



Rays of Light

Navigating the polycrisis with a focus on
India and Philanthropy

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Executive Summary

The report uses the metaphor of light to illustrate the polycrisis. It emphasizes the importance of keenness and illumination within us and in the world around us to comprehend this phenomenon while thinking about resilience. The research journey reflects the sporadic nature of light, drawing upon emerging theories and practical experiences in philanthropy and non-profit sectors. Focused on India as a microcosm of global dynamics, the report identifies philanthropy as a potent force for change, capable of addressing immediate needs and building sustainable solutions. The report is structured into the four sections below.

1. The Kaleidoscope:

Reflecting recurring patterns, setting the context by unveiling the landscape in India

In a world facing the polycrisis, understanding its impact and finding solutions that foster resilience is paramount. However, the narrative today led by the West and North, which fails to encapsulate the disproportionate impact felt by the Global Majority. This report initiates an inquiry by delving into three pivots: the significance of acknowledging the Global Majority, the relevance of the Indian context, and the crucial role of philanthropy.

The Indian context is a microcosm of global challenges and solutions:

The Indian context emerges as a microcosm of global challenges, offering reflections and solutions due to its diverse complexities. India, straddling global leadership and deep-rooted barriers, champions the cause of the Global Majority and hosts platforms amplifying their voices. However, it grapples with income inequality, unemployment, healthcare disparities, and gender inequality, echoing global concerns. Acknowledging the Global Majority is imperative as the pandemic unveiled stark global asymmetries, showcasing the need for a more equitable response. Developing countries, primarily constituting the Global Majority, face exacerbated challenges with insufficient assistance, exacerbating humanitarian crises and constraining fiscal capabilities.

Philanthropy can play a crucial role in addressing inequality and fostering resilience:

Collaborative efforts involving governments, businesses, civil society, and philanthropy are essential in navigating the complexities of the polycrisis. Philanthropy emerges as a key stakeholder, historically embedded in India's cultural fabric, addressing inequality and societal challenges. Its role in empowering grassroots initiatives and bridging funding gaps is pivotal, especially amidst expanding needs and fiscal constraints. Philanthropy, with its agility and strategic partnerships, can amplify impact, foster resilience, and drive inclusive development tailored to local contexts. In the face of unprecedented challenges, philanthropy emerges as a beacon of hope, driving adaptive change essential for a resilient future.

2. The Prism

Dissecting homogenous light, detailing analytical frameworks while acknowledging boundaries

The first part of this section outlines six interconnected features that draw upon the polycrisis experience in India. These features offer insights into the tangible challenges and opportunities to help understand the context and depict a relationality to the Global Majority.

The linkage between climate change, biodiversity, natural resource crisis, and food security:

The vulnerability to climate change poses significant threats to food production, security, and rural livelihoods. Addressing this multifaceted crisis requires resilience-building approaches, emphasizing a combination mitigation and adaptation strategies to safeguard vulnerable communities.

Ties between well-being, personhood, and inadequate social security:

Social determinants profoundly impact individual well-being, with marginalized communities facing disparities in access to safe environments, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities. Strengthening social security measures and promoting inclusive policies are essential for addressing the diverse needs of vulnerable populations.

Intersectional identities and unequal power structures:

Complex societal dynamics encompass various intersecting identities, including gender, caste, ethnicity, and class, which shape unequal power dynamics and perpetuate cycles of discrimination and poverty. Adopting an intersectional approach is crucial for understanding and addressing systemic inequalities within the polycrisis.

Research and development to boost local economies and solutions:

There are gaps in inter-disciplinary support and institutional capacity for research and development (R&D). Enhancing R&D capabilities across sectors and fostering local innovation is essential for addressing interconnected crises and promoting economic resilience.

Interlocks between public institutions and accountability in governance:

The effectiveness of public institutions in governance and development is crucial for upholding democratic values and ensuring accountability. Strengthening institutional integrity and promoting good governance are imperative for building resilience and addressing societal tensions.

Strong infrastructure and improving universal access to services:

Infrastructure development plays a pivotal role in meeting development goals and ensuring equitable access to essential services. Investing in infrastructure, particularly in health, education, and agriculture, is vital for addressing socio-economic challenges and promoting inclusive growth.

The second part of the section focuses on philanthropic trends in India, which are evolving towards catalytic action, emphasizing collaboration, community engagement, and evidence-based approaches. This shift positions philanthropy to address complex challenges like the polycrisis by fostering resilience within ecosystems and communities. To understand how philanthropy can effectively respond to these challenges, a temporal analysis is conducted, utilizing the Three Horizons Framework. This framework maps 10 philanthropy practices based on patterns and time to envision a transition towards a future equipped to tackle the polycrisis. A glimpse of the analysis is as follows.

Horizon 1:

Common philanthropic practices risking obsolescence due to a myopic vision, scale prioritization over impact, and neglect of community consultation and broader social change complexities

Horizon 3:

Promising future practices emphasizing collaboration, community-centric programs, and unrestricted funding, fostering resilience, equity, and inclusive solutions to the polycrisis

Horizon 2:

Innovative practices advancing philanthropy towards Horizon 3, focusing on intangible causes, narrative-building, and supporting change agents, with a human-centric approach prioritizing community well-being and resilience

3. The Spectrum

Culminating as takeaways, with a deep dive on philanthropic practice and case studies

Emerging practices identified within Horizons 2 and 3 represent pockets of the future already visible in the current landscape of Indian philanthropy. Although these trends are currently evolving, their adoption is likely to increase as the polycrisis deepens. These seven practices can be articulated as the visible spectrum, lighting the path ahead to guide philanthropic action.

Practice 1

Shifting power dynamics towards equity by anchoring collaboration among diverse stakeholders across sectors and levels

- ✓ Builds consensus among diverse stakeholder groups through convenings, dialogues, and participatory processes
- ✓ Implements programs with a focus on leveraging strengths of partners + pooling funding for common outcomes

Practice 2

Exhibiting catalytic giving by providing autonomous, unrestricted, and long-term funding to organizations

- ✓ Funds corpus, administrative, personnel and program budgets without placing terms or conditions
- ✓ Makes funding commitments to civil society organizations between or greater than 5-to-10-year horizons

Practice 3

Building community-centric programs by supporting local leadership as well as enabling decentralized decision-making and problem-solving

- ✓ Supports organizations run by community members and proximate leaders with an intersectional lens
- ✓ Endorses organizations with participatory processes and community collaboration built into programs

Practice 4

Foreseeing the unpredictability of philanthropic work by accounting for failures, risks, and the need for experimentation

- ✓ Facilitates the execution of pilots, innovations, and experimentation by providing risk capital
- ✓ Encourages organizations to report on failures, learnings, challenges by facilitating open dialogue

Practice 5

Strengthening civil society institutions through capacity building to foster agility for ongoing and emerging crises

- ✓ Bolsters organizational capacity through trainings for program staff, administration, and governance
- ✓ Enables cohort-based cross-learning opportunities for common themes such as technology, finance, etc.

Practice 6

Providing resources for intangible causes by supporting narrative building through civil society movements and individuals as change agents

- ✓ Sponsors collectives, fellowships, individual change agents, and/ or civil society movements
- ✓ Finances research, advocacy, campaigns, and/or convenings to change the narrative

Practice 7

Promoting the wellbeing, mental health, and collective resilience of affected communities and frontline workers engaged

- ✓ Focuses on the mental health and wellbeing of frontline workers and practitioners engaged
- ✓ Considers mental health and well-being as an overarching developmental outcome for building collective resilience

The section also includes a rubric for self-reflection to help philanthropic actors map their own response to the polycrisis. To demonstrate how these philanthropic responses are applied, case studies from the Indian context are provided, which delve into a specific practice in the spectrum highlighted earlier.

4. The Observatory

Focusing on the radical and enduring tenets, as aspirations for the future

From an aspirational perspective, there are critical shifts needed in philanthropy. There is a need for philanthropic preparedness and intentionality, to acknowledge inequality, embrace flux, and assume accountability. This transformation can be initiated through the tenets highlighted below:

- The polycrisis prompts scrutiny of unequal power dynamics, urging philanthropy to acknowledge historical perspectives and assume accountability
- Philanthropy must be seen as 'sharing' rather than giving to address systemic disparities and empower marginalized communities, as this can level inequalities
- Resilience requires patient capital that fosters lasting change through flexible, long-term grants and community collaboration
- Philanthropy must move beyond addressing isolated causes to tackle root issues underlying interconnected crises

The report has focused on funders and their giving patterns. However, there is a need to further explore the perspective of nonprofits, civil society, and community leaders working on the ground. This report is aimed at illuminating the path for philanthropy, offering preliminary guidance, highlighting primary risks, and proposing strategies to effectively use capital to bolster collective resilience amidst an unprecedented future. Forming a response will require both deep introspection and agile action. Given the polycrisis threatens human survival itself – it is important for different actors within the philanthropy ecosystem to seek the light within and show an unwavering commitment to fostering resilience, for people and the planet.

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Frequently Asked Questions on the Polycrisis

In the course of our research process, we identified a recurring need to clarify the meaning of the term "polycrisis." Recognizing this, we opted to begin the report by addressing frequently asked questions (FAQs).

What is the 'polycrisis'?

The polycrisis refers to the situation in which a society or global system faces multiple interconnected crises simultaneously, which can be economic, political, environmental, health-related, or of various other types.ⁱ There is wide agreement among experts that these interacting crises produce harm greater than the sum of those crises would produce in isolation, if their systems and roots were not intertwined.ⁱⁱ

How does a polycrisis differ from a regular crisis?

The Cascade Institute discusses that the polycrisis significantly degrades humanity's prospects.ⁱⁱⁱ It is characterized by the convergence of several crises, often exacerbating each other, leading to a more complex and challenging situation than a single, isolated crisis.^{iv}

Why is the polycrisis important right now?

Currently, 'polycrisis' is not regarded as a generic term but a proper noun, representing this specific era of global history. There exists a single polycrisis, occurring in the current Anthropocene, where human activity has had a significant impact on the interconnected planetary systems. The polycrisis today is marked by an accelerated pace, and an overwhelming breakdown of multiple systems all at once.^v This era combines antithetically both vast material prosperity and inequality that has brought us to the brink of an ecological and systemic breakdown. It is an unprecedented phase in history, distinct from any previous experience, recorded in civilization.^{vi}

Where is India situated in the global polycrisis?

The polycrisis is a global phenomenon, affecting humanity unequivocally. India also faces the polycrisis, visible in several interlinked challenges such as economic inequality, disease burden, internal distress migration, food insecurity, etc.

How does the polycrisis impact society?

The polycrisis can have widespread and profound effects, including social unrest, economic hardships, displacement for large number of people, and challenges to governance and institutions.^{vii}

What are few critiques of the term ‘polycrisis’?

Critics argue that the term is oversimplified and disregards the prolonged consequences of capitalism. They claim that there is a tendency of resorting to “brute empiricism” – unpacking only what appears to be, rather than questioning the layers beneath the surface. There is oversight in addressing the substantive drivers and implicit causes of the crisis.^{viii} Some have dismissed the term for being unclear and unnecessary, referring to it as merely history in process.^{ix}

How are philanthropy and the polycrisis linked?

Philanthropy can be pivotal in responding to the polycrisis by building collective resilience for immediate needs and future shocks. It can help address funding gaps, pioneer innovative solutions, engage communities, and provide relief in times of disasters.^x Furthermore, by providing long-term flexible capital and shifting power dynamics, it can help build collective resilience of communities and planetary systems in the face of unprecedented challenges.^{xi}

What role does international cooperation play in addressing the polycrisis?

International collaboration can be crucial in addressing the polycrisis, given the repercussions are not confined to national borders. For example, cooperation on crisis response such as climate disasters and pandemics is essential to deploy solutions at scale.^{xii}

How can societies respond to the polycrisis?

A response to the polycrisis would involve acknowledgement and coordinated efforts across sectors, including government, civil society, and the private sector. Focusing on adaptability, resilience, and preparedness will be necessary.

Preface |

Light as a Metaphor

We Have Been Here Before by Hamraaz¹

I dreamt that, nearing his end,
my father wrote the story of his life
in the language of his grandmother.

I don't understand the words,
he told me, but I think you
will find it useful someday—

it has something to do
with the way we lived
in the dark times that came

before these dark times.
It is not easy to remember,
he told me. It has something

to do with scattered light,
and how I love you.

In the pursuit of understanding complex global challenges like the interconnected crises we face (the polycrisis), 'light' can be a great metaphor, echoing the sentiment in Hamraaz's poem "We Have Been Here Before" where scattered light illuminates the path through dark times. The poem also touches upon the resilience we find through interpersonal relationships, social connections, and our intertwined community consciousness.

Light enables us to perceive and discern the world around us, instilling hope, and courage to navigate the pathways ahead. Comprehending the 'polycrisis' demands a similar illumination, within ourselves and upon the world around us. Learning about this subject requires a keenness to see beyond the surface. Thus, in our endeavor to research and navigate this complex subject – we have used 'light' in its myriad appearances as a guide to glean, discern, present insights to inspire action.

Our journey through this inquiry has mirrored the sporadic nature of light itself – appearing inconsistently across contexts, shifting like the sun setting in the West, while rising in the East. The research work builds upon emerging theory and narrative on the polycrisis, as well as our practice in the philanthropy and non-profit sectors. The insights are primarily based on practical experiences because the narrative is crafted as a call to action. The intention is to highlight prompts for reflection and provide guidelines for response, based on the wisdom of existing pathways.

¹ Hamraaz is a contemporary anonymous Indian poet who writes poetry about the dark times. Many of their poems became popular through Instagram.

This report explores the polycrisis through the lens of India, a microcosm of global dynamics, and investigates philanthropy as a potent force for change. As the world's most populous nation, India's strength in numbers has a significant influence on global development outcomes. Philanthropy (which refers to the donation of time, money, or resources to charitable causes), is a pivotal force for nudging transformative change and building collective resilience. It can help in responding to the polycrisis due to its risk-taking ability. Through flexible capital deployment and a long-term vision, philanthropy holds the capacity to not only address immediate needs but also build sustainable solutions on a global scale.

Collective resilience refers to the ability of communities and planetary systems to bounce back from challenges, can be fostered by philanthropy. Philanthropic organizations can build collective resilience by shifting power, providing resources, funding infrastructure development, and promoting collaborative action.

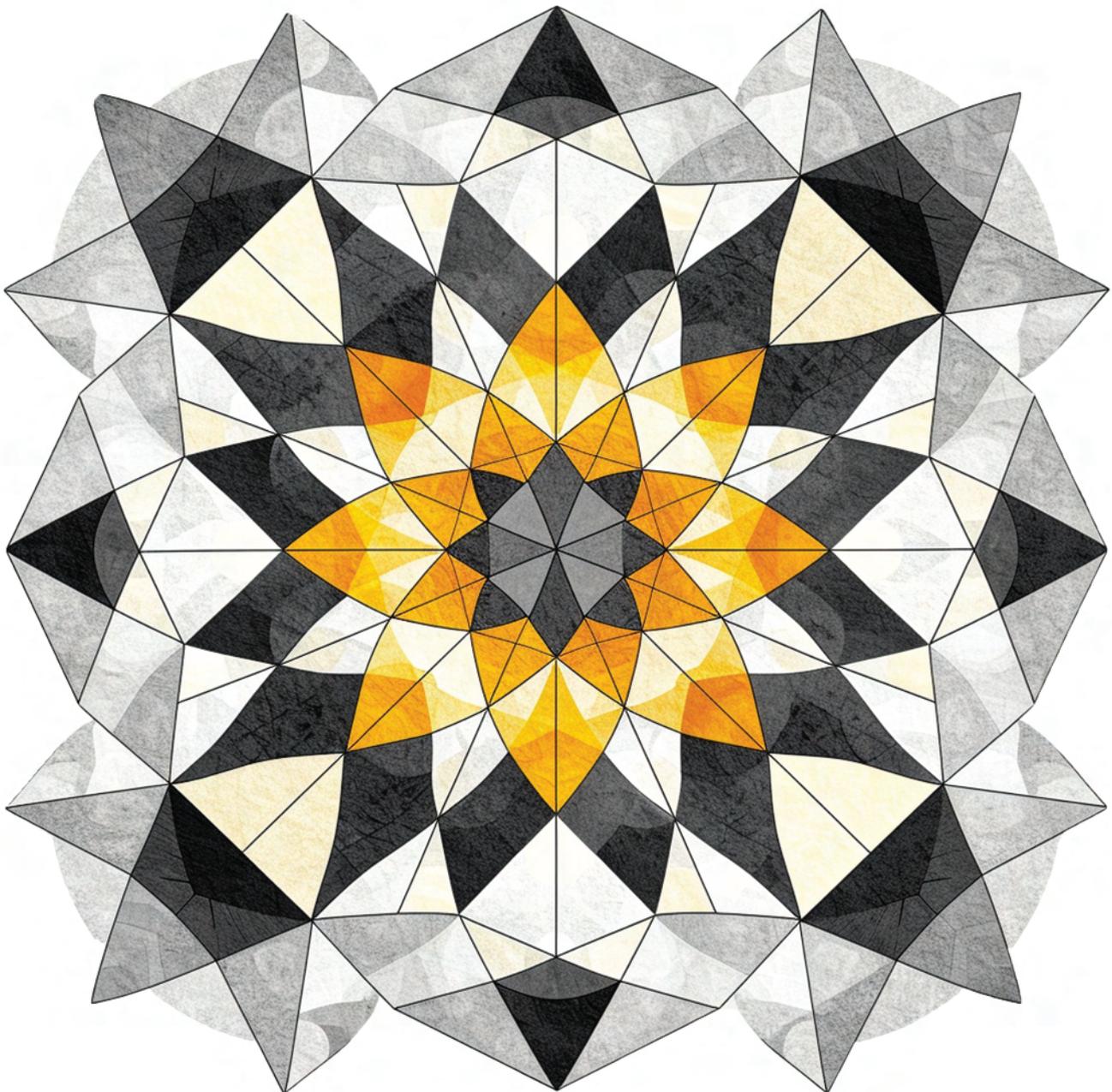
In this report, we will explore how philanthropy can foster collective resilience, the ability of communities to bounce back from challenges through four sections:

- a. **The kaleidoscope** reflecting recurring patterns, setting the context by unveiling the landscape in India
- b. **The observatory** focusing on the radical and enduring tenets, as aspirations for the future
- c. **The prism** dissecting homogenous light, detailing analytical frameworks while acknowledging boundaries
- d. **The spectrum** culminating as takeaways, with a deep dive on philanthropic practice and case studies

For a reader, the purpose of this report is to ignite a response. Acknowledging, understanding, dissecting, and highlighting insights can be important steps in creating transformative change.

The Kaleidoscope

The kaleidoscope mirrors repeated reflections to showcase patterns. This section sets the context for the report, by reflecting on India as a region, and philanthropy as a stakeholder. It lays the foundation with describing the geopolitical landscape and internal contours of India. The section also provides a view of the Indian philanthropy landscape, in relation to local and global nuances.



The perception of any phenomenon occurs at the level of optics, as it is seen by onlookers, and experiences, based on how it is felt by stakeholders. In the case of the polycrisis, the optics suggest that the narrativization is led by the West and North.^{xiii} Yet the Global Majority will feel the disproportionate impact. A more inclusive approach to understanding and addressing the polycrisis can help in crafting solutions addressing the diverse and far-reaching implications. Hence, this report begins with exploring three fundamental questions that have shaped our narrative and position in contributing to the evolving knowledge on polycrisis. The three questions are:

The three questions are:

- Why is it important to acknowledge the Global Majority?
- Why is the Indian context significant?
- Why is philanthropy a key stakeholder?

We have situated our research in the locus of India, extending to the Global Majority. While touching upon the geopolitical narratives, we cover India's critical position and the nuanced complexities that underpin its ascent on the global stage. We also examine the compounding challenges in India, offering an exploration of their ramifications within the broader context of the polycrisis. Philanthropy has been considered a critical stakeholder from the perspective of solutioning for the polycrisis. As we grapple with unprecedented challenges, the rhetoric that philanthropic giving exists because of inequalities and exploitative systems, must be acknowledged.^{xiv} Philanthropy must address the ongoing polycrisis by wielding the power of its substantial resources and flexibility at its disposal.

Why is it imperative to acknowledge the Global Majority?

The pandemic revealed global interconnectedness and asymmetries between countries, across various spheres. Evident in the mobilization of resources, distribution pathways struggled to enable recovery from the crisis, as well as provide social protection to

affected communities.^{xv} Early observations during the pandemic indicated a surprising twist in public health challenges, revealing that high-income countries exhibited higher cumulative and daily mortality rates. Data available over time highlighted a significant shift, developing countries had a higher share of deaths than previously thought, accounting for over 50% of the excess deaths.^{xvi} This brings us to two important questions: Would the repercussions of the polycrisis ever be experienced equally? How can we proactively address these fault lines to ensure a more equitable response in the future?

Assistance for developing economies continues to be insufficient. These are among the first to be impacted by global economic downturns, encountering substantial capital outflows, and more stringent financial conditions. Confronted with the most severe humanitarian crisis since World War II, amidst the aftermath of the pandemic, these economies are under unprecedented strain, further limiting their already constrained fiscal capacity to address urgent public health and social needs.^{xvii}

Historically, development agendas have been influenced by powerful and prosperous economies, shaping a narrative reiterating the dichotomy of the Global North and South. However, this framework falls short in understanding the polycrisis, which disproportionately impacts developing nations. To effectively address this, there is a need to shift power dynamics and redefine the narrative. The narratives around development should authentically reflect and be driven by the firsthand experiences and perspectives of those who are most impacted. Considering that two-thirds of the world's population resides in the Global South, it is evident that this region is in fact, the Global Majority.^{xviii} Studying the polycrisis requires a subversion of the dichotomy to accept the multilayered problems and conflicts faced by numerous developing nations like India, within the Global Majority.^{xix}

Why is the Indian context significant?

India can be considered as a microcosm in experiencing global challenges and a laboratory to test replicable solutions because of its own multifaceted/ myriad complexities. Placed at the intersections of global leadership, a robust development story, and deep-rooted structural barriers – India can provide deep reflections towards addressing and responding to the polycrisis.

Over the past decade, India has steadfastly advocated for the Global Majority, addressing not only its domestic challenges but also emerging as a prominent voice for the larger global population.

It has been showing a strong commitment to uphold the aspirations of the Global South and is on the path to shift power dynamics. As the host for the G20 summit for 2022-2023, India has promoted the interests of Africa, sustainable development, mainstreaming of gender equity, and unconditional development co-operation.^{xx} This role not only showcases India's commitment to addressing the shared concerns of the Global South but also highlights its determination to amplify the voices often overlooked on the international stage.^{xxi}



Figure 1: Key opportunities in the Indian context

Simultaneously, India grapples with multifaceted challenges. Income inequality looms large, leaving a sizable segment in extreme poverty while concentrating wealth among a few. Youth unemployment and the lack of job security contribute to severe mental health and socioeconomic issues. Urban unemployment surged to 10.05% in October 2023 from 5.98% in 2021.^{xxii} Disparities in healthcare persist, particularly in rural areas, reflected in only 0.5 public hospital beds per 1,000 people as per a WHO report.^{xxiii} Gender inequality continues to be a concern with India ranking 127 out of 146 countries on the Gender Gap Report 2023.^{xxiv} India ranks 111 out of 125 per 2023 Global Hunger Index - this poor ranking shows that food security is still a critical issue in India.^{xxv}

However, India's dedication/ commitment to addressing diverse concerns, spanning food security, infrastructure development, post-COVID inequalities, public health, technology access, climate change, and gender issues, resonates with similar challenges faced by other developing countries compared to Western and Northern development paradigms. Furthermore, India's stature as a leading economy, the world's largest democracy, and its substantial population endows it with significant leverage in global affairs.^{xxvi}

The challenges and opportunities in India reiterate the complexity of the context. However, within this complexity is an echo of the global polycrisis. Navigating these demands innovations, cross-sectoral collaborations, and adaptive strategies necessitates concerted efforts from governments, businesses, civil society, and international stakeholders to leverage the opportunities and steer towards resilient pathways for India, contributing towards the broader global response to the polycrisis.

Why is philanthropy a key stakeholder?

India has transformed into a giant economic force, outrunning most G20 economies and is projected to remain resilient against the backdrop of a sluggish global demand.^{xxvii} Its economic foothold rests with the top 1% of the country holding more than 40% of

the country's wealth.^{xxviii} Philanthropy can be an important stakeholder in addressing such inequality by reallocating resources or sharing financial assets and other resources among diverse segments of society. It has been an intrinsic part of the fabric of Indian society, deeply embedded within its cultural ethos and historical narrative. Through the infusion of ideas, innovations, and the establishment of crucial institutions, philanthropy has left a mark on the nation's development story.

Philanthropy has made a significant impact in the establishment and support of nonprofit organizations and community-based groups dedicated to addressing pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. The Indian development sector has seen initiatives by major philanthropists like Azim Premji, among others, whose foundation has made significant contributions in the education space. Through its various initiatives, including teacher training programs, school improvement projects, and policy advocacy efforts, the foundation has helped enhance educational outcomes and build capacity in schools and communities across the country, particularly in rural and marginalized areas.^{xxvii}

Historically, philanthropic action has been supporting grassroots initiatives and community-led projects that empower residents, strengthen social cohesion, and build resilience from the ground up. By providing grants, technical assistance, and mentorship, philanthropy has enabled communities to mobilize their own resources, leverage their strengths, and address challenges in ways that are culturally relevant and sustainable thereby addressing their hyperlocal and specific needs.

In the aftermath of the global pandemic, India is confronted with an array of development challenges that surpass the government's individual capacity to effectively address them. Most of the social sector spending in India, around 95%, has traditionally been shouldered by the public sector. However, due to an expanding budget deficit, increased debt burden, and rising crude oil prices, there's a growing need for private philanthropy to step in and fill the funding gap. Despite foreign funding remaining stagnant, private philanthropy has shown a moderate growth rate of about 10% in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, despite it being marginally higher than the previous growth rate of 5% from FY 2018 to FY 2023. Private philanthropy grew 10% in FY 2023, to INR 1.2 lakh crore (\$15 billion).^{xxvii}

The sheer scale and complexity of future challenges necessitate collaborative efforts from various sectors. Philanthropists can emerge as key players wielding a unique advantage. They possess a nimbleness and flexibility in their approach. This agility allows philanthropists to provide essential risk capital that fuels innovation and supports unconventional initiatives that might otherwise struggle to find backing in uncharted territories. By taking calculated risks and investing in bold ideas, philanthropy can catalyze transformative change and foster resilience within communities.

Moreover, philanthropic interventions have the potential to serve as catalysts, complementing institutional and governmental initiatives. By leveraging their flexibility, expertise, and resources, philanthropic organizations can fill gaps, test new approaches, and scale successful models, thereby supporting the ecosystem towards addressing complex challenges of our time.

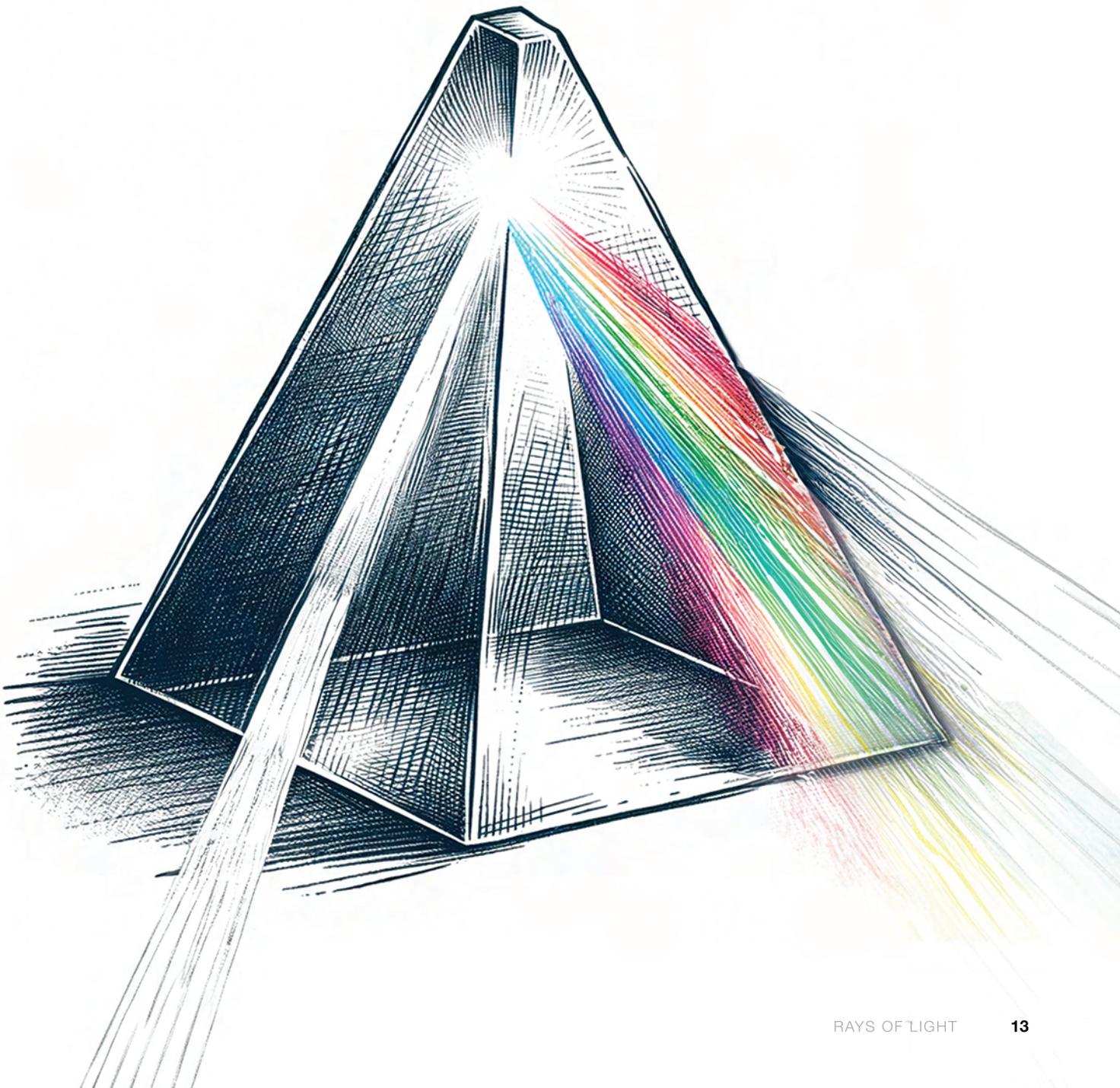
Through strategic partnerships and collaborative efforts, philanthropy can amplify impact, build capacity, and foster a culture of innovation and learning within communities. By engaging stakeholders at all levels and promoting participatory approaches, philanthropy empowers communities to take ownership of their development, identify local solutions, and drive sustainable change from the ground up.

Beyond funding the direct implementation of programs, private philanthropy has the potential to fuel the growth of research and advocacy organizations that generate knowledge, shape public discourse, and influence policy decisions in areas critical to bringing to the forefront, voices from the ground and shape development initiatives for resilience-building.

In emerging economies like India, philanthropy also assumes a heightened importance due to its ability to strengthen and enhance the quality of social service delivery, drive inclusive development, and experiment with innovative solutions tailored to local contexts. India's diverse and complex social landscape requires nuanced approaches, and philanthropic organizations often pioneer new models, pilot programs, and scalable interventions that government and larger institutions might find challenging to implement promptly. In the context of the polycrisis – philanthropy can drive adaptive change, which is essential to address the plethora of unprecedented future challenges.

The Prism

The prism is a tool that helps analyze homogenous light to understand its different constituents. The second part of the report describes the processes, tools, and limitations within our approach. It discusses the analytical framework applied for gleaning trends and identifying critical breakpoints. This helps contextualize both the polycrisis with reference to India, and other developing contexts, through features, as well as the philanthropy ecosystem, using the Three Horizons Framework.



Methodology and Limitations

The study explores the concept of "polycrisis" in the context of India and its impact on philanthropy. We first examined how "polycrisis" is understood globally, finding a gap between the experiences of developed and developing countries. While global discussions focused on issues like the Ukraine war or cost-of-living crisis, it overlooked the existing crises faced by low-resource nations. Thereafter, we shifted the focus to India, investigating how the polycrisis affects vulnerable populations. Through research and interviews the study identified key risks India faces and proposes six characteristics of the polycrisis within the country. Finally, the research examines how philanthropy can respond to this complex situation. It analyzes existing philanthropic practices in India and proposes a framework for effective interventions to build resilience among affected communities.

The study acknowledges limitations in its methodology. The researchers' role as intermediaries could introduce bias, and reliance on outdated data (like 2011 census) might affect accuracy. Additionally, the concept of "polycrisis" being new in India may have limited expert insights and the depth of findings. These limitations were mitigated by consulting sector experts, using accepted data sources, and including diverse perspectives.

Research question 1: What does the Polycrisis mean for India?
<p>Consolidating knowledge on the Polycrisis in India</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertook secondary research and desk review on the context • Conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 cross-sectoral experts and thought leaders
<p>Gleaning India's risk profile through SDG data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traced key concerns based on the SDG dashboard and WEF Global Risks Report • Analyzed interconnections between distinct challenges
<p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Breakpoint analysis → Six features of the polycrisis in India
Research question 2: How can philanthropy respond to the Polycrisis?
<p>Analyzing giving behavior of philanthropists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertook secondary research on the Indian philanthropy landscape • Leveraged institutional knowledge on philanthropy • Tracked philanthropic giving to glean trends • Identified catalytic philanthropic practice in response to the polycrisis • Conducted interviews with five philanthropists
<p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Listing and analysis of philanthropy practices based on the Three Horizons Framework → Rubric for reflecting on philanthropic practice → Case studies with good practices from Indian philanthropy

A detailed breakdown of the methodology is provided in the annexures.

Breakpoint Analysis

A breakpoint is a key defining challenge within a category that is also posited as an opportunity for the future. The below table maps the breakpoints in the polycrisis. The rows represent the scale from a global to a local to a stakeholder perspective. The columns illustrate key risk categories identified under the World Economic Forum Global Risk Report.

POLITICAL

POWER IN FLUX:

The 21st century is marked by a confluence of shifting political dynamics, devastating wars, and multipolar power struggles, fundamentally reshaping global power structures, and impacting everything from resource management to trade



SOCIETAL

PERVASIVE INEQUALITIES

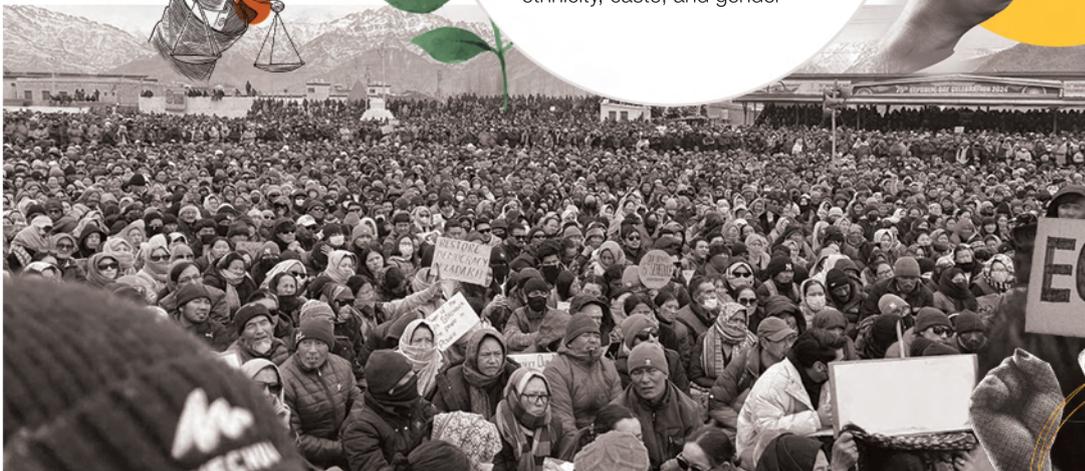
The multi-dimensional poverty, widening wealth gaps, gender and intersectional barriers, are exacerbating social disparities, while infectious diseases and mental health crises pose further challenges for human wellbeing

DECENTRALIZING PROCESSES:

India's stable democratic government is a big plus but need stronger institutions at the local levels, especially in villages and cities to address gaps related to governance, service delivery, law and justice

CHECKING PRIVILEGE

Social disparities persist due to inadequate social security against various shocks, leading to unequal access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, reinforced by social hierarchies like disability, ethnicity, caste, and gender



COLLABORATION FOR SCALE:

Partnerships with government fragmented due to the lack of intent among funders, platforms for social policy engagement and academic/ research support to underserved sectors

INCLUSION IS NOT THE NORM:

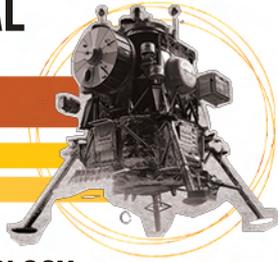
Funder-centric models are common, with inadequate bottom-up approaches in decision making and representation of community knowledge and lived experiences

WORLD

INDIA

PHILANTHROPY

TECHNOLOGICAL



ENVIRONMENTAL

SURVIVING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Unmitigated resource depletion, fueled by rampant industrial emissions and waste has affected biodiversity and escalated climate disasters, correlating also to increase in disease burden

ECONOMICAL

COSTS OF ECONOMIC GROWTH

Domination of consumer markets in developed countries, combined with structural issues and prioritization of profit over social welfare is linked to developing economies struggling with debt, inflation, and limited control over their trade destinies

FIREWALLS OF TECHNOLOGY

Shortfalls in access leading to fragmented use, while overreliance on technological solutions masks vulnerabilities; necessitating data democratization and proactive measures to address automation's impact on jobs



THE LOCAL AND LAST-MILE:

Factors such as insufficient investment in research and development, vulnerability to cyber-attacks, gaps in utilizing technology to address developmental issues, stakeholder accountability towards including the most vulnerable based on gender, disability, caste, and ethnicity



ECONOMIC POWER CONCENTRATION

High GDP growth masks unequal wealth distribution; skill gaps hinder youth and gender potential leading to pay disparities, unemployment and intergenerational poverty cycles; mutualism between governments and corporates influences decision-making for public infrastructure and governance



THE DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT

The vulnerable and marginalized communities face the threats of losing livelihoods and hunger with imbalances in ecological systems caused by overuse of land and natural resources; the unequitable distribution of natural resources is also linked to over-consumption among the privileged



CLIMATE CHANGE IS A MISSING LENS

Lack of focus on intersectoral climate action in health, livelihoods, and education programs along with inadequate engagement of private stakeholder networks

PHILANTHROPY NARRATIVE

Philanthropic giving is discretionary and sporadic because of the lack of intentionality to redistribute generational or billionaire wealth, and decolonize aid

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL:

The opportunity to leverage technological development for social change is untapped with slow momentum and rigor towards social innovation, research, and data analysis

Features of the Polycrisis

In this section, we delve into the outcomes of our analysis, presenting six interconnected features that reflect the polycrisis experience in India. These features draw upon the breakpoint analysis illustrated above and capture the essence of the research process. Features, in the context of our analysis, refer to the distinctive characteristics or elements that shape and define the polycrisis scenario in India. Therefore, these are part of the prism – a framework for us to discern the manifestation of the polycrisis. Learning about the features can help build perspective on challenges at hand and devise appropriate strategies for building collective resilience.

These features serve as crucial threads, weaving together a narrative that encapsulates India's contemporary challenges, emphasizing

the interconnectedness and resonance among disparate issues. By offering a holistic view of the complex interdependencies within the polycrisis scenario, the features offer meaning-making messages, identified through a rigorous analysis of risks and challenges impacting India.

Furthermore, these features provide a relational blueprint applicable to other developing contexts and the global majority. Contrasting the analysis conducted for these features with contextually relevant insights can provide a clearer understanding of the polycrisis anywhere. Moreover, the tacit understanding gained through such analysis can help enable more intentional philanthropic action, ensuring that efforts are directed towards addressing the root causes and facilitating sustainable solutions.

In the climate crisis, marginalized communities, people closest to and reliant on nature for livelihoods are worst impacted by it. Globally, the focus is to reduce consumption and build alternatives for renewable energy. While this is essential, there is a missing layer in our response - we aren't paying enough attention to the marginalized communities, who face immediate and local impacts. For example, bringing women from historically marginalized tribal communities into the fold of power and leadership can drive inclusive responses to the climate crisis."

~ **Neju George Abraham**,
 Director of Strategic Planning and Operations at Industree Foundation

1.

The linkage between climate change, biodiversity, natural resource crisis, and food security

Unpacking realities in India:

India's vulnerability to this global crisis positions it as the seventh most at-risk of facing catastrophic climate events.^{xxxix} Climate change is a risk-factor, threat, and determinant of significant damage to food production, security, and livelihoods for more than 45% of India's rural-based population.^{xxx} As the agricultural and allied sectors face intensified effects of climate change, there is pressure to their survival. Over 65% of cultivated land relies on natural rain cycles for irrigation.^{xxxi} Fluctuations in rainfall, extreme temperatures, water scarcity, and natural disasters disrupt this delicate balance, leading to reduced yields, heightened food prices, and economic hardships. The ripple effect touches three-quarters of India's impoverished population, who are dependent on rural economies for sustenance^{xxxii}. This imbalance in the agrarian value chain further plunges vulnerable communities into poverty. Addressing this multifaceted crisis demands an approach rooted in resilience-building for communities. Predictions of a 16% drop in food production by 2030 - risking starvation for 65 million people - necessitate urgent measures for food security through robust production and distribution channels.^{xxxiii}

Relationality to the Polycrisis:

While curbing emissions and investing in renewable energy are vital for environmental preservation, equal emphasis must be placed on safeguarding communities, conserving biodiversity, and fortifying ecological and food distribution systems against calamities. The Global Majority hosts a demographic that will face disproportionate impact on their livelihoods.^{xxxiv} Adopting a comprehensive climate action strategy that embraces both mitigation and adaptation is essential for building community resilience. Recognizing the vulnerability of communities that are proximal to climate-induced catastrophes and integrating preparedness measures into disaster recovery efforts are necessary.^{xxxv} Adopting a polycrisis approach to development involves consciously integrating the impacts of climate change on individuals, systems, and regions that depend heavily on natural ecosystems and can face concentrated losses. Therefore, bridging the gap for marginalized populations, often excluded from opportunities and protections, is crucial for equitable growth. Empowering these communities to thrive while safeguarding their livelihoods and economic independence forms the cornerstone of a comprehensive response to the polycrisis. Ultimately, building a safety net at the grassroots level while maximizing opportunities for marginalized identities remains a critical step.

Mental health is an issue that is deeply implicated across all these issues. It affects the affluent or impoverished alike. It's so far been approached as a treatment issue and less of a social-economic or political issue. The polycrisis helps us use a lens to look at issues from an intersectional framework."

~ Ingrid Srinath

Founder and Director at the Center for Social Impact and Philanthropy at Ashoka University

2.

Ties between well-being, personhood, and inadequate social security

Unpacking realities in India:

Social determinants have a direct impact on individual well-being, evident in aspects like access to safe environments, freedom of expression, equal livelihood opportunities, and education and healthcare. India's measures of life satisfaction and subjective well-being fare poorly on a global scale, compared to countries that have an intentional focus on policies that prioritize happiness or social cohesion, and maintain dignity within communities. Evidence supports the correlation between policies that are intentional about improving well-being and the attainment of these outcomes^{xxxvi}. These effects play out in several spheres of Indian society. For example, only a few public spaces in India are disability friendly. A study reveals that more than half of the District Court complexes lack wheelchair ramps and over 30% don't have disability friendly toilets^{xxxvii}. Mental health services are limited, while lacking queer- and caste-sensitivity. Moreover, 90% of India's workforce comprises of informal workers who are exposed to gender discrimination, poor working conditions, and have limited access to financial or social protection making them susceptible to poor physical and mental well-being.^{xxxviii} Citizens from marginalized gender and caste groups continue facing heavy burdens of multidimensional poverty because of poor mental health.^{xxxix}

Relationality to the polycrisis:

Policies and structural benefits such as welfare schemes, income security, healthcare, and access to spaces for healing and safety can counter the negative burden imposed by the polycrisis and must be made accessible to those who are most in need.^{xi} Without adequate social protection, individuals are exposed to higher risk of trauma and loss, and may face slower recovery from economic shocks, environmental damages and other social determinants of poor health and mental distress^{xii}. For this, a rights-based approach, one that is based on assuring quality and timely access to healthcare and resources is essential. An intentional focus on securing conditions that promote individual well-being and nurture people across institutions and social structures can become the cornerstone of an effective response to the polycrisis. Thus, identifying pathways that focus on securing individual well-being and increasing the capacity to exercise personhood in institutions, systems, and through the lifespan, becomes a key tenet of a polycrisis response.

“When we speak to rural communities, farmers, and agricultural workers, they tell us how polycrisis is impacting their lives in multiple and interconnected ways – from climate crisis that triggers nutritional poverty, which in turn creates a health crisis, which then gets aggravated by migration, leading to voicelessness of communities on the margins. Because the polycrisis combines multiple stressors, it cannot be neatly defined. It is a phenomenon that requires multiple, interlinked solutions. And the real experts for addressing this phenomenon are communities on the ground with lived experiences.”

~Manisha Gupta,
Founder and CEO, StartUp!

3.

Intersectional identities and unequal power structures

Unpacking realities in India:

In the Indian context, intersectional realities are visible amidst the multitude of identities associated with gender, sexuality, disability, caste, ethnicity, class, and religion.^{xliii} While it is useful in understanding the plurality of our context, it can also serve as a tool for solution building for community resilience. It helps create a basis for devising solutions such as affirmative action, social justice reforms, universal basic incomes, political representation, etc. Identity is a key determinant for accessing power and privilege in the Indian society. The top 10% hold 77% of the country's wealth, while the bottom 50% poor were pushed further into poverty post the pandemic.^{xliiv} Such contrasts are visible across human development indicators. Female literacy rates are lower by 15% in comparison to the male average. Gender-based violence is a linear explanation of the consequence of patriarchy, and its scale in India. There was a 23.6% spike in crimes against women in six years between 2016-22^{xliiv}; an indicator of widening discrimination against women. Women and girls belonging to historically marginalized Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes categories face greater discrimination than men from privileged caste identities.^{xlivi} Such power imbalances persist through generations, leaving historically marginalized communities without representation and social justice. This creates inter-generational cycles of poverty and identity-based discrimination.

Relationality to the polycrisis:

The term intersectionality was introduced in 1986 by Black Feminist scholar Kimberley Crenshaw to explain how layers of identities, such as gender and race, contribute towards shaping the experiences of oppression.^{xlvii} The theory of intersectionality argues that oppression such as violence, conflict, and disharmony do not occur in isolation, but are a consequence of warped power dynamics within society.^{xlviii} Since then, the concept has been adopted by movements as a tool to understand and solve for unequal power dynamics in society. These power structures permeate not only in socio-political and economic systems but also within communities. Amidst the polycrisis, intersectional thinking can be used to understand how systems, institutions, and cultures engage with multiple layers of identity and complex power dynamics. It is an important tool to identify and disrupt cycles of oppression. In turn, this can aid the promotion of peace, equity, cultural integration, and improves the strength of accountability within the community and larger social structures. Action in the polycrisis must be risk-informed and contextualized to local realities and adaptability. Thus, considering intersectional identities and unequal power structures can disrupt existing hierarchies, this can enable marginalized communities to access a greater number of mainstream platforms and to participate in decision-making.

“The current problem is that research in technology is disconnected from the masses. It is used on a mass scale and ends up reinforcing power and inequalities in society. For example, what is the role of technology in removing hate speech, or gender-based violence? Or, more deeply, its intervention in farming, health, and education without drawing from the expertise of farmers, epidemiologists and patients, students, and teachers? Unfortunately, hierarchies are formed within the world of technology and there is a bias that its very existence improves efficiency or solves a problem. Technology needs to reflect the social needs of the world and emerge from it. Here, philanthropy can play a significant role by exercising care in its ambition to solve social problems. This is needed through introspection on its own role in the role of technology as a solution to complex social problems. Here, setting up robust institutions, development of pedagogy and curriculum in state colleges, strong policy planning and governance infrastructure, resources, and expertise to research on digital technologies, going beyond the principles of proprietary information, but also encouraging open-source and start-up tinkering labs that pick up heuristic practices with caution to the benefits and social harm. We have models where people are interested in using technology to address the public good. India needs patient, domestic and diverse sources of philanthropic capital to back it up. Our country has a demographic dividend that is projected to last for the next two to three decades, while this is a short window for national development, it requires long-term capacity building.”

~**Apar Gupta,**

Co-founder of Internet Freedom Foundation

Liberty, equality, and fraternity are three constitutional values. However, democratic institutions enabling the uptake of these values don't exist in isolation. It is important to understand that we need to build the triad of Sangha, Sangathan and Sanstha, borrowing from Buddhist values. 'Sangha' refers to the concept of the community learning together. 'Sangathan' refers to creating issue-based dissent for greater accountability. Finally, 'Sanstha' refers to institutions which operate across level to provide information, deliver justice, retain democratic values, undertake governance, and support leadership. We need to revitalize this systemic concept. "

- **Gagan Sethi,**

Founder, Centre for Social Justice

4.

Research and development to boost local economies and solutions

Unpacking realities in India:

Economies prioritizing research and development (R&D) tend to foster robust knowledge exchange, thereby enhancing productivity.^{iv} R&D expenditure in India has been growing overall, multiplying by three-fold in the past two decades.^{xix} National policy has incentivized a start-up boom, which has generated a rise in registered patents during the past decade. Our recent strides in cost-effective space exploration are a great example of how rigorous locally grounded research can create a positive impact. This has set a precedent for countries in the Global South.¹ There is an opportunity for India to scale such capabilities to distinct sectors. While the impetus and investment for R&D has been increasing, it has been restricted to a few sectors and stakeholders. The central government accounts for 45% of the share, and a chunk of the investment has been focused on defense and fuel-related industries¹. Private sector investment on R&D falls below the global average and is largely constricted within areas of pharmaceutical and drug advancement. Further, India's expenditure in infrastructural support, bureaucratic processes, and quality resources are key gaps in end-to-end support for research and development.ⁱⁱⁱ On a global scale, India's expenditure on research and development falls among the lowest. The lack of diversity of investment is a barrier to creating homegrown solutions and innovations.ⁱⁱⁱ 'Participation in higher education institutions' is labeled one of the weakest areas of investment according to the SDG dashboard, displaying a lack of intentionality towards expanding a knowledge base and improving the capacities of local institutions and researchers. Despite having a substantial youth workforce, a concerning 45% of Indian graduates lack the skills required by industries.^{iv}

Relationality to the polycrisis:

Stagnated development in R&D is a common challenge among countries in the Global Majority. Deliberate efforts and investment in integrating digital technology, improving educational quality, upskilling, infrastructure, and research across various fields, can help build efficient replicable solutions that cater to the youth of today and of future generations. While addressing interconnected crises – collaborative grassroots approaches involving local governing bodies, citizens, and systems can enhance disaster resilience. Research towards fostering, preserving, or advancing knowledge from the ground up can make communities resilient. Encouraging academic research, gathering demographic data, and refining monitoring and evaluation processes are ways of enriching contextual learning and catering to diverse needs. By expanding knowledge systems beyond scientific and industrial realms, embracing various fields to explore and nurture local wisdom, communities can reap sustained benefits, and make a shift towards innovation and ownership of know-how. Intentionally supporting R&D in inter-disciplinary fields can fortify diverse industries, technologies, and necessities, correlating with outcomes such as economic security, robust crisis responses, and equitable economic growth across demographics, therefore building resilience for low-resource economies in the polycrisis.

5.

Interlocks between public institutions and accountability in governance

Unpacking realities of India:

Within democratic countries, the role of public institutions is to secure legitimacy and carry out tasks of governance and development^{lv}. Certain functions such as protecting democracy, ensuring justice, and establishing bureaucratic processes fall under the purview of India's public institutions.^{lvi} Institutions also safeguard human rights and ensure that the collective welfare of the people remains a national priority. Public institutions in India are run by a series of stakeholders such as the parliament, judiciary, financial institutions, civil services, and defense. A high standard of functioning among these systems can be understood through their measures of transparency and accountability.^{lvii} Public institutions in India ostensibly strive to cater to comprehensive needs; however, the actual delivery of services often reveals inefficiencies and shortcomings.^{lviii} Fragmentation of institutional delivery and integrity can affect public trust and pose significant challenges for effective crisis response mechanisms. Lack of accountability can affect the quality of services delivered, particularly for marginalized communities. It can also diminish public confidence in accessing justice. Such cracks in the system can exacerbate societal tensions, hinder conflict resolution, and impede the timely handling of emergent crises, ultimately impacting social cohesion and stability.

Relationality to the polycrisis:

Maintaining the integrity of institutions that encapsulate generational wisdom, cultural heritage, and leadership can foster systems that operate in the best interest of citizens as well as sustainable development. Strong institutions serve as the bedrock of good governance, criminal justice, and human rights, ensuring their effective implementation and upholding societal values. In countries where cultural diversity and identities play pivotal roles in societal dynamics, institutions act as pillars that safeguard these values. Preserving the integrity of institutions is crucial to building resilient policies, justice systems, and administrative networks. With this, the people's trust in local governance and institutions can overcome tipping points in a polycrisis where the civil society, government actors, justice bodies, and administrative personnel need to work together on ground. This will be operational in preventing escalated social violence, promoting equity, and encouraging community participation through local institutions. Therefore, investing in institution building and perceiving linkages between unprecedented crises and the health of good governance is a vital component to addressing the polycrisis.

Incorporating an understanding of the nature and experience of inequality (particularly economic) is fundamental to developing a useful definition of the term polycrisis. Inequalities in access to infrastructure, institutions, representation, and justice systematically disenfranchise marginalized communities. This differential access amplifies the experience of the polycrisis for the poor and marginalized. The ways in which different sections of society are sheltered, or not, from disaster can determine whether and how they apprehend, navigate and survive a polycrisis."

~ **Gayatri Menon**,
Sociologist

6.

Strong infrastructure and improving universal access to services

Unpacking realities:

From transport systems, power generation, and water and sanitation systems – infrastructure is crucial to meeting development goals. Investing in infrastructural development is a step that determines the strength and capacity at which economic growth can take place.^{ix} Robust infrastructure enables better distribution and access to necessary services to the population. India’s push for economic growth has increased infrastructural spending, driving economic growth to a 7.8% increase in this year, compared to last.^x As better infrastructural investment in sectors like transport and employment push economic development further, missing links in the equitable distribution and accessibility of basic infrastructural services remains a concern.^{xi} Health, housing, agricultural development, and water and sanitation are critical areas where infrastructural development is linked to basic services. Encompassing priority needs such as access to basic income, shelter, water, and good health and hygiene depend on infrastructural spending in remote geographies and intersectional identities to permit equitable reach. However, India fares poorly across these indicators. 19% of schools function without teachers, 69% of them in rural areas.^{xii} Gaps in public expenditure on hospitals, agricultural machinery, and affordable housing limit community access to core needs.

Relationality to the polycrisis:

Unchecked crises in health, education, or agriculture pose severe threats to a significant segment of the population, especially posing challenges to economic growth among low-resource economies. A lack of robust infrastructure in these crucial sectors amplifies the impact of these crises, especially among those residing in remote, underserved, or slum areas. With a substantial portion of the global majority grappling with socio-economic challenges, harnessing localized solutions becomes imperative for effective crisis management. Investing in infrastructural development geared toward health facilities, educational institutions, and agricultural advancements is pivotal. A decentralized approach, focusing on localized solutions can ensure that marginalized communities, often overlooked in centralized systems, receive essential services and support. By prioritizing affordable and accessible infrastructure, low-resource economies can address the pressing needs of its vast population facing multiple challenges. Thus, investing in sustainable and quality public infrastructure can boost public health, prevent crisis from climbing to tipping points, and facilitate equitable distribution in the polycrisis.

Philanthropy practices for the polycrisis

Philanthropic trends in India are shifting towards becoming catalytic, which warrants increased stakeholder collaboration, diffused ownership in decision-making and deeper engagement with communities.^{lxiii} This is visible across different types of funders. According to the India Philanthropy Report 2024, there is ~5x increase in number of collaboratives established per year since 2020. The report also highlights that even corporate givers, usually restricted by stringent compliances, are providing multi-year grants.^{lxiv}

This shift towards evidence-based and collaborative giving positions philanthropy to become a powerful force in addressing complex challenges like the polycrisis. By building resilience within ecosystems, institutions, and for affected communities – philanthropy can create lasting positive change. To understand how philanthropy can best address the polycrisis in the evolving Indian context, we have incorporated a temporal analysis. Such an analysis allows us to identify both established patterns that may be losing effectiveness and emerging trends with the potential for long-term impact. By examining these coexisting forces, we can envision a future perspective of Indian philanthropy, equipped to tackle the polycrisis.

Three Horizons

To identify these practices in the Indian context, we utilized the Three Horizons Framework. Based on our analysis, we identified 10 philanthropy practices. Then, we mapped these 10 philanthropy practices along the axes of patterns and time.

Introduced by Bill Sharpe at the International Futures Forum, the framework aims at envisioning a transition from the present to a viable future, as a tool to map systems change.^{lxv} The axis of patterns refers to repetitions and frequency of the practice. The axis of time signifies the transportability of the practice, across time. Using the framework, we acknowledged the current state which is likely phasing out (Horizon 1), articulated the desired future (Horizon 3), and crucially, identified the critical pathways (Horizon 2) that differentiate between incremental changes perpetuating Horizon 1 and those driving transformative shifts towards Horizon 3.^{lxvi}

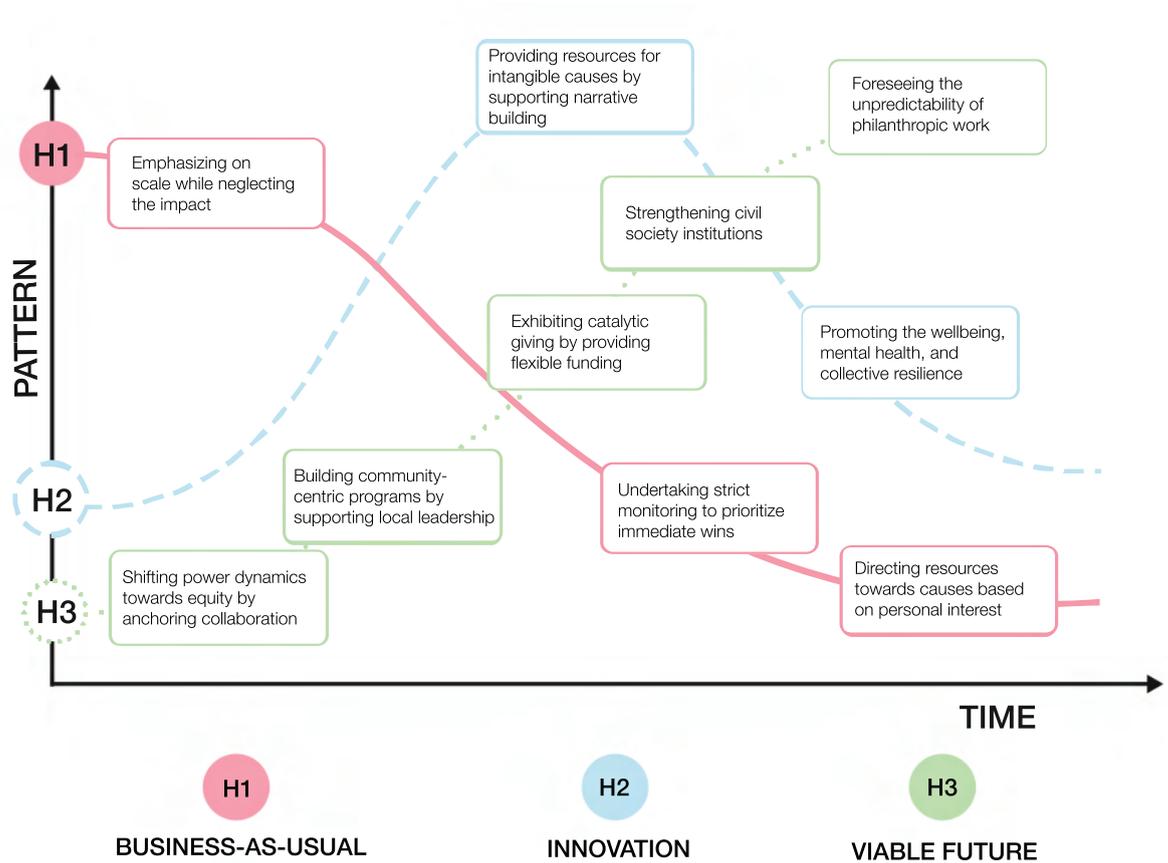
The business as usual of Horizon 1:

This represents common practices in philanthropy that are at risk of becoming outdated. These practices often suffer from a myopic vision and excessive rigidity. It includes the prioritization of scale over individual impact and overlooks unintended negative consequences. It focuses on immediate wins in monitoring and evaluation, neglecting the broader context. Additionally, resources are allocated based on personal interests rather than consulting communities and civil society. Such practices often disregard the bigger picture about social change being complex and taking time. The qualitative aspects of building trust and empowering communities are overlooked.

“Corporates becoming board members of philanthropies. Civil society needs to reverse roles and we must have social sector leaders on boards of corporates. This can influence how they work. Social sector leaders must be able to ask questions back to private sector and hold them accountable. There is a need to create spaces where all stakeholders can take feedback in collaboration.”

~ **Manak Matiyani**,
Feminist, queer activist, and development professional

Figure 2: Mapping Philanthropy Practices for the Polycrisis to the Three Horizons Framework



A viable future in Horizon 3:

The practices elucidated have the potential to become the norm in the future, and therefore are most suited to addressing the polycrisis. These practices foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders across sectors and levels. It champions community-centric programs and unrestricted funding. Anticipating unpredictability, such practices are risk-forward, failure-ready, and experimental. As we navigate through uncertain terrains of the polycrisis, the adaptive nature of these practices shows greater promise in navigating the complexities of our evolving world. By recalibrating power dynamics towards equity, these approaches offer a pathway towards more inclusive and resilient solutions.

The innovation within Horizon 2:

The practices described are the innovations that are advancing the philanthropy ecosystem towards Horizon 3. It includes allocating resources to intangible causes. This is promoted by nurturing narrative-building efforts led by civil society

movements and supporting individuals acting as change agents. Rather than focusing on process hygiene alone, the practices here are human-centric, focusing on the lived experiences to further inter-generational transfers of wisdom. Accordingly, such funding also supports the well-being, mental health, and collective resilience of communities, including frontline workers and civil society leaders, recognizing their crucial role in achieving sustainable transitions.

Emerging practices identified within Horizons 2 and 3 represent pockets of the future already visible in the current landscape of Indian philanthropy. Although these trends are currently nascent, their adoption is likely to increase as the polycrisis deepens. These seven practices can be articulated as the visible spectrum, lighting the path ahead to guide philanthropic action.

Glimmers of Change

This section features excerpts from civil society initiatives related to empowering the most vulnerable communities and underserved sectors. What unites these diverse endeavors is their shared emphasis on co-creation, setting up of commons-based platforms, and the civil society assuming significant leadership roles. Philanthropy emerges as a pivotal player in facilitating the infrastructure for these initiatives. Coined as "glimmers of change," these efforts underscore the philanthropy's supportive role as communities take the forefront in driving transformation.

EkStep Foundation's Journey with Societal Platform Thinking

At the forefront of a transformative shift in social impact and philanthropy, EkStep Foundation embodies **Societal Platform Thinking**, advocating for open digital public goods. Sunbird, EkStep's flagship project, symbolizes this approach, expanding its influence beyond education into diverse sectors. Drawing inspiration from Aadhaar's success and leveraging varied social sector experiences, EkStep integrates design principles such as a platform-centric approach and minimalism into its Societal Platform Approach, supported by Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies. The foundation's core belief is in meticulously crafting scalable solutions to address fundamental challenges. EkStep envisions a collaborative space facilitated by the Societal Platform, where diverse entities converge to make informed decisions, catalyzing interactions and propelling societal progress through open-source thinking. In essence, EkStep Foundation emerges as an innovative force, shaping a future where collaborative efforts and open digital solutions drive societal advancement on an unprecedented scale.^{lxvii}

Social Compact & Migrants Resilience Collaborative

Championing the path towards influencing collaborative action from the ground-up are two initiatives are **Social Compact and Migrants Resilience Collaborative (MRC)** that work with multi-stakeholder partners to visibilize the needs of informal workers. Social Compact works within India, while MRC works in India, and across geographies in South and Southeast Asia.^{lxviii} These initiatives bring together corporates, worker organizations and experts into a co-solutioning relationship, to ensure greater dignity among industry-employed informal workers in India. Based on a human-centred framework, their approach is to gather knowledge and insights from worker organizations, and further this to be used as recommendations to influence industries to implement better worker conditions in their facilities—driving a systemic shift by institutionalizing better practices for informal workers. For instance, Social Compact works to establish worker facilitator centers at several geographies in the country that strengthen last-mile access to social protection and worker safety.^{lxix}

Rebuild India Fund & The Grow Fund

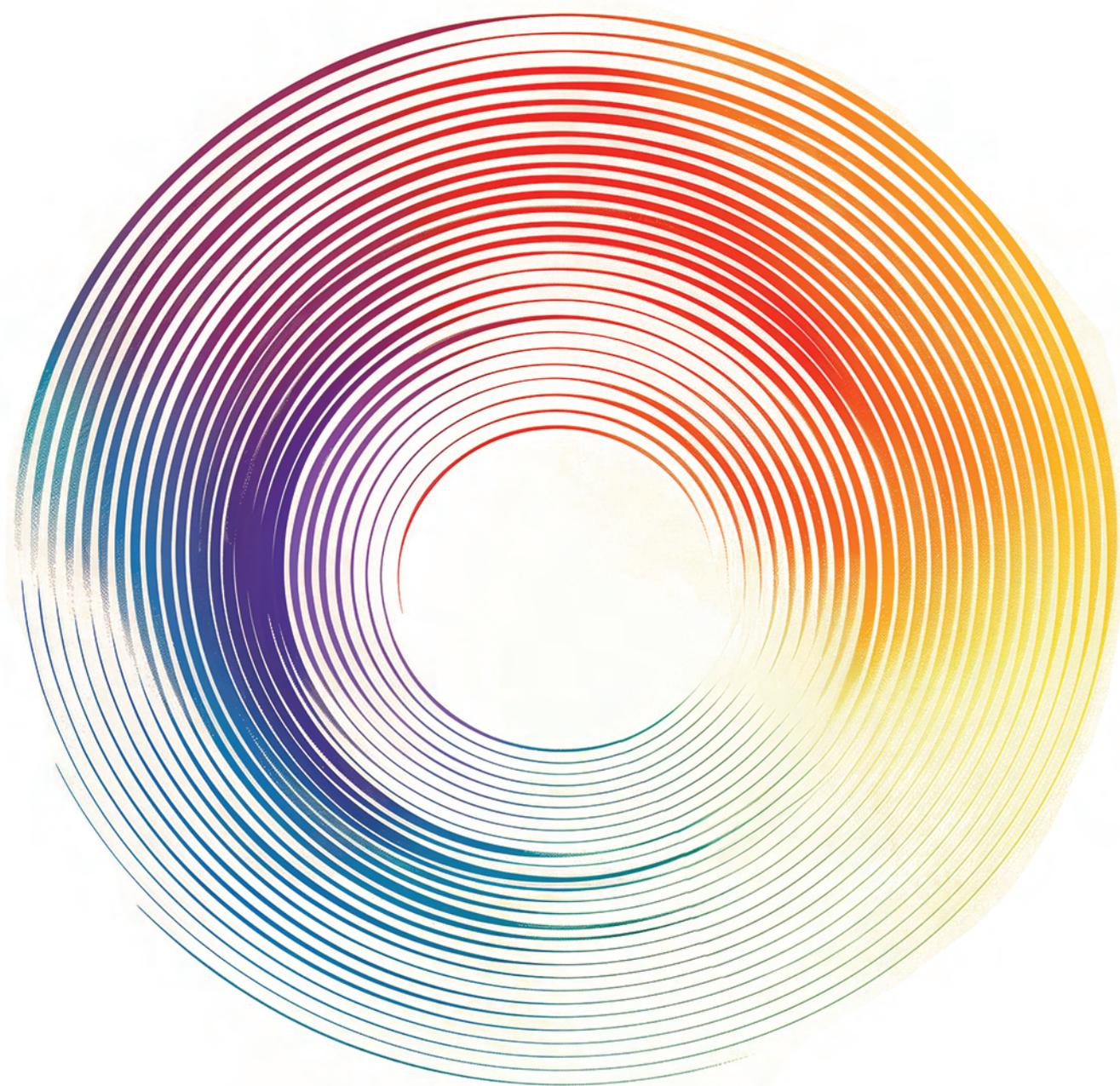
Grant-making initiatives that embody unrestricted and long-term funding for grassroots organizations are putting philanthropy's good practices from paper to practice. The **Rebuild India Fund**, supported by the Tarsadia Foundation, and **The Grow Fund** (The Grassroots Resilience Ownership and Wellness Fund), supported by a collection of philanthropists are focused on strengthening the capabilities and resilience of community-based organizations to serve with greater impact for most vulnerable. By providing flexible funding, organizations can prioritize key organizational functions and develop leadership for future readiness. The Grow Fund places importance on organizations ability to cover critical costs to function optimally, build resilience and sustain their ability to create meaningful change within communities.^{lxx} In the same strand, The Rebuild India Fund prioritizes proximate leadership, supporting and encouraging the representation of needs of the community's most disadvantaged through multi-year flexible funding. Walking the talk, the Rebuild India Fund also provides grants through a participatory grant making process where members of community-based organizations are involved in decision-making.^{lxxi}

Pay-What-It-Takes

Historically, funding cycles have often emphasized heavily on beneficiary needs, while neglecting the needs of the NGOs, and community-based organizations that drive and deliver impact. Shifting this dynamic is the Pay-What-It-Takes Initiative (PWIT), anchored by the Bridgespan Group and supported by a collective of philanthropists. Their model is centered around five key principles that solidify a realistic grant-making approach that creates scope for financial resilience, organizational development, and long-term funding. Pledging to pay a fair share of organizational costs – going beyond the normative 15% cap, the PWIT initiative promotes a crucial systemic shift in deepening impact, equitable partnerships, and prioritizing the well-being and organizational health of its no-profit partners in philanthropy. Through knowledge, conversations and thought leadership – PWIT informs and influences mindsets and practices of funders, NGOs, and intermediaries.^{lxxii}

The Spectrum

The spectrum is a band of colors that constitute visible light. This part of the report collates our takeaways from the research based on the analytical tools utilized above. It elucidates seven philanthropic practices that can help address the polycrisis. The section also includes a rubric for reflection, to guide philanthropic action in the future. The section also spotlights philanthropic journeys in India, with case studies, to exemplify how the practices identified translate to action.



Seven Practices in Philanthropy

Uncertain times, defined by constant shocks and disruptions, demand resilience – not just to survive, but to thrive in the face of adversity. The polycrisis, a complex web of interconnected challenges, necessitates an evolution in traditional philanthropic practices. Philanthropy can play a critical role in building resilience within vulnerable communities and ecosystems by shifting power, providing unrestricted funding, supporting community-centric programs, taking risks, strengthening civil society institutions, and creating innovations. Based on our analysis, seven philanthropic practices serve as guideposts for this transformation. The seven practices are articulated below, with working principles to facilitate their integration.

PRACTICE 1.

Shifting power dynamics towards equity by anchoring collaboration among diverse stakeholders across sectors and levels

ACTIONS

- Builds consensus among diverse stakeholder groups through convenings, dialogues, and participatory processes
- Implements programs with a focus on leveraging strengths of partners + pooling funding for common outcomes

Philanthropic efforts intended to build equity acknowledge the importance of diverse perspectives and collaboration. By fostering partnerships among stakeholders across sectors and levels, the decision-making process becomes more rigorous and decentralized. Such an approach recognizes the inherent hierarchies and works towards shifting power dynamics, building the community's agency to challenge status quo and make choices. Collaboration also provides platforms where representative voices are heard and valued in decision-making structures.

PRACTICE 2.

Exhibiting catalytic giving by providing autonomous, unrestricted, and long-term funding to organizations

ACTIONS

- Funds corpus, administrative, personnel and program budgets without placing terms or conditions
- Makes funding commitments to civil society organizations between or greater than 5-to-10-year horizons

Social change takes time and requires multi-year funding which can be stewarded by communities themselves. This requires seeing funding beyond project-based timelines. The capital provided should be long-term, flexible, and unrestricted. Civil society organizations and community leaders receiving the money must have the autonomy to use these funds based on their needs and discretion. This helps grantees find the freedom needed to innovate, adapt, and invest in building resilience. It helps address root causes.

PRACTICE 3.

Building community-centric programs by supporting local leadership as well as enabling decentralized decision-making and problem-solving

ACTIONS

- Supports organizations run by community members and proximate leaders with an intersectional lens
- Endorses organizations with participatory processes and community collaboration built into programs

To create impact for the grassroots, supporting and mobilizing community leadership is key. Proximate community leaders have a deeper understanding of the hyperlocal challenges tied to their lived experiences. This helps create an ethos that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion in the philanthropy ecosystem. Such approaches ensure that programming prioritizes community needs and last mile reach. It also builds greater ownership, accountability, and responsiveness for local contexts and affected communities.

PRACTICE 4.

Foreseeing the unpredictability of philanthropic work by accounting for failures, risks, and the need for experimentation

ACTIONS

- Facilitates the execution of pilots, innovations, and experimentation by providing risk capital
- Encourages organizations to report on failures, learnings, challenges by facilitating open dialogue

Success in philanthropic work is not limited to high impact numbers based on outreach, scale, and funding deployed. Philanthropy can be successful even when it supports pilots or processes which don't provide quantifiable results. Acknowledging the inherent unpredictability and risks can help in embracing a culture open to learning from failures. This can encourage grantees to experiment, learn from failures, and instill critical thinking. Such dynamism can create opportunities for innovation and growth.

PRACTICE 5.

Strengthening civil society institutions through capacity building to foster agility for ongoing and emerging crises

ACTIONS

- Bolsters organizational capacity through trainings for program staff, administration, and governance
- Enables cohort-based cross-learning opportunities for common themes such as technology, finance, etc.

Proactive capacity building can strengthen civil society institutions, who are at the forefront of crisis response and on-ground efforts. Civil society institutions can also help raise accountability and trigger collaboration among diverse stakeholders to enable agile action. Providing support to these institutions can strengthen response systems for unprecedented emerging challenges. This entails providing resources, training, expertise, and strategic support to improve agility, resilience, and knowledge.

PRACTICE 6.

Providing resources for intangible causes by supporting narrative building through civil society movements and individuals as change agents

ACTIONS

- Sponsors collectives, fellowships, individual change agents, and/ or civil society movements
- Finances research, advocacy, campaigns, and/or convenings to change the narrative

Many crucial issues lack metrics and are complex to comprehend, which requires supporting narrative building for greater uptake. Empowering civil society movements and individual change agents can help develop and share compelling stories that raise awareness, shift public opinion, and ultimately drive social change through communities themselves taking action. Philanthropy can provide resources to effectively deconstruct and communicate complex issues for building awareness and collective resilience.

PRACTICE 7.

Promoting the well-being, mental health, and collective resilience of affected communities and frontline workers engaged

ACTIONS

- Focuses on the mental health and well-being of frontline workers and practitioners engaged
- Considers mental health and well-being as an overarching developmental outcome for building collective resilience

The mental and physical well-being of those directly impacted and the tireless frontline is a growing concern. Philanthropy can provide access to mental health services like counseling, trauma support, and other forms of healthcare for both affected communities and frontline workers. Such initiatives can promote stress management, healthy coping mechanisms, and social connections for those on the frontlines. These initiatives address the psycho- social contexts of affected communities, fostering collective strength and hope.

Rubric for reflection

Based on the seven practices outlined above, this rubric offers a framework for philanthropic actors to reflect on their approaches towards addressing the polycrisis. It provides prompts and actions based on diverse philanthropic approaches, allowing ecosystem actors to analyze their work on a common analytical plane.

Step 1: Learn and Discern >>

Utilize the following checklist to engage in a self-assessment of your philanthropic endeavors.

SELF REFLECTION

Practices	Actions	Yes	No
Shifting power dynamics towards equity by anchoring collaboration among diverse stakeholder across sectors and levels	Builds consensus among diverse stakeholder groups through convenings, dialogues, and participatory processes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Implements programs with a focus on leveraging strengths of partners + pooling funding for common outcomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exhibiting catalytic giving by providing autonomous, unrestricted, and long-term funding to organizations	Funds corpus, administrative, personnel and program budgets without placing terms or conditions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Makes funding commitments to civil society organizations between or greater than 5-to-10-year horizons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building community-centric programs by supporting local leadership as well as enabling decentralized decision-making and problem-solving	Supports organizations run by community members and proximate leaders with an intersectional lens	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Endorses organizations with participatory processes and community collaboration built into programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Foreseeing the unpredictability of philanthropic work by accounting for failures, risks, and the need for experimentation	Facilitates the execution of pilots, innovations, and experimentation by providing risk capital	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Encourages organizations to report on failures, learnings, challenges by facilitating open dialogue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strengthening civil society institutions through capacity building to foster agility for ongoing and emerging crises	Bolsters organizational capacity through trainings for program staff, administration and governance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Enables cohort-based cross-learning opportunities for common themes such as technology, finance, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing resources for intangible causes by supporting narrative building through civil society movements and individuals as change agents	Sponsors collectives, fellowships, individual change agents, and/ or civil society movements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Finances research, advocacy, campaigns, and/ or convenings to change the narrative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promoting the wellbeing, mental health, and collective resilience of affected communities and frontline workers engaged	Focuses on the mental health and wellbeing of frontline workers and practitioners engaged	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Considers mental health and well-being as an overarching developmental outcome for building collective resilience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Count the total number of 'yes' responses here =

Use case for the rubric

Articulating philanthropic impact has always had challenges, given that the journeys of funders are evolving, and the problems being solved are compounding. There are also significant information gaps that hinder a comprehensive view of how philanthropy addresses present-day challenges. Furthermore, the term 'polycrisis' remains unfamiliar in philanthropic circles, necessitating the creation of a common understanding. The rubric aims to bridge these knowledge gaps, weaving together fragmented information into a cohesive structure.

Who can use this rubric?

This rubric can be used by ecosystem actors across the philanthropy sector, including but not limited to intermediaries, philanthropy support organizations, individual funders, foundations, civil society organizations, think tanks, and academia.

What are the objectives of this rubric?

- Reflect practices and actions that can help respond to the polycrisis and unprecedented future challenges
- Identify practical steps to strengthen philanthropic approaches for responding to the ongoing polycrisis

How to use this rubric?

This rubric has three steps to help you strengthen your approach. First, reflect on your past and ongoing giving experiences using an objective checklist to understand how these might influence your polycrisis response strategy. Then, gain insights on your current approach based on the responses assimilated. Finally, use the reflections, prompts, and actions to build a more intentional response as a guide for tackling the polycrisis.

What are the key considerations and limitations of the rubric?

The rubric is built with an optimistic disposition, leveraging the Three Horizons Framework outlined in previous sections. It can help philanthropic actors see how their present actions are shaping the future. In the face of the polycrisis narrative, which can feel overwhelming and pessimistic, the rubric offers a counterpoint. It fosters awareness and demonstrates to funders how their current approaches contribute to long-term impact. While the framework explores a variety of practices, giving strategies are often non-linear and unique. Think of it as a map, not a pass/fail test, to guide diverse actors within the philanthropic ecosystem as they navigate the complexities of the polycrisis. There's no single starting point – you can begin with any of the identified practices. This rubric serves as a springboard to spark discussions and further brainstorming in these challenging times. Through continued application and analysis by researchers, practitioners, and funders – this framework can help build a stronger evidence base for effective giving.

Case Studies from the Philanthropy Ecosystem in India

India offers rich insights from the ground for exploring philanthropic responses to the polycrisis. We have chosen the following case studies from the different funder journeys we studied to showcase good practices. Each case study delves into a specific practice in the spectrum highlighted earlier and demonstrates how these are applied.

While there might be some overlap in approaches for the funders, the case studies are structured to emphasize interventions in alignment with a specific practice. Through these examples, we aim to illustrate how these practices are translated into action.

We would like to provide the disclaimer that the following case studies represent our interpretations and analyses of funders' approaches, based on their perspectives and information shared.

Case Studies from Horizon 3

The first five case studies highlight practices from Horizon 3 and focus on family philanthropy. This cohort of givers has played a crucial role in shaping India's evolution, through its flexible resourcing support. According to the India Philanthropy Report Series, families, with their ability to give freely and adapt their approach based on community needs, can play a crucial role in building a stronger foundation for impactful giving, moving away from historic preferences, and directing resources towards underserved areas. Over the years, this segment has also seen the emergence of disruptors and harbingers based on the funders' identity (age, gender, etc.) and source of wealth (whether it is first-generation or intergenerational wealth.) ^{lxiii}

1. Khorakiwala Family

“Communities don’t need saviours and are not helpless. It is important to focus on the tenet – nothing for us without us while supporting communities. We firmly believe that solutions can’t be built without consulting communities.”

- Khorakiwala family

Catalytic philanthropy approach

Strengthening civil society institutions through capacity building to foster agility for ongoing and emerging crises

About the funder

The Khorakiwala family owns the SwitzGroup, anchoring multiple food companies across 15 countries. The family had also founded one of India’s first departmental store ‘Akbarallys.’ Adam Khorakiwala is the director of Switz Foods under the SwitzGroup. Tahera Khorakiwala is a Pharmaceutical Medicine Practitioner with ViiV Healthcare in Ireland and heads the Khorakiwala Family Foundation.

Key challenges in focus

- **Healthcare services**

The urban poor communities face several challenges with access to healthcare services, especially for pregnant and young mothers. The lack of awareness, coupled with access to services, affects the development of children. This has repercussions on their ability to lead a healthy and functional life in adulthood.

- **Macro-level poverty**

The urban poor in India continue to face persistent challenges at the intersections of caste, class, gender, food security, social justice, and livelihood that manifest in continued marginalization throughout the lifespan of these communities.

Interventions supported

- Maternal, neonatal and child health in urban slum communities through a focus on access to pre-natal, antenatal, and postnatal health care and nutrition support
- Community development with a focus on women’s empowerment and agency and ending gender-based discrimination through leadership training and awareness

Key Collaborators

Local government and administrative bodies (indirectly through programs supported), community members, non-profit organizations

Interconnections in the funding portfolio

The interconnections across their funding portfolio are central to the wellbeing of children and mothers in improving access to healthcare that determine key life outcomes for children in education and livelihood opportunities.

Approach

Their philanthropic approach is rooted in gender intentionality and supporting organization strengthening towards building for scale, scope and resilience and strengthening service delivery on ground.

Vision for the future

It is important to acknowledge the layered disadvantages of communities because there is no quick fix or a single solution for the complexity of these issues. They want to collaborate with others and see value in leveraging the collective expertise, experiences, and data from teams and individuals with lived experiences of marginalization. In turn, this helps in building core capabilities of organizations, along the way, for effective solutioning. There is a need to commit towards a collaborative approach, recognizing the limitations of individual knowledge, working with organizations who think ahead and possess well-defined development plans both for internal and external growth.

2. Leena Dandekar

“When you are thinking about wellbeing of the communities and the landscape; it is very stakeholder rooted and driven. It is our job to make communities aware of and foresee these challenges and risks.”

~ Leena Dandekar

Catalytic philanthropy approach

Foreseeing the unpredictability of philanthropic work by accounting for failures, risks, and the need for experimentation

About the funder

Leena is the founder and director of the Raintree Family Office. She manages a socially conscious investment portfolio which is diversified and includes ESG conscious alternative assets, impact investments as well as public market equities. Before starting the Raintree Family Office and Raintree Foundation, Leena served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Camlin Group, where she helmed various strategic and operational initiatives. Leena holds a Bachelor of Arts in Economics, a Masters in Management Studies in Finance, and an LLB from Mumbai University.

Key challenges in focus

- **Climate Change**

Climate change is accelerating rapidly, eroding healthy ecosystems, and destabilising the delicate balance between the environment, communities, micro-habitats, indigenous knowledge, and biodiversity that are interdependent for their survival.

- **Infrastructural gaps**

More than 75% of Indian districts are hotspots for extreme climate events, exposing India’s poorest communities to crisis. Shoring up climate resilience measures to ensure community resilience through sustainable livelihoods, food and water security or environmental preservation is necessary. However, gaps in knowledge, infrastructure and implementation across geographies remains a roadblock.

Interventions supported

- Investing and implementing Sustainable Landscape Management (SLM) in select geographies to create climate resilient communities and ecosystems
- Building a strong evidence base through research and evaluation to support community resilience and sustain the climate, biodiversity, and ecological systems

Key Collaborators

Scientists, government bodies, community leaders and community members, women leaders, non-profit organizations, philanthropists, policymakers, researchers

Interconnections in the funding portfolio

Her philanthropy focuses on building resilient communities by placing an emphasis on interconnections between climate change, sustainable economic development, and mental wellbeing in focused geographies, over a sustained period, for creating deep impact.

Approach

The approach is holistic and focuses on the entirety of the landscape. It integrates systems of education, agriculture, mental wellbeing, gender, and livelihoods to ensure that communities learn to prosper and preserve the ecosystem around them. Funding decisions are focused on building sustainable ecosystems in harmony with the wellbeing of people and the planet.

Vision for the future

The approach will continue focusing on ensuring community members are stewards of knowledge and caring for their environment. By interlinking ecology with humanity, the funding will go towards ensuring that communities thrive in strong and resilient ecosystems.

3. Luis Miranda

“Giving communities fish to eat is charity, and teaching them fishing is skilling. However, what if we create an atmosphere where everyone in the community can make a living out of fishing? Everything falls into place automatically when the environment is geared towards helping people thrive and develop as a community. This is what good public policy can achieve.”

~ Luis Miranda

Catalytic philanthropy approach

Exhibiting catalytic giving by providing autonomous, unrestricted and long-term funding to organizations

About the funder

Luis Miranda was a finance sector professional and is now a practicing philanthropist. He is the Chairperson of Centre for Civil Society and CORO. He is Co-Founder of Indian School of Public Policy and Take Charge, a mentoring programme for Catholic youth in Mumbai. Luis and his wife, Fiona, have been working to leverage their networks to help the organizations they support. He has been involved in setting up two highly successful companies – HDFC Bank and IDFC Private Equity. He believes that economic development is the best way to get people out of poverty.

Key challenges in focus

- **Fundamental social challenges**

In India, quality healthcare and education are still lagging for a vast number of people. Despite the efforts by the government, funding gaps exist due to the size of the problem. The ratios for teachers to students and healthcare practitioners to patients are disproportionately skewed.

- **Infrastructural gaps**

As we move towards urbanization and digitization – last mile infrastructural gaps are affecting communities who have been historically marginalized and underserved. Access to electricity, safe sanitation, drinking water and internet connectivity are shortfalls in the cities today.

Interventions supported

- Community empowerment in low-income urban and rural communities and remote geographies through a focus on strengthening local leadership, gender equity and promoting education
- Research and development with a focus on social policy towards educating students and practitioners, bridging gaps between theory and practice, and fostering dialogues among ecosystem stakeholders

Key Collaborators

Government and administrative bodies (at the local, state, and national level), proximate leaders and community members, non-profit organizations, philanthropists, academics, policymakers

Interconnections in the funding portfolio

Their funding portfolio is linked to supporting communities achieve their goals, through resourcing support which not only strengthens service delivery at the grassroots level but also influences evidence-based policymaking.

Approach

The philanthropic approach is built upon building sustainable solutions based on contextually relevant challenges. The grants provided are largely directed towards programs where the community is involved in design, planning, and implementation and towards supporting organizations build a capital for growth. Nearly all grants are unrestricted and for areas that others tend to not fund.

Vision for the future

It is important to build an atmosphere where communities feel supported. The social challenges of the future will be different from the present-day scenario. Funding should focus on preserving people where they are rather than making them move with their personal interests.

4. Raj Mariwala

“When you build for the margins, you cover everyone. But when you start off in the center, you will never reach the margins. There can be no scale without inclusion. Transforming oppressive structures is a long-term process and we ultimately have an accountability to the communities we serve.”

~ Raj Mariwala

Catalytic philanthropy approach

Shifting power dynamics towards equity by anchoring collaboration among diverse stakeholder across sectors and levels

About the funder

Raj Mariwala is Director of Mariwala Health Initiative, an advocacy, capacity building and grant-making organization focusing on accessible mental health for marginalized communities. While previous engagements have included Advisory board roles in Lancet Commission on Ending Stigma and Discrimination as well as Global Mental Health Action Network, currently, Raj is on the board of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP). Alongside this, Raj is also a practicing canine and feline behaviorist.

Key challenges in focus

- **Historical marginalization**

In India, historically marginalized individuals and communities face systemic oppressions based on caste, class, ability, age, region, gender, sexuality, religion. This exacerbates and renders them susceptible to mental health stressors as well as development challenges such as poverty, food insecurity, etc. Compounded pressures of socio-economic and political disadvantages affect the physical and mental health of these communities.

- **Systemic barriers**

Mental health is a both a human right and development issue. The inadequate focus on root causes correlates to service shortfalls in terms of accessibility and quality of care. When underlying social, political, and economic factors shaping our identities remain unaddressed - mental health inequalities are further perpetuated. Service providers, policy makers, researchers and other critical stakeholders need to consider taking a psychosocial, affirmative, and user-centric approach that prioritizes marginalized communities.

Interventions supported

- Channeling grants and strategic support to organizations and collectives that work within communities, understanding their lived experiences and adopting approaches like affirmative counselling, to improve access to mental health services
- Influencing policy making and evidence building around mental health with a focus on rights-based approaches and prioritizing the needs of marginalized communities

Key Collaborators Service providers, practitioners, activists, government bodies, proximate leaders and community members, non-profit organizations, philanthropists, academics, policymakers

Interconnections in the funding portfolio

By integrating a mental health perspective, the grant-making initiative prioritizes the transformation of unequal power dynamics that adversely impact marginalized communities. The funding portfolio recognizes and addresses the lived experiences and systemic oppressions encountered by marginalized communities. Additionally, their approach actively incorporates intersectoral concerns, such as climate change and poverty, contributing to a more responsive and comprehensive mental health infrastructure that aligns with the diverse needs of the affected communities.

Approach

This philanthropic approach is centered around intersectionality in mental health and wellbeing. It sees promise in the idea that social change is achieved by transforming oppressive structures. They underscore the need to begin at the margins while scaling and supporting community-based interventions that actively advocate for the deinstitutionalization of mental health services.

Vision for the future

Their commitment remains steadfast towards fostering localized solutions and embracing intersectionality by going beyond the biomedical models and consider broader societal factors. They will also continue incorporating diverse perspectives in addressing challenges such as climate change by advocating for a shift in social fabric, utilizing counter narratives and indigenous knowledge, and taking a community-first approach.

5. Sunita Maheshwari

“The issue has never been money. It is about what we should do with the money. The power of partnerships can be critical in building better public health infrastructure and supporting communities with their mental health. With increasing news around climate crisis – it is imperative for communities to build mental resilience and adaptability.”

~Dr. Sunita Maheshwari

Catalytic philanthropy approach:

Building community-centric programs by supporting local leadership as well as enabling decentralized decision-making and problem-solving

About the funder

Dr. Sunita Maheshwari is a Paediatric Cardiologist who did her MBBS at Osmania medical college followed by postgraduation at AIIMS, Delhi and Yale University in the US. She was the winner of the "Young Clinician Award" from the American Heart Association and the "Best Teacher Award" at Yale University. She won Outlook Business WOW 2019 (Woman of Worth) and 2014's 'Amazing Indian' award by Times Now. She cofounded India's first and largest teleradiology company, as well as other start-ups in the health care space including TeleradTech, RXDX healthcare and Healtheminds. She is also passionate about social impact and runs two trust funds. People4people has set up over 600 playgrounds in government schools and the Telrad Foundation provides teleradiology and telemedicine services to poor areas in Asia that do not have access to high quality medical care. She also is on the board of Glaxo Smith Kline India and HDFC bank and chairs their CSR committees.

Key Challenges in focus

- **Mental health challenges:** The escalating technological progress, urbanization, concretization, and social media use are contributing to a concerning breakdown in mental health and well-being, particularly among children and adolescents. Depression and anxiety are becoming pervasive issues. This crisis is exacerbated by the absence of open spaces, limited outdoor exposure, and insufficient play areas for children. The cumulative impact of these factors underscores the urgent need to address mental health challenges, emphasizing the crucial role of accessible outdoor spaces for holistic well-being of children.
- **Limitations in access to healthcare:** Despite the widespread reach of technology, a significant gap persists in awareness and access to fundamental primary healthcare services in remote regions of India.

Interventions supported

- Creating a Phygital model for healthcare delivery: Scaling up clinics and telemedicine in rural India by improving the infrastructure, reach of medical practitioners, and technical knowledge
- Setting up open playgrounds for government schools in India with an aim to improve the overall wellbeing and mental health of children and adolescents

Key Collaborators Local government schools, communities, medical and healthcare practitioners

Interconnections in the funding portfolio

The funding reveals interconnections evident in rapid urbanization, digitization, and the strain on public health systems. This impacts service delivery and access for the most underserved communities. These factors can exacerbate mental health and wellbeing concerns.

Approach

Sunita's philanthropic strategy places paramount importance on community-centric initiatives that are highly responsive to community needs. Scalability and an own-and-operate model further define her approach, ensuring sustainable and impactful solutions are tailored to local contexts.

Vision for the future

In shaping a philanthropic future, she has a dedicated commitment to actively empower communities, emphasizing their ownership and involvement in crafting solutions. Technology not only acts as a tool but also catalyzes innovation and efficiency. The vision revolves around advocating for government collaboration and fostering partnerships between public and private sectors. It commits to inclusivity by focusing on affordable solutions, addressing skill gaps, and prioritizing climate change and risk mitigation. This holistic approach aims to drive sustainable, equitable change, firmly rooted in the belief that collective efforts can usher in a greater resilience in the future.

Case Studies from Horizon 2

The two case studies highlighted below illustrate practices from Horizon 2, specifically focusing on innovations within the collaborative philanthropy approach. This approach emphasizes partnerships between civil society organizations and funders. Emerging research by the Bridgespan Group suggests a surge in collaborative philanthropy within India's philanthropic landscape. This collaborative approach offers several advantages: It allows funders and civil society to pursue ambitious goals and build fields.^{lxvii} The innovative practices showcased below focus on empowering individual changemakers, offering a fresh approach that departs from the more visible field building model within collaborative philanthropy, as explored in research.^{lxviii} These practices pave exploratory paths for a critical mass of individuals well-positioned to influence narratives and, consequently, social norms. Such innovative approaches are helping cause paradigm shifts within India's philanthropy ecosystem.

1. Cocoon Initiative

“As someone who sits in the position of being both a grantor and a grantee, I've felt we need to do a significantly better job of giving organizations and people the capacity to take care of themselves in a manner that they feel is right for them. I see this as the first small step that we can and should do to support our NGO leaders.”

~ Donald Lobo,
Executive director, Chintu Gudiya Foundation

Catalytic philanthropy approach

Promoting the well-being, mental health, and collective resilience of affected communities and frontline workers engaged

About the initiative

The Cocoon Initiative is a fund that supports civil society leaders to take a sabbatical and rejuvenate from their work. The aim of the initiative is to provide NGO leaders, social entrepreneurs, and leaders of social impact work to take an extended break from the challenging demands of their work to focus on personal rejuvenation. The initiative provides a minimum of three months of personal funding to the leader, and they decide how to spend their time (resting, travelling, spending time with family and friends, retreats, learning, wellbeing, health, etc.)

Key Challenges in focus

- **Burnout and mental distress**

Social sector practitioners are exposed to a range of stressful experiences, challenges, and circumstances in their daily work. The prevalence of compassion fatigue can be a burden on their mental health and can carry forward into the quality of their work and personal life.

- **Inadequate structures for rest and recuperation**

Unlike other sectors of organized work, there is a lack of systemic allowances by which social impact leaders and practitioners can avail substantial rest and rejuvenation needed to recover from the demands their work, focus on a vision for the future, and lead a satisfactory quality of living.

Disruptive ways of working

- **Well-being focused approaches to funding**

The cocoon initiative displays a shift from funding focused on quantifiable impact, to qualitative measures that tackle systemic inadequacies. This approach is geared towards sustainable and meaningful change, focused on building a resilient ecosystem for those who serve.

- **Trust-based capital for intangible outcomes**

By providing flexibility in the structure of the program through the tenure and conditions of the sabbatical centered on the grantee's decision-making, the initiative shows an emphasis on funding for intangible outcomes such as mental health and wellbeing through a trust-based approach.

Collaborative partners

NGO practitioners, CEOs and CXOs, social entrepreneurs, and civil society leaders

Vision for the future

Aiming to solve complex societal challenges is not a marathon, but multiple marathons, that make heavy demands on one's wellbeing. The only way to maintain course is by holding space for social impact leaders to take an intentional pause from the demands of their work to reflect, celebrate and focus on their well-being without the worry of personal financial commitments. This is a first step towards addressing caregiver burden via a systemic approach.

2. Omega Resilience Awards

“Our outlook with the fellowship program is to look for the real unusual suspects that fall outside the grid. Addressing the polycrisis is about drawing knowledge and resources from non-domain specific areas of impact, and encouraging methods of research that highlights new ways of thinking and working with challenges”

~Manisha Gupta, Partner, Omega Resilience Awards, India

Catalytic philanthropy approach

Providing resources for intangible causes by supporting narrative building through civil society movements and individuals change agents

About the initiative

The Omega Resilience Awards (ORA) fellowships is an innovative catalytic grant-making program that provides fellowships, research grants, and media creation. Their goal is to support new models of thinking, leadership, communication, and engagement in response to the challenges of the global polycrisis and the emergent opportunities to promote resilient responses. It is anchored by StartUp India, an organization that seeds and scales ventures that create lasting impact for excluded communities in India. The program is supported by Commonweal, a US-based NGO dedicated to healing, resilience, and justice.

Key Challenges

- **Accelerated pace of global crises**

The polycrisis is changing the nature of systems and institutions as we know, and moving at a faster pace than the world is equipped to manage. Cumulative threats to established systems, economies, and institutions are overwhelming the ability of policymakers, practitioners, institutions, and governments to remain effective. The climate emergency, the mismanagement of the response to the pandemic, and the war in Ukraine are all current manifestations of the interlocking dysfunction characterized by the polycrisis.

- **Gaps in understanding the polycrisis phenomenon**

The Global South is coping with a disproportionate burden of crises that are only becoming more frequent. At the same time, high-resource economies are finding it difficult to rely on previously tried and tested methods of coping with crises. The need for innovation is dire. This calls for a new course of action, where systems can be built around a community-informed knowledge base and draw from diverse and imaginative voices.

Disruptive ways of working

- **Changing the narrative**

The Omega Resilience Awards fellowship program identifies communicators, artists, changemakers, and public intellectuals who can translate for their communities and audiences, the connections between seemingly disparate phenomena – climate, water, health, and migration. These connections inform the community’s agency and builds agility for interacting within the larger systems affected by the polycrisis.

- **Building capacity for innovative solutions**

The fellowship works alongside partners from across different sides of the table, centering its efforts around issues that have a compounded impact on the Global South. The fellowship is supporting explorative practices by civil society actors who lead by developing and championing knowledge, systems thinking, resources, and action that is imaginative. It is creating innovation and strengthening the capacity of communities to build resilience.

Collaborative partners

Researchers, social entrepreneurs, designers, communicators, civil society actors, policymakers, academics, think tanks and funder networks

Vision for the future

Enable communities and civil society actors to respond, adapt, and develop flexibility to the changing landscape of the polycrisis. In this, the role of ORA fellows is to enable communities to make meaning of the impacts of the polycrisis; take action to slow, if not reverse, the damage by the global polycrisis; and outline what a more resilient future might look like.

The Observatory

The observatory offers wider lenses for exploring ranges of light, visible and invisible in the universe. While it may not provide definitive explanations, it inspires curiosity to begin further action. This section discusses the radical and enduring shifts needed in the philanthropy narrative, from an aspirational perspective. It also offers tenets to guide reflection and course correction in the face of the polycrisis.



Tenets for the Future

The polycrisis is a pivotal moment to discern and take stock of unequal power dynamics. Through this report, we have focused on funders and their giving patterns. However, we acknowledge the need to further explore the perspective of nonprofits, civil society organizations, and community leaders working on the ground. This report is aimed at illuminating the path for philanthropy, offering preliminary guidance, highlighting primary risks, and proposing strategies to effectively use capital to bolster collective resilience amidst an unprecedented future.

Before forging ahead, it is crucial to scrutinize philanthropy's role in serving these communities at the heart of crises. As critics have said, the polycrisis must be rooted in historical perspectives, alluding to generations of marginalized communities enduring prevailing oppressive structures and cascading crises.^{lxxvi} For responding to the polycrisis, the power dynamics behind philanthropy must change. There is a need for philanthropic preparedness and intentionality, to acknowledge inequality, embrace flux, and assume accountability. This transformation can be initiated through the tenets highlighted below.

- **Inequality is inextricably linked to philanthropy:**

The role of philanthropy is commonly perceived as a form of altruism and compassion, where wealth accumulated by individuals in the form of surplus capital is given to communities, with a desire to invest compassionately in their wellbeing and resilience.^{lxxvii} The roots of this money, power and privilege interlink with colonial and socio-economic structures which limit wealth within circles of privilege.^{lxxviii} In this narrative, the voices of the affected communities, those most impacted by effects of natural disasters, economic shocks, polluted water and air, or food supply shortages, are missing. Inequality is a central aspect of the polycrisis, dividing those equipped to weather setbacks and build resilience from those lacking resources, power, and privilege.

- **Giving must be seen as sharing:**

Climate change, humanitarian crises, and economic insecurities trace back to the concentrated wealth and power held by a select few. Undoing the deep-set structures of inequality is essential for responding to the polycrisis. This is not possible unless philanthropy acknowledges a radical shift from 'giving' to adopting a principle of 'sharing'.^{lxxix} Philanthropy as an act of sharing shifts its role from an altruistic act to one of social responsibility. The latter readily acknowledges that the cracks inherent in systems are designed to favor those with money, power, and privilege. Philanthropy oriented towards sharing of resources thus becomes an act of leveling the playing field; open and willing to share resources with communities as co-owners. This evolution in philanthropy can bring a recognition that historic wealth creation comes at the expense of communities and the environment.^{lxxx}

- **Resilience depends on patient capital:**

Resilience in the face of multiple crises hinges on sharing money, power, and privilege to uplift marginalized groups. Relying solely on wealth and influence perpetuates a system favoring existing inequalities, eroding trust in institutions meant to ensure fairness and resource access for everyone. Philanthropy aimed at responding to the polycrisis must see capital as a catalyst for change – capital that is patient, open to risk, and adaptable. This implies the approach must link to providing flexible and long-term grants with an emphasis on community leadership and collaboration. This type of capital fosters transformative change, empowering partners to use resources for lasting community well-being and resilience.

- **Moving beyond the isolated causes:**

Access to safety during crises has historically favored those with resources to prepare for or escape adversity. However, the polycrisis shifts this dynamic significantly. Climate change, mental health challenges, migration, conflicts, and pandemics affect even stable and advantaged communities. Such crises blur the lines between privilege and vulnerability, disrupting the ability to evade adversity solely through wealth or privilege. Catastrophes are no longer isolated experiences. These are interconnected phenomena, reshaping our world, affecting everybody, everywhere. Therefore, philanthropy must solve for root causes, beneath the layers of unpredictable disasters or visible events.

As we conclude this report on the intersections of India, the polycrisis and philanthropy, it is evident that forming a response and understanding the interconnected challenge will require both deep introspection and agile action. Given the polycrisis threatens human survival itself – it is important for different actors within the philanthropy ecosystem to seek the light within and show an unwavering commitment to fostering resilience, for people and the planet.

“What is the proper mode of administering wealth after the laws upon which civilization is founded have thrown it into the hands of the few?”

~ Andrew Carnegie,
The Gospel of Wealth (1889)^{lxxxix}

Annexures

Annexure 1

Methodology & Limitations

This section delineates in detail the methodology and procedural framework employed in this study to investigate the concept of 'polycrisis' with respect to India and philanthropy as a stakeholder.

Our initial approach involved investigating the term 'polycrisis' to comprehend its global interpretation and usage. This entailed reviewing diverse literature sources like academic studies, publications, news articles, and reports from research institutions. Early in this review, a noticeable gap emerged in defining and universally understanding the term 'polycrisis' within an Indian context. While the global discourse is evolving, the comprehension of the polycrisis, grounded in the experiences of the Global Majority, is lagging in comparison to the Global North. Some examples of the concerns included in the narrative are the Ukraine war, surging oil prices, advancements in artificial intelligence, and cost-of-living escalations, leading to ramifications such as constrained global trade, inflation, evolving monetary policies, social upheaval, and state instability. However, this narrative primarily emphasized inflection points from the perspective of resource-rich nations, overlooking the sequence of events embedded in urgent crises within low-resource economies.

In tandem, our inquiry shifted towards a focused examination of the crisis' impact on vulnerable populations, particularly those residing in India. By zooming into India's specific risks, we attempted to discern how philanthropic interventions can strategically deploy resources to build resilience among affected communities. A summary of the key steps taken through our research process is described in the sub-sections below.

Limitations

The methodology deployed in the report is subject to several limitations that warrant consideration.

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Bias as an intermediary:

Our position as intermediaries may introduce inherent biases, potentially influencing the interpretation and analysis of data, impacting the objectivity of the findings. We have tried to mitigate this by cross validating our findings with sector experts and thought leaders.

Data paucity:

The research process faced limitations due to insufficient or outdated data. For instance, the reliance on census data from 2011 for India restricts the current assessment of demographic, economic, and social shifts, potentially affecting the accuracy and depth of our analysis. However we triangulated data with the SDG Dashboard, accepted by the Government of India and the international entities.

Unfamiliarity with the term 'Polycrisis':

The concept of 'polycrisis' was relatively unfamiliar within India during our research process (year 2023). This may have potentially limited the insights available through sector experts, thereby constraining the depth of our exploration and conclusions. We were not able to connect with all the stakeholders identified; however, we tried to cover experts with distinct perspectives.

**Research question 1:
What does the Polycrisis mean
for India?**

To comprehensively address the research question, we employed two key strategies:

- **Consolidating data to map the polycrisis:**

India is still using Census data from 2011 and while there are proxies available for key metrics on human development through national surveys – knowledge is fragmented.^{lxxxii} A key limitation to understanding India’s position in the polycrisis was the lack of disaggregated data.^{lxxxiii} Therefore, we anchored our process in globally recognized datasets. To formulate a view of India’s performance across development indicators, we scanned metrics across the 17 SDGs, along with their sub-goals for year 2022-2023. Hereafter, we linked these to the World Economic Forum Global Risk Report 2023 to spot correlations and interlinkages between the indicators.

- **Cross-validating SDG data with expert knowledge:**

We engaged with 10 stakeholders from diverse fields such as geopolitics, sociology/anthropology, economy, technology, law, and the environment, mirroring the categorization in the Global Risk Report by the World Economic Forum. Employing a semi-structured interview guide aligned with risk indicators, our approach aimed to glean insights from multifaceted angles. Emphasizing Dasra’s focus on marginalized Indian communities and societal disparities, we framed questions using an intersectional lens. This prompted varied responses from experts and offered a comprehensive perspective on the polycrisis, enabling us to corroborate our findings from SDG data, and link them to real-world examples from India and the world.

Outcomes of the process:

- Breakpoint analysis
- Six features of the polycrisis in India

Table 1: Features with context to India's SDG performance

Key Indicators from India's performance on the SDG Board	Features of the Polycrisis	
Environmental		
Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse	The linkage between climate change, biodiversity, natural resource crisis, and food security	
Mean area protected in freshwater sites important to biodiversity		
Mean area protected in marine sites important to biodiversity		
Mean area protected in terrestrial sites important to biodiversity		
Failure to mitigate climate change		
Natural Resource crisis		
Prevalence of undernourishment(%)		
Prevalence of children stunting under the age of 5		
Prevalence of wasting in children under 5 years of age (%)		
Political		
State collapse or severe instability	Interlocks between public institutions and accountability in governance	
Access to and affordability of justice		
Corruption Perception Index		
Press Freedom		
Property Rights		
Unsentenced detainees		
Societal		
Chronic diseases and health conditions	Ties between well-being, personhood and inadequate social security	
Age standardized death rate due to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease in adults aged 30-70 years(%)		
Collapse or lack of public infrastructure and services		
Demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods (% of women aged 15 to 49)		
Government revenue excluding grants		
Government spending on health & education		
Logistics Performance Index: Quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure (worst 1-5 best)		
Participation rate in pre-primary organized learning (% of children aged 4 to 6)		
Population using at least basic drinking water services (%)		
Proportion of urban population living in slums		
Universal health coverage (UHC) index of service coverage (worst 0 - 100 best)	Intersectional identities and unequal power structures	
Employment crisis		
Poverty headcount ration at \$3.20 a day		
Unemployment rate (% of total labor force)		
Erosion of social cohesion and societal polarization		
Homicides		
Ratio of female-to-male labor participation rate (%)		
Seats held by women in national parliament(%)		
Ratio of female-to-male mean years of education received (%)		
Infectious disease		
Incidence of tuberculosis (per 100,000 population)	Strong infrastructure and improving universal access to service	
Severe mental health deterioration		
Subjective well-being (average ladder score, worst 0-10 best)		
Technological		
Digital Inequality and lack of access to digital services		Strong infrastructure and improving universal access to service
Adults with an account at a bank or other financial institutions or with a mobile-money-service provider (% of population aged 15 or over)		
Digital Power concentration		
Expenditure on research and development (% of GDP)		

Please Note: Given India's strong performance on economic growth, we were not able to identify stressors under the SDG Index.

Research question 2: How can philanthropy respond to the polycrisis?

To explore the research question, we focused on:

- **Analyzing the giving behavior of philanthropists:**

India's burgeoning economy is influencing speedy growth within its circles of wealth. In turn, philanthropic trends have been going through transitions based on the heterogeneity of the different funding cohort, which can be determined by quantum and source of wealth. Family philanthropy, which includes giving by affluent, high-net-worth, and ultra-high-net-worth individuals in India is leading the transition from traditional modes of giving to more catalytic approaches. Due to its ability to give with its greater flexibility and risk appetite – in this research study, we have purposively focused on family philanthropy. Harbingers of this change are apparent in the increasing affinity towards inter-sectoral themes such as gender, equity, diversity and inclusion or climate action, as well as focus on strengthening the ecosystem.^{lxxxiv}

- **Leveraging analytical tools**

We fine-tuned the philanthropic practices identified and ensured that the list was mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. These practices were then mapped against the Three Horizons Framework which is a systems thinking tool and weaves in the concept of futures thinking for analysis. The method provides a view of the patterns of change, emphasizing the significance of short, medium, and long-term futures and the cyclical nature of transitions in societal contexts.^{lxxxv} The tool, by bringing forward the future context, helped create a reflective rubric for philanthropic practice.

- **Leveraging sectoral and institutional knowledge:**

Utilizing institutional knowledge from a Dasra-anchored network of family philanthropists, GivingPi – we collated a purposive sample of 100 family philanthropists and consulted with internal experts to understand their approaches. This process helped glean approaches to strategic and catalytic giving. Next, we shortlisted 25 philanthropists based on their catalytic giving potential, which considered a consolidation of aspects such as openness to learning, collaborative action, and knowledge sharing. Through this process, we were able to derive a few core practices that stood out as catalytic. These insights were corroborated with expert interviews (as outlined above in the methodology section) and existing literature on philanthropy. Finally, five out of these funders were interviewed based on their availability. Case studies on their philanthropy have been featured in the sections below.

Outcomes of the process:

- Mapping philanthropic practices on the Three Horizons Framework
- Rubric for reflecting on philanthropic practice
- Case studies with good practice from Indian philanthropy

Annexure 2

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Sunita Maheshwari	The Telerad Group
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Tahera Khorakiwala	Viiv Healthcare

Annexure 3

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