MacArthur Foundation

dasra

Funding Her Future

Advancing Philanthropy for Women and Girls in India

Part 1: The Legend and the Map | An Overview of the Sector Today

October 2026

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 1,200+ funders, mobilized more than $470 million in philanthropic capital, and supported 2,600+ 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. Funding Her Future: Advancing Philanthropy for Women and Girls in India, Part 1: The Legend and the Map | An Overview of the Sector Today (Mumbai: Dasra, 2026).

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Foreword

"The future depends on what you do today." — Mahatma Gandhi

India stands at a defining moment. As one of the world's fastest-growing economies and on the cusp of one of the largest intergenerational transfers of wealth in history, we have an unprecedented opportunity to shape how capital is invested in our collective future. [i] For decades, the development sector has rightly argued that investing in women and girls is one of the highest-return investments a nation can make. Better health, education, livelihoods, and leadership for women strengthen families, communities, economies, and democracies. Yet India continues to rank among the lowest globally on gender parity, reminding us that economic growth alone does not translate into equal opportunity. [ii]

As I pursue my doctoral research on women-led philanthropy, I have become increasingly convinced that we are asking only half the question. We often ask how much philanthropy reaches women and girls. We ask far less who decides where philanthropic capital flows, and whose voices shape those decisions.

Women have always been leaders. Across India's villages, towns, and cities, they have organized self-help groups, strengthened schools, championed health, stewarded natural resources, and held communities together through crises. Long before they possessed financial capital, they exercised social, cultural, and moral leadership built on trust, lived experience, and deep community connections.

Yet philanthropy and society have often privileged economic capital over these equally powerful forms of capital. We celebrate those who control resources while overlooking those who have spent generations building the social fabric that makes lasting change possible. The challenge before us is not simply to increase investments in women and girls. It is to recognize, trust, and invest in women's leadership at every level, from grassroots communities to family foundations, corporate boardrooms, and philanthropic institutions.

This moment is particularly significant because more women are creating wealth, inheriting wealth, and stepping into visible philanthropic roles. But participation does not automatically translate into authority. The opportunity before India is to connect women who steward financial capital with women who steward communities, ensuring that lived experience and local wisdom shape how resources are deployed.

This report is an invitation to think differently. Investing in women and girls is not an act of charity; it is one of the smartest investments India can make for its future. If we aspire to build a Viksit Bharat, we must recognize women as architects of progress, stewards of capital, and leaders of change. The future of India, and perhaps the future of philanthropy itself, will be shaped not only by how much we invest in women and girls, but by how much we trust women to lead.

Neera Nundy
Co-founder and Partner, Dasra

Prologue

Laxmi was married at sixteen. No one asked what she wanted. She followed the norms of her time, as her mother had before her.[1]

Her daughter, Ayesha, is seventeen. She is studying for her medical entrance exams, the first in her family to aim this high, while helping her mother turn a tailoring stall into an online shop. [2]

The distance between these two lives is the story of India's progress for women and girls over the past thirty years.

Child marriage has nearly halved. [iii] The choice Laxmi never had is now Ayesha's to make. Female literacy has risen from 39% to over 70%. [iv] Ayesha is on her way to becoming a doctor, in a classroom her mother never entered. And over 100 million women have joined self-help groups (SHGs), often described as the largest women's financial inclusion movement in the world — the same network helping turn a tailoring stall into an online shop.[v]

Each of these numbers is a door that was once closed. Behind them: decades of sustained government investment in education, health, social protection, livelihoods, and financial inclusion, creating opportunities for millions for whom these opportunities were previously out of reach. And a civil society and philanthropic sector that undertook the last-mile work to strengthen livelihoods, expand financial access, and shift norms community by community.

1 Laxmi is a composite illustrative persona developed from recurring themes identified in the research and does not represent any actual individual.

2 Ayesha is a composite illustrative persona developed from recurring themes identified in the research and does not represent any actual individual.

But this progress has not been even, and it is not guaranteed. India has made strong gains in education; gains in economic parity have been slower to accumulate. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025 ranks India 131st of 148 countries, with an overall parity score of 64.1%. The decline is reported to be driven mainly by women's retreat from decision-making spaces, including political office, corporate boards, and within households.[vi] These are the spaces where the next set of gains need to happen.

An ecosystem of nonprofit institutions works in these areas, some national, and some rooted in a single district. They help women access opportunity where the gains described above are still building. For philanthropy, they are the bridge between capital and impact. That bridge is under strain.

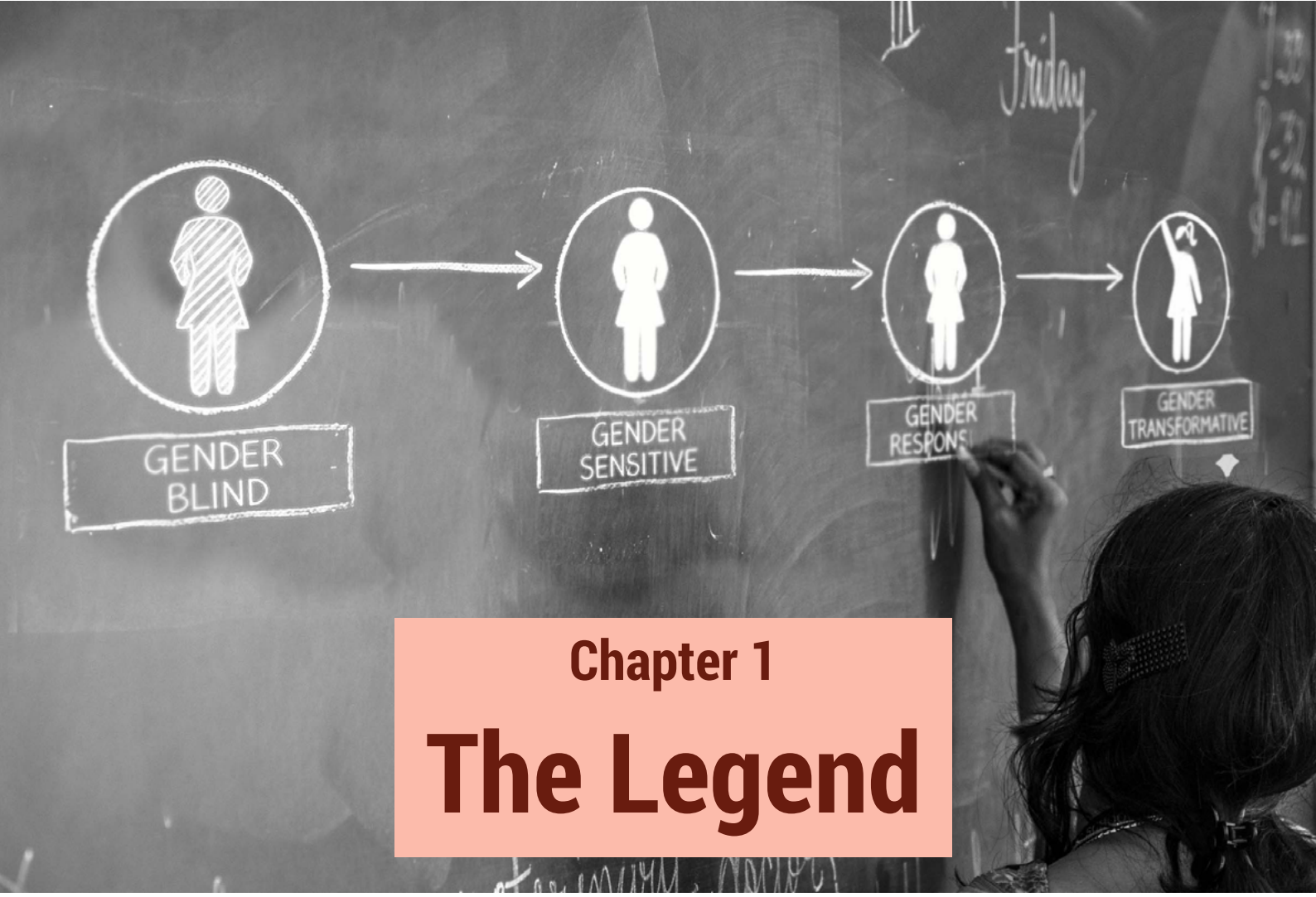
Across 169 organizations working with women and girls that we surveyed, funding arrives slower than the work requires and rarely covers more than the next grant cycle. The median organization has six months of runway. The median grant takes 7.5 months to move from application to disbursement. Seven in ten organizations reported a funding deficit last year. 70% have no reserves. Only 4% are financially stable. In short: many of these organizations are likely to run out of money before the funding they applied for arrives.

That matters, because so much of the progress described above runs through this ecosystem. So, what does it mean for what comes next?

Much is known about how the lives of women and girls have changed in India. Far less is understood about the civil society and philanthropic ecosystem that helps make that change possible. Which organizations receive funding? Which struggle to access it? What influences funder decisions? Where are resources concentrated? And where do critical gaps remain?

Progress for women and girls is not a function of funding alone. The interplay of policy decisions and implementation, nonprofit leadership, philanthropy support, and community action shape it. This study deliberately narrows its focus to one part of that larger picture - how grant capital flows to gender-focused organizations, and the factors that enable or constrain access to it. It does this by drawing on a survey of 169 organizations working with and for women and girls, alongside 38 interviews with nonprofit leaders and ecosystem actors. Through this, Funding Her Future explores how organizations access philanthropic capital, the realities they navigate, and the opportunities to strengthen support for women and girls in India.

The Viksit Bharat 2047 (Developed India) vision puts women and girls at the center of its ambition. A girl who stays in school becomes the woman who earns, leads, and changes what her community believes is possible for others. This report examines what it takes to invest in her future. It suggests that the returns are intergenerational and measurable.



Chapter 1

The Legend

"जर तुम्हाला स्त्रीला सुखी करायचे असेल, तर तिला स्वातंत्र्य आणि शिक्षण द्या"
"If you want to make a woman happy, give her freedom and education."

- Savitribai Phule

The foundation of gender equity work in India is rooted in our history. We have a rich heritage of reformers and teachers like Savitribai Phule leading the way from lived experience. It has been resourced by the many grassroots leaders, practitioners, and scholars who have contributed to the knowledge and practice.

Together, they have built a rich and evolving understanding of how gender inequality is produced and what it takes to address it. However, this work doesn't exist in a vacuum. It has also been shaped by state policy, development priorities, philanthropic trends, and shifting global patterns. Understanding the present landscape, therefore, requires examining the historical and institutional forces that have shaped how gender equity has been conceptualized and resourced over time.

The Legend builds on this body of work. It traces how gender has been understood across policy, civil society, and philanthropy, and draws from this evolution a framework for examining how funding flows toward this work today. Drawing on global development literature, it situates the research on four analytical dimensions: thematic adjacencies, intersectoral lens, depth of gender integration, and intersectionality and inclusion, through which funding for gender equity can be understood.

Contemporary Frameworks on Gender Equity

For this report, funding for gender equity is defined in alignment with *SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. Within the ethos of the SDG framework, which highlights the principle of 'leave no one behind', the report extends the definition to gender and sexual minorities. In doing so, it draws on the themes of SDG 5 as a consistent and comparable framework, enabling diverse funding streams to be systematically categorized and assessed across contexts. This section builds from that foundation to examine what counts as funding for gender equity.

The report examines gender equity funding through four key dimensions.

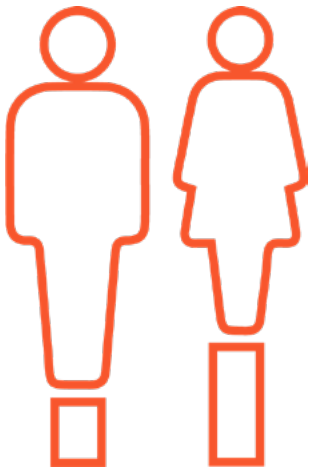
Table 1 : Analytical dimensions of gender equity funding

Analytical dimension	The literature	Learning from the ground
Thematic Adjacencies: Gender equity funding is organized through domains where inequality is structurally embedded. This dimension examines how thematic entry points shape how gender is defined, prioritized, and resourced. (e.g., gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, leadership, social protection, agency).	Multilateral and policy frameworks organize gender into priority themes, positioning it across development domains as a strategic lens.	Themes operate in combination in practice; organizations engage across domains simultaneously, with gender shaped by power, norms, and institutional constraints.
Intersectoral Lens: Gender inequality is produced through overlapping social, economic, environmental, and institutional forces. This dimension examines how gender equity funding operates across education, health, climate, and livelihoods.	Civil society programming and global frameworks (e.g., SDGs, AWID) reflect gender as cross-cutting across sectors and systems.	Gender is embedded within sectoral programs and made legible through them; it appears through access, participation, and outcomes rather than as a standalone axis.

Analytical dimension	The literature	Learning from the ground
Depth of Gender Integration: Drawing on the Gender Integration Continuum, this dimension examines the extent to which approaches are gender-neutral, gender-responsive, or gender-transformative to reflect how deeply programs recognize, respond to, and seek to shift normative structures.	The Gender Integration Continuum (GIC) anchors analysis across a spectrum from gender-blind to gender-transformative; frameworks by CARE and Oxfam build on this, converging on the view that genuine transformation requires simultaneous change across individual, institutional, and structural levels.	Gender is most visibly operationalized through participation targets and women-focused technical programs; deeper engagement with gender as a social and structural dimension remains an evolving area.
Intersectionality & Inclusion: Lived experiences of inequality and discrimination are shaped by intersecting identities across caste, class, age, religion, disability, sexuality, ethnicity, and geography. This dimension examines how gender equity funding reaches, reflects, and responds to these differences.	BIPOC, Dalit, Queer, and Disability scholarship, alongside global philanthropic frameworks (e.g., AWID, Equality Fund), establishes intersectionality as essential for understanding and addressing how overlapping identities shape marginalization and guide more targeted resource allocation.	Practitioner insights reveal intersectionality as most visible in CSO work with Dalit, Adivasi, queer, trans, and disability communities, yet identities tied to caste, care work, informal labor, and queer/trans inclusion remain underrepresented and underfunded within mainstream gender discourse.

The sections that follow provide a detailed examination of each of these dimensions.

1. Thematic Adjacencies



Understanding the dimension

Gender equity funding is understood through a set of thematic adjacencies where gender intersects with broader development priorities. The focus is on *where gender fits* within developmental priorities. These adjacencies include Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health; ending gender-based violence (GBV) and legal recourse; agency, leadership, and representation of women; skilling, livelihoods, and entrepreneurship for women; and social protection, alongside financial and digital inclusion. These domains serve as practical entry points for funding and intervention, shaping how resources are directed across the ecosystem.

Gleaning from the literature

This framing is strongly shaped by multilateral and policy ecosystems, which position gender as a strategic lens across multiple development domains. The UN Women Strategic Plan (2026–2029) articulates four core impact areas: peace, security, and humanitarian action; women's economic empowerment in resilient economies; elimination of violence against women and girls; and women's leadership and decision-making.[vii] Similarly, the Generation Equality Action Coalitions expand this to include GBV, economic justice, bodily autonomy and SRHR, feminist climate action, technology and innovation for gender equality, and feminist movements and leadership.[viii]

Taken together, these frameworks demonstrate how gender equity is articulated through a set of thematic priorities that reflect the multidimensional nature of inequality.

Learning from the ground

Insights from practice show that these thematic adjacencies operate in combination. Civil society organizations (CSOs) often work across multiple domains simultaneously, reflecting how gender inequality is produced through the interaction of social norms, economic conditions, and institutional structures.

Organizations work through fluid entry points, where livelihoods are shaped by mobility and care burdens, or where health outcomes are linked to agency, access to information, and social protection. These overlaps are central to how gender is experienced and addressed. Practitioners also emphasized that work across these thematic domains is deeply interconnected and shaped by broader structural realities.

2. Intersectoral Lens

Understanding the dimension

Gender equity funding is examined through an intersectoral lens, which focuses on how gender operates across overlapping and most actively engaged domains such as education, health, climate action, livelihoods and economic empowerment, water, sanitation and hygiene, and technology. These domains represent points of intersection where multiple systems converge to shape gendered experiences.

This lens shifts the analytical focus from where gender is located to how gender operates across systems. It enables a more grounded understanding of both funding flows and program design, highlighting that meaningful progress on gender equity requires interventions that respond to the interconnected nature of inequality.

Gleaning from the literature

Global frameworks reflect this intersectoral understanding. This is evident in the SDG indicator framework, where gender-specific indicators are distributed across multiple goals, including poverty reduction (SDG 1), food security (SDG 2), good health and well-being (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), climate action (SDG 13), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16).[ix]

At the same time, civil society programming has long operated through this intersectoral reality in practice.

Gender inequality is produced and reinforced through overlapping social, economic, environmental, and institutional systems, and interventions on the ground have evolved in response to these interconnected dynamics. Feminist and women's rights organizations, in particular, have long operated across multiple domains. Evidence from Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) indicates that most organizations work across seven to eight interconnected issues, with nearly a third engaging across more than ten thematic areas. These span gender, sexuality, reproductive health, economic and climate justice, racial justice, caste equity, drug policy reform, and more.[x]

This highlights that gender inequality is experienced across multiple, simultaneous dimensions, requiring integrated responses across sectors.

Learning from the ground

Insights from practice reinforce this intersectoral reality. Gender equity is rarely addressed as a standalone domain; instead, it is embedded within sectoral priorities such as livelihoods, health, and climate, where multiple sectors converge to shape outcomes.

In these contexts, gender becomes visible through questions of participation, access, and inclusion within sectoral programs.

However, the extent to which gender is meaningfully integrated varies, and often depends on how explicitly it is designed into interventions. Practitioners note that while gender may be present across sectors, it is not always treated as a cross-cutting lens and can remain implicit or under-articulated in program design and implementation.

"It's all right to say that through our livelihoods program, we are affecting two million women. But you still may not be addressing gender as an identity and as a social construct to examine how the project is challenging power dynamics in the family, community or the village. A gender lens can only be brought in if it's intentional and if it's called out. Otherwise, it remains intentionally hidden."

- Jahnvi Andharia,
Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST)

3. Depth of Gender Integration

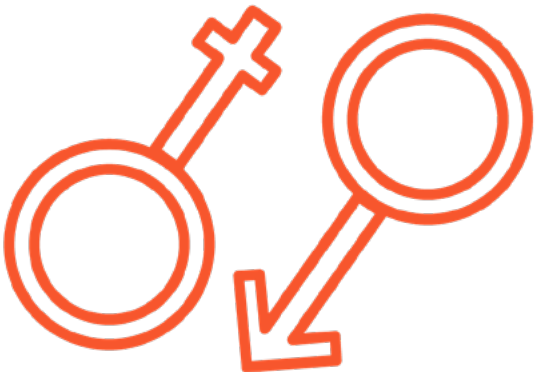
Understanding the dimension

Gender equity funding is examined through the extent to which gender is integrated across the program lifecycle – from design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation.

The Gender Integration Continuum (GIC), developed by the Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG), provides a useful framework for this analysis. It assesses whether, and to what extent, gender needs and inequalities are considered in policy and program objectives, design, and implementation. The GIC consists of five categories that exist along a continuum from more regressive approaches that ignore gender needs and inequalities (gender-discriminatory and gender-blind), to more progressive approaches that address gender inequality (gender-sensitive, gender-responsive, and gender-transformative).[xi]

In the context of this report, an abridged interpretation of the framework has been adopted, to include:

- **Gender neutral**: programs designed to improve development outcomes, irrespective of gender needs
- **Gender responsive**: programs designed to respond to the specific needs of women and girls with sensitivity
- **Gender transformative**: programs designed to transform gender roles, norms, and power relations in the society



Gleaning from the literature

CSOs and multilaterals have built on the GIC to develop frameworks that illustrate what deeper gender integration looks like in practice. CARE's Gender Equality Framework (GEF) takes a transformative approach aimed at achieving gender equity by strengthening individual agency, changing relations, and transforming structures.[xii] Oxfam's Global Program Framework on Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights (TLWR) extends this further by highlighting the interrelationship between gender equality, organizational change, and the institutions and power dynamics that shape communities. It identifies five levels of change — from individual to global — that must be addressed simultaneously, recognizing that individual-level change is unsustainable without corresponding shifts in community structures and government policy. Taken together, these frameworks converge on the view that the depth of gender integration is what determines whether programming is genuinely transformative.[xiii]

At the systems level, institutions such as UNDP have a mandatory gender equality marker to track allocations and expenditures made to advance or contribute to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The marker uses a four-point scale ranging from no contribution to gender equality (0) to gender equality as the principal objective (3) and is used to code both development and management outputs, irrespective of whether they were designed to contribute to the advancement of gender equality.[xiv]

In India, the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) and its draft successor the National Policy for Women (2016) articulate the need for gender-sensitive program design across sectors, while the Government of India's Gender Budget Statement, introduced in 2005-06, provides a concrete mechanism for tracking public expenditure on gender — distinguishing between allocations wholly directed at women and those that are partially so.[xv]

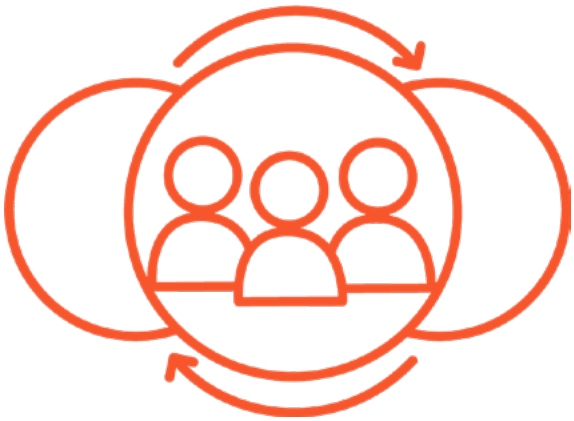
Within philanthropy, funders engage with these frameworks through multiple complementary pathways, including gender mainstreaming, gender-lens investing, and gender-focused giving. Many adopt a twin-track approach, integrating gender considerations across all programs while simultaneously investing in initiatives explicitly designed to advance gender equity, resulting in portfolios of interventions that operate at different points along the gender spectrum.[xvi]

Learning from the ground

Insights from expert conversations suggest that gender is often operationalized through participation targets, such as ensuring a minimum proportion of women in programs, rather than being fully integrated into program design or outcomes. This can result in inclusion being treated as sufficient, without deeper engagement with how gender shapes the substance and quality of programming.

Some practitioners also noted that programs designed specifically for women tend to focus on technical or livelihood outcomes, with limited emphasis on reflecting gender as a social or structural dimension. Some experts also reflected that expectations around integrating gender across programs were more explicit in earlier years but have not consistently deepened over time.

4. Intersectionality and Inclusion



Understanding the dimension

Gender equity funding is examined through the lens of intersectionality and inclusion. Intersectionality recognizes that people's lives are shaped by their identities, relationships, and social factors. These combine to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression depending on a person's context and existing power structures[xvii]. First articulated by Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality provides a framework to understand how systems of disadvantage such as caste, class, gender, and sexuality interact to shape lived realities and create compounding marginalizations. Subsequent scholarship has extended this to how funding and resource distribution must similarly account for these overlaps.[xviii]

In this report, the analysis maps the work of CSOs serving historically marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs and NTs), persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ communities, religious minorities, and socio-economically disadvantaged groups. It also examines how funding flows to these organizations, including the extent to which their work is supported.

Gleaning from the literature

Intersectionality has been widely applied as a tool for analysis and policy design. AWID highlights its role in understanding how different identities shape access to rights and opportunities. In practice, this means that efforts to understand the impacts of economic policies on women must also ask specifically about the experiences of those from different ethnic groups, migrants, poor women, and other identified groups — rather than treating women as a homogenous category.[xix]

Within philanthropy, this lens has been further developed by women's funds to guide resource allocation. The Equality Fund, for instance, outlines that applying an intersectional approach helps philanthropists ascertain where resources are most needed and enables proximate leadership by making funders more aware of the power structures within which they operate.[xx] In the Indian context, feminist scholarship has established that women's position in society is greatly determined by caste and Dalit women occupy a distinct social location shaped simultaneously by caste and gender, laying the conceptual groundwork for understanding why funding that addresses gender alone is insufficient for communities where caste-based exclusion is equally persistent. Work on Dalit women, in particular, highlights how funding approaches that focus on gender

alone may not fully address the layered and compounding realities of marginalization where caste-based inequalities remain central. [xxi]

Learning from the ground

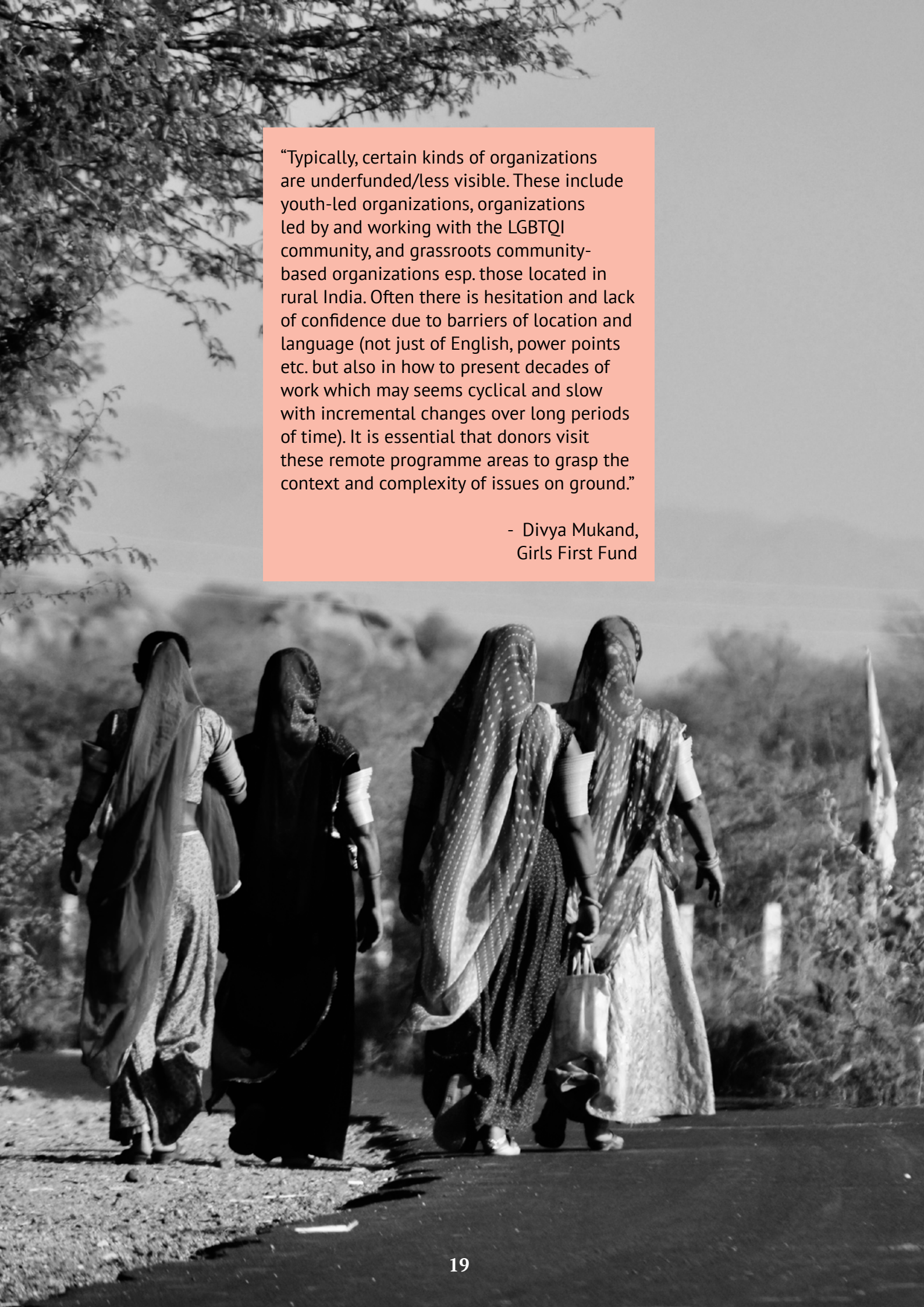
Insights from practitioner conversations suggest that intersectionality is most visible on the ground through the work of social movements, scholars, and CSOs engaging with communities shaped by overlapping forms of marginalization. These include organizations working with Dalit, Adivasi, queer, trans, disability, and other historically excluded groups.

Practitioners noted that these realities are not always equally visible within broader gender discourse. As a result, certain identities, issues, and forms of work – particularly those linked to caste, care work, informal labor, queer and trans inclusion, and youth leadership receive limited funder attention and support.

These observations point to the importance of examining whether gender is being addressed and also which communities, lived realities, and forms of exclusion are being centered within that work.

"Feminist organizations led by Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, queer, trans, and disability rights communities, particularly outside metropolitan areas, remain chronically underfunded, despite leading some of the most transformative and intersectional work on gender justice. This is especially true for efforts to address caste-based violence, structural discrimination, and access to justice for marginalized communities. If we are serious about systems change, we must invest in the movements driving it. Likewise, while global attention to the care economy, social protection and unpaid care work is growing, this is yet to translate into sustained financing."

- Priyanka Samy, National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW)



"Typically, certain kinds of organizations are underfunded/less visible. These include youth-led organizations, organizations led by and working with the LGBTQI community, and grassroots community-based organizations esp. those located in rural India. Often there is hesitation and lack of confidence due to barriers of location and language (not just of English, power points etc. but also in how to present decades of work which may seems cyclical and slow with incremental changes over long periods of time). It is essential that donors visit these remote programme areas to grasp the context and complexity of issues on ground."

- Divya Mukand,
Girls First Fund

Box 1: What are some of the existing frameworks tracking funding towards gender equity?

What are some of the existing frameworks tracking funding towards gender equity?
In international development finance, resources directed toward gender are tracked through a mix of financial tracking frameworks and broader gender measurement tools. While some frameworks focus directly on classifying and monitoring funding flows, others help assess the wider gender equality landscape that such funding seeks to influence. Together, they offer useful reference points for understanding how gender is prioritized, tagged, and measured across systems.

1. OECD DAC gender equality policy marker: The OECD DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker assesses and tracks the scope of gender equality in the objectives of development organizations. It uses a three-tiered scoring system to distinguish between projects where gender equality is the principal objective, a significant objective, or not targeted.[xxii] This marker has become a global standard for tracking bilateral and multilateral development finance.

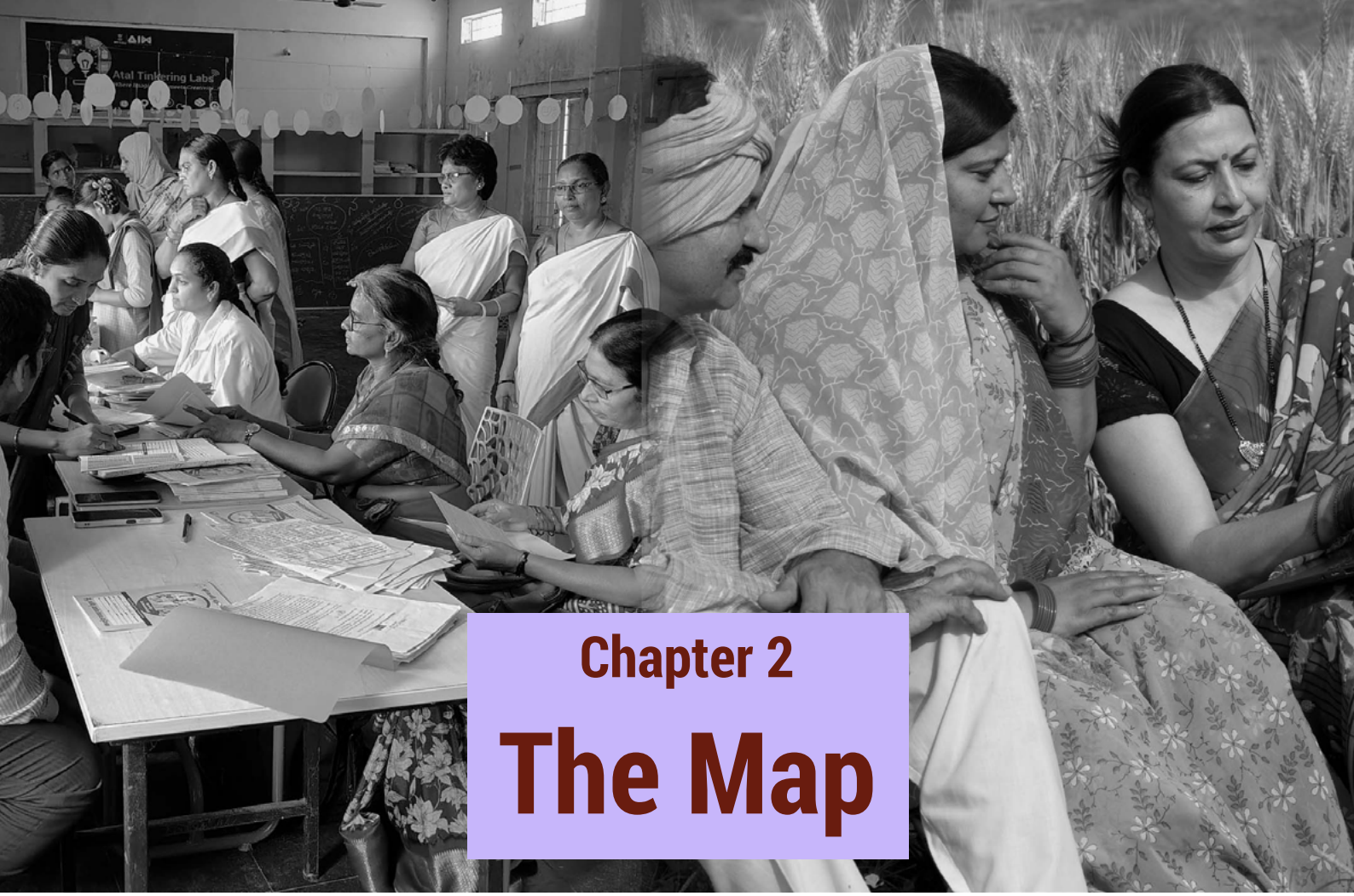
2. UN Gender Equality Marker (GEM): Adopted across UN agencies, this framework tracks how programs and budgets contribute to gender equality. Aligned with the OECD marker, it is being institutionalized across the UN system, with full adoption expected by 2026. It helps identify where investments for gender equality are concentrated and monitors the gap for resource allocation to ensure transparency and accountability.[xxiii]

3. Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD): TOSSD is an international standard that measures the flow of all resources for sustainable development to developing countries. Introduced under the Addis Ababa Action Agenda in 2015, it expands beyond traditional aid to capture a broader landscape of financing, including gender-related flows within sustainable development.[xxiv]

4. AWID Feminist Funding Ecosystem Framework: Developed by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), this framework takes a movement centered approach to understanding how resources flow to feminist movements, women's rights organizations, and grassroots actors. It highlights the complexity of funding ecosystems and provides a more dynamic, three-dimensional model to identify gaps, power imbalances, and opportunities for more responsive funding practices.[xxv]

5. Equal Measures 2030 (EM2030): EM2030 developed the 2024 Gender index which shows where the world is positioned on the gender equality vision embedded in the 2030 Agenda. It offers a comprehensive, multidimensional index that evaluates gender equality across 139 countries, representing 96% of the world's women and girls, spanning 56 indicators across 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.[xxvi]

These dimensions demonstrate that gender equity funding cannot be understood through a single sector, issue area, or funding category. Gender operates across overlapping systems, institutional structures, and lived experiences, making funding flows inherently multidimensional. The Legend provides a framework for interpreting the ecosystem beyond aggregate funding numbers alone. It offers the grounding necessary to understand how funding is distributed, which forms of work become more visible and fundable, and where structural gaps continue to persist.



Chapter 2
The Map

The Map is grounded in a survey of 169 NGOs and 38 in-depth interviews. It examines the landscape of gender equity work and funding in India across four dimensions: who is doing the work and what is the work, who is funding the work, financial realities on the ground,, and where is funding going.

What is the work, and who is doing it?

Globally, the organizations doing the most essential gender work operate on a median annual budget of just USD 22,000, and between 2013 and 2023 those budgets saw no real growth. Indian organizations sit at a similar scale.[xxvii]

Further, women's rights organizations globally work across a broad and interconnected set of issues, spanning gender justice, climate resilience, sexual and reproductive rights, crisis response, safety, and economic participation.[xxviii] Practitioners interviewed for this study described a comparable breadth in India that spans GBV, health and nutrition, livelihoods and economic collectivization, girls' education, and engagement with governance systems, combined with sustained efforts to shift the social norms that underpin inequality.[xxix]

Across our sample, gender-focused nonprofits are diverse in their missions and approaches, but they share several common characteristics.

Organizations in this sample appear predominantly small, locally embedded, and led by people with direct proximity to the communities they serve.

Table 2: What is the work, and who is doing it?

Key Ideas	Description
Small, locally led, and proximate to communities	Two-thirds of surveyed organizations are micro (budget under INR 50 lakhs/INR 5 million) or small (INR 50 lakhs - INR 3 crores/INR 5 million – 30 million). Over 82% operate at district/block or regional level and nearly all (~93%) work in rural or mixed geographies. Most report at least one founder or senior leader from a historically underrepresented community.
Resources are concentrated in just a few organizations	Financial resources are highly skewed across the sample. The median organizational budget is INR 1.6 crore/INR 16 million, while the top 5% of organizations account for 63% of the total reported budgets.
An inverse resource gap based on organizational leadership	Organizations led by marginalized communities receive roughly a third less funding than the sample median. Those led by Scheduled Caste, Persons with disability, and Denotified and Nomadic Tribe communities report lower median budgets than the overall sample median.
Implementation oriented, evidence-starved by design	Organizations closest to communities often prioritize immediate delivery because they operate with limited resources, leaving less room for learning and evidence generation, even though these are increasingly required by funders.
Geographic spread is nation-wide	The sample spans the full breadth of India, with organizations working locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.
Most surveyed organizations intentionally work on gender	Over 90% of surveyed NGOs prioritize intentional gender integration, with 57% describing their work as gender-transformative and 36% as gender-responsive.
Thematic focus correlates to organization size	Organizations in the sample more likely to work on GBV prevention remain micro in size, while larger NGOs are more likely to focus on skilling, livelihoods, and entrepreneurship.

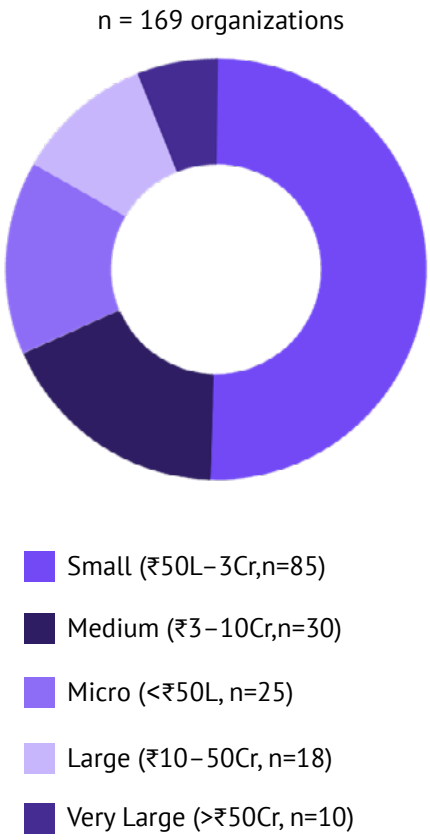
Key Ideas	Description
Smaller organizations are closer to deeper gender work	A greater share of micro-organizations in the sample work on themes such as GBV, where interventions often require long-term engagement with norms, safety, and systems.
Larger organizations focus on scalable livelihood-linked themes	Larger NGOs in the sample are more concentrated in skilling, livelihoods, and entrepreneurship, which are easier to design at scale and align with funder preference for measurable outputs.

Small, locally led and proximate to communities

Two-thirds of organizations in our survey sample are micro (annual budget under INR 50 lakhs / INR 5 million) or small (INR 50 lakhs – INR 3 crores / INR 5 million – INR 30 million) (Figure 1). Over 82% operate at a local (district/block level) or regional level, and nearly all (~93%) work in either rural or rural and urban geographies combined. The surveyed organizations are structured around local presence and proximity to communities.

This proximity and embeddedness extend to leadership composition. Most surveyed organizations report at least one founder or senior leader from a historically underrepresented or marginalized community including leaders from Scheduled Castes (38%), religious minorities (35%), Scheduled Tribes (31%), persons with disabilities (15%), LGBTQIA+ communities (13%), and Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (8%) and other socio economically disadvantaged backgrounds (24%). Nearly three-quarters (~73%) report women from these communities in leadership positions.

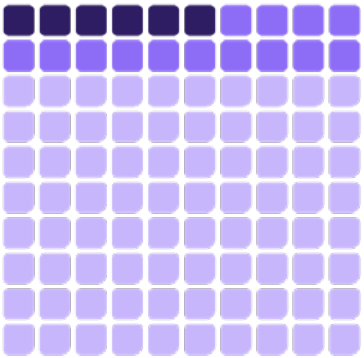
Fig 1: Budget size distribution across the sample



Resources are concentrated in just a few organizations

The distribution of financial resources across the sample is highly skewed. The median organizational budget is INR 1.6 crores/INR 16 million, compared to a mean of INR 12.1 crores/ INR 121 million, indicating that aggregate figures are influenced by a small number of large organizations. For most surveyed organizations, the lived financial reality aligns far more closely with the median than the mean. The concentration is stark: the top 5% of organizations account for 63% of the total reported budget (INR 2,038 crores/ INR 20,380 million) (Figure 2). Three organizations alone hold 43% of all financial resources in the sample.

Figure 2: Resource concentration across sample



Budget distribution across 169 organizations surveyed — each square represents 1% of organizations (~1.7 orgs)

Top 5% of organizations
Hold 63% of all reported budgets — ₹2,038 crores total. Three organizations alone account for 43%

Next 15% (25 orgs)
Hold an additional 14% — medium and large organizations with established institutional backing.

Bottom 80%
Share the remaining 11%. Median budget: ₹1.56 crores. This is where most of the sector's deepest work happens.

Box 2: The Inverse Resource Gap

On average, organizations led by marginalized communities receive roughly a third less funding than the sample median. Organizations with leadership from Scheduled Caste communities report a median budget of INR 99 lakhs/ INR 9.9 million, those led by individuals from communities of persons with disabilities INR 1.03 crores/INR 10.3 million, and those from Denotified and Nomadic Tribe communities INR 1.08 crores/ INR 10.8 million, all of which are lower than the sample median of INR 1.6 crores/INR 16 million.

The pattern holds consistently across organizational sizes. Organizations whose leaders share the lived experience of the communities they serve are among the least resourced in the sample. While understanding the drivers of these differences is beyond the scope of this analysis, the findings underscore the importance of applying an intersectional lens when examining patterns in philanthropic funding within the gender space.

> "Organizations led by historically marginalized communities can also face barriers if donors are not intentional. Because representation matters, but ecosystems don't automatically correct for historical exclusion."
>
> – Radhika Uppal, Gender and Development Specialist

Implementation oriented, evidence-starved by design

Organizations closest to communities, and operating with the least resources, often prioritize meeting immediate needs. This is reflected in the orientation of the surveyed organizations: 54% identify service delivery as their primary function, highlighting an operational focus shaped by proximity and on-the-ground realities. This emphasis is reinforced in how organizations prioritize their work more broadly. Knowledge-building emerges as the least prioritized function in the sample, with only 18% of organizations ranking it first, 34% rank it second to last, and 37% rank it last. Ecosystem development, in contrast, is distributed relatively evenly across priorities, suggesting it is often embedded within program delivery.

The geographic spread is nation-wide

Organizations in the sample span the full breadth of India, with 38% operating at the regional level, 36% locally (block or district level), 24% working nationally, and 2% internationally. Among regional organizations in our survey, presence is distributed across all six zones: North (24%), East (22%), West (20%), Central (14%), South (14%,), and North-East (6%). [3]

Gender work across the sample is largely intentional

The commitment of organizations in the sample is deeply intentional. Among surveyed organizations, 57% describe their programmatic approach as gender-transformative and a further 36% as gender responsive, indicating that over nine in ten organizations operate at the more intentional end of the integration continuum.

Organizations work across an even thematic spread

There is a broad spread in the thematic areas that organizations engage in. 57% of organizations work on skilling, livelihoods and entrepreneurship; 49% on ending GBV; 48% on education; 44% on agency, leadership and representation; 41% on health and well-being; and 31% on social protection and financial and digital inclusion.

The deepest work lives in the smallest organizations

About 68% of micro-organizations work on GBV prevention, which is high touch and context specific work that relies on sustained community engagement and trust. Among large and very large NGOs, 61% focus on skilling, livelihoods, and entrepreneurship, which are more readily designed at scale and aligned with funding models that prioritize measurable outputs. [4] Social protection remains the least represented theme across all budget categories, pointing to a gap that cuts across the surveyed organizations as a whole.

3 Region-level counts are small, and regional disaggregation should therefore be interpreted as indicative of direction.

4 The survey includes 10 Very Large organizations. Findings relating to this subgroup should therefore be interpreted as indicative rather than representative.

Box 3: Remarkable reach on thin budgets

Top five NGOs account for 65% of this reported reach, mirroring the concentration observed in resource distribution. The median reach of organizations is ~18,000 lives annually on a median budget of INR 1.6 crores/ INR 16 million. This ratio points to a high resource efficiency across the sample, and most strikingly among small and mid-sized NGOs working with limited resources.

Who is funding the work?

Globally, gender equality receives just 8% of total philanthropic funding, with 81% of that funding concentrated in sexual and reproductive health.[xxx] A comparable estimate of philanthropic funding to gender in India does not yet exist; our research aims to fill this gap in a forthcoming installment. However, available evidence suggests that funding is limited in scale, heavily concentrated by theme and structurally misaligned with the most complex work represented in this sample.

Funding composition shifts significantly with organizational size, and more consequentially with the depth of gender integration in program design.

Table 3: Who is funding the work?

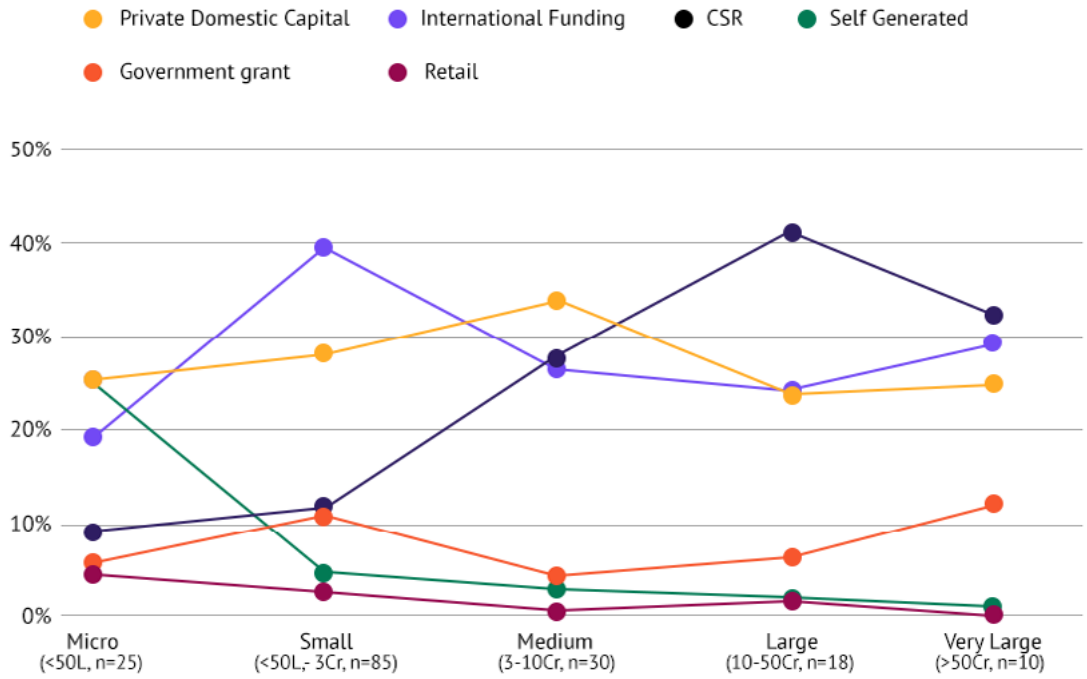
Key Ideas	Description
Seven funder archetypes, different playbooks	Seven funder archetypes emerged from the survey responses. Each brings its own priorities, strengths, and constraints, but none covers the full spectrum of gender work on its own.
International donors remain critical but are receding	International donors have historically been associated with equity-focused and structural gender work, often with more flexible capital.[xxxi] Recent shifts in foreign funding have created gaps in sustained support, especially for smaller organizations. [xxxii]
Domestic philanthropic foundations can play an anchoring role	Domestic foundations are relatively stable across organization sizes and are well-positioned to step in as international funding retreats. However, much of domestic philanthropy still prioritizes visible, measurable, and project-specific outcomes.
CSR grows with organizational size	CSR becomes more prominent as organizations grow, rising sharply among large organizations. It is typically tied to defined projects, shorter cycles, and measurable outputs.
HNI giving remains underutilized	HNI contributions remain small across organization sizes and are often ad hoc or issue-driven. This limits their role in supporting long-term or structurally complex gender work.
Government funding is modest but strategic	Government grants remain a modest contributor overall but can be important where organizational work aligns with national priorities, welfare schemes, or geographically complex contexts.
As gender work deepens, the funding base narrows	Gender-neutral programs draw more heavily on CSR, while gender-transformative programs rely more on international donors and philanthropic foundations. As organizations tackle longer-term, complex gender issues they depend on a smaller set of funders, leaving transformative work most exposed to shifts in capital.

Seven funder archetypes, different playbooks

Seven funder archetypes emerge from the survey responses. Each brings its own priorities, strengths, and constraints, and none, on its own, covers the full spectrum of gender work. The limited overlap between them potentially constrains the nature of the work organizations undertake.

Figure 3: Funding distribution by organization size

Mean % of total funding per source | n = 169 organizations



1. International Donors

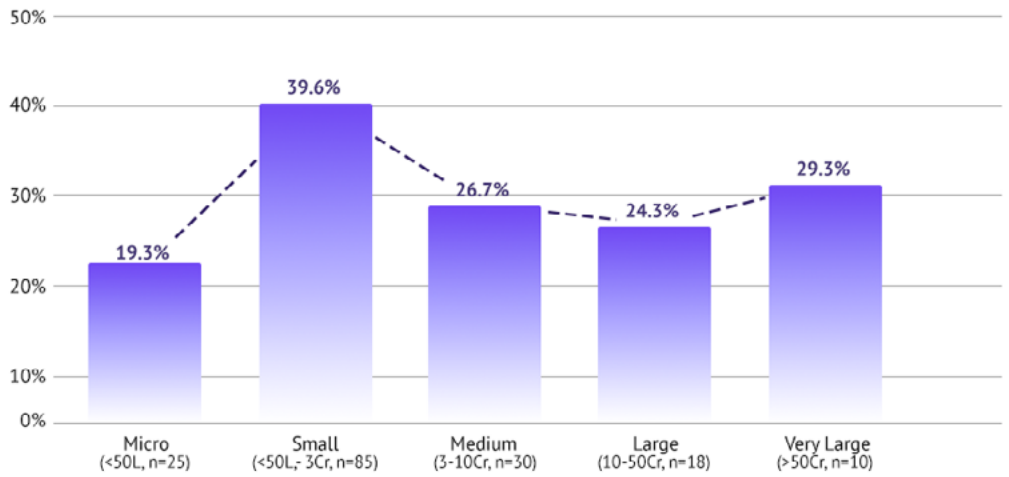
International donors account for an average of 40% of small organization's budgets, the highest share of any funder type at this size. This tapers to 24-27% among medium and large NGOs (Figure 3). Historical research and sector literature have documented the role of international funding in supporting gender-focused civil society organizations, as well as longer-term efforts related to equity and social outcomes.[xxxiii]

Practitioner Insight:
Respondents frequently described international funders as providers of relatively flexible or unrestricted capital, enabling organizations to respond to evolving on-ground needs, invest in organizational development, and support knowledge generation. This flexibility was often viewed as particularly valuable for work that requires longer time horizons or is less easily measured through short-term outcomes. Experts also pointed to changes in the international funding landscape in recent years, citing geopolitical developments, regulatory shifts, and evolving donor priorities as factors influencing the availability of funding for gender-focused work.[xxxiv] Organizations in the sample report reduced access to sustained support from these sources, particularly smaller organizations reporting the highest reliance on them.

> "One of the big changes in the last five years has been the shift in the foreign funding landscape. There has been a withdrawal of foreign funders, and even among those that remain, there's been significant shrinkage of funding. Funds that used to flow downward through intermediaries are no longer available to smaller women's rights organizations that don't have direct access to foreign funders. This has meant that access to foreign funding, which was typically more gender transformative, has diminished."
>
> - Sudarsana Kundu, GenderSphere

Figure 3.1: International donor: Share of funding by organization size

Mean % of total funding | n = 169 organizations | Dashed line shows trend across size tiers



2. Private Domestic Capital

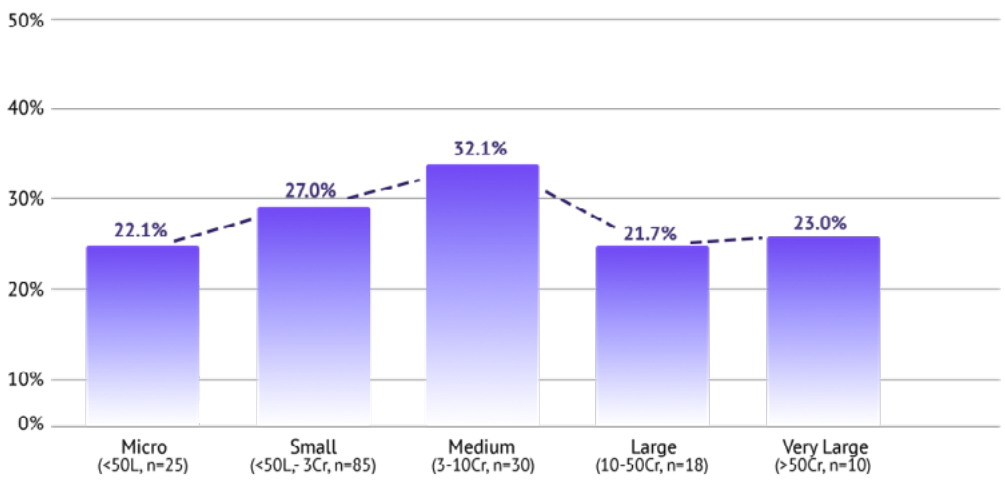
a. Domestic philanthropic foundations

Domestic philanthropic foundations are one of the more consistent funding sources across organization sizes. Their contributions remain relatively stable, ranging from an average of about 22% for micro-organizations to 32% for medium ones, without significant drop-offs at larger scales. This stability makes them well-positioned to play an anchoring role as international funding retreats.

Practitioner Insight:
Larger and more structured foundations often bring longer time horizons and greater openness to flexible, values-aligned approaches. Much of domestic philanthropy continues to prioritize themes with visible and measurable outcomes, resulting in funding that is typically project-specific and shorter-term. As the number of domestic foundations grows, engagement with more complex gender work remains uneven, with sustained engagement concentrated among a small set of foundations that consistently support this work.

Figure 3.2: Domestic philanthropic foundations: Share of funding by organization size

Mean % of total funding | n = 169 organizations | Dashed line shows trend across size tiers



b. High net worth individuals (HNIS)

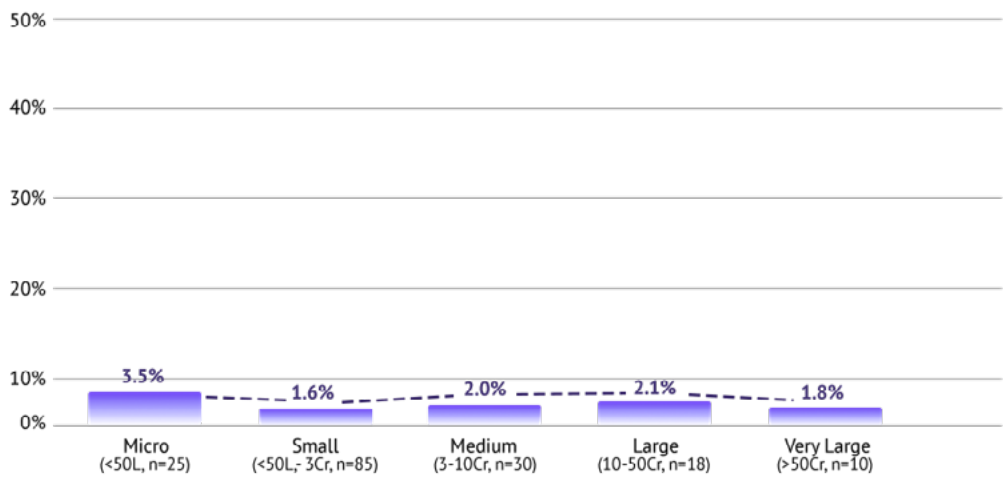
HNI contributions remain small across all organization sizes, between an average of 1% to 4% of budgets. This share does not appear to increase significantly as organizations grow, suggesting that HNI giving remains an underutilized source of capital, with potential to play a much more significant role within the funding landscape.

Practitioner Insight:

HNI contributions are often ad hoc and issue-driven, with a preference for causes that are visible, tangible, and easy to communicate. As a result, funding tends to be episodic rather than sustained, limiting its role in supporting long-term or structurally complex gender work. An emerging cohort of professionals (salaried individuals) is seeking more sustained engagement with gender equality, though this has yet to translate into funding at scale. While the signal exists, it has not yet been systematically activated by the sector or its intermediaries.

Figure 3.3: HNI Share of funding by organization size

Mean % of total funding | n = 169 organizations | Dashed line shows trend across size tiers



3. CSR

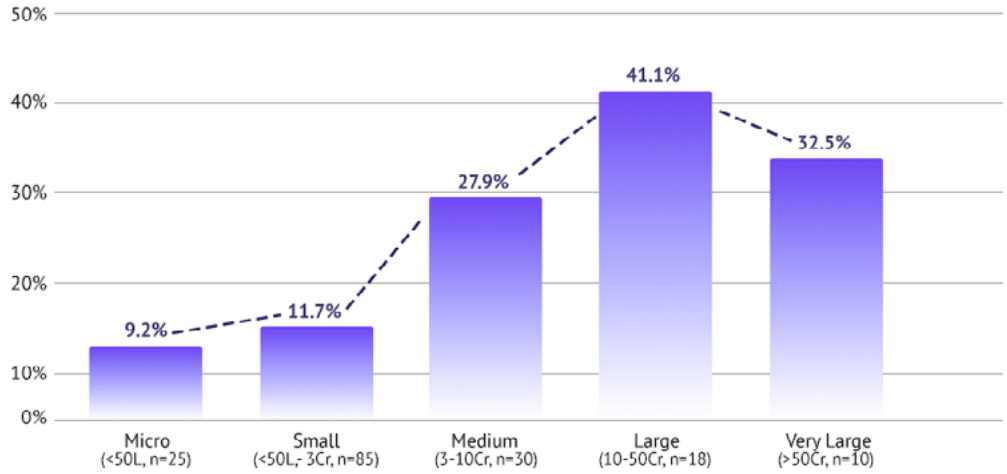
CSR funding becomes increasingly prominent as organizations grow. Micro and small NGOs receive an average of 9-12% of their budgets from CSR; among large organizations, this rises to 41%. In practice, CSR funding is typically tied to defined projects, shorter funding cycles, and specific reporting requirements, shaping both how it is accessed and the types of interventions it supports.

Practitioner Insight:
Gender is often incorporated as a cross-cutting consideration, most commonly through women's participation targets rather than as a standalone focus. As a result, CSR funding tends to align with implementation-oriented work and interventions that can be clearly defined and measured.

> "Gender is often applied as a horizontal lens for CSR programs. Skilling programs typically carry a criterion of 50% women. The unintended consequence of course, is that 50% is considered good enough. Relatively few programs take a gender-first approach."
>
> - Sumit Tayal, Give

Figure 3.4: CSR Share of funding by organization size

Mean % of total funding | n = 169 organizations | Dashed line shows trend across size tiers



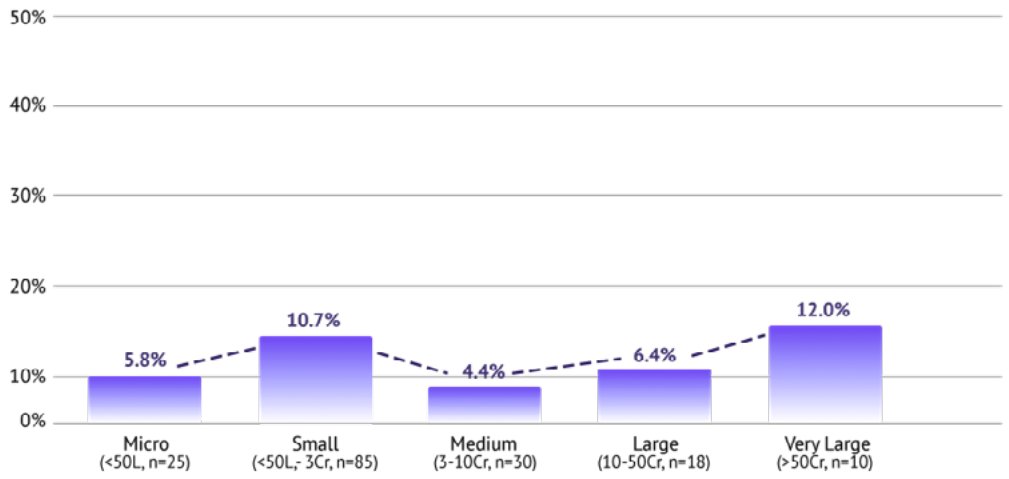
4. Government grants

Government funding remains a modest component across organization sizes, typically accounting for an average of 4-12% of total budgets. This suggests that access to government funding is often linked to alignment with existing schemes, administrative capacity, and programmatic proximity to state priorities.

Practitioner Insight:
Practitioners describe government funding as requiring a high level of documentation and reporting capacity, but view this funding as a valuable strategic opportunity, particularly for organizations whose work intersects with national priorities and existing welfare schemes. In geographically complex contexts, as the data later shows, government funding plays a proportionally larger role.

Figure 3.5: Government share of funding by organization size

Mean % of total funding | n = 169 organizations | Dashed line shows trend across size tiers



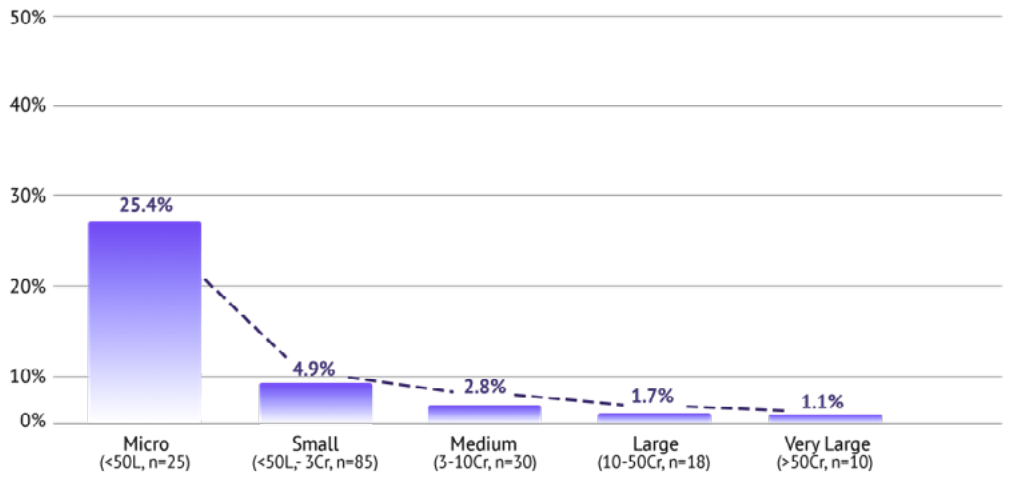
5. Self-generated revenue

Micro organizations rely on self-generated revenue for an average of 25% of their budgets – the highest share of any single domestic funding source for this group. As organizations grow, this share shrinks substantially, becoming a minor contributor for medium and larger NGOs, which rely more heavily on grants and CSR funding.

Practitioner Insight:
For early-stage organizations, self-generated revenue provides a degree of operational autonomy in the absence of institutional and philanthropic funding. It is a survival strategy - the way the organization funds itself while it waits for philanthropic recognition. Its decline with scale suggests that viability may be constrained by limited capacity to build and sustain revenue-generating models over time.

Figure 3.6: Self-generated share of funding by organization size

Mean % of total funding | n = 169 organizations | Dashed line shows trend across size tiers



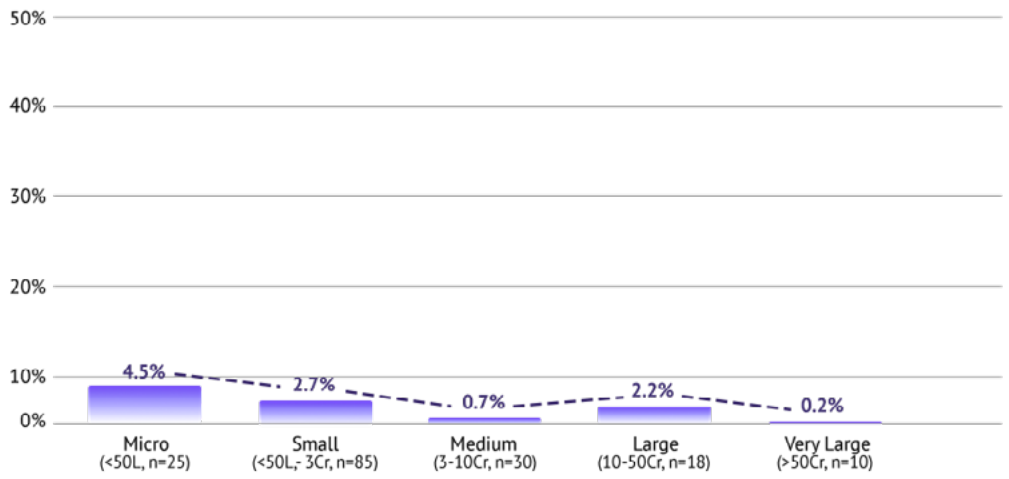
6. Retail giving

Retail giving accounts for 5% of micro-organization budgets and 3% of small ones, falling to under 1% for medium and very large organizations.

Practitioner Insight:
Crowdfunding outcomes are highly issue dependent. Campaigns connected to tangible, human-centered needs (such as children or shelter) tend to generate stronger public response, while equally critical work in legal aid, community mobilization, and norm change remains chronically underfunded through this channel.

Figure 3.7: Retail share of funding by organization size

Mean % of total funding | n = 169 organizations | Dashed line shows trend across size tiers



As gender work deepens, the funding base narrows

The size-based patterns above show how funding composition shifts as organizations grow. A more consequential shift emerges when funding is examined through the depth of gender integration in program design.

Among NGOs with more gender-neutral programs, CSR is the largest contributor (30% of budgets on average), with international donors at 21%. Among NGOs with gender-transformative programs, the positions reverse: international donors rise to 37% while CSR falls to 17%. Philanthropic foundations track the international-donor pattern, increasing from 15% to 28% as programs become more gender-intentional (Figure 4).

This divergence reflects differences in funding design. CSR is typically structured around defined outputs and shorter timelines, which has implications for its suitability for long-term, systems-oriented work such as gender transformation.

In contrast, respondents describe international donors and philanthropic foundations as more willing to support sustained, equity-focused efforts, citing greater flexibility and tolerance for longer time horizons.

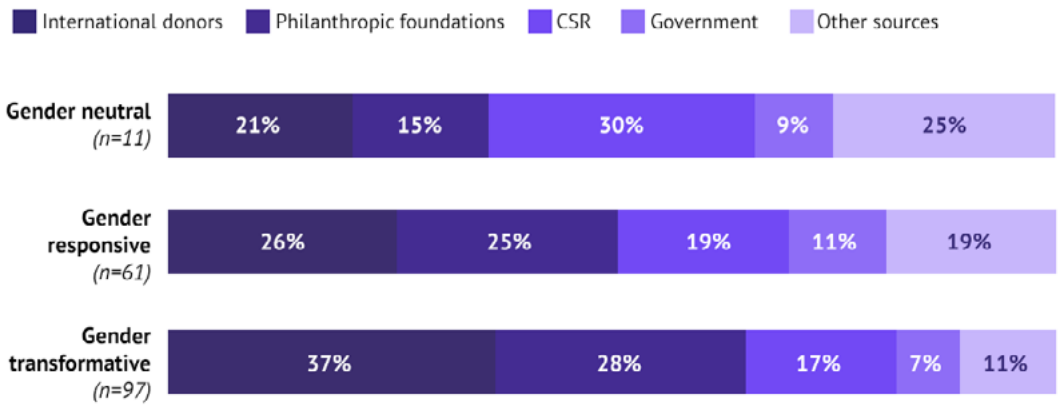
As organizations deepen their gender work, taking on complex challenges, working across longer time horizons, and addressing entrenched social norms, their funding base narrows. Among organizations represented in the sample, those undertaking the most intensive gender-transformative work rely on the narrowest funding base, making them especially vulnerable to shifts in funder priorities and capital flows. The central paradox: the work most essential to lasting change is the work the funding system is least built to sustain.

Broadening the funding base is a necessary response, with domestic philanthropy well-placed to step into areas where international funding is receding.

Figure 4: Funder composition by depth of gender integration in programs

The deeper the work, the more concentrated the funding risk.

Funder composition by depth of gender integration in program design (% of budget, average across organizations)



What is the financial reality on the ground?

The funding composition outlined above which narrows as gender work deepens, is fragmented in structure, and limited in underserved geographies has implications on the financial reality organizations work within. This section examines that reality.

Financial strain is widespread across the sample, not confined to its margins

The sample faces a dual financial strain: immediate instability, with nearly 70% of surveyed NGOs reporting operating deficits, only 30% reporting balanced positions, and 1% reporting a surplus; and long-term fragility, as 70% of NGOs have no corpus funds at all, and among those that do, more than a third have already drawn on them to cover operational shortfalls. Even where a corpus exists, it is steadily being drawn down.

Table 4: Financial reality on the ground

Key Ideas	Description
Within the sample, organizations faces both immediate instability and long-term fragility	Nearly 70% of surveyed NGOs report operating deficits, while only 1% report a surplus. At the same time, 70% have no corpus funds, leaving organizations in the sample exposed to funding delays, shocks, and shifts in donor priorities
Vulnerability cuts across the sample	A composite vulnerability assessment, based on indicators such as financial runway, funding deficit, corpus availability, and international donor reliance, shows that vulnerability is widespread across the sample, with 46% of surveyed organizations being highly vulnerable
Organizational size does not protect against financial vulnerability	55% of small organizations and 40% of very large organizations are highly vulnerable. This shows that surveyed organizations across budget sizes face conditions of precarity
The timing gap creates a structural cash-flow risk	The median financial runway is six months, while the median grant conversion timeline is seven and a half months. For half the sample, the next grant arrives after existing funds are likely to run out

Vulnerability cuts across the sample, regardless of organizational size

To understand the extent of financial vulnerability, we created an indicator to assess the financial vulnerability of each NGO in our sample. A composite indicator helps quantify vulnerability in a way that allows us to compare patterns across organizations and examine whether specific characteristics, such as organization size, are associated with financial vulnerability.

Each organization in the sample is scored on four binary indicators listed below, and the resulting **composite score**, ranging from 0 to 4, captures how many distinct dimensions of financial precarity an organization faces simultaneously.

Table 5: Financial vulnerability indicators

Key Ideas	Description	Why This Matters
Financial Runway less than six months	The organization has insufficient reserves to sustain operations beyond six months without new funding	A 3–6 month reserve is commonly used as a practical benchmark for nonprofit financial stability.[xxxv] For grant-dependent NGOs, especially those with less diversified funding, the higher end of this range is more appropriate because grant renewals and disbursements are often unpredictable.[xxxvi] As this reality is applicable to NGOs working on gender in India, a runway below six months is treated as an early marker of vulnerability.[xxxvii]
International Donor Reliance (40% or more)	More than 40% of the organization's total funding comes from international donors, creating exposure to geopolitical and policy shifts	A concentration of 30% or more from a single donor is commonly used as a benchmark for donor concentration risk.[xxxviii] For NGOs working on gender issues in India, we apply a slightly higher 40% threshold to international donor reliance as a more conservative marker of vulnerability, given that international funding has historically been a major source of support but is now becoming less predictable.

Absence of Corpus Funding	The organization holds no long-term reserve or endowment fund to draw on during funding gaps	Corpus or reserve funds represent an organization's most flexible source of capital during funding gaps, delays, or disruptions. Research on nonprofit financial vulnerability identifies endowment or reserve sufficiency as an important predictor of financial security and distress.[xxxix]
Self-reported Funding Deficit	The organization reports that current funding is insufficient to meet its programmatic and operational needs	Since financial precarity is shaped by the nature, timing, and cost of an organization's work, an organization's own assessment of whether current funding is sufficient is critical. This indicator captures funding gaps that may not be visible through budget size or revenue mix alone, especially where programmatic and operational needs exceed available resources.

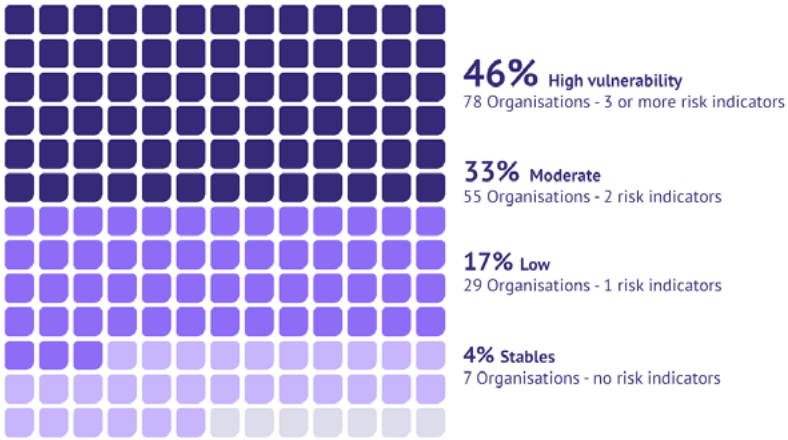
How to read the Composite Score
3–4 indicators met- High Vulnerability
2 indicators met- Medium Vulnerability
1 indicator met- Low Vulnerability
0 indicators met- Stable

Each indicator is weighted equally, reflecting the view that financial vulnerability is multidimensional and that no single condition is inherently more severe than another, rather the number of conditions an organization faces simultaneously reflects the extent of precarity. An organization facing two or more of these conditions simultaneously is considered meaningfully more precarious than one facing only one. Nearly half of NGOs (46%) fall into the high-vulnerability category, meeting three or more of these conditions. A further 33% are moderately vulnerable, meeting two conditions, while only 4% meet none and can be considered financially stable (Figure 5).

Across these categories, confidence in meeting funding needs remains strikingly low and does not recover even among the least vulnerable organizations. Only 8% of highly vulnerable NGOs from the sample report being very confident about meeting future funding needs; this figure rises only to 10% among low-vulnerability organizations. Even among financially stable organizations, only one organization reports being very confident. This near-universal lack of confidence points to a set of organizations that experience funding as fundamentally unpredictable, regardless of their current position.

Figure 5: Financial vulnerability across the sample

n = 169 organizations



Grant cycles routinely outlast survival capacity

The median financial runway in the sample is six months. The median grant conversion timeline is seven and a half months. For half the sample, the next grant will arrive after the money has run out (Figure 6).

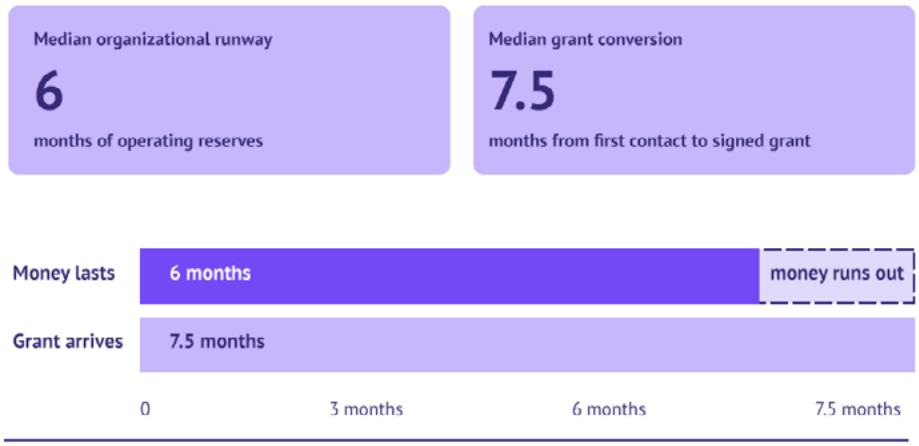
Among NGOs with three months or less runway, 91% face grant cycles that outlast their survival capacity. Even among those with four to six months of runway, more than 60% face the same constraint.

Altogether, 49% of NGOs fall into a critical zone: short runway and extended grant timelines converging into a condition of near-permanent financial precarity.

The math is simple: For half the sample, the next grant arrives after the money runs out. Organizations bridge this gap through founder loans, delayed salaries, and paused programs. This pattern is shaped by the design of funding flows. The variables that govern this sit outside the control of financial management.

Figure 6: Financial runway vs. grant conversion timeline

For half the sample, the next grant arrives after the money runs out



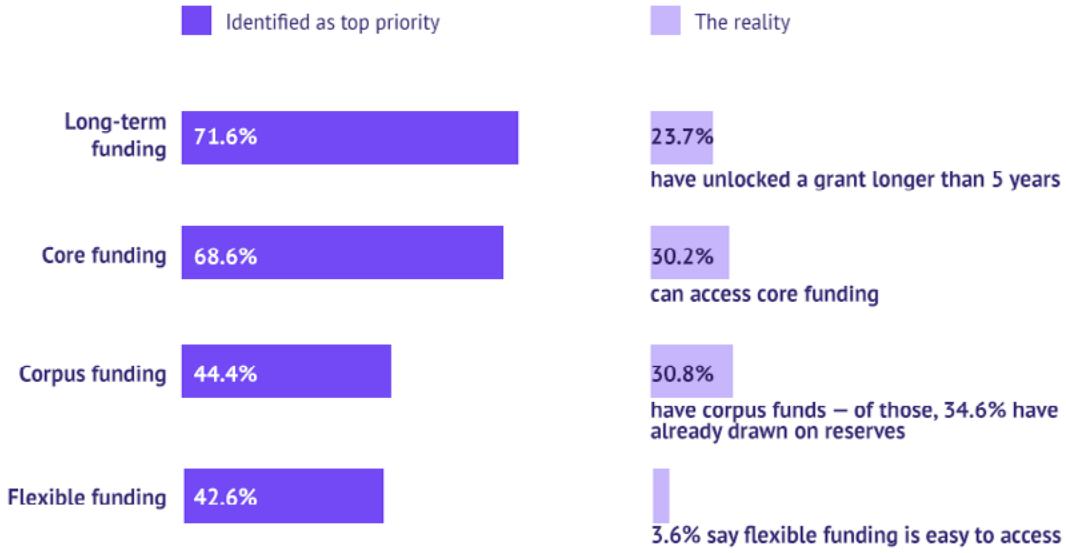
Funding instruments are misaligned with what the work requires

Short-term, project-based funding structured around pre-defined outputs constrains organizations' ability to address structural and intersectional drivers of inequality. It limits investment in community-led learning, adaptation, and reflection. (Figure 7) Women and girls' lives do not pause between grant cycles. Funding structures need to reflect this. The organizations closest to communities, often led by people with lived experience and working on the most complex gender issues, are also those facing the greatest financial vulnerability. Resources tend to flow more readily to larger, administratively equipped organizations and to areas where outcomes are easier to define and measure. This suggests a misalignment between how funding is distributed and the nature of the work required to achieve meaningful change.

> "There has been a shift away from corpus funding toward more project-based support, which influences the scope and depth of work. With program priorities often shaped externally, opportunities for long-term, transformative work particularly across gender, caste, and other intersecting inequalities can be difficult to sustain."
>
> - Ranjani.K.Murthy, Researcher, Gender and Internationality

Figure 7: Funding needs and realities

*What organizations need vs. the reality**

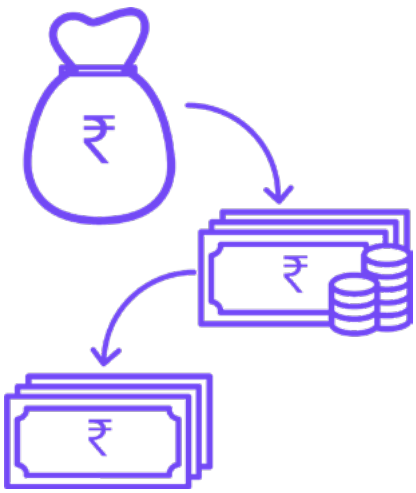


** Respondents selected their top 3 funding priorities; percentages reflect multi-select responses.*

Where is funding going?

Globally, philanthropic funding for development remains concentrated in more legible sectors. Health and education accounted for 51% of private philanthropic disbursements between 2020 and 2023. Even within gender-specific giving, funding is concentrated, with SRHR receiving a major share of funding, while the government and civil society sector accounted for only 7% of total philanthropic funding.[xl] India exhibits a similar pattern, where foundational investments in education and healthcare continue to garner a larger share of philanthropic funding, alongside emerging sectors like climate action, GEDI (gender, equity, diversity, and inclusion), where funding has diversified.[xli]

In this section, we analyze survey insights to explore how specific program areas and cross-cutting dimensions are affected by funding. Program areas represent the main thematic focus areas of organizations in the sample. Here, funding sources diverge by focus: themes where gender is integrated into broader sectoral work lean heavily on CSR and domestic funding, while programs with a transformative gender focus rely more on international donors and domestic philanthropy. Cross-cutting dimensions are analytical lenses that shape how work is designed, staffed, and resourced. Across these dimensions, distinct funding patterns emerge that directly influence the inclusion of underserved communities, geographies, and themes.



Headlines from this Section

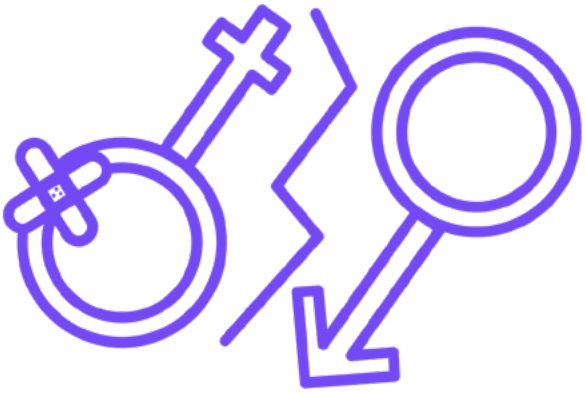
Program Areas

1. GBV draws strong institutional support, but CSR lags furthest behind
2. Agency and leadership leads in transformative work, but funding remains concentrated
3. Skilling and livelihoods have the most diversified funding, but structural constraints limit economic gains
4. Health draws the highest CSR share, but funding volume needs to translate into gender-intentional design

Cross-Cutting Dimensions

1. Knowledge building is central to the work of organizations in the sample but remains its least-funded function
2. Work with men, boys, and gender minorities has expanded faster than its funding base
3. Programs reach intersectional groups, with scope to embed inclusion more deeply in design
4. Government funding reaches underserved geographies more than CSR does

Program Areas



1. GBV draws strong institutional support, but CSR lags furthest behind.

Even one step ahead in addressing GBV can create inter-generational change

The Funding Mix:
Institutional funders (foreign and domestic) are strong supporters of GBV programs, accounting for two-thirds of the funding mix. NGOs from the sample report 34% of their budgets from international donors and 29% from domestic foundations. CSR contributes an average of 14% to the issue, the lowest share across all themes.

The Macro Context:
Nearly one in three ever-married women in India (32%) disclose spousal violence when asked confidentially (NFHS-5). Administrative data captures a different stage: approximately 4.4 lakh cases of crime against women are formally registered annually, with 'Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives' the largest category (31.4%). The two sources measure disclosure at different points, and the persistence of under-reporting and barriers to disclosure shapes how and whether women draw on the services available to them.[xlii]

Practitioner Insight:
Sector experts have shared that within GBV, funding tends to concentrate on service delivery interventions, such as helplines and one-stop crisis centers. Working on sensitive issues such as sexual and domestic violence can also present additional fundraising challenges, including difficulty in meeting recurring costs and non-concrete outcomes. This requires deeper alignment and sustained engagement with funders.

The Reading:
Confidential disclosure to a surveyor and a decision to pursue a formal complaint are different acts, and the second is one many women do not take. Interventions that work on the first are correspondingly slow and hard to measure. This funnel effect may explain the funding mix itself: institutional funders can tolerate slow, hard-to-measure outcomes, while CSR's preference for countable annual results may explain its lower share, not lower concern. Whether current funding reflects true unmet need, or the difficulty of designing fundable interventions for a largely hidden problem, is worth sitting with.

2. Agency and leadership lead in transformative work, but funding remains concentrated

Sustained investment in agency and leadership shapes the next generation of decision-makers

The Funding Mix:
International donors and domestic foundations are the primary supporters of agency and leadership work, together accounting for two-thirds of the funding mix. Organizations receive 37% of their budgets from international donors, the joint-highest share across themes, and 29% from domestic foundations. CSR contributes 18%, while government grants make up 5%.

The Macro Context:
Strengthening women's agency and leadership is central to addressing structural gender inequality. It has implications for who participates in decision-making and whose voices shape the systems that govern their lives. In India, 22 states have implemented a policy of reserving 50% of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).[xliii] As of 2020, 46% of elected Panchayati Raj representatives (~14.5 lakh) are women, one of the highest scales of representation in the world.[xliv]

Practitioner Insight:
Funders are more likely to support women's agency and leadership when it is linked to measurable outcomes in areas like education, health, or livelihoods, positioning these as pathways to other goals rather than outcomes in themselves. This makes it difficult to fund leadership, decision-making, and shifts in power as primary objectives. Unlike education enrolment or income gains, shifts in agency and decision-making power are harder to attribute, slower to materialize, and more difficult to standardize across geographies and communities, making them less legible to conventional funder reporting frameworks. As a result, sustained support for this work remains concentrated among a small set of institutional funders with the appetite and time horizons to resource change that unfolds over years, not grant cycles.

The Reading:
Formal representation has moved substantially. The survey funding data suggests that support has not fully caught up to this shift. Support remains concentrated among a narrow set of international and domestic funders willing to back slow, hard-to-attribute change, while CSR and government together make up less than a quarter of the mix. Whether funded programs are keeping pace with, contributing to, or lagging behind this shift is a separate question the survey data alone cannot answer.

> "Leadership and equity-oriented work faces real funding challenges and is more likely to attract support when connected to outcomes in education, health, or livelihoods. Similarly, resilience-building work tends to be underfunded despite its importance. Women and girls on the ground demonstrate extraordinary resilience, and communities show their own capacity for leadership and knowledge but translating this into lasting change depends on sustained, long-term support."
>
> - Sanya Seth, UN Women

3. Skilling and livelihoods have the most diversified funding, but structural constraints limit economic gains

Intentional livelihood funding can turn income into economic self-determination

The Funding Mix:
Skilling and livelihoods draw on a relatively diversified funding base across all themes with contributions from international donors (28%), domestic foundations (25%), CSR (21%), and government grants (10%). CSR's contribution here is comparatively higher than in most other themes, reflecting natural alignment with corporate workforce and supply chain priorities.

The Macro Context:
When women gain access to sustainable livelihoods, this can generate positive spillovers at the household level, including improvements in education, health, and economic resilience. 68% of the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) beneficiaries are women. Between FY16 and FY25, the per woman PMMY disbursement amount increased at a CAGR of 13%, reaching INR 62,679, while per woman incremental deposits grew at a CAGR of 14% to INR 95,269. States with higher disbursement shares to women have also recorded higher employment generation through women-led MSMEs, reinforcing the effectiveness of targeted financial inclusion in enhancing women's economic empowerment and labor force participation. [xlv]

Practitioner Insight:
Skilling and livelihoods are easier to fund because they sit close to mainstream development and CSR priorities, with clear outputs such as women enrolled, trained, placed, or linked to credit. However, gender integration can remain shallow when programs stop at metrics of participation. More transformative work requires addressing the structural barriers that shape women's economic participation, including mobility restrictions, care burdens, workplace norms, wage disparities, control over income, and asset ownership. Without this layer, funding may improve access to livelihoods without it fully translating into sustained economic self-determination.

The Reading:
Funder ease and community uptake both point the same direction here. This is the one pairing where funding attention and outcome data appear to move together rather than apart.

> "Family offices and next-generation philanthropists are emerging; domestic philanthropy is growing. But the challenge is that many of them are still at an early stage of understanding the development ecosystem. Naturally, they gravitate toward themes such as health, education, skilling, and entrepreneurship - themes that are easier to understand and communicate and have visible outputs."
>
> - Radhika Uppal, Gender and Development Specialist

4. Health draws the highest CSR share, but funding volume needs to translate into gender-intentional design

Health and Education are highly fundable, but the results have not been inherently transformative

The Funding Mix:
Health has the strongest domestic funding base across the themes. CSR contributes 22%, the highest share for any thematic area, while government contributes 10%. Education relies more heavily on institutional philanthropy, drawing 32% from international donors and 26% from domestic foundations. It also reports the highest self-generated revenue across themes at 9%.

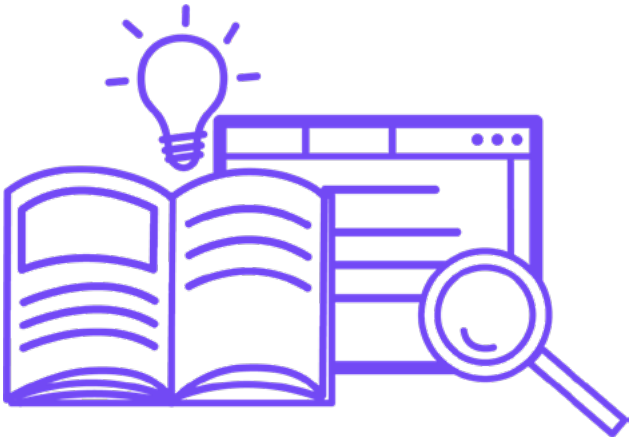
The Macro Context:
Health and education are foundational to women's long-term agency and mobility. Access to healthcare shapes women's ability to make decisions about their bodies and futures, while education influences their economic participation, household decision-making, and engagement in public life. One of the clearest markers of that health foundation is nutritional status. Women's anemia (ages 15-49) rose from 53% to 57% between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5. Part of this rise is attributed to a change in blood-testing methodology (capillary HemoCue vs. venous sampling) rather than underlying health trends alone; the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption of nutrition service delivery during the NFHS-5 field period is also cited as a contributing factor. [xlvi]

Practitioner Insight:
Health and education are easier for funders to understand and support because they offer visible and measurable outcomes. The variety of ways in which funders can support this theme also means that programs can range from general service delivery to deeply gender-intentional work. Around 54% of organizations working in health and 53% of those in education report gender-transformative approaches, demonstrating that the depth of gender outcomes is shaped by program design.

The Reading:
High CSR investment sitting alongside current indicators is easy to misread as funding failure. Given the methodological caveat, the rising number does not necessarily mean the investment isn't working.

> "The majority of our funders are education donors. Without hard educational outcomes, it would be hard to raise money and scale. It is because we have our feet in both gender and education that we are actually able to scale and do what we do."
>
> - Non-profit practitioner

Cross-cutting Dimensions



1. Knowledge building is central to the work of organizations in the sample but remains its least-funded function

The evidence gap shows up as the demand for proof outpaces the support for it.

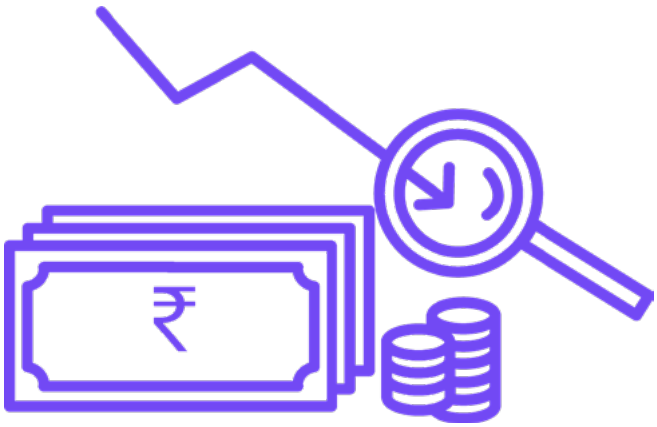
The Funding Mix:
Organizations prioritizing knowledge building currently report the highest reliance on international donors at 43%, nearly 12 percentage points above the sample average, while CSR contributes just 14%, the lowest among all functional categories. [5]

The Macro Context:
Knowledge building is central to how gender work is understood, funded, and scaled, but it remains the least prioritized function across the sample. Evidence is required in proposals, reporting frameworks, and decisions on continuation or scale. However, the generation of that evidence through longitudinal research, adaptive learning, and community-led learning receives limited dedicated support. Only 42% of indicators needed to monitor gender-related SDGs are available. [xlvii]

Practitioner Insight:
Knowledge building is structurally undervalued because its returns are diffused and delayed, unlike the visible, attributable outputs that funders can point to within a single grant cycle. Monitoring and evaluation have historically been shaped around donor compliance rather than organizational learning.

The Reading:
Heavy reliance on international funders for knowledge-building work sits alongside a data infrastructure gap: less than half of the indicators needed to track progress exist at all.

5 Thirty organizations in the sample ranked knowledge building as their top priority; therefore, the findings should be treated as indicative rather than representative of the broader sector



2. Work with men, boys, and gender minorities has expanded faster than its funding base

Expanding programmatic scope to men, boys, and gender minorities is a strategic imperative

The Funding Mix:
Funding profile for men and boys reflects a familiar pattern. International donors account for 35%, above the sample average of 32%, while CSR contributes 17%, below the sample average of 19%. Domestic foundations provide around 29% of budgets, though support remains concentrated among few funders. As a result, work on male engagement draws on the same international and philanthropic funding streams that support broader gender transformative efforts, with limited diversification from domestic sources.

The Macro Context:
Gender programming is increasingly expanding beyond women and girls to include men, boys, and gender minorities. Work with men and boys is already widely integrated, with 65% of GBV and education-focused organizations reporting active engagement in our survey sample. However, this expansion is not matched by diversified or proportionate funding. For LGBTQIA+ communities, 23% of organizations report inclusion within their programmatic scope, indicating growing but still limited integration into mainstream gender work.

Practitioner Insight:
While the importance of engaging men, boys, and gender minorities is widely acknowledged, these areas are often treated as extensions rather than core programmatic priorities. As a result, they remain under-resourced and insufficiently embedded in long-term strategies.

The Reading:
Men-and-boys engagement is already common practice in nearly two-thirds of GBV and education organizations, an approach directly relevant given how widespread these attitudes remain.

3. Programs reach intersectional groups, with scope to embed inclusion more deeply in design

Intersectionality can make gender work more responsive to lived realities

The Funding mix:
Programs extend reach to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), sex workers, and migrant women. However, program design treats inclusion as additive.

The Macro Context:
Women account for 44% of India's disabled population, approximately 11.8 million people. This figure is considered an undercount, given the underreporting of disability status within households, particularly for women. Limited visibility can shape how needs are assessed, with implications for planning and resource allocation. [xlviii]

The Reading:
Coverage of intersectional groups exists, but an additive design approach may not match a population that is both large and likely undercounted.

4. Government funding reaches underserved geographies more than CSR does

Following public commitment can deepen gender outcomes

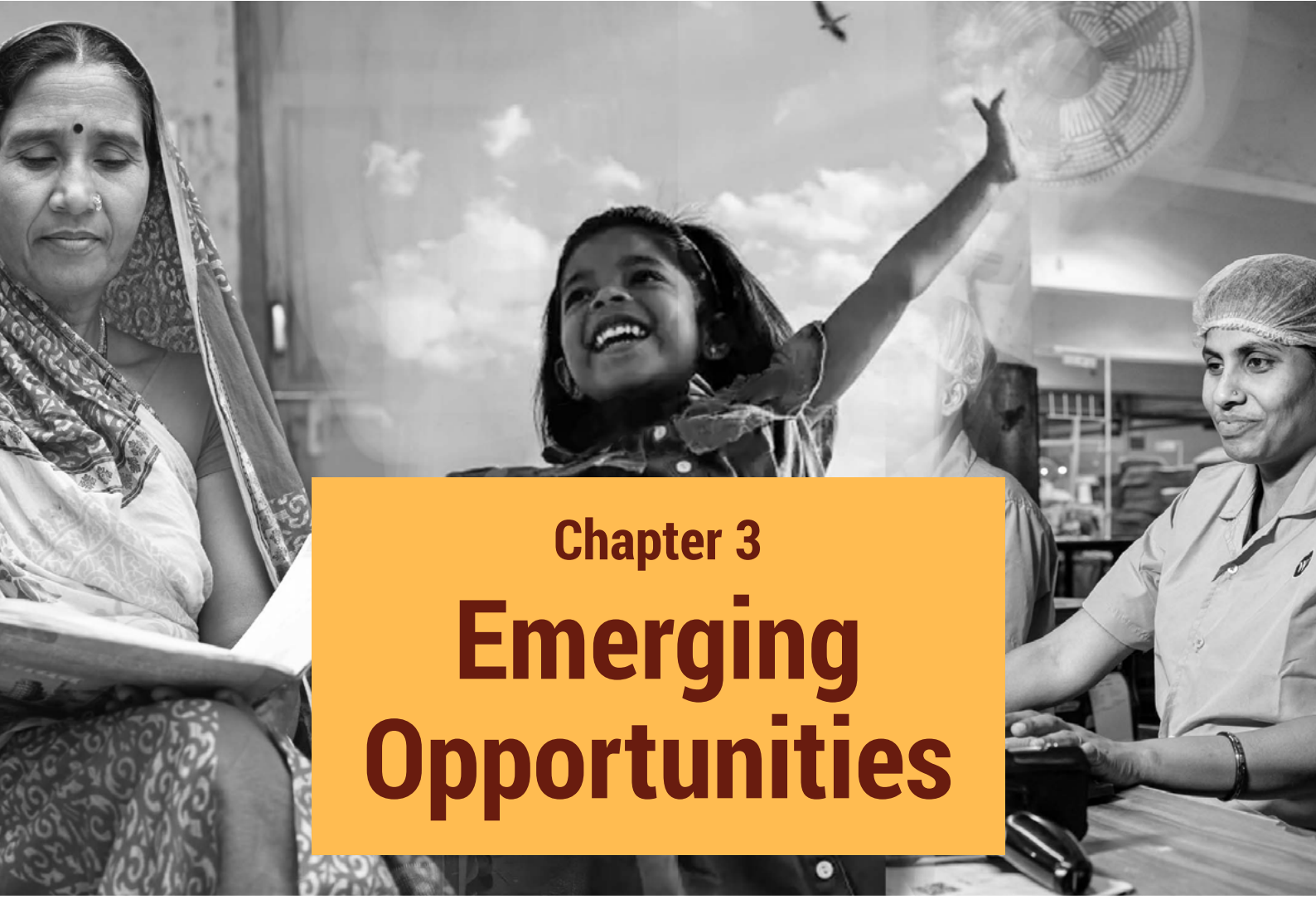
The Funding mix:
Organizations in the North-East get 36% of their funding from the government. [6]

The Macro Context:
CSR funding stays concentrated in industrialized states; the North-East receives a comparatively small share. Government initiatives such as PM-DevINE aim to support infrastructure, social development projects, livelihood generation for youth and women, and the filling of development gaps across the region.[xlix]

The Reading:
Government funding shows a stronger presence in underserved areas. Industrialized states can follow a similar trajectory to redistribute CSR more effectively.

> "Gender work must be grounded in intersectionality. Women are not a homogeneous category, and any meaningful engagement with gender equality must account for the layered realities of caste, class, geography, disability, and sexual identity. The intersecting identities of the women, men, boys, girls, and sexual and gender minorities we work with shape the nature of their vulnerabilities as much as their possibilities. This specificity must be reflected in how we frame, fund, and deliver our work."
>
> - Mercy Kappen, Visthar

6 The sample includes six NGOs working in the North-East; findings relating to this subgroup should therefore be interpreted as indicative.



Chapter 3

Emerging Opportunities

This section outlines emerging opportunities arising from our current research. These will be updated based on further evidence generated over the course of the coming year.

- **Support GBV organizations to create intergenerational benefits for women and girls:** There is a strong opportunity to unlock greater public funding by supporting GBV organizations, creating intergenerational benefits for women and girls, including sexual and gender minorities. 64% of organizations working on GBV in our sample report applying gender-transformative approaches in their programmatic work, reflecting deep sectoral expertise. India's policy ethos has consistently supported such programs, providing a strong foundation for greater CSR investment to strengthen last-mile delivery.

- **Deploy catalytic capital toward strengthening women's agency and decision-making within existing participation platforms:** India has already built participation platforms at scale, over 10 crore women are linked through 90 lakh SHGs, and as of 2020, 46% of elected Panchayati Raj representatives (~14.5 lakh) are women, against a global average of 36% of seats in local deliberative bodies.[1] The opportunity lies in building legal and financial literacy, women's ownership over assets and mobility, and leadership pipelines and networks that enable women to exercise agency and leverage existing platforms more effectively. As with other complex outcomes, this work requires patient capital and remains an area where domestic philanthropy is significantly underleveraged.

- **CSR and other institutional funders can redirect existing skilling and livelihood investments into economic self-determination:** Funding often reaches women through generic livelihood pathways without fully addressing the constraints that limit their economic gains. India already has large-scale livelihood access infrastructure. The opportunity now lies in converting this access and credit into economic self-determination. Funders can support digital and financial literacy, safe mobility, childcare support, income progression and wage equity measures that help women progress in income, own assets, and strengthen financial autonomy.

- **Embed gender intentionality across programs:** Foundational thematic areas such as health and education attract substantial philanthropic investment in India, creating an opportunity to make gender outcomes more explicit within large-scale investments.[li] Funding for these themes is often justified through broad service delivery goals, leaving gender-specific outcomes embedded rather than explicit — the opportunity is to make this existing funding more gender-intentional. In health, CSR and institutional funders can support dedicated work on adolescent health, menstrual health, SRHR counselling, and reproductive autonomy, including through consumer-facing retail giving campaigns. In education, funders can make girls' retention in school the central outcome by supporting classroom safety, caregiver engagement, and school-level practices that help girls stay and progress. This can build on existing gains to create more enabling health and education infrastructure at a holistic level.

- **Support locally grounded evidence and gender research to strengthen program design and sector practice:** Greater investment in long-term research, learning-oriented evaluation and community-led studies can strengthen program design and implementation and improve the reporting infrastructure that funders themselves rely on. This can help organizations move beyond proving delivery within grant cycles and generate the learning required for more sustained, scalable, and transformative change.

- **Use disaggregated evidence and community insight to strengthen inclusion in program design:** UNESCO's review of male-engagement programs in India found that most programs have not documented their impact on the lives of women and girls, often tracking only attitude change among men. Proven pilots, such as family-planning programs that shifted household decision-making, have also struggled to scale because of limited funding, capacity constraints, and a shortage of rigorously evaluated India-specific models. [lii] Domestic CSR and philanthropy can support the scaling and outcomes-linked evaluation needed to turn promising pilots into proven, fundable models. Similarly, investment in India-specific evidence and scalable program design can help move LGBTQIA+ inclusion from fragmented efforts to more institutionalized practice.

- **Rebalance capital toward gender underserved geographies through place-based strategies:** There is a growing opportunity for funders to align with India's public investment in the North-East, where initiatives such as PM-DevINE are directing resources toward infrastructure, livelihoods and development gaps across the region. [liii] The opportunity can extend to states such as Bihar and Jharkhand, where public investment is creating opportunities to strengthen outcomes for women. [liv] As these investment scale, philanthropic capital can complement them by supporting last-mile actors who help translate these efforts into community outcomes such as increased women's participation.

Annexures

A. Upcoming Research

The next phases of this research – Navigation & Journeys and The Destination – will build on this analysis to examine what shapes funding decisions, how approaches differ, and where opportunities exist to better align capital with the work it seeks to support.

- Gender Sector Sizing Model: The model is being designed to address a persistent gap in how gender funding is tracked in India: current estimates typically put it at under 1% of philanthropic capital, a figure that likely understates the real picture because it only captures funding explicitly labeled "gender." [lv] This model adopts a supply-side approach to estimate the fuller share of Indian philanthropic capital that contributes to gender equity.

- Navigation, Journeys, and the Destination: We will also map the journeys of a selected set of NGOs and funders to understand how gender-focused work is enabled, funded, and sustained. For NGOs, the case studies will focus on what has enabled them to scale and secure funding over time, as well as what hasn't worked. For funders, the journeys examine motivations, barriers, and evolving giving approaches across archetypes such as men as allies, women philanthropists, multi-generational families, allied-sector actors, and large corporates, among others. We will also articulate forward-looking directions for how philanthropic capital can be deployed to maximize gender impact. This includes identifying where funding should be prioritized to drive the greatest outcomes and how strategic, well-targeted investments can be catalytic.

B. Methodology Note

This report draws on a mixed-methods research design combining a quantitative survey of NGOs working in India with qualitative key informant interviews (KIIs) with sector experts and practitioners. The primary research tool was a self-administered survey distributed via Zoho Survey, open from January through March 2026 with 169 responses, complemented by 38 interviews with sector experts and practitioners.

Survey Sample
To estimate an appropriate sample size for this research, we used NGO Darpan's Women Empowerment category as a proxy for the population of relevant NGOs. This category comprises 144,321 registered organizations. Using this estimate, we calculated a minimum required sample size using Cochran's formula, with a 90% confidence level, a 7% margin of error, and p=0.5 (given the absence of a prior baseline estimate).
This indicated a minimum sample size of approximately 139 respondents. Outreach continued beyond this threshold, and the survey closed with 169 unique responses after data cleaning.

Organizations were not required to be exclusively gender-focused to participate. To better understand the role of gender within participating organizations' work, respondents were asked to classify their primary interventions as gender-transformative, gender-responsive, or gender-neutral, based on standardized definitions provided in the survey. Respondents were also required to provide a written justification for their classification.

Given the subjective nature of self-classification, the research team reviewed each organization's rationale and, where necessary, cross-checked responses against broader survey submissions to ensure consistency with the definitions provided. This approach enabled a distinction between organizations working primarily on gender equity and those addressing gender alongside broader development objectives. 57% of organizations in the final sample were classified as having gender-transformative interventions.

The survey did not collect data on whether organizations were formally women-led. However, it did capture the presence of women from historically underrepresented or marginalized communities in senior leadership positions, including founders and/or C-suite executives. Of the organizations surveyed, 73% reported having women from historically underrepresented or marginalized communities in senior leadership positions.

Survey Design and Administration

The survey was administered in Hindi and English to improve accessibility and comprised 50 mandatory questions across multiple-response, open-ended, and numerical formats. Built-in validation checks helped minimize data-entry errors, and only fully completed submissions were included in the final sample. Responses were collected through a combination of direct outreach, social media recruitment, and follow-up reminders. The survey was open to NGOs across India, with no geographic restrictions on participation.

Key Informant Interviews

To complement and validate the survey findings, the research team conducted 38 interviews with practitioners and sector experts. Interviews were conducted with participants' consent to be recorded and quoted.

Transcripts were analyzed in Atlas.ti using a combination of inductive coding to identify emerging themes and deductive coding to examine, contextualize, and validate patterns observed in the survey data. This approach enabled both the generation of new insights and the triangulation of quantitative findings with practitioner perspectives.

Data Privacy and Confidentiality

Respondent and organizational information was collected solely for verification and data-quality purposes and was not shared externally. All data was stored securely and accessed only by the research team. Findings presented in this report are aggregated and do not identify individual respondents or organizations.

Limitations

While this research surfaces important patterns, tensions, and operating realities across the gender sector ecosystem, the limitations of this research must be acknowledged. First, the study employed a purposive and network-based sampling approach and is therefore not nationally representative of all organizations working on women and girls in India. As a result, the study may underrepresent smaller, informally organized actors, as well as organizations operating in geographically remote areas with limited visibility within existing sector networks. Second, the analysis maintains an implicit focus on civil society and institutionally networked actors; consequently, the multitudes of feminist movements in India, spanning diverse ideologies, regional histories, and informal or autonomous modes of organizing, have been captured only in a limited manner. Third, as the survey component was self-reported, responses may be shaped by social desirability which could affect the accuracy of certain findings. Finally, the findings and interpretations may be influenced by our own positioning and inherent bias as a sector intermediary within the philanthropic landscape.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to our partners MacArthur Foundation and Ford Foundation. This effort would not have been possible without their generous support and partnership. We value their commitment to advancing investment in women and girls and are grateful for their support of this work.

This report was shaped through insights and engagement from individuals and organizations working across the gender ecosystem in India. We are thankful to the NGO leaders, feminist practitioners, researchers, funders, intermediaries, and ecosystem actors who took the time to engage with us through interviews and validation discussions. Their reflections, experiences, and critical perspectives helped sharpen our understanding of the evolving realities and opportunities shaping gender-focused work today.

We are grateful to the 169 organizations that participated in the survey informing this study. Their contributions provided an important foundation for understanding sector-wide funding patterns, organizational experiences, and emerging trends across the ecosystem.

We would like to thank Neera Nundy, Deval Sanghavi, and Parnasha Banerjee for their leadership and guidance throughout the initiative. We are also grateful to colleagues across the Dasra team, including Ami Misra, Prachi Pal, Mahima Sharda, Aanshi Gupta, Taanya Kapur, and Nemat Shaikh as well as Megha Jain, Tanya Dikshit, and Suveera Venkatesh, for their thoughtful inputs, encouragement, and continued support during the course of this work.

We would also like to acknowledge the following sector experts and practitioners whose insights contributed meaningfully to this report:

List of Sector Experts and Practitioners (A-Z)

Aditi Jha,
Breakthrough

Anupriya Ghosh,
Jagori

Anuradha Chatterji,
Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA)

Anurita Hazarika,
North East Network (NEN)

Archana Dwivedi,
Nirantar

Averil Spencer,
Launch Girls

Chhavi Doonga,
Independent Consultant

Divya Mukand,
Girls First Fund (GFF)

Gautami Gavankar,
Kotak Private Banking

Jahnvi Andharia,
Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST)

Jayapadma R V,
Azim Premji University (APU)

Kalpana Viswanath,
Safetipin

Kruti Dalal,
Advancing Reduction In Mortality And Morbidity Of Mothers, Children And Neonates (ARMMAN)

Manisha Gupta,
Start Up!

Mercy Kappen,
Visthar

Moutushi Sengupta,
Oneworld Colab (OwC)

Nayreen Daruwalla,
Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (SNEHA)

Neeta Hardikar,
ANANDI

Neha Sahu,
Launch Girls

Peggy Dulany,
Synergos

Pooja Sharma Goyal,
The Udaiti Foundation

Priyanka Samy,
National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW)

Radhika Uppal,
Gender and Development Specialist

Ranjani K. Murthy,
Researcher, Gender and Internationality

Renu Mishra,
Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives (AALI)

Reshma Anand,
Ford Foundation

Ritesh Agarwal,
Ford Foundation

Safeena Husain,
Educate Girls

Sanchita Mitra,
Self-Employed Women's Association Bharat (SEWA Bharat)

Sangeetha Vadanan,
Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (SNEHA)

Sanya Seth,
UN Women

Sarbani Bose,
Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN)

Seema Kulkarni,
Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM)

Seema Panthaki,
Jaineev Consulting LLP

Shriya Sethi,
The Convergence Foundation (TCF)

Shubha Chacko,
Solidarity Foundation

Soumya Rajan,
Waterfield Advisors

Sruthi Kutty,
Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality (IWWAGE)

Sudarsana Kundu,
GenderSphere

Sumit Tayal,
Give

Swatee Deepak,
Shake The Table

Subhalakshmi Nandi,
Ford Foundation

Tamanna Basu,
Shakti Shalini

Yamini Mishra,
MacArthur Foundation

List of Abbreviations

AWID – Association for Women's Rights in Development

BPfA – Beijing Platform for Action

CARE – Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere

CAGR – Compound Annual Growth Rate

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

COVID-19 - Coronavirus Disease 2019

CSO – Civil Society Organization

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

CSW – Commission on the Status of Women

CSWI – Committee on the Status of Women in India

DAY-NRLM - Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission

DNTs/NTs - Denotified and Nomadic Tribes

ECOSOC - Economic and Social Council (United Nations)

EM2030 - Equal Measures 2030

FY - Fiscal Year

GAD – Gender and Development

GBV – Gender-Based Violence

GEDI - Gender, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

GEF – Gender Equality Framework

GEM – UN Gender Equality Marker

GIC – Gender Integration Continuum

HNIs – High Net-worth Individuals

ICPD – International Conference on Population and Development

ICRW – International Center for Research on Women

IGWG – Interagency Gender Working Group

ISST India – Institute of Social Studies Trust

KII – Key Informant Interviews

LGBTQIA+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and other sexual and gender minorities

MCH – Maternal and Child Health

MDGs – Millennium Development Goals

MSME – Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

MUDRA – Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency

MYRADA – Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency

NABARD – National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development

NALSA – National Legal Services Authority

NFHS – National Family Health Survey

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

ODA – Official Development Assistance

OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OECD DAC – OECD Development Assistance Committee

PM-DevINE – Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North Eastern Region

PMMY – Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana

PRI – Panchayati Raj Institutions

PWDs – Persons with Disabilities

PWDVA – Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act

RMNCH+A – Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health.

SCGs – Savings and Credit Groups

SCs/STs - Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes

SDG 1 – No Poverty

SDG 2 – Zero Hunger

SDG 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing

SDG 4 – Quality Education

SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

SDG 10 – Reduced Inequality

SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

SDG 13 – Climate Action

SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

SEWA – Self-Employed Women's Association

SHGs – Self-Help Groups

SRHR – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

TLWR – Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights (Oxfam framework)

TOSSD – Total Official Support for Sustainable Development

UHNI – Ultra High Net-worth Individual

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNGA– United Nations General Assembly

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USD – United States Dollar

WAD – Women and Development

WASH – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

WID – Women in Development

WMM – Women Moving Millions

Annotated Bibliography

The foundation of gender equity work in India traces back to reform movements of the early 19th century. This body of work has been sustained over generations by grassroots organizers, practitioners, and scholars, whose contributions have produced an evolving understanding of how gender inequality is produced and what addressing it requires. This work has not developed in isolation; it has also been shaped by state policy, development priorities, philanthropic trends, and shifting global politics. Understanding the present funding landscape therefore requires examining the historical, political, and institutional forces that have shaped how gender equity has been conceptualized and resourced over time. The sources below have informed our research and analysis and reflect the broader body of scholarship and practice that underpins this report.

Timeline

This timeline is provided solely as historical and research context. References to movements, advocacy, policy developments, organizations or funders are descriptive and do not indicate Dasra's endorsement, participation, funding or institutional position. Entries draw on published histories of the Indian women's movement and on public records of policy and philanthropic developments.

1940s–50s

Policy & Law

1946 The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established as a functional commission of ECOSOC. Its mandate was to promote women's rights in political, economic, civil, social, and educational fields; prepare recommendations and reports to ECOSOC; and make recommendations on urgent problems. The CSW became the principal global policy-making body on gender equality and remains so today.

Source: United Nations Economic and Social Council, Resolution Establishing the Commission on the Status of Women, E/RES/2/11, 21 June 194; United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women, United Nations.

1956 The Hindu Succession Act enhanced women's property rights but some concerns persisted.

Source: Government of India, The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, Ministry of Law and Justice, 1956

Movements & Civil Society

Women's political participation in the nationalist movement created India's first generation of conscious women leaders. Sarojini Naidu (later the first woman President of the Indian National Congress), Aruna Asaf Ali (who hoisted the Indian flag at the 1942 Quit India Movement rally in Bombay), Sucheta Kripalani (later independent India's first woman Chief Minister), and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit were central figures. Women's participation in the nationalist movement created a generation of politically conscious women leaders who would shape post-Independence policy. It is estimated that approximately 17,000 women were imprisoned during the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Sources: Rajya Sabha Secretariat, Women Members of Rajya Sabha, Parliament of India. Women Members of Rajya Sabha; Shrivastava, M. (2017). Invisible Women in History and Global Studies: Reflections from an Archival Research Project. Globalizations, 14(1), 1–16.

Philanthropy & Funding

Funding for women and girls in India during this period came from multiple sources. Large industrial families such as the Tata Trusts, Birla Foundation, and the Sarabhai family supported areas such as girls' education, health, and social welfare.

Community trusts and caste-based welfare funds proliferated, supporting girls' schools and maternal health clinics. This was the dominant mode for most Indian givers.

Sources: Mathieu Cantegreil, Dweep Chanana and Ruth Kattumuri (eds.), Revealing Indian Philanthropy, Alliance Publishing Trust, 2013; Indian Space Research Organisation, Dr. Vikram Ambalal Sarabhai, Government of India.

1948 Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay built the Indian Co-operative Union and later the Crafts Council of India and the National School of Drama — mobilizing financial and institutional resources to support artisan women across India, blending livelihood generation and cultural preservation.

Source: Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, Fifth Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Memorial Lecture, Government of India.

1960s

Policy & Law

1961 Dowry Prohibition Act enacted in India. Amendments to the Act (1984 and 1986) introduced clauses on penalties for demanding dowry, minimum and maximum penalties for giving or taking dowries, and banning advertisements offering money in connection with a marriage.

Source: People's Archive of Rural India, The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, PARI Library, 1961

Maternity Benefit Act enacted in India, mandating paid maternity leave and prohibiting dismissal during pregnancy.

Source: People's Archive of Rural India, The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, PARI Library, 1961

Movements & Civil Society

Development theory globally still treated women as passive beneficiaries. The 'Women in Development' (WID) approach that recognized women as agents was only beginning to form. Emergence of student, peasant and anti-caste movements which provided a theoretical platform for urban educated women to organize into autonomous groups.

Source: INFLIBNET, Women's Movement in India – Social Movement, INFLIBNET, Ministry of Education, Government of India.

Philanthropy & Funding

Philanthropic attention to women in this period remained predominantly welfare oriented. Literacy campaigns, maternal and child health (MCH) services, and vocational training programs for women were the dominant modes of philanthropic intervention.

Source: Kathleen D. McCarthy, From Government to Grass-Roots Reform: The Ford Foundation's Population Programmes in South Asia, 1959–1981, Voluntas.

1970s

Policy & Law

1974 The Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) submitted its report, *Towards Equality*, to the Government of India. It documented the deterioration in women's status since Independence across health, education, employment, and political representation.

Source: People's Archive of Rural India, Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, PARI Library, 1974

1975 The First UN World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City. The UN Decade for Women was declared with the theme Equality, Development and Peace (1976–1985).

Source: United Nations, World Conference of the International Women's Year, Mexico City, 1975, United Nations, [n.d.]

1976 The Equal Remuneration Act was enacted in India, mandating equal pay for equal work and prohibiting gender discrimination in hiring and promotion.

Source: Press Information Bureau, Equal Remuneration Act, Government of India, 2023

1979 The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the UN General Assembly.

Source: OHCHR, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1979

Movements & Civil Society

1972 The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) was formally registered as a trade union in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. It was born when Ela Bhatt stood alongside poor migrant handcart-pullers and headloaders in the city's cloth market, listening to their struggles and uniting them for fair wages.

Source: Self-Employed Women's Association, History, SEWA.

1973-74 The Chipko Movement began when Gaura Devi led 27 women in Uttarakhand to protect trees from being felled by hugging them. and was followed by the implementation of The Forest Conservation Act in 1980.

Sources: Ecology Action Centre, Ecofeminists, Ecology Action Centre, 2023; Kumud Sharma, Kusum Nautiyal and Balaji Pandey, Women in Struggle: Role and Participation of Women in the ChipkoMovement in Uttarakhand Region of Uttar Pradesh, Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1987,

1975 Onwards The Autonomous Women's Movement (AWM) emerges as progressive organizations recognize patriarchal oppression as the root cause of women's oppression. Collectives like Saheli and Manushi form organizations, spearheading public campaigns on dowry and sexual violence.

Source: Srila Roy, The Indian Women's Movement: Within and Beyond NGOization, Journal of South Asian Development, 10(1), 2015, pp. 96–117.

Philanthropy & Funding

International funders such as the Ford Foundation, Oxfam, and USAID (under the Percy Amendment) became major funders of Indian women's organizations. This initiated a long-term relationship between global philanthropy and India's women's development sector.

Sources: Ford Foundation, Changing the Game for Women and Girls, Ford Foundation; Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, Silver Shackles: Women and Development in India, Oxfam GB, 1984; U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, Foreign Assistance Act / Percy Amendment, U.S. Department of State; U.S. Agency for International Development, Third World Women, USAID.

SEWA pioneered 'solidarity philanthropy', where women from low-income households pooled small resources to build collective institutions (the SEWA Bank, producer cooperatives, and childcare cooperatives). This

model was bottom-up, member-owned, and built on women's collective agency.

Source: Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), History

1980s

Policy & Law

1985 The Third UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi adopted the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000 — a comprehensive framework for advancing women's equality in development, peace, and decision-making.

Source: United Nations, World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women, Nairobi, 1985, United Nations, [n.d.]

1986 National Education Policy recognized education as an instrument of women's empowerment.

Source: Ministry of Education, Government of India, National Policy on Education, Programme of Action, Government of India.

1988 Mahila Samakhya Program launched in India, where village-level women's collectives (sanghams) use participatory methods for 'education for women's equality', not merely literacy.

Source: Ministry of Education, Mahila Samakhya: Genesis, Government of India, [n.d.]

Movements & Civil Society

1980s The AWM drives national campaigns on women and violence, while ensuring autonomy by not accepting any funding. Women participate in mass movements like textile strikes, students protests and environmental issues too.

Source: Krishnaraj, M. (2012). The women's movement in India: A hundred year history. Social Change, 42(3), 325-333 ; Kumar, R. (1989). Contemporary Indian feminism. Feminist Review, (33), 20-29."

1984-85 MYRADA (Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency), Karnataka, pioneered informal Savings and Credit Groups (SCGs) — the precursor to India's SHG movement.

Source: MYRADA, History, MYRADA, [n.d.]

1987 NABARD piloted an SHG-Bank Linkage Program connecting women's savings groups to formal credit. The SHG became the foundational unit of grassroots women's organizing in India — simultaneously a financial tool, a social platform, and a vehicle for collective action.

Source: NABARD, SHG-Bank Linkage Programme, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, [n.d.]

Philanthropy & Funding

1983 Mama Cash was founded in the Netherlands — the first international women's fund in the world — as a mechanism to resource the work for women's rights and social transformation that was otherwise neglected by the worlds of philanthropy and government funding. By 1985, approximately 35 women's funds were in some stage of development.

Source: Mama Cash, Who We Are, Mama Cash, [n.d.]

The Global Fund for Women supported the emergence of other women's funds, such as the African Women's Development Fund.

Source: Uprising of Women in Philanthropy, Building the Global Women's Funding Movement, Uprising of Women in Philanthropy, [n.d.]

1986 The MacArthur Foundation began grantmaking in India and opened a New Delhi office in 1994. The foundation's work primarily supported reducing maternal mortality and advancing SRHR for young people, along with improving secondary education participation for girls from marginalized communities.

Source: MacArthur Foundation (2021). MacArthur's population and reproductive health grantmaking: Part I: A narrative history of the MacArthur Foundation's population and reproductive health grantmaking (1986-2019)

1990s

Policy & Law

1993 The UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna adopted the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, which affirmed that the human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights.

Source: OHCHR, Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1993

1994 The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo was a landmark event on reproductive rights. It centered on women's right to decide on number, spacing, and timing of children.

Source: UNFPA, International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), UNFPA, [n.d.]

1995 The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) was adopted by 189 states. The most comprehensive global framework for women's equality; it continues to be the reference document today.

Sources: UN Women, The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at 30 — and why that matters for gender equality, UN Women, 2025; Ford Foundation, 1999 Annual Report, Ford Foundation, 1999;

1997 The Supreme Court of India formulated the Vishaka Guidelines, mandating organizations to establish mechanisms for redressal of sexual harassment complaints.

Source: Supreme Court of India, Vishaka & Ors. v. State of Rajasthan & Ors., AIR 1997 SC 3011, Supreme Court of India, 1997

1999 The UN designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Source: UN Women, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, UN Women, [n.d.]

Movements & Civil Society

"NGOization" begins as autonomous women's collectives become funded formal organizations working on social transformation through externally funded projects. Activism addresses new challenges brought by economic liberalization.

Source: Vasudha Katju (2022) The autonomous women's movement in India: Beyond the NGOization framework, Asian Journal of Women's Studies, 28:4, 495-509, DOI: 10.1080/12259276.2022.2142361

NABARD's SHG-Bank Linkage Program (formally 1992) scaled rapidly. By the late 1990s, hundreds of thousands of SHGs were operational across India — largest concentrations in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala. SHGs became multi-purpose platforms: financial services, literacy, health education, and political participation — not just savings groups.

Source: Source: National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), SHGs: Saving for the Present, Securing the Future, NABARD.

Philanthropy & Funding

International philanthropic infrastructure deepened: global foundations sustained Indian women's organizations through the decade, creating institutional capacity. Beijing BPfA created a global advocacy framework that philanthropists could fund against — tying donations to measurable international commitments.

Source: United Nations, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995.

2000s

Policy & Law

2000 The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted. Goal 3 (Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women) specifically targeted the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education (by 2005) and at all levels by 2015.

Source: United Nations, United Nations Millennium Development Goals, United Nations, [n.d.]

2001 The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women — India's first comprehensive national policy document on women's empowerment — was adopted. It called for gender budgeting and mainstreaming across all government departments.

Source: PRS Legislative Research, National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001, PRS Legislative Research, 2001

2005 The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) was enacted in India. The PWDVA contains a comprehensive definition of the term 'Domestic Violence' to include economic and emotional abuse.

Source: Press Information Bureau, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2025

2005-06 India's first Gender Budget Statement introduced. By 2007–08, 50 ministries had established Gender Budgeting Cells.

Source: Vibhuti Patel, Gender Budgeting in India, UN Women Gender Responsive Budgeting, [n.d.]

Movements & Civil Society

2007 Gender mainstreaming in watershed development — women's formal inclusion in Watershed Committees was introduced during this period, following sustained engagement by ICRISAT and civil society organizations, though decision-making power remained uneven.

Source: International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), A Comprehensive Assessment of Watershed Programs in India: Summary Proceedings of the Review and Component Workshops, 23–27 July 2007, ICRISAT, 2007.

2008 Breakthrough launched 'Bell Bajao!' (Ring the Bell), a media and cultural campaign calling on men and boys to speak out against domestic violence. Its award-winning public service announcements, inspired by true stories, reached over 130 million viewers across India.

Source: Breakthrough, Bell Bajao, Breakthrough, [n.d.]

Philanthropy & Funding

2007 Women Moving Millions (WMM) began as a campaign with the goal of building a global collective of women making bold philanthropic gifts of USD 1 million or more for the advancement of women and girls. Between 2007 and 2009, WMM raised over USD174 million from 95 members.

Source: Women Moving Millions, Our Story, Women Moving Millions, [n.d.]

Gender mainstreaming entered philanthropic vocabulary — funders began requiring gender analysis in grantee proposals and program design.

Source: OECD, How Philanthropic Foundations Support Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, OECD, 2024; Climate and Development Knowledge Network, Growing Demand from Funders for Gender-Sensitive CCA Proposals, 2014.

2010s

Policy & Law

2010 UN Women established by unanimous vote of the UN General Assembly. Source: UN Women, About UN Women, UN Women, [n.d.]

2013 India became the first country to mandate CSR spending (2% of net profit) through the Companies Act Section 135. 'Promoting gender equality and empowering women' was listed as an eligible activity.

Source: Government of India, The Companies Act, 2013 — Section 135 and Schedule VII, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2013

2014 The Supreme Court of India passed the NALSA judgement, recognizing transgender persons as a third gender.

Source: Centre for Law & Policy Research, NALSA v. Union of India: Third Gender Identity, Centre for Law & Policy Research, 2014

2015 The SDGs were adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit. This includes Goal 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) with nine specific targets on discrimination, violence, unpaid care, reproductive rights, among others.

Source: United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations, [n.d.]

The 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme launched to address declining child sex ratios. It first targeted 100 districts with the lowest Child Sex Ratio and then expanded nationally.

Source: Ministry of Women and Child Development, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Government of India, 2015

Movements & Civil Society

2010 Gender lens investing gained recognition as an organized field — the deliberate integration of gender analysis into investment analysis and decision-making.

Source: Criterion Institute, Our History: Gender Lens Investing, Criterion Institute.

2014-15 Digital feminist activism expanded in India with platforms such as Feminism in India, The Ladies Finger, and Agents of Ishq building large online communities. Campaigns such as 'Pinjra Tod' raised questions about curfew rules in university hostels in Delhi. Similarly, 'Why Loiter' challenged gendered restrictions on women's use of public spaces.

Sources: Centre for Internet and Society, Understanding Feminist Infrastructures, 2026; Vani Vivek, After claiming the night, Pinjra Tod heads towards Jan Sunwai on October 10, DU Beat, 2015; Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade, Why Loiter? Radical Possibilities for Gendered Dissent, 2011.

Philanthropy & Funding

Mandatory CSR created a new and large pool of corporate funding for women, though much of it remained welfare oriented

Sources: Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India, CSR Activities by Corporate Houses, 2016; Pragyan Parimita Nayak and S. K. Das, Analysis of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Expenditure and its Execution for Women Empowerment in India, 2021.

Professional philanthropic infrastructure grew in India's UHNI community: donor-advised funds, giving circles, and philanthropic advisors emerged.

Source: Accelerate Indian Philanthropy & Boston Consulting Group, Wealth with Purpose: A Report on Private Indian Philanthropy, 2024.

2020s

Policy & Law

2020 UN Women documented a global 'shadow pandemic' amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Women bore disproportionate job losses, unpaid care burdens, increased incidence of domestic violence, and SRHR access restrictions.

Source: UN Women, Violence against women during COVID-19, UN Women, 2020

2022 The Supreme Court of the United States overturned Roe v. Wade (1973), eliminating the federal constitutional right to abortion in the US, affecting global funding.

Source: Supreme Court of the United States, Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, No. 19-1392, Supreme Court of the United States, 2022

2023 India's Constitution (106th Amendment) Act reserved one-third of seats for women in Lok Sabha, state assemblies, and Delhi assembly, including SC/ST reserved seats.

Source: Government of India, The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, Ministry of Law and Justice, 2023

Movements & Civil Society

Feminist digital organizing accelerated through the pandemic — mutual aid networks, social media campaigns, and online communities scaled rapidly.

Source: Pallavi Banerjee, Deep Care: The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Work of Marginal Feminist Organizing in India, Gender, Work & Organization, 2022.

Shifts in the international policy environment on reproductive rights created new urgency for civil society. Funding for women's rights organizations became more contested internationally.

Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office, International Family Planning Assistance: USAID Has Faced Implementation Challenges Related to U.S. Policy and COVID-19, 2022.

Philanthropy & Funding

Women's funds provided capital to underserved areas during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, The Urgent Action Fund provided grants for feminist activists working on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic response. It prioritized activities related to community care, remote work and digital gatherings, online advocacy campaigns, COVID-19 awareness campaigns, and supporting vulnerable populations.

Source: Feminist COVID Response, Funding, Feminist COVID Response, [n.d.]

2021

Co-Impact launched the Gender Fund aiming to raise and deploy USD 1 billion to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women's leadership by supporting women-led organizations in the Majority World.

Source: Co-Impact, The Gender Fund, Co-Impact, 2021

In India, family philanthropy leadership and governance are becoming more inclusive and forward-looking, with women leading philanthropic efforts. Giving priorities are also expanding beyond legacy causes toward GEDI (gender, equity, diversity, and inclusion), climate action, livelihood enhancement, arts, culture and heritage, and animal welfare.

Source: Dasra & Bain & Company, India Philanthropy Report 2026: The Step Change India Needs – Strengthening Philanthropy Infrastructure to Accelerate Private Giving, 2026.

The EdelGive Hurun India Philanthropy List 2025 counted 24 women among 191 philanthropists who collectively donated INR 10,380 crore/ INR 10,3800 million in FY2025. These included Rohini Nilekani (climate resilience, education, gender equity, governance, and civil society); Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw (science, research, and education); Bina Shah of the Harish & Bina Shah Foundation (arts, education, environmental sustainability, health, and livelihood); and Anu Aga and family (education, through the Thermax Foundation).

Source: EdelGive Foundation and Hurun India, EdelGive Hurun India Philanthropy List 2025, EdelGive Foundation and Hurun Research Institute, 2025

Key Theoretical Approaches to Gender in International Development

Three frameworks that have shaped how development organizations, governments, and philanthropists understand and respond to gender inequity.

Women in Development (WID) **Origin: Early 1970s; Second wave feminism**	**Women and Development (WAD)** **Origin: 1975; Neo-Marxist feminism and dependency theory**	**Gender and Development (GAD)** **Origin: 1980s; Socialist feminism**
WID holds that women are often excluded from the benefits of development and seeks to ensure resources and interventions improve their condition. It sought to recognize and integrate women into existing development aid policies and programs. However, WID does not challenge male-female hierarchies — it focuses instead on practical, women-specific needs such as skills development for income generation. Its failure to address power differentials between women and men is considered its major shortcoming. [lvi]	The WAD approach aimed to explain women's exploitation through the material conditions of capitalist development, with a specific focus on the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism — setting it apart from WID. WAD recognized that women have always contributed to economic development, regardless of whether their work occurred in the public or private sphere. [lvii]	GAD-centered approaches rest on three premises: that gender relations are fundamentally power relations; that gender is a socio-cultural construction rather than a biological given; and that structural changes in gender roles are possible. Central to GAD is the belief that transforming unequal power relations between women and men is a prerequisite for sustainable improvements in women's lives, placing the onus on both women and men to reshape gender relations. This conceptual shift from 'women' to 'gender' also created space to include a focus on men and boys. [lviii]

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