

Leadership in Civil Society training by the Civil Society Academy, Asia

By Navneet Narwal

“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people together to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

—Antoine de Saint Exupery

Civil society has become a major force in creating positive impact globally and across different parts of the world. A civil society focuses on active citizen participation in developmental activities, so that all citizens can lead a dignified life. The reach and impact of civil society organizations highly depends on the ability of their leaders. Therefore, leadership is the most vital component to achieve success in civil society organizational development as well as in achieving social change.

The “Leadership in civil society: how to become an exceptional civil society leader” course that I took part in was conceptualized, designed and implemented by the Civil Society Academy, Asia. The overall course objective was to instill exceptional leadership qualities in participants by equipping them with effective tools and innovative concepts to master the greatest challenges in the workplace and at home. The course prescribed that participants be capable of developing and implementing a leadership agenda for themselves and their organizations through the following steps:

- Become more effective and influential in achieving social change and shaping civil society.
- Explore history, concepts, and roles of civil society such as advocacy, empowerment, and service delivery.
- Embark on an intensive journey to reflect on your leadership skills such as team leadership, and self-leadership.
- Address important leadership challenges, such as improving your communication skills, enhancing your team and organizational performance, and redefining key strategies and processes.

The course included two workshops with a total of twelve training days and personalized coaching sessions that stretch over a four-month period. This was a brilliant opportunity, and I reflected and learned a lot during this phase of the course. The course offered a balance between international and external situations, and coherence between mandated and field practices.

The course methodology of interaction with many civil society leaders from various countries, such as Tanzania, Myanmar, Cambodia, Nepal, Germany, India, and Afghanistan, was a great opportunity to pick up new ideas and look beyond our own experiences.

The first phase of the course, at Sihanoukville in Cambodia from April 22–28, 2018, included training sessions and associated mentoring. My major takeaway from this phase was a developed understanding of the following:

- Analysis of self and team leadership, and reflection on management style, i.e. a creative blend between leadership and management.
- Understanding of civil society: concepts, history, definitions, global and local trends.
- Overview of a rights-based approach versus a community-based approach to development.
- Case studies and interaction with resource persons.

The team of facilitators, Herbert Wolpert and Dirk Reber, were marvelous in discussing concepts and making sessions interactive and attractive at the same time. I am eagerly waiting to attend the second phase of this course to be conducted in New Delhi in August–September 2018.

“Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.”

—Peter Drucker



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