

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION^{Review}

Supplement: From Philanthropy to the Front Lines
A New Era for Corporate Philanthropy
By Paurvi Bhatt

Stanford Social Innovation Review
Winter 2021

Copyright © 2020 by Leland Stanford Jr. University
All Rights Reserved

Stanford Social Innovation Review
www.ssir.org
Email: editor@ssir.org

A New Era for Corporate Philanthropy

An overdue need to address social and health inequities has collided with compounding global crises, forcing businesses to reevaluate their values.

BY PAURVI BHATT

This year's global crises unearthed a new chapter in the long-running history of inequities in health, social disparities, and racial injustice. The disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on the health and economic stability of marginalized communities elevate the need for intentional focus on social justice and equity worldwide. Underserved populations experience greater disparities in every social arena, from health care to education.

These issues galvanized a global movement to confront our divides and reshape our future. Most importantly, this movement accelerated commitments to address inequalities to deliver lasting change.

In response to this urgency, communities call for renewed focus on local action that brings together partners across sectors to deliver meaningful change for the many populations that continue to be left behind. But what will



Paurvi Bhatt

this really mean? How can we act so this chapter of change doesn't fall to rhetoric? These questions are reverberating across the private sector, with 79 percent of CEOs reporting in a survey that they have had to reevaluate their corporate purpose as a result of COVID-19. Meanwhile, 61 percent of Americans surveyed in June 2020 believe that any corporate action or policy enacted to advance racial equity means nothing without accountability measures in place.

The call to action we face today requires a reexamination of how businesses engage in society and how they will exceed employee expectations to address pressing issues. It also amplifies the expectation that corporate

philanthropy fully reflects our values—ensuring disparities in our communities are genuinely considered and addressed across stakeholders, decisions, and results.

As a leader of a corporate philanthropy, I experience this moment of reckoning from a unique perspective. And, as the first woman of color and first Asian to lead the Medtronic Foundation, I'm also the daughter of immigrants to the United States. I was influenced by the "independence generation" of India, the generation that shaped a massive, fledgling

democracy that continues to evolve, despite the residual effects of colonial rule. Like many leaders, these influences and identities affect my perspective in listening and engaging in an equitable response to the issues we face today. Like me, many of my colleagues in corporate philanthropy and global health are compelled to reflect: Are we truly considering how

systems in our societies are driving our divisions? Are we tapping into the full potential of corporate philanthropy to deliver social impact that achieves real change? And specifically, are we as leaders taking the time to appreciate our own history, our role and influence, and how we need to evolve as stewards of resources in this time?

We often say global change requires local action. Yet this moment compels every one of us to be bold and do more than communicate a call to action. It requires us to act with intention and attention. It requires courage, momentum, and integrity—qualities nonprofit partners on the front lines of the community demonstrate every day. They've shown us that now is the time for



corporate philanthropy to innovate beyond the traditional components we are so used to deploying: siloed areas of charitable giving, employee volunteerism, and transactional grantmaking. Now, more than ever, we need a new approach—one that brings these unique assets together to leverage even greater and more equitable change.

At the Medtronic Foundation, we are working hard to listen first, reexamine what impact truly means, and bring the full power of our financial resources, Medtronic employees, and collective voice to make the greatest difference to those in need. For us, "impact" means deepening our investments by bringing all our assets to partnerships that are anchored in addressing local needs. This is a hallmark of



our model—staying focused on the outcomes that drive measurable change in communities.

START BY LISTENING

In this supplement, we offer an insider's view, not only from the Medtronic Foundation but also our partners, on how to support communities affected by the clash of COVID-19 with extant social injustices. We offer diverse perspectives and firsthand insights on how to attain solutions, solidarity, and measurable impact to social inequities and the pandemic response.

The inequities embedded in our day-to-day lives are now clear. By unleashing the collective action of corporate philanthropy, on-the-ground community and health system partnerships, and the powerful voices of the underserved,

we can bring a more empathetic perspective to deliver significant social change.

Our legacy as leaders, organizations, partners, and citizens will be shaped on how we examine our past, act today, and set the course for the future. Many of us come to this work with a never-ending belief in progress. Making that progress happen will require a courageous reframing of the systems that deliver change. Corporate philanthropy and community partnerships are important vehicles of change, but the crises before us today call for executing against our missions in a different manner—through closer partnerships, deeper engagement of communities, detailed measurement, and plans driven by those on the ground who genuinely know the communities they serve.

Medtronic employees participate in a food packing event for SEWA-AIFW, a nonprofit committed to family wellness in Minnesota.

History will mark 2020 as a turning point in the global effort to achieve better health for the underserved and greater equality for Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities. The first chapter has been written. The rest will depend on how we move together to create lasting change. As active members of the social change community, we are eager to learn and make meaningful progress together—with you. ●

Paurvi Bhatt is president of the Medtronic Foundation and vice president of philanthropy for Medtronic, where she oversees a multicountry and multimillion-dollar global strategic philanthropy portfolio to improve health outcomes for underserved people.