



I focus

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100 ideas for the social sector

Recently I launched 100 ideas that might advance the social sector.

The purpose of sharing these ideas is to help place the social sector back on the agenda where it belongs and through out-of-the-box solutions address some major issues we have to contend with. As academics we are duty-bound to keep providing elucidations to very complex problems. This has to happen through a mélange of lecturing, research, dissertations, our social engagement and reflection as we go about our professional life journey.

In the *100 Ideas for the social sector* that I am proposing I am putting at the centre of the debate NGOs who need to be recognized as being at the heart of our communities.

They are the ones that need to oil our social machine.

They are the ones that need to guide us in this juncture.

To start with, I believe there are serious structural reforms we need to address, and this can only happen if we have a social plan panned out in detail (proposal 5) which must be owned by all those involved. Unless we have a clear road map where we want the sector to go it will remain impossible to deal with the complexities that are developing in this sector. Having adequate systems and the right infrastructure is fundamental.

Not only.

I believe the time is ripe to get all stakeholders around a table; academics, policy makers, politicians, civil society led by the President of Malta and have an ongoing conversation on this sector (proposal 51). It is only by having this ongoing debate that we can ensure that the ship is steered in the right direction and respond to the needs 'out there'. I also recommended that when it comes to the political manifesto, the social section of the electoral programme should be common for all parties to ensure we have a comprehensive non-partisan vision (proposal 36).

FSWS needs to evolve more into a coordinating entity. It has taken on itself too much and needs to be sleeker because it might be draining too many resources that should instead be focused on the directorates and agencies (proposal 41) it encapsulates.

The following are some other recommendations I put to the table;

The issue of leadership is prob-



lematic. We have a dearth in leadership whether it is in public entities or NGOs and authorities. This is a crisis that has been swamping us and has left gaping holes in the sector. The Faculty for Social Wellbeing together with the Faculty for Economics, Management and Accounts are offering a post-graduate course in social care management to start addressing this lacuna.

The notion of Commissioners is also a noble concept that was set up with good intentions. However, I believe that in many cases it isn't working or not effectively enough (proposal 3) and hence I am suggesting that Commissioners should have a transversal role and they should respond to Parliament and not simply become part of a Ministry's trappings.

One other aspect that worries me is that the social sector is again spread amongst too many Ministries, I must have counted at least nine and this apart from the Parliamentary Secretaries who all have a finger in the 'social pie'. I expect that the Ministry responsible for social policy takes the lead - fragmentation is

a no-go (proposal 4).

The money that the government and the EU institutions give to NGOs shouldn't become simply a carrot or means to sway the agenda (proposal 8). We should set up an autonomous *Foundation* so that the financing that the government gives will not go directly to the organizations and associations, but it will be the responsibility of the *Foundation* to direct the monies in the projects that are most deserving. This will ensure autonomy and seemingly dependency from the government. This will also guarantee that the whiners don't get the whole lot. There should also be transparent criteria and we should also encourage social enterprise to minimize dependency on the government for resources.

Something else I pointed out is in proposal 10. Charity collections should stop. When there is a new project being proposed or funds needed by an NGO a request should go to the *Foundation* (see above) rather than setting up a cantankerous campaign. Telethons on TV should be focused on creating awareness

on the issues and not to collect money. Collecting money in this way should stop. We need marathons, but of ideas and solutions and of ways on how to attract volunteering.

The UM, especially the Faculty for Social Wellbeing, should offer more empirical data and research (proposal 11). If we want the sector to have tangible solutions rather than populist knee-jerk reactions we need to invest money for research in this sector.

I am also proposing (12) that we really address the issues around misogyny that have encapsulated our country. We need to see more women leading the ranks and this might save us at least a bit from the egos that govern male leadership.

As I mentioned in proposal 13, a healthy environment should be synonymous with social wellbeing. Gentrification and the way our country is going to the best bidder is worrying. Government needs to understand that not having enough space will result in distress.

As mentioned in proposal 17, we also need to have Community Development Workers placed in

every locality governed by a Local Council so that we can keep understanding what is happening in our communities and how we can address these issues.

On a separate note, I feel that children should not be used in electoral campaigns or for marketing purposes. The impact this has on children is devastating (proposal 26).

If there is an issue that merits our intervention this is the issue of social exclusion and poverty (proposal 30). We need all the possible help from NGOs in particular the Millennium Chapel and Caritas Malta to help us with this.

On the subject of abortion, I believe that it should not be legalized but decriminalized (proposal 37).

We should also be reviewing our social benefit system (proposal 45) to ensure we are not creating dependency. We also need to tackle the issue of benefit frauds with even more determination.

I also appeal in proposal 62 to ensure that all medication needed is made available and our dependency on organizations for life-saving or life-extending medication should be the *raison d'être* of the Government.

Mental health seems to be the Cinderella of our social services. In proposal 72, I appeal for more dedicated funds, an improved mental health strategy and a new hospital suitable to the needs of the people who need to use it. I go on to state in proposal 82 that we need a policy on suicide. I am also concerned that we have too many support lines. I believe we need to have one national support line which offers all kinds of services - 179. I am also of the belief that we should have trained personal and the right infrastructure to support first responders who either go through difficulties themselves or people who are victims (proposal 87).

Proposal 92 is about addressing institutionalization which runs into thousands of people being placed in residential homes. Related to this is that we also need to tackle loneliness (proposal 15) which is leaving a scar in our society.

Immigration is also another issue that needs to be handled urgently and expeditiously (proposals 20, 27, 44). I believe that Malta should be the epitome of humanity and serve this population well.

Finally, in proposal 100 I encourage our communities to reignite a passion to chinwag and to have each other's back. We also need to connect with that which worked in our communities in the past.