



Stanford eCorner

Grass Roots Work vs. Philanthropic Work

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/232/Grass-Roots-Work-vs-Philanthropic-Work>

Ramdas considered work in grass roots versus at the philanthropic level. One of the things that pushed her to reflect on that decision, was where she could best use her skills and how they would lead to the best results.



Transcript

Do I ever feel like you know, I want to be doing the work at the grassroots. I actually, I did feel like that a lot when I was 18 and 19. And I dropped out of college and told my mother that I was going to work with NGOs and make a difference in India. I think one of the things that really pushed me to reflect on that decision... I actually have a sister who has chosen to do that and she was an Ashoka fellow and runs a wonderful small NGO working with women and animal husbandry and livestock issues in Orissa and Eastern Uttar Pradesh. For me, I think the issues were about where I could use the skills that I had and that I felt could lead to the best results. Recently I did an interview with someone and it was printed in a Silicon Valley newspaper called Biz, Inc. and I really, what I her, one of my turning points was a conversation with an elderly man in the village that I worked in Bihad who said to me as I was making a mess and kind of trying to burn all the wheat from the chaff and just dropping everything all over the place, he said to me, "You know, I know you want to help us but why is it that you don't think of the fact that you aren't educated and you know how to read and write. You don't even know how to speak english! And if you really want to do something for us, you could be talking about what our lives are like. You could be writing what our lives are like.

You could be talking to people who have power to make a difference in our lives. And I don't think you're ever going to be such a good farmer." That's what he said. It's not that at that moment it just changed my life but I think it kind of sat inside me for a while and I really had to think about it. And I think each of us has different ways in which we can be the change that we want to be in the world as Gandhi, to paraphrase Gandhi. And I think each of us has to choose that path that we can choose and do it because we think we can do it best. Not because we think that's the right thing to do or because everybody else is doing it or because it's the sort of honorable thing to do but really because it's also what you do best. And it's taken me a long time of kind of trying many different things to come to a place like the Global Fund and really feel like, "Okay, I'm home. This is what I do and this is what I like to do and this is what I can do," and feel like you are making a difference. And the things that you originally somewhere started out wanting to make a difference and... So I think that's how I've made my choice.

But I think it's hard as being here and I think maybe right now particularly. Being right here in the United States and not being in a different part of the world. I think that's hard at moments. But in some ways, I feel like that's also an important job. I feel that having lived in this country and having lived in other countries many, many years of my life, playing the role of a bridge is maybe one of the reasons which I can be a good entrepreneur in India.