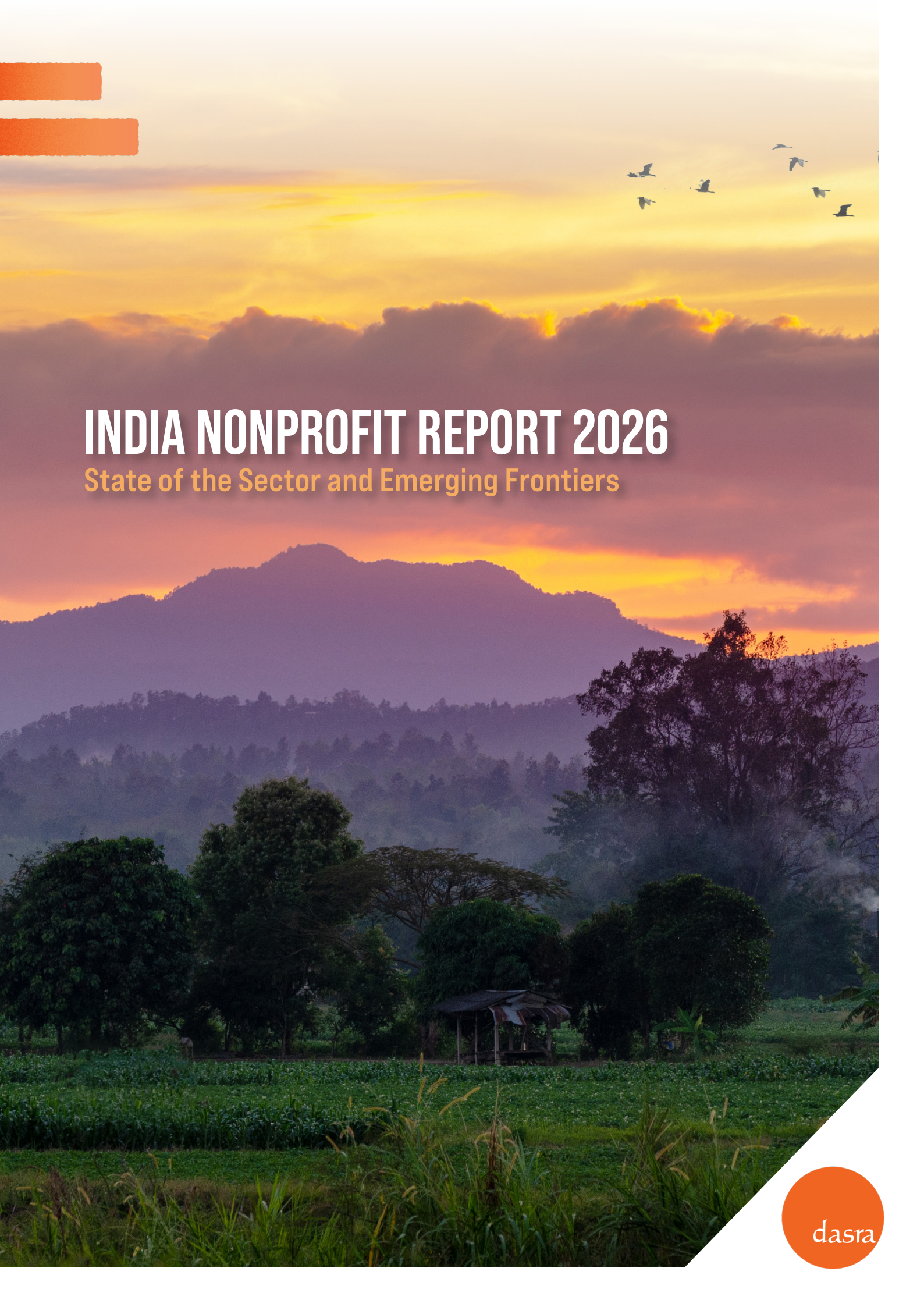


The background of the entire page is a photograph of a rural landscape at sunset. In the foreground, there is a lush green field with tall grasses. In the middle ground, there are several large, dark trees and a small, simple wooden structure with a thatched roof. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a sky filled with orange and yellow clouds. Several birds are flying in the sky. In the top left corner, there are two horizontal orange bars of different lengths.

INDIA NONPROFIT REPORT 2026

State of the Sector and Emerging Frontiers

dasra



ABOUT DASRA

Dasra, meaning 'enlightened giving' in Sanskrit, is a pioneering strategic philanthropic organization that aims for a transformed India where a billion thrive with dignity and equity.

In 1999, Dasra began as a venture philanthropy fund to invest in early-stage nonprofit organizations in India. We recognized early that we had the responsibility, the capability, the connections, and the energy to be a long-game change agent and we resolved to make a transformative difference through it. Dasra has gone through different stages of evolution - from a philanthropy fund to a bridge between NGOs and funders, and now two decades later, it has cemented its identity as a leading nonprofit systems orchestrator working with diverse stakeholders across the social impact ecosystem. Over 26 years, we have engaged 1,208+ funders, mobilized \$475 million in philanthropic capital, and supported 2,623+ organizations. We strengthen organizations and leaders, build philanthropy infrastructure, and unlock knowledge and long-term capital to co-create solutions that shift systems and advance a more equitable future.

HOW TO CITE THIS REPORT

Dasra. India Nonprofit Report 2026: State of the Sector and Emerging Frontiers (Mumbai: Dasra, 2026)

INDIA NONPROFIT REPORT 2026

State of the Sector and Emerging Frontiers



Table of Contents

Foreword: The Power of Collective Resilience	7
---	----------

Executive Summary	8
--------------------------	----------

Section I: The Expanse	15
A. Patterns in Global Development Goals: Steady Gains for India	15
B. Focus on India's Nonprofit Sector: Anchoring Development & Equity	17

Section II: The Voice of Nonprofits	23
A. Sample Snapshot: Key Descriptors from the Survey	23
B. Leadership Mix: State of Inclusion and Representation	28
C. Funding Landscape: A Mix of Sources and Constraints	30
D. Organizational Challenges and Capacity: From the Ground Up	35

Section III: Scaling Journeys	39
A. Recap: Social Impact Taxonomy and Scaling Dimensions	39
B. Micro and Small Nonprofits: Lean Budgets with Hyperlocal Solutions	44
C. Medium Nonprofits: Proof of Concept to Replicable Models	46
D. Large and Very Large Nonprofits: Strengthening the Conditions for Change	48

Section IV: Adapting to the New	51
A. Narrative Building: Representing the Community	53
B. Systems Change: Shifting Structures, Relationships, and Norms	56
C. Collaborative Action: Harnessing the Power of Many	60

Conclusion: Funding an Ecosystem that Works	65
--	-----------

Appendix	68
Methodology	68
Acknowledgements	69
Glossary	70
References	72

List of Figures

Figure 1. India's Performance on HDI	16
Figure 2. India's Performance of SDGs	16
Figure 3. NGOs Registered by Regional Distribution	18
Figure 4. NGOs Registered by Population Density (per lakh)	18
Figure 5. State Income vs NGO Density	20
Figure 6. Budget Sizes of Organizations (INR 2026 Survey)	24
Figure 7. Years of Operations across Organizations (INR 2026 Survey)	25
Figure 8. Reach of Organizations (INR 2026 Survey)	25
Figure 9. Regional Spread of Nonprofits (INR 2026 Survey)	26
Figure 10. Rural-Urban Focus of Nonprofits (INR 2026 Survey)	27
Figure 11. Rural-Urban Focus of Nonprofits by Organization Size (INR 2026 Survey)	27
Figure 12. Marginalized Communities in Leadership Positions (INR 2026 Survey)	29
Figure 13. Financial Health Status of Nonprofits (INR 2026 Survey))	30
Figure 14. Financial Health of Organizations by Size (INR 2026 Survey)	31
Figure 15. Corpus Fund Availability for Nonprofits (INR 2026 Survey)	32
Figure 16. Corpus Fund Availability by Size of Nonprofits (INR 2026 Survey)	32
Figure 17. Percentage of Funding Sources by Organization Size (INR 2026 Survey)	32
Figure 18. Top Challenges for Organizations by Size (INR 2026 Survey)	36
Figure 19. Top Fundraising Challenges Faced by Organizations Across Sizes (INR 2026 Survey)	37
Figure 20. Scaling Dimensions	41
Figure 21. Activity Archetype Priority and Scaling Dimensions	43
Figure 22. Early Signals of Change (INR 2026 Survey)	52
Figure 23. NGOs Engaging with Narrative Building (INR 2026 Survey)	53
Figure 24: NGOs Engaging with Systems Change (INR 2026 Survey)	56
Figure 25: NGOs Engaging with Collaborative Action (INR 2026 Survey)	60
Figure 26: Funding Mix by Organizations Size as a % of Total Funding (INR 2026 Survey)	65

Foreword:

The Power of Collective Resilience

As nonprofits, we show up for the communities we serve with an abundance of spirit and against considerable odds. Behind these numbers lie the everyday triumphs of the sector: maximizing every resource to sustain programs, cultivating dedicated talent, and demonstrating incredible agility across small, focused teams.

India's civil society density is three times lower per 100,000 people in comparison to the US. While this density has immense room to grow compared to global benchmarks, our sector represents a vibrant, expansive ecosystem tailored to India's unique needs. The second edition of the India Nonprofit Report 2026 is here to showcase this incredible narrative. Our real strength does not lie in creating a few star organizations. It lies in our staggering volume, diversity, and resilience, the 515,000+ registered organizations working across every geography, thematic area, and community in the country. Our power is in the depth, breadth, and reach we build together.

This report also documents the vast, untapped potential of the nonprofit sector. Built on a survey of 438 nonprofits spanning the country and complemented by the lived wisdom of practitioners on the ground, we find a sector primed for success,

despite operating under persistent scarcity. Even with 68% of organizations reporting a funding deficit last year, and nearly three in four lacking the corpus fund to absorb shocks, the positive impact on the ground has not wavered.

Nonprofits are known to adapt, deliver and persevere, putting communities first, often without a safety net. This report is a tribute to the leaders who persist and innovate, refusing to accept the gap between India's boldest ambitions and its harshest realities as a permanent fixture.

India's nonprofits have never waited to be resourced before showing up. They have built schools in flood plains, run clinics from borrowed rooms, and held communities together through crises. We have seen how a simple belief can yield transformative results. We offer this as a call to recognize a sector uniquely positioned to drive immediate and enduring change, and an invitation to begin seeing India's nonprofits as a powerful force to fulfil the aspirations of a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

Deval Sanghavi & Neera Nundy

Co-Founders and Partners, Dasra

Executive Summary

India's nonprofit sector, with 515,000+ registered organizations, 16 million employees, and INR 11.3 trillion deployed in FY24 (by religious and charitable entities), is one of the largest organized civil societies in the world. This report, based on a survey of 438 nonprofits and 25+ expert interviews, captures the operational realities of the sector and the journeys organizations are taking to fulfill their mission.

Section I. The Expanse

Mapping India's development context and the scale, geography, and thematic footprint of the nonprofit sector, building on macro data via secondary sources

India's Development Context

70

India's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) score in 2025 — a 12-point gain since 2015, one of the fastest trajectories among large emerging economies. 400 million people lifted from extreme poverty since 2005.

INR 50L Cr

Projected public social sector spending by FY30, growing at 13% annually. The state is providing direction and capital; and civil society helps translate it to last-mile outcomes.

0.69 HDI

India's Human Development Index (HDI) — just above the South Asia average (0.67) but well below the OECD average (0.92). Gains from growth remain unevenly distributed.



16
million
employees



515K
registered
organizations



46%
of NGOs are concentrated in
Southern and Western India

The Nonprofit Sector's Presence

42 vs 441
per lakh population

Signals India has a density gap in the number of registered nonprofits when compared with the US. However, there has been a significant jump in nonprofit registrations since our last report, despite the constrained funding environment, indicating a formalizing sector.

46%

of nonprofits are concentrated in Southern and Western India, with the remainder spread across the Central, Northern, North-Eastern, and Island regions. This mirrors India's MSME landscape, where stronger funding pipelines and access to local talent have created more enabling conditions for organizations to emerge and sustain themselves in the South and West.

Nonprofit presence is highest in **Education**, **Health**, and **Gender**, mirroring government and donor priorities. Animal welfare, Prisoner's issues, Tourism, and Renewable Energy remain chronically underrepresented.



Section II. The Voice of Nonprofits

Capturing what running a nonprofit in India feels like, with a focus on funding, leadership, and organizational challenges across 438 surveyed organizations

Who Responded: Sample Profile

80%

surveyed organizations are micro (35%) or small (45%), operating with budgets under INR 3 Crores.

72%

have operated for over 10 years, signaling a mature sample.

92%

work in rural or mixed rural-urban settings, proving presence beyond urban centers.

Leadership and Inclusion

91%

of nonprofits have women in senior leadership, a positive trend towards gender equity. In comparison, India ranked 131st out of 148 countries in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index, highlighting the nonprofit sector as a trailblazer.

62%

of large and very large organizations respectively have no leadership representation from any marginalized community, the highest gap of any size band. The most visible organizations are least likely to be led by those with lived experience of marginalization.

Funding Landscape

68%

Reported a funding deficit in FY 2024–25. For micro-organizations, the figure is 83%.

73%

Nonprofits have no corpus fund. Of those that do, 25% have already drawn it down. Most organizations lack both present funding and future buffers.

Funding composition shifts sharply by size: micro-orgs diversify by necessity; small nonprofits rely heavily on private domestic capital (24%) and government grants (22%); medium orgs concentrate in CSR (43%), their most available but least stable source; large and very large orgs recover diversification through private domestic capital, international donors, and earned income.



68%

of nonprofits report having representation from marginalized communities in their leadership.



73%

Nonprofits have no corpus fund

Organizational Challenges

90% Cite funding and financial sustainability as their top challenge, most acute for micro and small organizations. The top fundraising barrier for micro and small organizations is donor access; for large organizations, it is securing long-term commitments.

76% Cite institution building (talent, governance, succession) as the second-ranked challenge, most acute at large and very large organizations (94–100%), where it becomes a binding constraint at scale.

44% of micro organizations cite collaboration deficit as a challenge, they lack access to the peer networks that larger actors take for granted.

74% have participated in leadership development programs / have a designated second-in-line leader, showing encouraging signals of institutional maturity.

Section III. Scaling Journeys

Examining how nonprofits of different sizes create impact and choose to grow revealing a differentiated view of scale

A Differentiated View of Scale

- Micro and small organizations scale deep, forming a layer that is hyperlocal, relationship-driven, and closest to communities most in need. With frugal innovation, their place in the sector is responsive to on-ground needs.
- Medium organizations also scale deep, but the texture changes as the sector's proof layer. Their focus is on generating evidence, building replicable models, and professionalizing operations.
- Large and very large organizations scale across, expanding to new geographies, new communities, and developing different programs. This is the sector's influence layer – shaping policy, scaling proven models, anchoring public accountability. Their effectiveness depends on the health of the ecosystem below.

Section IV. Adapting to the New

Looking at how nonprofits are actively adapting to the new frontiers of narrative building, systems change, and collaborative action

Narrative Building

64% Of nonprofits actively engage in narrative building, but for micro and small orgs, this work is embedded in behavior change and remains under-articulated and underfunded as a strategy.

Larger organizations are shifting from **awareness-led to solution-oriented narratives**. AI, social media, and data tools are democratizing content creation and amplifying grassroots voices.

Systems Change

75% Actively work toward systems change — engaging policies, dealing with institutional power dynamics, and community ecosystems beyond service delivery.

28% Engage in government partnerships as their primary systems change pathway. Approach differs by size: small orgs work through informal hyperlocal relationships; medium orgs formalize through MOUs; large orgs co-design within public systems.

Collaborative Action

59% Engage meaningfully in collaborative action. An emerging intermediary ecosystem is building a 'nonprofits' infrastructure that strengthens the sector's connective tissue.

COVID-19 accelerated collaborative models; partnerships formed during the crisis have translated into sustained multi-stakeholder initiatives in livelihoods, education, and gender.

Conclusion. Funding an Ecosystem that Works

The survey data illustrates how different funding sources play either a catalytic or supporting role across various organization sizes. This helps map out exactly how funders engage across the four key functions.

- ➔ **Help meet direct project costs:** Retail giving makes a small contribution across all bands, highest at micro (11%). Self-generated revenue follows a U-shape, high at micro (24%, survival) and recovering at very large (12%, scale). The data suggests direct project cost funding is self-sourced or met through retail donations.
- ➔ **Fund and scale proof of concept:** The data shows that CSR rises steeply with organization size, from 15% at micro to 43% at medium and 50% at large. This is the clearest data signal in the set, directly indicating the critical role CSR investment plays in scaling proof of concept.
- ➔ **Support institution building and leadership development:** Private domestic capital remains stable across all five bands (21–25%). It is the most consistent source in the dataset, implying a natural fit for institution building and leadership development. International donors and the government play supporting roles here, with data signals as less direct.
- ➔ **Strengthen enabling environments and credibility:** The government can play a critical role in strengthening the enabling environment and credibility. However, government grants peak at small (22%) and nearly disappear at large and very large (3–4%), even though these organizations can work closely as strategic partners for policymaking.

Credit: Magnific



An Interconnected Sector and Three Recommendations for Funders

So far, these three sizes of organizations are seen as separate categories. However, these are nodes in a single system. Micro and small organizations generate grassroots evidence and innovation. Medium organizations test it, refine it, build the proof. Large organizations scale it, institutionalize it, and change systems around it. Break this chain anywhere, and it breaks everywhere.

Three Recommendations for Funders

First: Redefine excellence in the nonprofit ecosystem.

The sector is being measured against a definition of success it was never designed to meet. A micro nonprofit that deepens roots in the community and stays is not a failure; it is the foundation. A medium nonprofit spending five years building rigorous evidence is being strategic; it is the proof layer. A large nonprofit stepping back from direct service to architect the ecosystem is maturing; it is the influence layer. Redefining metrics of success will help generate partnerships with local government bodies and route social protection funds through organizations already embedded in communities. It will lead to building resource centers that support collaborative action and systems change and include them in policymaking as strategic partners.

Second: Fund the system, not the organization.

The sector's financial fragility is a feature of the funding practices they depend on. Investing in ecosystem conditions means for small organizations, this means opening funding channels through intermediaries, lowering eligibility bars for organizations without requisite funding. For medium organizations, this means shifting from project-tied grants to institutional grants adequate to the vision, and funding second-line leadership, governance, and evidence infrastructure. For large organizations, this means funding governance models, second-line leadership, and coalition infrastructure through long-term non-programmatic capital. The government is already developing mechanisms like the Social Stock Exchange to help nonprofits formalize and access domestic capital at scale.

Third: Commit to a long-term partnership, not project funding.

The funding structure is clear: to survive, nonprofits must seek grants for projects. This converts nonprofits into subcontractors and crowds out the institutional investment that durable social change requires. Flexible capital for staff capacity and communications, is what allows organizations to become visible and fundable. Such funding helps build institutions effective over longer horizons, and with thematic specialization. Nonprofit organizations must be seen as stewards and partners. Grant commitments should span time scales adequate to the vision. Organizations working on norm change, policy influence, or community trust cannot operate on short funding cycles. Social impact requires time and patient capital.



Section I

The Expanse



India's vision for Viksit Bharat @2047 to become a fully developed, inclusive nation by the centenary of its Independence, rests on a development architecture that civil society helped build, in close conjunction with the State. From pre-Independence social reform to current-day institution-building, nonprofits have been the first movers. The sector ensures the gains from development reach the farthest populations and geographies. As India enters the final five years of the SDG decade, with 1.4 billion people, and a persistent gap between policy ambition and last-mile reality, this role becomes more consequential.

A. Patterns in Global Development Goals: Steady Gains for India

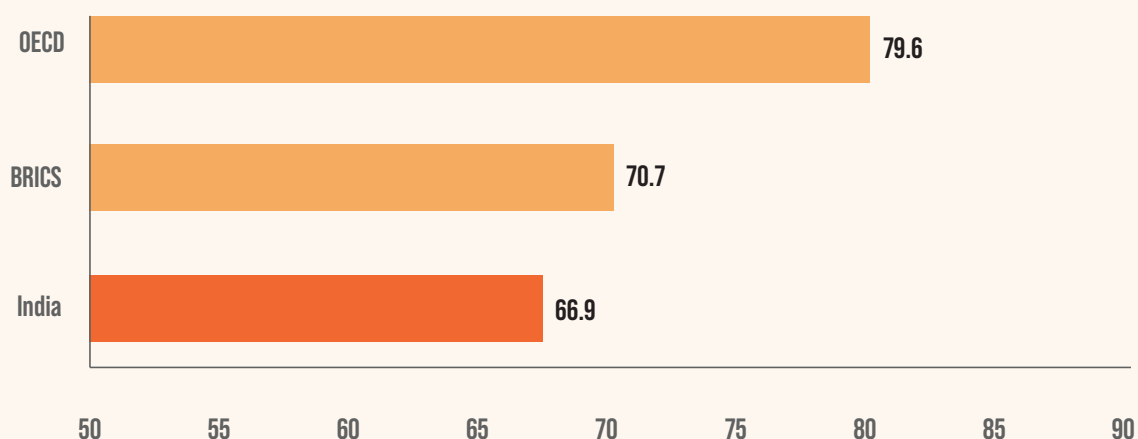
A strong foundation towards key development milestones: India's SDG score of 66.9 in 2025 reflects a 12-point gain since the 2015 baseline, one of the fastest improvement trajectories among large emerging economies. Particularly strong strides have been made on SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 7 (Clean Energy), and SDG 9 (Innovation), with over 400 million people lifted from extreme poverty since 2005 and renewable energy capacity tripling since 2015.ⁱ

Closing the gap against global yardsticks: At 66.9, India trails close to the BRICS average (70.7). The gap has more than halved since 2015, when the difference exceeded 10 points. Yet India remains significantly behind the OECD average of 79.6, underscoring that substantial work remains.

Moving beyond Human Development Index averages: India's Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.69 places it just above the South Asia regional average (0.67), reflecting improvements in life expectancy, mean years of schooling, and per capita income. However, the gap with the OECD average (0.92) underscores that there remains significant room for improvement and even distribution of gains.ⁱⁱ

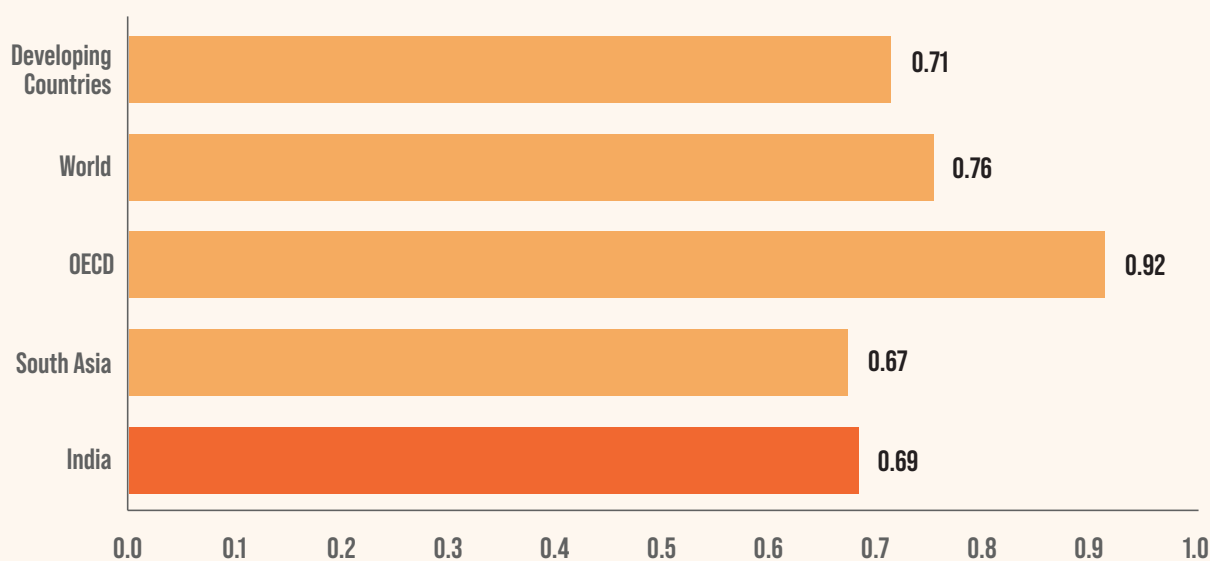
The scale of India's growth is bolstered by public spending: Public spending on the social sector has grown at 13% annually, reaching ~INR 27 lakh crore today and projected to hit INR 50 lakh crore by FY30, with investment in healthcare and education leading the way.ⁱⁱⁱ

Figure 1: India's performance on SDGs



Source: Sustainable Development Report 2025, UNSDSN

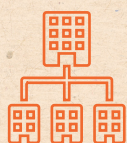
Figure 2: India's performance on the HDI



Source: Human Development Report 2025, UNDP

What emerges from this data is a clear mandate for the work ahead. The State is already providing the vision and the capital. If the goal is truly to leave no one behind, we need to focus on the last mile.

B. Focus on India's Nonprofit Sector: Anchoring Development & Equity



515,000+

NGOs registered on NGO-Darpan portal up by 95% from 2025^{iv}



3.78%

Amount deployed as a % of India's GDP FY24^v



16 Million

Estimate people employed by nonprofits, 3X the IT sector^{vi}



INR 11.3 Trillion

Amount deployed by Charitable and Religious Entities in FY24^{vii}

India's vibrant nonprofit sector has long been the critical link between translating government investment and last-mile reach. By extending services to underserved geographies and the farthest-to-reach communities, nonprofits have long been indispensable partners in the nation's development journey. Nonprofits bridge service delivery gaps; amplify community voices, and drive frugal innovation when resources are scarce.

This ecosystem is one of the oldest and largest in the world, with its origins in India's Freedom Movement. While over 515,866 nonprofits are registered on the NGO Darpan portal, estimates suggest the total number may be as high as 3 million.^{viii} Beyond its social impact, the sector is a powerhouse for the economy, employing an estimated 16 million people and standing as one of India's largest organized employers. For context, this is three times the Indian Information Technology sector.^{ix}

Nonprofits are especially decisive in reaching the populations that aggregate statistics can often render invisible. For Dalit, Adivasi, and Bahujan communities, persons with disabilities, urban migrants, and women in remote regions, the distance between socio-economic inequalities and development outcomes is wide. Nonprofits shorten this distance.

As India enters the final five years of the SDG decade and counts down to 2047, the sector's role is undergoing a fundamental shift. It is evolving from

a movement builder to a systems actor: shaping policy, anchoring public accountability, and co-designing solutions alongside both the government and the private sector to secure India's future.

Mapping the Nonprofit Sector: Distribution and Density Across States

The section below moves from vision to evidence, utilizing NGO Darpan data to map the ecosystem's scale, sectoral diversity, and geographic reach. By profiling these organizational structures in depth, we aim to provide a clearer view of the forces driving India's social transformation.^x

42 vs 441

NGO Density (Measured as number of NGOs per lakh population) of India vs United States, respectively

While the gap reflects structural differences in the infrastructure, it also understates true civil society activity, given small scale, informal and community-based organizing and net registrations, falling outside of the NGO Darpan portal.

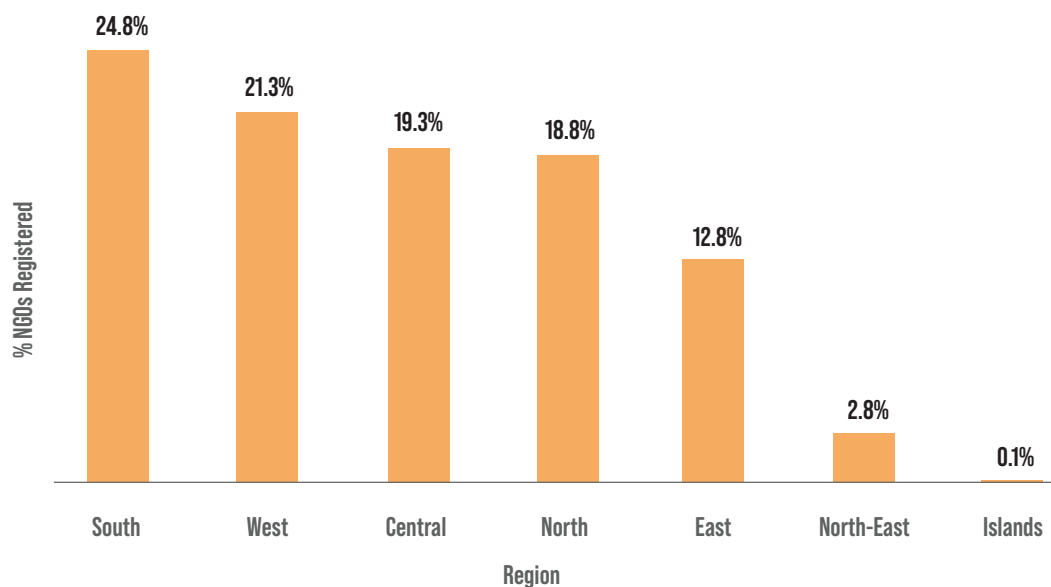
Source: NGO Darpan, World Bank, U.S. Department of State – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

NPO Density and Regional Concentration

Southern and Western India have higher NPO density: Nearly 46% of NGOs are concentrated in Southern and Western India, reflecting stronger urbanization, institutional capacity, talent, and access to funding in these states.

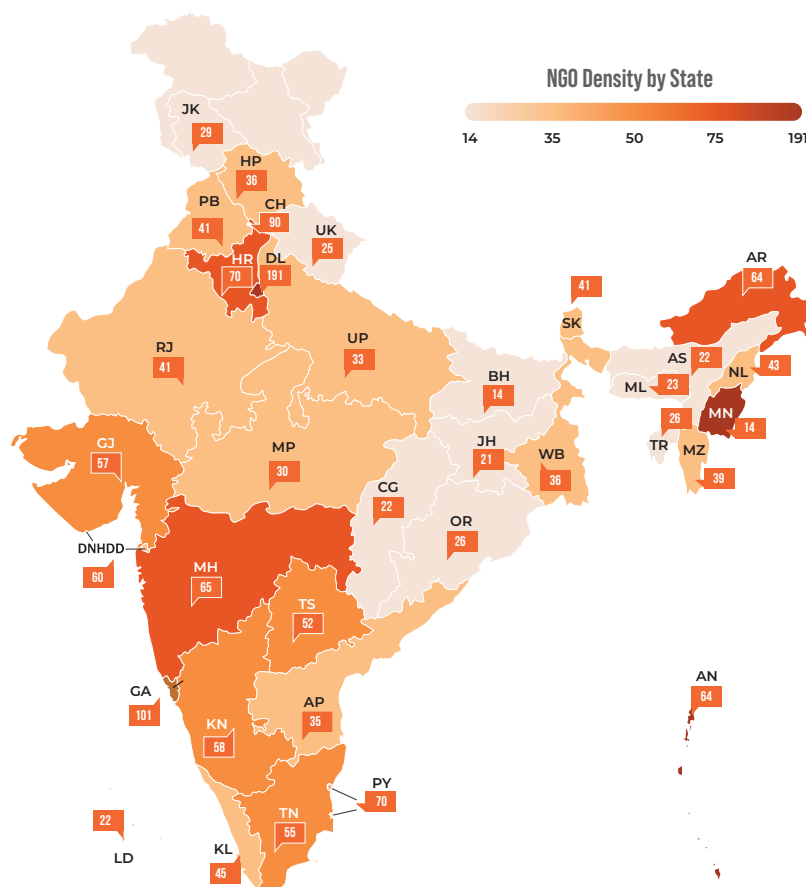
State Wise NGO Density

Figure 3: NGOs registered by regional distribution



Source: NGO Darpan

Figure 4: NPOs registered by population density (per lakh)



Source: NGO Darpan, Census of India 2011

Scale and Regional Distribution

India's nonprofit ecosystem has reached an unprecedented scale. With 515,866 non-profits now registered on the NGO Darpan portal it is, by absolute measure, one of the largest organized civil society networks in the world. However, this masks a significant density gap. India averages just 42 nonprofits per lakh people^{xi}, a fraction of the 441 per lakh seen in the United States (based on NGO Darpan registrations).^{xii} While this gap reflects structural differences in economic capacity, it also highlights the “invisibility” of the sector; a vast amount of informal, community-based organizing remains uncounted by official registries.

Geographic Concentration and the MSME Mirror:

The sector's growth is not uniform. Nearly 46% of all registered nonprofits are concentrated in Western and Southern India, mirroring the footprint of India's MSME landscape. Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh alone account for over a quarter of the national total.

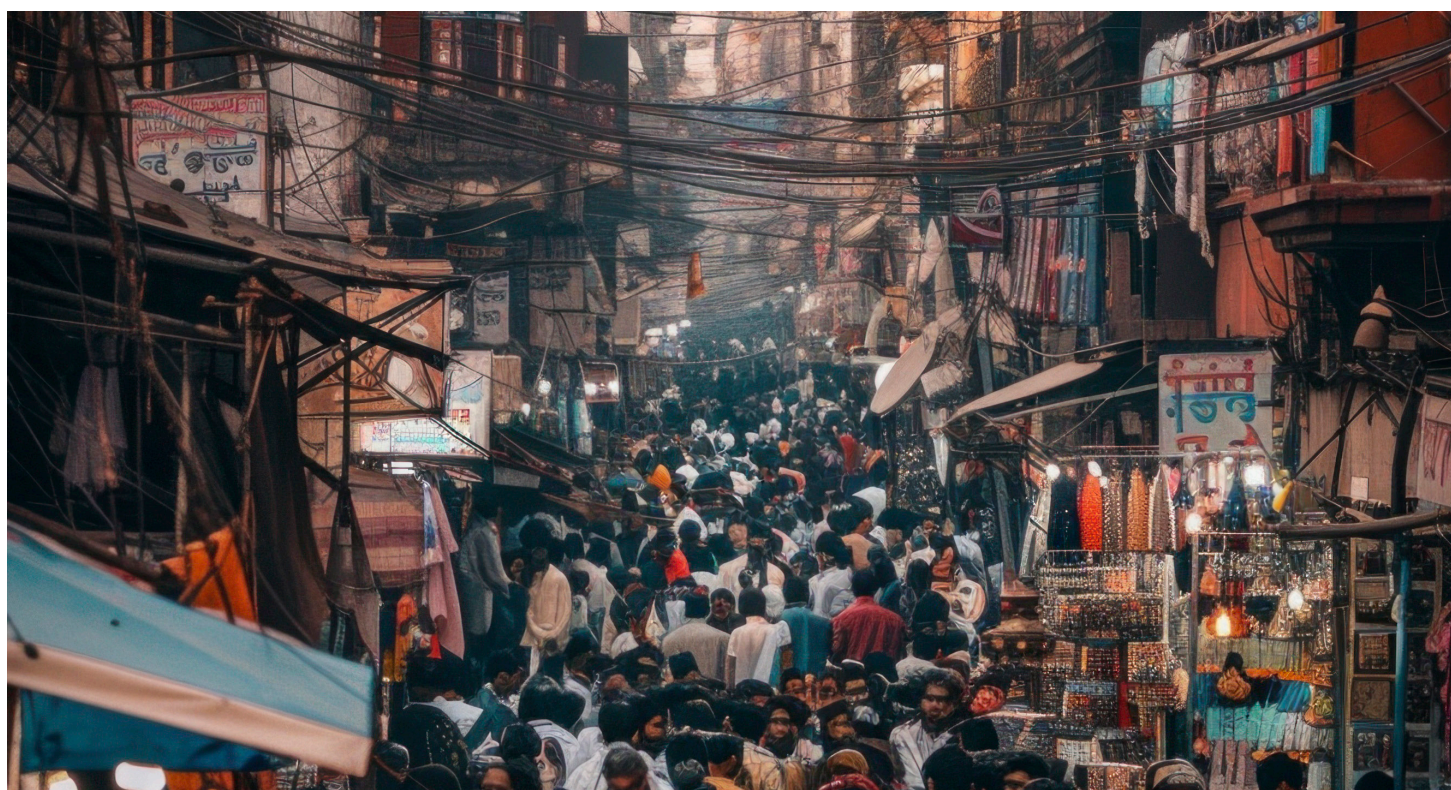
The Density Leaders: Delhi leads with 191 nonprofits per lakh, though this is likely skewed by organizations headquartered in the capital rather than their actual field coverage. Other states with high nonprofit concentration are:

- Goa: 107 per lakh population
- Haryana: 70 per lakh population
- Puducherry: 69 per lakh population
- Maharashtra: 65 per lakh population
- Karnataka: 58 per lakh population

The Geography of Vulnerability: The data reveals a pragmatic trend in India's civic infrastructure. States with high urbanization and robust talent pipelines sustain dense ecosystems in both the nonprofit and MSME sectors.^{xiii} Whereas, the regions with the highest developmental and ecological vulnerability remain underrepresented:

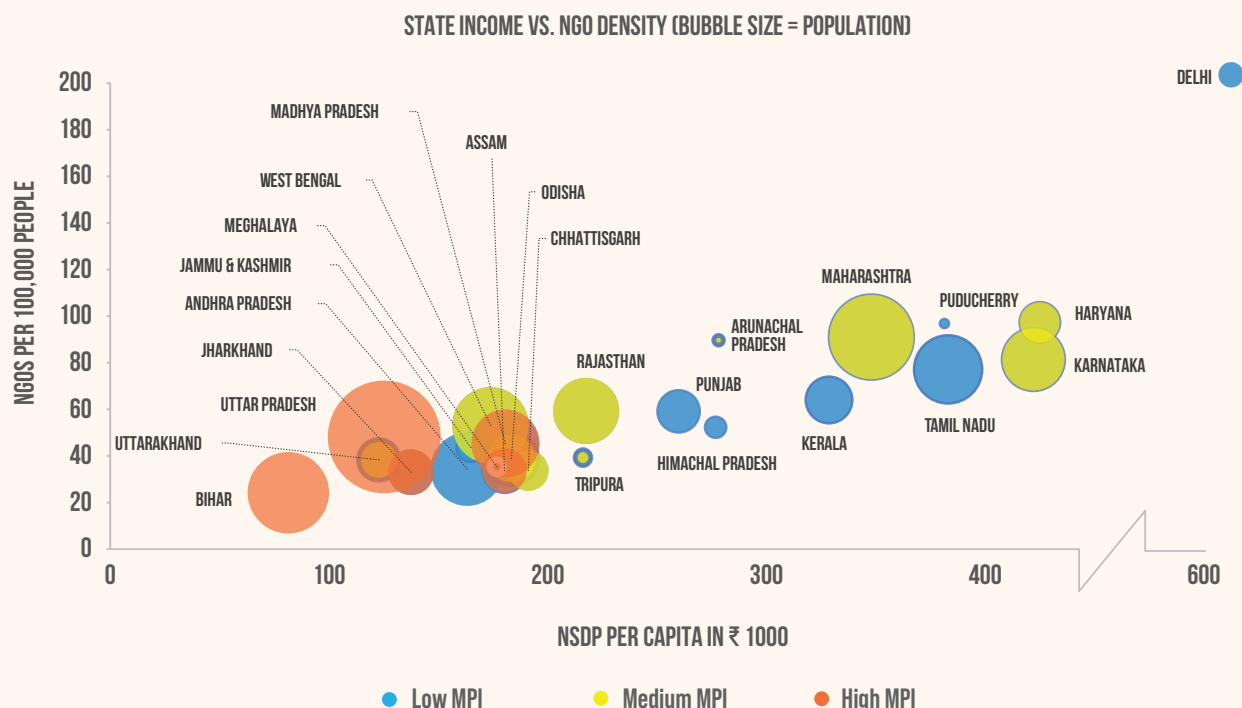
- **The East (12.8%):** Despite deep poverty burdens in Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal, the institutional presence remains low.
- **The North-East (<3%) & Island Regions (<1%):** Geographic isolation, limited CSR attention, and capacity gaps have left these vulnerable regions with the thinnest formal nonprofit coverage.

Credit: Magnific



Tracing Development Needs: Nonprofit Presence & Economic Concentration

Figure 5: State Income vs NGO Density



Source: NGO Darpan, Census of India 2011, RBI Handbook of Indian States

The chart above plots each state by its NSDP per capita (economic capacity, on the x-axis) against NGO density (calculated as: registered NGOs per lakh population, on the y-axis), with bubble size representing population and color indicating level of multidimensional poverty - a composite measure of deprivation across health, education, and living standards.^{xiv} Taken together, the chart maps formal civil society presence in India as proportionally distributed to states where economic capacity and institutional strength. The states that most need civil society infrastructure are the least likely to have it. Reversing this requires deliberate effort to build the enabling conditions, funding pipelines, and local talent that allow organizations to form and survive in less developed regions.

➔ **Economic Strength of a State and NGO Density are Strongly Correlated:** India's formal civil society is concentrated where institutional conditions are strongest. Economically stronger states have higher NGO densities like Maharashtra (65 NGOs per lakh), Karnataka (58), and Tamil Nadu (55), which sit well above the national average (42), drawing on mature

CSR pipelines, urban talent pools, and well-established funding ecosystems that make organizational formation and survival easier.

➔ **The Most Deprived States are Underserved:** States carrying the country's highest multidimensional poverty burdens like Bihar, Jharkhand (21), Madhya Pradesh (30), and Chhattisgarh (22) have NGO densities that are less than half the national average. These are also India's most populous and under-resourced geographies, where the distance between a government scheme and an actual beneficiary is widest.

➔ **The Civil Society Map and the Deprivation Map are Near-perfect Inverses:** The data reveals that the states with the strongest formal civil society presence are also economically stronger. Strong civil societies build strong economies. By expanding organizational infrastructure into underserved communities, we can bridge economic gaps and empower local leaders to drive sustainable, equitable growth.

Sectoral Distribution: Mirrors of Funding & Development Priorities

Nonprofit presence aligns with national policy priorities and funding. Most nonprofits are concentrated in Education & Literacy, Health & Family Welfare, Children, Women's Development, and Arts and Culture – a distribution that closely mirrors both government and donor priorities. These are sectors where outcomes are measurable, and funding pathways and philanthropic infrastructure are well established.

This also correlates with SDG priorities. India's Voluntary National Reviews consistently flag SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health), SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) as areas requiring the deepest civil society engagement - precisely the domains where NGO density is highest.

NGO density across thematic areas matches government and priorities. This pattern holds up against public expenditure data. The Union Budget consistently places Education and Health among its largest social sector allocations: together accounting for over INR 2.1 lakh crore in the 2024–25 Budget, and flagship schemes such as POSHAN 2.0, the National Health Mission, and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao directly correspond to the top NGO focus areas of nutrition, child welfare, and women's development.^{xv}

Few sectors remain systematically underserved. Sectors such as Prisoners' Issues, Scientific and Industrial Research, Land Resources, Tourism, and Animal Welfare have minimal NGO presence, pointing to systemic shortfalls in areas critical for long-term justice, innovation, and ecological sustainability.

Credit: Magnific



Credit: Magnific



Section II

The Voice of Nonprofits



Section I mapped the ecosystem from the outside — its scale, geography, and thematic footprint. Section II goes inside: through a survey of 438 nonprofits, it captures what it actually feels like to run one.

Even with NGO Darpan, representative data on the state of India's nonprofit sector remains scarce. The Voice of Nonprofits survey addresses this gap by capturing responses from 438 nonprofit organizations across the country, spanning diverse regions, thematic areas, and organizational sizes. Drawing on these insights, the survey offers a structured snapshot of how India's nonprofits operate, what they face, and how they sustain themselves. Even without direct extrapolation, this significant sample uncovers the critical patterns and trends defining the sector.

The section is organized across four areas of enquiry:

- **Sample snapshot** profiles the characteristics of the survey respondents, including the budget size, age, geographic reach, and rural-urban focus, etc., thus establishing the structural context within which all subsequent findings sit.
- **Leadership and inclusion** examine investment in the representation of women and historically marginalized communities in senior leadership roles.

- **Funding landscape** maps how organizations raise money, source composition by size, funding deficits, corpus fund access, and the specific barriers encountered while fundraising.
- **Organizational challenges** surface the sector's most pressing operational constraints across four categories: funding, organizational capacity and institution building, trust and compliance, and collaboration.

A. Sample Snapshot: Key Descriptors from the Survey

The survey captured responses from 438 nonprofit organizations across India, spanning a wide range of sizes, ages, and geographic reach, thus providing a cross-sectional view of the structural diversity of India's formal civil society. In this subsection, we describe the key characteristics of our sample.

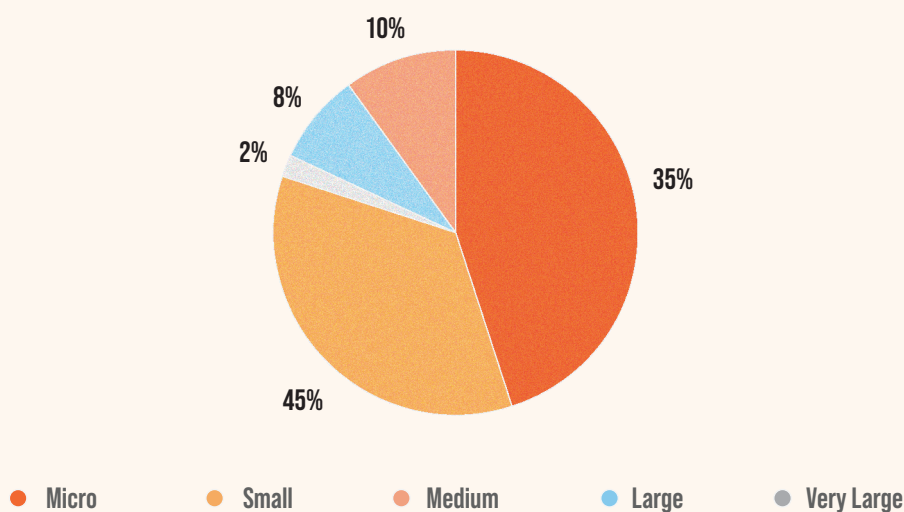
Size: A Sample Dominated by Smaller Organizations

The survey categorizes organizations by annual expenditure:

- Micro (under INR 50 lakh),
- Small (INR 50 lakh–3 crore),
- Medium (INR 3–10 crore),
- Large (INR 10–50 crore),
- Very Large (above INR 50 crore).

By this measure, four in five respondents are micro or small. Micro (35%) and small (45%) together account for 80% of the sample, with medium (10%), large (8%), and very large (2%) making up the remainder. This is consistent with broader sectoral patterns, where the vast majority of India's nonprofit ecosystem operates at a modest scale.

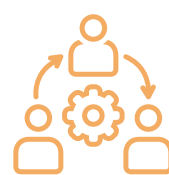
Figure 6: Budget Sizes of Organizations (INR 2026 Survey)



Age: Largely Mature Organizations

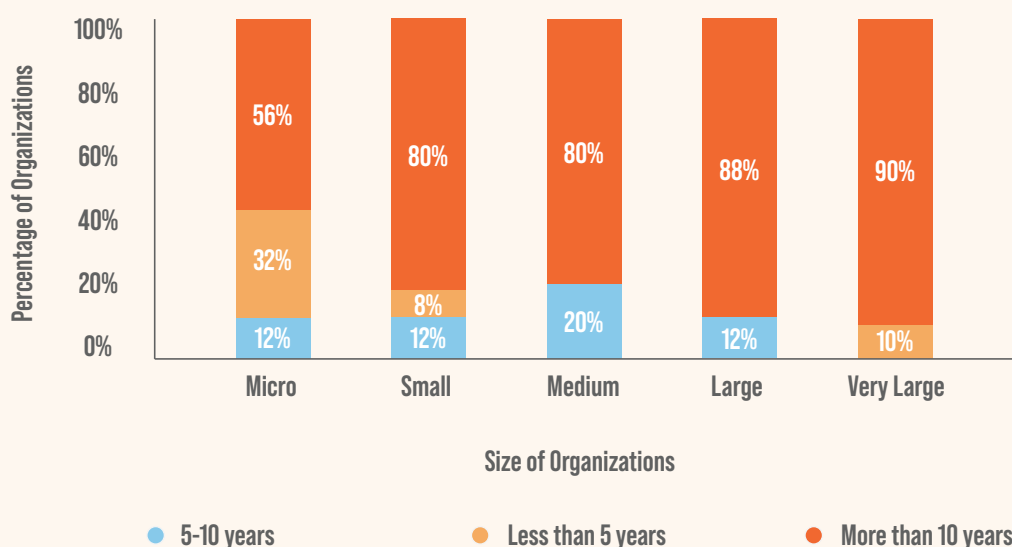
72% of surveyed organizations have been operating for more than ten years, with only 15% less than five years old. This skew toward organizational maturity suggests that the survey captures established institutions rather than early-stage entrants.

Large and very large organizations are almost exclusively long-standing: ~90% respectively have operated for over a decade. Survival over time is a precondition for growth in a sector where funding is short-term and erratic. Similarly, while a majority, 57% of micro-organizations have been operating for over 10 years, nearly 32% are less than five years old. This is the only size category where new entrants form a meaningful share, suggesting that many organizations begin at the micro level.



72%
of surveyed
organizations have
been operating for
more than ten years,
with only 15% less
than five years old

Figure 7: Years of Operations across Organizations (INR 2026 Survey)

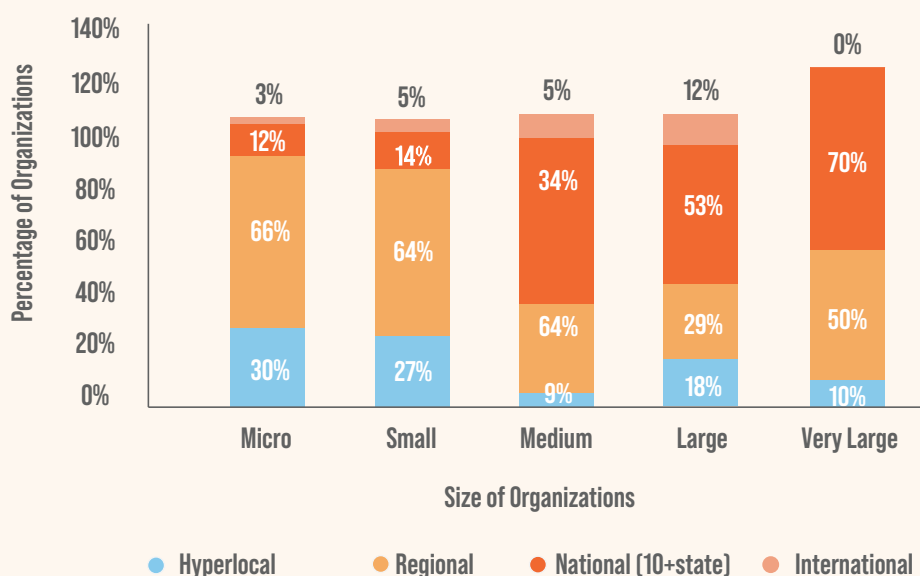


Reach of Operations: Predominantly Regional

25% organizations operate at a hyperlocal level; 62% operate regionally, and 20% nationally across ten or more states. Only 5% operate internationally, suggesting that India's nonprofit sector is locally and regionally embedded rather than operating at national levels.

The size-scale relationship is instructive: large and very large organizations are most likely to operate nationally (53 – 70%), while micro and small organizations concentrate at the regional (64-66%) and hyperlocal (27-30%) levels, reflecting how budget size shapes geographic reach.

Figure 8: Reach of Organizations (INR 2026 Survey)



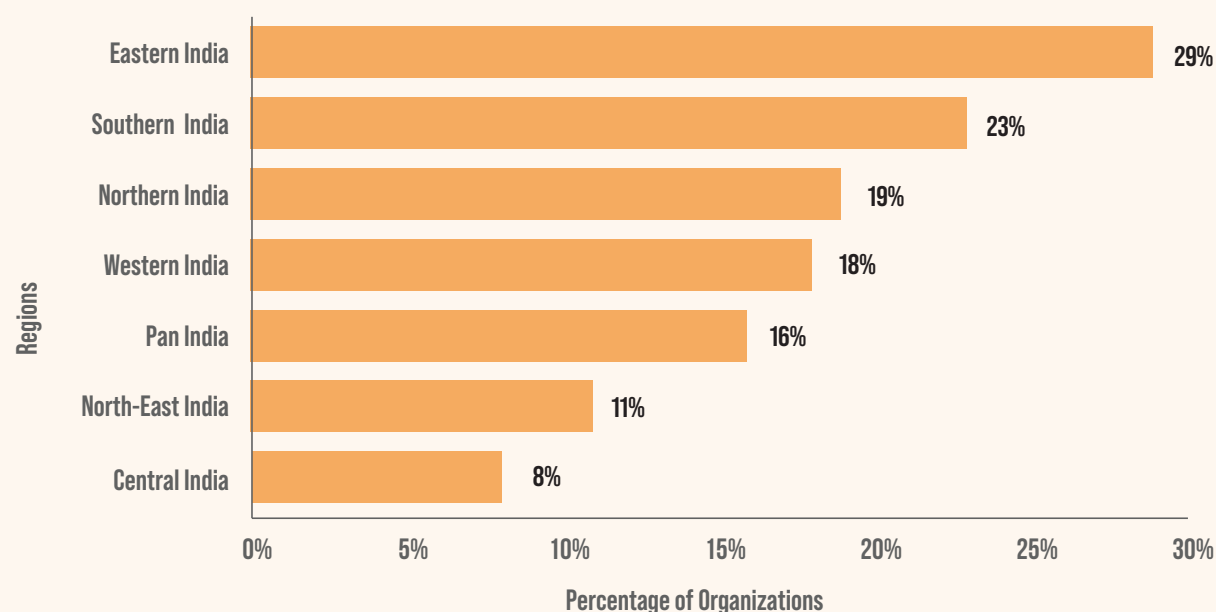
Note: Total percentages sum to more than 100% because respondents were permitted to select multiple options.

Geographic Presence: Eastern India Leads, Central India Is Underserved

Eastern and Southern India have the highest representation in the survey, together accounting for 52% responses, followed by Northern and Western India (19 and 18%, respectively), North-East India (11%), and Central India at just 8%. 16% of respondents operate pan-India.

Unlike NGO Darpan, which captures registration details, this survey asked respondents about the region of operations, a distinction that likely explains why Eastern India, despite accounting for only 13% of Darpan-registered NGOs, leads the sample. Central India's 8% share remains the starkest underrepresentation, consistent with Darpan data.

Figure 9: Regional Spread of Nonprofits (INR 2026 Survey)



Note: Total percentages sum to more than 100% because respondents were permitted to select multiple options.

Rural-Urban Focus: A Predominantly Rural and Mixed Sample

92% of surveyed organizations work in rural areas or a combination of rural and urban settings. Only 8% focus exclusively on urban areas.

Very large (80%), large (44%), and medium (64%) organizations in the sample are the most likely to work across both rural and urban settings, respectively, reflecting the reach that large budgets enable. This also suggests that even the sector's largest organizations have not retreated from rural work due to community needs.

Micro and small organizations similarly work across both areas but have the lowest urban presence in the sample: just 8% work exclusively in urban settings as against large organizations (21%).



92%
of surveyed
organizations work
in rural areas or a
combination of rural
and urban settings.

Figure 10: Rural-Urban Focus of Nonprofits (INR 2026 Survey)

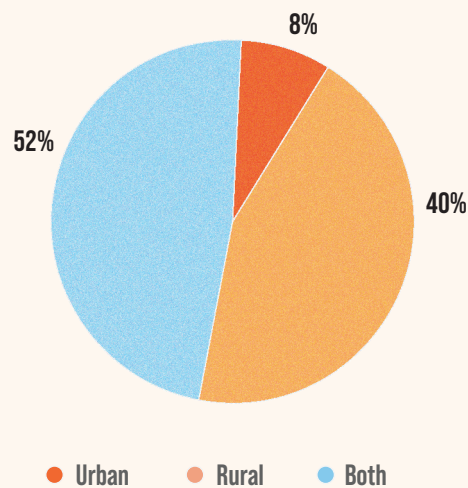
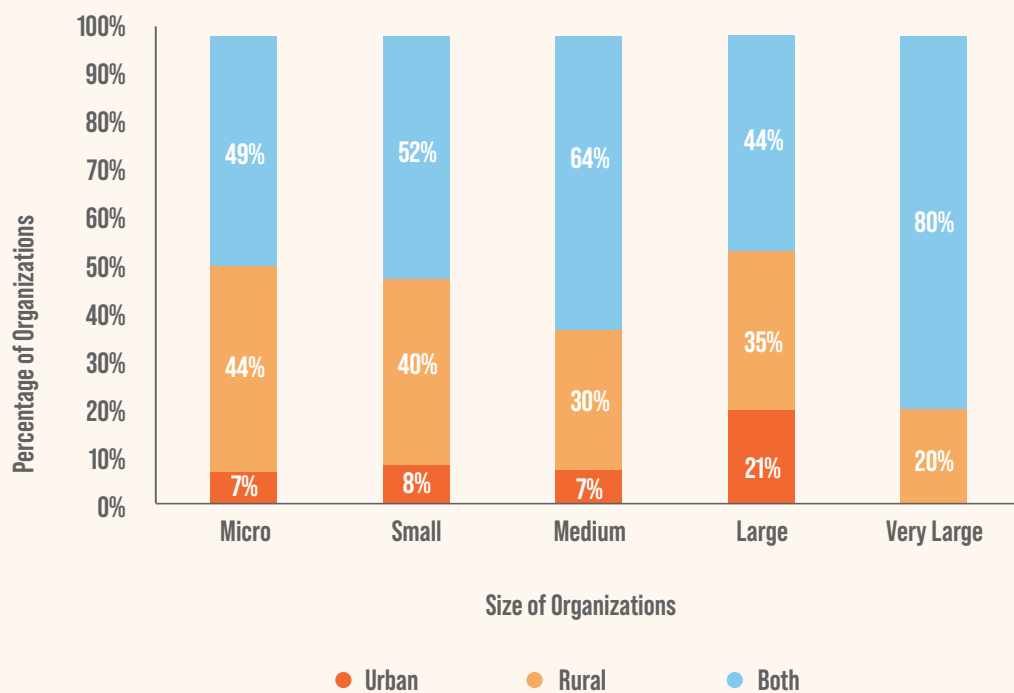


Figure 11: Rural Urban Focus of Nonprofits by Budget Size (INR 2026 Survey)



Dominant and Underserved Sectors

Education (67%) and Livelihoods and Skill Development (65%) lead the survey, followed closely by Gender Empowerment (56%), Health and Nutrition (55%), and Environment, Biodiversity and Conservation (52%), with Agriculture and Rural Development and Child Protection each also at 8%. This distribution is broadly consistent with the NGO Darpan data analyzed in Section I, as well as both government and corporate funding priorities.

Mirroring the NGO Darpan data, Think Tank and Policy (8%), Data and Technology (8%), and Urban Planning (6%), sectors critical for upstream impact, rank the lowest among the responses, reflecting the absence of sustained funding for these in the nonprofit ecosystem. Mental Health (22%), Social Protection and Entitlement (20%), Animal Welfare (12%), and Arts and Culture (12%) also remain structurally under-represented despite the scale of need.

While Education and Livelihoods are the top two sectors across every size band, size does shape the concentration in certain secondary sectors.

The size-based divergence is most visible at the margins. Social Protection and Entitlement (26% among micro, 3% among large) work is carried out by smaller organizations, suggesting that funding towards these domains remains sparse.

Taken together, the sample snapshot reveals a sector that is older and more regionally rooted than its low visibility might suggest. The dominance of micro and small organizations, the concentration in Education and Livelihoods, and the near-absence of policy and systems-change actors may reflect, at least in part, where funding has historically flowed, which geographies it has reached, and which kinds of work it has chosen to support — insights that give a directional picture of the ecosystem at large.

B. Leadership Mix: State of Inclusion and Representation

Who leads an organization shapes what it prioritizes, along with whose experience it centers, and how it is perceived by funders and communities alike. The survey examined two dimensions of leadership inclusion: the representation of historically marginalized communities in senior roles, and the presence of women in leadership. Leadership inclusion in the surveyed organizations present a mixed picture: near-universal representation of women at senior levels. However, there are meaningful gaps in the representation of historically marginalized communities, especially among the sector's largest organizations.

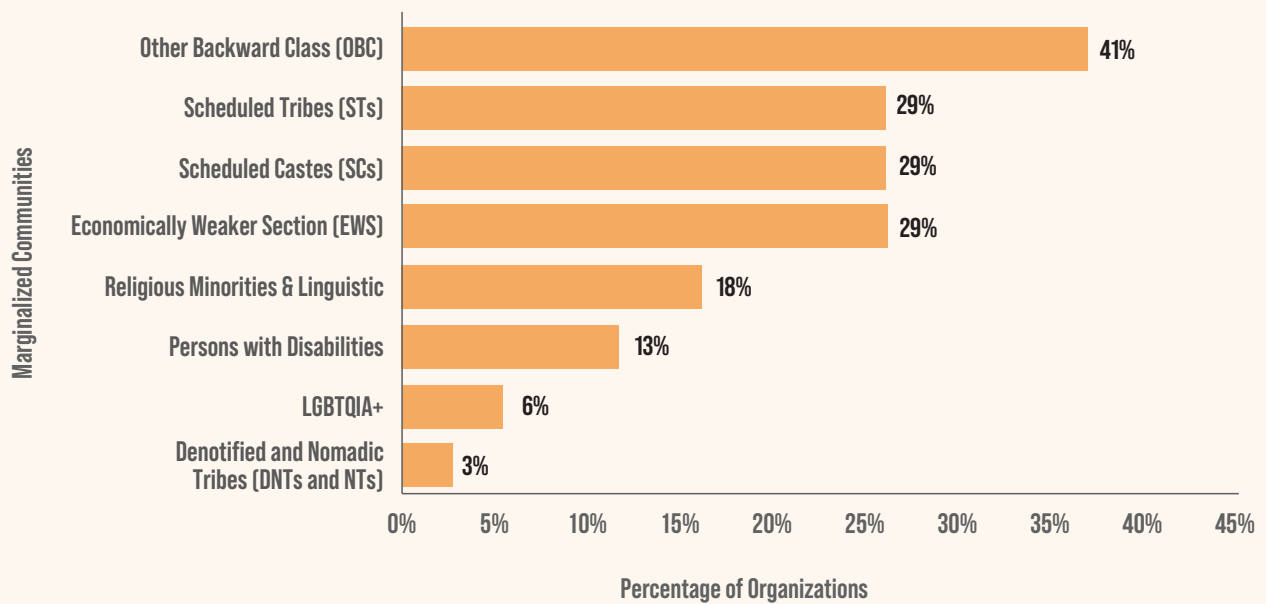
Marginalized Communities in Leadership: Progress with Gaps for Larger Organizations

68% of surveyed organizations report leadership representation from at least one historically marginalized community. OBC representation leads at 41%, followed by Economically Weaker Sections (29%), Scheduled Castes (29%), and Scheduled Tribes (29%). Religious minorities account for 18%, Persons with Disabilities 13%, and LGBTQ+ communities 6%. Denotified and Nomadic Tribe communities, who are among the most historically excluded groups in India, register at just 3%.

However, the size of an organization has implications for representation. 61% large and 60% very large organizations report having no leadership representation from any marginalized community, the highest across any size band. The organizations most visible to funders and policymakers are also less likely to be led by those with lived experience of marginalization.

The consequences extend beyond representation. A study found that 70% of NGOs led by Dalit, Bahujan, or Adivasi (DBA) community members reported no operating surplus in the past three years, compared to 45% for non-DBA-led organizations.^{xvi} Marginalized community-led organizations are not only under-represented in the sector's upper tiers but remain structurally less funded and resilient.

Figure 12: Marginalized Communities in Leadership Positions (INR 2026 Survey)



Note: Total percentages sum to more than 100% because respondents were permitted to select multiple options.

Women in Leadership: A Sector Ahead of the Curve

91% of surveyed organizations report having women in senior leadership, a finding that holds with remarkable consistency across all size bands.

In comparison, India ranked 131st out of 148 countries in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index 2025, highlighting the nonprofit sector as a trailblazer.

The nonprofit sector has historically attracted women leaders, both from communities it serves and from educated urban cohorts drawn to purpose-driven careers — a pattern reinforced by the significant share of Indian philanthropy directed toward gender equity and women-focused programs.

Credit: Pexels



C. Funding Landscape: A Mix of Sources and Constraints



The incentives for NGOs are overwhelmingly project-driven. To survive, you must raise money, and to raise money, you must sell projects. This often turns NGOs into subcontractors for funders seeking tangible, short-term outputs instead of meaningful and lasting impact. Overturning this cycle requires deep strategic coherence and brave leadership. ”

- Rakesh Rajani, JustSystems

Financial sustainability is the foundational condition on which everything else in nonprofit operations rests. Three survey questions together map the sector's financial health: whether organizations have enough money for current needs, whether they have built a buffer for future uncertainty, and whether that buffer has already been drawn down.

1. Funding Deficit: The Majority are Running Short

A funding deficit occurs when an organization's income is insufficient to meet its programmatic and operational needs, forcing it to cut programs, defer costs, or draw down reserves.

68% of surveyed organizations reported a funding deficit in FY 2024–25. Only 31% reported balanced funding, and just 1% reported a surplus. Size is a key factor and consequential: 83% of micro organizations and 66% of small organizations report a deficit, against 47% for large and just 30% for very large. More than four in five of the sector's smallest organizations are, in effect, running on insufficient resources. This is consistent with evidence from similar studies. A study found that half of surveyed Indian NGOs reported no operating surplus over three consecutive years. It is also consistent with the findings of the India Nonprofit Report 2025.^{xvii}

By comparison, the Center for Effective Philanthropy's State of Nonprofits survey 2025 found that only about a third of US nonprofit leaders reported a budget deficit in the last fiscal year, a striking contrast that underscores the financial fragility in India's nonprofit sector.^{xviii}

Figure 13: Financial health status of nonprofits (INR 2026 Survey)

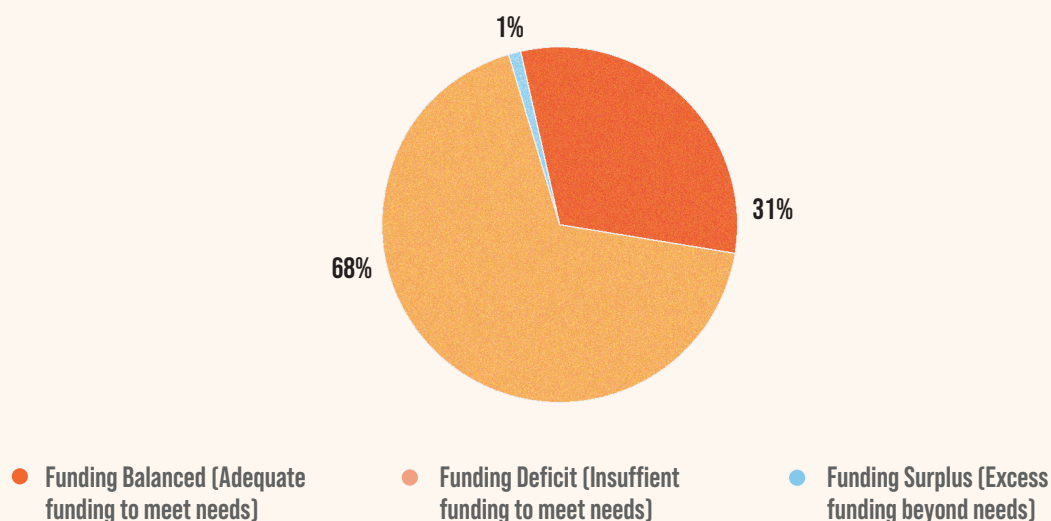
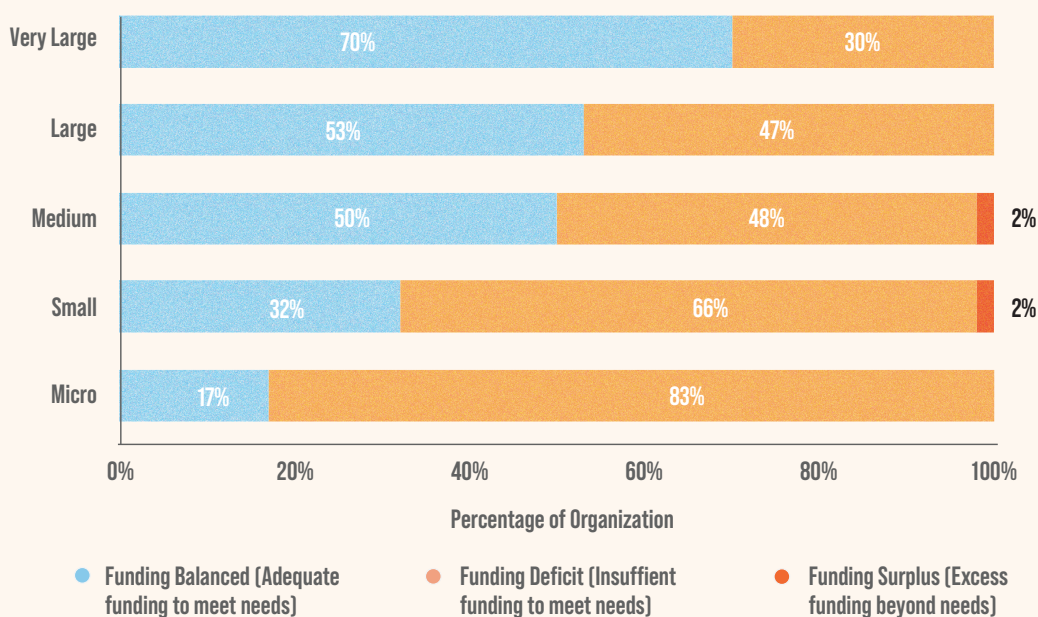


Figure 14: Financial health of organizations by size (INR 2026 Survey)



2. Corpus Fund: A Buffer Most Small Organizations Miss

A corpus fund is a capital endowment held by an organization to absorb shocks and provide long-term financial stability. Distinct from program funding, it is what allows an organization to weather delayed disbursements, sudden donor exits, or economic disruptions without cutting into programs or people, thus serving as a marker of institutional resilience.

73% of surveyed organizations reported having no corpus fund. The size divide is stark: 80% of very large and 68% of large organizations have corpus funds, compared to just 27% of small and 13% of micro organizations. The organizations most exposed to funding volatility have the least capacity to absorb it.

Among the 27% that do have a corpus fund, 25% report having drawn it down in the past three years due to budgetary shortfalls. The buffer organizations have built is already being consumed. Read alongside the deficit data, this describes a compounding vulnerability: most organizations have no buffer; those that do are spending it.

A key barrier is donor perception: corpus contributions are often viewed as administrative rather than impactful, making funders hesitant to support long-term financial resilience. This bias

in the funding ecosystem perpetuates the very fragility that a stronger funding culture could resolve, keeping the sector structurally exposed to the ever-changing external environment.^{xix}

Together, the deficit and corpus findings describe a sector operating without adequate cushion at either the present or future horizon. Most organizations lack sufficient funding today, and most also lack the reserves to absorb uncertainty tomorrow. The organizations most exposed to this double vulnerability are the smallest and least visible to institutional funders, suggesting that the sector's financial fragility is structurally reproduced by the very funding practices it depends on.



Why are smaller organizations dipping into corpus funds? It's simple. At a larger level the concept of long-term or corpus is fading away. Foreign funding streams have reduced over the last five to six years, CSR money is not reaching many smaller organizations, and even government payments are delayed. Organizations still need to run their operations, so they end up breaking into corpus funds just to survive.

- KN. Gopinath, Dhvani Foundation

Figure 15: Corpus fund availability for nonprofits (INR 2026 Survey)

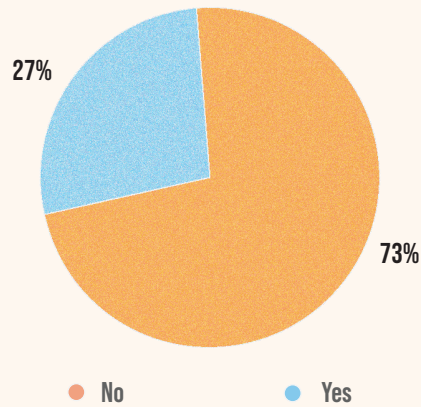


Figure 16: Corpus fund availability by size of nonprofits (INR 2026 Survey)

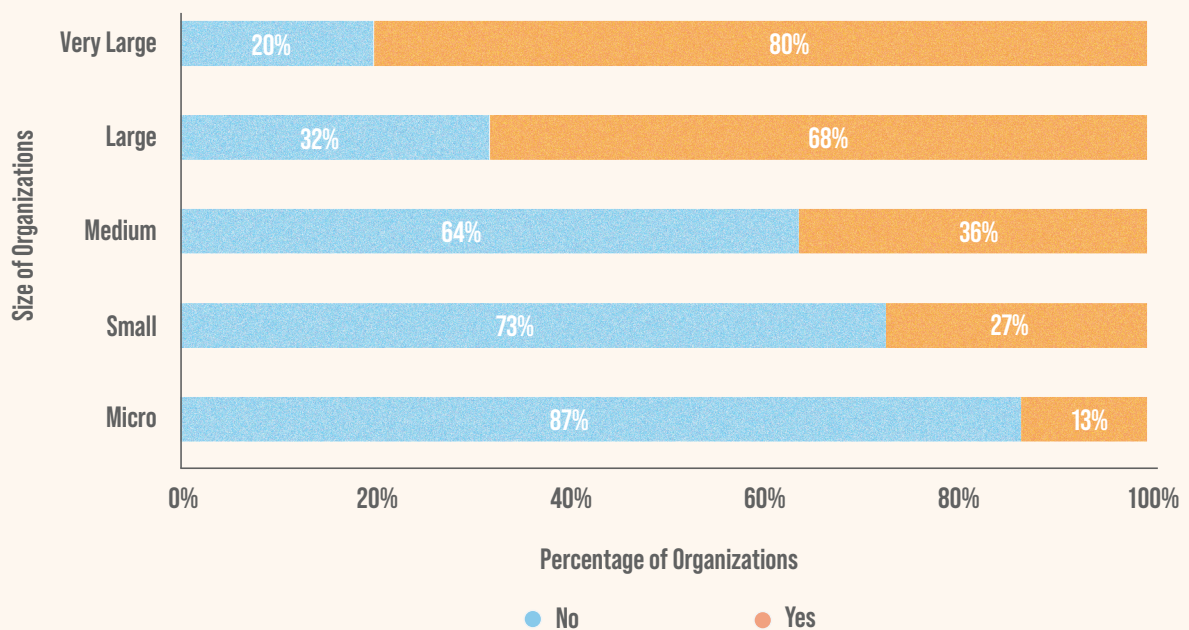
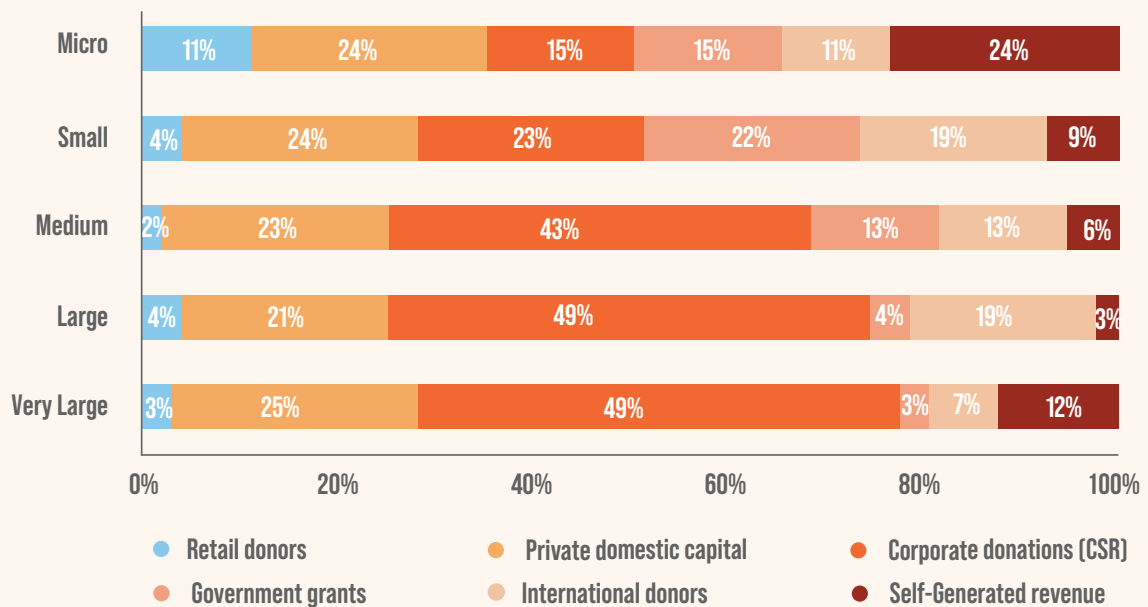


Figure 17: Percentage of Funding Sources by Organization Size (INR Survey 2026)



3. Understanding Funding Composition of Nonprofits

Funding composition is one of the most revealing indicators of an organization's financial resilience. A diversified funding base provides both stability and flexibility. Concentration in any single source creates dependency. The data shows a sector where funding structures shift dramatically by size, and where the risks of concentration are most acute at the smallest and most vulnerable end.

- ➔ **Private Domestic Capital:** This refers to contributions from family givers and philanthropic foundations based in India. Typically, this is relationship-driven and often the most flexible capital available to nonprofits.
- ➔ **Corporate Donations (CSR):** These contributions are mandatory under Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, for qualifying companies. Typically, this is project-tied, compliance-heavy, and increasingly routed through in-house corporate foundations.
- ➔ **Government Grants:** This refers to funding from central and state government schemes, typically project-specific, time-bound, and contingent on registration requirements.
- ➔ **International Donors:** This refers to funding routed via foreign philanthropic foundations, bilateral agencies, and diaspora giving. It is accessed through FCRA registration and is subject to an evolving regulatory environment.
- ➔ **Retail Donors:** This includes individual giving from everyday donors, typically small, transaction-based, and growing through digital channels.
- ➔ **Self-Generated Revenue:** This is earned income through fees, training, consultancy, or social enterprise models. It provides the greatest autonomy but requires organizational infrastructure to build and there are limitations to generating such revenue.

Micro Organizations are Diverse by Necessity, Not Design

- ➔ Domestic Capital at 39% (private domestic 24% + CSR 15%), Other — comprising self-generated revenue and retail donors at 35% (self-generated 24% + retail 11%),
- ➔ Government Grants at 15%,
- ➔ International Funding at 11%.

This apparent diversification is a survival response. Micro organizations draw from wherever they can, in amounts too small to rely on any single source. While domestic capital continues to be the biggest source, composition changes by size – driven largely by changes in CSR funding while giving from High Net Worth Individuals (HNIs) and private foundations remains stable. CSR funding at 15% is the lowest among any

size band reflecting the preference of corporate giving programs for NGOs with established track records, audited financials, and visible scale. Self-generated revenue at 24% and retail donations at 11% are the highest of any size band, reflecting small amounts (individual donations, community fees, training income, and service charges) that sustain organizations where institutional funding is inaccessible. A study found that only 10% of total individual giving in India, roughly INR 3,500 crore is directed to nonprofits, limiting the ceiling on retail income even for organizations actively pursuing it.^{xx} International funding also plays a relatively meaningful role at 11%, suggesting that some micro organizations have actively built FCRA-compliant capacity and are accessing foreign grants to supplement their otherwise constrained income base.

Small Organizations Show How Government Grants Step In

- Domestic Capital at 47% (private domestic 24% + CSR 23%)
- Government Grants at 22%, the highest of any size band
- Other at 13% (self-generated 9% + retail 4%)
- International Funding at 19%, also the highest across all size bands

Three findings stand out. Government grants rising to 22% reflects the role of scheme partnerships as a primary funding route for organizations that have established local credibility but lack the institutional visibility to attract large CSR or philanthropic capital. CSR at 23% increases sharply from the share seen at the micro level. This jump reflects a credibility threshold effect: small organizations begin to demonstrate operational maturity, making them eligible for corporate giving programs that remain out of reach for their smaller peers.

International funding at 19%, which is higher than any other size suggests that small organizations are actively building FCRA capacity and cultivating foreign funding relationships as a deliberate pathway to growth, even as domestic institutional capital remains limited.



Even before the recent cuts in foreign funding, there was already a broader shift away from India in global funding priorities. As foreign funding avenues narrowed, nonprofits increasingly adapted to domestic philanthropic and CSR priorities that emphasize scale, measurable outcomes and more technocratic approaches to social change.

- Ingrid Srinath

Medium Organizations Show How Domestic Capital Becomes the Anchor

- Domestic Capital reaches 66% (private domestic 23% + CSR 43%)
- Government Grants drop to 13%
- Other categories fall to 8% (self-generated 6% + retail 2%)
- International Funding remains at 13%

CSR's share rises consistently with size, from 15% at micro to nearly 43% for medium organizations, reflecting a proof-of-concept dynamic: corporate funders invest in organizations that have already demonstrated credibility and scale.

The concentration risk is sharpest here. An organization deriving almost 66% of its income from domestic institutional capital, predominantly CSR, is highly exposed to shifts in corporate priorities, regulatory changes, or the growing trend of companies routing CSR through in-house foundations rather than NGO partners. The India Philanthropy Report (IPR) 2024 noted that CSR spending, while growing, remains concentrated among a small number of large companies - making it an unreliable anchor for organizational sustainability.^{xxi} Government grants, retail, and self-generated revenue all drop sharply at this band, leaving medium organizations with the least diversified funding structure of any size category.

Large Organizations Show How CSR Dominates the Funding Mix

- Domestic Capital at 71% (private domestic 21% + CSR 50%)
- International Funding at 19%
- Government Grants drop sharply to just 4%
- Other categories fall to 7% (self-generated 3% + retail 4%)

The India Philanthropy Report (IPR) describes private philanthropy's increasingly catalytic role at this scale - which is funding proof-of-concept models that government and CSR can subsequently adopt, a dynamic most visible in the large segment's high private domestic capital share.^{xxii} The near disappearance of government grants at 4% is also notable. Large organizations have largely moved away from government funding pipelines, likely reflecting the compliance

burden, delayed disbursements, and programmatic restrictions that make government grants less attractive as organizations develop the credibility to access CSR and philanthropic capital instead. International funding at 19% remains significant, reflecting established FCRA relationships and the multi-year foreign partnerships that larger organizations can sustain.

Very Large Organizations Show Returns from Strategic Diversification

- ➔ Domestic Capital at 74% (private domestic 25% + CSR 49%) - highest for any band
- ➔ International Funding at 7%
- ➔ Government Grants at 3% — the lowest of any size band
- ➔ Other categories rise to 15% (self-generated 12% + retail 3%)

The most distinctive feature of the very large segment is the re-emergence of other income at 15%. The second highest after micro organizations and driven almost entirely by self-generated revenue at 12%. At scale, organizations begin to build earned income streams through training, consultancy, social enterprise, and licensing that meaningfully reduce donor dependency. International funding declines sharply at a very large scale (7%, the lowest of any band), likely reflecting both the regulatory complexity of managing FCRA at scale and the availability of sufficient domestic capital to substitute it. Government grants at 3% confirm that at this scale, organizations have largely exited government funding pipelines in favor of more strategic and flexible capital.

Across all five size bands, the data suggests a funding journey shaped by structural access. Micro organizations diversify by necessity; small organizations lean on government grants and international funding as credibility opens new doors; medium organizations become heavily concentrated in CSR, their most available but least stable anchor; large organizations deepen that concentration while shedding government and community income streams; and very large organizations begin to recover diversification. The trajectory is one of increasing domestic capital concentration punctuated by a late recovery, and it raises a directionally important question about whether the funding structures available

to organizations in the middle of this journey are adequate to sustain their growth.

D. Organizational Challenges and Capacity: From the Ground Up

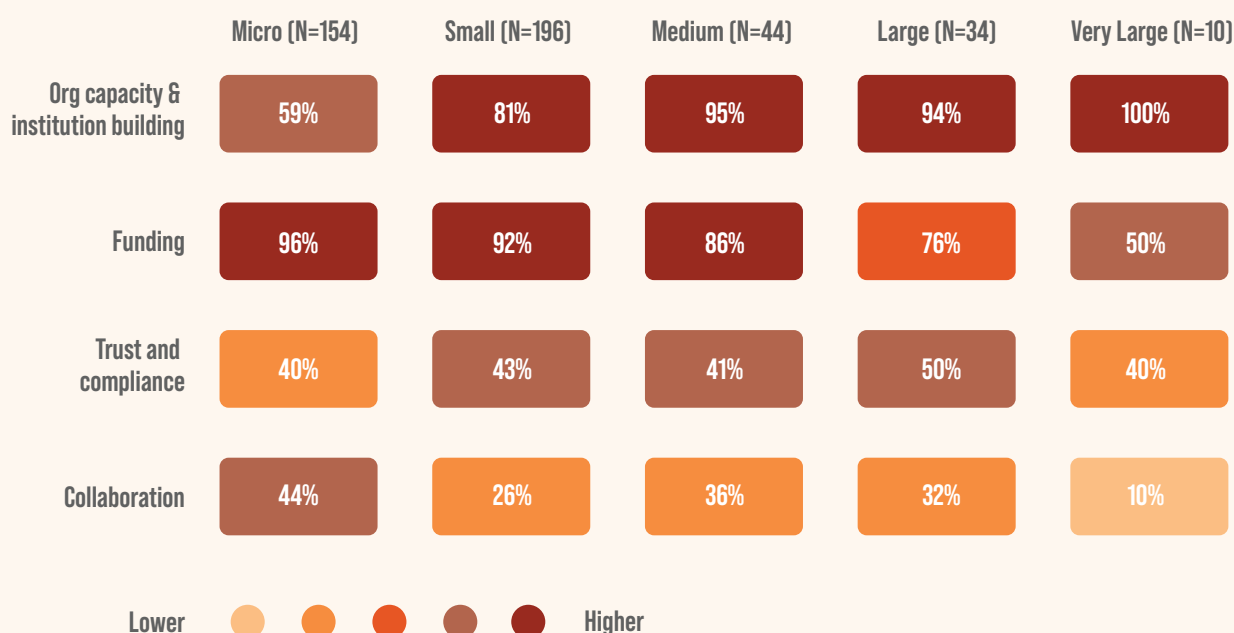
1. Funding as a Core Challenge

Funding and long-term financial sustainability remain the most cited challenges at 91%, corroborating the findings on funding deficit and corpus data documented earlier in this section. The challenge is highest among micro (96%) and small (92%) organizations, consistent with their deeper exposure to funding fragility. Very large organizations cite it least, at 50%, which is still a quarter of the sector's largest actors. This reflects that funding uncertainty is structurally endemic across the sector.

Credit: Magnific



Figure 18: Top Challenges for Organizations by Size (INR 2026 Survey)



Note: Total percentages sum to more than 100% because respondents were permitted to select multiple options.

2. Deep Dive on Fundraising Challenges

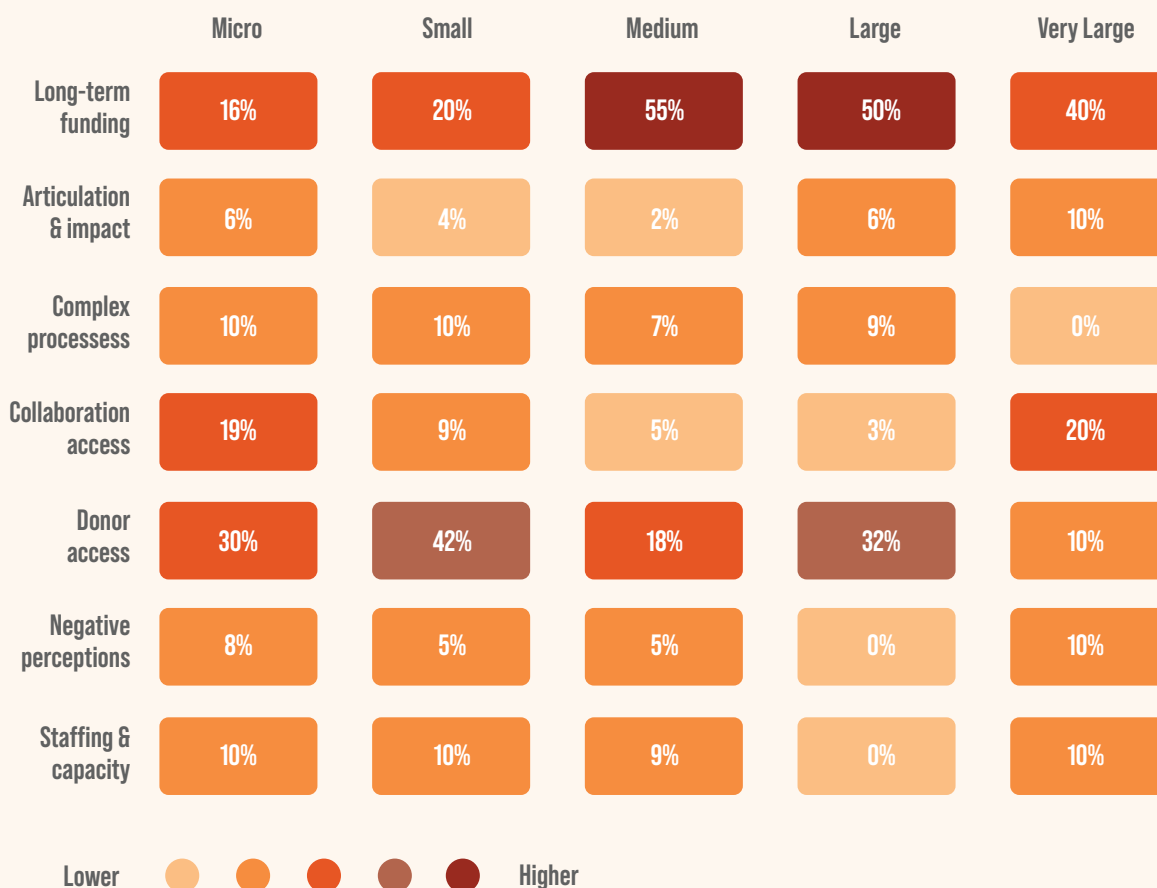
- We also asked organizations about the specific challenges they encounter while fundraising. Findings show that the nature of challenges shifts by organizational size.
- For micro and small organizations, the challenge is the most fundamental i.e., donor access itself, which is cited by 30% of micro and 42% of small organizations as their top barrier. Another survey found that 46% of nonprofits did not know how to attract new donors.^{xxiii} Micro organizations also cite lack of collaboration (19%) among their top three challenges, suggesting that isolation from sector networks directly compounds fundraising invisibility.
- For large and medium organizations (50% and 55% respectively), the top challenge is securing long-term funding. Other Studies found that

83% of grants to Indian NGOs provide just one year of funding, forcing constant re-fundraising rather than planning and building.^{xxiv} For very large organizations, the challenge evolves further: impact articulation and regulatory compliance emerge as key constraints, reflecting that at this scale, the barrier is not finding funders but convincing them to renew.

- The largest organizations are struggling to secure long-term commitments from funders they already have access to, while smaller organizations face a more basic barrier: getting to funders at all.

The data on challenges faced by nonprofits reveal a sector navigating several compounding structural constraints simultaneously. Respondents were asked to select up to three challenges, producing a picture of co-occurring pressures.

Figure 19: Top Fundraising Challenges Faced by Organizations Across Sizes (INR 2026 Survey)



Note: Total percentages sum to more than 100% because respondents were permitted to select multiple options.

3. Institution Building: The Hidden Ceiling for Large Organizations

Institution Building (talent retention; operational and capacity challenges linked to governance, data, and technology; and unclear leadership succession planning) is the second most cited challenge overall (76%), but its distribution by size reveals a pattern in the data.

Almost all large and very large organizations (94-100% respectively) cite it as a constraint, while micro-organizations report it at 59%. This suggests a transition point somewhere between small and medium where the nature of the primary challenge shifts from “finding money” to “building the institution to manage it.”

4. Trust and Compliance: A Sector-Wide Pressure

Trust and Compliance (policy changes and regulatory and compliance issues; and inadequate trust and transparency in the public domain) ranks third, distributed evenly at 40-50% across most

size bands, making it a consistent challenge across the sector, regardless of organizational size. The regulatory dimension has grown in salience: an evolving FCRA environment has shaped access to foreign funding, and compliance requirements have expanded. For smaller organizations with limited legal and finance capacity, compliance is an added operational cost and risk. For larger organizations, it shapes strategic decisions about funding sources, partnerships, and geographic reach.

5. Collaboration Deficit: A Fragmented Sector with Implications for Smaller Organizations

Lack of collaboration with other nonprofits and development actors is cited least overall, ranging from 10% for very large organizations to 44% for micro-organizations. Micro, Small, and Medium organizations feel this most acutely, due to limited access to peer networks, shared learning platforms, and the collective visibility that comes from being embedded in a recognized sector network.

In a sector where organizations often work on overlapping issues without shared infrastructure and competencies for the same limited donor pool, the collaboration deficit has real consequences for learning, and collective bargaining with funders and government.

6. Organization Capacity: Leadership Development

Investment in leadership development spanning senior leadership training, board strengthening, and organizational strategy, is a signal of commitment to long-term institutional health, particularly in the nonprofit ecosystem where non-program funding is scarce and operational demands leave little room for capacity investment.

74% of surveyed organizations have participated in leadership development or institutional strengthening programs in the past two years, signaling strong demand for learning and development.

The commitment is broadly consistent across size bands, though depth varies. Very large (80%), large (79%), and small (79%) organizations lead, while medium (68%) and micro (68%) trail slightly. That even micro organizations report participation at 68% suggests the sector's appetite for capacity investment is not just a function of resources, but of awareness and access to relevant programs.

7. Second-in-Line Leadership: Vulnerability for Smaller Organizations

Second-in-line leadership refers to the presence of a designated leader capable of stepping into the primary leadership role. In a sector characterized by founder-driven models, the development of second-line leadership implies a shift toward structures that can outlast individuals and sustain transitions.

76% of surveyed organizations report having a dedicated second-in-line leader - a stronger finding than might be expected given the sector's resource constraints. When looked through a size gradient, 90% of very large and 85% of large organizations have second-line leadership in place, compared to 77% of small, 75% medium, and 73% of micro organizations.



When leaders join fellowships or peer programs, it provides immense moral support and self-confidence. In an environment that often feels isolated, these networks remind you that you aren't fighting individual battles alone. This sense of community opens up access and opportunities for nonprofits in a very subtle yet deep manner. ”

- Sneha Arora, ATMA

Strong leadership and institutional continuity are foundational to an organization's ability to sustain impact, navigate transitions, and build long-term credibility. The survey findings on this front are encouraging and suggest that the sector's shift from founder-driven models toward more resilient institutions is well underway.

Micro, small, and medium organizations, which face the greatest structural vulnerabilities, are also least likely to have accessed leadership development programs and have a designated second-in-line leader. Collective investment through intermediaries and funder support for leadership development is an area where the evidence suggests outsized returns, and one where even modest shifts in grantmaking practice, such as dedicating a meaningful share of grants to non-program capacity, could make a material difference at scale.

The challenges surfaced across this section are compounding pressures. Funding fragility limits investment in organizational capacity; weak institutional infrastructure makes impact harder to articulate; poor impact articulation reduces funder confidence; and reduced funder confidence perpetuates short-term, project-tied grants that prevent organizations from building the very capacity they lack. Collaboration, the one mechanism that might partially offset these constraints for smaller organizations, is also least accessible to those who need it most. The data, taken together, is suggestive of a sector caught in interlocking structural constraints that individual organizational effort alone is unlikely to resolve.

Section III

Scaling Journeys



Sections I and II describe a sector under pressure. Section III asks a different question: given those pressures, how do India's nonprofits choose to grow, and what does that tell us about where impact comes from?

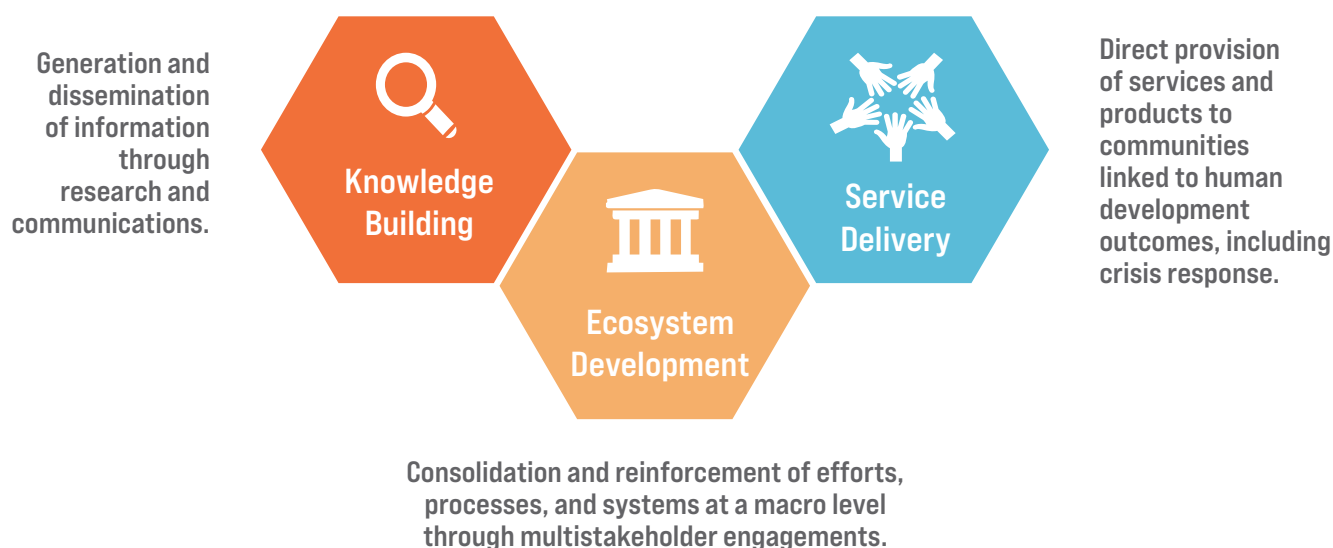
This section examines what India's nonprofits do, how they create impact, and how those roles evolve as organizations grow. Drawing on survey data, in-depth interviews, and case analysis, it maps the sector's work across three functional archetypes and three distinct pathways to scale. The section begins with a recap from the India Nonprofit Report 2025. Thereafter, it examines how micro-small, medium, and large organizations are each creating impact and building toward scale — and what those different journeys reveal about the conditions that make nonprofit work durable.

A. Recap: Social Impact Taxonomy and Scaling Dimensions

This recap section distills two foundational frameworks introduced in the India Nonprofit Report 2025,^{xv} the Social Impact Taxonomy (what work nonprofits do) and the Scaling Dimensions (how nonprofits grow), to support sector practitioners and funders in articulating, measuring, and strategizing for impact.

1. Social Impact Taxonomy

Despite the diversity of NGO work across sectors, geographies, and communities, based on our research, all NGO activity can be classified across three activity archetypes. These archetypes are not mutually exclusive; organizations routinely draw on all three as part of their evolving program portfolios.



Activity Archetypes	What it involves	Illustrative outcomes
Knowledge Building (KB)	Generation and dissemination of information through research and communications <i>Includes:</i> Fundamental research, operational research for program design, participatory research, MEL studies, knowledge dissemination in media and events, codification of learning, stakeholder dialogues	• Evidence-based programmatic action • Public awareness and social/behavioural change • Decision-making structures supported • Changing narratives with representation and visibility
Service Delivery (SD)	Direct provision of services and products to communities linked to human development outcomes, including crisis response <i>Includes:</i> Designing programs, community mobilisation, establishing support centres, offering education, health, nutrition, livelihoods, food security, housing, clean water, and crisis relief	• Community resilience built for the long term • Welfare enabled through development outcomes • Sustenance provided for vulnerable populations • Freedoms and opportunities for individuals and communities
Ecosystem Development (ED)	Consolidation and reinforcement of efforts, processes, and systems at a macro level through multistakeholder engagements <i>Includes:</i> Shared community infrastructure, digital platforms, coalitions and networks, fellowships and training, capacity building, supporting smaller organizations	• Multistakeholder collaborations for SDGs • Infrastructure developed for communities • Systems and processes strengthened in institutions • Transformative systemic change for the long term

Source: Dasra and Kearney analysis, *India Nonprofit Report: Role, Evolution, and Impact (2025)*

2. Scaling Dimensions

Scale is often misunderstood as growing bigger. The scaling dimensions are not linear stages; these are simultaneous strategic choices available at any point in an NGO's journey. Organizations may pursue all three at once, or shift emphasis as their capabilities, resources, and community contexts evolve. Since NGOs are not profit-driven, all three dimensions require patient and flexible capital. Understanding these dimensions enables funders to make more informed decisions about investing in and monitoring the sector. The report reframes scale as a context-dependent, directional strategy for maximizing impact, shaped by two critical elements:

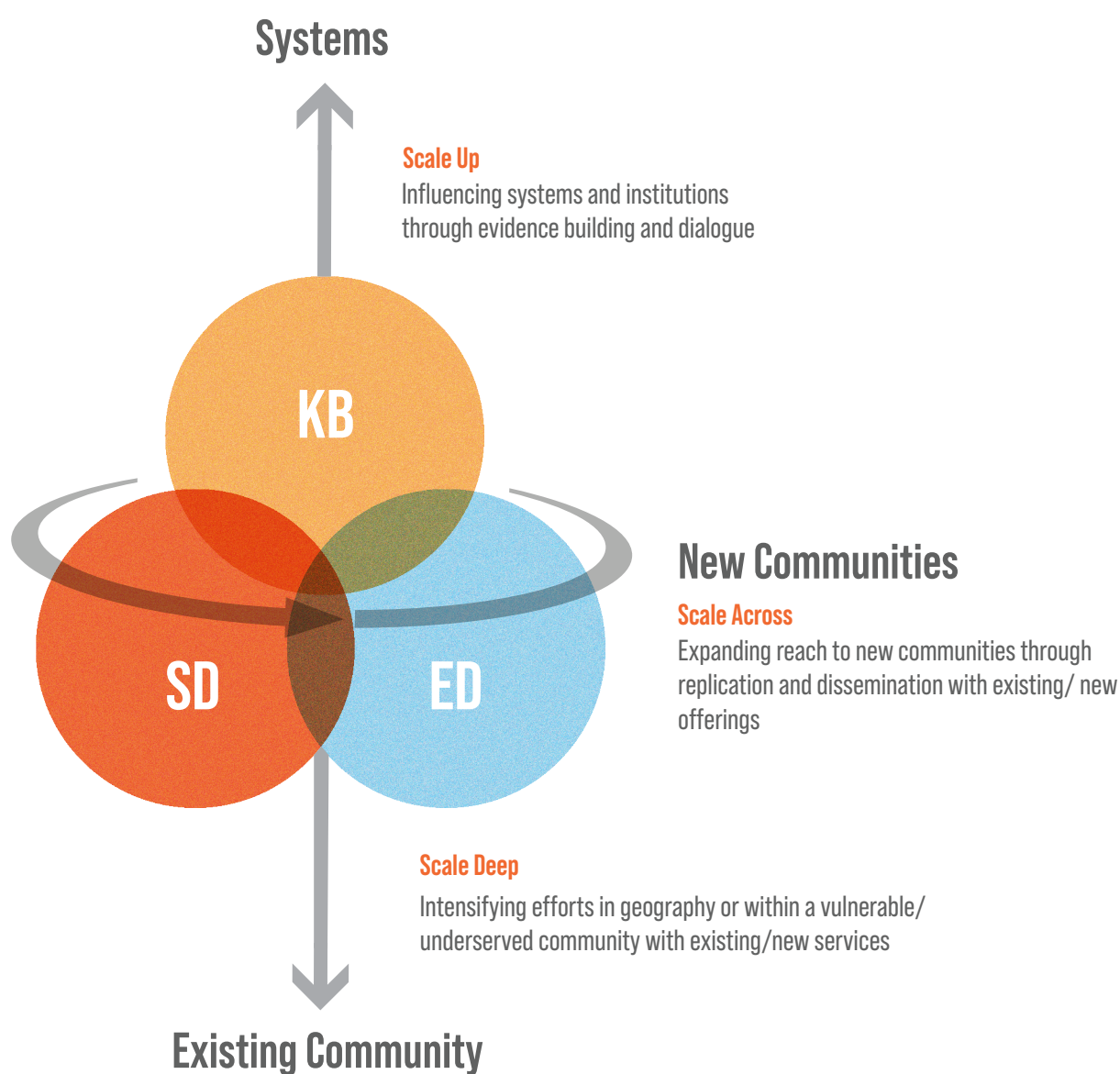
- ➔ **Community:** Groups of people united by common socioeconomic conditions, cultural identities, values, or geographic belonging, whose collective circumstances shape lived experience across generations.
- ➔ **Systems:** Interconnected structures, institutions, networks, and relationships that shape shared behaviors, norms, power dynamics, and decision-making for all embedded actors.

Three distinct scaling dimensions have been observed across the NGO sector.

Dimension	Definition	Focus area
Scale Deep	Intensifying direct support or building new programs for a specific underserved community or geography, addressing root causes by shifting societal and cultural norms.	Existing community or geography
Scale Across	Expanding direct or indirect support via programs to more communities or geographies through replication and dissemination of existing or new models.	New communities and geographies
Scale Up	Providing indirect support by targeting decision-making institutions, systems, or the overarching development environment through specialized programs and influence building.	Systems

Source: Dasra and Kearney analysis, India Nonprofit Report: Role, Evolution, and Impact (2025)

Figure 20: Scaling Dimensions



Source: Dasra and Kearney analysis, India Nonprofit Report: Role, Evolution, and Impact (2025)

3. How the Two Frameworks Connect

The Social Impact Taxonomy and Scaling Dimensions model work together: the taxonomy clarifies what an NGO does, while the scaling dimensions clarify how it chooses to grow its impact. Together, they give NGOs a common language to articulate strategy and help funders understand the diverse pathways through which meaningful, systemic change occurs. In the following sections, we have used both frameworks to articulate how micro-small, medium, and large/very large organizations are delivering impact and achieving growth, drawing on qualitative data from interviews and a pan-India survey.

One pattern is common across all organizations surveyed: service delivery is the primary activity archetype regardless of size. How organizations prioritize the remaining two archetypes, however, varies. That variation turns out to be indicative of scaling orientation.

➔ **Micro-small and medium organizations** follow service delivery with knowledge building and then ecosystem development (SD → KB → ED), a pattern consistent with Scaling Deep: an inward, community-focused logic that builds understanding before attempting to influence systems or replicate models.

➔ **Large and very large organizations** follow service delivery with ecosystem development and then knowledge building (SD → ED → KB), a pattern consistent with Scaling Across: an outward, dissemination-focused logic oriented toward replicating proven approaches across new geographies and institutions.

These patterns emerged from survey responses in which nonprofits ranked their activity archetypes as functional priorities, and they are explored in detail in the sections that follow.

Our sample does not yet yield sufficient evidence to draw firm conclusions about Scaling Up, the dimension concerned with influencing decision-making structures and the overarching development environment.

Similarly, we acknowledge that not all permutations and combinations of the activity precedence are visible through data. It remains a hypothesis to be tested as the evidence base grows. What the data does show clearly are two distinct patterns linking archetype priority to scaling orientation across organization sizes, which we have explained in the sections below.

Credit: Magnific



Figure 21: Activity Archetype Priority and Scaling Dimensions



Source: Voice of Nonprofits Survey, Dasra analysis

B. Micro & Small Nonprofits: Lean budgets with Hyperlocal Solutions

1. Impact Narrative

Organizations in this category operate with constrained budgets and lean teams, typically embedded in a single geography or community. Their defining strength is proximity: most of their staff are drawn from the communities they serve,

and their work is shaped daily by lived experience rather than strategic plans drawn up in distant offices. At this size, service delivery and knowledge production are deeply interwoven.

For example, **Anubhuti Trust**, which works with Denotified and Nomadic Tribe (DNT) communities, has spent years converting its internally developed understanding of community needs into published modules and Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials because almost nothing existed. This is knowledge-building that fills a documentary void larger institutions have long overlooked.

Sadbhavana Trust, based in Lucknow and working with survivors of domestic violence, runs an explicitly feminist program that trains girls as community activists and photographers, operates a community radio platform called Mohalla Radio, and facilitates intergenerational dialogues with grandmothers and mothers-in-law to

dismantle the household structures that enable gender-based violence. The work is hyperlocal, slow, and deliberately so. The organization knows that shifting patriarchal norms has no shortcut.

UTMT, working on indigenous beekeeping with Adivasi communities across Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, runs behavior change programs with farmers alongside knowledge production partnerships with UNESCO, GIZ, and agricultural universities. Their work bridges grassroots service delivery and nascent ecosystem development, though they acknowledge a significant gap between the quality of their field implementation and their capacity to communicate it externally.

2. Scaling Pattern: Deep

SD → KB → ED

The predominant scaling logic at this size is depth over breadth. Anubhuti Trust has explicitly reclaimed the definition of scale for itself, resisting funder pressure to expand geographically and prioritizing what they call organic growth, working more intensively within the same communities over time. It is a deliberate theory of change, not a capacity constraint.

Sadbhavana Trust has expanded modestly into new urban and semi-urban blocks in Lucknow, such as Kakori and Malihabad, but does so by training community members to carry the work forward rather than by opening new offices. UTMT represents a slight departure: they are beginning

to scale across through a training of trainers model, leveraging trusted intermediaries like Dasra's Rebuild India Fund and the Foundation for Ecological Security to extend reach without the cost of building new infrastructure.

Even here, however, the logic is relational rather than institutional. This pattern is borne out by the survey data. When organizations in the micro and small category were asked to rank their activity archetypes, a majority prioritized service delivery first, knowledge building second, and ecosystem development third. The prominence of knowledge building over ecosystem development reflects an orientation inward and downward, toward understanding and strengthening specific



Grassroots partners are often treated as token participants, receiving minimal credit in reports and media. Larger organizations view them as mobilizers rather than intellectual contributors. There are hardly any safeguards for the intellectual property and agency of tribal and nomadic organizations ”

- Deepa Pawar, Anubhuti Trust

communities.

3. Internal Evolution

Across all three organizations, the most significant internal transition underway is a shift from informal, founder-held knowledge toward more structured institutional systems. Anubhuti Trust has responded to external pressure by codifying its values into legally sound policies grounded in constitutional values, feminist principles, and Ambedkarite thought. This ensures that its ideological foundations survive beyond any single leader. Sadbhavana Trust, navigating a more constrained environment, has moved from large-scale public demonstrations toward relationship-based networking and written documentation, without abandoning its core commitments. UTMT is building second-line leadership and a capital reserve to reduce dependence on short-term CSR cycles and create the conditions for longer-horizon planning.

A shared and unresolved constraint across organizations is the gap between communications capacity and field performance. The organizations acknowledge that their fieldwork is often of higher quality than their ability to make it visible. Funders who demand storytelling, photography, and digital production rarely provide the funding to commission it professionally. For UTMT, this is compounded by an institutional wariness toward technology rooted in a failed digital intervention a decade ago, which has made adoption of new tools slower and more cautious than it might otherwise be.

Taken together, micro-small organizations present a fragile picture. Their proximity to communities is their greatest asset, and their focus on scaling deep is a considered response to both their resource reality and theory of change. However, depth alone is not sufficient for building durability. Without investment in institutional systems, communications infrastructure, and more equitable collaborative relationships, the impact these nonprofits build remains exposed to the very external shocks they are least equipped to absorb. Addressing this asymmetry requires flexible, long-term funding and genuine partnership. It is a precondition for the ecosystem to work at all.



We go wherever there is a need. We don't do something because of external stakeholder expectations. We are stuck to deepening our work in geography since this was the need and there is still work to be done. ”

- Dr. Kranti Rayamane, Halo Medical Foundation

C. Medium Nonprofits: Proof of Concept to Replicable Models

1. Impact Narrative

Medium organizations occupy a distinctive and often underappreciated position in the ecosystem. They are large enough to develop institutional systems, invest in research and evidence, and maintain meaningful government relationships, but

small enough to remain agile, retain community connection, and change direction without the bureaucratic weight of larger entities. They are, in many ways, the sector's experimental layer.

For example, **Bal Asha Trust**, working in child welfare and institutional care in Maharashtra, exemplifies the way medium organizations shift from direct service delivery to case management and systems navigation. Their Mumkin program now manages files for a network of 42 Child Care Institutions through an MOU with the state government. They have also built data partnerships with technology firms using Google for youth employability and Morgan Stanley for a family reunification prototype and actively share their methodologies as public goods to encourage replication. Their narrative change work is practical and results-driven: by placing HIV-positive children and older children with families groups the sector had labelled unadoptable, they changed what other NGOs believed was possible.

Citizens Association for Child Rights (CACR), which works on adolescent health and menstrual rights in Maharashtra, has made a deliberate shift from product

distribution to behavior change. Their move from distributing sanitary pads to running six-to-eight-month empowerment modules, covering reproductive health, anemia, nutrition, HPV, and gender sensitization, reflects a shift in theory of change. 80% of their resources now go toward adolescent programs. They have begun training peer educators to run community dialogues and are working toward a state-level MOU with the Government of Maharashtra to scale anemia mitigation. In parallel, they hired their first dedicated communications professional to turn years of field data into a public-facing institutional identity.

Project Deep, an outlier in this category, prioritizes systemic policy influence over organizational scale. By embedding staff in government offices and using its 800-household pilot as a data source for policy design, the organization focuses on shaping the welfare ecosystem rather than expanding its own footprint.

2. Scaling Pattern: Deep

SD → KB → ED

Medium organizations in this sample prioritize service delivery first, knowledge building second, and ecosystem development third. At this size, the expression of Scaling Deep shifts in character. Where micro and small organizations scale deep through sustained presence in a specific geography, medium organizations do so through sustained investment in a specific problem

— building evidence, deepening government integration, and intensifying programmatic quality within a defined thematic focus rather than expanding across new communities or sectors.

CACR's depth is expressed in the shift from a transactional health intervention to a multi-layered behavior change program that now encompasses anemia, nutrition, HPV, and gender sensitization — all within the same communities, with the same

population, over a longer time horizon. Bal Asha Trust's depth lies in moving from shelter provision to active case management for a network of institutions, building the institutional infrastructure that determines outcomes for children long after any single program ends. Organizations like Project Deep take the depth logic to its furthest point: their 800-household cash program exists to understand the problem thoroughly enough to influence how the state designs cash-based welfare for millions.

3. Internal Evolution

Medium organizations face a distinct set of internal pressures around institutionalization. CACR has explicitly identified the risk of remaining founder-driven and is investing in second-line leadership and institutional systems. Bal Asha Trust is transitioning from experience-led to framework-led, by documenting 40-years of unwritten knowledge into replicable strategy documents and developing predictive indicators for family reunification outcomes. Project Deep is navigating the tension between maintaining a tight thematic focus on cash-based welfare and donor pressure to expand scope.

Funding remains a significant structural constraint, and it bears directly on the aspiration for expanding reach. CACR describes the tangible funding trap:

CSR partners willing to fund physical products like sanitary pads but unwilling to fund the qualified trainers and sustained behavior change modules that make the pads meaningful. The very things that make medium organizations effective at scaling deep- longer time horizons, thematic specialization, investment in evidence- are the things that short-cycle project funding actively disrupts.

Medium organizations are the sector's proof-of-concept layer. Their scaling logic to go deep, build evidence, shift what the state and sector believe is possible is arguably the most strategically coherent in the sample. However, this size of organization remains fairly underfunded relative to its ambition. The road ahead for this cohort depends less on what they do next than on whether funders are willing to resource the depth of work they are already doing.



Unlike traditional NGOs that spent decades on grassroots work before scaling, we integrated government engagement and scale into our strategy from inception. ”

- Muzamil Baig, Project Deep

Credit: Magnific



D. Large & Very Large Nonprofits: Strengthening the Conditions for Change

1. Impact Narrative

Nonprofits at this size share a set of characteristics that distinguish them from smaller peers: significant institutional history, deep government relationships, multidisciplinary teams, and a mode of operation that is increasingly oriented toward orchestrating change across systems, sectors, and

geographies. The shift from direct implementers to ecosystem players — from doing the work to strengthening the conditions in which others can do it — is visible across virtually every organization in this group.

For example, **Gram Vikas (Odisha)** uses long-term research and development to build undeniable proof of concept before approaching the government. Their goal is to shift state perspectives and hand over implementation rather than running programs at scale. **Buzz Women (Karnataka)** scales the “idea” rather than the organization. Operating in seven countries, they use a decentralized model where community leaders drive outreach, eventually transferring total ownership to local women’s institutions.

SEEDS Seeds has pivoted from direct implementation to strategic orchestration. By leveraging existing grassroots networks

instead of building new infrastructure, they create localized coordination systems that complement state disaster resilience efforts. **Sauramandala Foundation** (Northeast) employs a “problem-to-policy” framework. Their “Team as a Product” model is unique: once a pilot is ready for state adoption, the implementation team transfers with the project to ensure continuity. **Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT)**, the largest entity, shifted from public health implementer to ecosystem player. Their TB Mukht Panchayat model, piloted in 5,900 panchayats, has successfully scaled into a national program across 15 states.

2. Scaling Pattern: Across

SD → ED → KB

The survey data reveals a telling shift at this scale: large and very large organizations prioritize service delivery first, ecosystem development second, and knowledge building third. The displacement of knowledge building by ecosystem development, relative to smaller organizations, is the key signal. These organizations are not primarily focused on generating new understanding of their communities; they are focused on disseminating proven models, building the infrastructure for others to replicate their work, and orchestrating the conditions for impact to travel across new geographies and institutions. This is the signature of Scaling Across.

The distinction from Scaling Deep is important. Large and Very Large organizations still deliver services, which remain the foundation. However, the growth logic has shifted from intensifying within a known community to expanding reach through replication and dissemination. Buzz Women’s franchise model, SEEDS’ orchestration of grassroots networks, KHPT’s replication of the TB Mukht Panchayat approach across fifteen states, and Sauramandala Foundation’s problem-to-policy framework are all expressions of this: impact travels not through the organization growing larger, but through models, tools, and frameworks being adopted by others.

3. Internal Evolution

Across this group, the direction of internal evolution is strikingly consistent: less direct implementation, more framework transfer; less geographic expansion, more replication through partners; less parallel system-building, more deliberate complementarity with the state. Sauramandala Foundation speaks of radical knowledge transfer and dismantling gatekeeping, large NGOs stopping the practice of expanding into unfamiliar themes and instead directing resources to specialized local organizations that already have deep contextual expertise. SEEDS is building toward complementary governance models. KHPT is evolving toward what it calls systemic facilitation, a role centered on orchestrating change across actors rather than owning any piece of it.

A shared tension across all five organizations is the mismatch between their scaling logic and their funding architecture. Scaling Across, replicating models, building ecosystem infrastructure, and embedding in government requires long time horizons, flexible capital, and a willingness to

fund institutional capacity rather than discrete project outputs. The funding that most of these organizations can access rewards the opposite: short cycles, visible outputs, and measurable beneficiary counts. KHPT and SEEDS both identify this as the primary constraint on the depth of their government engagement and the quality of their collaborative work.

Large and very large organizations represent the sector's dissemination layer. The organizations that, at their best, take what has been proven at smaller scales and build the infrastructure for it to travel. That role is significant and irreplaceable. However, the credibility is high when the proof of concept being disseminated is generated by smaller, more embedded organizations working in closer proximity to communities. The impact of the large-organization layer depends on the health of the micro-small and medium layers beneath it. An ecosystem that under-invests in depth will eventually run out of things worth scaling across.

Credit: Magnific



Credit: Magnific



Section IV

Adapting to the New



The previous three sections examined the structure of the sector, its scale, its financial realities, and the pathways through which impact travels. This section looks at something harder to measure: how organizations are actively evolving their approaches, and what the leading edge of that evolution looks like. We explore how nonprofits are strengthening this adaptive capacity, and what it means for their ability to respond to a changing world.

Nonprofit work is frugal and innovative, powered by constraint as much as by vision. Limited funding, fragmented collaboration, and persistent resource gaps have shaped how nonprofits grow, and how far they can go. Much like India's startup economy, the sector is propelled by a vast base of small and micro-organizations that continuously adapt, improvise, and create room for new ideas precisely because the status quo is never affordable.

Most nonprofit work happens in the shadows, coming into focus during crises. Providing water security in floods, expanding the reach of polio vaccines, providing safe spaces for victims of violence or abuse, or improving standards of care in child-care institutions; the sector has consistently stepped up as a partner to state efforts in moments of acute need. Most recently, during COVID-19 pandemic, nonprofits acted as a rapid-response infrastructure, supporting migrants, delivering relief, and accelerating digital adoption.

Beyond these moments of urgency, their work remains steady and often invisible: running classrooms, managing finances, maintaining community relationships, and navigating operational constraints. Nonprofits are constantly evolving, their strength most visible in crisis, but spring to action when most needed.

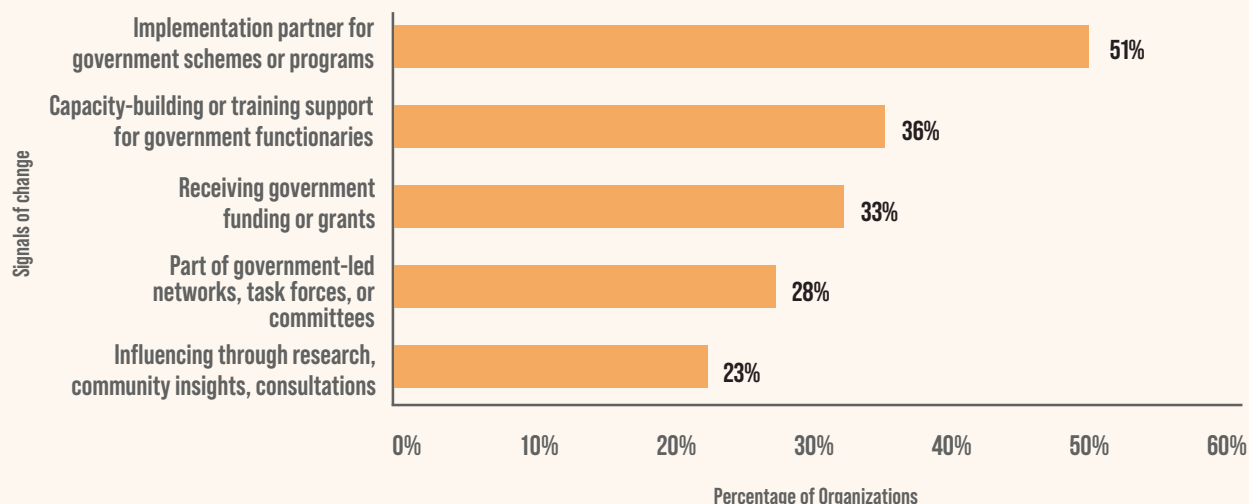
Today, in a time of growing uncertainty shaped by economic instability, geopolitical shifts, and rapid technological change, this quiet, continuous work

is becoming even more critical. Building on earlier analysis of how internal capacities and external forces shape nonprofit trajectories, this report goes a layer deeper to examine how organizations are adapting to grow, not only to scale; evolving their approaches, operations, and capabilities.

We observe that organizations are committed to evolving how they operate, respond, and engage with the realities around them. As nonprofits navigate the complexities of the everyday world, they are constantly adapting. This adaptation reflects a different kind of growth, one that builds strength over time. It can be understood as developing a muscle or as cultivating resilience in response to ongoing internal and external shifts.

Early signals point to nonprofits shifting the way they operate in response to regulation, resources, and geopolitical climate. Nonprofits are increasingly moving beyond reactive service delivery toward more intentional, long-term approaches to impact. There is a growing emphasis on investing in internal capacity and capabilities, while also strengthening the broader ecosystems they operate within through partnerships, knowledge-sharing, and deeper engagement with public systems. This reflects a more proactive orientation, where building networks, influencing institutions, and enabling others becomes as critical as direct implementation. These shifts are reflected in the survey findings below.

Figure 22: Early Signals of Change (INR 2026 Survey)



Note: Total percentages sum to more than 100% because respondents were permitted to select multiple options.

We cover three areas where nonprofits are actively innovating, building capabilities, and engaging more deeply with the broader ecosystem. These areas, narrative building, systems change, and collaborative action, reflect how nonprofits are responding to internal and external shifts.

- ➔ **Narrative Building:** The rise of digital media, social platforms, and AI has transformed how nonprofits approach narrative building. While shaping narratives has long been integral to their work as part of social movements, this section explores how nonprofits across sizes are adapting these approaches to strengthen their reach and influence.
- ➔ **Systems Change:** The development ecosystem is experiencing an influx of data, growing emphasis on evidence, regulatory shifts, and increased focus from funders on systems change. In response, nonprofits are navigating how to engage with systems while evolving their own approaches. This section examines what systems change looks like in practice, and how nonprofits of all sizes are using diverse strategies to influence systems.

- ➔ **Collaborative Action:** An increase in collaborative platforms, alliances, and peer networks is reshaping the nonprofit landscape. These shifts are encouraging organizations to seek deeper partnerships and use collaboration to strengthen their efforts. This section explores the different ways nonprofits are collaborating and what this means for their impact.

The analytical lenses applied in this section are focused on:

- ➔ **Adaptation by budget size:** How nonprofits across budget segments are responding to change and leveraging their capabilities
- ➔ **Quantitative insights from the survey:** Data on how nonprofits are engaging with each frontier, and how this shapes their influence based on scale of operations and capacity
- ➔ **Qualitative insights from the ecosystem:** Case examples and perspectives on how nonprofits are adapting in practice, and what these signals for direction, depth of influence, and impact

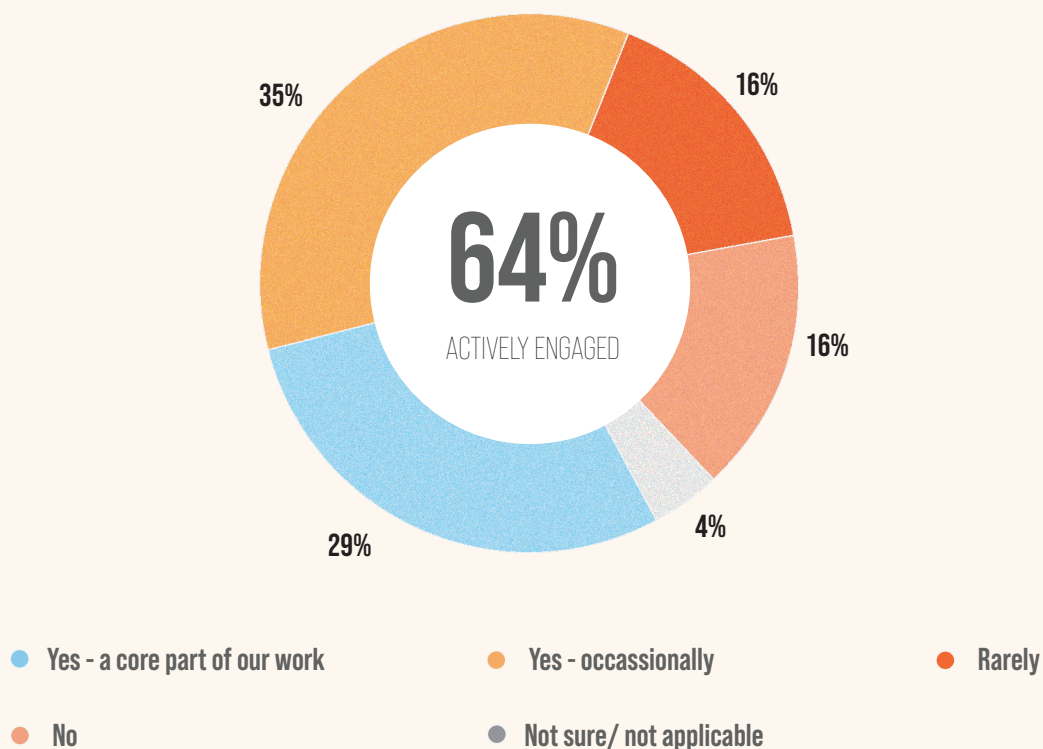
A. Narrative Building: Representing the Community

Narratives are the accumulated weight of stories, cultural norms, geopolitical realities, and lived experiences that shape how societies understand and act on the challenges before them.^{xxvi} For nonprofits, working with narrative is not optional. Whether the issue is caste discrimination, air quality, menstrual health, or child adoption – the

story a society tells about a problem determines what solutions it is willing to accept. Organizations that understand this build more durable change. Those that do not risk delivering impact that disappears the moment their program ends.^{xxvii}

Our survey revealed that 64% of nonprofits actively engage in Narrative Building through their work.

Figure 23: NGOs engaging with Narrative Building (INR 2026 Survey)



NGOs operate at varied budget sizes, each adopting different ways to conduct narrative change; within communities and the sector at large.

- Medium organizations start to build narrative infrastructure: With more flexibility, capacity and resources, medium nonprofits begin to invest in building vehicles for narrative infrastructure. This could be through a dedicated communications staff, social media presence or website. Narrative change takes on an exterior, becoming streamlined at an organizational, rather than programmatic level.
- Large organizations shape ecosystem-level narratives: Large organizations operate with integrated narrative strategies that function across multiple levels at once, shaping perceptions at the grassroots while simultaneously influencing discourse across the broader sector. They combine local, field-level storytelling with systemic narratives, allowing them to reflect community realities and engage with and impact national policy frameworks.

1. Sectoral Trends

- **Commonly embedded in practice, but under-leveraged as a core strategy:** Small and micro nonprofits routinely drive narrative building through behavior change: mobilizing communities, elevating local champions, and building trust-based relationships. Yet these efforts remain implicit, under-articulated, and underfunded as a core programmatic lever despite their central role in shaping mindsets and behaviors.

- **Shift from problem-focused to solutions-driven narratives:** Larger nonprofits are moving from broad, awareness-led storytelling to more deliberate, mission-aligned narratives: engaging funders, media, and policymakers through solutions-oriented framing, and shifting from data-heavy communication to human-centered storytelling that foregrounds dignity, agency, and lived experience.
- **From centralized campaigns to varied narrative strategies:** Social media, AI, and data-driven tools are reshaping narrative building, democratizing content creation, amplifying regional and grassroots voices, and enabling nonprofits of all sizes to drive engagement through more scalable, ecosystem-led approaches.



You can't walk into a municipality and tell them their city is choking. You walk in and say — we have a tool, we have a mandate, and we want to help you use both. That's when the guards come down. ”

- Brikesh Singh, Asar

For example, **CACR** expands the narrative on menstruation beyond women and girls by engaging boys and men, transforming it from a stigmatized, “girls-only” issue into a shared community responsibility through sustained behavior change.

Bal Asha Trust, an organization working to improve the uptake of child adoption, uses targeted WhatsApp communities to engage stakeholders. Two organizations working on young women's agency, Sadbhavna Trust

and Buzz Women, are also leveraging new narrative tools. Sadbhavna Trust runs Mohalla Radio and trains community-led digital teams to spotlight local narratives, while Buzz Women is building multilingual, women-led digital content and communities.

Bal Asha Trust challenges the notion of “unadoptable” children by showcasing real, credible stories of adoption, influencing mindsets among key decision-makers such as judges and social workers.

2. Strategies to influence narrative change

Narrative change is becoming core to nonprofit strategy, amplifying impact and scaling grassroots resonance. To drive meaningful community impact, organizations navigate local narratives, cultural norms, policy frameworks, and economic realities to influence change. Organizations may pursue one or more scaling pathways, applying narrative strategies across these levels.

Circle of Influence	Scope	Methods
Community level	Shift mindsets through direct programs that engage with dominant narratives	Behavior Change, Community Mobilization, Community Engagement
Organizational level	Strengthen models, program design, and interventions for replication and scale	Program Design, Theory of Change, Mission Statement
Ecosystem Level	Shape sector-wide narratives via research, influence, and knowledge building	Collaborative Platforms, Training and Capacity Building, Thought Leadership

3. Narrative Building: Caselets from the Ground

1. The Lungs Billboard — Making Pollution Visible

A coalition of nonprofits deployed a “lungs billboard”; a 10x16 foot outdoor installation fitted with a white lung structure that visibly blackened within four days of exposure to ambient air. Rather than positioning it as a challenge to government, partner organizations approached municipal commissioners directly and framed it as a public awareness tool aligned with their mandate under the National Clean Air Program. Commissioners in cities like Dhanbad, Pune, and Nagpur agreed to inaugurate the installations themselves. To sidestep disputes over data credibility, partners offered to disable the AQI monitoring display and use government-approved figures — keeping the focus on the undeniable visual message. The result was a government-backed narrative intervention that made air pollution tangible without triggering institutional resistance.

2. Mental Health & Transgender Inclusion — Naming What Was Always There

Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) has been advancing mental health outcomes for over two decades. Through sustained engagement with marginalized communities, the organization built agency, resilience, and collective decision-making well before mental health gained sectoral visibility. Crucially, KHPT led what it describes as India’s transgender inclusion movement as early as 2003. This was a time when neither funders nor policy frameworks recognized it as a formal thematic area. This long-term, community-led work contributed to a broader narrative shift that crystallized in the repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code—a policy milestone they cite as evidence of how sustained engagement can shift deeply entrenched legal and social norms.

B. Systems Change: Shifting Structures, Relationships, and Norms

Systems change refers to efforts that shift the underlying structures, relationships, and norms that shape everyday experiences of communities and individuals who engage with public systems for their everyday needs. For nonprofits, this extends beyond service delivery to addressing root causes; engaging with policies, power dynamics, behaviors, and community ecosystems that sustain complex challenges. Systems change is challenging to quantify, and the sector's engagement with it is varied.^{xxviii}

Our conversations with nonprofits reveal a spectrum: from organizations that are only beginning to think systemically, to those that have spent decades deliberately working to shift the structures that determine who gets help and who does not. What connects them is a conviction that service delivery alone, however excellent, cannot close the gap between India's ambitions and its ground-level reality.

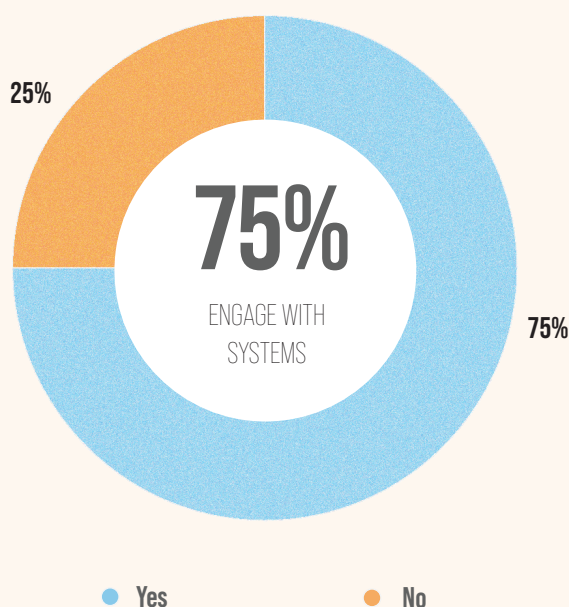
Our survey revealed that 75% of nonprofits actively work towards influencing systems change.



Systems change requires the patience to build trust and the commitment to stay the course to achieve the outcomes planned, but a short-term funder mindset often gets in the way. You need 'urgent patience'; the ability to be nimble and agile in the moment while remaining committed to the long game – think decadal bold bets not annual grants ! ”

- Anant Bhagwati, Bridgespan

Figure 24: NGOs engaging with Systems Change (INR 2026 Survey)



Across all organization sizes, 51% organizations approach systems change through partnership with the government at the hyperlocal, regional and national levels. Nonprofits across size categories influences systems change based on their strengths, reach and capacity.

- ➔ **Small organizations** are rooted in informal, trust-based engagement. They tend to rely on strong, hyperlocal relationships with frontline workers and community actors - partnering with Panchayats, district and regional level government bodies to scale up and gain long-term support for programs. This enables deep, context-specific impact, but is often difficult to sustain or replicate as it depends heavily on individuals and informal networks.
- ➔ **Medium organizations** are building structured system integration. Medium organizations move toward formal partnerships with government through mechanisms like MOUs and embedded roles. While more intentional and scalable, these relationships are still evolving and not yet fully institutionalized. Medium organizations show meaningful participation in government-led networks, nonprofit coalitions, and alliances, suggesting a role in reach, service delivery, and representing communities as custodians of knowledge.
- ➔ **Large organizations** are embedded within systems to enable scale. They operate as co-design partners within public systems, working with public institutions, international nonprofits, foundations, and a host of smaller nonprofits to deliver. This allows for sustained impact, with models focused on training, building capacity, and fostering uptake as a coordinated effort. 47-60% Large and very large organizations engage with systems through

fostering partnerships and coordinated action for the sector. Through multiple modes simultaneously, including influencing through research and participating in task forces, indicating they operate as strategic partners rather than pure service delivery.

1. Sectoral Trends

Systems Change in Nonprofits focuses on embedding solutions, building leadership, and leveraging feedback loops to achieve sustainable impact.

- ➔ **Systems change as a scale engine for nonprofit solutions:** Nonprofits are increasingly viewing scale through a systems change lens. This implies that they are looking at Scaling Up as a potential pathway for growth. Integrating solutions into public systems rather than running parallel programs is now central to growth, embedding work within policies and structures for sustainable impact.
- ➔ **Leadership and capacity as foundations:** As nonprofits grow, they strengthen mission and leadership to support systems change. This includes translating on-ground knowledge into policy, building lasting relationships, and collaborating with governments and stakeholders to drive sustained, systemic impact.
- ➔ **Driving feedback loops:** Nonprofits create feedback loops that inform policy and improve systems. Small organizations identify local gaps, small and medium groups model solutions across the delivery chain, and larger organizations use evidence to push for structural changes. Together, these roles enable continuous learning and more responsive system-level decision-making.

For example, in states where its model has proven effective, Educate Girls partners with government systems to train teachers to adopt and deliver its approach. By building capacity within public education, it embeds these practices into everyday classrooms, enabling sustained scale.

SEEDS builds resilient communities through a holistic, inclusive approach, strengthening existing systems. It works with state and district authorities to localize coordination, supports civil society with targeted expertise for self-help groups and community

organizations, and generates evidence on loss and damage to inform more responsive disaster response systems.

Organizations are moving away from founder-driven models, investing in second-line leadership to sustain systemic work. Small and medium groups like Bal Asha Trust and Sadbhavna focus on continuous engagement with government and nurturing community leadership. Larger organizations like Buzz Women adopt decentralized, community-owned models, empowering local leaders to drive expansion.



When we talk about systems change, we have to recognise that no organization, however strong, can solve complex social challenges at the scale India requires on its own. The role of social impact organizations is really to act as catalysts — to experiment, build proof points, bring stakeholders together, and help create approaches that larger systems can eventually adopt and scale sustainably. The goal is to strengthen the ecosystem around the problem so that change can sustain beyond any one intervention. ”

- Anu Prasad, India Leaders for Social Sector

2. Catalysts for Systems Change

Organizations work with systems to adapt, deepen, and sustain their impact for communities. Depending on their pathway, they embed their models into policies, practices, and publicly accessible resources to enable long-term, system-wide change. This is driven through three key catalysts:

Catalyst	Scope	Method
Publicly accessible resources	Organizational models within institutions such as schools, hospitals, and government	Embed organizational models and replicate programs in institutions such as schools, hospitals, and government bodies to create publicly accessible services, products, and systems
Policies	Proven models and interventions to shape policy and influence decision-making	Advance models and interventions that shape policy and influence system-level decision-making
Practices	Live interventions and programs that can reach larger populations	Expand proven programs to reach larger populations through government adoption and integration into publicly accessible systems

3. Systems Change: Caselets from the Ground

1. Classrooms to Boardrooms, Connecting Systems to Drive Scale

Educate Girls has evolved from working through government permissions to actively shaping policy and systems. When it identified that 90 million young women were outside education, employment, or training, it conducted landscape studies across 12 states to make the issue visible to government stakeholders and advocated for open schooling pathways to enable older girls to complete secondary education. In Uttar Pradesh, a learning camp for children of sanitation workers at the Kumbh Mela demonstrated strong outcomes and was subsequently adopted by the state for future iterations. Rather than expanding direct implementation, Educate Girls built a network of 31 partner NGOs across four states, providing curriculum, training, and funding support, while anchoring policy engagement at higher levels. Having exited 8,000 villages where the issue of out-of-school girls was addressed, the organization focuses on enabling government and communities to sustain impact independently.

2. Turning Community Action into System Adoption

Gram Vikas strengthened decentralized water governance by building local capacity to manage and sustain water systems through its Water Secure Gram Panchayat program. It trained a cadre of youth leaders, Jal Bandhus, to map and monitor water sources across villages, generating real-time data to inform planning and decision-making. Working with Village Development Committees and Gram Panchayats, communities developed source-specific action plans and applied scientific techniques such as contour trenching and reforestation to restore groundwater levels. As awareness deepened, communities mobilized to map resources, demand institutional support, and collectively implement conservation efforts. This approach shifted water management from externally driven delivery to community-owned governance, embedding knowledge, accountability, and long-term stewardship within local systems.

Credit: Magnific



C. Collaborative Action: Harnessing the Power of Many



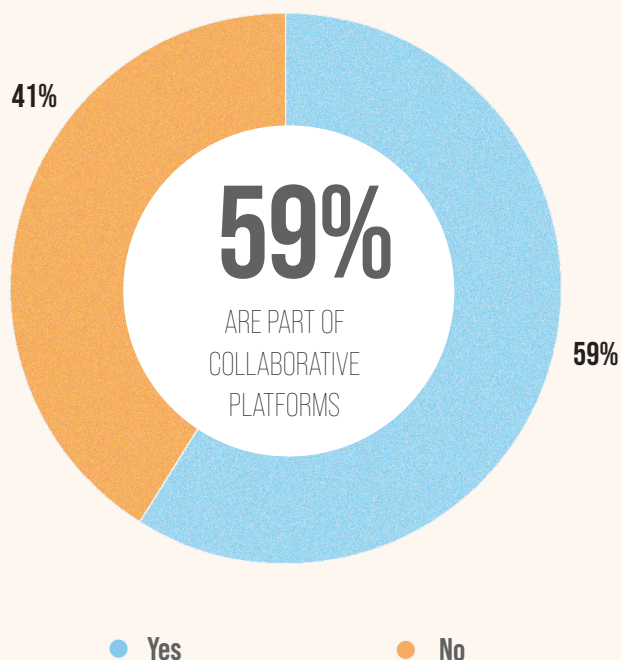
I'm a huge believer that collaboration makes for the biggest difference between a not-for-profit and the 'for-profit' space. For-profit, by definition, is competitive because it's about shareholder value, thereby it's about share of market, customer, wallet, or eyeballs. Whereas the nonprofit space is about shared ideas, resources and collaboration. Because the child who is going hungry doesn't want you to fight with each other to get a funders' money. She wants you to work together so that the system, as a whole, works together. ”

- Ravi Shreedharan, ISDM

Collaboration has long been a defining feature of India's development trajectory, driving impactful movements in fields such as child protection, environmental action, and queer rights. For this report, collaborative action is defined as how nonprofits work together to exchange knowledge, pool expertise, build partnerships, and create bridges to increase impact across the development ecosystem. This approach enables organizations to amplify reach, scale solutions, and address complex social challenges more effectively.^{xxix}

Our survey revealed that 59% of nonprofits in our sample engage meaningfully in collaborative action with peers and intersectoral stakeholders.

Figure 25: NGOs Engaging with Collaborative Action (INR 2026 Survey)



Collaboration in the sector is dominated by knowledge exchange, capacity building, and networking. Collaboration is a common focal point for most nonprofits. Across sizes, organizations leverage their strengths to foster relationships and build partnerships.

- ➔ **Small and micro-organizations** leverage peer learning and capacity building most heavily (24–27%) to build capabilities, relationships, and partnerships. Small organizations are fostering common ground for collective action through hyperlocal collaboration. Engage in hyperlocal coalitions and peer networks (e.g., ASHA workers, ward councilors) to exchange knowledge and pool resources. They leverage collaborative platforms to move beyond siloed action and build shared understanding at the community level.
- ➔ **Medium nonprofits** are growing field-level partnerships through formalized collaboration and shared expertise. They formalize collaboration through coalitions and alliances. Work together to build field-level knowledge and expertise, with the aim of reaching the next level of scale through coordinated action. Medium organizations show a strong interest in intersecting collaboration for knowledge exchange, aiming to scale, innovate, and use collaborative platforms to strengthen partnerships.
- ➔ **Large organizations** are architecting ecosystem-level collaboration through coalitions, systems, and partnerships. They lead and design collaborations by building coalitions and embedding government partnerships. Critical to their work is creating transferable models and systems for peer adoption, acting as architects of collaboration, and establishing frameworks at an ecosystem level. Large organizations show meaningful participation in anchoring collectives for on-ground action, reflecting their convening role within the broader ecosystem.

1. Sectoral Trends

- ➔ **Emerging intermediary ecosystem:** A flourishing network of intermediaries, incubators, accelerators, and consulting firms is shaping a “nonprofits for nonprofits” ecosystem. These actors strengthen the sector by building organizational capacity, facilitating knowledge exchange, and connecting funders with nonprofit needs, enabling more coordinated, effective, and sustainable social impact.
- ➔ **Peer networks as a counter to siloed action:** Peer networks and collaborative platforms help nonprofits move beyond siloed action, fostering shared perspective, learning, and stronger path-to-scale strategies. While many organizations participate in regional, local, and national platforms, those in remote geographies often face access barriers. Expanding these networks across all sizes and locations is essential to ensure meaningful participation, diversity, and equitable impact.
- ➔ **Field-level action as an outcome of collaborative philanthropy:** Collaborative action is reshaping the nonprofit ecosystem, with organizations pooling expertise, sharing resources, and coordinating efforts. The urgency of COVID-19 accelerated this shift, leading to new partnerships that translate collective contributions into tangible, field-level impact across sectors like rural livelihoods, education, and gender.

For example, **India Leaders for Social Sector's (ILSS)** alumni network, peer learning groups, and fundraising networks span 700–800 organizations, demonstrating genuine collaboration, with founders sitting on each other's boards, organizations pitching to donors jointly, and openly sharing funder leads, practices that highlight the strength and trust within peer networks.

Under the Mango Tree (UTMT) collaborates with peer organizations to expand its programmatic reach, working with the **Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)** to co-create specialized training programs

and partnering with organizations in Assam through the Rebuild platform to enable shared learning and joint implementation across contexts.

ATMA strengthens the nonprofit ecosystem by building NGOs' internal systems and institutional capacity, creating peer networks, and modeling meaningful collaborations. By encouraging engagement with broader sector platforms, ATMA builds a network of nonprofits for nonprofits, fostering trust, connectivity, and the conditions that enable small and mid-sized nonprofits to collaborate effectively and sustainably.



The last decade has been an evolution of professionalization. We've seen nonprofits scale across the country and diverse issue spaces, with more people choosing the sector as a dedicated career path and working to institutionalize organizations more than ever before. ”

- Harpreet Bagga, Purpose

2. Levels of Collaborative Action

Collaborative action in nonprofits strengthens networks, develops field knowledge, and builds ecosystems for impact. Organizations scale impact by strengthening reach across three levels of the nonprofit ecosystem.

Level of reach	Scope	Activity
Peer-to-Peer Networks	Deepen relationships, share knowledge, and build support among nonprofits	Deepening relationships, learning, and support within and between individual nonprofits
The Field	Train and support nonprofits and stakeholders to replicate programs and innovations	Expanding the reach of programs and innovations by training other nonprofits and stakeholders
The Ecosystem	Build platforms and alliances that connect actors and enable systemic impact	Building shared platforms, alliances, and structures that connect multiple actors to enable systemic impact

3. Collaborative Action: Caselets from the Ground

1. Migrant Resilience Collaborative: Purpose-Driven Collaboration Across Differences

The Migrant Resilience Collaborative, led by Asif Sheikh, demonstrates the power of purposeful collaboration across ideological and institutional divides. Emerging from the COVID-19 crisis, which exposed the vulnerabilities of migrant workers losing access to benefits across state borders, the initiative brought together a diverse coalition of state governments, NGOs across the ideological spectrum, and private sector actors. United by a shared commitment to inclusion and equity, the collaborative not only addressed immediate needs but also unlocked systemic solutions, including activating a long-unused cess on private industry to channel resources toward migrant welfare. This case highlights how meaningful collaboration goes beyond alignment, bringing together diverse actors around a clear purpose to drive impactful, system-level change.

2. Bihar Development Collective: Building a Collaborative Ecosystem

The Bihar Development Collective (BDC) is a platform that brings together organizations and practitioners across the state to strengthen the development ecosystem through collaboration. It enables peer learning, mentoring, and cross-sector dialogue, helping nonprofits move beyond siloed efforts. BDC has built a strong statewide network, increased grassroots visibility, and supported leadership development, while facilitating partnerships across nonprofits, funders, and government. In doing so, it has shifted the ecosystem toward more coordinated, trust-based collective action and inclusive impact.

Credit: Magnific



Credit: Magnific



Conclusion

Funding an Ecosystem that Works



The tension between philanthropic flows and nonprofit action is persistent. Challenging the assumption that all nonprofits aspire toward expansion can make for a good starting point to ease this tension. The evidence from this report shows how many nonprofits are doing exactly what they set out to do, and they are doing it well. It is critical to understand that the problem is structural. Nonprofits need resources and ecosystem conditions to sustain their vision.

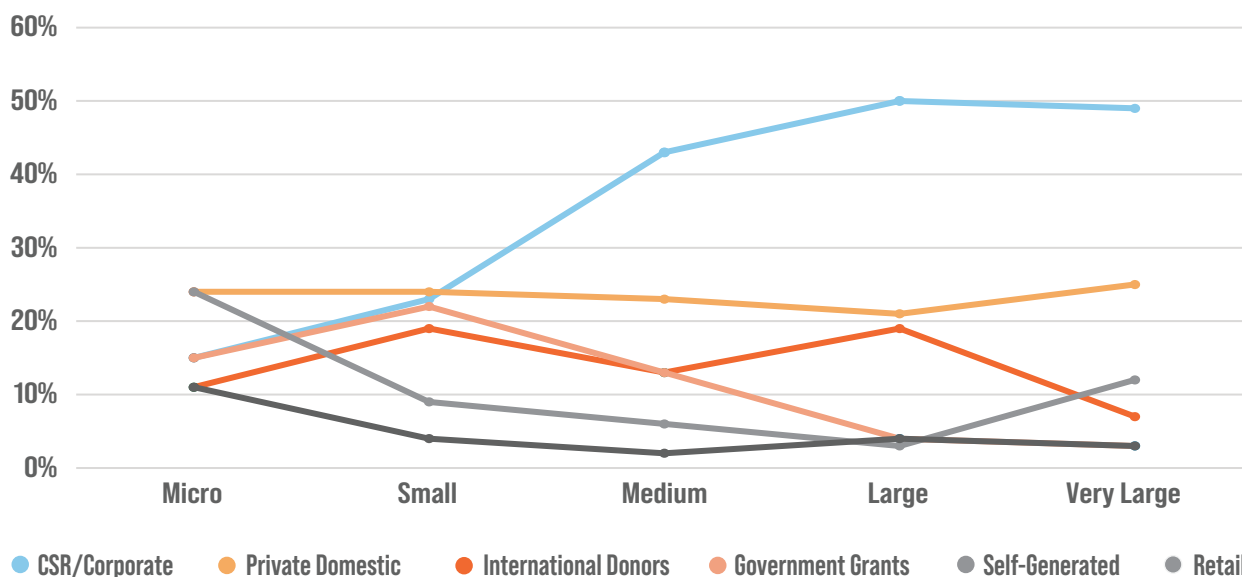
Mapping funding roles in the nonprofit ecosystem

Funding sources can play distinct roles in the nonprofit ecosystem. At the foundation, they meet direct project costs, funding the on-ground work that communities depend on. Moving up the chain, funding and scaling the proof of concept takes what works and builds the evidence to replicate it. Supporting institution building and leadership invests in the organizational infrastructure (governance, talent, succession) that makes impact

durable. And at the systems level, strengthening enabling environments and credibility shapes the regulatory conditions and public legitimacy within which the entire sector operates.

The survey data illustrates how different funding sources play either a catalytic or supporting role across various organization sizes. This helps map out exactly how funders engage across the four key functions.

Figure 26: Funding mix by organization size as a % of total funding (INR Survey 2026)



- ➔ **Help meet direct project costs:** As seen above, retail giving makes a small contribution across all bands, highest at micro (11%). Self-generated revenue follows a U-shape, high at micro (24%, survival) and recovering at very large (12%, scale). The data suggests direct project cost funding is self-sourced or met through retail donations.
- ➔ **Fund and scale proof of concept:** The chart shows how CSR rises steeply with organization size, from 15% at micro to 43% at medium and 50% at large. This is the clearest data signal in the set, directly indicating the critical role CSR investment plays in scaling proof of concept.
- ➔ **Support institution building and leadership development:** Private domestic capital remains stable across all five bands (21–25%). It is the most consistent source in the dataset, implying a natural fit for institution building and leadership development. International donors and the government play supporting roles here, with data signals as less direct.

The Interdependence of the Nonprofit sector

So far, these three sizes of organizations are seen as separate categories. However, these are nodes in a single system. Micro and small organizations generate grassroots evidence and innovation. Medium organizations test it, refine it, build the proof. Large organizations scale it, institutionalize it, and change systems around it. Break this chain anywhere, and it breaks everywhere.

- ➔ Under-invest in depth, and large organizations have nothing credible to disseminate
- ➔ Under-invest in evidence-building, and proof remains anecdotal
- ➔ Under-invest in scale and policy, and innovations don't funnel across geographies

What if we designed an ecosystem around what these organizations are?

The micro-organizations would be resource-adequate enough to sustain their work and invest in systems. The medium organizations would be funded for depth rather than constantly pressured to expand. The large organizations would be freed from doing everything themselves and repositioned as infrastructure and policy leaders. The sector would work because the system that surrounds them finally made sense.

Credit: Pexels



Three Recommendations for Funders

First: Redefine excellence in the nonprofit ecosystem.

The sector is being measured against a definition of success it was never designed to meet. A micro nonprofit that deepens roots in the community and stays is not a failure; it is the foundation. A medium nonprofit spending five years building rigorous evidence is being strategic; it is the proof layer. A large nonprofit stepping back from direct service to architect the ecosystem is maturing; it is the influence layer. Redefining metrics of success will help generate partnerships with local government bodies and route social protection funds through organizations already embedded in communities. It will lead to building resource centers that support collaborative action and systems change and include them in policymaking as strategic partners.

Second: Fund the system, not the organization.

The sector's financial fragility is a feature of the funding practices they depend on. Investing in ecosystem conditions means for small organizations, this means opening funding channels through intermediaries, lowering eligibility bars for organizations without requisite funding. For medium organizations, this means shifting from project-tied grants to institutional grants adequate to the vision, and funding second-line leadership, governance, and evidence infrastructure. For large organizations, this means funding governance models, second-line leadership, and coalition infrastructure through long-term non-programmatic capital. The government is already developing mechanisms like the Social Stock Exchange to help nonprofits formalize and access domestic capital at scale.

Third: Commit to a long-term partnership, not project funding.

The funding structure is clear: to survive, nonprofits must seek grants for projects. This converts nonprofits into subcontractors and crowds out the institutional investment that durable social change requires. Flexible capital for staff capacity and communications, is what allows organizations to become visible and fundable. Such funding helps build institutions effective over longer horizons, and with thematic specialization. Nonprofit organizations must be seen as stewards and partners. Grant commitments should span time scales adequate to the vision. Organizations working on norm change, policy influence, or community trust cannot operate on short funding cycles. Social impact requires time and patient capital.



Annexures



Methodology

This report uses a mixed-methods approach combining primary research with nonprofits and sector experts and secondary analysis of public and published sources.

We surveyed 438 nonprofits across India to capture perspectives across organization size, age, geography, and thematic focus, with particular attention to funding patterns, operating realities, and programmatic practice. The survey was mobilized across the entire nonprofit ecosystem through various channels, including social media posts, mass email campaigns, and through networks of our partner organizations. This was complemented by 25+ interviews with nonprofit leaders and sector experts to surface sector trends, structural challenges, and future opportunities. We interviewed 16 experts from the sector working across intermediaries, funding organizations, and large ecosystem players. Further, we also interviewed 11 nonprofit leaders from organizations across various budget sizes.

The analysis also draws on publicly available government data (NGO Darpan), academic research, sector reports, and grey literature to contextualize findings and strengthen the report's overall evidence base.

Limitations: The sample reflects organizations within Dasra's networks and partner ecosystems; while this ensures engagement with active, mission-driven nonprofits, it is not a random or nationally representative sample of the Indian nonprofit sector. As with all self-reported survey data, findings are contingent on the accuracy and candor with which organizations responded - social desirability bias or imprecise recall may affect responses, particularly on sensitive topics such as funding adequacy and leadership composition.

To analyze sectoral trends and patterns, this report utilizes data from NGO Darpan, a publicly accessible database. While alternative estimates regarding the aggregate size of the sector may exist, NGO Darpan was selected for its public availability and standardized reporting. Furthermore, because the platform is updated periodically, the data analysis in this report reflects a specific snapshot of the sector up until February 2026.

Acknowledgements

This report was made possible by the generosity of the nonprofit leaders, sector experts, and academics who shared their time, knowledge, and experiences to generate insights for this report. We thank the 438 NGOs across India who took the time out to earnestly respond to our survey. Their contributions have provided an essential cross-sectional view of the structural diversity, challenges, and aspirations of India's civil society. The report was written and researched by the Dasra team: Aditya Vishwakarma, Ami Misra, Anushka Dias, Kirti Jain, and Sanat Kanwar. We are grateful to the following individuals and organizations who shared their strategic insights and expertise throughout the research and development process, contributing significantly to the depth of this report:

Anant Bhagwati	The Bridgespan Group
Anu Prasad	India Leaders for Social Sector
Brikesh Singh	Asar Social Impact Advisors
Deepa Pawar	Anubhuti Trust
Deval Sanghavi	Dasra
Gayatri Nair Lobo	Educate Girls
Hameeda Khatoon	Sadbhavna Trust
Harpreet Bagga	Purpose
Ingrid Srinath	Sector Expert
K. N. Gopinath	Dhwani Foundation
Liby Johnson	Gram Vikas
Manu Gupta	Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society
Muzamil Baig	Project DEEP
Neil Kamat	Sauramandala Foundation
Nitin Wadhvani	Citizens Association for Child Rights
Neera Nundy	Dasra
Pushpa Aman Singh	GuideStar
Rakesh Rajani	JustSystems
Ravi Shreedharan	Indian School of Development Management
Sanghamitra Savadatti	Karnataka Health Promotion Trust
Sneha Arora	ATMA
Subhashree Dutta	Nudge Institute
Sujana Krishnamoorthy	Under the Mango Tree Society
Sunil Arora	Bal Asha Trust
Uthara Narayan	Buzz Women

Glossary

BRICS	An economic grouping comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
Corpus Fund.	A permanent capital reserve invested to generate income for long-term sustainability
CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)	Corporate initiatives aimed at contributing to social and environmental development.
DBA (Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi).	Collective term referring to historically marginalized caste groups
DNT / NTs (Denotified and Nomadic Tribes)	Communities historically stigmatized and lacking formal recognition.
EWS (Economically Weaker Sections)	Individuals classified based on economic disadvantage.
FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act)	Indian legislation regulating the receipt and utilization of foreign funding by nonprofits.
FY (Financial Year)	A 12-month accounting period used for financial reporting (typically beginning in 1 st April and ending on 31 st March of the following year.
GDP (Gross Domestic Product)	The total monetary value of goods and services produced within a country.
HDI (Human Development Index)	A composite indicator measuring health, education, and income to assess development.
IEC (Information, Education, and Communication)	Strategies for raising awareness and influencing behavior through communication.
LGBTQIA+	An umbrella term for diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.
MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning)	A framework for assessing program performance and enabling continuous improvement.
MOU (Memorandum of Understanding)	A formal agreement between parties outlining roles and responsibilities.
MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises)	A classification of businesses based on size and turnover.
NGO (Non-Governmental Organization)	An independent, non-profit entity working toward social, environmental, or developmental goals.
NGO Darpan:	A Government of India platform for NGO registration and transparency.
Nonprofits / NGOs	Used interchangeably to refer to mission-driven, not-for-profit organizations.
NPO (Nonprofit Organization)	An organization that reinvests surplus revenues into its mission rather than distributing profits.
NSDP (Net State Domestic Product)	The total economic output of a state, net of depreciation.

OBC (Other Backward Classes)	Socially and educationally disadvantaged communities identified by the Government of India.
OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development)	An international body promoting economic growth, stability, and improved living standards.
PwD (Persons with Disabilities)	Individuals with physical, mental, or sensory impairments.
SC (Scheduled Castes)	Historically disadvantaged caste groups recognized in the Constitution.
SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)	A set of 17 global goals adopted by the United Nations to address poverty, inequality, and environmental sustainability by 2030.
ST (Scheduled Tribes)	Indigenous tribal populations recognized in the Constitution.

References

- i UN DESA, "The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025," United Nations, 2025.
- ii UNDP, "Human Development Report 2025: A Matter of Choice: People and Possibilities in the Age of AI," United Nations Development Programme, 2025.
- iii Bain & Company and Dasra, "India Philanthropy Report 2026", 2026.
- iv Government of India, NITI Aayog, "NGO Darpan Portal," Government of India, Accessed: 10 February 2026.
- v Government of India, NITI Aayog, "NGO Darpan Portal," Government of India, Accessed: 10 February 2026.
- vi Government of India, NITI Aayog, "NGO Darpan Portal," Government of India, Accessed: 10 February 2026.
- vii Government of India, NITI Aayog, "NGO Darpan Portal," Government of India, Accessed: 10 February 2026.
- viii Government of India, NITI Aayog, "NGO Darpan Portal," Government of India, Accessed: 10 February 2026.
- ix PIB, "Number of employees in IT," Press Information Bureau, August 2022, <https://www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1847841®=3&lang=2>.
- x Government of India, NITI Aayog, "NGO Darpan Portal," Government of India, Accessed: 10 February 2026.
- xi Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, "Population Finder (Census 2011)," Government of India, 8 February 2026.
- xii World Bank, "Population, total – United States", World Bank Open Data, 2024. <https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/releases/2025/01/non-governmental-organizations-ngos-in-the-united-states>
- xiii IBEF, "MSME Industry in India," India Brand Equity Foundation, February 2026, <https://www.ibef.org/industry/msme>.
- xiv Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, "Population Finder (Census 2011)," Government of India, 8 February 2026.
- xv Government of India, Ministry of Finance, "Expenditure Budget 2024–25," Union Budget 2024–25, 2024.
- xvi R. Mohapatra et al., "Pathways to greater social mobility for India's Dalit and Adivasi communities", The Bridgespan Group, 2022.
- xvii The Bridgespan Group, "Building Strong, Resilient NGOs in India: Time for New Funding Practices," 2021.
- xviii J. Im, A. Grundhoefer, and E. Smith Arrillaga, "State of nonprofits 2025: What funders need to know", Center for Effective Philanthropy, May 2025.
- xix The Bridgespan Group, "Bridging the Gap on Funding the True Costs of NGOs in India," 2022.
- xx Sattva Consulting, "Everyday giving in India", Sattva Consulting, 2019.
- xxi Bain & Company and Dasra, "India philanthropy report 2024", Bain & Company, 2024.
- xxii Bain & Company and Dasra, "India Philanthropy Report 2024," 2024.
- xxiii India Development Review and Samhita, "The Fundraising Challenges Plaguing Indian Nonprofits," Indian Giving Benchmarking Report, 2018.
- xxiv India Development Review and Samhita, "The Fundraising Challenges Plaguing Indian Nonprofits," Indian Giving Benchmarking Report, 2018.
- xxv Kearney and Dasra, "India Nonprofit Report 2025: Role, Evolution, and Impact," 2025.
- xxvi FrameWorks Institute, 'Big Duck, 'The Power of Narrative Change for Nonprofits', 7 October 2020.
- xxvii FrameWorks Institute, 'Guiding Narrative Change: Considerations for the Philanthropic Field,' December 2024.
- xxviii The Bridgespan Group, "Five Critical Mindsets for Nonprofit Systems Thinkers," The Bridgespan Group, 26 June 2025.
- xxix Voluntary Action Network India, "Collaborations in the Voluntary Sector," December 2022.



