



## Research Foundation for Governance: in India

### Summary of the Conference

#### **“EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG INDIANS IN GOVERNMENT”**

On Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2010, Research Foundation for Governance in India (RFGI) in partnership with Global Young Indian Professionals and Students (GYIPS) and Centre for Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship (CIIE), Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) organized a conference on ‘Exploring Opportunities for Young Indians in Government.’ The event was held in the Sunil Mehta Conference room on the IIMA Campus.

The seminar began with opening remarks from Ms. Kanan Dhru, founder and Managing Director of RFGI, who opened her speech with a quote from Kishorelal Mashroowala describing the plight of millions of Indians who continue to remain indifferent regarding their socio-economic situations and the need for a cognitive shift in the way bureaucrats and policy makers approach the issue of governance in India. Ms. Dhru went on to introduce her brainchild, RFGI and described the present employment opportunities available in the organisation. The floor was next handed over to Ms. Akanksha Midha, regional head of GYIPS, who introduced the fellowship programme that is currently on offer by GYIPS and how it aims to provide paid fellowships in various ministries and government departments to young Indians who are interested in exploring the government sector.

Next, Ms. Surti, compere of the event, introduced the three panelists, Ms. Shaheen Mistri, Mr. Anand Shah and Shri P.K. Laheri. First to speak was Ms. Mistri, the co-founder and board member of the Teach for India foundation. She introduced the fellowship



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programme offered by Teach for India foundation and the work that it does in the education sector. She described how India faces a jigsaw puzzle of problems. According to her, two of the pieces in that puzzle are problems in the education system and the need for future leaders who are passionate. She believes that the fixes can come from outside the system. The programme chooses highly skilled graduate students and mid-career professionals for a two-year placement in a municipal school within the Mumbai district. The objective of the programme, she explained, is to bridge the gap between 'entitlement' to good education and 'access' to good education. By bringing in highly talented individuals into challenging classroom environments, they begin to appreciate the hurdles that hamper an effective educational establishment in India. They face actual microcosmos of India in the classes, they see existing social differences and act in order to change the social direction of the kids in only two years. Ms. Mistri also stressed the rigorous selection process that only chooses approximately 7% of all candidates, all with diverse backgrounds ranging from prestigious Indian institutions to Ivy League universities abroad. She explained why a prestigious background does not guarantee success, giving some examples of people who have failed because they were expecting teaching to kids to be easy. She also shared the perspective of fellows who are transformed as persons as they see changes in lives of students who had as good education as in private schools and that motivates them to change the system. She described how the programme began in Mumbai with the help of a local politician who plans an overhaul of the educational system, Teach for India 'inserted' 50 fellows that acted as catalysts in schools. She went on to talk about the spillover benefits of the programme, of how these individuals begin to inspire other teachers to adopt novel and innovative ways of teaching students. Ms. Mistri spoke of older, conservative teachers who manifested interest in the methods the fellows use that are interactive and get students' attention.



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The floor was then addressed by Mr. Anand Shah. Mr. Shah, a Harvard graduate, is the founder and Board-member of Indicorps and has been instrumental in the development of various social initiatives including the Grassroot Development Laboratory and the Piramal Prize for Innovations. Mr. Shah shared Ms. Mistri's views regarding the gap between access and entitlement that hurdles good governance in India. He started off by providing a broad overview of governance and its objectives and asked the audience the meaning of "government". He suggested 3 possible answers that the audience agreed with, namely: to keep society in order, deliver care services, and guide a country towards its aspirations. Mr. Shah implied regarding the "microcosmos" remark of Ms. Mistri that the future leaders of India will not be able to handle even 400 million people if they cannot handle a class of 40 students. He went on to talk about how there are several jobs that those who have the potential to govern can take up outside the government by bridging the gap between the establishment and civil society. An example of these supplementary' jobs in government include programmes such as the Saurashtra Welfare Scheme. Most rural Indians continue to remain oblivious about their entitlements to welfare and fail to collect on welfare payments. Schemes such as the Saurashtra Welfare scheme saw the emergence of career paths that supplement governmental work where civil society initiatives took up the role of creating awareness about peoples entitlements to welfare. He advised the students to try to go to schools or public office if they are tenacious and want to help, as those institutions just might say "yes". He also added that politicians are interested in youth having a way into politics and supported this argument by giving the example of Raul Gandhi. He said that some people want to make money for a Mercedes, but he wants to make a difference. It is this lesson that the youth of India take forward alongside their enthusiasm to serve in the governing bodies of the state. He concluded that public administration doesn't need people with answers but people with a will to work hard.



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The last panelist for the evening was Shri PK Laheri, a former Chief Secretary of Gujarat of 1969 cadre. The witty Shri Laheri, whose charm and rhetorical skill brought the house down with laughter and engaged the youth in their game. He stated that current generations have witnessed deep changes that took place from the Independence till now and that they face different challenges than the youth of older generation but at the same time also has more opportunities. He spoke of the five major hurdles that challenge good governance today which, perhaps every Indian can relate to: the need for the communication of societal problems and using media not only for entertainment but also for educating the masses, engagement and motivation of youth and lack of people who can provide that motivation, a departure from political apathy and the cultivation of a rigorous problem solving tradition. He also added that only by sharing and caring can Indians tackle corruption and change the Indian society. The seminar highlighted not only the key needs within the governance today but also the need for change in the attitudes of new entrants within government. He described the attribute of power as not something that ought to invoke disgust and shame but rather a means to a greater end and needed if one is to contribute to society. "Political power," in his words, "is not a privilege but a responsibility." He ended with the following quote: "Seeking power is seeking responsibility".

Following the discussion by the panellists, Professor Sharma from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad addressed the gathering and opened the floor for audience interactions. The audience had an opportunity to ask the panellists questions in order to further the debate. The audience asked many interesting questions and many valid points were made by the young students interested in a career with the Government.

This event was very successful and certainly encouraged discussion about need for the youth power in changing the systems in India. The feedback from both the panellists and members of the audience has been very positive. The organisation plans to continue its



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work in bringing awareness on this topic and getting more and more youngsters interested in governance in India. Many thanks to the panellists who kindly gave up their own time to participate in the event and also to the members of the public who attended the same.