Varna Sri Raman

Development Economist | Consulting

Contact

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About Me

An award-winning social researcher with eighteen-plus years of experience in the development sector in India. She has worked with gender, public health, Advocacy communications, education, governance, livelihoods, disaster reduction and response, resilience, and climate change research in over seven countries. Varna has served as the head and external member of internal posh committees in several organisations, has worked in feminist litigation at the Supreme Court of India and is a lifelong member of the Feminist Evaluation Network (FEN) and GENSA (Gender and Equity Network South Asia)

SKILL MAP

RESEARCH:
SURVEY PROTOCOL CREATION
EXPERIMENTAL|QUASI EXPERIMENTAL QUALITATIVE| MIXED METHODS
RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS PROGRAMMING CSPRO
COMMCARE | SURVEY CTO
ANDROID ODK

DATA ANALYSIS:
MAXQDA| R | PYTHON VIA ANACONDA
DATA VISUALIZATION AND ANALYTICS:
POWER BI | LOOKER STUDIO

REPORT WRITING:
FORMATIVE & SUMMATIVE INSIGHTS
HCD APPROACHES
KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

TRAINING:
PEDAGOGY|
INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN |LMS CURRICULUM DESIGN
INTERNAL ADVOCACY
ASSESSMENT TESTS

MANAGERIAL:
TEAM LEADERSHIP | LAUNCHES
BUDGET MANAGEMENT
BUSINESS STRATEGY
PROJECT MANAGEMENT & PLANNING NEGOTIATION
FORECASTING INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

WRITTEN CONTENT:
SOURCING & CURATION
REWRITING & EDITING | PROOFING & C-R
COPY|DOCUMENT & BOOK PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

EDUCATION

Sri Sankara Senior Secondary School (CBSE), Chennai
Graduated in 2000 – 92%, 1ˢᵗ Division.
The School, Krishnamurti Foundation India (CISCE), Chennai
Graduated in 2002 – 94%, 1ˢᵗ Division.
Electives: Economics, Environmental Studies, English, Health Studies

Delhi University, Delhi, South Campus
BA (Hons), Philosophy – 67% 1ˢᵗ Div Gold Medalist

ICFAI School of Public Policy Hyderabad,
MPP, (Public Finance) – 8.33/10 CGPA Summa Cum Laude 1ˢᵗ Division

National Institute of Business Management, Chennai
MBA (Corporate Law) – 4.3/5 CGPA, Summa Cum Laude
1st Division

TATA Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, 2014*
MPhil (MRes) | PhD - Development Studies,
Thesis Title: Schools in Urban Slums in India –
Constraints, Capabilities and Choices

WORK EXPERIENCE

Freelance Consultant and Entrepreneur
2019 – Current

Selected Assignments
➔ ***Client: The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) –*** Principal consultant on the South-South food fortification technology and skill transfer project (India and West Africa) and the Food Culture Institute project for India.
➔ ***Client: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation -*** Principal consultant on the MEL portfolio supporting primarily on Womens' Economic Empowerment and Public Health projects.
➔ ***Client: The India Health and Climate Resilience Fund—***Building the India Health and Climate Resilience Fellowship programme, focusing on including Human-Centered Design capacities at the district level to establish a "learning layer" in the Indian administrative system to solve complex public health and climate resilience problems over the next decade, 2024.
➔ ***Client: Railway Children India*** - A study on developing family reunification strategies for runaway platform children from the Delhi-Bengal railway corridor focused on climate change and the livelihood challenges these children face across six central Indian states, 2023.
➔ ***Client: Catalyst Consulting*** - A study on unpacking parental attitudes to low-cost private schooling, especially for girl children in seven states of India, 2023 for Catalyst Consulting.
➔ ***Client: Tata Trusts*** - A study on menstrual practices and product choices for married women and their daughters in five Indian states.
➔ ***Client***: ***Covid Relief Co*** - Mapping COVID data availability during the second wave of the pandemic in India
➔ ***Client: PLAN India -*** Authoring the 'Because of I am a Girl' report focusing on Gender Based Sex Selection (GBSS) laws and enforcement in India

Evidence Action, Programme Director No Lean Season, (Global)
2018

➔ **Execute the Global Strategy and management of the NLS program**
  ○ Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for NLS, incorporating evidence-based approaches and impact-focused methodologies.
  ○ Manage program operations across multiple countries, ensuring alignment with strategic objectives and compliance with local regulations and cultural norms.
➔ **Facilitate, grow, and steward NLS partnerships for scale and impact**
  ○ Enhance program reach and effectiveness, identify, cultivate, and manage relationships with key stakeholders, including government entities, NGOs, funding partners, and community organisations.
  ○ Negotiate partnerships and collaborations that leverage resources, expertise, and networks to drive program scalability and impact.

➔ **Oversee advocacy and communication efforts**
  ○ Lead the development and execution of an advocacy strategy that promotes policy changes and secures support for labour mobility initiatives.
  ○ Direct communication efforts to raise awareness of NLS's impact, share success stories, and engage with diverse audiences through various channels.
➔ **Lead technical inputs and quality controls**
  ○ Ensure the program's design and implementation are based on the latest research and evidence, incorporating innovative practices and technologies where appropriate.
  ○ Establish and maintain rigorous quality control and monitoring systems to evaluate program effectiveness and make data-driven adjustments.

- ➔ **Ensure quality service delivery of the program**
  - o Oversee the operational aspects of NLS, ensuring that services are delivered efficiently, effectively, and with high quality to the beneficiaries.
  - o Implement mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement to enhance program delivery and beneficiary satisfaction.
- ➔ **Lead the expansion of the NLS programme subject to continued impact evidence**
  - o Analyze program data and impact evidence to identify opportunities for expansion and replication in new geographies or contexts.
  - o Develop and execute plans for scaling the program, ensuring adaptations are made to fit local contexts while maintaining program integrity and outcomes.

American India Foundation Director, LEI
2017
- ➔ Created, developed, disseminated, and encouraged the adoption of an organization-wide MEL strategy, including robust theories of change (TOCs) and indicator tracking systems.
- ➔ Established programme audits focusing on quality, programmatic and financial perspectives.
- ➔ Implemented a Quality Assurance (QA) process for programme quality at AIF
- ➔ Drafted a research and programme Innovation Strategy (IS) under the Knowledge Management (KM) process.
- ➔ Worked to create a body of evidence on social development outcomes in peer-reviewed journals
- ➔ Worked on strategic impact measurement solutions, including:
  - o Cost-effective measures,
  - o Calculating social returns on investment (including impact investing bonds)
  - o Designing special purpose vehicle financing (such as FLDGs)
  - o Impact per beneficiary measures.
- ➔ Recruited, managed, and retained a high-quality MEL team, resulting in the expansion of MEL services.

Verian (formerly Kantar Public), Insight Director, Delhi
2016
- ➔ Produced high-quality and high-impact research studies for several independent quantitative and qualitative studies, including several rounds of pre-testing and baseline studies for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) on family planning.
- ➔ Led and produced a detailed state-level implementation index for India's Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan and UNICEF (UP) of RTE and the Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) framework for UNICEF.
- ➔ A suite of studies for CARE International (India), including unique studies on the effect of collectivisation (*of Dalit and Tribal women*) on women's empowerment, including developing pioneering mixed-methods indices and women's empowerment measurement methodologies.
- ➔ Published two award-winning industry whitepapers on *Sanitary Practice Adoption Barriers and Facilitators in Urban Slums in India* and *Barriers to Modern Family Planning Methods Uptake in Rural India – What Should BCC Campaigns Focus On* featuring advanced multivariate analysis including pricing estimations, segmentation/CHAID and multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) procedures.
- ➔ Created India Pulse, Kantar Public's syndicated research offering of Government Approval Ratings (GAR) – the equivalent of the worldwide political barometer series (AFRO/ASIAN and EURO Barometers), including offer design, costing and pricing, marketing collaterals and brand positioning.

BBC MediaAction, Evidence Building Specialist, Delhi
2014-2015
- ➔ Responsible for end-to-end project management of research projects, staff motivation and independent research-related communications outputs.
- ➔ Produced high-quality and high-impact research studies for more than twenty-two projects, including livelihood evaluations, WATSAN-WASH and RMNCH+A social research, resilience and humanitarian response research, social media campaign evaluations for resilience research and lifeline programming formative and assessment studies.
- ➔ Evaluation and formative studies for the Shaping Demands and Practices (SDP) project, part of the BMGF-led Ananya consortium in Bihar, to positively influence family planning and MCH outcomes. The work for the SDP project included various content tests, formative studies (for ATL and BTL interventions), user and usability tests and summative evaluations.

Sesame Workshop India, Research Director, Delhi
2009-2013
- ➔ Managed research to support the mainstreaming of health, girl child concerns and ECCE education in commercial children's television across India.
- ➔ Managing formative (pre-testing) and summative research around the television show and Sesame's outreach work across the country in six metropolitan cities. In addition.
- ➔ Also led Sesame Street's digital initiatives, which focussed on incubating various digital projects to enable

last-mile access to quality early childhood experiences, including a suite of award-winning Android apps.
➔ Worked closely with PR, advocacy, marketing and communication teams and understood media planning, selling/buying and the strategic analysis of media ratings, spots, slots and advertising points in the Indian media landscape.
➔ Architect of the formative study that guided the content and insights for the MEENA Radio programme for adolescent girls' health for UNICEF, which Sesame Workshop India created for the first time in 2011 for UNICEF.
➔ Architect of the award-winning Sesame Workshop India proposal to USAID under the Grand Challenge series for development focussing on reading, resulting in what is now called the All Children Reading (ACR) consortium of non-profits worldwide.

Institute of Financial Management and Research, Project Manager, Chennai
2008
➔ Worked on promoting safe institutional deliveries for women residing in rural areas.
➔ Designed a microfinance loan program (as part of an RCT-based evaluation pilot) that made it easier for pregnant women to access institutional delivery services.
➔ The execution of a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) pilot study focused on enhancing safe institutional deliveries in rural areas and included the following pieces of work:
  o Conducting detailed statistical analysis to determine the appropriate sample size, ensuring sufficient power to detect meaningful effects of the intervention. This calculation was based on preliminary estimates of the expected effect size, considering the variance within the target population.
  o The study employed instrumental variable techniques to estimate the Local Average Treatment Effect, explicitly focusing on individuals who were induced to participate in the program due to the microfinance loan offer. This was pivotal in understanding the program's impact on a subgroup of the population most likely to be influenced by the intervention.
  o Before the pilot, an in-depth analysis was undertaken to estimate the anticipated effect size of the microfinance loan program on institutional delivery rates. This involved reviewing existing literature and conducting preliminary field surveys to inform the statistical power and design of the RCT.
  o Meticulously established treatment and control groups, ensuring random assignment to accurately evaluate the program's efficacy. This included developing criteria for randomisation and ensuring the process was immune to selection biases.
  o To guarantee consistency and reliability in implementing the microfinance loan program across different locations, comprehensive SOPs were developed. These procedures covered every aspect of program delivery, from beneficiary enrolment to loan disbursement and repayment processes.
  o Rigorous criteria were established to determine household eligibility for the program and to identify those most in need of financial assistance for institutional deliveries. These criteria considered income levels, access to healthcare facilities, and previous birth history.
  o Designed detailed household questionnaires to collect baseline and follow-up data, enabling the measurement of critical outcomes and covariates. The development of these questionnaires was guided by the study's primary research questions and informed by a thorough literature review.
  o Analysis plans were crafted to outline the statistical methods for evaluating the collected data, including regression analysis, difference-in-differences estimation, and propensity score matching, where appropriate.

Selected Publications
➢ Sri Raman, Measuring School Readiness: The Sesame Workshop India Experience, November 2011, Entertainment Education Conference (EE5) JHUCCP
➢ Sriraman and Banerjee, Study of Impact of ECE on primary level outcomes, the Galli Galli Sim Sim intervention in ICDS (Mumbai), 2012, Journal of Childcare and Education Policy
➢ Sanitary Practice Adoption Barriers and Facilitators in Urban Slums in India, whitepaper for BMGF, 2016
➢ Barriers to Modern Family Planning Methods Uptake in Rural India – What Should BCC Campaigns Focus On, whitepaper for Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2016
➢ Schooling in Urban Slums in India - Choices, Capabilities and Constraints, 2016, HDCA Journal, Helsinki
➢ A framework for operationalising the Capabilities Framework in Poverty, 2016, HDCA and World Bank Poverty Measurement Journal
➢ Strengthening Public Schooling Systems in India – A Teacher-Centric Model Might Make All the Difference to Education – 2018 IDR
➢ The India Inequality Report (the India Supplement to Global Inequality Report for DAVOS in 2022) and India Discrimination Report for OXFAM India in 2022.
➢ Editing and co-authoring a book on human experiences of the second wave of the Pandemic in India, A Year of Havoc, for OXFAM, 2022.
➢ Budget and Social Welfare Allocations Review, CBA 2023
➢ Bringing Justice to Manipur, Live Law via PTI 2024
➢ Op-eds in ET, The Wire, BS, OneWorld South Asia, The Hindu and Washington Post. – 2023 and 2024