

There is a global movement underway. It challenges our assumptions about how businesses make money and what they do with it. It demands that businesses make social change central to their business models; not an add-on or afterthought. This movement is social entrepreneurship.

Within the humanitarian world we are motivated and enlivened by a desire to see social change. It is no accident that it forms the vision statements of most organisations that work in the sector. It is the driving impulse for most humanitarian staff. Yet somehow we are less comfortable with the use of business to achieve that social change. We have pigeon-holed businesses as purely profit driven, with no social concerns beyond branding. And yet, the sustainability and efficiency of the business world have much to offer as a model for humanitarian problems. Why shouldn't humanitarian activities be, accountable and cost-efficient and environmentally sustainable?

So how can social entrepreneurship contribute to the humanitarian action?

1. Do business with integrity.

*Intent matters. Integrity matters.
Courage matters.* (Sharad Vivek Sagar)

The entrepreneurialism of social enterprises is that they bring business learning to social change. As profit-driven entities, social enterprises understand that time needs to be efficiently used and that activities are undertaken only if they can be justified and costed. Actions aren't taken just because there's a budget line for it. Employees *can and should* justify how they use their time and the output that they have generated with their investment. They should not be spending their organisation's money to sustain their own position, without measurable impact for those they serve. For a business, innovation and adaptation are critical, and all things are measured against impact (not spending!). If there's only stagnancy and complacency, they go out of business.

Any business *can* choose to work in a way that brings positive benefits to the society they live and work in. Indeed, it's the society they serve and the society that sustains them. Businesses make choices every day. Whether to pay extra for a sustainable product and whether to support women or minority groups in the workplace. *How we work matters.*

A social enterprise makes working with integrity central to good business practice.

2. Use profit for social good.

Many social enterprises are for-profit entities. There are many ways, however, to use the profits generated. A social enterprise believes in using profits to drive positive social change and to have a positive and substantive impact on the world. This could take the form of direct contributions from profits to causes of importance to the business. Profits that go to charities or ethical investments. Profits that can and should help support *pro bono* work by employees of the business. Such work can support research and provide support to other organisations at reduced rates or no charge.

3. Engage ethically.

I call upon the leaders of businesses and enterprises to invest in humanity. They are bearers of social responsibility and political influence and can be force multipliers of the norms and values that the United Nations and its partners have long stood for.¹

It is logical that if the humanitarian world is going to reach out to the private sector in a more substantial way in coming years that it thinks carefully about with whom it engages and why. The private sector is a broad one; thankfully it includes many organisations with a strong moral

or ethical approach. Among those are social enterprises. So key lessons include:

- ensuring the entity you are working with meets high ethical standards measured by independent bodies such as B Corp²;
- remaining open to learning about how business approaches and practices can benefit the humanitarian world, and;
- consider the innovations and adaptations that are being embraced by the private sector, including social enterprises, such as innovative technologies and flexible working arrangements.



¹ One Humanity: Shared responsibility, Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2016

² <bcorporation.com.au/what-are-b-corps/why-b-corps-matter>

