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Vanessa Goas

Welcome to data for What? The Development Gateway podcast. I'm your host, Vanessa Goas, and in this series we'll explore combating climate change with data and innovative approaches. In this episode, we're speaking with Roshan Paul, who was formerly with our strategic partner. Deeply committed to curiosity and challenging the status quo, Roshan has a rich career developing innovation around creating socially impactful careers.

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Vanessa Goas

At IREX, Roshan was the director of the Leadership Practice, one of our four core practice areas. In that role, he conceived and set up the Climate Talent Initiative, IREX's first in-house climate program. Roshan has since left IREX to set up and lead an independent new philanthropic entity, also called the Climate Talent Initiative, which will continue to support our climate work as part of a broader portfolio of programming at the intersection of climate change, talent and leadership development.

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Vanessa Goas

Welcome, Roshan.

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Roshan Paul

Hi. Well, thanks for having me on.

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Vanessa Goas

Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to be a leader in social impact careers?

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Roshan Paul

My story begins back in India, actually, which is where I grew up. I grew up pretty normal, middle class background, but I played a lot of cricket in high school, and that was kind of my main reason for existence. And so when I realized I wasn't going to become a professional cricket player to cure my broken heart, I fled to America, to a small village in North Carolina where they don't know anything about cricket back then.

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Roshan Paul

At least now, it's a little bit more prevalent in North Carolina in particular. But back then, I like most foreign students in the U.S. I was going through college looking at jobs and consulting, investment banking and so on, and didn't really know what I was going to do. But then my final year of college coincided with 911, which was followed, a few months later by a terrorist attack on the Parliament building in India, followed a few months later by violent riots in western India between Hindus and Muslims, followed by the US starting to bomb Afghanistan and talk about bombing Iraq.

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Roshan Paul

And all of that was happening in the year that I was graduating from college. And so it seemed to me that the two countries I knew best were on fire. And I didn't think that going to a consulting firm or an investment bank would really, like, make a difference in what was happening in the world. So I decided to turn down actually a pretty lucrative consulting opportunity in the US, and moved back to India, where I started working in social entrepreneurship, and that started a ten year career in the field of social entrepreneurship.

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Roshan Paul

And kind of towards the end of those ten years, a lot of the people who thought I was nuts for making that choice about like leaving the US and turning down this consulting role and moving back to India to work for a nonprofit at a pretty low salary. A lot of those people were asking me, hey, like, now you're kind of working on at the global level and flying around the world and speaking at conferences like that sounds cool.

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Roshan Paul

I'm a bit bored in my cubicle here in this corporation. How could I also build a career in social impact? And I realized that I may have some answers and how to do that at the same time. I had also just finished grad school. I was learning that I learned much more while working than I ever did in school, even though I went to like, some of the best universities in the world.

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Roshan Paul

And so I felt like there was something missing in the way that people were being trained for their careers, particularly those who are studying for careers in social impact. And also one

employers needed at the time. And so I decided to start an organization, along with a co-founder called Amani Institute, that focused on helping people build careers in social impact.

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Roshan Paul

According to what was really needed in the field and not necessarily what your typical master's in international relations or, you know, peace studies or so on, like was was giving you. I left that organization for about ten years. We grew to we started in East Africa and then expanded to Latin America and then to South Asia as well, and worked with over 10,000 people around the world who were trying to improve or scale their careers and social impact and then step down from that organization, wrote a book about everything I'd learned about social impact for years, and then joined my role at EECs, where I continue to be able to have lots of young people

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Roshan Paul

around the world build and scale their impact careers, which is obviously very satisfying and including in the climate change space as well, which is, I guess, what we'll be talking about.

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Vanessa Goas

I think a lot of people from our generation can really identify with that moment of existential dread that you were going to describe at the end of your college career. what would you do in making that transition? For me? It's an incredible story. Thank you for sharing that. Now that you've been doing this for a while, from where you're sitting, what do you see that's been happening in the field of social impact work and climate work.

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Vanessa Goas

How are these sectors operating both together and separately, like what are the trends that you've been seeing?

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Roshan Paul

I think climate change work is one part of the broader field of social impact, right. You have education and health, economic development, human rights, conflict resolution and so on. A humanitarian world and all of these sectors work in ways that are distinct from each other, but also overlap in some ways. And then you've got climate and environment as another sector as well.

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Roshan Paul

And so I think that these issues are often very connected. So you have climate and health or climate and technology and climate and education and so on. So there's again, lots of overlap between them in terms of the trends. It's really kind of varied and things that I maybe foresaw 5 or 6 years ago. Then we had a pandemic.

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Roshan Paul

And and I think things change again, I think as we're looking at remote work and how that can affect, you know, the way someone thinks about their career, that's increasingly becoming a factor as well. And then of course, there's, you know, global issues like climate change, but also

the future of democracy, the rise of I, things like that, that are all kind of, you know, trends that are shaping our field and shaping our work in ways that unsettle, fully fleshed out or understood or known.

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Roshan Paul

And we can look back a little bit and like in hindsight, start to understand, oh, the pandemic led to remote work, which is fundamentally going to reshape the future of work. But it's hard to look now at like, what's I going to do to all of our you know, what's patients threatening us from now or 15 years from now, or even like how an increasingly warming planet is going to be affecting the choices we might make about our lifestyles, about where we work and things like that.

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Vanessa Goas

Hindsight will definitely be 2020, but it's a question of how can we be agile enough to react to the things that are happening in real time, to prepare people who have no real needs for jobs, and to to be in the job market. One of the major programs that you've developed during your time at IRS has been the Climate Talent Initiative.

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Vanessa Goas

Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

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Roshan Paul

The Climate Talent Initiative was born from in a little way, like my own challenge as well as I transitioned my career from the organization I founded, in part because I was really interested in passionate about trying to do something to address the climate crisis, but found it was actually quite hard to get a job in the climate change field.

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Roshan Paul

And I felt that I was in a good position because I had built and scaled an organization globally. I have an Ivy League education, and, you know, I've lived and worked all around the world, and yet I found it next to impossible to get a job in climate change. And so as I started to like, you know, look into why that is, I, I understood that the climate field historically has been pretty narrowly defined and focused around the climate science, climate policy and to some extent, climate tech, but that this wasn't going to be enough to scale the sector to meet the needs of our time, because I firmly believe that climate change eventually going

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Roshan Paul

to become something as cross-cutting as technology is today. Right? Like we couldn't imagine our work without using a daily use of technology. The way that I for instance, has sort of infused the workspace and the culture as a cross-cutting issue. So I think eventually in 5 or 6 years, we're going to look at climate, the way we look at the attack today as like just something inseparable from how we do our work.

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Roshan Paul

And so in order to be able to actualize that or to even meet that moment when it comes, we need to expand the tent and bring in many, many more different kinds of people into the space. Right? One of the leaders in the space from Project Drawdown says that in the future, every job will be a climate job.

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Roshan Paul

And I actually think that there's a lot to that as well. Right. So how do we like sort of meet demand and supply? Learning from my own journey, I felt that there's many, many kinds of work that we in the climate field that we don't necessarily need climate scientists to do, our climate policy experts to do right. We need people from finance, from the legal profession, from the communications field.

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Roshan Paul

You know, we need salespeople, we need program managers, we need HR people, and so on, because otherwise the climate facing organizations aren't going to be able to scale up to get the talent that they need to meet that mission. So that's essentially what the Climate Talent Initiative is trying to do. It's trying to de-risk that entry of skilled professionals from many different fields into working in the climate facing nonprofits, climate facing social businesses and so on.

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Vanessa Goas

That's really exciting. And I can very much resonate with this question of climate change work being so focused on the hard science, right, like the hard data and things like that, and it being

somewhat inaccessible to everybody else. Well, at the same time, I believe and I'm sure you agree, that climate change affects everything. There's not going to be a single sector of society that's going to be unaffected by climate change.

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Roshan Paul

I totally agree.

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Vanessa Goas

From my perspective, one of the most unique components of this initiative is the kind of flexible support that IRA is able to offer to mid-career professionals. So providing these customized development and leadership opportunities and the initiative. Can you give us some examples of what these customized opportunities might look like?

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Roshan Paul

Yes. So as I said, what the initiative is really trying to do is to make that transition process less risky for both the individual that's making that transition, who maybe, you know, leaving a job where they're doing pretty well, let's say in finance to work for climate finance. Like that's a risky step to take for them. But it's also risky for the organization.

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Roshan Paul

They're going to go to that, you know, has a particular culture, has a particular approach, has a particular set of individuals from the climate space to get this like new finance person coming in who doesn't come from the same field, right. So there's a cultural kind of challenge on both sides, and that makes it there's a perception of risk with this.

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Roshan Paul

So what we're trying to do is to smoothen that pathway, to make that transition a little bit easier through a very customized program. And so we've got what we call the climate finance fellowships. And this is just one example, the Climate Finance Fellowship, which looks for finance professionals who want to work in climate finance related jobs and gives them a guaranteed salary for a year with a climate finance nonprofit so the nonprofit doesn't have to fundraise additionally for this person salary.

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Roshan Paul

But we cover their salary on top of that because these are finance experts, but not climate experts. We also give them access to climate related education and a credential. So they also, you know, get to do a course and get a lot of exposure to leaders in this field that sort of serves as both their academic but also practical real life education in climate change related things.

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Roshan Paul

And so that, you know, creates that domain expertise. A little bit. On top of that, we add leadership development and nonprofit organizational culture, exposure to them through a set of workshops and courses around various topics with regard to building their skills to work in the

nonprofit space, and also to be leaders in the space. And then we add on top of that, coaching aspects are every other receives a coach and has access to a coach to help them with, you know, making that transition as well.

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Roshan Paul

So it's a lot of different resources, you know, customized to people. And again, this program is global. So we have fellows from, you know, Columbia to Hong Kong. Right. And everywhere in between. So there's like a 15 hour time difference between sort of easternmost and westernmost house. So it's it has to be very customized then to each person's reality, to that country's climate sector and to that country's legal structures as well for nonprofits and so on.

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Roshan Paul

So it's so it does need to be very customary. And then the hope when about six months through this program and we're learning a lot both in terms of like what's making it very successful, but also what are things we would improve from the next time around. And the hope is that at the end of this process, the nonprofit and the family, the finance professionals says, you know, we've kind of dated for a year.

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Roshan Paul

Let's say we like each other. Let's get married, right? Like, let's be a let's like let it be a long term, full time role that we're willing to hire you for. And this the fellowship then like, allows both sides to feel comfortable making that investment in each other for the future. We are following a similar model. We started with finance by following a similar model with the legal profession.

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Roshan Paul

So with lawyers in Africa that were also doing something similar with communications professionals in Southeast Asia. So there's different fields right now we're looking at in terms of different sectors, but there could be other ways in which this grows as well.

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Vanessa Goas

With all of the different potential elements of climate change, it looks like the initiative is focusing quite a bit on the question of climate finance. Is there any particular reason why you narrowed your focus a little bit on climate finance in particular?

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Roshan Paul

Yeah. One of the things that our funding partners have been interested in doing is looking at it by sector. So finance is one, as I said, law is another, communications is another. Political organizing could be another. So we're looking at these different fields. And partly because that's a little bit, you know what the interest from our partners has been.

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Roshan Paul

But finance by itself is I mean, there's no doubt that it is one of the biggest areas of focus within climate change, because if we are going to make that energy transition away from fossil fuels towards renewable energy, that's going to take a major push to financing renewables at the scale

that it takes to power the entire global economy and all of our lives, and also to create financial disincentives to keep financing fossil fuels as well.

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Roshan Paul

Right. So there's both a demand and supply side with regard to finance that is important. You know, and I don't know what the exact numbers are in finance. Like what's the gap in finance needed. But it's in the hundreds of billions of dollars of additional finance that we need. If we have to make that complete energy transition. And so climate finance plays a really important role in advocating for that kind of investment.

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Roshan Paul

And and also showing the increasing costs of continuing to invest in fossil fuels, and the hopefully long term profitability of starting to invest in more in renewables as well. So it's a really central kind of issue to drive this whole movement forward.

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Vanessa Goas

Yeah. It seems to me it's where the rubber really meets the road. And it's it's also a little bit of where DG has been focusing, you know, some of our efforts. If you've been kind of listening to our podcast this last season, we've been talking quite a bit about climate finance data that do sort of accessibility to it.

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Vanessa Goas

And I think that the the very interesting connection for me with the Climate Talent Initiative is we're, you know, we're discovering just like this vast amount of data that the like with all data, you can interpret it in many different ways to, to serve your purposes. Right. And I think that, you know, a lot of times, I think there was a reported devex just this week that was talking about how some very high percentage of development financing that should have gone to climate mitigation and climate change adaptation would have actually happened anyway.

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Vanessa Goas

So here these donors are claiming that they're making these like huge investments, but in reality, this money would have been spent on these exact same things anyway. And they're just adding kind of climate dash, you know, to the front of their work. So what I'm really excited about also is thinking about how all of these new leaders can actually look at this data, do this work, and really come to the table and say like, hey, actually, you guys aren't meeting your commitments or, you know, not enough money is being spent or whatever the, you know, the potential outcome might be.

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Vanessa Goas

So this is like a really exciting opportunity for me, too, because the data needs its story to be told.

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Roshan Paul

I guess I'm really excited to hear that. And then she has been focusing on that. I do think it's really important to be able to gather that data, gather the evidence, to be able to, you know, basically hold people's feet to the fire in terms of what they've promised and whether they're living up to it or not. I think that there's there's some value in the in the greenwashing, in a sense, in that like it's saying that people are like, this is important.

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Roshan Paul

We need to be able to align what we're doing, even if we were going to do it anyway to this. So it helps to build a brand. But of course it doesn't. It's I mean, it could be a failure if it stopped there. So I think the narrative and the communications do need to keep growing and people need to be held to account.

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Roshan Paul

But it's also encouraging that people are starting to see the importance of it and want to be associated with it. So this might be naive of me, but I also don't want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. In terms of that, people are finally starting to be forced to see that this is important, but then let's like encourage them to keep going as well.

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Vanessa Goas

In that vein and kind of thinking, thinking big picture thinking to the future, what are some recommendations that you have to other global organizations, donors, partners, or implement others who are interested in expanding into climate work or collaborating in this kind of work?

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Roshan Paul

I would say, my first one would be to find your niche, right? So climate is a very large space, right? And there's there's lots of critically important work that needs to be done. And as we just talked about earlier, it's going to be part of everything. And the climate field historically has been more focused on the gigatons of carbon that need to be reduced from going out into the world, and then the science and the tech and less than the people now, I reckon, is 100% focused on people.

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Roshan Paul

So we found that that was a niche that I could fill. And a growing focus on people and people's connections to them work as a leverage point to be able to get more people working in this, in this area. That was kind of our niche, you know, an under-invested area, one that we think will be of growing importance that we wanted to focus on.

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Roshan Paul

That's going to be different from organization to organization. So I think like there's it's a huge tent and depending on your organization's skills, capacities or mission, etc., I think you can start to focus on what your own contribution can be as an organization to this. Right? So whether or not it's focused on people that could be focused on health, let's say climate and health or, on on data as an annual case, I mean, obviously that's a huge area of interest and focus.

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Roshan Paul

So I promise you it's there, right? Like your niche is there. And we need everyone to contribute, no matter who you are or what you do. You know, if you're listening to this, then you have a role to play. And so I would encourage everyone to like look at your niche. Don't try to look at all of it because it's a huge area and it's ubiquitous.

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Roshan Paul

It's going to be in everything. So so find your mission focus there.

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Vanessa Goas

That is great advice for everybody kind of working. Second, because as you said, it's a huge it's a huge challenge. And I think, you know, diving in and focusing would make sure that we have good coverage and people can lend their expertise in, you know, like really critically important ways. Thank you, Roshan, for joining us so much. wonderful chatting.

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Vanessa Goas

I'm wishing you the best of luck after this sort of, preliminary period of this initiative. And I'm really excited to hear what the results are going to be.

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Roshan Paul

Thank you, Vanessa, and thanks for having me on. Very happy to be here and happy to come back in six months or whenever and and share how things are going.

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Vanessa Goas

Yeah, I'm sure we'll be talking again soon.

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Vanessa Goas

Thank you for listening and a special thanks to our guests. This episode was produced and edited by Analisa Goodmann. Our theme music was created by Mark Hatcher. Learn more about Development Gateway: An IREX Venture on our website at [Development gateway.org](http://Developmentgateway.org), or through our social media.