



COMPANY OVERVIEW

Manak Manch: India's Voluntary Sustainability Standards Coalition

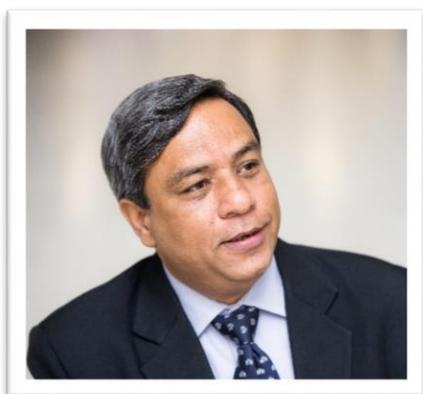
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Funding Received: £2,000 Ignition Award

www.sustainabilitystandards.in

Three words to describe your journey so far... I feel great!



Tell us a little bit about yourself, the Enterprise and your journey so far. I am Dr Bimal Arora and I did PhD in Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability. Post PhD in 2010, I led a €3 million project (2010-2013) to incubate a Social Enterprise in India, the Centre for Responsible Business (www.c4rb.org) and I was CEO until the end of 2014. Now I serve as honorary Chairperson of CRB.

Manak and Manch are Hindi terms, meaning standard and platform respectively. Manak Manch is India's Voluntary Sustainability Standards Coalition. There is enhanced global awareness and quest around leveraging private-sector resources, capabilities, technologies and innovations to support developing solutions to tackling environmental degradation and creating social value. Global business membership

coalitions (such as the World Economic Forum and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development) are doing a great job in mobilising international businesses to ensure corporate commitments to sustainability, and engaging in finding solutions to global sustainability challenges. However, at country level, there are very few successful examples of such coalitions. The complex sustainability issues and associated challenges, opportunities and solutions, are usually rooted in the local, regional and national cultures and contexts. Forming membership-based, corporate sustainability coalitions at national levels (mobilising micro, small and medium enterprises and linking to global coalitions and businesses), would well serve the agenda of tackling environmental degradation and create social value at national level, while contributing to the global sustainability agenda.

I started the idea of a Corporate Sustainability Coalition in India and developed a concept note which I shared with 10 businesses in India and a few international academic scholars and experts in my network. The feedback was positive, but I realised I needed more than a "coalition" to attract membership from businesses in India, they are more inclined to regulatory approaches and compliance. Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) have been growing in popularity in Europe and the USA and thousands of businesses in India (connected as suppliers with global supply chain networks) seek compliance through certifications to VSS. Developing a VSS in India may strengthen the value proposition of the Coalition idea and I'm currently testing this idea.

How was your idea conceived? I've been engaged in policy, engagement and research on VSS since 2011. As part of CRB, I created an annual flagship conference in India on sustainability standards and my research projects at The University of Manchester supported my idea. I am currently involved in guest-editing a special issue with the Journal of Business Ethics on the topics of VSS, and co-authoring an edited book on VSS in India.

What is your company mission? My mission is to create a successful venture that will offer market based logic for businesses to engage in social responsibility and sustainability practices, particularly in India and in other emerging markets.

At what point, did you realise that the idea had commercial potential? While Corporate Sustainability Coalitions and VSS are generally created and sustained with private and public funds, there is a market logic to the standards and certifications,

and that's why it receives the support of global businesses, brands and governments. Several international VSS (such as Forest Stewardship Council and Rainforest Alliance) have become multi-million pound enterprises in last few decades. However, these developments have been limited to the US and Europe, and I believe they have great potential for emerging markets as well, but are yet to gain currency. In the process of my application to the UMIP Ignition Fund for AMBS staff, I felt that the idea had commercial potential. Thankfully, UMIP and AMBS also supported the idea for testing the feasibility.



What approaches did you first employ to develop the idea? I first developed a concept note to test the idea with a few businesses and stakeholders. My inspiration was the notion of business responsibility and sustainability, my strong belief in the power of businesses to do good and be positive contributors to achieving the global UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the power of my idea to encourage sustainability among businesses through market based logic and principles.

How did you get involved with the Innovation Optimiser? I submitted a proposal for the AMBS focused UMIP Ignition Fund in January 2017, and secured a £2,000 Ignition Award to further develop my idea and test the feasibility. I was then invited to attend the Roadmap programme to develop the business case.

How did this engagement help you? While I have been involved in developing a successful Social Enterprise earlier, I did all that with my own knowledge and experience. The Roadmap programme has been very useful in helping me gain insights into the entrepreneurial terminologies, structured processes and approaches, and will further be helpful in sharpening the ideas for my next venture. I feel better prepared for working on my venture and in raising funds from market.

Were there any standout moments from the Innovation Optimiser that helped propel your idea forward? The Roadmap programme pushed me into deeper thinking and strengthened my idea. The idea of developing a VSS, as a frontal strategy for a Corporate Sustainability Coalition in India, was propelled by these sessions. I believe this will greatly benefit my venture.

What have been your major milestones and achievements so far? The biggest milestones to date have been; the development of a concept note, feasibility testing and feedback from a select group of businesses in India and international experts, further development of the VSS concept, and the development of strategic next steps.

How has being involved with Entrepreneurial activity benefitted you? I've already had experience of developing a successful Social Enterprise, and being a serial Social Entrepreneur is a joy and thrill for me. Involvement in entrepreneurial activity supports my research, and vice versa. With my entrepreneurial activity, I will be in a better position to demonstrate the impacts of my research, and the same supports my research. Maintaining a fine balance is important.

What future support are you looking for to progress your business? In terms of next steps, I'm looking to develop my ideas for VSS in India, operationalising it, linking it to the Coalition idea, and developing a connected business model. I need support with developing a business plan, getting into right networks, and raising funds for my venture.



Would you encourage other staff, academics and research students to seek support for their ideas through the Innovation Optimiser? I speak highly among my colleagues about the Ignition Fund, Innovation Optimiser and the Roadmap programme, and would continue to encourage other staff, academics and research students to seek support for their ideas and attend the Roadmap programme.

