



### Young Minds Big Ideas: Making Profit Greener

17<sup>th</sup> March 2010, Development House, 6.30pm

“So now that your company has no other options, you want to clean up your act?” This is just a snippet of the fascinating debate on responsible business practices that took place as part of the Sudarshan Project’s Young Minds Big Ideas series.

Audience members were asked to imagine they are a company opening a new paper mill factory in rural India. Given a few details on this potential project and asked “What would you do next?” The group discussed whether there was a need for more research. “You need to conduct more research, consult with the local community and learn more about the political environment”, argued one side. The opposing side disagreed, “If you have an opportunity to create something, new jobs, new opportunities you need to start doing things. Too much research can be a hindrance.”



As more details emerged about this investment, such as the 100% increase in employment, the contamination of the water supply by the mill, breakdown of community cohesion and bribes being paid to local officials; again the questions was asked, “What do you do next?”

“Well I would now take action. I’ll start taking action, stop paying bribes and clean up my act.”

However, other opinions differed. “Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is not something that you tag on at the end as an afterthought. It is about getting it right from the start. Otherwise it doesn’t work.”

And here the central theme of this event emerged, and that of the Sudarshan project. As one member of the audience pointed out, **“it’s about the three P model – People, Planet and Profit.”** As part of AFP’s wider Jagruti (development awareness) programme, the Sudarshan project works with Asian Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to look at these wider issues and at how the inherent ethos of SMEs influences their business practices.



Vijay Riyait – Co-founder of Ardent iSys

Guest speaker, Vijay Riyait of Ardent iSys are an example of this. An offshore software company that works in Leicester and Mumbai, Vijay and his partner Ashish ensure that their business reflects their values. **“People are so important to us. They are our resource.** We rely on them as developers, as the face of the company and so we have to be able to support them to deliver effectively”, says Vijay.

Vijay spoke about the different methods they use in valuing their employees. For example, they realise that personal situations can change so rapidly in India, so they provide an interest free loan to their employees after one year with the company to ease this process.

They also invest in their employees personal and professional training through providing out of hours access for staff as well as grants for books and exams for professional training courses. Ardent iSys recognise that technology is changing rapidly and this is one way for their employees for keep up-to-date with the latest developments.

But are they successful? Does this all help? “Yes. We have a fairly good retention rate. We treat our employees are like family.

For an SME, we are competing with big multinationals like IBM and Microsoft for the same people but we strive to go beyond just wages and monetary benefits. In this current climate, our employees are beginning to realise just how much we as an SME can offer them.”

He admits it can be challenging but that doesn’t stop them. “As an SME, we can’t solve all the world’s problems but we just have to step outside our offices in Mumbai and see India’s problems. We do what we can.”

As the floor was opened up to the audience, people shared their own experiences of working in India and discussed the reasoning behind the challenges faced by SMEs doing CSR work. One person shared their own experience of working for a company in India and the UK, comparing that CSR in this way wasn’t something that SMEs in India thought about.

Another described how the working cultures in the two countries are different which can make the experiences more challenging.



“We organise staff family days and Diwali celebrations”

As Sheetal Shah, Project Manager of Sudarshan, concluded, **“There is not only one business model. SMEs need to be forward thinking. Being a responsible business is not a question of if but when. Don’t be left behind.”** Vijay and Ardent iSys are proof of this. They embody a Sudarshan business. They lead by example.

NB: the paper mill factory is a real-life example of business and bad practise. For more information visit <http://www.affp.org.uk/where/uttar-pradesh>

For more information about the Sudarshan Project please contact Sheetal Shah – [sheetal.shah@affp.org.uk](mailto:sheetal.shah@affp.org.uk)

For more information about Ardent Isys, please contact Vijay – <http://www.ardentisys.com>

Keep up with all the latest developments and events at [www.affp.org.uk](http://www.affp.org.uk) or join the Facebook group Asian Foundation for Philanthropy



*This project is funded by UKAID from the Department for International Development.*