

# Preface

**Every schoolchild** in India is taught about the unity in the imagined community's diverse cultures. But few are taught why we have such diverse cultures. Cultural diversity is not merely an historical accident. It is the direct outcome of the country's extraordinary biological diversity. Until the global "multinational culture" fuelled by the Industrial Revolution hit the world, each culture in India, as much as in the rest of the world, was the result of people trying to survive within their immediate environment and indeed of an attempt to optimise the resources of their environment.

But incorporating environment into hardcore economic decision-making is probably as distant a dream today as it ever was in India. Sadly, there is very little understanding even among economists and policymakers of the dire need to do so.

The challenge before India is immense. We need to maximise the productivity of our environment in a sustainable manner. This calls for extremely disciplined systems of resource use and management. This type of management will never emerge unless we improve our policy and decision-making systems.

Away from the limelight some individuals, communities, institutions and even government officials are trying to bring about this change by innovating solutions to contemporary development challenges faced by people across the country both rural and urban.

Consider the community of Deulgaon Mali, a small village in the impoverished Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Not so long ago, when a newly posted, fiery block development officer sought to reintroduce community toilets in the village, people squarely told him no. They wanted a wall to cover

a portion of the land women had been using for defecation. They told him women feel stifled in a toilet closet and lose the chance of socialising with other women. Their assertion led to the creation of a model, named half-humourously *Mahila Gappa Shauchalaya* or women's chatting toilet. Today, the model has not only made community toilets a success in rural Vidarbha but also shows that India can become open defecation-free only by lending an ear to communities.

In Delhi, Gurugram and Bengaluru, young entrepreneurs are trying to herald a change in societal attitude towards sexual health by delivering condoms, lubricants and contraceptive pills at the doorstep. Then there are start-ups that provide home-cooked food to the vast migrant working population, while others are renting farm lands to health-conscious city dwellers who want to practice farming on weekends and grow food just the way they want.

*Frames of Change* chronicles 41 such interesting and inspiring initiatives. These are neither tales of social and economic mutinies nor are they sporadic expressions of some eccentric individuals. Rather, they are solutions worked out at the local level by individuals or communities, often in difficult times and situations, despite bureaucratic indifference and lack of political support.

This book retrieves them from oblivion so that they can be replicated in the national and global context. These initiatives can inspire out-of-the-box thinking among those who wish to start entrepreneurial ventures with a social purpose. While some have already become templates for wider changes, others can inspire governments to do more. These are the *Frames of Change* that define a new India.