

# IN-CONVERSATION WITH HANNA RUDDIES, HEAD AT IMPACT HUB

We speak to the dynamic leader who has created a global network of entrepreneurs who are rooted in the local market context

Bhairavi Jani



**H**anna Ruddies is the Global Growth & Acceleration Head at Impact Hub, a 100+ strong network of locally rooted, globally connected entrepreneurial communities focused on creating measurable positive impact in the world. She has global experience of interacting with entrepreneurs from across the world, and was recently in India to help set up Impact Hubs in the country.

**Tell us more about Impact Hub as a concept in general. How is it unique?**

By creating a truly locally embedded ecosystem that listens to the needs of the local market context, and at the same time being globally connected with 100+ Impact Hubs, the Impact Hub Network provides a unique opportunity for communities of changemakers to create radically

positive change all around the world. In our 100+ locations, we host diverse communities of entrepreneurs, practitioners, investors, and organizations. By not only hosting our communities, but also by offering collaborative working and meeting spaces, and supporting programs to drive entrepreneurial action for a more just and sustainable world, Impact Hub is creating conditions for entrepreneurship and diversity to flourish.

**Tell us about Impact Hub's acceleration programs.**

Over the course of the past 12 years, we have developed several acceleration programs that help our entrepreneurs to get to the next level of their journey. Accelerate2030 is a great example of how a program has been developed by one of our Impact Hubs – in that case Impact Hub Geneva in Switzerland – and has scaled across the network. Accelerate2030 helps entrepreneurs from all around the world to scale their venture to another country/market throughout a 9-months designed program.

**How is Impact Hub different from a co-working space?**

The core of what we do is building communities for impact. Being part of a community, locally as well as globally, will help entrepreneurs to find peers,

to share knowledge, and to feel supported. Being an entrepreneur can be a lonely journey and by joining an Impact Hub community, the entrepreneur finds the support of an enabler and catalyst for social change as well as like-minded peers. One element of our business is providing workspace, but more importantly, building resilient communities. Moreover, we offer global connections to 16,000+ members, and a global Passport which allows every Impact Hub member to work from any other Impact Hub around the world, and lastly, we design support structures for our members that will help them all along their entrepreneurial journey, such as mentorship, incubation programs, etc.

**Two new Impact Hubs are expected to start in India this year. What is their nature? Tell us more.**

With the support and partnership of IEF, we are exploring how Impact Hub can be established in one Tier 1 and one Tier 2 cities. Hence, we hope for a lot of peer to peer support between those two Impact Hubs given the fact that the two teams will be going through a similar journey at the very same time. Moreover, given the fact that many cities across India are saturated with co-working spaces and incubators, but not necessarily focused on

social change, we are excited to disrupt the market and see how communities for impact can thrive in any city across India, a place where there is so much potential for impact!

**At Impact Hub, there are both social and fully commercial enterprises. In your view, what are the different challenges faced by social enterprises when compared to traditional commercial enterprises?**

First of all, many social entrepreneurs would not even call themselves social entrepreneurs. The word 'social' or 'impact' is understood differently all across the globe. An entrepreneur who might be considered an impact entrepreneur in Khartoum, Sudan might not be categorized in the same way in Berlin given the language difference and more importantly the market difference. So, the first challenge is the language. Moreover, impact investment is still developing across the globe and finding its own path. Having said that, above all, regardless of the fact if you are an entrepreneur or social entrepreneur, you will face the same challenges, such as access to finance, talent attraction, and much more. As our network does offer entrepreneurial support services, we are helpful to all of these entrepreneurs, but the focus of our communities is on creating a more just and sustainable world.

**You interacted with a couple of entrepreneurs from the Northeast on your recent visit to India. How was your experience?**

These entrepreneurs left me completely speechless; interacting with talented entrepreneurs



who are below 25 years but have already set up multiple enterprises is simply amazing. Moreover, the strong need for job creation became very apparent to me. Having had the pleasure to interact with entrepreneurs from the Northeast made me realize what a humble, kind, and pro-active culture it is. Given the drive of these young entrepreneurs, I am excited to see what the future has to offer.

**Do you see a swing towards social impact as a key measure of success for a business enterprise?**

Yes – given all the challenges that we are facing as a society these days, isn't it crucial that any new business contributes to a more just and sustainable world? Having said that, measuring impact is hard and it certainly implies having a common understanding about what 'social' and 'impact' means. The SDGs are providing a common understanding, one unique framework for us to

establish a common ground for social impact measurement. Our network has already been measuring its impact for years together with academic research partners, but the SDG framework is a crucial step towards being able to measure the impact we are creating around the world via one language.

**Advice you'll sign off with for all entrepreneurs, especially new ones?**

Practice your empathy skills. If you deeply listen from your heart and truly understand what your market needs, your venture is more likely to be successful. Listen to what has already been tried out across the globe to solve a similar problem. Listen to what is the deep root of the problem that you are trying to solve. And above all, never forget that you are not alone in this. Find your peers! 

The writer is Chairperson, IEF Entrepreneurship Foundation