

## Leadership Development in the Social Sector

**Date:** 18 March 2026

**Speaker:** Mr. Minar Pimple

Mr. Minar Pimple over the course of his career has founded and led impactful organisations such as Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) and held key leadership roles across global institutions including Oxfam, the United Nations Millennium Campaign, PDHRE (People's Movement for Human Rights Learning), and Amnesty International.

Mr. Pimple grounded his insights of leadership in social sector by sharing and reflecting on his 40-year long journey in the sector. Growing up in a small town and moving to Mumbai for college and then for work across the world he shared how understanding the role of power, privilege, and lived experience is essential for leaders. Experiences in the early phase shaped the leaders' thoughts and actions in the future. Thus, Mr. Pimple shared that remaining open in the beginning and dabbling in multiple causes before choosing the cause to serve is essential.

Fascinatingly, a pattern that became obvious in Mr. Pimple's work was starting from providing support for a specific incidence (say eviction of pavement dwellers, communal riots, earthquake) to amplifying the cause and creating voices and collaborations across communities, cities, countries, continents became a hallmark of his work. While working to save the affected in the Latur Earthquake he recognised the need for collaborations between multiple technical and social organizations. The ability of the leader and the organization to move from the particular to general creates sustainable impact for the communities. A leader who understands how to build structures and mechanisms for collaboration creates significant impact, opined Mr Pimple.

Leadership he said, in social sector must be adaptive and responsive, noting that "strategic plans in the social sector must be written in pencil," allowing flexibility in the face of evolving realities. Rigidity of thought, plans, and processes can lead to distortions in serving the purpose.

An obsession that Mr. Pimple shared was to build and sustain organizations beyond their founders. He shared several aspects of leadership and organization design and structure that support longevity. Mr. Pimple noted that two aspects are central to succession- the leaders own intention to move away much before he/she becomes the bottleneck and understanding of structures and the need for decentralisation and integration. The role of leader in ensuring longevity cannot be under-emphasized. He said, that it is the leaders imperative to focus on building sustainable institutions and move beyond the founder. However, intention would be insufficient. Actions such as transitioning from "I to We" by nurturing teams and creating systems that enable organisations to thrive independently are necessary. Describing what he meant Mr Pimple illustrated how he led a strategic restructuring by creating independent yet interconnected entities such as YUVA Urban, YUVA Rural, and YUVA Consulting—each with its own governance and leadership before he stepped away as the leader of YUVA. He moved away from YUVA 22 years ago and the organization continues to do well.

In addition, Mr Pimple emphasized that inaccurate understanding of scaling can also come in the way of longevity of organizations. Scaling in social impact sector may not be seen as one-dimensional issue-growth in numbers but as preserving values, impact, and community agency. Mr Pimple shared

his own example of how within YUVA, they have constantly redefined their field of action while keeping values intact.

Effective social sector leadership requires deep engagement with communities, where trust—not financial capital—is the most critical currency. At Amnesty International Mr Pimple shared that he understood that irrespective of the scale it was important in the social impact sector to remain close to the community. Decentralising research and operations by relocating roles from global headquarters to regional contexts, though not easy, increased the impact of the work of Amnesty International.

Most importantly he also shared that leaders in social sector need to display moral grit and courage. Their ability to speak truth to power even under institutional pressure is non-negotiable. Accepting the vulnerability, collaborating with the stakeholders, and staying true to purpose is at the core of leadership in social sector. Beautifully put Mr Pimple said, leadership in social sector requires balancing strategy with empathy and navigating complexity with integrity. Leaders of social sector need to embody three roles: the activist (purpose-driven), the architect (institution builder), and the ambassador (voice for communities).

In short, leadership in the social sector is enriched by openness, adaptability, deep commitment to communities, moral courage and grit. Lasting impact comes from building institutions that outlive their founders.