



Expanding Livelihood Opportunities

Established in Delhi in 1983, Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) was pioneered by a group of young professionals, all of whom were inspired by the conviction that individuals with knowledge resources and empathy for the marginalized must work with communities at the grass-roots in order to help them overcome poverty. PRADAN believes that the path toward conquering economic poverty is through

enhancing the livelihood capabilities of the poor and giving them access to sustainable income earning opportunities. PRADAN ranks #47 in the Great Place to Work® Institute's Study and #1 in the Industry Category of NGOs.

Interestingly PRADAN's employee composition is of young professionals holding specialized degrees from renowned universities who later work in remote villages of the country. One might speculate

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PRADAN

what attracts them to work for a social cause, explains Soumen Biswas, Executive Director, "All people, especially young, are touched by inequalities and the sufferings of others. Many of them look for opportunities so that they can act to change the situation for better. However, not many know that it is possible to do it full time in a professional way and still live a decent life, free from monetary worries. Young people get attracted when they know this from us. As they join us, they see the supportive organizational environment of PRADAN and the professional growth opportunities. They also get moved by the warmth of the families in the villages we work with. On the other hand, there are also the hardships of the rural areas and the pressure of back-home social milieu. Those who can sustain continue with us and the others choose different career paths, even though they still cherish the memories."

PRADAN's work focuses primarily on assisting communities at the grassroots level in order to help them overcome poverty across some of the poorest states of India. Maintaining employee morale and motivation in such a setup seems like a daunting task but PRADAN has made it possible. Says Nivedita Narain, Programme Director, PRADAN, "Finding the right kind of person, and putting processes in place where s/he feels central and significant are key ingredients to stimulate and nurture the employee motivation and morale. We need to accept that a career in the grassroots, in the social sector, is an unconventional one for young, educated Indians. It requires them to swim against the social current, and invokes resistance and opposition from the family. PRADANites live and work in far-flung remote areas, with no electricity or water and work under extremely difficult conditions. Thus, the process of helping them sift their own sources of fulfilment is initiated from the beginning, and continues through processes throughout or engagement in PRADAN."

The organization has received several awards and accolades recognizing the selfless service bestowed toward the underprivileged in India. The company attributes this success to two fundamental themes underlying its working

concept. Firstly, expanding livelihood opportunities for poor people and second, getting caring and capable people on board to do so.

People Matters spoke to both Biswas and Narain to understand what makes them a great workplace.

What makes you a great workplace?

Soumen Biswas: PRADAN gives its professionals a chance to fulfil their personal mission. In PRADAN we believe that we have joined the organization because we are concerned about deprivation, inequality, lack of well being of the underprivileged and we wanted to change the situation. We also believe that development is essentially a personal bond between two individuals and in this, each PRADANite is a trustee. All structures, systems and processes in PRADAN uphold and nurture this spirit. At PRADAN, we are not employers or employees - we are "trustees" in spirit and together we build PRADAN to fulfil PRADAN's mission which is also our personal mission - the reason for joining PRADAN.

Nivedita Narain: This is a very difficult question to answer, as our colleagues who live and work for communities struggle to make life meaningful and fulfilling for themselves and for those who are worse off. The key ingredient, I would say, is the acknowledgement of this struggle in the organization, as envisioned by our founders, which remains alive until today. All structures, systems and processes in PRADAN are collegial, professional, with integrity, transparent and empathetic. The goodwill we receive from our stakeholders, the smiles on the faces of the communities and the emotional support and professional rigor of our colleagues keep us going in the face of adversity and opposition. ■

PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR DEVELOPMENT ACTION (PRADAN)

PRADAN comprises of university-educated people motivated to use their knowledge and skills to remove poverty by working directly with the rural poor in some of India's poorest districts and states

2010 RANK: #47

PREVIOUS RANK: -

INDIA HQ: DELHI

FOUNDED IN INDIA (YEAR): 1983

EMPLOYEE STRENGTH: 269

GENDER RATIO (F/M): 1:3.84

OTHER RANKING: #1 (NGO)