



When Research and Action Join Forces

Towards Professional Social R&D

December 2022



Introduction and Objective: How and Why Was This Document Composed?

This document was formulated and written as the result of a joint discourse that developed between **SHEATUFIM** and **Yad Hanadiv** after it became clear that the two organizations are promoting parallel thought processes around social R&D – meaning research and development of applied knowledge and tools. Our common interest in the field ultimately encouraged us to join forces. The promotion of R&D processes in civil society organizations is not only growing, but is a key process in developing the field's professionalism.

Simply put, R&D processes should be included in the required infrastructure of organizations that are active in the social arena, similar to managerial, financial, operational, and other infrastructures.

The complete document (in Hebrew) presents an interim summary combining a depiction of the current on-the-ground situation, as well as relevant organizational thinking around two directions: Internally, so that follow-up processes can continue developing organizational endeavors, and externally, to invite other organizations in the social-civil sector to join this exploration of social R&D. In other words, we invite organizations to take part in an ongoing joint effort to develop the social R&D concept, comprised of desired applied work principles. This document is not a finished product, but rather a pause to think and further prepare.

Knowledge Development and R&D

Both organizations view knowledge development as a strategic point of departure in forwarding practical processes in the field.

Since its inception, **SHEATUFIM** has been operating with an approach that views knowledge as a vital infrastructure for social endeavor and a driving force for generating change and influence. The perception of knowledge as an infrastructure evolved alongside an ongoing process of making practical knowledge accessible in order to build up the capacities of civil society organizations. Over time, SHEATUFIM has developed tools and methods based on the understanding that the process of developing knowledge creates a collaborative social impact in itself.

In recent years, the knowledge development and research team at SHEATUFIM has been striving to operate according to an integrative model. The essence of this model is to learn and develop knowledge through a continuous cross-fertilization of ideas both from the world (trends and innovations in areas of cross-sector dialogue, public participation processes and system change) and internally (joint processes and Collective Impact initiatives that the organization develops and leads).

The mission of the knowledge development and research team at SHEATUFIM is to engage in a constant learning process to conceptualize, model, and develop tools through each of the Collective Impact initiatives, which are managed by and for the organization. Knowledge development, however, is not only vital for the initiatives themselves, but also for the network of partners involved in each initiative and for additional stakeholders who are not engaged directly in the initiative's effort, like potential partners and others. Therefore, most of the social R&D at Sheatufim is done with the aim of (a) creating synergy among the various initiatives' knowledge bases, and (b) sharing the organization's knowledge and perceptions to new target audiences (e.g., via **'The Studio'**). The overarching purpose of this enterprise is to expand and cultivate the arena of joint cross-sector collaboration and to serve as a home for **Collective Impact** in Israel.



During a gradual internal learning process, SHEATUFIM formulated the concept of "Emerging R&D," an idea with dual meaning: first, knowledge that is created from routine, ongoing activity and in a way that is in line with the organization's activities and central axis of operation; second, R&D as an element based on a reciprocal and ongoing balance of theoretical knowledge and on-the-ground reality.

At **YAD HANADIV**, a learning process was undertaken to examine the need and significance of social R&D on two levels: clarification and refinement of social R&D as a framework for knowledge development (e.g., as part of the Hashkafa program, **Avney Rosha** and in additional programs, as much as possible); and broad-based contemplation of social R&D's potential contribution in comparison to and inspired by R&D in the world. The Foundation is examining the role of R&D in strategies of social change: what are the goals of social R&D and who should be leading it? Some of the practical questions that form the professional social R&D model will subsequently need to relate to questions such as how to bridge between the different paces of the research and social worlds? How to combine knowledge emerging from the field with academic knowledge (e.g., from educational professionals and communities we work with)? Which R&D methods are suitable for scaling up? and more.

The subject was researched as part of an internal study at the organization and a series of interviews were conducted with relevant professionals. The key question was **how can scientific and research knowledge be translated into professional practice to develop high-quality, efficient, and more beneficial solutions that generate positive impact?**

While working together on the conceptualization and development, we realized that our insights are of strategic value, and not just to ourselves at Sheatufim and Yad-Hanadiv. They constitute a wider opportunity to achieve the social objectives in which we and other prominent professional players in the social arena are engaged.

It was for this reason that we decided to delve deeper, thereby formulating a professional compass for all those interested, which is presented in this document. It includes a practical definition and preliminary principles for **Professional Social R&D**. These principles lay a conceptual infrastructure which we hope will open doors to broad civil initiatives that will continue the development of social R&D in Israel.

But what is Professional Social R&D?

In a nutshell, effective R&D with long-term impact, based on professional ethics and committed to accountability, both towards the populations for whom we are working with and for all involved sectors: public, philanthropy, academia, community and others.

In light of the goals defined, the document consists of three chapters:

Chapter 1 lays a foundation and creates a common framework for the discussion, including definitions, a short socio-historical context and an initial mapping of the civil society organizations in Israel engaged in social R&D.

Chapter 2 examines three key issues on a deeper level which are central to us and most likely to many other organizations we encountered during this journey:

- A. Internal organizational tension between R&D process and other organizational processes.
- B. "It's all a matter of your point of view" – visible and hidden political significances of social R&D.
- C. The social organizations' work interface with academia during social R&D processes.



The discussion of each issue includes a proposed 'work principle,' ideas for applying this principle, and a third section in which we share our experience with you – the readers – under the heading "How is this relevant to us?".

Chapter 3 sketches an initial outline proposal for a multi-organizational arena – virtual and communal – in which we continue the discussion and development of the issues presented in this document and others. To this end, we propose two topics for discussion and five practical steps for setting the process in motion.

In many ways, this process was our way to "walk the talk" – to engage in research and development of social R&D. We would be happy to see this process expand and for us to be able to continue learning, deepening our understanding and conceptualization of Professional Social R&D.

We welcome your thoughts and comments and look forward to having you join us.

Write to us at yeda@sheatufim.org.il