



2025

**DIALOGUES ON
DEVELOPMENT
MANAGEMENT**

Compilation of insights and learnings
from the conference.

Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to everyone who made Dialogues on Development Management (DoDM) 2025 a meaningful and inspiring convening.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our keynote speakers, panelists, presenters, and session chairs for their insights and provocations that advanced the discourse on development management in India. Their contributions illuminated new possibilities for collaboration, community leadership, and institutional change.

Our sincere thanks to partner organisations and collaborators across Samaaj, Sarkaar, and Bazaar, whose participation grounded the dialogues in real-world experience. We also appreciate the researchers and Social Purpose Organisations (SPOs) who sparked vital conversations through their work. Finally, we thank all attendees and participants—practitioners, students, funders, government partners, and academics—for engaging with open minds and generous hearts. Your presence affirms our shared belief in the power of development management to build a just, compassionate, and inclusive India.

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Foreword

The Dialogues on Development Management (DoDM) 2025 brought together a vibrant and diverse community—over 1,175 participants, 80+ speakers, 20 sessions, and 12 research paper presentations across four immersive tracks on decision-making, resilient leadership, scaling social impact, and financing the future of change. More than a gathering, it was a collective act of reflection and imagination on the future of India's development sector.

The sessions were carefully designed to provide not just broad ideas or opinions, but practical insights, actionable frameworks, and real data points. Each session was structured as an interactive space where participants engaged with live inputs, ideated solutions, and contributed their voices. Whether in leadership, program design, fundraising, evaluation, or people management, participants gained:

- Research, literature, and curated data to reference and adapt
- Insights and practices directly applicable to teams and organisations
- Actionable blueprints—templates, case-based guides, and tested data inferences

DoDM 2025 marked another milestone in our collective journey with funders, practitioners, policymakers, academics, and young professionals to strengthen the practice of development management in India and beyond. Across plenaries, sessions, masterclasses, and research presentations, participants shared lived experiences, co-created solutions, and reimagined pathways for inclusive and sustainable development.

At its core, DoDM 2025 reaffirmed a powerful truth: social change requires not only resources but also robust management,

ethical leadership, and collaboration across Samaaj, Sarkaar, and Bazaar.

This year's convening was also marked by significant sectoral milestones. The launch of the **Frontline Leadership for Social Impact (FLSI) Certificate Program** was a critical step toward strengthening leadership capacity at the grassroots, while the release of the **State of the Sector Report on Outcomes Readiness** set a vital benchmark for progress in measuring and managing for impact. Together, these announcements highlighted the urgent need to build strong ecosystems of knowledge, leadership, and financing for sustainable social change.

The conversations reminded us that development management is not an abstract discipline but a lived practice—where evidence meets empathy, strategy meets resilience, and innovation meets inclusion. A soulful performance by rapper and poet, Mahi G, added a cultural heartbeat to the convening, reminding us that creativity and community are as essential to transformation as systems and strategy.

Most importantly, thank you to every participant who joined us. Your presence, questions, and contributions were the heartbeat of this convening, reaffirming our shared commitment to building a more just, equitable, and compassionate world.



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Launches and Announcements

The
Rockefeller
Foundation

Knowl

प्रदान
Pradan

British Asian
Trust



EMPOWERING THE LAST MILE:

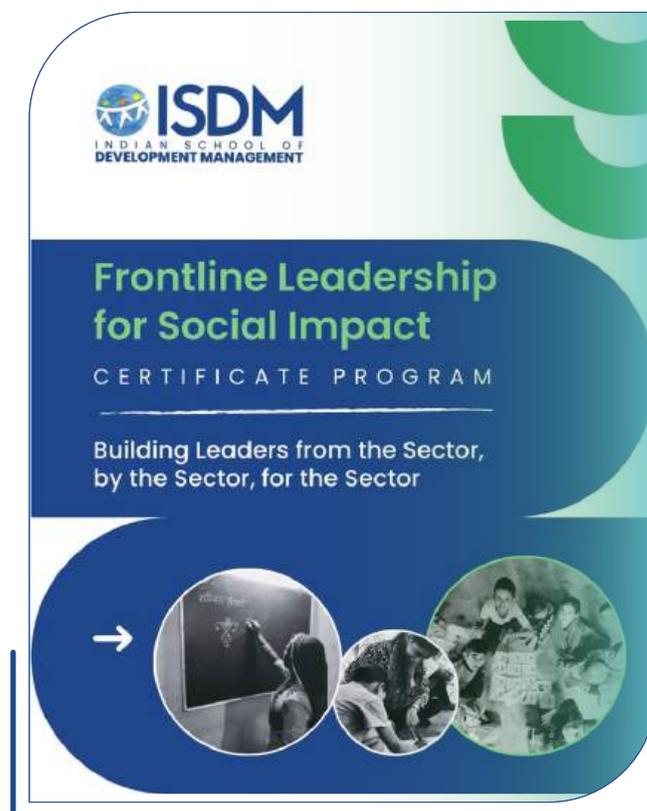
Launch of the FLSI Certificate Program

At DoDM 2025, the **Frontline Leadership for Social Impact (FLSI)** Certificate Program was launched by ISDM in collaboration with the **State Street Foundation**. This initiative aims to strengthen the development management skills and leadership capacities of frontline professionals in Social Purpose Organisations—those who are closest to communities and critical to last-mile delivery.

Frontline professionals often navigate complex, under-resourced environments. FLSI is designed to equip them with more than just technical skills—it emphasises systems thinking, personal reflection, community-rooted leadership, and collaborative action. The pilot cohort in Karnataka, with an all-women group, marks the beginning of a new era of grassroots leaders driving transformational impact.

FLSI signals a shift in how the sector invests in leadership—from top-down models to enabling grassroots changemakers.

The launch garnered strong interest and sectoral support, underscoring the pressing need for such learning pathways.



UNVEILING THE STATE OF THE SECTOR REPORT:

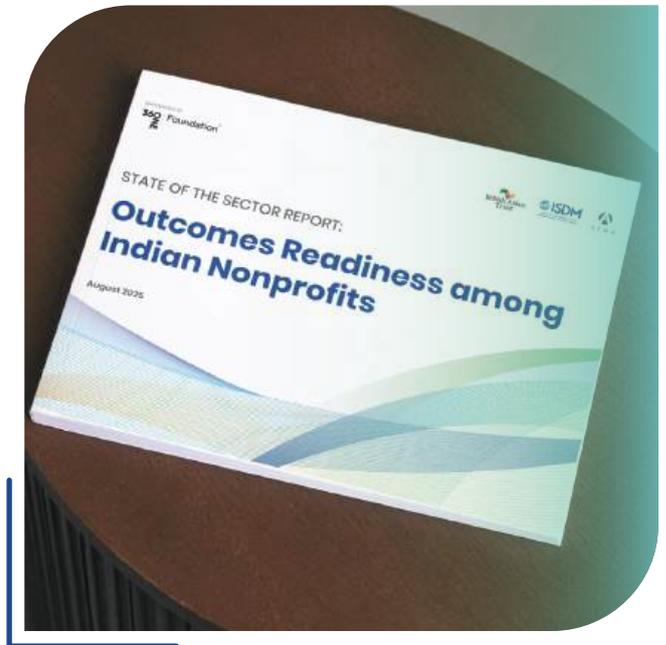
Assessing Outcomes Readiness Among Indian Non-profits

In a significant step towards advancing outcomes-based approaches in India's social sector, ISDM launched the **State of the Sector Report: Outcomes Readiness among Indian Non-profits** during the masterclass, **Outcomes Readiness in Practice – A Masterclass for Non-profits**, held under the track, **Financing the Future of Social Change** at DoDM 2025.

Developed by ISDM in collaboration with British Asian Trust, Atma, and 360 ONE Foundation, this is the first India-wide study to assess how prepared non-profits are to deliver and measure social outcomes effectively. The report is anchored in the Outcomes Readiness Framework, which emphasises that achieving outcomes requires a combination of organisational and program-level capabilities, supported by

strong systems, processes, and an outcomes-oriented culture. Based on an in-depth analysis of 82 non-profits working across education, skilling, and other sectors, the report highlights encouraging intent, with leadership, board governance, and stakeholder engagement emerging as relative strengths. However, it also reveals critical gaps—particularly in monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), risk management, financial planning, and consistent alignment of program systems to outcomes.

By offering a structured diagnostic perspective, the report not only maps the current state of readiness but also provides actionable insights on where capacity-building investments can make the greatest impact. It serves as both a benchmark and a practical tool for non-profits aiming to navigate the shift towards outcomes-based approaches.



DODM
DIALOGUES ON
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Plenary

PLENARY

Building a **Viksit Bharat** Through Development Management

Viksit Bharat and The Role of Development Man

August 2025





The question today is not whether India will have the money for development. The question is—do we have the talent to manage it?

Ravi Sreedharan, President, ISDM

nearly **\$2 trillion in development capital** to deploy—equal to India’s entire GDP a decade ago. This projection draws from the Government of India’s Vision for Viksit Bharat 2047, as outlined in NITI Aayog’s approach paper, which details ambitious goals for economic growth, infrastructure, and social progress. But whether this translates into **inclusive, sustainable progress** depends on the choices practitioners, policymakers, funders, and civil society leaders make today.

At DoDM 2025, below are six action imperatives that emerged from the plenary discussions:

SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR



Amit Chandra,
Co-Founder, A.T.E.
Chandra Foundation



Ashish Dhawan,
Founder-CEO, The
Convergence Foundation



Mirai Chatterjee,
Director, SEWA Social
Security



Amarjeet Sinha,
Ex-IAS & Senior Fellow,
Centre for Social and
Economic Progress



Sonia Singh,
Founder and CEO, SSA
India

1. BUILD SOCIALLY ROOTED DEVELOPMENT LEADERS

- Recruit and nurture leaders from disadvantaged communities who bring lived empathy.
- Use immersive training models (like the Self Employed Women’s Association’s (SEWA’s) Exposure Dialogues) to ground managers in the realities of informal workers and marginalised communities.
- Redefine “professionals” to mean technically skilled and socially rooted.



One of the things that we have found in SEWA that has been transformational is what we call the Exposure Dialogues Program. We started it for senior policymakers, but then our young manager said ‘what about us?’ We embed a young manager in the home of an informal woman worker, one of our SEWA sisters, and they live there for a couple of days and they follow her daily cycle. They have a dialogue with her about her life, her struggles, and how she has mitigated so many situations and adapted in her life. What our students and our young people say is that this is transformational.

**Mirai Chatterjee, Director,
SEWA Social Security**

India is entering a critical window where today’s choices will determine tomorrow’s progress. By 2047, we will have

2. PUT WOMEN AT THE CENTRE OF VIKSIT BHARAT

- Invest in universal childcare (1% of GDP as per SEWA estimates) to free women's time for economic and civic participation.
- Extend maternity and social security benefits to women in the informal economy.
- Ensure safe housing, transport, and flexible work to boost women's workforce participation.
- Promote women leadership in cooperatives, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and governance—as policy shapers, not just beneficiaries.



3. REBUILD INSTITUTIONS FROM THE GROUND UP

- Prioritise membership-based, democratic, community-led organisations (SHGs, cooperatives, federations).
- Push for favourable regulations that enable these institutions to thrive.
- Recognise care and eldercare economies as areas for job creation and inclusive growth.



You need community resource professionals. A very good example is the National Rural Livelihood Mission, which has over 6 lakh women who are today banking correspondents, agriculture extension workers, and animal husbandry extension workers. They are from the community but have acquired the skills to be able to carry out these functions.

Amarjeet Sinha, Ex- IAS and Senior Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress

4. INVEST IN HUMAN CAPITAL AND JOBS, NOT JUST GDP

- Double the investments in early childhood education (0–8 years) and integrate pre-primary learning into schools.
- Strengthen primary healthcare and nutrition systems.



I have a lot of hope in the women of this country. I think if they were given a chance to lead, they would be more inclusive, more peaceful and more democratic. In our experience during COVID, we have seen that they first went to [help] the poorest, the weakest and the most vulnerable. I think they would work hard to close the inequality gap.

Mirai Chatterjee, Director, SEWA Social Security



In the last 25 years, we have grown 10x in dollar terms—in terms of our GDP, but if you look at it we really haven't had a structural transformation in the way that can support people moving out of the farm into services and manufacturing, and our labour force participation rates are still very low. I think that's where we really need to focus

Ashish Dhawan, Founder-CEO, The Convergence Foundation

- Create enabling conditions for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and labour-intensive sectors to generate jobs, especially for women and youth.
- Balance GDP growth with structural transformation from agriculture to manufacturing and services.

- Collaboration – Design and deliver together across sectors
- Catalytic Change – Back bold, system-shifting ideas, even risky ones
- Compassion – Keep human dignity at the heart of development

5. FORGE TRI-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS FOR SCALE

- Build true collaboration across Samaaj (civil society), Sarkar (government), and Bazaar (markets).
- Use technology as an enabler, but ensure it serves communities and last-mile delivery.
- Institutionalise collaborative platforms where government, philanthropy, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) co-create and co-implement.

“ If we want to see real change, we have to move away from incremental funding as donors to catalytic bets or what I call big bets or disruptive ideas that can transform an entire system

Amit Chandra, Co-Founder, A.T.E. Chandra Foundation

“ A lot is possible when communities, the state, and the private sector, civil society—everybody comes together to work [together], there are some exponential gains which are possible. We have a Prime Minister’s Economic Advisory Council. Why don’t we also have a Prime Minister’s Human Development Council? All chief ministers, everybody sits together—from the panchayat to the prime minister, looking at the same set of 18 to 20 indicators. Let the whole country monitor them at the community level. You will see the change

Amarjeet Sinha, Ex-IAS and Senior Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress



6. FINANCE WITH THE 5CS FRAMEWORK

- Core – Stay anchored in mission and purpose
- Capacity – Fund institutions, systems, and people, not just projects

WHY THIS MATTERS

India’s journey to Viksit Bharat is a sprint within a marathon. The next 20 to 25 years will decide whether we become a model of inclusive development or one of the most unequal societies in history.

For practitioners, this means: build people, not just projects; invest in care, not just capital; and collaborate deeply, not just transact.



TRACK 1

The Art and Science of Decision-Making for Social Change

Decision-making lies at the core of every Social Purpose Organisation (SPO), shaping not only program outcomes but also organisational culture, governance, and credibility. Unlike corporations, SPOs make choices rooted in mission and values, often navigating complex realities with limited resources.

This track at DoDM 2025 explored how development managers can balance the science of decision-making—anchored in data, frameworks, and accountability—with the art of judgment, intuition, and lived experience.

It recognised that effective decisions are rarely linear; they require decentralisation to empower those closest to communities, robust data practices to inform strategy, and knowledge management to bridge tacit and explicit insights. By bringing together practitioners, funders, and researchers, the sessions under this track examined how organisations can move from instinct-driven approaches to structured, evidence-based yet empathetic choices. In doing so, the track sought to equip leaders with adaptive frameworks to make decisions that are inclusive, equitable, and transformative.

SESSION 1:

Flattening the Pyramid: Distributed Decision-Making for Success

SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR



Jigisha Maheta,
Managing Director, SEWA
Cooperative Federation



Kumar Anurag Pratap,
VP CSR Capgemini,
Technology Services India
Limited



Mathew Joseph,
Country Director, The
American India
Foundation Trust



Gayatri Nair Lobo,
Chief Executive Officer,
Educate Girls

The session “Flattening the Pyramid: Distributed Decision-Making for Success” addressed a core challenge in Social Purpose Organisations (SPOs): how to shift decision-making power from top down to the frontline. It examined the distinction between decentralisation and a more intentional, distributed model. The conversation, co-created with **Educate Girls** and **SEWA Cooperative Federation**, featured leaders from **SEWA, Educate Girls, Capgemini, and the American India Foundation (AIF)**, who shared their experiences and insights on balancing control with empowerment. The discussion was centered around the “when, how, and why” of this shift and its impact on leadership, culture, and community.



What decision is taken at what level itself is a decision.

Gayatri Nair Lobo,
CEO, Educate Girls

THE NUANCES OF DECENTRALISATION

The conversation revealed that decentralisation is not a one-size-fits-all solution but a strategic choice guided by context and purpose. It is about discerning which decisions to distribute and which to centralise, not simply pushing all decisions downward.



Decentralisation is not about chaos. It is about trust. It is about building systems that do not just wait for permission—They act

Jigisha Maheta, Managing Director, SEWA Cooperative Federation

- **Context over Ideology:** The extent of decentralisation depends on the organisation's size, stage of growth, and the community it serves. While programmatic decisions might be best made at the grassroots level, functions like compliance and governance often need to remain centralised for accountability.
- **Empowerment Requires Capacity-Building:** Decision-making cannot simply be transferred to a different level without first equipping individuals to manage it effectively. Organisations must therefore invest in strengthening the capacity of their staff by providing the requisite information, frameworks, and resources. As one speaker observed, "effective delegation is

only possible when the capacity to make informed decisions has been built at the next level."

- **A Pathway to Dignity:** Distributed decision-making can be a tool for empowerment and dignity. Stories from SEWA highlighted how its cooperative model transforms informal women workers from beneficiaries into decision-makers, giving them ownership and respect.



STRATEGIC AND CULTURAL SHIFTS FOR LEADERS

Distributed decision-making demands a fundamental shift in the leadership mindset—from control to enablement. Leaders must learn to "let go" and create a safe space for others to make decisions, even if they sometimes make mistakes. This is not just a structural change; it is a cultural one.

- **From Decision-Takers to Enablers:** Leaders consciously shifting from making every decision to creating frameworks and processes enable others to exercise judgment. As one speaker noted, deciding what decisions are made at which level is itself a vital leadership choice, highlighting the need for intentional design.

- **Transparency as a Foundation:** For a distributed model to function effectively, information must flow openly across all levels of the organisation. As one speaker emphasised, “The information my manager has—I have too.” Transparency not only builds trust but also ensures that those working at the front lines are equipped with the data and context required to make informed decisions.
- **A Strategic Response to External Pressure:** Decentralisation can be a pragmatic response to external challenges, not just an organisational design choice. American India Foundation’s decision to transform into a grassroots organisation in response to new regulations on sub-granting showed that a distributed model can be an adaptation strategy, not just a preference.

demonstrates how this approach can lead to effective scaling, learning, and adaptability.



If you expect people to lead, you must equip them to lead.

Jigisha Maheta, Managing Director, SEWA Cooperative Federation

IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

The session's insights align most strongly with the themes of Organisational Culture, People, and Leadership Development. The shift to a distributed model is fundamentally about a change in mindset and culture. It requires leaders who trust their teams, invest in their growth, and are willing to share power. It also

- **Scaling Social Impact:** As demonstrated by AIF’s restructuring, decentralisation can enable scale without diluting the organisation’s mission or losing relevance. By bringing decisions closer to the community, organisations can improve program quality and communication.
- **Organisational Learning:** A distributed model fosters continuous learning. By making data and context accessible to all levels, organisations embed learning into their decision-making practices, allowing them to adapt quickly.
- **Adaptive Strategy:** Empowering staff and communities to make decisions helps an organisation stay mission-focused while adapting its strategies to local contexts. This contrasts with a rigid, top-down approach that can become disconnected from ground realities.





Decentralisation will lose its meaning if the people we are doing it for do not know the 'why' of it.

Audience Member

WHY THIS MATTERS

Decentralisation isn't a quick fix or a buzzword. It is a journey of building trust, cultivating a culture of empowerment, and equipping people to make decisions that truly serve their communities. The goal is not just to flatten the pyramid but to build a more resilient and responsive ecosystem where everyone has a stake in success.

SESSION 2:

Making Your Data Work for You: The Data Maturity Journey

SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR



Aditi Namdeo,
Director of Strategic Initiatives, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab



Kavita Anand,
Co-Founder & Director, Adhyayan Quality Education Foundation



Aditya Krishnan,
Lead - BD and Marketing, Goalkeep



Suneeta Krishnan,
Deputy Director, India Country Office Gates Foundation



Piyali Paul,
Founder & CEO, Appo | Tech for Social Good



Manije Kelkar,
Founder & Director, Goalkeep

The session, "Making Your Data Work for You: The Data Maturity Journey," addressed a central theme in the social sector: how to move from instinct-driven to data-driven decision-making. The workshop, co-created with Goalkeep, combined an interactive exercise with a fireside chat, featuring leaders from **Goalkeep, J-PAL, Adhyayan Quality Education Foundation, the Gates Foundation, and Appo-Tech for Social Good**. The discussion, grounded in both the "art" and "science" of decision-making, explored the practicalities of building a data-mature organisation.



The 'best' decision is not always obvious at the start—data helps refine it over time. The goal is not to prove anyone wrong, but to enable better, more consistent decisions. Data complements intuition—strengthens and informs, rather than replaces it.

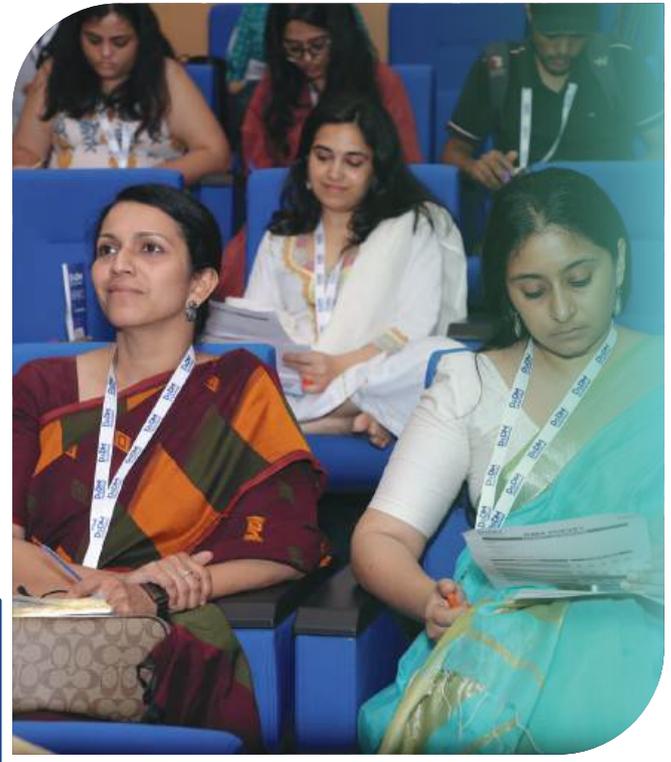
Aditya Krishnan, Lead - BD and Marketing, Goalkeep.

THE JOURNEY FROM INTUITION TO EVIDENCE

The conversation revealed that becoming data-mature is not a one-time fix but a continuous process that integrates different types of analysis into a decision framework. The session introduced participants to a practical, four-step framework:

- **Descriptive Analysis:** What happened? (e.g., student dropout rates). This is the starting point, providing a basic snapshot of a situation.
- **Diagnostic Analysis:** Why did it happen? (e.g., distance and safety concerns). This delves into the root causes.
- **Predictive Analysis:** What might happen? (e.g., models showing dropout risk). This uses data to forecast future outcomes.
- **Prescriptive Analysis:** What should be done? (e.g., pairing bicycles with community sessions). This uses data to recommend specific, high-impact actions.

The live activity demonstrated how the initial choices of participants, based on anecdotal knowledge, evolved as more information was presented, leading to more informed and confident decisions.



STRATEGIC AND CULTURAL SHIFTS FOR LEADERS

The session emphasised that data maturity is less about technology and more about people and culture. It requires a fundamental shift in mindset from leaders and team members alike.

- **Data Maturity is a Journey, Not a Score:** It is about a purpose-driven, fit-for-context use of data. The ISDM CDSSI Data Maturity Assessment (DMA) was presented as a tool to help organisations identify where they are in their data practices and guide their growth.



Define the quality of a learning outcome so that we move away from the idea that it's just grades to becoming the learning experience of a child's school

Kavita Anand, Co-Founder and Director, Adhyayan Quality Education Foundation

- **Top-Down and Bottom-Up Effort:** For data habits to stick, leadership must champion the use of data, while bottom-up capacity-building ensures frontline workers and field teams are equipped to use it.



Engage with our partners early to co-create the strategy and the theory of change ... rather than create burdens, create obligations or necessities on the part of civil society groups to produce certain kinds of data.

Suneeta Krishnan, Deputy Director, India Country Office, Gates Foundation

- **Purposeful Technology:** There is a common misconception that complex, expensive tools are a prerequisite for data maturity. The session highlighted that organisations should first use simple tools they already have (like Google Drive or spreadsheets) and only adopt new systems when they solve a problem their current tools cannot.



Data is not supposed to replace intuition ... it is supposed to back it, it is supposed to inform that intuitional hunch.

Aditi Namdeo, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab



Non-profits have the misconception that they need more sophisticated tools. Complex tools come with complex upkeep. They usually undervalue tools they already have. They haven't explored google drive and one drive but will talk to us about a new knowledge management system.

Piyali Paul, Founder and CEO, Appo | Tech for Social Good



Organisations tend to communicate the star stories. Instead, show all of it—the good, the bad and the ugly.

Manije Kelkar, Founder-Director, GoalKeep

WHY THIS MATTERS

Data-driven decision-making is not just a technical change; it is a cultural shift that enhances an organisation's ability to learn, adapt, and scale its social impact. By integrating data into their DNA, organisations can move from being reactive to being proactive, ensuring their programs are built on evidence, not just assumptions. It reinforces that data is not just for accountability but is an invaluable tool for learning and adaptation.

RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTATION (RPP)

Shaping Decisions with Values, Evidence, and Data

PRESENTERS



Shiny Dhar,
Analytics Specialist, Quest Alliance



Dr. Chandni Bedi,
Coordinating Director,
Navjyoti India Foundation



Malavika Krishnan,
Senior Associate, Madhi Foundation



Rebecca Swittens,
Manager, Madhi Foundation

This session showcased research papers that explored the ways in which values, evidence, and frameworks shape responsive decision-making. From water management in a rapidly urbanising district, to large-scale education reform, and data maturity in resource-constrained SPOs—the discussions highlighted the need to connect human behaviour with systemic design, and to adapt strategies to uncertain and complex realities.

DR. CHANDNI BEDI – WATER, LIVEABILITY, AND HUMAN VALUES IN GURUGRAM

Dr. Bedi’s research focused on how human values influence water use behaviour and perceptions of liveability in Gurugram. Using Schwartz’s Value Theory and a survey of 484 households, the study clustered residents into groups with distinct motivational drivers. For example, people’s choices around affordable appliances, or their willingness to revive lakes, were tied not just to need but to values like fairness, aesthetics, and community pride.

- Identified six liveability outcomes like equitable and reliable supply, revived surface water bodies, decentralised treatment, quality water, robust infrastructure, and sustainability practices.
- Policy recommendations included shifting campaign messages from “save the environment” to appeals linked with health, cost savings, aesthetics, and property value.
- Emphasised the importance of real-time data, culturally grounded messaging, and community stewardship of water bodies.



People worship water bodies at home, but not here. Policies must connect these values with behaviours to bridge the gap

Dr. Chandni Bedi, Coordinating Director, Navjyoti India Foundation

MALVIKA KRISHNAN – EDUCATION AT SCALE: LESSONS FROM ENNUM EZHUTHUM

She shared insights from Madhi Foundation’s partnership with the Tamil Nadu government, impacting 2.7 million students and 85,000 teachers. The work demonstrated how evidence can drive systemic change when grounded in empathy and co-creation.

- The **Spiral Curriculum** allowed students to progress based on competency rather than grade, helping teachers manage multi-grade classrooms.
- Scenario planning enabled continuity of learning during COVID, with tiered strategies ranging from partial closures to worst-case minimal delivery. Using scenario planning (pre- and post-COVID), the team demonstrated how to keep learning, moving when closures and funding volatility hit.
- Highlighted the importance of collective leadership, resilience to shocks, and aligning state, district, and classroom systems.



Lead with evidence, but ground it in empathy—this is how learning systems become resilient.

Malavika Krishnan Senior Associate, Madhi Foundation

SHINY DHAR – A RESPONSIVE DATA MATURITY FRAMEWORK FOR SPOS

Addressing the reality that 90% of Indian SPOs work with budgets under ₹10 crores and high staff turnover, she presented a responsive data framework tailored to their needs.

- Critiqued rigid, stepwise maturity ladders that encourage mimicry without capacity, leading to dashboards for “show” rather than learning.
- Proposed a **People, Process, Purpose (PPP)** approach, with technology in service of the mission.
- The presentation offered five key takeaways, including starting with just 3–5 easily measurable indicators, using the framework as a compass for learning by doing, and recognising that progress is not linear. This approach ensures that data is used for learning and adaptation, rather than just for reporting outputs.



Dashboards should be for learning, not just for show.

Shiny Dhar, Analytics Specialist, Quest Alliance

WHY THIS MATTERS

In complex systems, responsiveness and reflection matter more than one-size-fits-all models. Each of the presentations highlighted core barriers, mechanisms of empowerment, and practical recommendations for distributed decision-making and inclusive development management in the Indian context. The presenters emphasised that development managers must understand how generational shifts, emotional realities, and digital inequalities intersect with leadership and inclusion. Program design must incorporate intersectional lenses and support structures that value identity, agency, and emotional well-being.



MASTERCLASS

Knowledge Management Approaches in Decision-Making Under Uncertainty

PRESENTERS



Neha Parti,
Director - Schools, Quest Alliance



Tanvi Negi,
Director, Knowledge Hub,
Quest Alliance

Across India's social sector, decision-making is increasingly shaped by uncertainty—from volatile funding streams to technological disruption and shifting policy landscapes. In such contexts, knowledge management (KM) is not a back-office exercise but the very foundation of strategic and operational effectiveness. Yet, many organisations still struggle with balancing lived experience and structured evidence, often losing critical insights to silos, exits, or ad-hoc practices.

This masterclass, presented by **Neha Parti and Tanvi Negi from Quest Alliance**, addressed the core topic of **Knowledge Management Approaches in Decision-Making Under Uncertainty**. It explored how organisations can design systems that effectively balance tacit and explicit knowledge, ground-level evidence, and emerging data-driven practices.

DEFINING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN CONTEXT

- **Tacit Knowledge—The Hidden Asset:** Skills, intuition, lived experiences, and

judgments of people. Often the most valuable yet most elusive organisational asset

- **Explicit Knowledge—The Visible Foundation:** Data, documents, reports, and frameworks. Easier to codify, but risks becoming static if not embedded in culture and use.



ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Effective KM is a deliberate, systematic, and ongoing process. It rests on five interconnected pillars that must work in sync to turn knowledge into a strategic asset:

- **Culture:** A culture of trust and psychological safety is non-negotiable. This allows for the free sharing of ideas, including failures and critical feedback,

without fear of judgment. Leadership commitment is essential for embedding this KM culture.

- **People:** Individuals are the core carriers of knowledge, with their stories, lived experiences, and tacit wisdom. Valuing "knowledge champions" and their frontline insights is crucial to creating organisational change.



Tacit knowledge like skills, intuition, lived experiences is often 'the most valuable yet most elusive organisational asset.'

Tanvi Negi, Quest Alliance

- **Process:** Structured processes like after-action reviews and knowledge repositories ensure that KM becomes a methodology, not an afterthought. The process must be designed to capture both explicit (documented) and tacit (intuitive) knowledge.

Quest Alliance shared their work on DataBytes and other data documentation approaches, completing five years of 'strategy cycle'. DataBytes are data-driven insights and analysis that Quest Alliance uses and publishes, as their work involves leveraging data to improve educational outcomes, track initiative effectiveness, personalise learning, and advocate for policy change. A document is ready to understand the learnings, failures and recommendations based on the last five years.

- **Structure:** Organisational structures must facilitate cross-discipline awareness and communication. For example, streamlining reviews across different levels—from state to program to the executive team—ensures ground-level insights feed into strategic decisions.



Tools, policies, systems are more important in enabling a successful knowledge management system than the attitude and practices of people, organisational culture and felt the need for KM

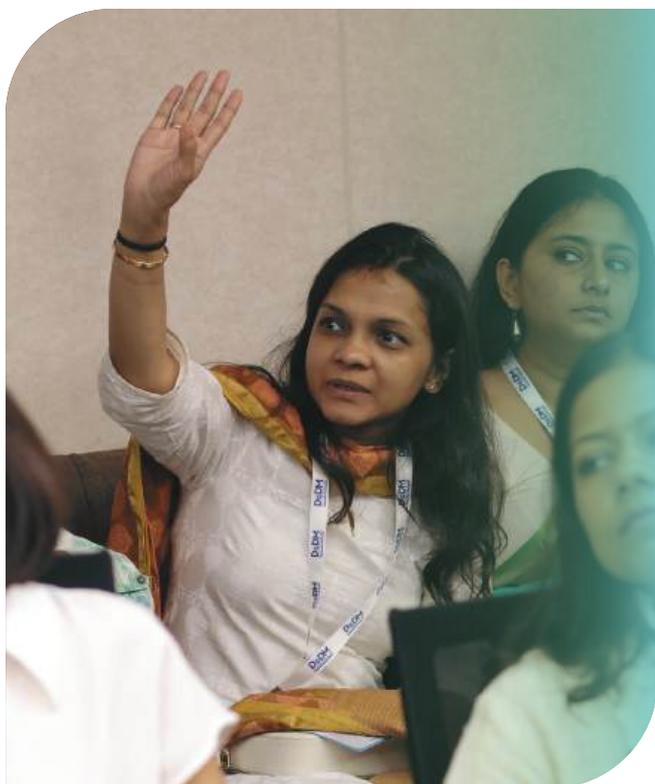
Neha Parti, Quest Alliance

- **Technology:** Technology expands the reach of knowledge, making insights scalable and searchable. Digital tools, dashboards, and repositories are crucial, but they are only effective when aligned with a supportive culture and engaged people.

NAVIGATING THE MATURITY SPECTRUM

Organisations can gauge their knowledge management maturity by reflecting on their practices, as highlighted in the masterclass.

- **Aware but Unfocused:** These organisations see the value of Knowledge Management but rely on informal, ad-hoc practices instead of a formal system.
- **Active but Inconsistent:** These organisations implement some tools or processes, but they are often dependent on specific individuals or their initiative, leading to inconsistency.
- **Focused and Strategic:** These organisations embed KM as an organisational priority, with dedicated time and resources. Knowledge documentation is integrated into program design, and leadership champions the effort to ensure insights actively shape future actions.



ACTION-ORIENTED SOLUTIONS

- **For Leaders:** Champion a data-driven culture and commit time and resources to KM. Ensure that systems are in place to capture experiential knowledge, such as lessons from failed projects.
- **For Practitioners:** Cultivate a habit of reflection and knowledge sharing, such as through "World Cafe" sessions or internal communication platforms. Use technology not just for reporting but for enabling real-time insights.
- **For Organisations:** Design systems that balance tacit and explicit knowledge. Move beyond a procedural focus to create a rhythm for capturing knowledge insights.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Knowledge Management (KM) is essential for organisations to make informed decisions, reduce duplication, and retain institutional memory. By systematically integrating tacit and explicit knowledge, KM strengthens both immediate problem-solving and long-term adaptability. Effective adoption requires alignment across people, processes, technology, and culture/structure (mentioned above), ensuring that knowledge is continuously captured, shared, and applied. In doing so, KM becomes a core enabler of organisational efficiency, learning, and resilience.

Middle Management: Data Insights



TRACK 2

Strengthening the Core for Social Change

India's only National Conference on Development Management



Resilience and leadership are indispensable for Social Purpose Organisations (SPOs) operating in volatile, uncertain, and resource-constrained environments. Track 2 at DoDM 2025 focused on how SPOs can cultivate adaptive leadership, strengthen governance, and build resilient systems that endure shocks while staying anchored to their mission. The sessions explored leadership not only as a set of individual capabilities but as an organisational culture that values collaboration, trust, and equity. Case discussions illuminated how resilience is fostered through transparent governance,

distributed authority, and investment in people. The masterclass highlighted frameworks for cultivating leadership pipelines and embedding resilience into everyday practices, while research paper presentations contributed empirical and conceptual insights on leadership models tailored for the development sector. Collectively, this track underscored that resilience is not about avoiding crises but about learning and evolving through them—enabling SPOs to lead with courage, adaptability, and vision in service of long-term social change.

SESSION 1:

Middle Matters: Developing the Leaders Who Hold it All Together

SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR



Vivek Sharma,
Founder-Director, Gandhi
Fellowship Program



Dr. Meenu Bhambhani,
Vice President & Senior
Grants Manager, APAC
State Street Corporation



Pooja Mathur Pande,
Director HR, Antara
Foundation



Kavneet Sahni,
Associate Director, Dasra



Praveen Kumar S,
Deputy CEO, Swami
Vivekananda Youth
Movement (SVYM)



Deeksha Punia,
Director, People
Management, ISDM



Middle managers are integrators, who translate strategy into action, who take culture to the ground level. Middle managers integrate the organisation's work across silos.

Deeksha Punia, Director—People Management, ISDM

MIDDLE MANAGERS ARE A STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP LAYER

- Middle managers act as the bridge between executive leadership and frontline teams. They interpret and translate high-level strategy into operational actions that teams can execute.
- By linking different departments and teams, they ensure that communication flows smoothly and that various parts of the organisation collaborate effectively.
- Middle managers are instrumental in reinforcing and shaping the company culture; they embody organisational values and model behaviours for others.



Flip the leadership pyramid. An inverted leadership pyramid builds leadership at the field level first. The program officers, frontline workers, and fellows are the ones who are solving complex day-to-day problems on the go; they analyse data and have to navigate complex public systems. All of this needs leadership building. The middle management has to build that leadership on the field. One way is to add more middle layers, without hierarchies, and create mentorship and coaching roles.

Pooja Mathur Pande, Director, HR, Antara Foundation



INVESTING IN MIDDLE MANAGERS AT THE RIGHT TIME IS CRUCIAL

- Middle managers are not built overnight. They grow when organisations invest intentionally through mentoring, expanded responsibilities with support, and continuous, on-the-job learning. More than formal training, what matters is creating space to reflect, experiment, and lead.
- Investment should begin when there are strategic shifts that require alignment across organisational levels, especially to ensure coherence in direction and execution.
- Organisations should start investing in middle managers when they need to reinforce leadership at the intersection of strategy and execution, particularly during periods of complexity or rapid change that demand steady, grounded leadership.
- Investing in middle managers should begin early, when they are stepping into new responsibilities and the organisation is stable enough to support learning, and must continue consistently, rather than waiting until burnout or performance issues arise.

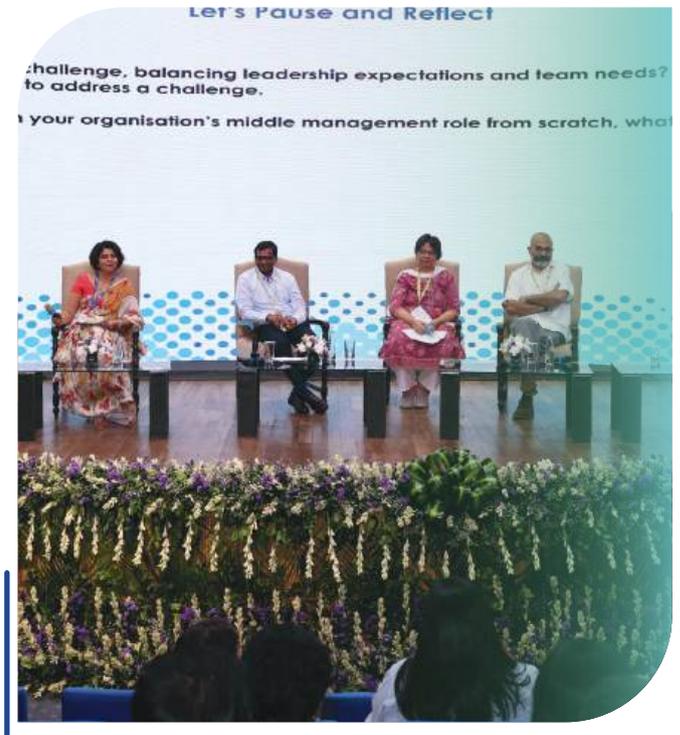


Look at the complexity your organisation is going to manage or is managing. Don't wait when your organisation is at the cusp of expanding geographically, has new talent coming in, or when the funder pool is shifting. At that moment, there is so much to manage. Organisations must be prepared much before that happens. Middle management can become the breakers or makers when those changes happen.

Kavneet Sahni,
Associate Director, Dasra

REIMAGINE WAYS TO BUILD THE MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

- Shift beyond “capacity building”, which may undermine their existing knowledge and lived experience.
- Adopt the mindset of nurturing their capabilities/strengths, instead of fixing gaps. Investment means creating environments where their existing wisdom, field experience, and tacit knowledge can be sharpened and scaled.
- Create lateral transfer opportunities to enable time-bound opportunities across departments.
- Create peer learning spaces, which can help in building communities of practice where middle managers can exchange experiences, rather than relying only on top-down training. This peer-to-peer reflection helps bridge the gap between theory and ground realities.
- Invest in adaptive skills, which includes people management, conflict navigation, decision-making under uncertainty, and cross-team collaboration. These adaptive capacities are more important than technical training alone.



Our fundamental KRA (Key Result Area) at Gandhi Fellowship is to build the people who build the organisation. And it is not about building capacity, which is a flawed thesis because it operates from the assumption of inadequacy. Instead, we should say it is about building talent and an individual's growth.

Vivek Sharma, Founder-Director,
Gandhi Fellowship Program

WHY THIS MATTERS

Investing in middle managers strengthens organisational culture by equipping the very people who shape values, translate strategy, and hold teams together. Nurturing their capabilities, through peer learning, adaptive skills, and early continuous support, creates resilient leadership pipelines and healthier people-centric systems.

SESSION 2:

Leveraging Volunteer Power: 2X Your Impact for the Same Cost

SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR



Aarti Mahadevan,
Founder, Governance Counts



Dr. Kiran Modi,
Founder - Managing Trustee, Udayan Care



Padma Rajeswari,
Director, Aditya Birla Center for Enriching Lives



Venkat Krishnan N,
Principal Trustee, India Welfare Trust



When you convert a relationship into a transaction, often you actually destroy value rather than create value.

Venkat Krishnan N, Principal Trustee, India Welfare Trust

India's non-profit sector is shifting from viewing volunteers as peripheral helpers to recognising them as strategic partners. The session highlighted how organisations can multiply their impact by designing volunteer programs that prioritise relationships, access premium expertise, and build scalable systems.

FROM TRANSACTIONS TO RELATIONSHIPS

- Volunteers are not free labour—they are partners who bring networks, credibility, and passion.
- Organisations like Udayan Care have built multi-level volunteer structures where senior volunteers manage others, creating sustainable systems.
- Motivation comes from impact, not certificates. Volunteers stay engaged when they see real change.



If you calculate at the rate of 122 hours annually per volunteer, the total contribution of volunteering comes to almost 507,195 hours of work for the organization. Imagine if we had to pay for this work, where would we raise that kind of money. So it's not only that these volunteers bring in diversity, they bring different kinds of experience which is priceless.

Dr. Kiran Modi, Founder - Managing Trustee, Udayan Care

ACCESSING PREMIUM EXPERTISE

- Strategic volunteering unlocks skills non-profits could never afford to hire.
- CFOs, consultants, and senior executives bring high-value expertise that transforms organisational capacity.
- Udayan Care receives 500,000+ volunteer hours annually, equivalent to 250 full-time employees worth ₹62 crores, against a budget of ₹50 crores.
- This is not about free basic labour but about mobilising high-quality professional skills.



Imagine if you can ask the CFO of a company like Birla Group, who costs 2 and a half crores, as a volunteer. If you can get that person to spend 12 hours a month with you... just imagine what that will do for your organisation.

Venkat Krishnan N, Principal Trustee, India Welfare Trust

CORPORATE DEEP VOLUNTEERING

- Aditya Birla Group's model requires employees to spend 2–3 weeks embedded in non-profit projects using their professional skills.
- Mutual benefits:
 - Non governmental organisations (NGOs) receive strategic expertise.
 - Employees develop empathy, adaptability, and gratitude.
- The program's success is measured not by numbers but by continued engagement beyond the formal program.



We had some 450 people self-nominating as volunteers. This was because there was a huge amount of word of mouth from the people who had volunteered with us earlier.

Padma Rajeswari, Director, Aditya Birla Center for Enriching Lives

BUILDING SCALABLE VOLUNTEER INFRASTRUCTURE

- **High-value volunteer engagement requires systems and standards:**
 - Volunteer manuals and categories (Udayan Care maintains 7–8).
 - Tracking, reporting, and feedback mechanisms.
 - Volunteer-to-volunteer management hierarchies.
 - A culture of quality with no tolerance for mediocrity.

- **Dr. Kiran Modi highlighted the scale:**
 - 4,143 volunteers contributed 507,195 hours last year.
 - Equivalent to massive financial value if monetised.
 - Beyond numbers, volunteers bring diversity and experience that is priceless.

The deeper value lies in how well organisations institutionalise volunteer engagement so that individual contributions translate into long-term capacity. When volunteers are given clear roles, access to peer support, and recognition of their expertise, they don't just complete tasks, they help strengthen the organisation itself.

This moves volunteering from being an episodic activity to a structural pillar of the institution, ensuring continuity, accountability, and innovation even as individuals come and go.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

- **Shift from coordination to partnership**, that is, volunteers are treated as co-owners of the mission, not temporary helpers.
- **Invest upfront** in program design, relationship-building, and infrastructure. This yields exponential returns.
- **High-quality volunteers contribute exponentially** more value than traditional staff hiring models.



Before you leave the hall today, pick up your phone and say that you want volunteers... This is about building relationships. And we are South Asians; we thrive on that!

Aarti Mahadevan, Founder, Governance Counts

WHY THIS MATTERS

Strategic volunteer engagement is not simply about filling gaps with unpaid labour. It is about rethinking how non-profits build capacity. When organisations design relationship-driven systems and invite volunteers to act as co-owners of the mission, they unlock levels of expertise, commitment, and resources that would otherwise remain out of reach.

This shift matters because it allows non-profits to access senior-level skills, scale their operations, and sustain engagement without proportionally increasing costs. More importantly, it reframes volunteers as essential partners in social change rather than temporary helpers. This is truly a win-win for all concerned. For leaders in development management, the message is clear: investing in the design and cultivation of volunteer programs can double organisational impact at the same cost, transforming both the institutions and the individuals who serve them.

SESSION 3:

Next-Gen Workspaces: Values, Voice and Velocity

SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR



Malavika Pavamani,
Strategic Partnerships
Lead, Pravah



Girish Balachandran,
Founder & Managing
Director, ON PURPOSE



Anvita Viswanathan,
Assistant Manager, Karo
Sambhav



Aman Bhaiya,
Vice President & Head of
Strategy, SBI Foundation



This session invited leaders and practitioners to reimagine workplace norms through the lens of evolving values, behaviours, and expectations. Development Professionals representing different generations were part of the panel. Together, they explored what it takes to drive cultural and structural shifts to build inclusive, agile teams that can thrive amidst change.



Millennials must carry forward the wisdom and stability of legacy, while opening up space for innovation and risk-taking. Too much legacy risks rigidity; too much innovation risks losing depth and identity.

Malavika Pavamani, Strategic Partnerships Lead, Pravah

GENERATIONAL "TIGHT ROPES" REQUIRE OPEN DIALOGUE

- Each generation faces distinct workplace challenges. Gen Z struggles between wanting autonomy while showing accountability, Millennials balance preserving organisational legacy with driving innovation, and Gen X leaders navigate pushing for performance without overwhelming their teams.
- The solution is not eliminating these tensions but creating structured spaces for intergenerational conversations where these challenges can be openly discussed.



While the newer generations want purposeful work, they also want to be paid very competitively. For this to happen, we have to shape our teams into high-performing teams. How much of that is possible within the time that is available to get the job done, along with the question on [how] far we can push the team to perform at their very best, without completely breaking them, is a tight rope we walk.

Girish Balachandran, Founder and Managing Director, On Purpose

REDEFINE PROFESSIONALISM AROUND INTENT AND OUTCOMES

- Traditional definitions of professionalism are evolving. Gen Z values ownership of outcomes with freedom in process, Millennials emphasise integrity and intent, while Gen X focuses on clear role expectations and proactive communication.
- The most effective approach combines these perspectives—maintaining organisational standards while allowing flexibility in how work gets accomplished, as long as the intent is clear and results are delivered.

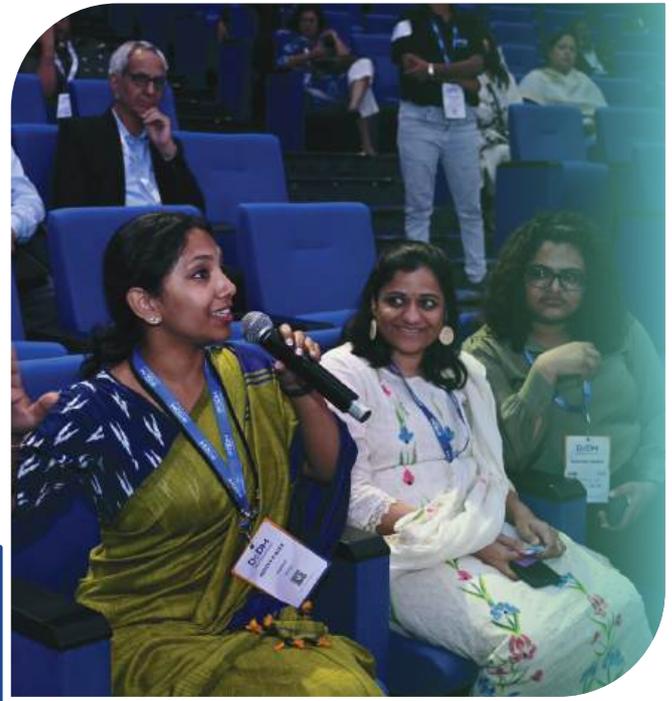


Something that I struggle with as Gen Z is how do I protect my freedom and take decisions on my own, while also demonstrating accountability for my work. Especially when accountability is usually measured in meeting deadlines or the number of reports that I have done. Whereas for me, it is about how much ownership I am taking about my work, and how creative I am in doing it.

Anvita Viswanathan, Assistant Manager, Karo Sambhav

PURPOSE-DRIVEN WORK MUST INCLUDE HOLISTIC WELL-BEING

- While 90% of Gen Z see purpose-driven work as non-negotiable, they also reject hustle culture and prioritise work-life balance.
- Organisations need to move beyond just offering meaningful work to creating environments that support mental health, provide growth opportunities, and allow for radical transparency about challenges.
- This includes consistent feedback loops, role-modeling healthy behaviours, and involving younger employees in goal-setting rather than just task execution.



I need to honour the founders legacy—the values, methods, and credibility that have brought us here. This is shaped by Gen X/founder leadership, where continuity, rigour, and loyalty to what has worked are deeply valued. But I also need to embrace Gen Z's call for relevance—new tools, faster changes, digital-first approaches, and a voice that resonates with today's realities. Gen Z expects adaptation, boldness, and experimentation.

Malavika Pavamani, Strategic Partnerships Lead, Pravah

WHY THIS MATTERS

Development organisations must move beyond rigid, top-down strategies and embrace adaptive, inclusive approaches that reflect diverse generational perspectives. This shift demands leadership that balances performance with well-being and empathy. Development management education must prepare professionals to navigate complexity with cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and a deep connection to community needs.



RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTATION (RPP)

Redefining Leadership: How Young Women and Gen Z Are Shaping Inclusive Development

PRESENTERS



Ravi Dhanuka,
CEO and Board member,
i-Saksham Education and
Learning Foundation



Payal Jain,
Co-Founder and CEO,
Populi



Kadeeja Nourah B H,
Research Associate, Birla
Institute of Management
Technology (BIMTECH)



Drishti Sharma,
Development Practitioner/
Freelancer



Dr. Shreya Mishra,
Assistant Professor, Birla
Institute of Management
Technology (BIMTECH)

Three research papers were presented as part of this session, focusing on how the younger generation is reshaping the contours of inclusion, power, and leadership in the development sector. The session included presentations by scholars and practitioners, followed by discussions with the audience.

THE i-SAKSHAM FELLOWSHIP, PRESENTED BY RAVI KUMAR DHANUKA

This fellowship empowers local young women in Bihar to be ‘edu-leaders’—leaders of change solving education and gender challenges to drive personal and community transformation.

- **Barriers to Leadership:** Young rural women face visible, structural, institutional, cultural, and personal barriers—these deeply erode confidence and restrict their leadership opportunities.
- **Program Impact:** The i-Saksham Fellowship builds self-belief and leadership through coaching, safe spaces, peer support, and contextual tools, leading to substantial increase in confidence, agency, and active participation in community decision-making.
- **Community and Family Trust:** Familial trust in young women’s decisions rose dramatically, with community acceptance shifting from passive to active; alumni networks like WAYAM (Women Achieving and Yearning to Achieve More) help sustain resilience and agency.
- **Transformative Pathways:** Fellows progress to higher education, social sector jobs, civic leadership roles, and emerge as change agents and resource persons in their communities
- **Recommendations:** Fostering inclusion through dialogue, engaging men as allies, and structured opportunities for leadership in governance and non-traditional fields are vital for long-term change.



Earlier, I wasn't allowed to step out alone and even I didn't have the confidence to go out by myself. But during the fellowship, that changed. Now, I can go out anytime; I just need to inform my family. This has given me a new sense of freedom.

Edu-Leader, Jamui

THE RESEARCH STUDY BY BIMTECH SCHOLARS, KADEEJ AND SHREYA

The study explored how rural women's digital exclusion is not just technological but deeply emotional and cultural. Women must manage guilt, fear, reputation, and societal expectations to participate online.

- **Two Types of Emotional Labour.** "Surface acting" (outward conformity) and "deep acting" (internalising norms) are both widespread; these restrict agency even when access is theoretically possible.
- **Social inclusion theory and Hochschild's emotional labour theory** explain multi-layered, intersectional exclusions that persist despite infrastructure improvements.
- **NGOs are key to building trust**, mediating cultural sensitivities, and empowering women through digital training and financial literacy, which can reduce emotional burden and increase autonomy.
- **Interventions Needed:** Addressing mindsets, recognition of emotional labour by policymakers, and cognitive-level interventions are vital to enabling real digital and social inclusion for women.

RESEARCH STUDY ON GEN Z BY DRISHTI SHARMA

The study captured Gen Z's experiences and motivations in the development sector.

Gen Z professionals are highly value-driven and enter the sector for social impact, but experience tension between ideals and institutional realities.

- **Gendered Inclusion Gaps:** Only a minority of young women feel heard in decision-making spaces due to tokenism, power hierarchies, and lack of mentorship, especially in legacy NGOs.
- **Workplace Well-being:** Emotional support is insufficient; job satisfaction dips after a few years, and retention is threatened by low pay and constrained leadership spaces.
- **Innovation versus Agency:** High enthusiasm for innovation (70%) among Gen Z, but organisational rigidity limits their agency and voice.
- **Recommendations:** Improve mentorship and clear career pathways, foster inclusive leadership, reform pay structures, and balance organisational learning with youth-driven innovation.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Each of these presentations highlighted core barriers, mechanisms of empowerment, and practical recommendations for distributed decision-making and inclusive development management in the Indian context. The presenters emphasised that development managers must understand how generational shifts, emotional realities, and digital inequalities intersect with leadership and inclusion. Program design must incorporate intersectional lenses and support structures that value identity, agency, and emotional well-being. For rural women, digital empowerment must go beyond access and build confidence, address societal guilt, and promote peer learning. For youth in leadership, reflective practice and community engagement must be integral to their developmental journey.

MASTERCLASS

Resilience Beyond Resources: Building Blocks of Strong Organisations

PRESENTERS



Shruti Goyal,
Partner, Dalberg Advisors



Kakul Misra,
Director - Strategic
Capacity Building, ISDM



Niranand Kumar,
Associate Partner, Dalberg
Advisors

India's social sector faces an unprecedented disruption: 63% of NGOs reported funding drops in 2020, 35,000 organisations lost FCRA registration, and global ODA declined by 7.1%. Yet these shocks represent just the beginning; climate risks, technological disruption, and regulatory shifts demand organisations that can both withstand immediate crises and adapt to long-term transformation.

ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS FOR ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

DEFINE RESILIENCE AS DUAL CAPACITY

- **Absorptive Capacity:** Systems, resources, and governance to manage immediate shocks without mission compromise.
- **Adaptive Capacity:** Agility, innovation, and foresight to evolve with changing contexts

- Balance both capabilities simultaneously rather than choosing crisis response over strategic evolution.
- Maintain core values while adapting operations to new realities.



APPLY THE FOUR-PILLAR FRAMEWORK

STRATEGY AND SYSTEMS

- Anticipate shifts in community needs, policy, and climate through live risk registers.
- Develop adaptive theories of change that pivot without mission drift.
- Embed risk management into governance rather than treating it as an operational afterthought.
- Create feedback loops connecting ground reality to strategic decision-making.



TALENT AND CAPACITY

- Design systems attracting, retaining, and developing talent for shifting sectoral expectations.
- Invest in second-line leadership and succession planning beyond founder dependence.
- Upskill teams in AI, MEL, and digital tools as core competencies.
- Build a continuous learning culture that adapts to new tools and methodologies.

FUNDING AND RESOURCES

- Diversify toward a domestically inclined, multi-year flexible funding base.
- Move beyond program budgets to cover core costs, reserves, and long-term capacity investment.
- Reduce dependency on single funding sources or geographies.
- Build financial reserves enabling strategic pivots during crises.

TECHNOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE

- Treat digital infrastructure and data as mission-critical assets.
- Move from compliance reporting to decision-enabling data systems.
- Create real-time dashboards providing operational insights.
- Enable seamless knowledge flow across organisational levels.

Only 12% of NGOs have structured data collection for decision-making.

NAVIGATE THE MATURITY SPECTRUM

- **Aware but Inactive:** Recognise risks but lack the capacity for systematic response.
- **Active but Unfocused:** Implement ad-hoc solutions without strategic coherence.
- **Focused and Pre-emptive:** Embed risk management into organisational DNA with systematic anticipation.

Organisations evolve along this spectrum regardless of size. Small NGOs can leap to pre-emptive approaches through strategic focus rather than resource accumulation.

BALANCE HEART AND HEAD

- Co-create a strategy with beneficiaries, aligning perceived versus real community needs.
- Maintain empathy while building analytical capacity for evidence-based decision-making.
- Ensure community feedback reshape to organisational strategy rather than confirming existing assumptions.
- Ground strategic planning in the lived realities of target populations.

ADDRESS SECTOR-WIDE VULNERABILITIES

- **Climate Risks:** 75% of NGOs lack climate mitigation plans despite program vulnerability.
- **Technology Gaps:** SPOs risk irrelevance without AI adaptation strategies.
- **Funding Concentration:** Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) growth remains unevenly distributed, with only 2–4% reaching poor states.
- **Data Deficits:** Most organisations lack real-time insights for strategic pivoting.

IMPLEMENT ACTION-ORIENTED SOLUTIONS

- **For Leaders:** Conduct four-pillar self-assessments, embed risk in governance, diversify funding sources.
- **For Practitioners:** Build feedback loops, invest in data infrastructure, plan talent succession.
- **For Funders:** Provide multi-year flexible grants, fund institutional resilience, support knowledge platforms.
- **For Students:** Study resilience frameworks, practice empathetic strategy design, value ground reality.

LEARN FROM CRISIS RESPONSE

During the masterclass, participants analysed an agricultural SPO facing donor exits, management turnover, and weak data systems.:

- **Short-term:** Reduce project scope by 50%, leverage government partnerships, stabilise finances.
- **Long-term:** Develop second-line leadership, invest in real-time dashboards, transition to community-owned enterprise model.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Resilience enables organisations to fulfill missions without compromising quality or values during disruption. As India's development sector navigates climate change, technological advancement, and shifting funding landscapes, the ability to absorb shocks while adapting strategically will separate thriving organisations from those merely surviving. For practitioners, resilience is not optional, it is fundamental infrastructure, enabling sustainable impact in an increasingly volatile world.





TRACK 3

Financing the Future of Social Change

This track addressed one of the sector's most pressing challenges: how Social Purpose Organisations (SPOs) can move from financial fragility to long-term resilience. The discussions in different sessions emphasised that compliance and accountability should not be seen as burdens but as enablers of fundability and lasting partnerships. By reframing audits, governance systems, and internal processes as strategic tools, SPOs can strengthen their credibility and unlock access to flexible and repeat funding. Equally, the track interrogated power dynamics within philanthropy, pressing for more equitable, trust-based relationships that

recognise SPOs as co-creators of impact rather than implementers of donor mandates. It also highlighted retail fundraising as a powerful strategy for SPOs. The masterclass offered hands-on strategies for using audits as tools to build funder confidence. Research presentations on the topic consolidated sector trends, frameworks, and case studies, positioning compliance as a strategic enabler. Recognising that short-term, conditional funding limits institutional growth, the track highlighted the need for stronger governance, trust-based partnerships, and transparent financial practices.

SESSION 1:

From Compliance to Credibility: Strengthening Civil Society Narratives

SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR



Aarti Mahadevan,
Founder, Governance
Counts



Narayan Devanathan,
President & Chief Strategy
Officer, Dentsu South Asia



Yamini Mishra,
Country Director,
MacArthur Foundation



Satyajit Gupta,
VP & Assistant General
Counsel, EXL



Biraj Patnaik,
Executive Director,
National Foundation for
India (NFI)



Until the lion learns to tell its tale, the tale will always be told from the perspective of the hunter.

**Aarti Mahadevan, Principal
Consultant, iVolunteer and
Governance Counts**

Civil society organisations (CSOs) excel at creating social impact, yet they often struggle to control the narratives about their work. Increasingly, external forces, state actors, funders and media, define how Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are perceived, frequently casting them as inefficient, corrupt, or even anti-national. This pushes organisations into defensive, compliance-driven postures rather than enabling them to proactively tell stories of transformation and public value.

THE CREDIBILITY PARADOX

Credibility is deeply contextual. For instance, a security guard praised community-led religious groups for feeding elders, while a retired banker dismissed all NGOs as unnecessary since government programs had sufficed for his family. These contrasting views illustrate how credibility is not a fixed attribute but something that operates differently across communities. Yet, in practice, credibility is often reduced to compliance checklists. One foundation even lost funding because a field worker's aunt cooked meals for the team in a remote area—flagged as a “violation” despite being the most practical solution.



Compliance is basic hygiene. How good a driver I am can't be decided by whether I stop at red lights. That's the minimum. What I do beyond that creates credibility.

**Yamini Mishra, Country Director,
MacArthur Foundation**

THE NARRATIVE BATTLE

- **Who Controls the Story?** State and non-state actors increasingly drive civil society narratives, often framing organisations as either incompetent or anti-national. This forces the sector into defensive compliance rhetoric rather than proactive impact communication.
- **The Audience Framework:** Effective narrative change requires understanding five distinct groups: supporters, broader community, unreachable audiences, opposition, and unconvertible critics. Organisations must speak authentically to each other while maintaining core values.

THREE CRITICAL FAILURES

- **Corporatisation:** Adopting business language transforms distinctive civil society values into corporate-speak. Organisations lose their authentic voice pursuing funder appeal through startup terminology and business metrics.
- **Competition Over Collaboration:** Fragmented approaches create destructive competition. Organisations working on identical problems poach each other's talent rather than building collective impact.
- **Compliance Obsession:** Overregulation forces disproportionate resource allocation to documentation over delivery. Some social entrepreneurs now choose company structures over NGO registration to avoid bureaucratic burden.



VALUE-BASED CREDIBILITY

- **Human Rights Foundation:** Despite political sensitivity, human rights provides unifying sector values, including "the right to receive funding for human rights work."
- **Beyond Surface Inclusion:** Working with marginalised communities requires fundamentally different approaches. A scholarship program for the Musahar community needed four-year support instead of two to create the community's first graduate, demonstrating impact beyond conventional metrics.
- **Authenticity Over Polish:** Grassroots organisations speaking local languages with genuine community connections often demonstrate stronger credibility than urban organisations with sophisticated presentations.

THE DONOR DILEMMA

- **Prescriptive Philanthropy:** Short-term cycles, rigid frameworks, and minimal overhead caps undermine organisational development. Research indicates 29% indirect costs build strong organisations, yet most funders cap overheads at 15%.
- **Unequal Power Dynamics:** CSR managers treating NGOs as service providers creates transactional relationships. Organisations hesitate to report challenges, fearing funding cuts rather than collaborative problem-solving.
- **Communication as Credibility:** Open dialogue emerged as the strongest credibility indicator. Organisations that proactively share challenges and invite joint problem-solving build stronger relationships than those presenting only successes.

SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS NEEDED

- **Collective Representation:** Civil society lacks effective industry bodies, unlike other sectors with multiple associations lobbying for shared interests. This fragmentation weakens advocacy power.
- **Essential Public Goods:**
 - Health insurance for sector professionals
 - Collective solidarity spaces and strategic coordination
 - Narrative change infrastructure
 - Diversified funding ecosystems



We need to move from isolation to solidarity, from metrics-driven narratives to trust and value-based storytelling that serves our constitutional democracy.

**Biraj Patnaik, Executive Director,
National Foundation for India (NFI)**

WHY THIS MATTERS

- **For Organisations:** Move from defensive compliance rhetoric to proactive value-based communication. Invest in authentic storytelling connecting community impact to constitutional values.
- **For Funders:** Prioritise partnership over oversight. Support organisational development recognising that trust-based relationships produce better outcomes than compliance-heavy monitoring.
- **For the Sector:** Build a collective voice through effective representation while creating public goods that strengthen narrative capacity within a unified constitutional framework.

SESSION 2:

Power, Partnership and Philanthropy: What Really Works in Trust-Based Giving?

SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR



Riti Mohapatra,
Partner, The Bridgespan
Group



Reshma Anand,
Regional Director, Ford
Foundation



**Dr. Pratyush Kumar
Panda,**
CEO, OneStage



Dr. Sarika Kulkarni,
Founder, Raah Foundation



Sonya Fernandes,
Chief Program Officer,
Ashraya Hastha Trust



Mangesh Wange,
Chief Executive Officer,
Swades Foundation



The onus of a philanthropist never comes from a space of trust deficit. This entire journey from wanting to give a grant to setting up robust processes is a journey that happens through lived experiences.

**Sonya Fernandes, Chief Program
Officer, Ashraya Hastha Trust**

The session revealed a fundamental challenge: while donors begin with genuine intent, relationships often evolve into transactional compliance exercises rather than collaborative partnerships. Organisations and funders both desire authentic partnerships, yet current systems prioritise oversight over outcomes.

THE TRUST PARADOX

"Challenging experiences" become embedded in institutional memory, creating compliance layers that distance partners from shared missions.





We've lost conversation. Our engagement has become transactional. It is no longer conversational.

Reshma Anand, Regional Director, Ford Foundation

MOVE BEYOND TRANSACTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Replace compliance-driven engagement with conversational partnerships.
- Lead with curiosity about ground realities rather than predetermined solutions.
- Shift from one-way reporting to two-way dialogue and joint problem-solving.
- Address the fundamental question: "How many times do you speak to us when it is not related to a grant?"

APPLY THE THREE C'S FRAMEWORK

- **Curiosity Over Assumptions:** Leading with genuine inquiry about ground realities rather than predetermined solutions. Program officers who travelled to learn, not evaluate, built enduring relationships.
- **Care in Design:** Understanding organisational life stages, leadership transitions, and regional contexts that shape realistic partner capacity.
- **Conversation Beyond Reporting:** Moving from one-way reporting to two-way dialogue. As one participant asked: "How many times do you speak to us when it is not related to a grant?"

DEMONSTRATE THE FIVE T'S OF PARTNERSHIP

- **Truthfulness** in communication builds a foundation for long-term collaboration.
- **Transformation** in communities becomes a shared measurement of success.

- **Trustworthiness** through consistent delivery creates institutional confidence.
- **Teamwork** with joint ownership replaces hierarchical grant relationships.
- **Talent-driven Leadership** with adaptive capacity navigates changing contexts.



BREAK POWER DYNAMICS THROUGH STRUCTURE

- Share decision-making authority rather than maintaining funder control.
- Conduct joint field visits, building mutual understanding through ground experiences.
- Create anonymous partner surveys, holding funders accountable for relationship quality.
- Acknowledge vulnerability: "None of us know how to do this by ourselves."



There is no substitute for authenticity.

Sonya Fernandes, Chief Program Officer, Ashraya Hashta Trust

INVEST IN REAL PARTNERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE

- Cover indirect costs and organisational development, not just program expenses.
- Support capacity building, learning, and sectoral resilience beyond funding.
- Practice a "pay what it takes" approach recognising the full cost of sustainable operations.
- Align purpose, principles, and processes for authentic collaboration.

LEARN FROM CRISES AND SUCCESS STORIES

- **Transparency Test:** NGO reporting ₹15,274 surplus and asking for guidance built trust, leading to a ₹50 crore project management.
- **Crisis Collaboration:** A ₹18 crore budget cut led to closed-door workshops where partners redesigned programs collaboratively.
- **Small NGO Impact:** A ₹20-lakh, community-embedded NGO delivered results after several larger NGOs declined to take on the assignment.

ADDRESS SYSTEMIC IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS

- Recognise that both funders and organisations manage complex internal constituencies.
- CSR teams navigate legal and business stakeholders while NGOs handle diverse community expectations.
- Build empathy, reducing the "heroism problem" where organisations prove worthiness through extraordinary measures.
- Create peer learning platforms and celebrate exemplars.

REQUIRED MINDSET SHIFTS

- **For Funders:** Move from projects to people, invest in long-term capacity, accept transformation timelines.
- **For Organisations:** Communicate proactively beyond reporting, share challenges as collaboration opportunities.
- **For the Sector:** Address compliance fatigue through collaborative frameworks, strengthen governance while maintaining flexibility.

THE THREE P'S ALIGNMENT

Successful partnerships require alignment of **Purpose** (shared vision), **Principles** (engagement approaches), and **Processes** (operational frameworks).



I have always treated NGOs as partners. There is a lot of know-how at the grassroots level.

Dr. Pratyush Kumar Panda,
CEO, OneStage

WHY THIS MATTERS

Trust-based philanthropy is not conditional, it is a fundamental approach requiring conscious, mindful adaptation to organisational contexts. As India deploys significant development capital towards 2047 goals, the sector's ability to build authentic partnerships will determine whether resources create lasting change or merely satisfy compliance requirements.

SESSION 3:

Retail Fundraising: A Strategic Pillar for Sustainable Impact

How NGOs can shift mindsets, engage donors, and build resilient funding models

SPEAKER



Dhaval Udani,
Founder and CEO,
danamojo

“People are not giving to your organisation; they are giving to your cause.”

At DoDM 2025, Dhaval Udani demystified retail fundraising, highlighting why it is a powerful strategy for NGO sustainability and systemic impact. His talk emphasised that retail fundraising goes beyond raising money—it is about building lasting connections, fostering community ownership, and enabling collective action that drives long-term change.

Below are five actionable takeaways designed to help development practitioners build stronger, more scalable, and resilient donor ecosystems.

DIVERSIFY FUNDING FOR STABILITY

- NGOs often rely heavily on CSR and institutional grants, but these can be volatile or opaque in their actual impact at the ground level.
- Building a broad base of individual donors cushions against funding shocks and strengthens sustainability.

- Individual giving is often undercounted in India’s development narrative, but offers long-term stability.

“Our problem is that we try to find donors. We are not ready to convert people into donors ... many of us go to HNIs, and I want to expose the option of retail fundraising.”

ENGAGEMENT IS KEY

- Move beyond transactional asks—embrace authentic, regular communication.
- Share compelling stories, meaningful cause updates, and invitations to participate to build relationships.
- Treat donors as co-travellers and advocates, not just funders.





Donors become ambassadors for your organisation and give you things money cannot buy.



In the last 5 years, individual giving has increased by 92% while corporate giving has grown by 48% ... it is a bigger pie and it is growing faster, which is a good enough reason for you to start doing something about it.

COST-EFFICIENT AND SCALABLE SYSTEMS

- Retail fundraising need not be expensive.
- With well-designed processes, a single well-crafted appeal can reach thousands.
- Implement simple donor-engagement systems, such as story-led newsletters, curated donor days, and lightweight Custom Relationship Management (CRM) systems, for hygiene and tracking purposes.



Retail fundraising is not expensive. It is either how we do it or who does it.

INDIVIDUAL GIVING BUILDS COMMUNITY AND CONTINUITY

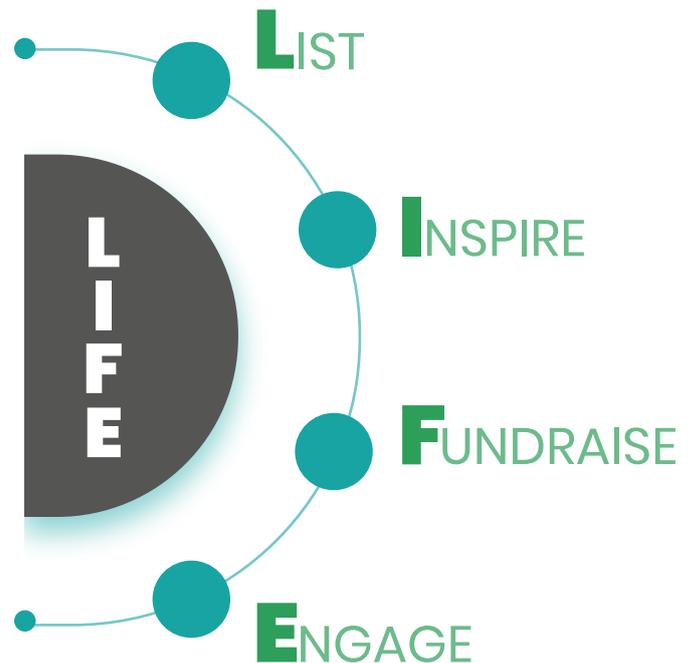
- Donors do not just provide funds; they contribute networks, referrals, advocacy, and in-kind support.
- Strong donor relationships can last for generations if nurtured thoughtfully.
- Anchoring asks in clear, cause-linked outcomes (instead of vague, unrestricted appeals) increases trust and clarity.

TAP INTO INDIA'S GIVING POTENTIAL

- As civic participation grows, individual giving is poised to expand significantly.
- Clear, compelling asks backed by regular updates can unlock this potential.
- NGOs should focus on building simple, cause-focused campaigns that enable participation at scale.

PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

LIFE MODEL



OPQRS WORKFLOW



SUGGESTED TACTICS:

ONLINE —> Short story-led newsletters

OFFLINE —> Donor Days, Volunteering windows

PEER TO PEER —> Simple crowdfunding toolkits

COMPLIANCE MADE SIMPLE

- Use your own website for direct payments.
- Crowdfunding platforms for peer-to-peer drives.
- Let technology handle receipts and routine queries.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How can we treat retail donors as **community members, not emergency funders?**
- What is the **simplest donor-engagement rhythm** your team can sustain?
- Can we shift asks toward **clear, cause-linked outcomes?**

RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTATION (RPP)

Innovative, Collaborative, And Inclusive Financing Models for Social Change

PRESENTERS



Satish Kumar,
PhD Candidate, IIM
Lucknow



Vinod Kumar Pandey,
Founder, Rozgar Dhaba
-Jobs4all



Sumit Ghosh,
Co-Founder, Sankalp
Micro Association

From reimagining finance as a tool of inclusion, to testing the promise of the Social Stock Exchange (SSE), to unlocking government-civil society partnerships, the session highlighted diverse pathways for scaling change. The research presentations embodied the RPP track's intent: a platform to share knowledge, test ideas, and strengthen the practice of Development Management.

SUMIT GHOSH, CO-FOUNDER, SANKALP MICRO ASSOCIATION

The presentation by Sumit Ghosh, Co-founder, Sankalp Micro Association, emphasised how social organisations can leverage innovation, technology, and partnerships to drive large-scale change. Ghosh pointed out the conflict between formal financial systems, which are efficient

but exclusive, and informal systems that are accessible and based on trust. He stated that finance should go beyond technical structures and be viewed as a tool for justice and inclusion.

KEY IDEAS

- **Design for Scale, Not Just Innovation:** Innovation must move beyond pilots and prototypes. Success in the development sector depends on embedding innovative solutions into systems and institutions for sustained impact.
- **Build Collaborative Ecosystems:** Cross-sector partnerships involving government, private sector, and communities are essential. Such collaboration ensures relevance, local ownership, and long-term sustainability.
- **Balance Between Informal Trust and Formal Systems:** Informal mechanisms work because of trust, flexibility, and access. Formal systems offer scale and regulation. Development efforts must bridge the two without sacrificing community rootedness.
- **Finance is Not Just Technical—it is Social and Ethical:** Financial interventions carry behavioural and ethical dimensions. Perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and trust are as important as the instruments themselves—especially in microfinance and hybrid models.

- **Digital Must Not Reinforce Exclusion:** While digital platforms and data systems can enhance outreach and efficiency, they must be inclusively designed. Ignoring local contexts can lead to further marginalisation.

SATISH KUMAR, PHD CANDIDATE, IIM LUCKNOW

He examined how institutional mechanisms, especially the Social Stock Exchange (SSE), influence access to finance for social enterprises. This presentation looked at India's Social Stock Exchange as a new way to formalise social finance. Kumar compared it to examples from around the world, like the UK, and questioned how effectively it could support social enterprises.

KEY IDEAS

- **SSEs Offer Legitimacy, But Access Remains Limited:** India's Social Stock Exchange provides legal recognition and visibility for non-profits, potentially unlocking new funding avenues. However, its current scope excludes for-profit social enterprises and involves complex compliance requirements.
- **Global Lessons Show Promise and Pitfalls:** While SSEs have seen mixed success globally, India's 2023 launch makes it one of the few active models today. Early insights suggest that striking



the right balance between legitimacy and operational flexibility will be crucial.

- **Institutional Environment is a Double-Edged Sword:** Policy support and regulatory frameworks can enable access to finance, but burdensome compliance processes, lack of awareness, and investor hesitation often hinder scale and participation.
- **Financing Must Prioritise Accessibility and Accountability:** SSEs have the potential to connect capital with accountability—but without streamlined processes, there's a risk of tokenism or excessive bureaucratisation. Building investor trust and ensuring liquidity remain core challenges.

The SSE is a promising institutional innovation in India's social finance ecosystem. But for it to truly democratise capital access, it must be simplified, expanded to include diverse enterprise models, and designed to build trust across funders, enterprises, and communities.

VINOD KUMAR PANDEY, ROZGAR DHABA (JOBS4ALL)

The presentation highlighted how corporates view their role in driving social impact through CSR and partnerships. Pandey focused on the challenges faced by tribal communities and the poor in Jharkhand. He advocated for co-financing models that combine the scale of government with the agility of non-profits to tackle exclusion.

KEY IDEAS

- **CSR is Evolving Towards Strategic Alignment:** Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is shifting from a compliance-focused obligation to a strategic investment model—where social impact initiatives align closely with business values, purpose, and long-term stakeholder interests.



- **Trust-Based, Multi-Sector Partnerships Enable Deeper Impact:** Effective public-private collaborations require trust between corporates, governments, and non-profits. Each partner brings distinct strengths: while the government offers scale and infrastructure, non-profits ensure contextual sensitivity and innovation, and corporates enable capital and data-backed rigour.
- **Outcomes Matter—But Relationships Sustain Impact:** Corporates increasingly value measurable outcomes and transparent reporting frameworks. Yet, short-term transactional approaches are giving way to long-term partnerships that prioritise continuity, learning, and community engagement.
- **Enabling Conditions Are Key to Scalable Innovation:** Initiatives like the Indian Administrative Fellowship (IAF) and Economic Inclusion Program (EIP) show that government buy-in, departmental convergence, and shared learning mechanisms are crucial for scaling systems-level impact.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Across the three presentations, a common thread emerged: innovation in the development sector must extend beyond novel ideas to become embedded within systems that are ethical, scalable, and contextually grounded. Whether it is designing inclusive digital platforms, enabling capital access through instruments like SSEs, or transforming CSR from compliance to collaboration, the core challenge lies in creating ecosystems that balance formality with flexibility and scale with sensitivity. For development managers, this demands a new kind of leadership, one that acts as a bridge between informal community practices

and formal institutional mandates. They must cultivate trust-based practices, combine financial acumen with ethical reflexivity, and help local actors navigate and influence complex systems. This also means ensuring that emerging mechanisms like the SSE remain accessible to grassroots enterprises, and do not reinforce elite capture or procedural exclusion.

As CSR partnerships deepen, managers must enable convergence—aligning state capacity, corporate investment, and non-profit ingenuity to create holistic funding models. This calls for fluency in strategy, facilitation, and institutional design.

MASTERCLASS

Outcomes Readiness in Practice – A Masterclass for Nonprofits

PRESENTERS



Anushree Parekh,
Associate Director, British Asian Trust



Annette Francis,
Co-Head - Skilling & Entrepreneurship, Pratham Education Foundation



Sneha Arora,
CEO, Atma



Sanyukta Chaturvedi,
Director - Programs,
Language and Learning
Foundation



Dr. Priyanshi Chauhan,
Senior Research Associate,
ISDM



Saumya Lashkari,
Director & Board Member,
360 ONE Foundation

OBF AND ITS RELEVANCE

Blended finance can unlock larger pools of capital by combining philanthropic, commercial, and private funding—making resources work smarter rather than chasing more. Increasingly, the focus is on Outcome-Based Financing (OBF), which ties a meaningful share of funding to pre-agreed, measurable outcomes. Unlike traditional grants, OBF incentivises accountability, smarter fund deployment, and sustainable results—giving funders confidence their capital delivers maximum value. This approach is gaining traction globally and in India, with the Government of India reaffirming its commitment to OBF at the International Conference on Financing for Development, 2025.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER FOR NGOS?

- **Credibility and Trust:** Demonstrating accountability to outcomes opens new donor opportunities.
- **Strategic Effectiveness:** Sharpens focus on what truly drives end outcomes, fostering innovation, learning, and efficient resource use.
- **Collaboration and Shared Risk:** Deepens partnerships between NGOs, donors, and government, aligning all stakeholders to a common north star.

KEY ASPECTS TO CONSIDER:

We need to distinguish between the concept of Outcome-Based Financing and the instruments used to implement it.

THREE KEY ASPECTS TO CONSIDER:

- **Proportion of Funding Tied to Outcomes:** This can vary (5%, 10%, even 80%), and there is no fixed rule. What matters is that the proportion is meaningful to the intervention.

- **Defining Outcomes:** Outcomes must be verifiable and measurable. While they need not always be quantitative, quantitative measures are often preferred.
- **Risk and Reward Model:** Payments are released only when outcomes are met. The critical question is: who funds the upfront costs and bears the associated risk?

Ultimately, OBF is about selecting and applying the right instruments and metrics suited to your context.

DEEP DIVE 1

Setting Outcome Targets

A key differentiator of an outcomes-ready program is not just selecting outcomes, but having confidence that those outcomes will be achieved by the end of the program. Program delivery must therefore be intentionally designed and optimised to reach those outcomes.

In practice, this means:

- **Causality and Intentionality**— Your intervention must demonstrably drive the desired change. Outcomes should be achieved not by chance, but through deliberate design.
- **Evidence Base** – Confidence can come from program maturity and track record, existing literature and established research, or insights from experts and peers in the sector.
- **SMART Indicators** – Outcomes should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.
- **Clear Targets** – Define how much you aim to achieve; this is what you will ultimately be accountable for.
- **Right Metrics and Incentives** – Choosing the right measures and incentive structures can re-orient the program's entire approach and thinking.



DEEP DIVE 2 Risk Management

Introduction to a three step process on how to identify, track and mitigate risk. There can be many types of risks—donor retention, regulatory risks, operational risks, talent and human resources etc. Here are some steps to building a risk mitigation strategy.

- Be clear on your goals and outcomes – what are you trying to achieve.
- Understand what categories of risk you face as an organisation—reflect deeply on the possibilities of why programs fail.
- List out a few risks you face in the most important areas, rate yourself on a scale. Ask yourself: what is the consequence of that—is it minor or critical? What is the risk level—is it urgent or can it be managed and planned around? What is the likelihood or probability—never or very often? This can help you prioritise which you need to work on.

Build risk management as a mindset in the organisation, it is a function to be done regularly, and with accountability assigned to people. If required, it can also be decentralised, e.g., the Business Development team thinks about fund raising, Program team thinks about program risks etc.

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE: THE CASE OF LANGUAGE AND LEARNING FOUNDATION (LLF)

OBF validated our government-driven model, brought in third-party evaluation, and gave us credibility with funders and partners. It helped us build internal capacity through regular reviews and performance orientation, while fostering collaboration with government, funders, and risk investors. By integrating tech-enabled M&E and sharing best practices, we've refined delivery and built a culture of continuous learning.

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE: THE CASE OF PRATHAM FOUNDATION

With OBF, donors themselves come in more mature—it is not just about funding, but also the support systems they bring along. Programs evolve through constant iteration, staying married to outcomes and open to changing the playbook as needed. By tying OBF to larger budgets and scale, we build accountability not just to donors, but the wider ecosystem and, most importantly, to the communities we serve.

TRACK 4

Delivering Social Impact at Scale



This track examined how Social Purpose Organisations (SPOs) can design, measure, and sustain impact at scale while navigating the complexities of India's development landscape. It moved beyond replication to explore diverse models of scaling—community-led, partnership-driven, organisation-led, technology-enabled, and systems or policy-led—highlighting their strengths, trade-offs, and hidden costs. Alongside scaling strategies, the track engaged with frameworks for assessing impact, probing how funder-driven and community-driven definitions can be aligned

through rigorous yet context-sensitive approaches. Participants explored the importance of a shared language for impact, the balance between cost and efficacy in measurement, and how evidence can inform governance and compliance without stifling innovation. Through research presentations and masterclasses, the track equipped participants with practical tools such as scaling canvases, theory of change/action frameworks, and adaptable M&E plans. The collective emphasis was on building reflective, credible, and resilient approaches to achieving social impact at scale.

SESSION 1:

Scaling What Matters: Models, Language, and Practice

SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR



Aakash Sethi,
Chief Executive Officer,
Quest Alliance



Sapna Karim,
COO, Janaagraha Centre
for Citizenship and
Democracy



Rukmini Banerji,
Chief Executive Officer,
Pratham Education
Foundation



Shrutika Jadhav,
Associate Director, Dasra

The challenge of achieving social impact at scale extends beyond simply reaching more beneficiaries. This session brought together leaders from Quest Alliance, Pratham, and Janaagraha—three organisations with 20+ year journeys in education, urban governance, and skill development.

Their experiences reveal scaling as an adaptive practice requiring organisational transformation, strategic partnerships, and systems thinking rather than linear replication. The conversation illuminated how successful scaling means fundamentally rethinking how problems are understood, solutions are designed, and impact is sustained through enabling others to carry the work forward.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE GOVERNMENT IS A CRITICAL ENABLER OF SCALE

- Go beyond compliance to shared ownership, unlocking policy influence, legitimacy, and long-term resources.
- Seek out change agents within government structures who share your vision.
- Solve real government pain points, rather than only promoting your agenda.
- Create formal platforms that endure political cycles and leadership changes.



You need to scale by letting the government take the onus of institutionalising programs, our role is to catalyse the environment of innovations with the government because only they can deliver at scale.

Sapna Karim, COO, Janaagraha Centre for Citizen and Democracy

TECHNOLOGY, WHEN GUIDED BY SOCIAL PURPOSE, CAN TRANSFORM THE WAY WE SCALE

- Focus on integrating tech with people and systems for real, sustained impact. Tech is most powerful when educators, facilitators, and learners drive its application rather than being passive recipients.



- Design solutions that are contextually relevant, easy to use, and responsive to local challenges, with continuous feedback loops from end-users.



The education philosophy, the education principles, [and] good pedagogy should sort of design the use of technology rather than the other way round. Everyone was thinking about scale, but is education thinking really guiding the use of technology and therefore, is it directed by pedagogy—was one of the areas we were really interested in exploring.

Aakash Sethi, CEO, Quest Alliance

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION ENSURES THAT SCALING IS ROOTED IN LIVED EXPERIENCE

- Move beyond growing your own organisation—focus on building others' capacity.
- Build coalitions around shared goals, enabling distributed leadership and field-wide advancement.
- Citizens' voices bring urgency and focus that no external actor can substitute.

ORGANISATIONS NEED STRONG INTERNAL LEARNING CULTURES

- Hire team members for curiosity and adaptability, not just technical credentials.
- Institutionalise regular moments for reflection to analyse what's working.
- Develop leaders of practice who embody hands-on solutions, not just theoretical advocacy.
- Create organisational principles that persist through staff and leadership transitions.

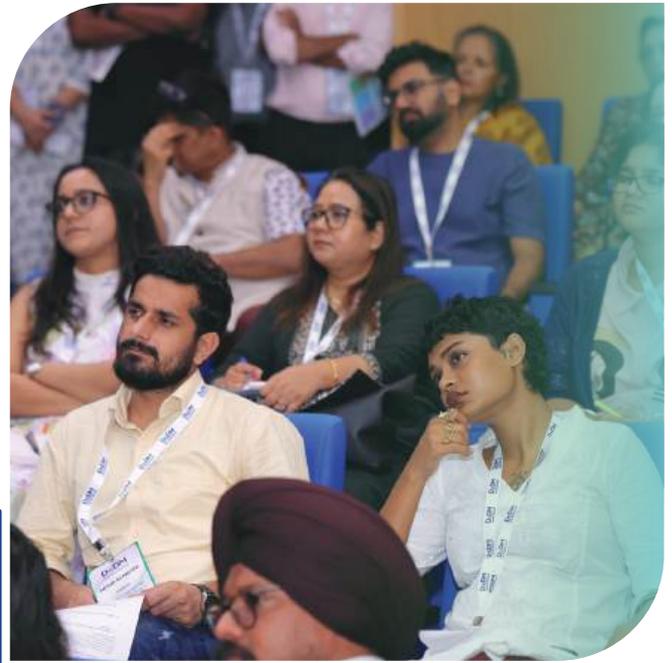
MAKE PROBLEMS TANGIBLE AND LOCAL

- Translate abstract issues into local, concrete experiences—use neighbourhood data, personal stories, and visible demonstration projects.
- Design platforms that invite broad participation and foster shared problem ownership by communities themselves.



A good understanding of a problem is probably halfway to a solution. Now, if a few people realise what a problem is, they can solve it for themselves. But it's important to actually feel the problem. I think 'feeling' the problem in some kind of systematic way is part of bringing attention and focus to it. In a country of millions and billions of people, the more people 'feel' the problem, the more likely it is to feel a desire to say, 'I can change it.'

Rukmini Banerji, CEO, Pratham Education Foundation



WHY THIS MATTERS

Scaling social impact is not about rapid expansion—it is about building **resilient systems, deep partnerships, and sustainable practices** that last for decades.

SESSION 2:

Methodologies for Studying the Long-Term Impact of Non-profits: Existing Practices and Future Directions

SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR



Neelima Khetan,
Managing Partner, Nous Consultants



Subrata Singh,
Executive Director,
Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)



Ankur Sarin,
Associate Professor, IIM Ahmedabad



Liby Johnson,
Executive Director, Gram Vikas



Narendranath Damodaran,
Consultant, PRADAN

Given the severe constraints of time and resources, the current compliance dictated funding scenario, and a demand for very specific or short-term results, is pursuing a measurement of long-term impact still necessary or even possible? This session explores this question from the perspective of three leaders associated with legacy organisations, who have been working towards capturing their long-term impact.

MEASURING SYSTEMIC CHANGE REMAINS A CORE CHALLENGE

- Foundation for Ecological Security's (FES) work shows that while it is possible to monitor temporal and spatial change in ecosystems and livelihoods through control villages, the real difficulty lies in capturing systemic and policy-level changes.
- How much change is due to the organisation's work vs. larger policy or societal shifts—remain unresolved. This highlights the limitations of existing methodologies and the need for innovation in how long-term systemic change is measured.

STANDARDISED METRICS FAIL TO CAPTURE INTANGIBLE AND INTER-GENERATIONAL CHANGE

- Gram Vikas emphasised that much of social change unfolds through stories, relationships, and intergenerational shifts, which standardised metrics struggle to represent.

- Examples like two school girls influencing each other's life choices underscore how personal transformation can ripple into community change—something often invisible in conventional frameworks. Capturing these narrative truths is essential for a fuller picture of long-term impact.



This is not a five year, six year or even a decadal matter. It is probably an intergenerational matter but many organisations in the sector need to come together. And ISDM kind of institutions have a role to facilitate this, to bring them together to look at what we have contributed. But we don't know how much of that can be credited to us and therefore that is the biggest gap.

Liby Johnson, Executive Director,
Gram Vikas

PURPOSE CLARITY ANCHORS LONG-TERM MEASUREMENT

- Neelima Khetan highlighted, organisations with a consistent mandate are better placed to track outcomes over decades.
- Even when external factors (like new highways or urbanisation) disrupt continuity, clarity of purpose allows organisations to assess their impact generation by generation.
- This suggests that impact measurement is as much about staying true to organisational purpose as it is about data and tools.



INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES PROVIDE THE MOST RELIABLE EVIDENCE

- Since capturing intergenerational impact with precision is nearly impossible, the practical approach is to measure intermediate outcomes rigorously and honestly.
- These smaller, measurable steps (e.g., improvements in education, health, agency) can be aggregated to demonstrate how incremental progress drives systemic transformation.
- This balances the tension between rigour and realism, allowing organisations to show value without over-claiming attribution.



At some point the intangible outcomes start emerging as tangible outcomes as well.

This is an opportunity to be measuring those that have taken some time to express themselves. We are talking about [a] slightly different set of outcomes.

**Ankur Sarin, Professor,
IIM Ahmedabad**

COLLABORATION IS CRITICAL FOR SECTOR- WIDE CREDIBILITY

- Both FES and Gram Vikas acknowledged that the sector's relevance is constantly questioned, with demands for standardisation from funders, governments, and the public.
- To counter this, organisations must come together to co-develop methods for recognising and validating intangible, long-term contributions.
- Institutions like ISDM can play a facilitative role, convening actors to create shared frameworks of understanding, which will strengthen collective credibility and resilience.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Taken together, these perspectives highlight that measuring long-term impact is as much about methodology as it is about mindset. As Prof Ankur Sarin suggests, "the sector needs to move from narrow, accounting-based measures to 'account-based accountability,' where narrative, evidence, and learning converge to validate an organisation's theory of change." Long-term impact measurement cannot be reduced to fixed indicators or attribution alone—it must embrace complexity, honour both tangible and intangible outcomes, and construct a compelling account of change that is rigorous, collaborative, and deeply contextual. Methodologically, this requires a focus on outcomes that are systemic in nature, unfold across different time frames, and eventually transform from intangible changes into tangible results. The ultimate goal is to capture this full spectrum of impact, weaving both data and story into an account of long-term, transformative change.



RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTATION (RPP)

Redesigning for Scale: Lessons from ECCD, Foundational Learning, and SEL

PRESENTERS



Navdeep Singh,
Founding Member and
Board Leader, Kachi Sadak
Foundation



Devyani Bhandari,
Manager – Monitoring &
Evaluation and Research &
Development Saturday Art
Class



Shashank Khare,
Manager–Education, HCL
Foundation



Dr. Nidhi Pundhir,
Senior Vice President –
Global CSR, HCLTech

The presentations demonstrated that scalable social impact requires **systemic redesign, community co-leadership, and adaptable frameworks**. Whether through Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), foundational literacy, or Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), the models shared provide replicable blueprints for transforming education and child development in India.

PRESENTATION BY NAVDEEP SINGH, FOUNDING MEMBER AND BOARD LEADER, KACHI SADAK FOUNDATION

The Initiative Paathshala reframed learning as a justice issue, showing that systems must

adapt to children’s realities. Its five-step, child-centric model, scaled from 1 to 100+ schools, proves the power of responsive pathways and community co-ownership.



Transformation begins when systems ask: ‘What must we change so that children can learn?’ instead of blaming the child

**Navdeep Singh, Founding Member
and Board Leader,
Kachi Sadak Foundation.**

- Responsive pathways (multi-age, need-aligned learning) outperform rigid grade-level teaching.
- Teachers as facilitators and co-learners (not mere content deliverers) unlock agency in students.
- Community co-ownership (parents, youth mentors, local volunteers) ensures trust and sustainability.
- Impact extends beyond test scores—confidence, curiosity, agency, and social trust are also important.

PRESENTATION BY DEVYANI BHANDARI, MANAGER – MONITORING & EVALUATION AND RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT, SATURDAY ART CLASS

Saturday Art Class demonstrated how arts can drive Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL), balancing deep-impact Art Labs with scalable educator training. Findings highlighted the need for joyful classrooms, age-specific SEL goals, and rigorous, performance-based assessments.

- SEL outcomes (confidence, communication, collaboration) improve with age. Primary students benefit most in knowledge/critical thinking; secondary students show stronger confidence and communication.
- Educator facilitation practices and parent involvement significantly influence outcomes.
- SEL goals should be age-specific and tracked systematically.
- Performance-based assessments capture SEL growth better than standard tests.
- Classrooms need to be more joyful and collaborative to sustain learning outcomes.

PRESENTATION BY SHASHANK KHARE, MANAGER-EDUCATION, HCL FOUNDATION

The Uday initiative strengthened urban early childhood care through a four-pillar framework—upgrading Anganwadis, community crèches, father engagement, and caregiver training—creating a replicable “source code” for sustainable ECCD.

- **Early childhood development requires tackling the entire ecosystem**—from government service delivery to parental engagement.
- **The four-pillar framework of the project included:**
 - Strengthening Anganwadis
 - Community crèches with flexible care hours
 - Father engagement (“Daddy Cool” initiative)
 - Caregiver training for women (creating a community care workforce)
- **Convergence with government programs:** Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) enhances legitimacy and sustainability.
- **Community-driven solutions** (flexible hours, father engagement) make models inclusive.

“Daddy Cool” successfully engaged 500+ fathers, shifting caregiving norms through simple nudges like workshops and WhatsApp messages.



WHY THIS MATTERS

All three models reject one-dimensional fixes. They addressed root causes across multiple levels—teachers, parents, government systems, and community culture, advocating for **systems thinking and complex problem design**.

From mothers and youth mentors in Paathshala, to caregivers in Uday, to parents in Art Class, communities were treated as co-architects, not passive beneficiaries. Effective models must manage the tension between intensive, high-impact approaches and scalable, light-touch interventions. All organisations used monitoring and evaluation to adapt and refine, rather than merely to demonstrate accountability.

MASTERCLASS

Rethinking Impact: Creating ToC and Resulting M&E

PRESENTER



Abhishek Sharma,
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At the heart of delivering social impact at scale lies the challenge of navigating complexity, uncertainty, and diverse stakeholder expectations. This masterclass did more than explain the mechanics of Theory of Change (ToC)—it reframed it as an essential mindset and practice for organisations striving to deliver social impact at scale. It urged practitioners to embrace uncertainty, foster learning cultures, and engage deeply with the complexity of real-world change.

ToC emerged not as a rigid roadmap but as a living framework—one that bridges day-to-day activities, outputs, and short-term outcomes with long-term social impact. The session invited participants to rethink their approach to program design and evaluation, emphasising that ToC is not merely about indicators but about illuminating the underlying assumptions and interdependencies that shape real change.

LINKING STRATEGY WITH ADAPTABILITY:

Theory of Change connects activities to outcomes while explicitly surfacing the assumptions and risks that underpin the process of change. This enables organisations to navigate complexity without being trapped by overly linear frameworks, fostering a more nuanced understanding of how change happens in real-world settings.

TRANSFORMING MONITORING AND EVALUATION:

Instead of focusing solely on pre-defined indicators, a well-constructed ToC clarifies what should be measured and why. This shifts evaluation towards supporting reflection and learning, allowing practitioners to adapt programs as they respond to emerging insights, rather than merely tracking progress against static benchmarks.

CO-CREATION AS A FOUNDATION OF IMPACT:

Effective ToCs are not crafted in isolation but through a co-creative process. Engaging funders, implementers, and community members ensures that the framework reflects diverse perspectives, making it both more legitimate and more practical. This collaborative approach strengthens the ability of organisations to align stakeholders around a shared vision, while grounding ambitions in local realities.





Engagement Corner

The Engagement Corner was designed as an interactive space at the DoDM 2025, which otherwise had a packed day of insightful and intense sessions. The idea was to create a light yet meaningful experience where participants could pause, connect, and engage with each other in a playful way—balancing the day’s rich discussions with moments of fun, curiosity, and collaboration.



THE GAME

The Snakes and Ladders – Development Edition was designed as an engaging reflection tool for participants to debate real-world challenges faced by practitioners in the social sector. Played in pairs, one teammate spins the wheel while the other advances on the board. Landing on a snake or ladder triggers a scenario-based question, where both players independently select from three possible answers within 30 seconds. Their choices—covering themes such as setting clear objectives, boosting community engagement, balancing donor and community priorities, handling data glitches, resolving team conflicts, and ensuring inclusive participation—determine whether they climb a ladder or avoid a snake bite.

The twist lies in the independent decision-making: only if both partners choose the same response can they move forward. Through dilemmas such as “How should you handle an unanticipated positive outcome?”, “How can you balance donor



reporting with program execution?”, or “How should you address the interconnected challenges faced by rural artisans?”, participants reflect on trade-offs, values, and the messy realities of development work. With only two chances to survive snake bites, the game pushes players to think critically, defend their rationale, and experience the complexities of navigating social change in a playful yet thought-provoking way.

THE RESULT



During DoDM, this corner stood out for its energy. Despite multiple sessions running simultaneously, the lively atmosphere and the buzz around the game attracted strong footfall, making it a highlight of the event. Participants were highly intrigued by the quiz format, sparking curiosity about the type of questions and categories. Many suggested single - or multi-word answers for easier participation.

Over 20 teams actively played, with the seed pencil gift to the participants further reinforcing the popularity of the corner. Much of the chatter revolved around question categories, showing how deeply participants engaged with the game’s mechanics. It also showcased how small, thoughtfully designed activities can create memorable micro-moments of joy and collaboration in larger learning events.

WHAT PEOPLE SAID



2025

“

I truly appreciated the balance between conceptual depth and practical actionables. Beyond the content, the diversity of speakers and organisations made the dialogue inclusive and relevant, along with the accessibility to dynamic track sessions.

“

The research paper presentation was really good. It gave insights into the work these organisations are doing.

“

The coming together of social sector thought leaders proved to be eye-opening.

“

As a partner, I deeply valued how DoDM 2025 brought together diverse stakeholders from development, sustainability, and innovation. The well-curated sessions, high-quality speakers, and meaningful networking opportunities stood out. The balance between thought leadership and actionable discussions made the event truly impactful.

“

The takeaways came through worksheets and practitioner-led sessions. Discussions were rooted in practice rather than theory.

Looking Ahead

DoDM 2025 has built on the momentum of earlier editions, emerging as a powerful space for dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge creation in the field of Development Management. This year, the conference brought together a wide spectrum of stakeholders—funders, Social Purpose Organisations (SPOs), policymakers, academics, and practitioners—to collectively reimagine the future of the sector.

Across carefully curated tracks and plenary conversations, participants engaged with actionable frameworks, case-based insights, and cutting-edge research. From financing social change and building sector resilience to leveraging volunteer power and shaping trust-based philanthropy, the sessions offered both strategic perspectives and practical blueprints that participants can take back to their organisations and communities.

DoDM 2025 also reaffirmed the importance of development professionals as socially rooted leaders who can bridge the aspirations of the Samaaj with the intent of Sarkaar and Bazaar. The discussions highlighted how values, ethics, and systems thinking must anchor the sector's response to complex challenges, while collaboration across institutions remains the key to lasting change.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our partners—**AMM Foundation, Ford Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, 4WSI, 360 One Foundation, Swades Foundation, SEWA Cooperative Foundation, SBI Foundation, Quest Alliance, Pravah, On Purpose, National Foundation for India, GoalKeep, Educate Girls, Dalberg, Atma, Piramal Foundation, India Welfare Trust, danamojo, British Asian Trust, Governance Counts, Agastya, Pradan, Mash Project Foundation**—whose energy, ideas, and commitment made this edition possible. Their collaboration exemplifies the very spirit of co-creation that lies at the heart of Development Management.

At ISDM, we remain dedicated to nurturing a cadre of skilled development managers and leaders, strengthening the ecosystem, and advancing the practice of Development Management for greater impact at scale. The ideas seeded and conversations sparked at DoDM 2025 will continue to resonate in the months ahead—shaping strategies, informing practices, and inspiring action across the sector.

We look forward to carrying this journey forward with you, and to welcoming you to the next edition of the Dialogues on Development Management.





DODDM
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