

Maths Centre director named Social Entrepreneur of the Year

Sharanjeet Shan of Maths Centre, a Johannesburg-based NPO that aims to improve maths, science and technology education in South Africa, has been named by the Schwab Foundation an awardee of the 2015 Social Entrepreneur of the Year...

This year, thirty-three social entrepreneurs across the globe were recognised for their ability to effect practical implementation of scalable solutions in the face of social challenges in their respective countries.

Maths Centre has a 30 year history of creating an impact in the South African education landscape. Despite the South African government having spent 7% of GDP and over 20% of government budget on education in 2013, the above-average spend on education often does not translate into high quality education. In light of this, Maths Centre focuses on the heart of the solution to the South African education crisis; targeting programs towards teachers and students in some of the most poorly-resourced primary and high schools in the country.



Sharanjeet Shan, Director at Maths Centre.

Maths Centre's 2014 projects supported 520 schools, reaching 174,695 learners and 4,268 teachers in maths and science. Learners impacted by Maths Centre achieved pass rates of 81.3% in mathematics and 85.5% in physical science. In addition, 146 learners obtained bursaries to enter industries dependent on maths and science competency, such as engineering and financial services.

Born in India, educated in India and England, Shan has lived in South Africa for over 20 years, but considers herself a citizen of the world. An educationist at heart she says, "Once you get to know who you really are and why you wake up every morning, then that's the path you want to follow. For me that path was as a teacher and ultimately as a Director at Maths Centre." Under Shan's leadership, Maths Centre develops programmes to enhance teacher qualifications, competencies and professionalism in mathematics, science, and technology subjects, while systematically monitoring learners' progression.

Maths Centre's programmes go beyond the classroom by including parents and communities as part of their solution to the education crisis. "Let every teacher champion their classroom, every parent their children, every grandparent their grandchildren with love, strong discipline and care, no matter what it takes," Shan adds. Maths Centre also provides skills development programmes for in-school and out-of-school youth, as well as high quality and effective teaching and learning materials.

Inclusive growth

The initiative has achieved significant, measurable results across over 50 projects throughout the country. A recent project rolled out in the Eastern Cape resulted in an increase of 86% in average learner maths scores within the project cohort. A similar project in Limpopo saw an increase of 53% in average learner maths scores. As a result of this strong track record, Maths Centre has received support from leading local and international funders including Shell, ABSA and the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, and partners with provincial Departments of Basic Education in all nine provinces. The contribution from a variety of funders and volunteers is indicative of the Maths Centre's aim to include all role players in ensuring successful education for South African learners. "For true transformation to occur, we need to tackle all facets that are hindering disadvantaged schools from catching up to higher standards of education," says Shan.

As part of the award, Shan will be representing Maths Centre at meetings of the World Economic Forum in Shanghai, Cape Town and Davos. "The 33 outstanding social entrepreneurs we have selected into the Schwab Foundation community this

year are designing transformative models in collaboration with government and business partners to generate truly inclusive growth. As such, social entrepreneurs represent an integral and dynamic community of the World Economic Forum," says Hilde Schwab, Co-founder and Chairperson of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship.

"We are seeing greater appetite among other stakeholder groups of the Forum to learn from social innovation models and collaborate with social entrepreneurs in innovative ways," adds David Aikman, Managing Director of the World Economic Forum. "I am confident this trend will only continue to grow in the future, and the World Economic Forum is proud to be at the forefront of catalysing partnerships among these stakeholder groups for social and environmental change."

The awardees will become part of the broader Schwab Foundation community of social entrepreneurs, which includes more than 300 outstanding social entrepreneurs from 60 countries. Schwab Foundation Social Entrepreneurs are fully integrated into the events and initiatives of the Forum. They contribute actively to and benefit from peer-to-peer exchanges with other social entrepreneurs, as well as interactions with top leaders in business, government, civil society and the media.

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