

## Transformational Leadership and Social Impacts via Volunteer Social Business Model for SDG#3 and #17

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### Abstract

*This study explores the transformational leadership style of Dr. Yogananth Andiappan within the Andiappan Yoga Community (AYC), contextualized through the five steps of design thinking and SY Model (2016) endorsed by SGS ISO accreditation body 10 years ago. Drawing on Yeung's SY Model framework, which emphasizes 7 principles of UNPRME and 17 UNSDGs, this research examines how Yogananth exemplifies transformational leadership by empower yoga volunteers with certification, fostering community empowerment via partnership with beneficiary number up to 92,000 in the annual report of 2023 with inclusivity and social innovations. Through qualitative analysis of analysing four years' annual reports (2020 – 2023) with organizational practices and community engagement projects, the findings reveal that Yogananth Andiappan's leadership promotes SDG#5 gender equity by encouraging active participation of women yoga trainers as volunteers, aligning with SDG#5 gender equality and SDG#8 decent jobs creation, facilitating the creation of meaningful employment opportunities, for example, project coordinators and yoga trainers/ MCs within the community. This leadership style underscores the importance of ecohumanistic values—empathy, sustainability, and social justice to drive positive social change. The study contributes to understanding how transformational leaders in nonprofit contexts with design thinking, SY Model (2016), UNPRME and UNSDGs for building sustainable wellness communities.*

**Keywords:** *Volunteer Partnership, Ecohumanistic Values, Design Thinking, Wellness, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)..*

### Introduction

Based on paper published on 5th November 2024, Legislative Council Panel on Economic Development, Policy Address Silver Economy, it is realised that “the Census and Statistics Department predicts that the number of persons aged 65 or above will increase from 1.64 million in 2023 to 2.67 million in 2043, while such proportion out of the total population will increase from 22.8% in 2023 to 35.0% in 2043. By then, more than one-third of Hong Kong's population will be elderly, signifying substantial market potential.” (p. 1 <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr2024/english/panels/edev/papers/edev20241105cb3-780-3-e.pdf>). “The Advisory Panel believed that the elderly population would become a significant consumer group in Hong Kong, and recommended that the Government could consider encouraging the business sectors to actively promote consumption among the elderly, constantly optimise existing silver products and services, as well as develop various types of silver products and services, so as to stimulate demand for products and services related to the silver economy.” (p.2) One of the elements for older adults will be developing balance and flexibility to avoid falls and enhance mobility for accessibility. Hence, this paper is going to explore potential market in yoga related wellness services and community-based projects with chair yoga, yoga balance and flexibility for the silver age population. In fact, chair yoga is also good for younger generation for happiness.

[https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2024/public/pdf/supplement/supplement-08\\_en.pdf](https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2024/public/pdf/supplement/supplement-08_en.pdf)

Under silver economy with growing aging population, Sustainable Development Goal SDG #3 wellness, promoting good health and well-being not only for older adults, but also younger generation for developing a sustainable lifestyle. Besides, the green economy is also complementary to silver economy in terms of pursuing wellness and growth. Based on United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), “a green economy is defined as low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive. In a green economy, growth in employment and income are driven by public and private investment into such economic activities, infrastructure and assets that allow reduced carbon emissions and pollution, enhanced energy and resource

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efficiency, and prevention of the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.” For the silver generation, often defined as individuals aged 60 and above, face unique health challenges, including decreased physical strength, reduced flexibility, impaired balance, and increased risk of falls and injuries. These age-related changes can significantly impact their quality of life, independence, and overall health status.

In response to the challenges of wellness, socially inclusion and ecosystem services with growth, it is time to explore the forms of innovative silver green business model for SDG#3 wellness and SDG#17 partnership with wellness services and exercises, such as chair yoga have gained recognition for their safety, accessibility, and effectiveness in improving physical and mental health among older adults. This paper explores the concept of transformational leadership and yoga wellness with a case study on a yoga NGO in Hong Kong with annual reports disclosed to the community, benefited silver community, older adults, young children with diversity groups of community projects on yoga wellness services. Drawing on existing literature, annual reports of andiappan community, Hong Kong and integrating insights from SY Model (2016), SDGs and design thinking, this discussion underscores the significance of transformational approaches to ageing well and greening well.

## Literature Review

The "green economy" refers to an economy that aims for sustainable development by reducing environmental risks (SDG#13 climate change) and ecological scarcities (SDG#14-15), while promoting social inclusion (SDG#5 gender equality and #10 removal inequalities) and economic growth (SDG#8 decent jobs creation). This paper focuses on yoga wellness business with transformational leadership for achieving SDG#3 wellness and well-being and SDGs in general.

Based on UNEP and literature, a green economy is characterized by the following elements, for example:

- Low-carbon and resource-efficient: minimizing carbon emissions in the process of production and consumption of products, semi-finished products and finished products/ services and using resources sustainably.
- Socially inclusive: ensuring that the transition to a green economy with diversity and equality benefited to all walks in life in a society.
- Sustainable development: balancing economic growth with environmental protection, social equity and governance structure (Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Environment, Social and Governance (ESG)).
- Investing in green infrastructure: promoting renewable and new energy with environmental-friendly waste management system and water conservation system.

## Connection between Green Economy and Yoga Wellness

In the past 10 years, the interlinkage concepts of green economy SDG#8 and yoga wellness SDG#3 has not been spelt out vividly. In fact, the green economy and yoga wellness are increasingly seen as complementary concepts with a shared focus on sustainable lifestyles.

For yoga wellness, the practice is focused on holistic well-being, aligned with a generic perspective of public health, connecting oneself with the nature, the purpose of life, the sustainable living, and socially and ecological responsibility. It is expected that yoga wellness practices can foster mindfulness and encourage the community to build health-conscious lifestyles, potentially contributing to a green economy.

## **From Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to IMM (Impacts Measurement and Management) - Social Impacts and Transformational Leadership**

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) guidelines of ISO 26000 highlight that a socially responsible organization needs to be aware of seven dimensions in their operations of business: labor practices, consumer issues, fair operating practices, human rights, organizational governance, community involvement and development and the environment. The priority of the seven dimensions is subject to the strategic planning of the management and the expectations of their stakeholders. For example, the management of a banking organization may need to understand the expectations of their customers when designing and launching different kinds of financial products and services, may need to identify not only their responsibility but also that of their business partners in the supply chain, may need to think about the environmental issues affecting their operations, their customers and their suppliers, and may need to consider ethical issues in their decision-making process so as to balance the economic, social and environmental impacts of sustainability; and the seven dimensions of CSR. The ISO Working Group on Social Responsibility (WG SR) has a high level of consensus in considering the needs of stakeholders in the guidelines of ISO 26000 for the benefit of the community. According to Cajazeira (2008), the major principles for ISO 26000 are: accountability, transparency, ethical behavior, consideration for the stakeholders, legality, international standards, and human rights. It is the responsibility of organizations to consider the needs of the stakeholders in these seven aspects when designing work processes or executing business-related activities. In fact, ISO standard 26000 conveys a message that non-economic inputs and soft side of outcomes are the trend of quality management system (QMS). Building quality into products and services for continuous improvement has been mentioned for scholars in total quality management in the past. Today, people started to explore integrating CSR and sustainability related elements into organizational strategy for sustainable business. Deep (2007) mentioned that there was a growing number proponents of the ‘stakeholder’ or ‘social responsibility’ model of corporate governance holding that business was accountable to a broader populace who have a direct or indirect stake in the enterprise’s activities. Although there is a lack of comprehensive evidence that CSR and sustainability lead to improving financial performance, awareness to environmental and social concerns from different stakeholders is needed for the progress of organization

The IMM (Impact, Measurement and Management) framework emphasizes understanding, creating, and evaluating social impacts, which are critical for nonprofits organization. The aim of a growing number of impact investors is to be more intentional in maximising positive – and minimising negative – outcomes associated with their investments through well defined impacts creation with projects that can be qualitatively and quantitatively measured projects’ impacts and practices. Leaders need to understand their core strengths and organizational culture when creating projects with tangible benefits aligned with community needs and broader goals in UNSDGs. In AYC’s case, leadership has prioritized measuring health improvements, mental well-being, and social cohesion among participants.

Leadership’s strategic focus on impact measurement has facilitated continuous improvement in yoga wellness projects, accountability and transparency of certified yoga trainer / volunteer involvement for building community trust. For example, the annual reports from 2020 to 2023 detail metrics such as participant satisfaction, health outcomes, and volunteer engagement levels, demonstrating a commitment to IMM principles. Leaders’ ability to interpret these metrics informs investors’ decision-making and resource allocation for generating social benefits.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Yeung, S.M.C. & Wong, F.C.C. (2022, p.16) mentioned that “transformational leadership came from the theory of charisma (Burns, 1978; Safonov et al., 2018). However, Barbuto (1997) argued that leaders can be transformational without a charismatic style. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire their people to achieve expected success and develop their leadership potential by engaging the followers to involve themselves (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978). Research in leadership has been dominated by transformational leadership since the 1980’s (Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018).” It is undoubtedly that leadership plays a critical and pioneer role in shaping the behaviours of followers for impacts. In this

paper, a community service-based organization “Andiappan Yoga Community (AYC)” has been selected to explore the impacts of transformative leadership of the founder to build a volunteer-based nonprofit organization with therapeutic yoga classes to those in need, which helps to expand and foster the concepts of green economy and yoga wellness, community engagement and social and ecological responsibility, for example SDG#3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 16, and 17. This paper explores how leadership motivated passionate certified yoga volunteers with a diversity of projects for AYC’s development in the past years via applying 5 steps of design thinking – empathy, ideas, prototype, experiment, validation with SDGs.

## **The Role of Leadership in Nonprofit Growth and Community Impact**

Leadership in nonprofit organizations, like AYC is fundamental with a shared vision/ mission to build positive organizational culture via volunteer engagement and community projects for social impacts. Effective transformative leaders inspire collective actions, foster innovations in building a volunteer-based social business model, and adapt to the changing community needs, for example elderly and children. AYC’s leadership has been instrumental in its expansion, evidenced by increased community projects and a growing number of volunteers with yoga certifications. Over the period 2020-2023, AYC’s annual reports reveal strategic initiatives, for example removing yoga barriers in different community projects, increasing community outreach, designing a diversified community yoga wellness programmes, and strengthening volunteer networks via ongoing workshop, meetings and certification programmes.

## **Applying Design Thinking to Leadership in AYC**

Design thinking, a human-centered approach to problem-solving, has been influential in nonprofit leadership by emphasizing empathy, ideas, prototype, experiment, validation (Brown, 2009). AYC’s leadership employs design thinking principles to refine its community service delivery, ensuring that therapeutic yoga classes meet the specific needs of diverse populations. For instance, leadership initiatives during the pandemic involved rapid prototyping of virtual yoga classes, adapting to restrictions while maintaining community engagement. This iterative process, driven by empathy for participants’ circumstances, exemplifies how design thinking fosters innovation in social impact organizations. Furthermore, leadership’s facilitation of participatory workshops and feedback mechanisms aligns with the core tenets of design thinking—listening to community voices and co-creating solutions. This approach enhances the relevance and effectiveness of AYC’s programs, fostering trust and deeper community ties, which are vital for sustained impact.

## **Leadership and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

AYC’s mission aligns closely with several SDGs, notably SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Effective leadership ensures that the organization’s activities contribute meaningfully to these goals. For instance, by providing free therapeutic yoga classes to underserved populations, AYC directly advances SDG#3 wellness by promoting mental and physical health.

AYC transformative leadership builds strategic partnerships with local organizations, healthcare providers, and volunteer certification bodies exemplify SDG#17 partnership, fostering collaboration and resource sharing. Over the years, the growing number of volunteers as trainers for community projects reflects leadership’s success of AYC in building a network that supports sustainable community development.

Furthermore, leadership’s emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility in program design with design thinking addresses SDG#10 by reducing inequalities in health and wellness opportunities. The expansion of community projects demonstrates leadership’s commitment to reaching marginalized groups, thereby fostering social cohesion.

## **The Impact of Leadership on AYC’s Community Projects and Volunteer Growth**

Leadership has been central to the expansion of AYC's community projects, which include mental health initiatives, elderly wellness programs, and youth outreach. The strategic vision set by leaders has prioritized scalability and sustainability, allowing projects to evolve and adapt over time. For example, the introduction of virtual classes during COVID-19 was a leadership-driven innovation that maintained service continuity and expanded reach.

Volunteer participation has surged, driven by leaders' capacity to inspire and mobilize community members. The organization's volunteer certifications—aligned with recognized standards—have increased, reflecting effective leadership in capacity building and professional development. This growth not only enhances program quality but also fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among volunteers, reinforcing the community's resilience and sustainability.

### **Leadership Challenges and Opportunities**

Despite the good practice of AYC community, there may have challenges need to be tackled, for example, limited manpower, availability of resources limitations, and knowledge of SDG to volunteers for maintaining long-term social impacts. AYC's leadership must navigate these complexities by fostering a culture of system thinking with plan, do, check, act of continuous learning, leveraging partnerships to overcome the limitations on resources, and employing innovative evaluation methods, for example adoption of ISO 26000 system or IMM. Embracing digital transformation and data analytics can further enhance systematic impact measurements.

Moreover, leadership has opportunities to deepen its alignment with SDGs by integrating environmental sustainability (e.g. environmental materials in yoga mat and accessories) into yoga practices (e.g. choosing a low carbon emission site) and expanding programs to underserved regions virtually. Building leadership capacity through training and peer networks can sustain growth and impact.

Leadership profoundly influences the impact and sustainability of the Andiappan Yoga Community. Through adopting design thinking, prioritizing social impact measurement, and aligning with SDGs, AYC's leaders have successfully expanded community projects, increased volunteer engagement, and enhanced service quality. As the organization continues to grow, adaptive, innovative, and impact-focused leadership will be essential in navigating future challenges and opportunities, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and healthier society.

### **Methodology and Key Findings**

#### **Annual Report Search to Identify Key Elements for ICH Yoga Practice Model**

Based on a recent article of Andiappan (2017), "mental and physical fatigue can be lessened by asana practice, which rests the brain and rejuvenates the body and the mind. The practice includes inverted postures like Sirsasana, Viparata Karani and Sarvangasana; forward bending posture such as Padahasthasana, Paschimottanasana, posture keeps the spine supple. Pranayama opens the chest and lungs and bring freedom in the diaphragm. Ujjayi, Bhujangasana and Adho Mukha Svanasana. Backward bending postures like Ustrasana, Chakrasana and Bhujangasana are helpful in relieving mental fatigue, which is the cause of physical dullness and laziness. In addition, twisting gm." (p. 22).

Emergence of business usually goes along with demographics change of a country and new demands of customers. Demand chain and supply chain management of product/ service are unique for different newly emerged industries under globalization and technological advancement in a society. Educators and industry practitioners need to be aware of these changes to catch up with new skills development and new job creation for sustainable development. In order to understand the benefits of yoga with new skills development and new job creation, Yeung (2017) explored the key elements of yoga business in the past 18 years through literature search. 17 relevant journal papers related to yoga business (1998-2016) have been selected and analyzed with NVivo software.

**Table 1 - Key Words Search on Sustainable Yoga Business**

(Literature from 1998 to 2016 with 17 selected articles)

Key words	Reference	Coverage
<b>Moral Development`</b>	<b>385</b>	<b>10.64</b>
Commitment	94	7.7
Humility	0	0
<b>Growing Business</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>21.44</b>
Service	48	8.75
Teamwork	0	0
<b>Sustainable Development</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>153.2</b>
Eco Impacts`	15	0.84
<b>Decent Job Creation</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>25.27</b>
Environmental Impacts	14	0.98
Social Impacts	57	1.07
Spirituality	29	1.23
<b>Quality of Education</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>6.98</b>
<b>Peace in Mind</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>3.09</b>
Resilience	35	2.78
<b>Innovations</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>3.09</b>
Harmony	1	0.06
Integrity	1	0.06

**Research Objectives (ROs)**

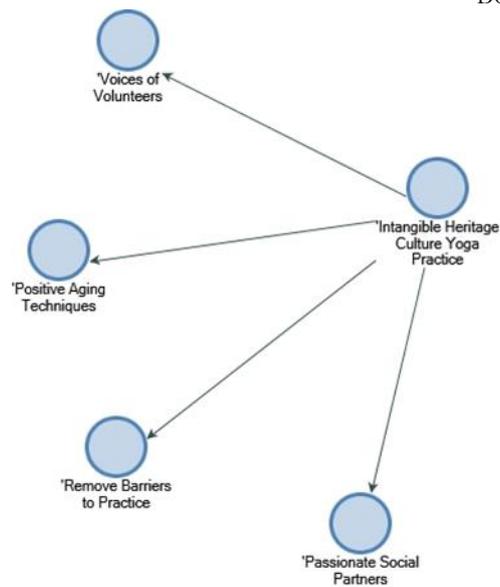
Previous research has found that UNSDG#4 quality of education in sustainable development has not been comprehensively explored in yoga business. This research explores further on the key elements for building an intangible cultural heritage yoga practice model for sustainable development.

Two Research Objectives (RQs):

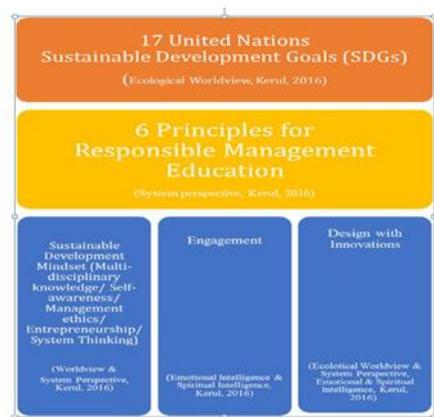
- 1) What are the key elements for an Intangible Cultural Heritage Yoga Practice Model?
- 2) What is the trend of community related yoga activities for social impacts in yoga business?

**1) What are the key elements for an Intangible Cultural Heritage Yoga Practice Model?**

Based on qualitative and quantitative analysis of these selected four years of annual reports in the website of Andiappan Community with founder / director - Dr Yogananth Andiappan, four major constructs are found for an ICH Yoga Practice Model (references of 382) – 1) Voices of Volunteers (122 references), 2) Positive Anti-ageing Techniques (38 references), 3) Remove Practice Barriers (34 references), and 4) Passionate Social Partners (27 references).



**Diagram 1 – ICH Yoga Practice Model**



**SY Model (Yeung, 2016)**

From the perspective of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), the results align with the goal#4 – quality of education with transferable skills, goal # 3 well being for quality of life, goal# 8 economic growth with decent job creation and goal #9 innovations with certified yoga volunteers for sustainable yoga business to serve the communities for silver and green economy. These findings are of practical value in terms of understanding the key elements for ICH yoga model through re-visiting the ways of educating trainers, volunteers, and the participants of elderly and a diversity groups of beneficiary, and the ways of creating connections in engaging social partners for social impacts in wellness. This brings insights to industry practitioners, investors, educators and policy makers on the importance of tracing the trend of emerging industry for sustainable development. And, the findings are well aligned with the philosophy of Andiappan Yoga Community (AYC) of Dr. Yogananth Andiappan’s therapeutic yoga for the services that offered to meet the needs of communities.

Drawing on Yeung’s framework (SY Model, 2016), which emphasizes 7 principles of UNPRME and 17 UNSDGs, this research examines how Yoganathan exemplifies transformational leadership by empower yoga volunteers with certification, fostering community empowerment via partnership with beneficiary number up to 92,000 in annual report of 2023 with inclusivity and social innovations. Through qualitative analysis of analysing four years’ annual report (2020 – 2023) with organizational practices and community engagement projects, findings reveal that Yogananth’s leadership promotes SDG#5 gender equity by

encouraging active participation of women yoga trainers as volunteers, aligning with SDG#5 gender equality and SDG#8 decent jobs, facilitating the creation of meaningful employment opportunities, for example, project coordinators and yoga trainers/ MCs within the community. This leadership style underscores the importance of eco humanistic values—empathy, sustainability, and social justice to drive positive social change. The study contributes to understanding how transformational leaders in nonprofit contexts with design thinking, SY Model, UNPRME and UNSDGs for building sustainable wellness communities.

**Andiappan Yoga Community (AYC)** is a volunteer-based nonprofit organisation offering therapeutic yoga classes to those in need.

### Vision and Mission

Yoga is an ancient practice that nurtures mental and physical well-being. Our vision is to remove barriers and make the benefits of yoga accessible to those in need.

Our mission is to enrich lives with yoga and expand access to its therapeutic benefits to all communities m o r e across Hong Kong. (source: <https://yogacommunity.org/>)

Name	Sources	References
'Intangible Heritage Culture Yoga Practice	4	382
<b>'Voices of Volunteers</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>122</b>
'Positive Aging Techniques	4	38
'Remove Barriers to Practice	4	34
'Passionate Social Partners	4	27

## 2) What is the trend of community related yoga activities for social impacts in yoga business?

### 2020 Annual Report in Numbers

Volunteers/ Volunteer Hours / Public Event / Projects/ Student Attendances

594 / 2557 / 1 / 20/ 1557

### 2021 Annual Report in Numbers

Volunteers/ Volunteer Hours / Public Event / Projects/ Student Attendances

440 / 3960 / 3 / 21 / 3627

\*\* NEW Continuing Education Workshop for Volunteers (6)

\*\* NEW Volunteer Meeting (5)

\*\* NEW Media Interview (5)

### 2022 Annual Report in Numbers -

Volunteers/ Volunteer Hours / Public Event / Projects/ Student Attendances

800 / 4160 / 2/ 16/ 9230

\*\* NEW Continuing Education Workshop for Volunteers (1)

\*\* NEW Volunteer Meeting (2)

\*\* NEW Media Interview (1)

### 2023 Annual Report in Numbers -

Certified Volunteers with Yoga Qualifications (with Active Community Volunteers) / Volunteer Hours / Community Projects/ Beneficiaries

3,800 (900+) / 55,000 / 107 / 92,000

(Source: <https://yogacommunity.org/>)

**Table 2 – Text Search on Key factors for ICH Yoga Practice Model**

Name	Sources	References
'Intangible Heritage Culture Yoga Practice	4	382
'Voices of Volunteers	4	122
'Positive Aging Techniques	4	38
'Remove Barriers to Practice	4	34
'Passionate Social Partners	4	27

**Table 3 – Text Search – ICH Yoga Practice**

Name	References	Coverage
AYC-2020-Annual-Report-Final	71	1.39%
AYC-Annual-Report-2021	102	1.41%
AYC-Annual-Report-2022-1	94	1.31%
AYC-Annual-Report-2023	115	1.80%

**Table 4 - Text Search - Voices of Volunteers**

Name	References	Coverage
AYC-2020-Annual-Report-Final	24	1.01%
AYC-Annual-Report-2021	37	1.11%
AYC-Annual-Report-2022-1	32	1.03%
AYC-Annual-Report-2023	29	1.02%

**Table 5 – Text Search – Positive Anti-Aging Techniues**

Name	References	Coverage
AYC-2020-Annual-Report-Final	2	0.05%
AYC-Annual-Report-2021	10	0.20%
AYC-Annual-Report-2022-1	9	0.16%
AYC-Annual-Report-2023	17	0.40%

**Table 6 – Text Search – Remove Barriers to Practice**

Name	References	Coverage
AYC-2020-Annual-Report-Final	9	0.32%
AYC-Annual-Report-2021	10	0.26%
AYC-Annual-Report-2022-1	6	0.16%
AYC-Annual-Report-2023	9	0.27%

**Table 7 – Text Search – Passionate Social Partners**

Name	References	Coverage
AYC-2020-Annual-Report-Final	6	0.21%
AYC-Annual-Report-2021	9	0.20%
AYC-Annual-Report-2022-1	10	0.24%
AYC-Annual-Report-2023	2	0.05%

## Conclusion

Based on the qualitative analysis on ICH yoga practice model for sustainable development, it is found that UNSDGs, SY Model and design thinking served as guiding principles to measure social impacts of IMM, appealing investors' interest in supporting community projects, for example SDG#3 yoga wellness projects to serve a diversity of stakeholders. Through N'vivo qualitative analysis of AYC four years' annual reports (2020 – 2023) with organizational practices and community engagement projects, the findings reveal that Dr Yogananth Andiappan's leadership promotes SDG#5 gender equality by encouraging active participation of women yoga trainers as volunteers, aligning with SDG#5 gender equality and SDG#8 decent jobs, facilitating the creation of meaningful employment opportunities, for example, project coordinators and yoga trainers/ MCs within the community. This leadership style underscores the importance of ecohumanistic values—empathy, sustainability, and social justice to drive positive social change.

It is time to explore the relevant skill sets required to become a transformational leader to deliver quality SDG#3 yoga wellness services to customers and the community in need for social impacts and increase the trust from stakeholders for sustainable development. Hence, ongoing data collection from different channels and communications with different stakeholders are important in transformational leadership in NGOs for social impacts.

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