



The Growing Momentum Behind Philanthropic Collaboratives in India

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In April 2020, just weeks into COVID-19's devastating spread across India, a group of grassroots nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) came to a frightening realisation about an unexpected consequence of the disease. The pandemic, which was having a disproportionate impact on historically marginalised and vulnerable communities, was exposing deep-seated disparities in access to health care, education, and economic opportunities. And in India's rural communities, those disparities were poised to explode as the pandemic triggered a historic, large-scale migration away from the nation's cities back to the villages.

The NGOs knew that, individually, each organisation had neither the reach nor the knowledge to help far-flung rural communities across the entire country. But if they banded together, they might make a difference. Seven of them began the Rapid Community Response to COVID-19, recently renamed the [Responsible Coalition for Resilient Communities](#) (RCRC), and the coalition quickly burgeoned throughout 2020. "By May, we were 20. By July, we must have been 40, and then very soon we became 60 [NGOs]," shares Ved Arya, who is the founder and national convenor of RCRC's board, called the Working Committee, and the founder of [Self-Reliant Initiatives through Joint Action](#), or SRIJAN, as well as the [Buddha Institute](#). Today, RCRC has more than 98 member organisations united by the desire to help India's rural population.

Funders such as the Azim Premji Foundation, Arghyam, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Ford Foundation quickly recognised RCRC's momentum and potential. Arya says early funding came at a pivotal moment for RCRC. In the months after its formation, RCRC demonstrated that it could convene and execute research initiatives in rural areas and leverage the findings with the Indian government and several state governments – all with limited resources and a frugal approach. "Augmenting the government's admirable efforts," Arya adds, RCRC "members ensured access to food, cash, and medicine, raised awareness about COVID-19 in the village community, and provided psychological counselling."

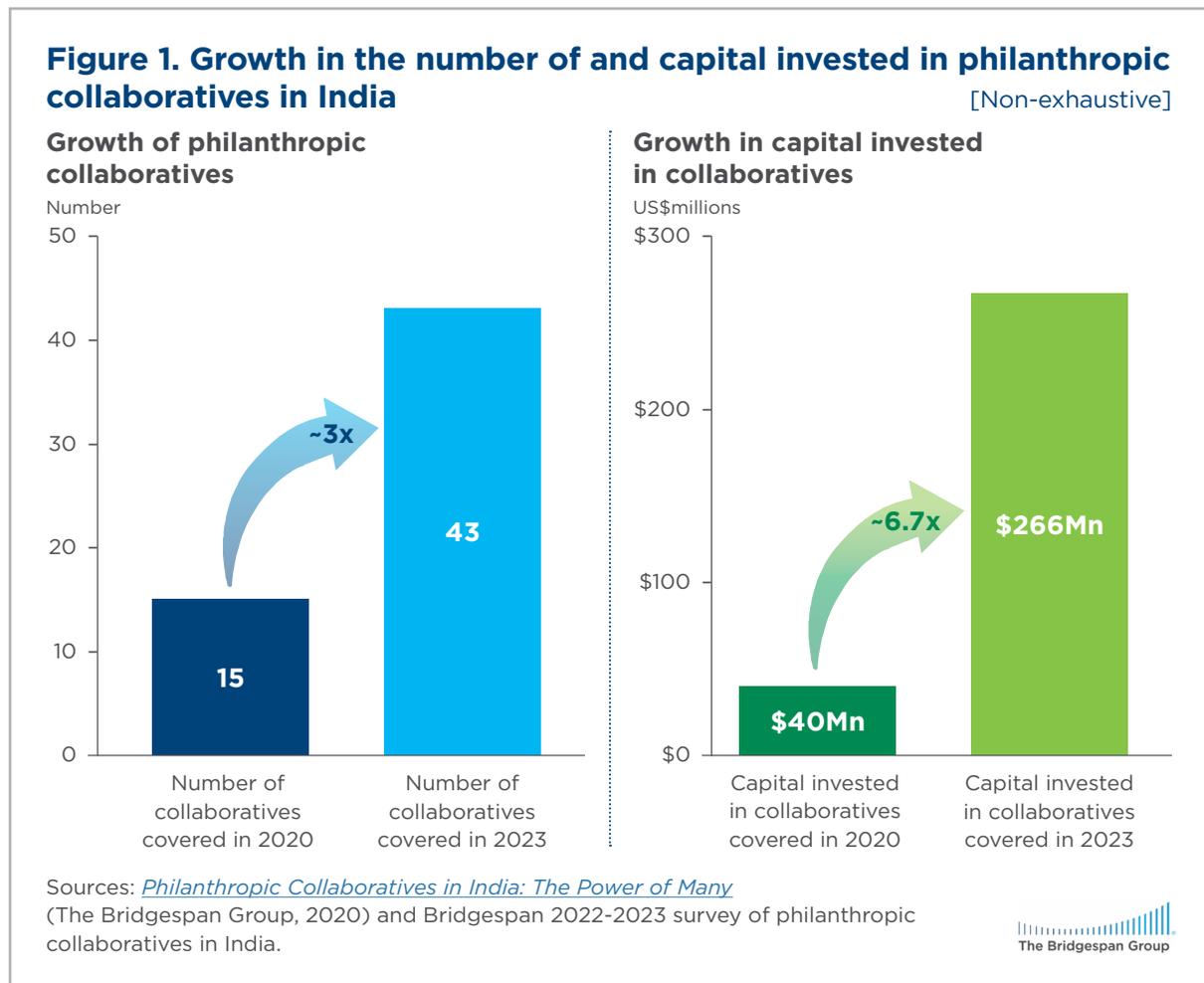
RCRC's approach was and is driven by the goal of supporting rural communities. Today, RCRC's coalition effort serves over 1.6 crore (16 million) people in over 110 districts across 15 Indian states. It generates research to better understand rural vulnerability and works with senior government officials on policy.

The past three years have underscored the importance of philanthropic collaborations, like RCRC, which cross sectors and connect diverse stakeholders not only to respond to a crisis, but also to collectively address complex social challenges across the Sustainable Development Goals over the long term – challenges such as systemic inequalities, poverty, social injustices, climate change, and more. In 2020, The Bridgespan Group's report, [Philanthropic Collaboratives in India: The Power of Many](#), highlighted how India's philanthropists and social-sector stakeholders were combining forces to collectively amplify and sustain their missions.¹

1 Pritha Venkatachalam and Kashyap Shah, [Philanthropic Collaboratives in India: The Power of Many](#), The Bridgespan Group, 2020.

They formed philanthropic collaboratives, which we define as initiatives that have been co-created by three or more independent actors, including at least one philanthropist or philanthropy. These collaboratives pursue a shared vision and strategy for achieving social impact using common resources and agreed-upon governance mechanisms.

The number of philanthropic collaboratives we have tracked in India has nearly trebled since our 2020 report (see [Figure 1](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic was a spark that united stakeholders: indeed, we have found 28 new collaboratives since the previous study. By no means is this an exhaustive list of new philanthropic collaboratives; nonetheless, it highlights the rapid growth in interest and investment in them.



To develop a deeper understanding of factors that drive collaborative action, how collaboratives can create disproportionate impact, and the challenges collaboratives face, Bridgespan conducted a survey, stakeholder interviews, and field visits over five months in 2022 and 2023. We spoke with the leadership teams, funders, and key operating partners of the major collaboratives and of corporate social responsibility (CSR) organisations that have invested in collaboratives.

We received 74 responses to our survey, which included approximately 30 funders (domestic/foreign foundations and CSR organisations). Amongst other data, the survey also captured [Net Promoter Scores](#) (NPSs) – a measure of satisfaction originally developed by Bain & Company to track customer loyalty. (For more on this, see “[Early Evidence on the Impact of Collaboratives](#),” page 9.)

To be sure, India’s social sector is vast; we cannot say definitively that our sample is representative of all the nation’s collaboratives. And the extent to which collaboratives achieve impact over and above what is possible through stand-alone philanthropy is still uncertain, given that many collaboratives are in their early stages and have not published their impact. What is clear, however, is the growing interest in and promise of collaboratives.

Our research pointed to some early answers to three key questions:

- Will the momentum behind the recent growth in collaboratives endure?
- Do collaboratives show early evidence of creating impact?
- Are collaboratives attractive for CSR organisations and high-net-worth individuals?

Making Progress with Collaboratives

Over 70 percent of the stakeholders of collaboratives we surveyed for our 2020 report strongly agreed that collaboration has enabled them to make more progress against India’s large, complex social challenges than had they acted alone. In the report, we highlighted three other advantages of collaboratives – that they:

- Leverage the diverse skills and experiences of different partners
- Expand the partners’ circles of influence and impact
- Help mitigate risk

Since early 2020, the number of collaboratives has grown dramatically. For this report, we looked at the larger sample of collaboratives and mapped them across the three life stages we identified in our earlier research: shaping strategy in terms of shared goals and objectives and respective areas of expertise (i.e. coming together); bringing shared strategy to life (i.e. working together); and exiting when shared goals have been achieved.

Of the 43 collaboratives we analysed for this report, 89 percent are either coming together or working together. This includes collaboratives, such as the [ClimateRISE Alliance](#), which are in the early stages of formation, as well as others like the [Bharat EdTech Initiative](#) (BEI) and RCRC, which have been active for a few years. The increase in collaborative activity has involved key segments across the philanthropic space – NGOs with multiple stakeholders, foreign foundations, high-net-worth individuals, domestic foundations, private sector organisations, and CSR organisations. (See [Figure 2](#) for a sample of collaboratives, page 5.)

Figure 2. Sample of philanthropic collaboratives in India by life stage

 Coming together			
Aspire	ClimateRISE Alliance	Transform NEEV Collective	Swasth Alliance
 Working together			
#COVIDActionCollab	Bharat EdTech Initiative	India Philanthropy Alliance	Responsible Coalition for Resilient Communities
ACT	Coalition for Women Empowerment and The Influencers	Life Skills Collaborative	REVIVE Alliance
Alliance for Suicide Prevention	Future of Impact Collaborative	Migrants Resilience Collaborative	Saamuhika Shakti
Anamaya	Future Right Skills Network	Punjab Education Collective	Social Compact
Asha Kiran	The GROW Fund		
 Exiting/re-inventing			
CoAST India	The India Protectors' Alliance	Road to Recovery Initiative	WASH Platform Maharashtra

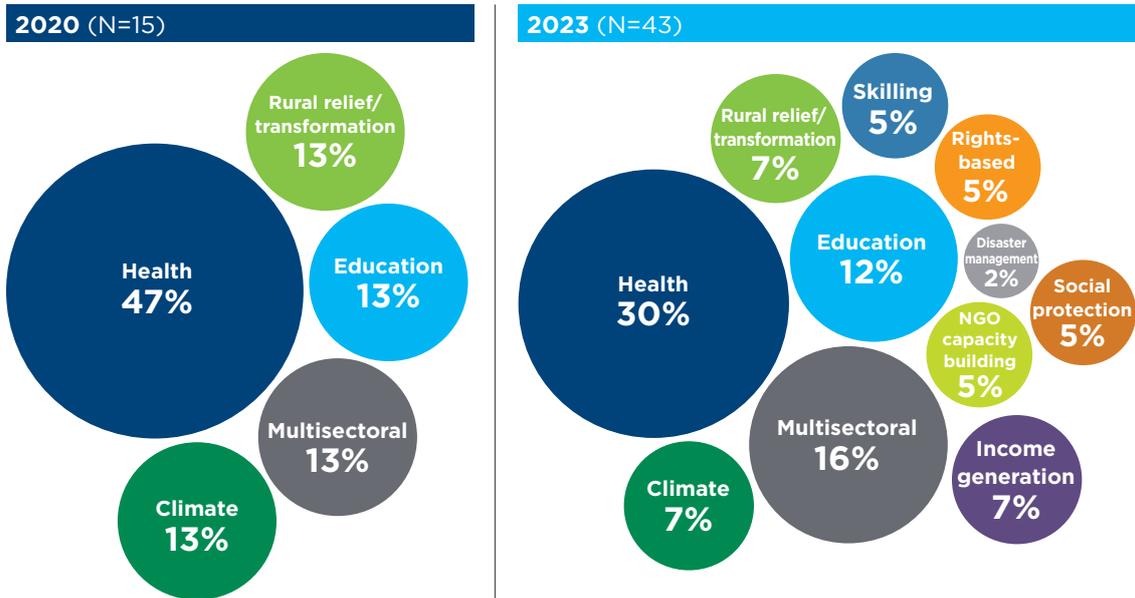
Source: Bridgespan 2022-2023 survey of philanthropic collaboratives in India.



Over the past three years, collaboratives have formed across a wide set of issue areas, going beyond sectors that traditionally receive significant funding from philanthropy. Whilst a majority of collaboratives in 2020 represented the health care and education sectors, collaboratives now operate across more sectors. In addition, more collaboratives are multisectoral, meaning they explicitly work beyond programmatic siloes. (See [Figure 3](#), page 6.) This is consistent with our research on philanthropic collaboratives operating around the world: respondents to a [recent global survey of collaboratives](#) reported that they concurrently work on a median of six secondary issue areas.² Some of the collaboratives in India have expanded their focus, such as [ACT](#), which started working on health care but has now expanded into education, environment, and gender. Others, such as RCRC, advocate for marginalised populations by looking to address multiple issues in the communities they serve.

2 Alison Powell, Wendy Castillo, and Simon Morfit, [The Philanthropic Collaborative Landscape](#), The Bridgespan Group, 2023.

Figure 3. Sector focus of philanthropic collaboratives in India



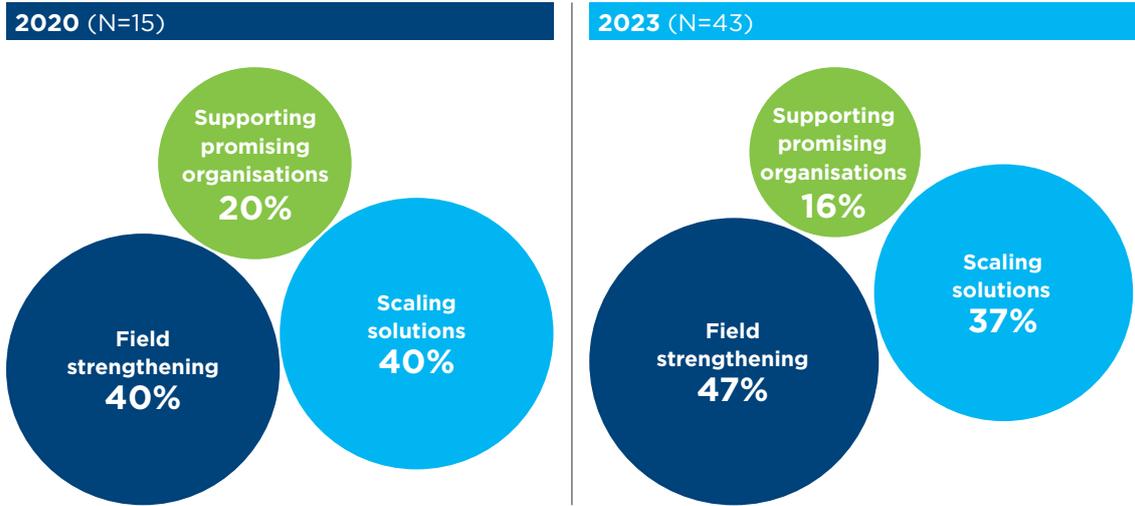
Sources: *Philanthropic Collaboratives in India: The Power of Many* (The Bridgespan Group, 2020) and Bridgespan 2022-2023 survey of philanthropic collaboratives in India.



Another way to look at the work of collaboratives is how they approach their fields. Nearly half of the collaboratives in our sample embrace field strengthening as their primary goal (see [Figure 4](#), page 7). Field strengthening, which some refer to as ecosystem building or [field building](#), is the oft-unseen work of bringing together and galvanising myriad actors across a social change issue, or field, to achieve a shared goal for equitable systems change. Field strengthening means working and coordinating across actors to pursue shifts in policy and institutional practices, to strengthen relationships amongst stakeholders, to enhance funding, or to change public narratives around an issue.

Many of society’s major social-change successes have benefited from the critical field-building work of a collaborative or intermediary, such as the role of [Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance](#), in the eradication of polio. And collaboratives often embrace such population-level change as their goal. In our survey, 85 percent of respondents say that collaboratives enable more-effective systems-change work in society. “Taking a collective approach is crucial to make transformative change in issues such as climate and child protection,” says Nalini Tarakeswar, head of programmes and monitoring and evaluation at UBS Optimus Foundation. “We needed to disrupt the process of everyone doing things by themselves in a fragmented manner.”

Figure 4. Primary goals of philanthropic collaboratives in India

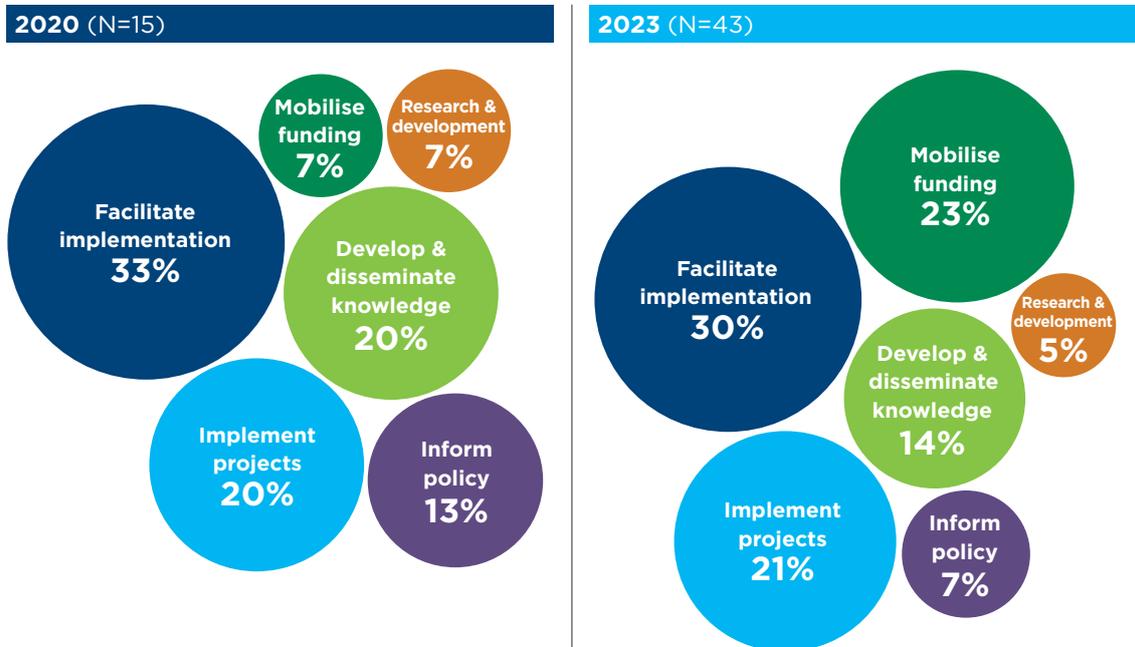


Sources: *Philanthropic Collaboratives in India: The Power of Many* (The Bridgespan Group, 2020) and Bridgespan 2022-2023 survey of philanthropic collaboratives in India.



In addition, whilst the primary roles of collaboratives remain varied, we found more who say their primary role is to mobilise funding. Still, similar to 2020, most collaboratives focus on either facilitating implementation or implementing projects themselves. (See [Figure 5](#).)

Figure 5. Primary roles of philanthropic collaboratives in India



Sources: *Philanthropic Collaboratives in India: The Power of Many* (The Bridgespan Group, 2020) and Bridgespan 2022-2023 survey of philanthropic collaboratives in India.



Will the momentum endure?

It would be impossible to think about changes in the social sector between 2020 and 2023 without considering the role of the COVID-19 pandemic. The need for providing prompt relief to those affected by the pandemic led to the formation of several new collaboratives – and faster action. Whilst collaboratives typically take time to come together, agree on shared goals, raise funds, and coordinate their work, the pandemic dictated that relief efforts would have to quickly ramp up, scale solutions across geographies, and demonstrate impact. There was an urgency to invest in scalable models by shortening the time taken to set up structures, mobilise, pool resources, and identify local nonprofit partners where needed. Several funders put their current priorities on hold and changed gears during these crisis years. This led to a surge in collaboratives.

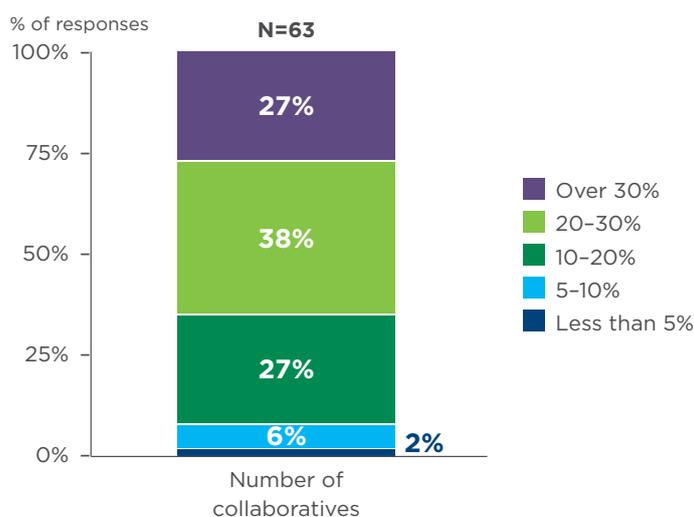
For example, the repercussions of a strict lockdown meant no access to physical classrooms for students across India. Enter BEI, which formed as a collaborative in August 2021 to improve learning outcomes for students amidst the pandemic. It is made up of 18 partner organisations who draw on their areas of expertise in different capacities and sectors and bring together funders, technology and education companies, and NGOs as well as financial management, marketing communications, programme management, and measurement, evaluation, and learning (MEL) organisations. “None of the partners in the Bharat EdTech Initiative could have brought about the economies of scale [that the collaborative] achieved by themselves,” says a BEI representative. “The collective approach to work with the government helped bring credibility to the work.”

Of the new collaboratives included in our research, 11 were formed in the initial weeks and months after the pandemic hit with specific COVID-19-related objectives: relief provision, crisis management, information dissemination, and a push towards vaccinations. Will they endure? The data suggest yes.

Eight of these new collaboratives in our sample are now shifting their focus from serving near-term pandemic needs to creating opportunities with long-term relevance, such as developing livelihoods and building resilience amongst grassroots organisations and communities. They are expanding focus areas and supporting newer sets of

Figure 6. Expected growth of philanthropic collaboratives in India by 2030

“Today, collaboratives (as defined) are less than 5% of total philanthropic giving in India. In your aspiration/opinion, by 2030, what should this proportion be?”



organisations. Whilst BEI started out as a project for 25,000 students, for example, it now aims to enhance learning outcomes for a million students by 2025. It can only reach that scale by expanding how it collaborates with partners. Other examples include [Asha Kiran's](#) programmatic shift from relief work to sustainable livelihoods and ACT's expansion of its Rs100 crore (about \$12 million) health fund to bridge affordability and access gaps in mental health, tuberculosis, cancer, and other health services.

We reviewed the budgets of 30 collaboratives in our sample and estimate that they represent about 2 percent of philanthropic capital today. Our survey indicates that collaboratives are expected to increase in significance in India in the coming years. Over 90 percent of our survey respondents believe collaboratives could account for at least 10 percent of philanthropic capital in India by 2030; that optimism is shared across different types of collaborative partners (see [Figure 6](#), page 8).

We have also seen increasing long-term funding commitments to collaboratives, suggesting confidence in these structures. For instance, the [REVIVE Alliance](#) was launched by the [Samhita-Collective Good Foundation](#) partnership to assist microbusinesses and small businesses impacted by the pandemic with a financial model that encompasses long-term empowerment and financial and digital inclusion. It has since onboarded private-sector banks and other partners to mobilise funding for REVIVE 2.0.

“Returnable grants were one out of many instruments we considered and used to create an impact. As of September 2023, we have impacted 700,000 people and disbursed Rs150 crore [roughly \$18 million]. Now we are looking to impact 10 million people and ... increase funding. We are using ... access to blended finance, digital tools and services, social security schemes, and trading specific skills,” says Priya Naik, founder and CEO of Samhita.

Early Evidence on the Impact of Collaboratives

To understand how philanthropic collaboratives have been effective, we started out by speaking with participants to hear their perspectives. For example, we spoke with participants of the [Saamuhika Shakti](#) collaborative, made up of nine organisations³ that joined forces in 2020 to help informal waste pickers lead secure and dignified lives.

Every Indian city's waste-management system relies on an extensive network of informal waste pickers. In Bengaluru, approximately 22,500 waste pickers recycle an estimated 600 tonnes of waste every day. The waste-picking community continued to work through the pandemic lockdowns to ensure better living conditions for the city residents. Yet few advocate for waste pickers as essential workers in society; thus, opportunities for education, health, and other public services often elude them and their families.

3 Those organisations were the H&M Foundation, The/Nudge Institute, WaterAid India, Save the Children India, Hasiru Dala, Social Alpha, BBC Media Action, Care India, and the Sambhav Foundation.

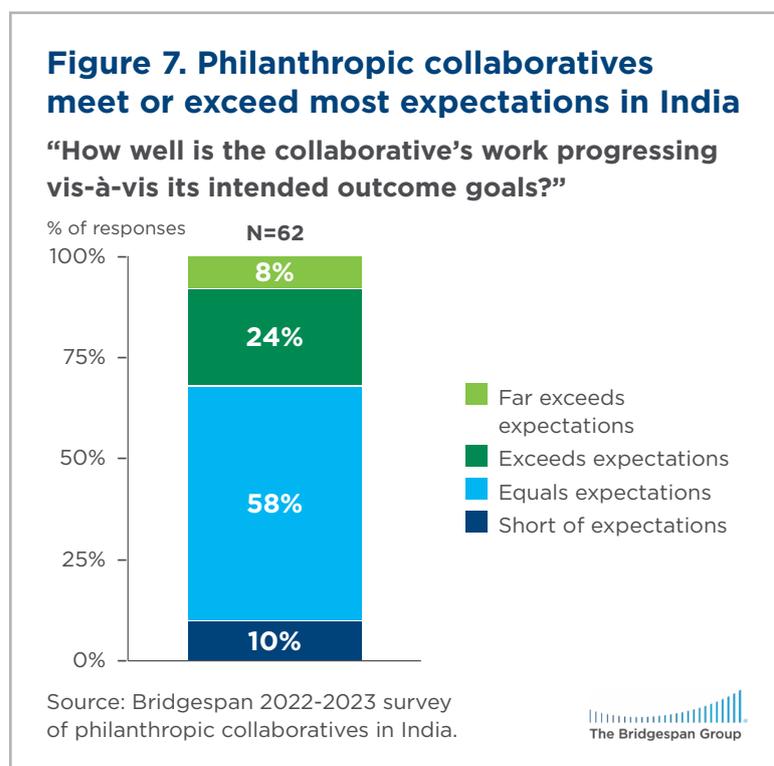
That’s where Saamuhika Shakti came in. The initiative worked closely with waste pickers to identify specific ways in which the collaborative could be helpful, such as by improving working conditions and improving access to social services and education. Saamuhika Shakti also worked to shift public perceptions around waste pickers, such as with its [#Invaluables social media campaign](#). The scope of Saamuhika Shakti today extends to economic aspects (e.g. skill building) and social aspects (e.g. education, health, housing, water, sanitation, and hygiene), with a specific focus on ensuring that women, girls, and other vulnerable groups have equitable access to these services. It has helped over 7,000 waste pickers and family members with life skills and over 9,000 children from waste-picker communities with access to education. The #Invaluables campaign has also reached over nine million Bengaluru residents.

The collaborative was initiated and continues to be supported by the H&M Foundation. The/Nudge Institute plays a pivotal role as the “backbone organisation” – a coordinating body that brings stakeholders together. The backbone isn’t just a facilitator; it plays an active role in helping the collaborating partners learn and improve. Akshay Soni, who is executive director of Saamuhika Shakti as well as head of marketing at The/Nudge, explains: “One of the key pillars that The/Nudge is also looking at is collaboration in terms of how partners within the collaborative can work closely with each other to benefit the community. After four years of on-ground experience, we have built up a body of knowledge and learnings that we are taking in to design Phase 2 of Saamuhika Shakti, to ensure the community’s voice is at the center of the work. ... We are also sharing these learnings with the larger impact ecosystem to encourage stakeholders to support cross-sectoral collaborations that take a systems-change approach.”

We heard similar stories from other collaboratives. In response, we set out to explore a quantitative view of their work through a survey. We found that 90 percent of respondents feel that collaboratives’ work equals or exceeds the intended outcome goals. Moreover, 81 percent of respondents believe that the benefits of collaboratives exceed their costs. (See [Figure 7](#).)

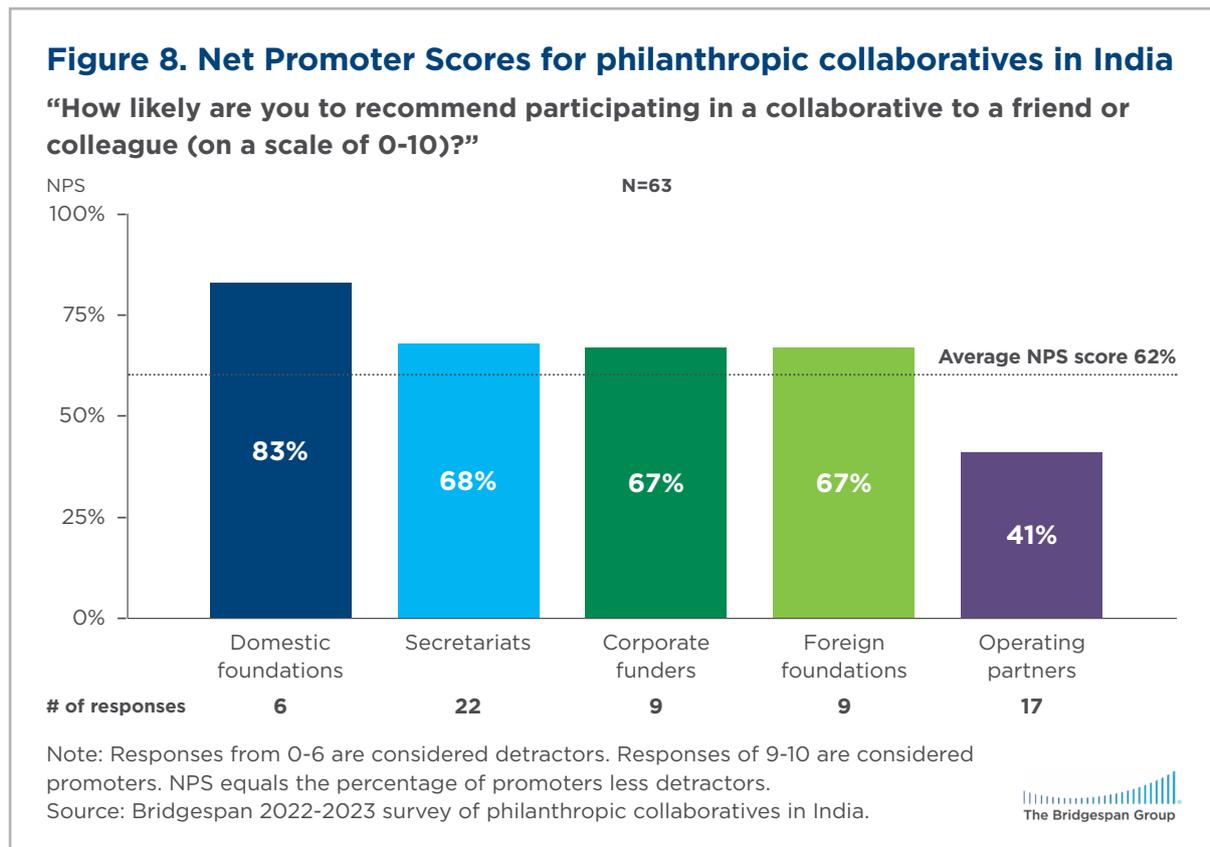
We also looked at NPSs to see how funders, backbone organisations, and operating partners view collaboratives, as well as to validate what we heard in interviews. The use of NPSs is a common

approach in market research to understand customer loyalty and satisfaction. Using a survey, customers are segmented on their likelihood to recommend a company to others.



The percentage of customers who are enthusiastic “promoters” minus the percentage who are naysaying “detractors” yields an NPS, which can thus range from -100 (all are detractors) to 100 (all are promoters). Results above zero are generally considered good, and those above 50 considered excellent.

The key question in our survey was: “How likely are you to recommend participating in a collaborative to a friend or colleague?” Collaboratives scored an average NPS of 62, indicating high levels of satisfaction. Only 5 percent of respondents are “detractors,” or unhappy participants, and an encouraging 67 percent see themselves as “promoters,” or loyal and enthusiastic participants. (See [Figure 8.](#))



The strongest promoters of collaboratives are domestic foundations, with 83 percent of them promotive of collaboratives. There is strong support from corporate funders as well. This demonstrates the appeal of collaboratives amongst Indian funders. Funders have other options for their philanthropy, so their satisfaction with philanthropic collaboratives says something. Operating partners are less likely to be vocal advocates, with several being neutral on advocating for collaboratives; this is largely driven by challenges in aligning with other partners and the complexity they face in executing the ambitious goals of the collaborative. Philanthropic collaboratives with a relatively more developed approach to MEL have even higher NPSs.

The importance of measurement, evaluation, and learning

For the 10to19 Dasra Adolescents Collaborative (10to19), a clear MEL framework has played a key part in its evolution. India has the largest adolescent population in the world, at an estimated 254 million, or one in five Indians. 10to19, a collaborative platform that unites stakeholders across the adolescent-services ecosystem, launched in 2017 and has helped channel \$48 million from 30 funders ranging from bilateral organisations to domestic individual philanthropists.⁴ 10to19's focus is on adolescent girls, opening doors for economic opportunity and improving their agency and access to nutrition, health resources, and education. It also strives to reduce early pregnancy and acts of sexual violence.

As it worked with implementing NGOs, government partners, and funders, 10to19 realised how important measuring and evaluating impact could be, not necessarily for reporting to those partners, but rather so it could improve over time. As a result, for its subsequent phase of field-building work (2022-2027) – which involves a complex mix of driving social change, conducting knowledge management and policy advocacy, setting the field's agenda, and networking with stakeholders – it has developed an MEL framework to foster continuous learning optimisation.

“We have a logical MEL framework that has five-year goals and draws from [our] North Star goals,⁵ right down to the activity level,” shares Nandika Kumari, associate director at Dasra and part of the 10to19 team. As a field-building collaborative, these five-year goals revolve around field-level outcomes related to knowledge building, policy advocacy, youth leadership, creation of participatory spaces, and mobilisation of government and private-sector funds for the social sector. In addition to translating field outcomes into outputs and activities, 10to19 has defined its data-collection tools and broad MEL processes by balancing considerations like efficiency, appropriateness, and effectiveness.

Indeed, collaboratives with an advanced approach to MEL have more net promoters in our survey. A third of respondents have yet to begin measuring results, and those without any measurement framework have dramatically lower NPSs. (See [Figure 9](#), page 13.)

However, MEL is not always straightforward for collaboratives, given the scale and long-term nature of their goals and their diversity of stakeholders. Indeed, about 70 percent of backbone organisations highlight that the time commitment and effort required to conduct MEL are major challenges. Collaboratives are inherently complex, and the approaches to measuring field building or systems change vary from traditional MEL frameworks. Still, our data and interviews suggest that conducting MEL is a challenge worth taking on.

Are collaboratives embracing equity?

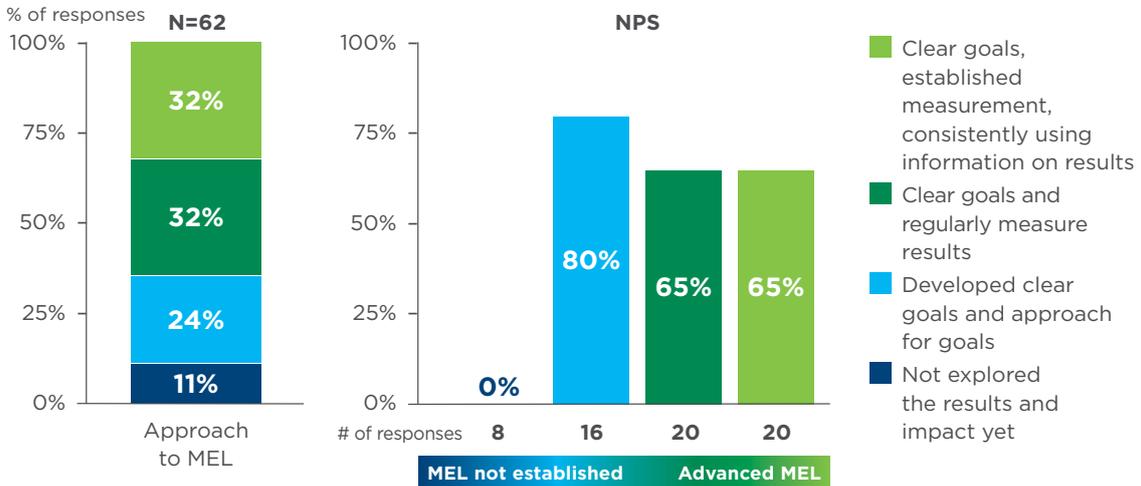
Two-thirds of respondents to our survey believe that the collaborative they are part of focuses on a marginalised group in their communities (see [Figure 10](#), page 13). Some focus

4 [India Philanthropy Report 2020: Investing in India's Most Vulnerable to Advance the 2030 Agenda to Action](#), Bain & Company, 2020.

5 10to19's four North Star, or key, goals are linked to broader Sustainable Development Goals and encompass health and well-being, equitable education, and gender equality; specifically, they are delayed age at marriage, delayed age at pregnancy, improved secondary education, and increased agency and employability.

Figure 9. Philanthropic collaboratives' approach to MEL in India - and resulting satisfaction

“How would you describe your current approach to understanding the results and impact of your collaborative?”

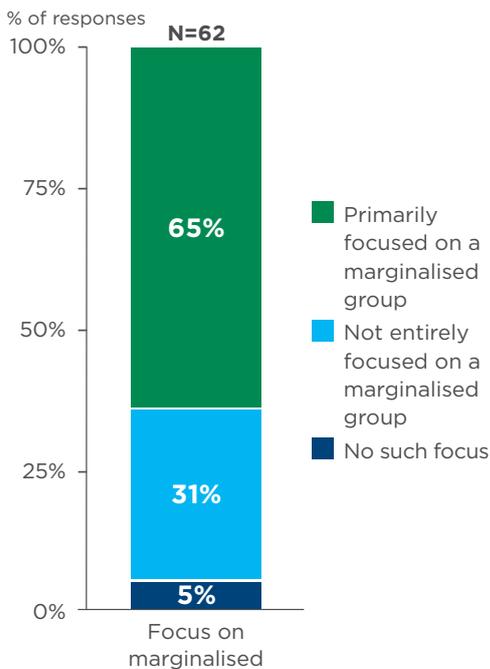


Source: Bridgespan 2022-2023 survey of philanthropic collaboratives in India.

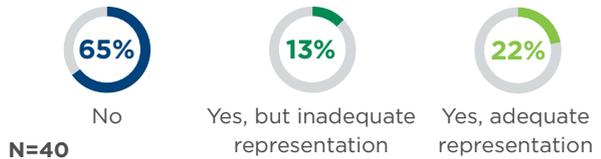


Figure 10. Most philanthropic collaboratives in India say they're focused on marginalised communities

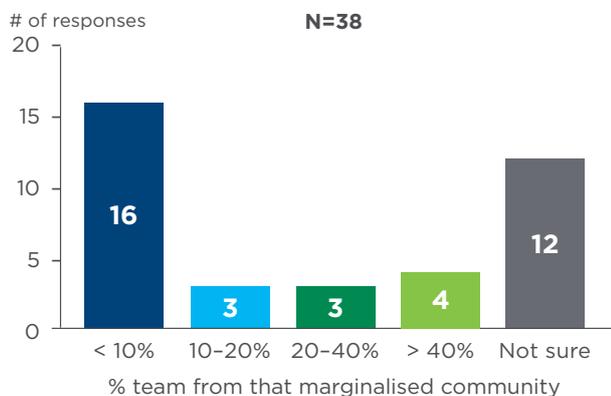
“Does your collaborative primarily focus on serving marginalised sections of society?”



“Does the collaborative’s leadership include members from that marginalised community?”



“Approximately what proportion of the collaborative’s team is from that marginalised community?”



Source: Bridgespan 2022-2023 survey of philanthropic collaboratives in India.



on waste pickers, migrants, unskilled workers, or tribal people; others focus specifically on women and girls to tackle gender inequities.

There is a lot of potential here. Collaboratives are well positioned to identify and elevate the voices of communities in their work by using the diverse strengths of partners. Two ways of achieving this include ensuring community representation in the collaborative's and any nonprofit partners' teams, and creating mechanisms for partners in the collaborative to centre community needs in the design and execution of the collaborative's work and in tracking outcomes.

To be sure, a collaborative's members will come to equity work with different understandings of what equity means and how to centre it. That could be one reason why less than one in four survey respondents who focus on equity report adequate representation of the marginalised focus community in their leadership.

It is hard work to bring a collaborative to a place of shared understanding on equity. At Saamuhika Shakti, "what we've done in the past is that we actually got our partners to take internal looks at their organisations," shares Soni. As an example, he says, they asked partners: "How many women do you have in the organisation? How many women are there in positions of power on the board? Do you have a PoSH policy?" – referring to a 2013 national policy on the prevention of sexual harassment. He adds, "it's surprising how many people don't have a PoSH policy."

Some collaboratives with an explicit focus on marginalised communities monitor their progress on working with those communities. In some cases, the collaboratives go beyond tracking the number of lives or households touched. For example, Saamuhika Shakti is in the process of incorporating a gender lens in its MEL framework that will be adopted by all the partners in the collaborative.

Collaboratives Are an Opportunity for Philanthropies and CSR Organisations

Bridgespan's [2022 research on domestic philanthropy](#) found that India's individual and family givers, as well as CSR organisations, could play a pivotal role in India's philanthropic future. Collaboratives could be one means for them to step into that role.

Indeed, the 15 corporate funders and domestic foundations responding to our survey have had good experiences with philanthropic collaboratives; these two stakeholder types had a combined NPS of 73. Organisations that have engaged in collaboratives name several specific benefits. One is the lower cost to reach target communities. Since collaboratives often have several partners that work closely with communities of interest, and they pool resources and leverage capabilities, investing through collaboratives provides a more efficient route to reach those communities.

Another benefit is the opportunity to learn and develop a common knowledge base. Collaboratives mix the diverse capabilities and experiences of partners, philanthropists, and CSR organisations. They are thus able to develop their understanding of communities of interest and promising approaches to reach them. This prevents duplication of effort and becomes especially valuable when philanthropists are looking to enter new geographies and thematic areas.

Still, there are untapped opportunities for domestic philanthropy to step up participation. Fifty corporations in India today have annual CSR giving of greater than \$5 million; 50 more could potentially have this capacity by 2050, according to a 2022 Bridgespan analysis of domestic philanthropy in India. These are corporations that intersect with business-owning families who have significant stakes in corporate governance and have personal or family wealth. These entities (corporations, family foundations, and wealthy individuals) could have a big impact on the sustainability and growth of India’s philanthropic collaboratives. As it stands right now, 30 percent of the top 40 CSR organisations are engaged in philanthropic collaboratives. These organisations together account for 28 percent of the CSR spend of the top 40 companies (see [Figure 11](#)).

In addition, we found that five funders (including both domestic and foreign funders) play a key role in 65 percent of a sample of 25 collaboratives covered in our research. If collaboratives are to grow to represent more than 10 percent of giving by 2030 (see [Figure 6](#), page 8), it is likely that more funders, including CSR organisations, will need to collaborate.

Figure 11. Philanthropic collaboratives funded by the top 40 CSR companies in India [Non-Exhaustive]

12 of the top 40 CSR companies
with CSR spend of Rs2,532 crore (2020-21)

OR

28% of top 40
companies' CSR spend

... are invested in **10** philanthropic collaboratives

Scaling solutions		Field building	
Seven of these collaboratives work on scaling solutions (four examples shared below)		Three of these collaboratives work on building the field	
Collaboratives	Number of CSRs involved	Collaboratives	Number of CSRs involved
ASMAN Alliance	Reliance Industries Limited	India Climate Collaborative	JSW Steel
	Reliance Jio		Wipro
	Reliance Retail	India Sanitation Coalition	Hindustan Unilever Limited
Asha Kiran	HDFC Bank	Larsen & Toubro	Sphere India
	Hindustan Unilever Limited	HCLTech	
Maharashtra Village Social Transformation Foundation	JSW Steel		
	Mahindra Rise		
	Reliance Industries Limited		
REVIVE Alliance	Vedanta Foundation		

Source: Bridgespan 2022-2023 survey of philanthropic collaboratives in India.



What is keeping more organisations from entering collaborations?

As promising as philanthropic collaboratives are, there are real and legitimate challenges. In our interviews, stakeholders shared four hesitations about entering collaborative partnerships, with an emphasis on CSR experiences:

- **Process of discovery.** Difficulties in finding collaborative opportunities and reaching common ground on impact potential, timelines, and priorities can prevent philanthropic organisations from engaging in collaboratives. CSR organisations, in particular, often have complex decision-making processes, which can give them further pause before exploring opportunities. Amongst survey respondents from organisations that haven't engaged in collaboratives, 55 percent report not having yet come across an attractive opportunity.
- **Perception.** Companies believe CSR laws and reporting requirements under these laws restrict the ability to fund collaborative programmes and make it harder for them to fund a backbone organisation. However, collaboratives can build financial tracking systems for CSR organisations to meet reporting requirements.
- **Preferences and power.** CSR organisations tend to prefer investing in projects where they manage programmes and outcomes. In our survey, 36 percent of respondents who have not engaged in collaboratives cite their preference for having adequate visibility and direct control of funded programmes as a reason for their lack of engagement. Whilst collaboratives are growing in importance, empirical evidence of their incremental impact over other approaches is not yet definitive. This also explains why some CSR organisations are essentially operating foundations.
- **Human resource capacity.** Many CSR organisations are staffed lightly; hence, they believe they lack the capacity to be an active partner in a collaborative. As CSR organisations grow, however, they will find their limited staffing could go a long way through a collaborative. Just as collaboratives allow CSR organisations to be more efficient with their capital investment, they are also an opportunity to be efficient with their people.

Evolving Practices to Sustain Momentum

Philanthropic collaboratives are here to stay. They can be flexible, cross-sectoral, and efficient. Some deliver needed services at a local level, as during the COVID-19 pandemic, with opportunities to scale; others work towards social change on a systemic level. Many are making a tangible difference to populations in need. (See "[What Conditions Are Well Suited for Collaboratives?](#)" on page 18.)

They are also relatively young and still growing into their potential. It takes time for the participants of a collaborative to learn how to work together, let alone to raise funds and grow programmes together. Many of the collaboratives that came together the fastest during the COVID-19 crisis are still learning from the experience and evolving their strategies and operating models. What might help that evolution? [Our 2020 report highlighted the "3Cs"](#) – three mindsets that participants adopted to fuel and sustain their collaborations: a commitment to working together, clarity of roles to help streamline collective action, and an openness to course correction, or shifting direction when conditions call for change. These 3Cs still apply as broad guidelines for collaboratives.

Through our interviews, we found that, in addition to the 3Cs, collaboratives that strive to grow and become more effective are still evolving their practices in four areas. Some practices are specific to collaboratives, and some are relevant to the evolving ecosystem around them:

- **Easier on-ramps for new funders.** The process of discovery, as noted above, is holding some funders back. Many are not aware of the breadth of collaborative options, and much participation to date has been more opportunistic than systematic. Easier on-ramps for different types of funders could unlock new philanthropic capital. This might include simpler ways for donors to find collaboratives that fit with their giving strategies, showcases of successful collaborative action, guides to working with different kinds of collaboratives, or other ways of lowering transaction costs and perceived risks for new funders. High-net-worth individuals, both domestically and amongst the global diaspora, and CSR initiatives might benefit from on-ramps tailored to their own needs and sectors of interest.
- **Guidance for backbone organisations.** Lower satisfaction amongst operating partners and backbone organisations points to how intense and challenging coordination and communication can be when working across diverse stakeholders. One way to address that is to support organisations that play the backbone role in collaboratives by investing in their skills and capabilities and helping them build their capacity. Because these organisations “own the action” in the collaborative, supporting them helps build the capabilities of the collaborative and its partner organisations.
- **Support for MEL design.** The benefits of MEL were clear through our survey and interviews. However, there aren't a lot of commonalities amongst approaches to MEL, even by those who are doing it. A toolkit that captures best practices, how-to guidance, coaching support for MEL process design and reporting, and maybe even technology tools would be helpful. It would help more collaboratives conduct MEL, with an emphasis on learning, which would make their initiatives more effective and transparent. (See Bridgespan's forthcoming publication, “How Philanthropic Collaboratives Can Build Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning Capabilities.”)
- **Equity in collaboratives.** Whilst most collaboratives focus their programmes on marginalised communities, it is less clear whether they are adopting practices that centre equity and inclusion. Collaboratives have an opportunity to lean into equity imperatives in several different ways. One way is to emphasise the importance of lived experience, which could manifest, for example, as a target equity metric (e.g. community representation on leadership teams, staff, or boards). Another way might be to share practices on equitable programme design and execution with other collaboratives and to learn from peers.

The good news: India has so much to draw on, not least of which is a vibrant technology ecosystem that is open to philanthropic collaboration. For example, a group of venture capitalists, tech entrepreneurs, and social impact leaders formed ACT in 2020 to provide pandemic relief. The collaborative has since gained momentum as more members joined and they came to realise one of their best assets was underused.

“One big principle that emerged was that tech innovation, data, and platforms had not been used as a lever in as big a manner for social change and for enduring problems,” says Aakanksha Gulati, director of ACT. “That became an important principle. Can we extend

ourselves now and over the next five to 10 years to see if tech and innovation have a role to play in more enduring challenges like education, health, environment, gender, and perhaps others over time?”

Gulati’s question could just as easily apply to all organisations in India. Can more extend themselves to see if they have a role to play in solving enduring social and environmental challenges? The growing momentum behind collaboratives offers one way to get started.

What Conditions Are Well Suited for Collaboratives?

Collaboratives have emerged to address a breadth of issues. Each offers efficient solutions for field building, scaling impact, or supporting promising organisations. Our research suggests that some circumstances provide additional impetus to collaborate; that is, in certain contexts, collaboratives are particularly attractive. We outline these contexts below:

- **Responding to crisis.** Collaboratives have demonstrated how they step in successfully when there is an emergency. For example, the [REVIVE Alliance](#) was formed in October 2020 to help informal workers and microentrepreneurs recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Through financial instruments such as returnable grants; programmes for skilling and digital skill building and literacy; and providing access to social security schema, REVIVE’s ongoing activities reached over 173,000 individuals in its first two years of existence. They’ve also helped enterprises like *kirana* (small general) stores, “beauty-preneurs,” street vendors, and others to recover from the economic fallouts of the pandemic, whilst also building their credit files to enable access to future loans. It has ambitions to expand its reach. “We are now replicating this model in creating a pharmacy collaborative – to get pharmacies to give better health care delivery as channel providers,” says Priya Naik, founder and CEO of Samhita, which helped to launch REVIVE.
- **Working with government.** Collaboratives can enable effective engagement with government stakeholders. They often have credibility with governments because having several organisations and individuals involved underscores the collective thinking behind the engagement, as opposed to individual agendas, as the Bharat EdTech Initiative experienced with its education work. Collaboratives often work with governments as stakeholders of their multi-stakeholder partnerships. “We have executed a big campaign [against tuberculosis] across all tribal districts, ... [reaching] out to the tribal population in 177 districts over six to eight months. That gave us insights right up to the village level,” says Ashwin Deshmukh, former vice president and head of advisory and strategic partnerships at [Anamaya](#), which focuses on health care amongst tribal and other marginalised communities. “Today, we have a connection to almost 65,000 villages across the 180 districts. The time that we spent was mostly to understand the ground reality, create connecting roads in the community, and build some rapport with the health department and the tribal welfare department at district, state, and national levels.”
- **Sharing risk.** Early-stage, high-impact organisations that are supported by collaboratives end up sharing risk across many players. One example is the

[Grassroots, Resilience, Ownership, and Wellness \(GROW\) Fund](#), which aims to build, support, and sustain 100 grassroots organisations across India for two years. When collaboratives enable funding for early-stage, innovative initiatives, the risk is divided so that no single funder takes on the onus of funding the entire initiative. Collaboratives also enable large investments in promising programmes that would be challenging for stand-alone funders. For example, [Co-Impact](#) was founded in 2017 with a focus on fostering just and equitable systems by connecting global philanthropists, foundations, and private-sector partners to pool funding for systems change in health, education, and economic opportunity in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

- **Providing holistic solutions for communities.** Collaboratives develop synergies amongst partners to deliver integrated solutions. For example, [Saamuhika Shakti](#) brings together partners with complementary skill sets to deliver tightly knit programmes for waste-picker communities. The intent is to help the communities lift themselves up as a whole, through different forms of [community-driven change](#), rather than to solve one challenge at a time.



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