25 June, 2019

STANFORD UNIVERSITY, CALIFORNIA, USA

4ᵀᴴ ANNUAL IDEAL VILLAGE CONFERENCE

Theme: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
Rural Development, Under-served Urban Communities and Inner Cities

Vision: The Ideal Village Project

Co-create "Ideal Villages" with rural/underserved communities to meet their essential needs in Water, Healthcare, Education, Energy, Livelihood and Sanitation through affordable and effective solutions, giving due consideration to eco-sustainability and self-reliance, partnering with Corporations (CSR), Non-profits and Government agencies

To direct resources and funding thru CSR efforts for revitalising rural and underserved urban communities

Collaborative Holistic Solutions for Underserved Communities Globally

Purpose

The 4th Annual Ideal Village Conference served as a forum for corporate leaders, social and academic experts, NGOs, impact investors, start-ups and others to share and discuss CSR initiatives to revitalise underserved rural and urban communities. This was accomplished through:

★ *Sharing of Information – needs, solutions, case studies, lessons learnt, success models to replicate, issues to address.*

★ *Forum for collaboration, networking, sharing of CSR-driven social impact experiences and outcomes.*

★ *Developing outcomes-driven action plans for future implementation.*

Target Audience

★ *Corporates:* Global MNCs, Silicon Valley and North American companies, Start-ups.

★ *Non-Profits:* Universities, NGOs, Government & UN agencies, WHO, etc.

★ *Investors:* Private Foundations, VCs, Social impact investors.

Sessions Covered

★ *Healthcare & Nutrition*

★ *Education & Connectivity*

★ *Water, Food, Energy & Sanitation*

★ *Livelihoods & Entrepreneurship:*

★ *Technology for Empowering Rural Women*

★ *Lessons from India's CSR Policy and Ecosystem for promoting rural development*

★ *Inclusive Capitalism*

The more than two-dozen featured speakers at the 2019 Ideal Village Conference, a diverse roster of business executives, scholars, doctors, philanthropists and NGO leaders, were in accord on at least one fundamental: the world is rich with resources and capabilities to curb suffering for billions of the poorest people around the globe.

Remaining unsettled, however, were two perennial questions that fuel the annual gathering: Who has the means and the heart to help forge this vital transformation? And how do we encourage others to join in?

At the invitation of Science for Society, nearly 200 participants shared answers to these questions during the day-long gathering on 25 June at Stanford University in California.

In his opening remarks, conference co-founder Dr. Sunny Anand used more poignant and urgent terms to summarise the conference goal: "To get solutions to address the most burning problems in our society today."

In its fourth year, the annual event, like its sponsoring organisation, focuses on transforming impoverished rural communities – where the bulk of the world's poorest live – into 'ideal villages', elevating living standards for billions of people who otherwise lack adequate education, sanitation, healthcare, electricity and other basic needs.

Each year, the conference showcases fresh strategies and technological innovations aimed at bridging the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' of the world.

Dr. Anand reminded participants that whilst billions of people are undernourished and struggle – and often fail – to obtain daily meals, science shows the world produces enough food for 18 billion people, more than double the world's population.

"The pie has always been growing," Anand explained, his optimism tempered by the fact that escalating prosperity has had minimal impact for those who need it most.

"There are huge divides and those divides are getting worse," Anand said, reciting a thought-provoking economic fact, cited by many of the day's speakers: the 26 wealthiest people in the world control more capital than half of the world's population combined.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Sundar Kamath, another co-founder of the

Conference and an executive at Sanmina Corporation, an electronics manufacturing business, reminded participants they were gathered in Silicon Valley, considered the high-tech hub of the world.

"But who are we developing this technology for?" Kamath asked, pointing out that the region's renowned products and innovative thinking are primarily intended for the those whose basic needs are met, leaving billions underserved.

His hope, he said, is that tech companies will give attention to what the world's most needy truly and urgently need and "do it in a very organised way, just like developing a product…put some discipline into the process."

To this end, Science for Society is developing an open-source database to capture and share details about efforts world-wide to introduce or improve vital services in rural communities.

The 2019 conference theme, 'Corporate Social Responsibility' reflects a wide-spread, fast- growing conviction that big business should engage in actions that benefit the public good, even when those efforts go beyond the profit-seeking interests of those companies.

But do big businesses have the motivation, will or moral responsibility to lead these type of efforts?

The government of India, with the first programme of its kind, requires large businesses to direct two percent of their after-tax earnings toward social responsibility initiatives of their choosing.

Throughout the world, particularly in the United States and Europe, corporations have voluntarily established 'CSR' (Corporate Social Responsibility) departments and initiatives. The effectiveness of these efforts is still being debated, but it is clear that consumers increasingly want more community involvement from corporations, beyond simply providing jobs and generating profit.

Keynote speaker, Ms. Manjula Talreja, Senior VP at Salesforce, a fast-growing, multi-billion-dollar cloud computing company, explained that surveys reveal that 90 percent of consumers believe corporations have a responsibly to improve the state of the world.

That's perfectly in line with her company, according to Talreja, touting the Salesforce business motto, written by the company's CEO: "The business of business is to improve the state of the world."

Encouraging other businesses to follow its lead, Talreja explained Salesforce's 'one, one, one' policy, where the company donates "one percent of time, one percent of equity and one percent of profit" for

social initiatives, including donating $1,000 per employee, directed at a cause that employee is passionate about. So far, she said, the company has contributed four million hours of employee time and $285 million in grants.

Another featured speaker, Ms. Bhuvana Santhanam, focused on rural village education, stressing that a fresh values-based teaching framework – one that focuses on the three H's: head, heart and hand – is key to uplifting rural villages and the world.

Santhanam represents the *Each One Educate One (E1E1) Foundation*, managed by alumni of Sri Sathya Sai Educational institutions of India, which helps fund free education to more than 5,000 students at 23 campuses in India, with plans to expand to each of India's more than 700 districts.

Santhanam herself was given a free, values-based education, and her gratitude inspires her to help provide similar opportunities to others. This "pass-it-on" approach is the foundation of the *Each One Educate One* concept.

She pointed out that common educational approaches are increasingly falling short. In the United States, on average, 7,000 students drop out of school each day, while huge, untenable student loan debt is escalating depression and suicide.

In the rural villages of India, where 280 million children under age 18 live, the quality of education is typically so low that many children approaching their teen years can barely read.

"Who is responsible for all of this?" she asked. "It is us. We are all global citizens."

If the next generation is to escape "the mad rat race we are all caught in," Santhanam said, "it is imperative to teach love and compassion hand-in-hand with other curriculum."

For Santhanan, there could not be a better community investment than 'paying it forward' to educate the young and underserved.

"Imagine the immense gratitude these children will have," she said. "We are seeing this in our institution, where the beneficiaries become the benefactors. I am extremely optimistic that something very positive is going to come of this global values-based education framework," she said. "It will happen. It must happen."

Businessman Mohamed Amersi, Founder of the philanthropic Amersi Foundation, spoke on 'Reinventing Capitalism'. "We need to humanise capitalism, not abolish it," Amersi said, before detailing a long list of the inhumane characteristics of modern business and economics that foster inequality and uncaring attitudes.

Amersi soundly rejected the *'Friedman Doctrine'*, the idea, espoused by Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman, whose free-market philosophy – deeply ingrained in the United States in particular – was summed up by his famous quote: "There is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits."

Contemporary economics, where the United States and other nations are increasingly plutocratic and corrupt, shows the Friedman Doctrine to be untenable, according to Amersi. "It is destroying faith in capitalism," he said.

Acknowledging that corporations have made "enormous contributions to economic prosperity," capitalism in its current form – with its tolerance for unrestrained greed – has exacerbated income and social inequality to the point that average financial compensation for corporation CEOs during the past 50 years has risen from about 40 times what the average worker earns to 500 times, while 3.5 billion people earn less than $5 per day.

"This is simply immoral and cannot continue," Amersi declared. "Humanising capitalism must include a commitment to ethics and transparency at the corporate level," he said.

Money lost to corruption annually, research shows, amounts to hundreds of billions of dollars. "If we were able to control this, the world would not have a single poor person living on it," he said.

Many conference participants talked of the necessity of a 'wholistic' approach – taking account of health, education, environment and economics and other factors in combination – to effect lasting change in the villages. Even the greatest educational environment will not succeed if students remain hungry and under-nourished.

The truth of this was inherent in the presentation by Mr. Anand Kadali, representing Annapoorna Trust of India, a charitable organisation begun in 2015 that brings free nutritious breakfasts and values-based activities to thousands of school children in disadvantaged areas of India.

Inspired by Sri Sathya Sai Baba's teaching to *'Love all, serve all'* and *'Help ever, hurt never'*, the trust has its own aspirational motto: "Let no child go to school hungry, ever."

Kadali told of learning about children being unable to perform and even fainting at school because of lack of nutrition. Dr. Sunny Anand, a paediatric care specialist, joined the discussion, detailing the biological importance of morning nutrition for children and quoting studies showing that routine consumption of a

proper breakfast results in a higher I.Q. as an adult, which leads to average salaries three times higher than those who lack adequate childhood nutrition.

In one innovative program, the Trust is introducing schools to Saisure, a cost-effective, plant-based micro-nutrient supplement that can be combined with milk and served to students.

Lest anyone think that the United States does not have underserved rural communities, Mr. Jon Levingston, Executive Director of Mississippi's Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce, detailed his county's grim statistics, establishing it as having one of poorest, most unhealthy populations in the nation, with the "highest infant mortality rates" and some of the "most strikingly inhuman conditions in which anyone lives in the U.S."

Numerous government programmes over the years aimed at regional job training and employment have largely failed, resulting in a belief among business leaders that most of the largely African-American local population is unemployable.

Before Levingston left the podium, however, his words grew into a success story, detailing a new work-training and employment programme introduced in Clarksdale, Mississippi by *PeopleShores,* a high-tech outsourcing company, based in San Jose, California.

"Who could possibly imagine that a tech company based in the Silicon Valley would even consider locating in the Mississippi Delta?" Levingston said.

The *PeopleShores'* business blueprint was essentially imported from India, based on *RuralShores*, an outsourcing company that launched about a decade ago, offering job training and high-tech employment in India's rural villages, now employing 4,000 employees in 16 rural centres, doing work for numerous corporations around the world.

RuralShores' CEO Murali Vullaganti, inspired by the *'Love All, Serve All'* philosophy taught by his spiritual teacher, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, recreated a US version of his company in 2017, calling it *PeopleShores*.

With emotion in his voice, Levingston proclaimed that *PeopleShores* "may hold a clue to the elimination of almost two centuries of cycles of poverty that imprison many families" in his community.

Operating in Clarksdale since last year, *PeopleShores'* success has been remarkable, according to Levingston. Employees have mastered marketable high-tech skills such as advanced robotic process automation work, with employee retention exceeding Levingston's most optimistic expectations.

Levingston credits *PeopleShores'* success to compassionate and enlightened treatment of its employees.

"Individuals were treated with respect and utter decency," Levingston explained. "*PeopleShores* held them to a high standard, but because they were so often affirmed in the best way, they met that standard, through intensive essential skills training combined with a level of respect and collegiality and genuine

regard for their inherent abilities and qualities. *PeopleShores* helps bend our nation further toward justice as well as toward the aspirational ideals that inspired our country's creation," Levingston said.

Other noteworthy conference presentations included:

Dr. Peter Meaney, Associate Professor of Paediatrics at Stanford, explained research showing that death of millions of children annually could be prevented by providing better training to healthcare workers, particularly when it comes to diagnosing and treating children one year old and younger.

Vince Liberatore, of Microsoft Corporation, said that his company believes efficient Internet access is key to unlocking better health and prosperity in the world's rural communities. There is a surprisingly large, under-reported lack of access to broadband computer service in rural regions of the USA, and the situation is even worse in many other nations.

Increasingly, if one doesn't have internet access, "it's as if you don't exist," Liberatore said. In sparsely populated areas where internet service providers have not found it cost-effective to provide broadband service, Microsoft is helping fund broadband infrastructure in exchange for revenue sharing with the service providers.

Dr. Maneesha Ramesh, Dean of International Programmes at Amritha University, India, spoke of the need to embed researchers in rural communities in order to effectively address their specific and unique needs.

Ramesh described her school's *'Live-in Labs'* curriculum, where students reside in villages, studying their ways and collaborating with residents on a day-to-day real world basis to create closely-tailored and sustainable initiatives to raise living standards.

Ms. Renuka Gupta, of *Pardada Pardadi Educational Society*, talked about how her charity helps young rural women in India – who are typically married by age 14 – become educated, forestall marriage until adulthood and find breadwinner jobs to become change makers in their communities. Although small, Gupta said she believes her organisation, with its track record of success, is a "model of change…a model of hope."

Conference moderator, Dr. Kevin Sheehan, an internationally recognised leadership training expert, encouraged participants to re-evaluate their view of the world to effect positive change.

"Effective programming," Sheehan explained, "comes from personal transformation. When we start thinking about the world community being *our* community; that every rural individual is part of our immediate family. That is the shift and change that is beginning to happen. It is a transformation of the human heart."

Further details about the 2019 Ideal Village Conference can be found at *http://www.scienceforsociety.com*. Science for Society plans to host another Ideal Village Conference in 2020.