

Balancing Equity, Ecology, and Economy Through Antyodaya Leadership: A Case Study of SELCO



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The sustainable development goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 aim to address the grand challenges of climate change and social exclusion by ensuring access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy for all, as enshrined in Goal 7. However, the current centralized economic growth model that relies heavily on the consumption of conventional energy sources, particularly fossil fuels, or other forms of nonrenewable energy, has been exacerbating the environmental crisis (Bansal et al., 2014; Qureshi et al., [this volume](#); Qureshi et al., 2021b, c; Wang et al., 2022). For example, evidence shows the electricity sector contributes more than 40% to all the CO₂ emissions globally, and this emission is likely to increase with the increasing electricity demand (Newell et al., 2021). Furthermore, the availability of affordable, clean, and reliable electricity still remains a challenge for rural, remote areas (Hande et al., 2015; Shyu, 2012; Xie et al., 2022).

According to the SDGs Report 2022, 733 million people still live without electricity and have to resort to various unclean solutions such as kerosene lamps for daily activities. The lack of access to a regular power supply and the limited availability of clean energy solutions affect the livelihood of the poor and marginalized and poses a health risk for at least 2.4 billion people (Sachs et al., 2022). Increasingly, it is realized that achieving a sustainable, equitable future, as envisioned in SDGs, requires a fundamental shift in the current top-down, growth-driven model (Bhatt, 2017, 2022; Bhatt et al., [this volume-a](#), 2023; Qureshi et al., 2022b, 2023) and a “better balance between economic efficiency, ecological sustainability, and social

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equity” (Amin, 2009, p. 30). In this context, social enterprises based on the Gandhian philosophy of development have the potential to offer alternative solutions (Bhatt et al., 2013; Bhatt & Qureshi, *this volume*; Ghatak et al., *this volume*; Iyengar & Bhatt, *this volume*; Kumar et al., *this volume*; Mahajan & Qureshi, *this volume*).

Social enterprises are hybrid organizations that leverage market-based models to generate social value and create income opportunities for socioeconomically excluded populations (Bhatt et al., 2019, 2022; Kistruck et al., 2013a; Qureshi et al., 2016; Hota et al., 2019, 2023). As hybrid organizations, social enterprises pursue and balance two competitive objectives: social objectives, which is focused on solving entrenched social issues in society, and commercial objective, which is focused on the financial sustainability of the organization through revenue generation (Bhatt, 2022; Parthiban et al., 2020a, b, 2021; Qureshi et al., 2018b, 2021a, 2023; Sutter et al., 2023).

The research on social entrepreneurship increased exponentially in the last decade, and scholars have used various perspectives to explore this phenomenon, including hybridity (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Bhatt, 2022; Doherty et al., 2014; Qureshi et al., 2017; Riaz & Qureshi, 2017), social intermediation (Kistruck et al., 2013a; Pillai et al., 2021b; Qureshi et al., 2021b, c), market inclusion (Bhatt et al., 2022; Pandey et al., 2021), social infomediary (Parth et al., 2021; Qureshi et al., 2018a, 2023), digital social innovation (Qureshi et al., 2021d; Zainuddin et al., 2022), and sharing economy for the marginalized (Escobedo et al., 2021; Hota et al., 2021; Pillai et al., 2021a; Qiu et al., 2021). Emerging research also uses the ecosystems approach (Bhatt et al., 2021; Jha et al., 2016), institutional entrepreneurship (Qureshi et al., 2016; Tracey et al., 2011), technoficing (Qureshi et al., 2022b, *this volume*), inclusion works (Hota et al., 2023; Qureshi et al., 2023), commoning (Bhatt et al., 2023; Iyengar & Bhatt, *this volume*), intersectionality (Qureshi et al., 2023), and resource mobilization (Hota et al., 2019; Kistruck et al., 2008, 2013b) to understand the management and impact of social enterprises. However, several gaps in our understanding remain.

Most significantly, even though most social enterprises either emerge or work in the Global South (Karamchandani et al., 2009; Rippin et al., 2018), the theories used for studying these social enterprises, by and large, have Western philosophical foundations (Sutter et al., 2019). Critics argue that these embedded Western-centric assumptions in entrepreneurship theory can run the risk of “transposing latent theoretical assumptions and prescriptions into new settings—a mismatch of theory at best, and a harmful intervention at worst” (George et al., 2023, p. 1). This is particularly true for social entrepreneurship (Doherty et al., 2014), which seeks innovative solutions to inequality, poverty, and climate change and requires a better understanding of social context (Bhatt, 2022; Bhatt et al., 2022; Hota et al., 2023; Qureshi et al., 2022b). Employing indigenous theories that bring new philosophical orientations to understand social enterprises can generate more novel insight.

The Gandhian perspective on development provides an alternative by challenging the false economy-ecology dichotomy and providing holistic, decentralized, and grassroots solutions to achieve SDGs. Indeed, many social entrepreneurs from India, a country described as an advanced laboratory for [social] enterprises

(Karamchandani et al., 2009, p. 11), have been inspired by the Gandhian vision of development (Bhatt et al., 2013; Bhatt, 2017).

In this chapter, we illustrate how Gandhian principles are enacted in practice through the case study of Solar Electric Lighting Company (SELCO) – a social enterprise based in Bangalore, India, and operating in multiple provinces. We first discuss the vision and mission of SELCO and demonstrate how the organization’s focus on meeting the energy needs of rural and marginalized communities aligns with Gandhi’s emphasis on uplifting the underprivileged and marginalized sections of society for the upliftment of all (i.e., *Sarvodaya* through *Antyodaya*). We then analyze SELCO’s organizational structure and implementation process and illustrate how its proximity to the community members, holistic strategies for self-reliance, and decentralized decision-making enact Antyodaya in practice. We conclude that by keeping the most marginalized individuals and communities at the center of all decision-making and planning, SELCO exhibits the tenets of Antyodaya leadership.

1 SELCO: Origin and Operating Structure

Our goal is to deliver 1 billion tonnes of emissions reductions by 2030. (Climate Impact Partners, n.d.)

We, at SELCO, believe that one of the ways to achieve the goal of equity is via the path of renewable energy. And more so, the powerful linkage between poverty alleviation and decentralized renewable energy automatically provides solutions to the ever-growing problems of global warming and climate change – the brunt of which is mostly borne by the poor. (Harish Hande, co-founder of SELCO)

Solar Electric Lighting Company (SELCO) is a social enterprise that aims to bring sustainable energy like solar energy to the base-of-the-pyramid customers and create systemic change toward poverty alleviation and climate change (Hande et al., 2015). It was co-founded by Dr. Harish Hande in 1995 in Bengaluru, India. Dr. Harish Hande won the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2011, an award that is considered to be Asia’s Noble Prize (Subramanian, 2015). The award recognized three very important aspects of SELCO – social enterprise, sustainable energy, and asset creators which, according to Hande, “epitomize the foundation for a world that is caring, peaceful and equitable” (Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, n.d.; see also Pai & Hiremath, 2016).

Throughout its 28 years of operation, SELCO has created 67 energy service centers in Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala; employed 552 persons; and has impacted more than one million people by providing access to sustainable and affordable energy (SELCO, n.d.-b). The company also works with individuals, small businesses, and larger organizations to bring sustainable and affordable power to their operations.

Today, SELCO functions as an energy access ecosystem. This ecosystem includes four independent yet interconnected organizations, each aiming to address the existing gaps in the current energy system.

- I. SELCO INDIA: It is a for-profit social enterprise that markets, sells, and installs sustainable energy products such as home solar systems to the base of pyramid customers. It operates primarily in southern India in the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh as well as in the northern state of Bihar in India.
- II. SELCO Foundation: It is a not-for-profit, field-based, research, and innovation hub. It aims to create replicable, scalable, need-based, sustainable energy solutions by fostering five critical enabling conditions (i.e., finance, skills, policy, and institutional linkages). SELCO Foundation's primary geographical focus is divided into three regions of varying socioeconomic typologies and terrains – drought-prone and arid regions of Northern Karnataka, the tribal belts of Jharkhand and Odisha, and the remote hills and plains of North East India. Additionally, being an open-source organization, it carries out knowledge transfer activities across the country and in similar contexts in Africa and Asia.
- III. SELCO incubation program nurture and catalyzes local, social enterprises that aim to provide sustainable energy solutions to underserved communities. SELCO Incubation's activities are co-located with that of the SELCO Foundation to ensure that developmental efforts in the regions are directly benefitted by local enterprises and populations.
- IV. SELCO Energy Access FUND: It is registered as a social venture fund under SEBI and provides patient capital (either as equity or debt) to last-mile energy access enterprises.

This decentralized, bottom-up ecosystem approach allows SELCO to work with a range of stakeholders (such as end users, innovators, institutions, and governing bodies) and as indicated in the literature (Bhatt et al., 2021; Jha et al., 2016) is crucial for creating sustainable social impact.

2 Philosophical Foundation: SELCO and Gandhian Principles

The founder of SELCO, Harish Hande, has been inspired by the work of Mahatma Gandhi and co-founded SELCO to take *direct action* against poverty and foster rural development. His vision to create a caring, peaceful, and equitable world through social entrepreneurship and asset creation is aligned well with Gandhi's vision of a development model that prioritizes equity over efficiency, need over greed, and care over competition (Iyer, 1986; Vidaković, 2022).

The idea of such a social enterprise ...had much to borrow from the Gandhian philosophy of sustainability.... If India needs to move forward in a more sustainable manner, the poor need to be part of that change, and social enterprise is the way to do it. (Harish Hande)

The two Gandhian principles that provide the philosophical foundation of SELCO's work are *Antyodaya* and village self-reliance. In the next section, we explain how SELCO, while working within the contextual frameworks of twenty-first century India, has adopted and adapted these principles to create self-reliant, participatory, inclusive communities (see also, Bhatt et al., [this volume-a, -b](#)).

2.1 Sarvodaya Through Antyodaya: Energy Solution for the Most Marginalized

A key principle of Gandhian philosophy that guides the mission, structure, and implementation process of SELCO is the principle of *Sarvodaya* (i.e., the uplift or welfare of all) through *Antyodaya*. The concept of Sarvodaya was used by Gandhi to describe a just society that uplifts all and works for the welfare of each and every human being (Vettickal, 1999). In such a society, freedom from injustices and social barriers, which prevent individuals from achieving their human potential, is at the core of development activities (Sharma, 1997). Gandhi believed that the practice of Sarvodaya starts from the below, by giving priority to the welfare of the lowest of the low and the poorest of the poor in the society (i.e., Antyodaya) (Gandhi, 1958a). As such, some refer to Antyodaya as the very soul of Sarvodaya (Diwakar, 1964; Vettickal, 1999).

The upliftment of all (i.e., Sarvodaya) through the upliftment of the last and the least (i.e., Antyodaya) is how SELCO defines its inclusive development objective. SELCO aims to achieve inclusive development by

Delivering Last Mile Sustainable Energy Solutions that Improve Quality of Life and *Socio-Economic Development for the Poor*. (SELCO, n.d.-a)

Gandhi also proposed Sarvodaya through Antyodaya as an alternative approach to address the trilemma faced by development actors in balancing the competing demands of growth, equity, and ecological sustainability (Balganesh, 2013). He declared utilitarianism as a “morally vacuous” economic theory due to its exclusive focus on material happiness and economic prosperity (Aydin, 2011; Vettickal, 1999). As utilitarianism evaluates social welfare based on *the maximum happiness for the maximum number of people*, Gandhi also criticized it for overlooking distributive concerns and the relative differences in utilities among individuals. He argued that an economic model that externalizes the social and environmental cost of production will result in extreme inequalities and overconsumption of resources (Appadorai, 1969). Harish Hande echoed the similar concern raised by Gandhi during the acceptance of the Magsaysay Award, in 2011. He noted that

These are times where material growth has taken precedence over the environment, social well-being and equity. The very foundation of society has become unsustainable. (Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, n.d.)

Instead of material progress, Gandhi envisioned Gram Swaraj – self-reliant village communities that are built upon mutual interdependencies, care, and fulfilling the needs of its members. He proposed the maxim of *Sarvodaya* (*welfare of all*) through *Antyodaya* (*the welfare of the most marginalized*) to conceptualize development activities in Gram-Swaraj (Martin, 2001). The principle of *Antyodaya* proposes that development activities should be designed and implemented to benefit the most marginalized. Gandhi suggested the following thought experiment whenever someone (i.e., a development actor) faces a dilemma in their individual or social action:

Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [them]. Will he [they] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [them] to a control over his [their] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melt away. (Source: *Mahatma Gandhi – The Last Phase*, Vol. II (1958b), p. 65)

As the progress of all is only possible through the upliftment of the most marginalized, Gandhi viewed social equity as an essential condition of a good and harmonious society (Gandhi, 1958a).

In SELCO, *Antyodaya* is an underlying principle guiding all organizational activities. The organization's mission statement shows a deeper commitment to the underserved, poor population and its implementation strategy also takes into consideration the specific needs and interest of the most marginalized. SELCO designed solutions for the poor because

SELCO recognized an unjust equilibrium – where the very poor are trapped in a cycle of poverty exacerbated by unreliable or unavailable energy access. (SELCO, n.d.-b)

SELCO envisions access to clean energy as an integral part of enabling the sustainable delivery of essential services such as health, education, and livelihood. It views the lack of energy access as one of the biggest challenges to poverty reduction in India. According to Hande, a lack of irregular access to energy,

has affected the reliable income generating activities for the underserved populations of the country. India can become the leader in poverty reduction through innovations in sustainable energy. (DH News Service, 2017)

Hande gives various examples where the lack of clean, regular energy access has affected the earning potential of the marginalized. One such example is silk farmers in Karnataka. These farmers used to rely on candles or kerosene lamps for lighting to feed the silkworms in the dark since the harsh light obstructs the growth of silkworms. However, the use of kerosene lamps was risky as a drop of spilled kerosene could destroy the entire basket of worms and could also cause fire-related accidents (Subramanian, 2015). There is also an example of flower pickers who had to carry a kerosene lamp in one hand and used the other to pick flowers at night so they could deliver flowers to the market early morning. SELCO India designed a solar-powered headlamp that was worn with a band leaving both hands free. This has increased the productivity, buying power, and quality of work of these underserved populations (Subramanian, 2015).

However, Hande also notes that the interest and needs of the poor and marginalized have been often neglected by big businesses and policymakers (Hande, 1999; Hande et al., 2017). A persistent myth is that the poor cannot afford and sustain sustainable technologies (Hande et al., 2015). He argued that in a country where nearly half of all households do not have electricity, this myth has deprived poor and marginalized groups of accessing solar technology benefits (such benefits include, cost-efficiency, clean energy, improvements in the quality of life, and livelihood) (Hande et al., 2015). SELCO is founded on the belief that the current model of economic growth has mostly benefited the rich and middle class and has overlooked the interest of farmers and remote rural communities. As the purpose of commercial businesses is primarily profit-seeking or economic in nature, they rarely consider the real needs of the majority of the population or the planet as a whole. They are rather fixated on meeting their own needs and comfort, often worsening societal challenges.

As indicated above, the pressing challenges faced by street vendors, silk farmers, flower pickers, rural manufacturers, and blacksmiths are often overlooked and not given priority by privileged innovators. These individuals and communities have the potential to shorten supply chains, reduce climate impacts resulting from mass production, and contribute to rural economies. Despite the potential benefits of supporting these marginalized groups, the privileged innovators who are in positions of power tend to overlook their needs and concerns. This failure to prioritize the interests of these groups has significant implications for sustainable development and equitable economic growth. If these marginalized groups are not supported, they may continue to face economic and social exclusion, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the importance of these communities and prioritize their needs when designing policies and programs aimed at promoting sustainable development and equitable economic growth.

Hande co-founded SELCO to challenge the myth that the poor cannot afford and sustain sustainable technologies and to show the potential that resides in socially and economically marginalized groups. Just as Gandhi believed in the dignity of marginalized groups, Hande also believes in the enormous potential of the poor and the marginalized. For example, he made the following comment about the street vendors:

Have you ever heard of a street vendor going out of business? This is what I ask the management students of today. My point is that with the most difficult of circumstances and with limited resources, he must be doing something right to sustain himself and not run out of business. For me, the all-time classic social entrepreneur is the street vendor – he never cheats and carries on sustainable delivery. But Kingfisher Airlines, despite possessing the best brains, is in the doldrums. SELCO started the same year as Lehmann Brothers. Today, we are here and they are not. (Chawla, 2012)

While SELCO burst the myth regarding the “bankability” of the poor, another key concern in enacting Antyodaya (i.e., designing and implementing marginalized-centric solutions) is the systemic barriers faced by the poor and marginalized in exercising their agency. Mounting evidence shows how the hierarchal social structure and the discriminatory social norms prevent the most marginalized from

accumulating the assets and capabilities required to break the cycle of poverty (Qureshi et al., 2018b, 2023; Sutter et al., 2023). As such, organizations practicing Antyodaya need to pay attention to the social context and challenge the existing power structure within the communities (Bhatt et al., 2022). There is also a need to design solutions that build upon the assets and capabilities of the marginalized (Hota et al., 2023) and promote self-reliance and enhance their dignity. Gandhi developed the concept of Swaraj (self-rule) as not mere independence from external power (i.e., Britain) but also as gaining independence from everything that is oppressive in the society (Vettickal, 1999). In the following paragraph, we illustrate how SELCO applies and adapt these concepts according to contemporary times and context.

2.2 *Antyodaya Through Decentralized Sustainable Energy*

Gandhi was convinced that decentralization of power was the key to a just and equitable society and had a concrete agenda for implementing decentralization of power. On a political level, he suggested the village as the center of governance and political decision-making. On an economic level, he recommended small businesses based on existing resources that advance mutual interdependencies. On a social level, he suggested equality among all social groups as the necessary condition for self-reliant communities (Thakker, 2011, see also, Oak, 2022; Bhatt et al., [this volume-b](#)).

Decentralized Sustainable Energy is at the core of SELCO's approach to enacting its vision of Antyodaya. Harish Hande believes that:

A decentralized approach in the spread of solar applications – using small-scale, stand-alone installations instead of large, centralized thermal stations – is best for reaching poor, remote villages where the technology is most needed. (Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, [n.d.](#))

The decentralized approach aims to offer comprehensive and holistic solutions to development and includes three main components: a complete package of products, reliable service, and need-based financing aimed to empower its customers.

2.2.1 **Complete Package of Product**

SELCO designs and offers a wide variety of solar products for different consumers (SELCO, [n.d.-c](#)). Since the aim is to provide long-term sustainable solutions to poverty, SELCO design product and services that create assets for the underserved population. Such assets can provide economic and social stability for the poor thus negating the threats of potential vulnerability in the future. For example, SELCO has developed products such as Solar Home Lighting, Solar Water Heater, Roti Rolling Machine Solar Inverter Systems, and other home appliances (such as Butter

Churners, Grinders, etc.) that aim to improve the livelihood and well-being of the end users.

Furthermore, these solutions comprise appropriate hardware and infrastructural technologies, which suit the needs of marginalized end users. For example, the use of improved Solar Powered Fan Blowers and Power Hammers has increased productivity, improved efficiency, and reduced drudgery of rural blacksmiths in India. Another example that connects income-generating activities, livelihood, and energy access is the solar powered small or medium scaled rice mill. SELCO reports shows how these rice mills have helped paddy growers mill their rice cost-effectively for their own consumption and increased their earned income from the sale of processed rice.

2.2.2 Doorstep Services

To reach the last mile and sustain the reliability and durability of its programs, SELCO also provides installation and aftersales services through the energy service centers (ESCs). These ESCs ensure maintenance support and guidance from the regional branch office and headquarters and form the basic building block of SELCO's rural operations (Pai & Hiremath, 2016). In March 2023, the company had a total of 67 ESCs working in various geographies. Each ESC has a service territory in which it provides SELCO's energy services.

2.2.3 Door-Step Financing

SELCO also offers door-step financing through microloans. The purpose of these microloans is to improve the accessibility of their solutions to poor and marginalized end users. Hande observed that while the poor spend a large portion of their income to meet their energy requirements, they are unable to pay a large sum of money at one go (Pai & Hiremath, 2016).

Recognizing the financial problem of the poor, SELCO created a financial model to connect its customer to rural banks (Hande et al., 2015; Pai & Hiremath, 2016). In this model, the customer would pay 10–25% of the price upfront as a down payment, and the rest was given as a loan to be paid back over a period of 3–5 years (Pai & Hiremath, 2016). However, initially, Hande faced two issues to address customer financing. First, there were no schemes in the banks to fund solar lighting as banks financed only income-generating activities such as agriculture or trading activity (Pai & Hiremath, 2016). Second, rural customers did not have the funds to make the down payment. To address the first issue, Hande used his social networks and long experience working in the field to approve the financing for solar lighting systems by rural banks (Pai & Hiremath, 2016). Now, SELCO works closely with financial institutions like regional rural banks to help allocate existing financial products or create new ones, toward the provision of credit for the procurement of assets by end users. To address the down payment situation, he worked together with various

development agencies to provide funds to small borrowers. It helps the borrowers in accessing existing governmental welfare schemes and philanthropic money to help bridge gaps in financing. This triple decentralized strategy for reaching the poor (i.e., a strategy of *customized products*, *doorstep financing*, and *doorstep service*) helps SELCO to enact *Antyodaya* in practice.

2.3 *Poor as Asset Creators and Employers*

Until the poor become asset creators, we are not empowering them. (Hande)

Antyodaya is based on the principle of equal dignity. Gandhi believed in mutual respect and the essential dignity shared by every person, despite their position in the social hierarchy. He aimed at the upliftment and enrichment of human life rather than a higher standard of living with no respect for human and social values. For example, Gandhi founded his theory of Trusteeship, which provides a guideline for businesses to integrate the social value with business value (Balakrishnan et al., 2017). This theory suggests that the distribution of wealth, which is crucial for achieving Sarvodaya through Antyodaya, is not about charity but about ensuring basic human dignity.

We find these principles of equal dignity and mutual respect enacted by SELCO during the implementation of their programs in the communities. As indicated above, SELCO customized its product based on the need of the poor. In this need-based customized business model, the poor are treated as partners, innovators, and enterprise owners (Pai & Hiremath, 2016). SELCO believes that solutions should not only be designed *for* the poor but also *with* the poor. While most organizations create product and services based on their assumption of what the poor need, SELCO work closely with the community members to understand their need and circumstances.

Wants can be standardized; needs have to be customized.

As noted above, SELCO create products that address the need of poor, underserved communities. Unlike luxury products (such as cell phones, dishwashers, etc.), which can be standardized, these need-based products had to be customized (e.g., lighting services for a street vegetable vendor or headlamps for silk farmers at night) (Pai & Hiremath, 2016). To understand needs, SELCO found it crucial to embed itself into the communities and see the client as a partner and not just a customer or an end user (Pai & Hiremath, 2016; see also, Hande et al., 2017).

This culture of being rooted in the community is informed by Hande's earlier experiences as a graduate student. As Hande notes (1999), his field visit to the Dominican Republic while a graduate student in the United States was very influential in understanding the importance of a decentralized energy approach to reach the poor in remote villages where the technology is most needed. After returning to India, he decided to spend time in villages to understand their needs and circumstances firsthand. These experiences made him realize that the adoption and

diffusion of technology are not just about the nature and type of product but also about the social realities that technology seeks to change.

Therefore, SELCO places significant emphasis on promoting innovation and enterprise development at the grassroots level to ensure that its developmental investments benefit the individuals and communities it aims to mobilize. At the core of SELCO's operations lies the value of inclusivity, which enables individuals at the base of the social hierarchy to participate in decision-making processes and effectively solve local problems. According to SELCO, this approach unleashes the true potential of marginalized individuals and communities that are often overlooked in mainstream development initiatives. SELCO believes that there is significant untapped potential in India to adopt this approach on a large scale, and this can help shift away from the current status quo. By prioritizing the needs and interests of marginalized communities, SELCO promotes equitable development and economic growth that benefits the entire society. By enabling individuals and communities at the base of the pyramid to fully participate in the development process, SELCO demonstrates a commitment to creating a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Since social contexts are often unfavorable to the most marginalized (Bhardwaj et al., 2021; Maurer & Qureshi, 2021; Qureshi et al., 2020, 2022a), SELCO's approach to seeing the poor as partners (instead of mere consumers) has been influential in enhancing their self-esteem and in helping them in accessing and using technology to better their lives. SELCO further expands these partnerships by creating decentralized ownership and community structures. These structures are mostly owned either by entrepreneurs from the communities it seeks to benefit, or by groups, both small and large like Self Help Groups and Farmer Producer Organizations.

To further elaborate upon how SELCO works with the small vendors as a partner, we illustrate it through the previously cited example of the rural blacksmith. SELCO first began to work on the solar-powered technology for the blacksmith when it learned about their problem from one of the SELCO's staff who came from the blacksmith community himself, in the state of Karnataka. Product designers at SELCO then worked closely with the blacksmith who explained the problem to design the new solutions. The product designer discovered a highly efficient fan being manufactured in the state and brought it to the blacksmith who attached a coupling pipe suitable to his forge which then became the final product. For this design service provision, the blacksmith was adequately compensated. This new product was then manufactured in the same state and installed along with the solar energy components by an enterprise from the region. Upon the success of this solution, it was replicated in other states like Assam. In this new state, the solar energy components were installed and serviced by a new enterprise in Assam rather than the original in Karnataka. This helps the new enterprise integrate the new product into its portfolio as well. If demand for this product showcases an increase in Assam, manufacturing of fans and the blower itself can be promoted in Assam. This example illustrates that replication of successful models, products, and services doesn't have to result in the scaling up of a particular enterprise but rather the scaling of processes and transfer of knowledge that can create equitable growth opportunities

in different states of India. This example also illustrates the unique hiring practices of SELCO and their enactment in Antyodaya.

2.4 Human Resource Management/Hiring Practices: Antyodaya Through Trusteeship

Gandhi believed that true economics stands for “social justice, it promotes the good of all equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for a decent life” (Rana & Majmudar, 2014). Gandhi proposed trusteeship as a moral instrument and a pragmatic tool to achieve Antyodaya. In trusteeship theory, businesses act as trustees to their stakeholders and use their wealth and resources to enhance common interests in society. Trusteeship also explains the reciprocal obligation of business stakeholders. In SELCO, a commitment to trusteeship is seen in its hiring, wage, and compensation policies.

2.4.1 Hiring Practices

SELCO’s organizational structure as a for-profit social enterprise shows a commitment toward its most marginalized stakeholders, rather than its shareholders. SELCO has a unique way to hire its employees. At present, almost 90% of SELCO’s 552 employees are from the local areas they serve (SELCO, n.d.-b). This reinforces mutual trust, empathy, and sensitivity between the client base and SELCO. The selection criteria for new staff at SELCO India focuses less on academic education (basic education or vocational training is accepted) and more on their desire to help local communities and develop their home geographies. This staffing protocol diverges significantly from those adopted by the mainstream developmental organization, or enterprises looking to serve the rural poor, or companies at large. Many of these organizations seek to hire highly qualified individuals, seen from a conventional lens of educational degrees from India’s top institutions. However, such hiring might not benefit the end-users, and the client base might not see any economic gain from the company’s business. Conversely, hiring staff with top institutions (without an in-depth induction) might also create a lot of pressure on such companies to increase their revenues to meet the high overhead costs brought by the choice of staff they hire. Not hiring from the client base also creates a sense of top-down client interaction in the sales process, which SELCO finds counterintuitive to its values of building trust and relationships with its clients. As Hande asserts:

[T]he country, which is plagued by caste system has created another “caste system” in the name of English and degrees. “There is entrepreneurship and innovations among those who have no knowledge of English and degrees as well. This needs to be tapped for the development of the country”. (DH News Service, 2017)

SELCO also provides professional development possibilities to its staff. As previously described, SELCO India's staff has a limited education background in the conventional sense; however, this factor doesn't impede the growth trajectories of its employees. The staff has two options for upward mobility: one is the managerial trajectory, where one can progress to leading a branch of SELCO India, a region, or the enterprise, and the other is a specialist growth trajectory catering to the technical staff engaged. An excellent example of the former is the current CEO of SELCO India, Mr. Mohan Hegde, who started as an Office Administrator in a branch of SELCO India. Despite many individuals within the 552 staff members of SELCO India that conventionally might be more qualified, the growth trajectory of Mohan Hegde and many others like him show SELCO's reciprocal obligation to its employee's well-being.

2.4.2 Wage and Compensation

The shareholder model has created a reward structure in which those at the top of the organizational hierarchy receive lavish bonuses and salaries and have a lot of bargaining power (Kavanagh & Veldman, 2020). However, those at the base of that hierarchies often end with tenuous, temporary jobs and near-poverty wages. In SELCO, we see an Antyodaya-driven compensation model. As noted by Hande,

In SELCO, 20% of the profit is kept aside for the employees and the way it is designed is that the person at the bottom of the hierarchy, the person who earns the least, gets the first hits at the profit.

Employees have the right to decide where these profits should be allocated, and in the past, an education fund and disaster relief fund were created based on their preferences. These policies and practices of SELCO show a long-term orientation and reciprocal instead of transactional obligations. Hande believes that Gandhi's vision of harmonious relations among business stakeholders could be achieved through these hiring and compensation policies. Such policies are an example of Gandhi's concept of reciprocal obligations as "each person's own interest is safeguarded by safeguarding the interest of the other" (Gandhi, 1938).

2.5 Conclusion: Insights on Antyodaya Leadership

The concept of *Antyodaya* leadership, which we define as structuring organizational activities to benefit the most marginalized individuals in society, is a fundamental aspect of SELCO's management approach. Through its mission, vision, and processes, SELCO's leadership team demonstrates a commitment to *Antyodaya* leadership principles. SELCO's operational structure is designed with the most marginalized at the core of their activities. They provide a complete package of products, reliable doorstep services, and need-based financing, ensuring that

marginalized individuals have access to essential services. Furthermore, SELCO views poor and marginalized individuals as asset creators and employers, demonstrating their belief in the potential of these individuals to transform their communities.

In keeping with their commitment to *Antyodaya* leadership, SELCO's hiring practices prioritize employing individuals from the local rural communities where they conduct their business. This approach ensures that those who are most familiar with the needs of the community are empowered to drive change from within. SELCO's wage and compensation practices are equitable and mostly nonhierarchical, further emphasizing their commitment to *Antyodaya* leadership. Promotion policies within the company allow anyone to rise from the lowest rank to top executive positions, demonstrating that SELCO values and nurtures talent at all levels. Perhaps, most importantly, SELCO's leadership team demonstrates genuine care for the most marginalized individuals and is committed to empowering them. As such, it shows how organizations could move away from the "rationalistic and utilitarian stance" to address structural inequalities (Bhatt, 2022) and instead prioritize the needs and capabilities of marginalized communities, to drive meaningful change and promote social justice. In this way, SELCO's management team exemplifies *Antyodaya* leadership and serves as a model for other organizations seeking to create positive change in the world.

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