OVERVIEW
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This collection of research explores the functioning of the social enterprise ecosystem as a catalyst and support infrastructure for social innovation in India. It focuses in particular on the way in which various formal and informal institutions bring together knowledge of social need with the capacity and creativity to respond in new ways to the challenges and needs of a developmental nature.

The cases and overview essays, written by leading researchers and social entrepreneurs in India, is aimed at a generalist audience. The collection is suitable for use in classrooms and corporate training, social entrepreneurs seeking to learn from others’ experience, and policymakers, development finance institutions and community leaders interested in strengthening the prospects for social innovation within social enterprise. The project also includes a collection of approximately 25 video-taped interviews offering first-person “voices of experience” from key individuals in the organizations profiled in the cases as well as others with experience in fostering social innovation in social enterprise. These are available on Villgro’s website at http://villgro.org/vox-videos.

The first two overview essays analyze the social enterprise ecosystem in India as a subcomponent of the social innovation system. Professor Shambu Prasad, Xavier Institute of Management Bhubaneswar’s “Thinking through Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship in India” places the social enterprise movement in the larger historical context, while Dr. Rajeswari Raina (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research)’s “Policies and the Evolution of Social Entrepreneurship in India: Tight-rope Walk to a Potential Runway” uses the analytical tools of innovation systems studies to examine the functioning of the support system for social enterprise. The third overview essay, “The Network Geography of Social Enterprises” by Dr. Lina Sonne (Okapi Research) empirically maps the social networks that underlie access to finance, talent, market knowledge, and other key inputs for social enterprises.

The next five cases cover a set of potential “nodes” for social innovation, providing an in-depth look at some of the successes, failures, and lessons learned from their experience trying to wed social knowledge with innovation capacity. Three cases focus on the explicitly declared support infrastructure for social innovation in social enterprise, while two analyze efforts to leverage the implicit market infrastructures of finance and of the customer relationships as vehicles for enabling and motivating social innovation.

The first two cases examine so-called “incubators.” Professor Subhasis Ray (XIMB), “Incubating social entrepreneurship as part of corporate social responsibility” studies an incubation effort located within the corporate social responsibility section of one of India’s major mining and steel company. The study, which examines two instances in which the company attempted to foster sustainable businesses to meet local social needs, and documents some of the challenges involved in corporate-community engagement, scaling up and transferring indigenous technologies, and using and reviving local resources. This case is particularly timely given the new Companies Act 2013 mandate that companies should allocate 2% of profits after tax to CSR.

The third case focuses on the Rural Technology Business Incubator at IIT Madras and the ways in which it leverages campus resources including the unique access to academic expertise across technical, scientific, and social disciplines. Joseph Thomas (Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship) explores the ways
in which several cohorts of enterprises have leveraged campus intellectual resources during the course of enterprise development and launch in “Rural Technology and Business Incubator: Leveraging the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras ecosystem for social enterprises.”

Two cases focus on the market infrastructure for social innovation. Professor Thillai Rajan (IIT Madras) “Innovation in social enterprises: The Role of Venture Investors” analyzes venture financing as a mechanism for encouraging invention and innovation toward social ends. To what extent do traditional tools and practices used in VC “translate” to the social space and what kinds of incentives does the VC-like relationship create for attention and responsiveness to social needs? The case builds on his previous survey of the venture capital landscape in India to examine potential contribution to innovation-based social enterprises.

Diana Jue (Fulbright-Nehru Research Scholar & Essmart Global), Selvan Thandapani (Essmart Global), Robert Weiss (Harvard Kennedy School & Essmart Global), Matthew Pruter (Essmart Global), and Jackie Stenson (Harvard University School of Engineering & Essmart Global)’s essay “Closing the Information Gap with an Essential Marketplace for Social Impact Technologies: The Case of Essmart” documents lessons from Essmart, a new social enterprise in Tamil Nadu that focuses on scaling up and commercializing social impact technologies to peri-urban and rural households. Essmart is a process innovation that takes existing technological innovations to the people who are intended to benefit from them. In addition to marketing, distributing, and servicing social impact technologies, Essmart collects localized data about consumer preferences, demand, and needs. Their case analyses lessons from efforts to strengthen a data collection and sharing process that supports the innovation-for-development ecosystem by creating a tighter feedback system around social impact technologies.

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