them together in turn required resources. An attempt to secure these from a sympathetic foundation – GFCF – ended apparently in failure after Renji himself was injured and his colleagues were unable to communicate in their broken English. The last episode ended on a cliff hanger. Where could the community turn next?

From his sickbed Renji spotted a call on the web from the GFCF for proposals.

Renji: So it was the GFCF of course, it was the Global Fund for Community Foundations. Of course, they understood what we were, a little bit but not fully. But the call for proposals was for environment and we were doing nothing on the environment. We are doing community growth. We were doing communities development, so many integrated parts in it: education, health and it was a kind of unique community effort as a whole, to get out of the pickle that they were living in and they had exactly nothing to do with the environment because they did not want to be any part of the environment. They had no land, they did not even have a tree, they did not even have a well, and they don't have even a house. So what environment could they have owned?

We are people who are working in the land. We are the people who cultivate the land. We are the people who build the wells. We are the people who clean the entire area. We are the people who clean the rivers, dredging the rivers. We are the people who clean the canals. All Indian sanitation from the sanitary blocks, latrines. So everywhere, we are the people who clean it. So we are related to environment.

I've written many proposals to many agencies based on their indicators and so on. Proposal guidelines where the pre-set outcomes and outputs of it are seemingly broad, but when you start writing it, it slowly guides you. Maybe you start with the school and by writing slowly you move into “this doesn't fit into this thing.” So this little bit we cut off. Finally you come up with the hospital project. So no relationship with the school! Because you had to adjust so much with the outcome, output and with the strategy.

This environment project was almost the same thing. So we never thought of it.

Terry: There has been many, many cases, where – as Renji described it – the project proposal process turns a school into a hospital and he freely admits that's what they were doing with their environment project: trying to dress-up work which wasn't directly related to the environment so it would fit the proposal.

Renji: They wrote us back, and they had the openness to tell us directly: "We understand that you did not want to write this proposal, you intended to write something else." So actually they understood that, so that really helped us. So then they asked us to write what we actually wanted! So that was the first time ever we really were able to communicate what was happening, and what we wanted to do.

Until now we've had a number of consultations – a very fruitful number of consultations. We had these on both sides: on the extreme poor community who actually we're going to do the things, and also with those committed 60 people who came together slowly. We asked them to expand their relation. So when we had a meeting platform and we had a facilitating round there then we wanted it to grow, and as of now we have 270 plus committed persons.

Terry: Finally. The groundwork had been done to establish the Dalit Community Foundation.

Renji: And since we had some reading about community foundations and so on, and so they renamed it as the Dalit Community Foundation, or DCF. So Dalit Community Foundation. This is how Dalit Community Foundation emerged, and we have the Dalit Community Foundation registered and we have 270 persons at this time owning it with the resources, spending their own resources and a large number of community groups that are owning this foundation. So we have a good base now. So there is a facilitating board, there is a governing board and it will connect a wonderful membership, and so much activities being taken care of.

So it took a long time, but of course as of now, this is really a community foundation, within a broken community. We always say that within the broken community, we have a very united and very strong financial and resource system working there. So that is what actually the community foundation's strength is and that's a big power with them: very strong, very much integrated and uniting groups working together when they are actually the broken people. So that is it. So that's a big achievement. So this is the Dalit Community Foundation.

Terry: During this journey we've seen the potential and power of community philanthropy, but also, as Renji explained, the establishment of the community foundation. I've seen in a fresh way how important it is to establish a proper, formally organized registered institution. That may come as a surprise since much of this discussion has been about the problems of dealing with formal institutions. But it's through having that formal institution that you can draw in different participants, that you can build trust and you can also build stronger relationships to government and other entities and start to shift the power from those larger scale organizations down to the community level. As Renji just said, these are groups who are working

together who were the broken people, the Dalit, and that whole story shows how the energy and innovation and imagination of such groups who are forgotten by many and marginalized, can be mobilized to start to make the changes the communities themselves want.

Renji: I guess, you know, this kind of conversation is, very much a new one for me. But I think we have done good. I think yeah!

Terry: You can find out more by searching “GFCF Dalit” to read [the blog post about the establishment of the foundation](#). My thanks to Renji Joseph. Check out the other episodes in this podcast series, where we meet with Janet, Mariane, Masha, Rita and Tarisai and find out about the “how” and “what” of community philanthropy.