The Grassroots and the Grass Tree: Humana People to People India

Abstract

Humana People to People India (HPPI) is a non-profit organisation working for the holistic development of marginalised populations in rural and urban India. Established in 1998, today it is an organisation with an organisational strength of over 4,000 people, and working in 7,000 villages across 92 districts. As of 2020-21, through its work, it had reached out to 2.8 million individuals. Its considerable experience offers opportunity for learners to reflect upon how an organisation with a wide footprint across thematic sectors and geographies has managed to remain connected and relevant to its founding grassroot ethos. The case engages with how HPPI evolved a structure, culture and organisational leadership to hold together multiple kinds of talent as well as work closely with the State and public delivery system that inform the current development narrative. The case can also inform learners of principles of design that can help organisations calibrate how they formalise and professionalise as they grow to scale.

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> It is about fostering new generations with golden hearts and hands, well-educated and with a personal ethic of such proportions that humanised relationships of all sizes can serve as substitutes for all sorts of dehumanising phenomena…And as always in the question of development, it is about promoting and preventing. Preventing the dehumanising of society, of institutions, of you and me. Promoting the humanisation of mankind, the only art form that contains the seeds to the flowers of happiness for all. (Humana People to People, 1998, p.29)

Origins

In the late 1960s, a group of young people from Denmark set out on a year-long journey around the world, seeking to broaden their horizons and experience the world around them. They travelled in their own bus, modified to include basic commodities and facilities for the young travellers. Their travels took them through Europe, across the Eurasian continental landscape, and finally to India. This group of travellers spent the year meeting people from many countries and cultures and going through all kinds of challenging experiences together (Ridenour, 2019). Before the era of widespread telecommunications, these travels also exposed them to a reality that was not widely known at the time, of deep inequalities between people and systemic injustices.

They returned to Denmark driven to share their experiences with others and to establish a form of education, a "school of life" which would impart unconventional yet relevant knowledge of the world. Their school would not be restricted to a campus, but include travels all around the world, and through these experiences, mobilise young students to participate in solving the problems that they saw around them.

In 1970, these young people set up the Travelling Folk High School, for young adults who wanted to learn about the world in ways beyond what was provided by the conventional schooling system. Throughout the 1970s, thousands of youngsters followed in the footsteps of the early founders of the school, travelling in refurbished buses, visiting over 140 countries, learning about world cultures and deep-seated social issues that existed. Wherever they went, they got involved in

small-scale development work, volunteering to build roads, bridges, schools, or marching against apartheid regimes in South Africa, Rhodesia, and Namibia (History of DNS, n.d).

In 1977, teachers from the Travelling Folk High School were looking to develop a practical instrument that its travelling students could use, to work towards improving conditions of distress, disease, or poverty that they came across on their travels. They set up the earliest forerunner to Humana People to People, known as Development Aid from People to People (DAPP). This early organisation, consisting of teachers and students from the Travelling Folk School, collected funds through door-to-door visits and by selling second-hand material in flea markets and village shops. With useable material donated for free: water pumps were built; old jeeps transformed into ambulances; and relief packages of equipment and material (protein biscuits, water, vitamins, notebooks, etc.) put together and sent to Mozambique for those fleeing the apartheid struggle in Rhodesia (History of DNS, n.d).

Over the next decade, DAPP built good relationships with many national governments in Africa, setting up national associations of DAPP in many of these countries. In 1989, the International Humana People to People Movement was formed by bringing together various disparate national associations, and in 1996, the Federation for Associations, connected to the International Humana People to People Movement, formally establishing the Federation Humana People to People. Refer to Exhibit 1 for an extract from the prologue to the Humana People to People Movement's charter.

Today (Dec, 2021), there are 29 member associations of the Federation, active in 45 countries. Across all its members, Humana has a portfolio of 1,400 development projects which reach over 12 million people in Africa, Asia, Central and South America. Development activity across all its members falls under the four key themes of sustainable agriculture and environment, community development, health, and education (Humana People to People, 2021).

The Federation supports its members with the development of programmes and projects; fundraising (through partnerships and the sale of second-hand clothes); capacity building of staff; legal advice; project management and operational assistance; and through influencing development agenda at a global level through international conferences. However, in each country, Humana People to People is an independent organisation, and the name of the country is suffixed to the name "Humana People to People." Each member has its own governance structures and procedures.

Humana People to People India is founded

The Humana People to People movement was founded in 1998 by its current chairperson Dr. Akula Padmavathi, and other social activists in India. The Indian member association of the movement is known as Humana People to People India, or HPPI[1]. On the proposal of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the organisation started its activities in Rajasthan, identified as one of the states of India with exceptionally low human development indicators at the time, especially in the areas of education, child mortality, and status of women and girls.

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[1]Humana People to People India is referred to in this case study as both Humana and HPPI.

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Civil society and social development in Rajasthan: a brief overview

While tourism promotion activities in Rajasthan and its storied past of proud and brave warrior rulers often conjure up evocative images—the grand forts and palaces of Chittorgarh, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur; rich traditions of folk music and art; or colourfully dressed nomads and camels dotting a desert landscape—modern Rajasthan's status as India's largest state (by area) also brings with it significant geophysical challenges for its people. Despite its size (representing 10.4% of India's geographical area), the state only has 1.16% of India's fresh surface water resources, and 1.72% of its groundwater resources (Kumar, 2020). Further, most of its land area is arid or semi-arid, and difficult to traverse. Droughts and famines are thus regular events in the state. These geophysical characteristics also result in severe socioeconomic impacts on its largely rural, agrarian population–in particular, on its population of women. Exhibit 2 of the case gives a short comparison of development indicators for Rajasthan relative to the rest of India, around the time Humana began its work in the state in the 1990s.

One of the results of Rajasthan's continuously low indicators of human development has been the development of a large civil society ecosystem, starting in the 1970s, with the objectives of adult education, welfare, and social development. Through the 1980s, the primary implementation approach followed by CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) working in Rajasthan was that of mobilisation of community participation in development processes. The efforts of the civil society sector during this time were recognised by the state government, and formal spaces were created in government policy and in state-run development initiatives for the participation of civil society. CSOs became involved in planning, implementation, training of personnel and in monitoring and evaluation. Further, international donor agencies supporting development initiatives in Rajasthan, also insisted on the participation of the civil society in projects they initiated within the state. For example, the state government's large-scale "Lok Jumbish" programme, launched in 1992 to achieve UEE (Universalisation of Elementary Education) was in part funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), a partnership that is credited with initiating widespread involvement of civil society into the programme implementation space in Rajasthan (Rajasthan Planning Department, 2011). A total of 52 NGOs worked on the Lok Jumbish programme. Their roles were formally written into the programme plans at cluster, block, and state levels–as mobilisation agencies and as resource agencies for pedagogic support and the delivery of training programmes (Ramachandran, 2003).

The increasing legitimacy and space provided for civil society in Rajasthan led to the rapid growth of the sector and the proliferation of different types of CSOs in the state through the 1990s in several of its underdeveloped districts, including welfare institutions, developmental organisations, religious and charitable organisations, recreation clubs, and formal schools.

Humana in India: growing community roots

Humana's first project in India, in 1998, was a community development project working with a single village called Kuttina in Neemrana Block of Alwar district, Rajasthan. The objective was to improve child survival rates and the welfare of women and children; 2,400 people benefitted from the project (Humana People to People India, 2017). When it first started out, Humana consisted of just seven employees and largely informal structures and processes. However, it brought with it the history of an international movement that had a proven record of implementing development

projects across sectors in multiple countries for decades. Over the next few years, HPPI's projects started increasing in size and outreach. Community development projects were initiated in Behror block, Alwar and Virat Nagar, Jaipur, encompassing 55 and 40 villages, respectively (Humana People to People India, 2005):

> When the organisation started, the overall development concept was a broad concept, which we call community development. It was basically focused on improving the lives of family and children of poor and marginalised people in rural communities. That was the outset, and that was the first project started in Rajasthan. We supported women in forming self-help groups, supported the health system in delivering better health services, started community-based preschools, preschool activities for children, supported the schools and so on. So, in every way, doing different activities to support existing community structures to deliver better services, and also building the agency of communities to access these services and solve the problems they have by themselves. And of course, whenever there is a community development project, then the community themselves identify particular problems: it could be water, sanitation, livelihoods, and so on. The project then seeks to find solutions to those kinds of problems together with people. So, that was our original point of departure. (Snorre Westgaard, CEO, Humana People to People India)

Humana today: a movement taking form

Today, Humana is active in 92 districts in India across 15 states, covering more than 7,000 villages and an outreach to 2.8 million people. Refer to Exhibit 3 of this case for an overview of Humana's project locations in India. The organisation has 80 partners that provide financial, technical, and/or infrastructural support for the implementation of its programmes (Humana People to People India, 2020). These include international governments, multiple central and state government departments, domestic and international private companies through CSR initiatives, domestic and international non-profits, as well as global funding agencies and development programmes.

In 2021, Humana had an annual budget of Rs. 48.73 crores across its four main programmatic areas (livelihood and community development, education, health, and environment). Of these, the livelihood and community development vertical accounts for the biggest portion of its annual expenditure (73%), followed by education (22%) (Humana People to People India, 2020). Refer to Exhibit 4 for an overview of Humana's financials.

Over the past 18 years, from having a presence in 100 villages to over 7,000 villages; and from a handful of staff to over 4,000 personnel, Humana has had stable leadership in a single CEO, Snorre Westgaard, who has seen this entire journey of change unfold.

2004: a new CEO arrives

In 2004, the current CEO of Humana, Snorre Westgaard, joined the organisation. Prior to moving to India, Snorre had worked with Humana People to People as a Project Director for programmes in Botswana and Zambia and before that, in Zambia as a Country Director for Development Aid from People to People (DAPP). Recalling the journey that led him to India, Snorre shares,

> I have been working in the social sector my whole life. From a very young age, I started travelling… This was the time when there was the end of colonisation and apartheid was still in South Africa. So, I was very inspired by the people who were fighting against injustice and inequality and wanted to do something. I worked for many years in different African countries, building schools and working together with communities, and that's how you can say I got my inspiration. Then in 2004, I got an opportunity to work here in India with Humana People to People India. It's the same motivation that when people have opportunities or access to opportunities and then work together and are united, they have enormous power and potential to actually change the situation from a not-so-good situation to a much better one. So, I think that's what always inspires me—to see people actually take action and change their life for the better in the field.

Snorre brought with him expertise in behavioural change, communication, and in handling large-scale development projects, specifically the implementation of a large HIV/AIDS programme in Africa. Adding an HIV/AIDS programme to Humana's work in India was high on Snorre's list of priorities. Another of Snorre's chief priorities early on was securing a diverse portfolio of funding sources that would allow Humana to expand its programmes and work on larger projects and scale. A robust funding portfolio could enable the organisation to build relationships with government partners, who would also support the implementation of such projects with a high impact footprint.

Snorre's early tenure

Early into his stint as CEO in 2004, in cooperation with the HPPI Board of Directors, Snorre's efforts focused on growing the size of Humana's operations and finding the necessary quantum and types of resources to support this growth. Over the next few years, from 2004 onwards, Humana's projects grew in size and scale, and the organisation added new thematic areas of work to its portfolio.

Initially only in Rajasthan, community development projects were started in Haryana and Uttarakhand by 2008. The eight community development projects across these three states involved the active participation of 2,17,333 community members. During this time, Humana also began its environmental action vertical with the launch of the Green Action project (*Harit Sankalp*). The project aimed to mobilise communities to implement local changes in farming and groundwater practices toward ensuring environmental sustainability. By 2008, four Green Action projects across Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu had provided training to 26,500 people; prepared 1,164 demonstration plots for rainwater harvesting, vermiculture units, and modern agriculture techniques; and led to

1,505 farmers actively implementing sustainable practices. In the same year, Humana's three HOPE centres across Rajasthan and Haryana (community-run HIV/AIDS support centres) provided one-to-one counselling for 4,827 people living with HIV/AIDS, including children and commercial sex workers, truck drivers, and migrant workers (Humana People to People India, 2007).

By 2012, Humana had 50 active projects and 350 full-time staff. At the same time, Snorre's efforts had started to bring in funding from global funding agencies like UNDP, UNICEF, UNAIDS, and USAID. Between 2005 and 2012, Humana's available funds grew from Rs. 1.96 crores to Rs. 20.1 crores (Humana People to People India, 2012).

Along with the funding came requirements for due diligence, where the funder would assess the structures and policies within the organisation prior to signing off on funds. USAID, for instance, conducted a complete due diligence process in 2009 and provided Humana with a list of recommendations for the formalisation and operational excellence of the growing organisation. Snorre recalls that,

> We had our first USAID project in 2009. It was a two-year project with USAID, funding a solar charging station with women self-help groups. So then, of course, they came in with due diligence. We passed too. It's not to my surprise that we passed, but they had several larger recommendations. And so, we did a lot in 2009. We introduced those recommendations—mostly to do with policies, and a new big green [policy] handbook was developed.

In response to its new funding environment, as well as the demands of its growing operations, Humana underwent a comprehensive restructuring exercise in 2012, most notably in terms of its people management structures, as Snorre shares,

> In 2010, we took a step towards developing our fundraising and partnership team. We employed new people on a much higher salary scale. Because of this, and because of the size of the organisation by then, we really needed to improve and establish our human resource management system. In 2012, we hired an external agency to do a review of our HR systems and come up with recommendations. The same year we hired our first dedicated HR manager to implement the required changes.

The first level of reforms in the organisation's people practices had actually happened with Snorre's arrival in 2004, when chairman Dr Padmavathi and Snorre developed the first HR policy for HPPI, in the form of a "little green HR handbook." Prior to his arrival, there were only three levels of salary in Humana—two at the management level and one for the field staff. Recognising that having the entire management team (then 12-14 people) on a single pay scale was not the best way for the organisation to function at its full potential, one of Snorre's early steps, under guidance by the board, was to put in place a differentiated pay scale for management staff.

The demands of new funders regarding formalisation inspired an opportunity for Humana to undertake organisational restructuring while accounting for the growing team. The organisational restructuring further led to the reorganisation of Humana's verticals of work. Prior to the arrival of

the larger funding agencies, Humana only had two verticals. The first was the broad umbrella of community development that Humana started with in India (in 1998), encompassing work in health, education, environment, food security and nutrition. The second was a specific vertical on HIV/AIDS, brought in when Snorre joined as CEO in 2004. In 2012, as part of the restructuring exercise, the organisation's work was divided into four key verticals which continue to this day: livelihood and community development, education, health, and environment.

Humana's engagement with the government

Humana started its work in Rajasthan in 1998 on the proposal of the Ministry of Home Affairs, and between 1998 and 2008, while working with local government institutions, mainly focused on establishing community roots. In 2009, the central government passed the Right to Education Act (RtE). During this time, Humana established education as one of the key programme verticals of the organisation. Although until 2009, Humana's work in education had involved setting up the informal "Academy for Working Children"—providing schooling for children who had dropped out of school, who had already entered work or whose parents had chosen not to send them to school—it was an independent initiative, with no affiliation to any government scheme or programme. The RtE Act had led to increased interest from state governments in developing education partnerships with civil society. There was also a renewed interest in the potential of the existing "Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan"2 as a vehicle for the implementation of RtE in the country (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2011).

In 2009, Humana's leadership met with the principal secretaries of the Ministry of Human Resource Development from multiple states and were advised to join the governmental push to develop teacher training capacity at DIETs (District Institute of Education and Training) in different states. Snorre recalls,

> We were advised to support their [the central government's] DIET: that's the District Institute of Education and Training, of which they had around one in each district, so there were around 700 of them. Our intention was to start our own teacher training institute, but then they [government officials] said, "There are so many private institutes, you will not have any impact. Work with us instead." So, our first project was in Chhattisgarh, where we worked first with one and then with three teacher training institutions. And then over the years, we worked with almost 30 different DIETs. Currently, we are working with 15 DIETS in four different states. That's the teacher training programme.

> In 2010, we [also] decided to take our experiences from the informal training centres of Academy for Working Children and convert that into a programme where we could leverage the government's *Sarva Shikha*

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2 *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* is a central government program for the achievement of Universalisation of Elementary Education*.* It was launched to implement the mandate of the 86th Amendment to the Indian Constitution, which is to ensure free and compulsory education for all children aged between six and 14. Through its activities since its launch in 2001, the program has built up the capacity and mechanisms to implement large-scale educational initiatives at grassroots.

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Abhiyan for out-of-school children. That *[sic]* took some time to develop the content and to develop very thorough operational manuals and pedagogical tools. Today, that is one of our bigger lines. We worked in Haryana, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh to get children back to school and bridge the learning gap. That's a very particular programme with very specific tools and we support the government in implementing their out-of-school children programme. And now this programme is very effective in bridging learning gaps.

…

Also, we are working as a service provider for the government of Jharkhand and it's really challenging, but it's a fantastic opportunity when it works because the government has the resources. The project is called *Tejaswini* and our part of it reaches over three lakh adolescent girls and young women. It is only by working with the government that you can leverage the kind of resources that can take a project to scale.

Reflecting on the journey of HPPI's work in collaboration with the government, Snorre recalls,

In all our community development projects, we also work very closely with the government, because very often, it's about leveraging government services, already existing services. So, we work with the district officers, with the health facilities, education facilities, social services, and so on. And then, on state levels, we have around 18 MoUs (Memorandum of Understanding) with different state departments. They are external stakeholders and our partners at the state level. [They are] not directly part of implementation—that's more at the district level. But they hold the partnership with us through the MoUs.

People at Humana

Today, there are nearly 4,000 people on Humana's payroll, associated with the organisation in various ways. 2,700 of these are part-time employees that mainly work on Humana's field-based projects as the need arises. The remaining 1,300 are full-time employees, based either at the head office or in the field. 700 of these 1,300 full-time staff are what Humana considers their core group of talent, representing the core capacity of Humana as an organisation. 80 of these 700 are based at the Head Office in New Delhi, and 620 are distributed across 100 project sites around the country.

The remaining 600 of 1,300 full-time employees are placed on a single, large project in Jharkhand called "Tejaswini." Humana is a service provider to the government of Jharkhand, working on clubs for adolescent girls and young women (aged 14-24), for counselling, life skills education and livelihood support services. More than 3.5 lakh young women are part of the Tejaswini clubs in Jharkhand.

Beyond the 4,000 staff on direct payroll, Humana also works with a number of volunteers on various projects. Humana considers these volunteers important internal stakeholders, and the organisation is responsible for their management. The volunteers do not appear on Humana's

payroll books.; they are instead paid by the state governments for the projects that they work on alongside Humana's team of personnel. Currently, there are 2,573 volunteers that Humana engages. The vast majority of these (2,354) are engaged in supporting the implementation of the Tejaswini project. The remainder are placed on Humana's education programme–"Kadam"– in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Haryana.

Formalising for implementation at scale

For Humana, given its size and operations across multiple thematic sectors, maintaining stability over time necessitated a certain degree of standardisation in its programme and programme implementation processes. Snorre elaborates on how formalisation has played a role in the journey of Humana,

> So, the procedures and processes have lot to do with the size of the organisation, because when the organisation is small, then you can say it is very much driven by the founder and the board, and the mission kind of percolates into all the different processes, and into how people are employed and so on. And that works as long as the organisation is fairly small. After a few years, when you get more employees, you need to start introducing clear policies, processes and procedures and have them described.
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> …
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> Then, I think another important thing that happened was that [in the past], Humana was very much built on giving employees opportunities to grow, to take bigger responsibilities. So, talent came from within the organisation. People were recruited in the villages, in the field. Then we built their capacity, and they took on bigger and bigger responsibilities. But then, at a time when we wanted to really expand and we wanted to increase our fundraising capacity, we saw the necessity of hiring more professional resources to actually do the fundraising, to do the financial administration and so on. And then of course, that was the time we also improved the HR department so that we could put in place the necessary processes and procedures to hire that kind of talent and manage that kind of talent. So, it very much depends on the needs of the organisation and also the size of the organisation.
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> ….Another example is, we developed different educational programmes where we also wanted to bring in professional expertise...You can say we have developed programmes in the field through our own efforts but then in order to take these programmes to the next level and develop high quality and more impactful programmes or materials, we also had to employ experts in the field.

While the leadership at Humana was working towards formalisation of people practices there was also a felt need to clearly articulate benchmarks of practice in its programmatic strategy. One of the key ways Humana chose to formalise organisational processes and structures was through a clear articulation and then standardisation of its governance practice across teams, regions, and programmes.

The notion of the "project"

Over the years, Humana has standardised its key unit of operation: the project unit. The intent of the project unit structure is to allow alignment of operational structure, leadership philosophy and core accountabilities of field implementation teams, regardless of the thematic sector, size, or location of a particular project.

The team composition of the project unit consists of the project unit leader (PUL or simply project leader), two or three co-leaders, and a project council. Depending on the size of the project, the council can consist of between five to 30 full-time staff members, who assist in the implementation of the project in the field.

The notion of the project itself, and the project leader—the central individual through which a project's goals are realised—are highly significant to the Humana People to People movement as a whole, representing a standardised element across the entire Federation of 29 members. It is enshrined in Humana's organisational charter as follows,

> A project takes its beginning when two parties meet. The one that is in need and the one that wishes to supply help. A good example is the country which needs teachers as the one and the organisation with the capacity to establish teacher training as the other one. The two must meet.
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> …
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> Humana People to People allocates appropriate funds to the project. The means can stem from one of the [member] associations, from local government funds or from an international source. Then the project leader is advertised for, found, and hired. With this central figure installed and on location the phase of establishing can start.
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> …
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> It is in the project itself, in the axis between the *effectivity*, measured on the objectives of the project, the *productivity*, measured on the solid efforts of the day-to-day handling of the programme on-site, and between the necessary *economising*, measured on one's own, and to a lesser extent, general ideals, that the *general outcome* of the project clearly will prove itself, as the *results* that can be counted, as the *effects* that can be experienced by the people involved and the local community, and as the *influence* upon attitudes and tendencies at the national and the international level.

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Therefore, the project leader organises his thinking in accordance with these fundamental guidelines, programmes his years of practice of the project around that axis, and makes sure that all the information coming from him concerning the project is accordingly inspired.

Therefore, it is never sufficient to build a school–in spite of the fact that the construction site in itself is generating jobs and turnover and collective efforts… The buildings will always be only a part of the results of the efforts to teach, to learn, to progress… Of course these results must be counted, of course they must be published. Of course they are significant… But they are part of that general outcome that we are seeking… They are what we strived for by building and by teaching. Therefore, they are centrepieces in the mind of the project leader. It is the effects for the people involved and the influence on the attitudes and tendencies in the community that we are after. (Humana People to People, 1998, p.53)

The project leader

Project leaders are high-value individuals to the organisation. Humana currently has around 100 project leaders, one at each of its 100 project sites. They are experienced individuals who have often worked on multiple Humana projects before reaching this level. It is critical for the organisation to maintain their pool of project leaders and retain them for extended periods. According to Snorre,

Project leaders are the most important people in the organisation. You can say that we who work here at the head office, are all service providers to them. Our job is to provide them quality input. [We also provide] some monitoring and control but that is part of the overall setup [of the organisation]. It is mainly to give them quality support so that they will succeed in the field.

Humana's organisational charter further emphasises the role of the project leaders as a collective that seeks to inspire the movement of "change":

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the project leader is the mainstay of the organisation, and the project leaders, as a collective, the leading forces of the [Humana People to People] movement. Without them to carry, without their personal passions or without the devotion and professionalism of each of them, the project might well be able to build the buildings and, to a lesser degree, run the day-to-day programmes, but never be able to obtain the effects, nor the influence.

For Humana People to People, half of the general outcome is not the half of the whole. Rather everything of something [sic] quite different. The ambitions of this organisation can therefore only be fulfilled with a corps of professionals, the project leaders, that over the years lead and run projects with a basic profile of thinking and communicating and acting as here described (Humana People to People, 1998, p.58).

The project unit structure also acts as a training platform for the development of new project leaders. The (usually two) co-leaders assigned to each project unit are groomed and trained to become future project leaders themselves, gaining project management experience and skills by assisting the project leader and rotating through different projects in Humana.

The "handover"

Complementary to the project unit structure is the process of handover at Humana. This is the process through which the organisation connects its partnership teams (who source and negotiate new projects and partnerships at the head office) to its field-based project teams who implement the project. The handover process ensures effective delivery of outcomes at project sites across the country, in agreement with the external partner and the head office team of Humana. Snorre elaborates,

> When a partnership has been negotiated and obtained, then there's a very important process called handover. That process is where the fundraising and the partnership team hand over the project to the project management support team and the project leader. The handover lays out: What are the objectives? What are the goals? What are the indicators? What is the whole plan? And so on. Then, there is a period where the project team makes the plans to implement this programme. And it's very important that they are 100% involved because they have to take 100% responsibility [for implementation]. At the same time, there are a lot of overlapping responsibilities because the person who negotiated the partnership still has the contact with the [external] partner and is accountable to the partner that everything goes according to the agreement.

> He [the partnership holder] does not directly assist [the project team] but does have lots of communication with the project team. The project management support team are the ones who are responsible for directly monitoring and providing support to the project team so that they [the project team] have what they need. And then we have the grant administration team, who are responsible for supporting the projects with proper reporting. The project leader writes the report, the grant management makes sure that the quality of the report is correct, and that the correct information is connected to the indicators. Every department has to be responsible, and it's an overlapping responsibility. Otherwise it can easily become a blame game where everybody blames each other.

Refer to Exhibit 5 for an overview of Humana's governance structure, showing the relationship between the field-based project units and the head office-based teams, such as programme (project) management support, grant management, and partnership development.

Nurturing local talent for impact

Once the project unit has finalised the project plan in consultation with the fundraising and partnership team, they are stationed at the project's execution site for its duration. Almost all of the required recruitment for the project is conducted locally at the field location, in alignment with Humana's recruitment policy for all programmes.

The organisation believes that regional talent brings a higher level of commitment to seeing through long-term development projects in their localities. Their ability to establish local networks and enhanced interpersonal relationships enable effective and enduring outcomes of projects on the ground, thereby reducing externalities or risks. The project leader holds the responsibility of recruitment of capable and mission-aligned regional talent in consultation with the central HR department of Humana. For instance, health programmes may look to recruit qualified health workers, while some education programmes require individuals who have completed a postgraduate degree. Such engagement of regional youth are project-based recruitments designed to last the duration of the project. Throughout this time, the project unit strives to foster a shared culture of performance, respect, and commitment in the team, in alignment with Humana's organisational values and vision.

Building a value-driven organisation

Snorre has led Humana as the CEO for 18 years, while several members of senior management have been present for 20 years or more. Humana has stayed steady in this regard, and a similar trend of retention is also seen in the wider organisation, with an average retention across all full-time staff of eight to nine years. Over the past five years, Humana has seen an attrition rate of full-time staff of just 2%. The fundamental basis of relationships within the organisation, as well as its programmatic approach, has been kept largely unchanged over 23 years, while continuously adapting to emerging needs of the field. In part, this has been possible due to the continued presence of staff from its very early days.

Humana keeps lines of communication to the CEO open to all levels of the organisation and senior leadership connected to the work on the ground. Staff are able to reach out directly to senior leadership to address concerns in the first instance, without having to go through a chain of command. According to Manu Mayank (Head of Social Impact and Sustainability at Humana), these voices are taken seriously, acted upon, and can even override executive decisions:

> Irrespective of the rank of a person, a person can have a better idea than the CEO and get voted and acted upon. It happens many times here. In large meetings, many times the CEO's or the leadership's idea [doesn't work] and any junior person can come up with an idea which gets taken up instead. So, that has helped a lot in improving the implementation of projects on the ground.

Humana's large external partner group and current portfolio of active projects are testament to the fact that it takes its project-based responsibilities and commitments toward its partners very seriously. However, this has not superseded the organisation's connection with the communities it works for on the ground or its internal talent pool. The organisation pays close attention to

developing and nurturing a grounded culture, characterised by respect, dignity and shared responsibility. Snorre explains that,

> An important red line throughout, all the way from the support officers, to the staff, to the project leaders, is a culture of responsibility… We have a good culture of shared responsibility. Without confusing responsibility, it's very clear that the project leader is 100% responsible for implementing [the project] together with his team, but he also knows that he has all the support systems that could help him. That also gives us the possibility of giving the responsibility of implementing projects to people who have a lot of field experience but are not necessarily super at writing reports or doing the documentation and things like that. And that's a very good thing. Because it means that we have people [on the ground] who are really good with people, they have people-to-people skills, both with their own employees and with the people that we are there to work with. So, that's an important part of the talent management [at Humana]: to develop this sense of responsibility in all parties.
>
> …
>
> What we are trying to achieve is to be a more flat organisation where everybody takes the responsibility [at their level] but also respects the last-mile worker in the field. … A very key word is responsibility and the other one is respect. Respect each and every person for the work they do and what they contribute, so that nobody as such is more important than anyone else… And that's a part of our culture, that we should always give dignity to people. And also, because of the kind of work that we do, if we are to succeed in doing work in the field, and gaining trust and respect from the community, we also have to show trust and respect to them. So, if your organisation is hierarchical, or doesn't really respect the last-mile field workers, then it's very difficult because they [the last-mile field workers] will kind of pass on that same concept to the people [in communities]. That doesn't work.
>
> …
>
> When it comes to responsibility in the field, that is what the handover [is about]. We hand over the project so that the project leader doesn't get bits and pieces, he gets the whole picture. He knows what his objective is, his ultimate goal, what the outputs, the outcomes, and the indicators are. He must know everything. And then of course, based on that, he or she will formulate and then implement a plan. And then there are quarterly review meetings, when the project leader comes together with the partnership holder, the people from economy and administration [team], and project management's core team. The project leader has to present the goals and results and show that he is responsible towards the people that he works with, and towards

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achieving the goals. That's the structure and that's how we build and maintain that responsibility.

Nurturing relationships and aspirations

Humana, according to Snorre, is well aware of the shortage of quality talent and of the competition for existing talent. The organisation consciously invests in developing deeper associations with people recruited at respective field locations by the unit leaders. Local recruits are closely observed over the course of their engagement with the project, with the aim of transitioning them into the full-time talent ecosystem at Humana based on performance, potential and attitude, as Snorre explains:

> The people who are recruited locally, we identify talent among them. Let's say a health project started in an area and we hired ten local women to train ASHAs (Accredited Social Health Activists), other Anganwadi workers and ANMs (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife). And then, after two, three years, we identified that maybe two of those ten are really great talents, they're willing to move, maybe their children are grown up, they can move to another place, for example. Then we offer them a new position in another project. And that is the start of the journey towards them becoming a more permanent part of the staff.
>
> …
>
> This [transfer of talent to new projects] is also part of enabling people to take on new responsibilities and grow in the organisation, and this is a very, very important part of the culture [at Humana] and it has always been there. As the organisation has grown more complex, and you can say more difficult, this process has been integrated as a part of HR. You can say it used to be a part of our practice and our culture and now it has become a part of formal processes.

Indeed, every single one of Humana's six current national programme managers (who oversee the entire operations of Humana's four main programme verticals from the head office) started out in the organisation as entry-level field officers, initially recruited locally at field sites for the duration of single projects.

While the presence of regional recruitments from project sites at the highest level of programme management in the organisation indicates that such a progression is possible in terms of access, Snorre notes that in his experience, a limiting factor to the ultimate upwards mobility of talent recruited locally is their willingness to work in different locations.

Building a career trajectory at Humana necessarily means rotating through multiple projects, often across district and state lines, something which experience has shown Snorre that many are unwilling to do. In that case, the furthest that a locally recruited field officer can move in terms of designation is Block Manager (head of all project operations within a particular block), and that too only in the case of a continuous project that is operating in one area for a long time.

In terms of horizontal mobility, Humana's membership in the wider Federation of 29 member organisations represents a unique resource for talent to travel, build capacity and broaden their horizons. Manu shares the story of one of his colleagues,

> We do have similar development management schools in South Africa, not Humana India but the Federation Humana People to People has a school there. So, many a times, [sic] quite a good number of staff have received training there as well. I'll tell you a story of a staff member I have from Alwar, Rajasthan. He joined Humana way before me, some 18 years ago, right after grade 12. His passport now has 23 stamps. A few years ago, he finished his MSW from IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University). He told me that he's the only person, not only in his village but probably for entire districts and districts around, who has so many passport stamps. So, because he performed very well and he wanted to learn, he attended multiple training sessions in our sister organisations, and now he travels to other countries to give training there on sustainable agriculture. He himself says that he never expected nor even dreamt that such a thing could happen. And this is not just one story, there are quite a good number of our staff who have travelled overseas, both as part of training, but also as part of a project, giving training and being trainers in other countries as well.

Retaining core capacity for effectiveness

According to Snorre, Humana's core group of full-time staff (700 people) represents its institutional memory and is something that the organisation invests in by encouraging retention over long periods of time. Institutional memory refers to a collective set of personal recollections, experiences, concepts, knowledge, and artefacts stored within the people of the organisation. Broader definitions of the term can also encompass formal records stored in the organisation, but in Humana's context, it refers to the informal capture, over time, of unrecorded knowledge and learning.

Across the whole organisation, there is a consistent trend of high retention rate and long-term associations with staff. Snorre reflects on what keeps employees engaged and motivated at Humana for extended periods of time:

> Giving space to grow is a very, very important motivating factor. Of course, all the employees should be aligned with the objective, not aligned but they should be engaged and involved in the objectives so that they take ownership of the objectives of projects that they implement. That is very, very important for satisfaction and for employees staying in the organisation and continuing to take up work. So overall, the most important things are: that people can see that there is the opportunity to actually do good, to take ownership, to have impact, and there is not too much compartmentalisation so that they don't know who does what. Lastly, that there is also good cooperation

between different people. I think these are the most important when it comes to motivation.

Where Humana does face a significant sourcing and retention challenge is in those instances where the type of talent required for a project is highly qualified and not obtainable from the local or regional community where the project is based. Manu notes that in such cases, qualified individuals that do accept the rural positions often leave within six to eight months due to the difficulties of rural immersion or finding better roles elsewhere. Over the lifecycle of longer-term projects, this attrition level makes it challenging to maintain continuity of work and donor confidence that the project is proceeding as planned. Snorre reflects,

> We have had challenges to get good people out in the remote, rural areas. We have teacher educators that we employed, and when they came to the DIET, they didn't even stay a day, because it was 20 kilometres from civilisation. That's a real problem, to find people who have the right qualifications. And then to employ them in remote rural areas—that's the challenge. That's really a challenge. And I think that's a pity. Sometimes we also work in DIETs in remote areas where even the government has problems finding people for those places. And it's such a rewarding job. That's why you have to find the right match.

Encouraging retention

The organisation has in place a package of retention-focussed HR policies to try and ensure that core institutional memory survives within Humana. Project units who are expected to travel and stay at field sites, often in rural areas that do not have the same amenities as their normal residences, are accommodated in guest-house facilities that Humana puts in place at these sites. These facilities ensure a certain degree of comfort and provision of the required amenities to ensure that staff can work smoothly. These facilities are part of commitments by Humana to build confidence in their field staff that their needs are being looked after, and the cost of these is not added to the project's budget.

Staff are allowed to request internal transfers to project locations that are more favourable to their existing family commitments, a practice which is encouraged and accommodated by the organisation's transfer policy. Staff being transferred to other projects at the end of a project go through a counselling process where they are given information about all the options available to them and are encouraged to make their preferences known.

Humana provides corporate medical insurance that goes beyond the standard cover of expenses, which usually only pertains to hospitalisations. The insurance facilitated by Humana also covers OPD treatments (Outpatient Department treatments) for all personnel, which are treatments for ailments that can be treated by walk-in alone.

Organisational policy also allows the personnel to withdraw up to three months' salary in advance in case of emergencies including health needs of relatives. The advance is recoverable in instalments from the salary of the concerned personnel over 12 months.

The compensation design and policy also have a significant impact on the retention practice at Humana. The salary scale is benchmarked against the market analysis of other social sector as well as corporate sector organisations, as well as against internal analysis of other domestic sources such as employment website Naukri.com, every three to five years. Salaries at Humana are competitive with the market and increments are determined with equal weightage to job performance and economic inflation. Snorre elaborates on the link between compensation and retention:

> Of course, there has to kind of be a baseline. I would say the salary is not the most important [factor] but there has to be a decent salary which is fairly competitive with other organisations and so on, to retain people. But once the salary is OK, then people look for job satisfaction and that means: there is a good environment; they feel that they get personal satisfaction out of the work they are doing because it is meaningful work; they are organised in a good team; there is good cooperation; there are no internal politics or the kind of contradictions that makes life difficult in the workplace; and that they really feel that they are contributing something.

> Our experience is that yes, we have quite high retentions, especially in the teams that are working very well together, and then we had examples where the team has not had maybe the right leadership or they have been kind of struggling to be well-organised or to build team spirit and are instead working individually—there we had lot of attrition, where people left. So, I think job satisfaction is number one, but there has to be a baseline which is a decent salary, which is fairly competitive. It doesn't have to be the best, but it has to be decent.

Pathways to future-readiness

Manu points out that it is unusual for companies registered as non-profits under Section 25 of the Companies Act to be as large as Humana—in terms of the number of people it associates with, the number of projects it takes on, and the base of donors and partners it works with. The organisation has managed to balance change and flux with a grounded consciousness, in a way that has allowed it to grow while remaining stable. Despite its size, the attention it has paid to building and maintaining a particular culture has resulted in talent maintaining long-term associations with the organisation.

With the organisation the size that it is today, building layers of resilience to external shocks has become more important. The organisation is dependent almost entirely on grant funding, which brings with it an inherent level of uncertainty. According to Snorre, such a funding dependency also makes the organisation "cumbersome" to manoeuvre in the long-term.

Humana is also looking to engage with thematic areas that are critical areas for the long-term survival and wellbeing of the communities it works with, but where work may not show immediate results. For instance, one such area identified is working on the effects of climate change in communities.

Securing additional forms of funding that goes beyond projects and which is long-term and/or thematic in nature is also seen as a way to build financial resilience and give the organisation the freedom and agility to work on areas that align with its long-term vision.

Despite its long presence working with grassroots communities in India, the organisation still sees a huge amount of work to be done ahead and notes that problems in the field are becoming ever more complex and demanding. The organisation's approach, in keeping with that of its parent movement, is consistent: to have teams of capable and dedicated individuals on the ground in its field locations, able to solve these problems together with communities. Building and retaining the right pool of talent, inspiring them to be able to innovate the solutions to, and take responsibility for these problems, presents an ongoing challenge for Humana, one the organisation is actively engaged with.

As Humana moves forward in a context that is changing, and an ecosystem that has become increasingly dynamic and agile: how it maintains what has been built up, and manages to remain agile whilst retaining a strong institutional memory, a sense of cultural belonging and stability of structure is a challenge that the leadership continues to address.

Exhibits

Exhibit 1: The Grassroots and The Xanthorrhoe (Grass Tree)

This is a short extract from the prologue to the Humana People to People charter, describing the journey that a "nonprofessional"—possibly a volunteer, or someone new to the development sector goes through, from stage 0, where they are not yet a member of any association (such as Humana People to People), to 1 (becoming a part of such an association), and so on.

Note that Xanthorrhoe is a species of flowering plant. It is known by the common name, "grass tree."

Hans Christian Andersen In Fatigues

Or

The Grassroots And The Xanthorrhoe (Grass Tree)

Once Upon A Time

*The nonprofessional on his very first assignment. Annihilatingly convinced and alien to being an NGO. From 0 to 1 equals nonmember to part of.

Onward lives in the legs, shouldering as total body language. Persistence and endurance as the leading lights of non-disintegration.

The roots of all grass encompass the passion for and the capacity of germination. You cut it off, it sprouts anew. You plow it under, it develops from underneath.

*The nonprofessional in his second operation. Informed, enlightened, but still not recognising being an NGO. From 1 to 2 represents a double portion. Evidently. Double-up points towards results worthwhile counting.

*The nonprofessional in his fourth action. The cause as integrated into him. From 2 to 4 represents again a double portion. Counting 1-2-3-4 - counting many.

Years pass by, actions come. Innumerability consists of ever bigger numbers. Results can only be counted by calculator.

The grassroots have sprouted a grass tree.

The Xanthorrhoe That Took to Multiplying

*The nonprofessional continuously performing. A confident stager on par with the cause. Again and again dashing the roots of evil. Centred in the cause, grassroots sprout Xanthorrhoe upon Xanthorrhoe. Double-up superseded by manifold. Passion engenders the likeminded.

The Multiplicity Of Xanthorrhoe Actualises the Necessity Of A Forest

The nonprofessional plays Australian Roulette, consequently hitting himself more often than not. Can see the grass trees accumulating to bolster the cause. When asked, denies being able to perceive a forest. Rightly so. No forest to see, as no forest has yet been formed.

Uneasy in his mind the nonprofessional suspects the smelling of a rat. He gets plenty of actions and deeds, is but in need of thorough advice. More trees make no forest.

The cause is as it used to be, the efforts are as they used to be, the nonprofessional is as he used to be. The same friends, the same locations, the same repetitions. Tradition and harmony prevail.

But the treetops meet, and the soil beneath them moistens and the remote corners are becoming green with mould.

…

(Humana People to People, 1998, p.7)

Exhibit 2: Rajasthan development indicators 1991 - 2003

Fig. 1: Rajasthan development indicators for 1991 - 2003

Indicator	Year			
	1991		**2001**	
	Rajasthan	**India**	**Rajasthan**	**India**
0-6 sex ratio	916	945	909	927
Overall sex ratio	910	927	922	933
Overall literacy rate	38.55	52.2	61.03	65.49
Male literacy rate	54.99	64.13	76.46	75.96
Female literacy rate	20.44	39.28	44.34	54.28
Female mean age at marriage	16.8	18.9	18.1	20
Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)	79	80	70	68
	1997-98		**2001-03**	
	Rajasthan	**India**	**Rajasthan**	**India**
Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)	398	508	301	445

Source: Sex composition of the population (2001); State of Literacy (2001); Bhagat (2016); National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (2014); Vital Statistics (n.d)

Exhibit 3: Humana's presence in India

Fig. 2: Locations of Humana project sites, 2021

92 districts in 15 states

Bihar
Districts
- Arrah
- Nalanda
- Patna
- Vaishali

Chhattisgarh
Districts
- Balod
- Baloda Bazar
- Bemetara
- Bilaspur
- Dhamtari
- Durg
- Gariyaband
- Jashpur
- Jajgir Champa
- Mungeli
- Raigarh
- Raipur
- Surajpur

Delhi
Districts
- Central Delhi
- East Delhi
- New Delhi
- North Delhi
- North East Delhi
- Shahdara

Uttarakhand
District
- Haridwar

Karnataka
District
- Ramnagara

Telangana
Districts
- Ranga Reddy
- Wanaparthy

West Bengal
District
- South 24 Parganas

Maharashtra
Districts
- Gadchiroli
- Mumbai
- Mumbai Suburban
- Thane
- Raigad

Haryana
Districts
- Ambala
- Bhiwani
- Charkhi Dadri
- Faridabad
- Fatehabad
- Gurugram
- Hisar
- Jhajjar
- Jind
- Karnal
- Kurukshetra
- Mahendragarh
- Nuh
- Panchkula
- Palwal
- Panipat
- Rewari
- Sirsa
- Sonipat
- Rohtak
- Yamuna Nagar

Madhya Pradesh
Districts
- Barwani
- Dewas
- Khandwa
- Ujjain
- Umaria

Jharkhand
Districts
- Bokaro
- Dhanbad
- Dumka
- Jamtara
- Khunti
- Latehar
- Lohardaga
- Ramgarh
- Ranchi

Jammu & Kashmir
Districts
- Jammu
- Samba

Rajasthan
Districts
- Dausa
- Jaipur
- Jodhpur
- Kota
- Sikar
- Sawai Madhopur
- Tonk

Uttar Pradesh
Districts
- Amethi
- Bahraich
- Prayagraj
- Gautam Buddha Nagar
- Ghaziabad
- Gorakhpur
- Jaunpur
- Jhansi
- Lucknow
- Meerut
- Shravasti
- Sidhartnagar
- Unnao
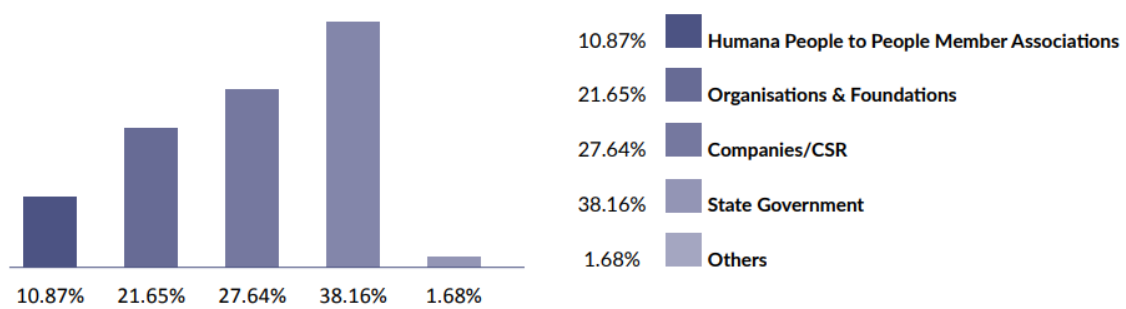- Varanasi

Himachal Pradesh
District
- Baddi

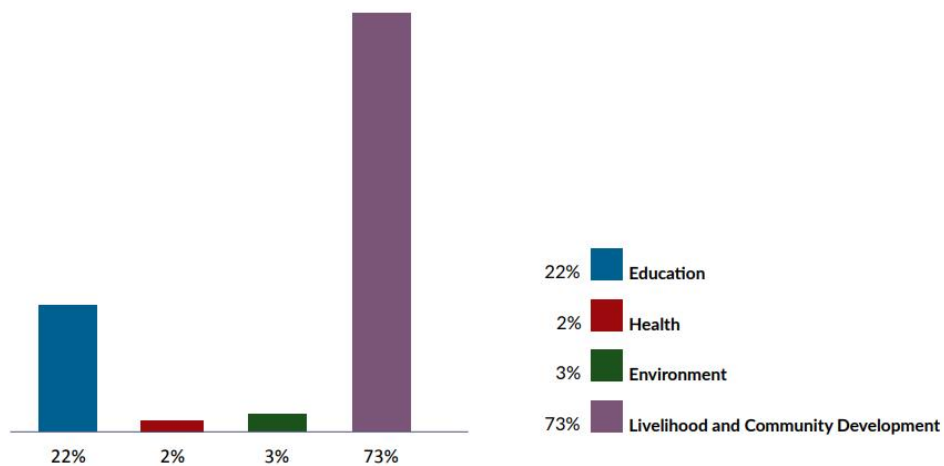Source: Humana People to People India Annual Report, 2021

Exhibit 4: Summary of financials

Fig. 3: Humana People to People India income sources and utilisation (2020-2021)

Revenue ₹ 48.73 Crore (₹ 48,72,76,014)

10.87%	Humana People to People Member Associations
21.65%	Organisations & Foundations
27.64%	Companies/CSR
38.16%	State Government
1.68%	Others

(Bar chart x-axis: 10.87%, 21.65%, 27.64%, 38.16%, 1.68%)

Utilisation

22%	Education
2%	Health
3%	Environment
73%	Livelihood and Community Development

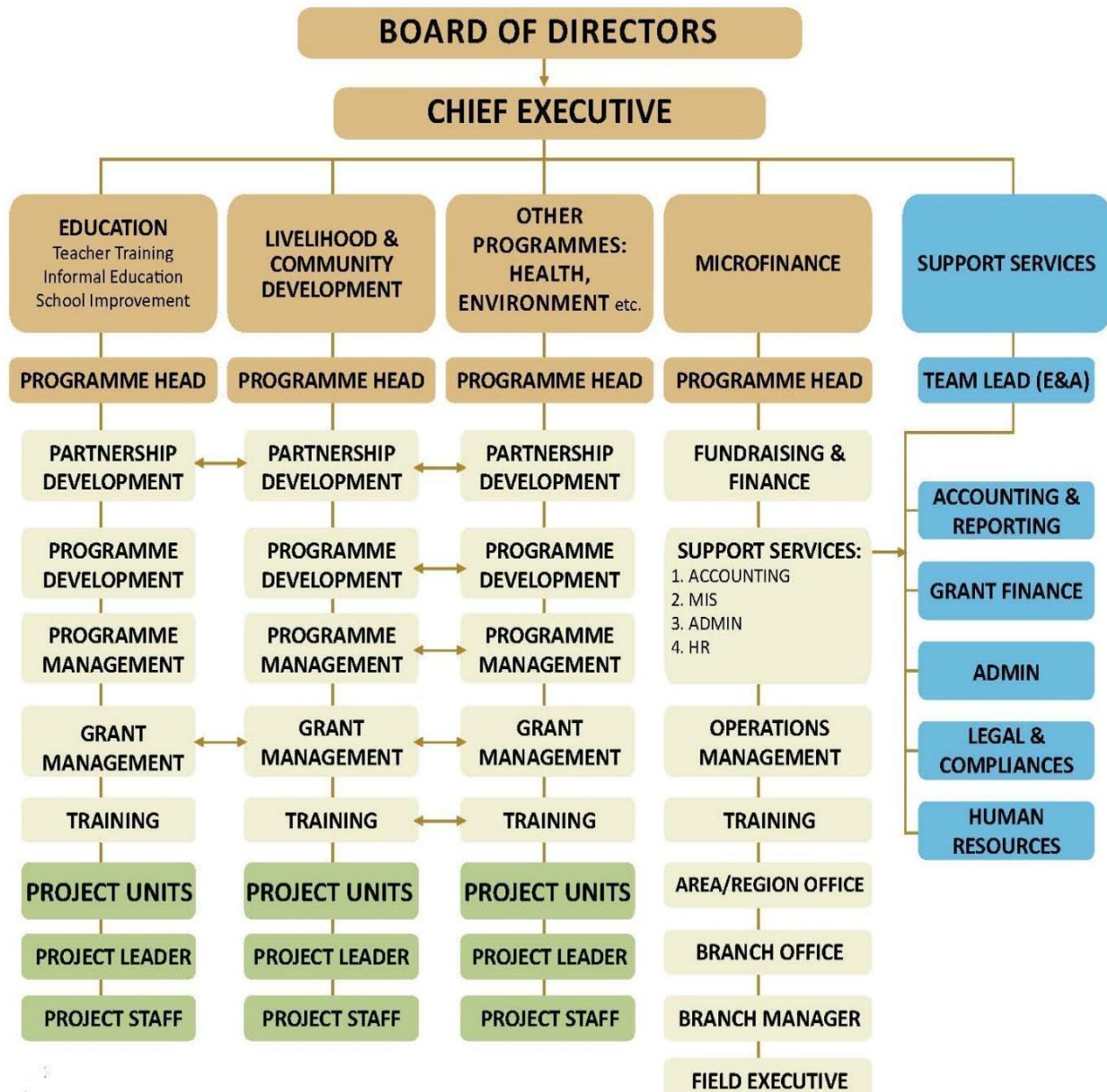(Bar chart x-axis: 22%, 2%, 3%, 73%)

Source: Humana People to People India Annual Report, 2021

Fig. 4: Humana People to People India income trend, 2011-2021
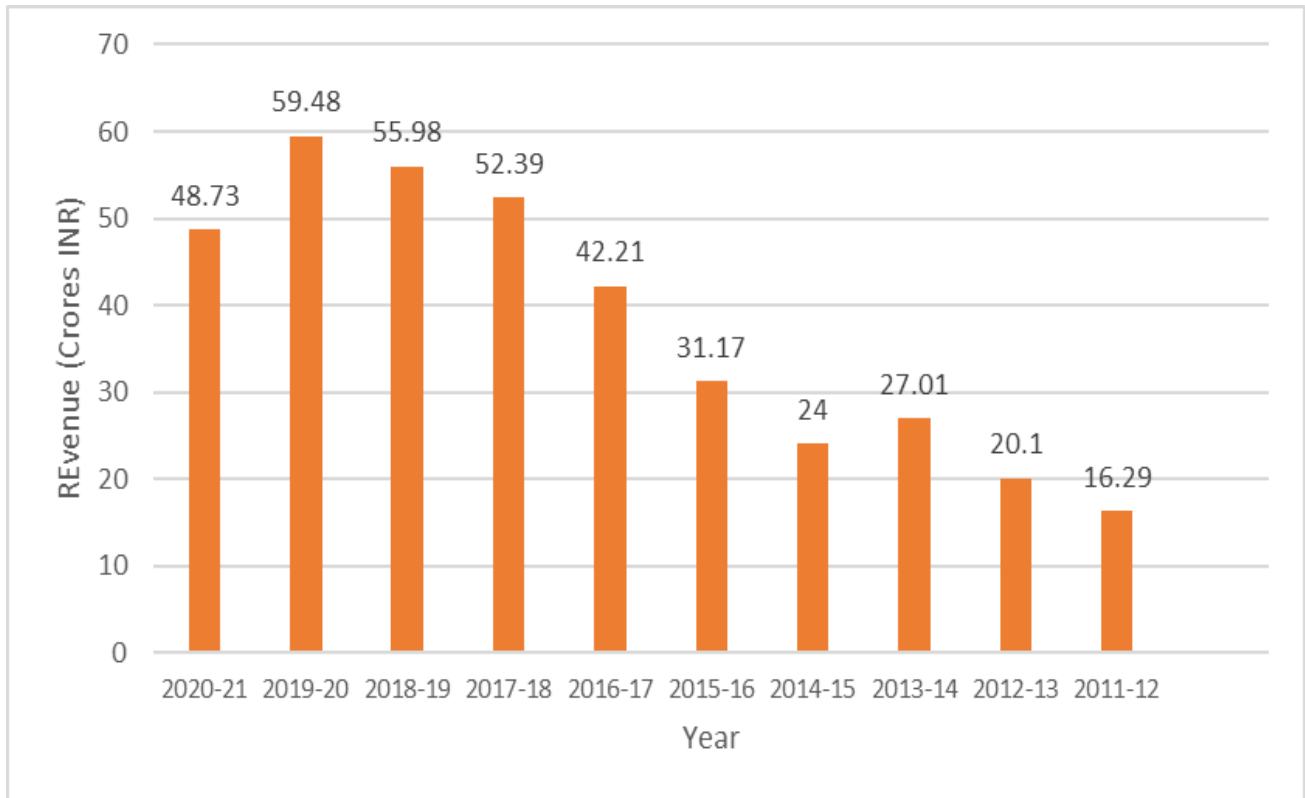
Source: Humana People to People Annual Reports, 2011-2021

Exhibit 5: Humana People to People India governance structure

Source: Humana People to People India internal, 2021

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