



omprakash

2020 Vision: **Let This Darkness** **Be a Bell Tower**

**facilitating relationships, dialogue &
learning between social change
agents around the world**



Omprakash Annual Letter

October 2020

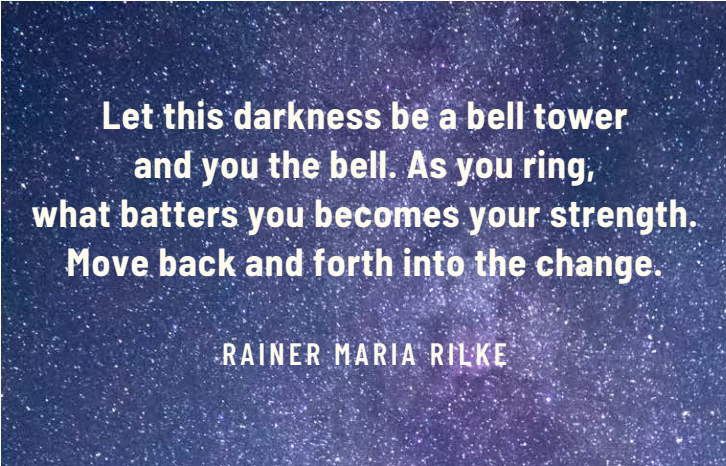
Dear friends and supporters,

For the past fifteen years we have shared an Annual Report in late February or early March. These letters typically report on the prior year's programs and financials while also setting goals for the year ahead and recommitting ourselves to our core values.

At the start of 2020, we were excited to share that 2019 had been a banner year for us, both financially and programmatically. For the first time since our founding, our earned revenue surpassed our total operating expenses, allowing us to channel 100% of donor contributions directly towards grants for Omprakash Partners and scholarships for students in our EdGE programs. Meanwhile, Omprakash Partners set an all-time record for total fundraising via our platform, and we offered our EdGE online training and mentorship to an unprecedented number of students, universities, and partnering nonprofits. We entered the year with renewed energy and excitement about charting the next stages of our journey.

Then the pandemic began, and the idea of reporting on our successes from 2019 suddenly seemed irrelevant. We decided to focus on the crises at hand and delay sending our annual update until "things calmed down" — and we all know how that turned out.

Now it is October, and the initial turmoil caused by the coronavirus has only metastasized, spurred on by the pre-existing and interrelated plagues of systemic racism, economic inequality, environmental destruction, and political extremism. This moment seems unprecedented in so many ways, yet none of us are strangers to the existential question of how to live and work wholeheartedly in a world full of sadness and suffering and injustice.



**Let this darkness be a bell tower
and you the bell. As you ring,
what batters you becomes your strength.
Move back and forth into the change.**

RAINER MARIA RILKE

And so in the midst of this most unusual year, we will not be sharing a typical Annual Report. Instead, we write to share a simple message: we are still here — and not just surviving, but ripening and strengthening as we seize this opportunity to sharpen our focus and deepen our commitments. Facing a world marked by isolation, division, and increasingly urgent demands to imagine alternatives to the status quo, our mission to build relationships, raise consciousness, and foster dialogue across differences seems more vital than ever before.

At the start of the pandemic, our immediate priority was supporting the safety of the team members, volunteers, and interns working with our Partner organizations around the world. We then turned our attention towards building and launching two free EdGE online learning communities to help individuals and social impact organizations adapt to this period of disruption and 'move into the change' as an opportunity for personal growth and social transformation.

To date, this [Facing Pandemic](#) course series has enrolled over 450 participants from more than 40 countries. We also focused on helping Partners envision ways that volunteers and interns could support their work without leaving home. As of today, Omprakash Partners have posted over 130 positions for online volunteers and interns, and have received nearly 400 applications and accepted 95 applicants for roles including remote teaching, translation assistance, and web presence improvement.

In April, we launched our new Web Access Support Program, offering emergency financial assistance to help Omprakash Partners pay for the crucial costs of internet access during this volatile time. To date, we have been able to award more than 60 grants covering 2-3 months of web access expenses for grassroots organizations across our network. We also launched a [new webinar and discussion series](#) to encourage dialogue and collaboration amongst Partners and other members of our network on diverse topics including the impact of the pandemic on people with disabilities, digital participatory theatre for conflict resolution, and wellbeing for social change leaders. We have continued supporting Partners with targeted consultancy from our Mentor team (now including 73 people across seven countries) via our Partner Development Grant program, and we are working with a subset of five Partners on a multi-year participatory action research project. Amidst all of this, we have also been excited to add 32 new Omprakash Partners from countries including Mexico, South Africa, Greece, and the United States; our Partner network now includes 186 organizations in 49 countries. In 2020 our Partners have already raised over \$4 million via Omprakash – an all-time record for our network, and a particularly vital transfer of resources at this time.

Meanwhile, we also completely revamped our core EdGE online learning curriculum to help our students interrogate the ways in which the pandemic exacerbates and illuminates pre-existing structures of social inequality. Our new core curriculum also grapples more directly with legacies of white supremacy and the ongoing struggle for racial justice, and includes a deeper emphasis on the inner work of cultivating resilience and even joy while simultaneously confronting the magnitude of human suffering and structural violence. As always, we continue to adapt this curriculum for different programs and audiences, and through this ongoing process we have launched several new [‘Widening Circles’ EdGE programs](#) with university partners including University of Washington, Quinnipiac University, Claremont McKenna College, and Colby College.



Drawing further inspiration [from Rilke](#), the Widening Circles motif engages one of the great ironies of this moment: even during this time of isolation and distancing, all of us are inextricably enmeshed in broader networks of possibility and interdependence that “reach out across the world.” Our work is a way of making these linkages more visible, so that they may invite us in to new ways of thinking and being.

The year is far from over, and we dare not predict what darkness lies ahead. What we can promise is that we will continue to move into the change, and do so with hope, creativity, conviction, and love. Thank you for being part of this journey.

**With gratitude,
The Omprakash Team**

If you wish to support our work with a financial contribution, please do so at omprakash.org/donate.

Voices of our Students

“I was just reflecting the other day about what a gift Omprakash has been for me. Not only have you made this year financially possible for me, but EdGE has helped me grow in ways I never expected. When I chose Omprakash for my gap year my biggest concern was that it would seem impersonal due to its virtual nature, but I've felt incredibly supported and connected. You are really good at what you do!”

“Being a part of EdGE has genuinely been transformative. Within my extremely STEM filled education I rarely have the opportunity to dialogue within my classes on any topics and often feel very stagnant in my non-technical thinking.[...] In EdGE, because there was no teacher/student dynamic, all of us were learning together with minimal power or expertise differences. This type of learning environment and the type of content that dived into prevalent and often misunderstood global topics was something I had been craving in my life. [...] I believe I am a more well rounded, equipped, and critically thinking human and student largely due to my involvement with EdGE and the wonderful humans I was able to discuss with.”

“It's interesting to reflect back on how Widening Circles gave me an avenue to lean in to understanding how to grapple with the uncertainties and paradoxes of life. I think the moments of this classroom that jump out to me are the smallest - a single line that resonated with me, feeling inspired by reading someone else's reflection, noticing how a recent unit changed how I viewed some aspect of the world around me. This program has also pushed me to take more time for reflection -- whether that is a walk, intentional journaling time, or some other form of creative expression. Widening Circles has been sobering, hopeful, humbling, and challenging, and, for that, I am grateful.”

“Though I was not expecting to have a culturally immersive experience abroad this summer, during the first month of my remote internship, I have learned a lot more than I expected. The interactions I have had through a screen have allowed me to understand more about the United States from the point of view of others.”

Voices of our Partners

“We are very happy and grateful with the support and guidance received from Omprakash during this pandemic and difficult times for everyone. During this time, staying together as partners and sharing experiences with all the members of the Omprakash network has been really useful as we have been able to exchange ideas and come up with other ways for everyone to adjust to this new reality we are all facing. We really appreciate your frequent efforts for providing all of us members, not only guidance but also new opportunities for support and improvement of our organizations. Thank you!”

“After so many months of social isolation, virtual classes - like all virtuality itself - become a bit tedious. However, the presence of volunteers from other countries makes the experience of the classes more interesting. Besides the benefit of having a native speaker as a teacher, virtual volunteers allow the teachers to give more attention to the students, something that is often really difficult in this context. They also relieve the teaching load of having to spend so many hours explaining and correcting for the various classes.”

“Internet and data access is one of those structural costs that are essential for the proper functioning of our organization but that, unfortunately, aren't usually covered by the grants that we receive. Receiving the Omprakash Partner Web Access Support will allow us to direct the limited funds (given the current crisis) that we get through self-fundraising actions to cover other structural costs.”

“I just wish to appreciate Omprakash for the amazing work you are doing to help NGOs world wide achieve their vision for social change.”

