



CENTRE FOR  
**Social Impact and  
Philanthropy**

# CSIP Working Paper 2022

## Localising Beneficiary Agency in the Social Impact Ecosystem

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**October, 2022**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to explore how the concept of agency applies to the philanthropic ecosystem; specifically, where the beneficiary's (the end receiver's) agency is located in the funder-on ground organisation relationship. In this paper, agency is understood as the beneficiary's ability to make a free, informed choice about their own welfare; throughout the paper, multiple dimensions, meanings, and contexts of the word 'Agency' are discussed. The objective of this paper is to start a discourse on keeping beneficiaries' agency central to all our developmental work and present some initial action ideas.

Key words: agency, beneficiaries' agency, empowerment, social impact, Impact measurement, philanthropic funding, long-term change, rights-based work, social justice, social development

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I almost failed in my master's academic writing assignments. Researching and writing formally and theoretically is difficult for me as a practitioner. I applied for this fellowship and started writing this paper to challenge myself to work on these skills. I thank the Almighty for providing me with enough resources, a safety net, support systems, patience and, most importantly, this opportunity to take on this exercise and stick with it till the end.

On the many countless days I faltered, I am eternally grateful to the one who pushed me, cajoled me and hand helded me to keep going. You are the glue which keeps me together, my Zuv.

I couldn't have done it without the support and capabilities of Aabid Malik, an excellent researcher and a beautiful human being who assisted and worked with me throughout this paper. I remain indebted to his efforts, especially with regard to the literature review, making interview notes and all the brainstorming which went in this paper. He has been an integral part of this paper, and if not for the formal standards governing the authorship, he would be a co-author to this paper. Thank you, Aabid for all your selfless work, motivation and confidence in me and this paper. I am sincerely sorry for all the instances I failed you.

I am grateful for the support and mentorship I received from the CSIP team to help this paper reach its current form. Without their push and guidance, I would have still been doing only the literature review.

When we started with this paper, we only knew of the word 'agency'. It's only because numerous organisations, people, and industry veterans took out their valuable time that we could unravel this term and present it. I am indebted to their insights. I wanted to research and write on this topic because of a field interaction I had five years ago. Since then, every field trip has kindled in me a desire to highlight people's agency. Thank you to everyone who trusted me enough to be their authentic selves, everyone who shared their dreams and goals with me and allowed me a glimpse into their lives. Through this paper, I hope to honour our conversations and shared vision to see more equitable philanthropy.

Finally, I exist because of my family, friends and caretakers. They will always be part of any endeavour of mine.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	<u>Introduction</u>	6
	<u>1.1. What does ‘agency’ mean and how does it differ from other commonly used terms?</u>	7
	<u>1.2. Where does agency feature in the existing social impact landscape?</u>	8
2	<u>Literature Review</u>	11
3	<u>Study: Methodology used, limitations of the study</u>	13
4	<u>Key Findings</u>	15
	<u>4.1. The various interpretation of the term ‘agency’</u>	15
	<u>4.2. How do donors and on-ground organisations engage in/support building the agency of their end beneficiaries.</u>	17
	<u>4.3. How much and in what ways do you include the people/ organisation you fund directly in your decision-making process?</u>	19
	<u>4.4. Measuring agency as part of the impact assessment (IA) exercise</u>	20
	<u>4.5. Balancing the longer time frame of agency-building work with shorter grant cycles</u>	22
5	<u>Tips from the field</u>	24
6	<u>Conclusion</u>	27
7	<u>Appendix</u>	28
8	<u>References</u>	41

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1) In the context of the social development ecosystem, agency is a multi-dimensional theoretical concept which often gets inaccurately mixed up with concepts such as empowerment, capacity building, training, collectivisation, and so on. These are all related but distinct concepts which needs to be treated separately from each other.
- 2) Project-based funding and quantitative impact reporting requirements drive grantees to side-line and de-prioritise the long-term, less quantifiable work of agency building that brings about gradual change.
- 3) Agency is incomplete without individuals having the power to make/direct decisions about their own welfare and, as such, unless philanthropic organisations provide beneficiaries with such avenues, agency-building work cannot be complete.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

*'These solar lights you brought are great, but we would have preferred solar-run coolers instead. You sit in an AC car, so you wouldn't realise that in this extreme heat, it's not the non-availability of continually run lighting solutions which is our pressing problem, but the unbearably hot living conditions.'*

—An excerpt from the author's conversation with a beneficiary from an externally funded access-to-energy programme during a field visit in Maharashtra

This research paper studies the phenomenon of an end beneficiary (the final recipient of philanthropic aid) being able to freely express their needs and having a role in designing/choosing the solutions/interventions meant for them (in other words, the simplified version of the term 'agency' that we are adopting in this paper) in a philanthropy-driven social impact ecosystem. The author has experience in working with donor organisations and has, thus, written this paper considering themselves to be part of the philanthropic ecosystem they wish to improve. In no way does the author wish to appropriate the voices of the beneficiaries; therefore, most of the viewpoints/experiences quoted here are directly from interviews and field conversations. The objective is to localise and contextualise beneficiary agency in the donors – on-ground organisations – end beneficiary exchange and gather practical recommendations from the field on various approaches that could be adopted to centre beneficiary agency in our combined intent and action.

The author has found that 'agency' as a term and concept is not very prevalent in the philanthropy ecosystem. Each stakeholder (donor organisation, intermediary, on-ground organisation, end beneficiary) has its own meaning and understanding of it. To simplify the analysis of the various stakeholders, present in the ecosystem, this paper clubs all of them into three main categories—the donors or the funding organisations who put in the funds, the on-ground organisations who typically receive and use these funds and the end beneficiaries for whose betterment and benefits the funds are meant and who are the community whom the on-ground organisations directly serve. There are also the intermediary organisations who sometimes serve as support linkages between the donors and the on-ground organisations in the form of impact advisors, incubators, project management firms, etc.

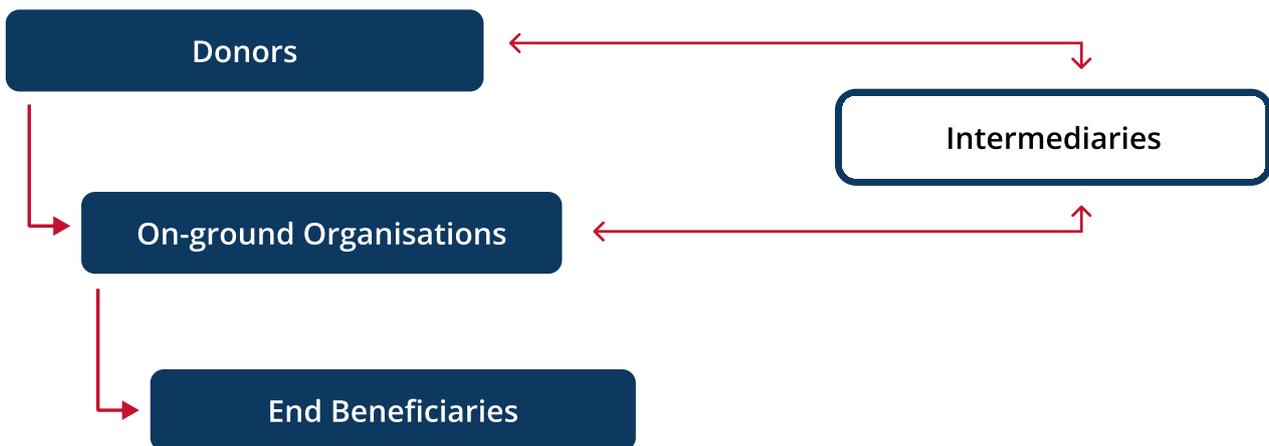


Figure 1: Depiction of typical relationship between different stakeholders in the social impact ecosystem.

The paper starts by laying out the different ways in which ‘agency’ is interpreted by different stakeholders and how that interpretation is reflected in their theory of change. Despite the many advances and nuances adopted by the ecosystem in the last few decades, fund exchange is still largely dependent on conventional quantifiable impact measurement. Given this, what does ‘agency’ mean, what does agency-building work look like, and how do we measure the impact of enhanced agency on a community? The paper presents key practical recommendations gathered from stakeholders in the ecosystem on what practices each stakeholder could adopt to contribute towards collectively enhancing their end beneficiary’s agency.

Primary data has been gathered using a mixed methods approach, including semi-structured interviews with 20 key informants from the ecosystem. Before the paper presents key findings and observations, we will first discuss why it is important to include the end beneficiary agency on our strategy tables and where the gap lies in the existing landscape.

## 1.1 What does ‘agency’ mean and how does it differ from other commonly used terms?

In this research paper, by ‘agency’ we mean the ability to act, that is, when individuals have the power to make their own decisions and solve their own problems without anybody limiting or influencing them. It also means the ability to identify goals or make choices and then act upon them. When we undertake voluntary actions, we do not feel they are happening to us; rather, we feel we have control over our actions.

In 'The Problems with Philanthropy, and What We Can Do to Fix Them', Rojas (2019) argues that every individual should be able to enjoy equal opportunities and rights without any systematic hindrance. The concept of human agency is central to the social justice agenda because it is the human capacity for the agency that drives the processes of structural transformation.<sup>2</sup> As rightly put by Jack Martin, agency is the capability of individuals to make choices and act on those choices in ways that make a difference in their lives.<sup>3</sup>

The author argues that agency is more expansive than other commonly used terms such as 'sustainable growth' or 'empowerment'. While sustainable growth focuses more on the outcomes and impact on beneficiaries' lives because of the intervention, empowerment places the power of a beneficiary's development in someone else's hands, making it seem like there is a transfer of power. In contrast, 'agency' believes that we all have been accorded the same power: the power to express yourself, the ability to oppose unfair power distribution, the ability to challenge systemic inequalities, and the ability to fight for your rights. Furthermore, we cannot remove the agency of a person, unlike empowerment. You can certainly prevent someone from exercising agency; however, at our own peril—it would be like depriving a plant of air, water, and sun. Limiting a person's agency basically means turning them into a pawn, an executor.<sup>4</sup>

A collective form of agency encompasses the following:

- **empowerment:** concerned with the processes by which people become aware of their own interests and how these relate to those of others
- **capabilities:** referring to people's ability to achieve various ways of being and doing which they have reason to value
- **power:** the means and capacity to make free and informed choices

Thus, when it comes to supporting someone's agency, other commonly used terms such as 'empowerment', 'capacity building', and so on fall under the larger purview of agency building, but they do not necessarily mean agency unless they are working in tandem.

<sup>2</sup>Naila Kabeer, 'Three Faces of Agency in Feminist Economics', in *The Routledge Handbook of Feminist Economics*, ed. Günseli Berik and Ebru Kongar, 1st ed. (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2021. | Series: Routledge international handbooks: Routledge, 2021), 99–107, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429020612-12>.

<sup>3</sup>Jack Martin, 'Self-Regulated Learning, Social Cognitive Theory, and Agency', *Educational Psychologist* 39, no. 2 (1 June 2004): 135–45, [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep3902\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep3902_4).

<sup>4</sup>Oliver Fortier, 'Empowerment Is Not Enough – Go For Agency Instead', *BIZCATALYST 360*, 14 August 2019, <https://www.bizcatalyst360.com/empowerment-is-not-enough-go-for-agency-instead/>.

## 1.2 Where does agency feature in the existing social impact landscape?

The modes in which philanthropy is practised is ever-evolving. Recently, models such as venture philanthropy, impact investing, and so on, have emerged to create a system of giving from the wealthy (represented by family funds, corporate foundations, individual philanthropists, etc.) to those in need.<sup>5</sup> There is an attempt to break philanthropy from the sentimentality of charity and convert it into a systemic effort required to address world problems, thus making it more of a duty than a whim.<sup>6</sup> India is witnessing these changing dynamics in its own way with the emergence of a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) law (Section 135 in the Companies Act, 2013), venture funds foraying into impact investments, and techno-managerial concepts being replicated in NGO operations.<sup>7</sup>

**Social entrepreneurs/social ventures** (interchangeable terms to denote businesses with a social impact focus) are becoming key stakeholders in the Indian social development ecosystem. From healthcare to climate change, local and global philanthropies alike are floating funds and developing extensive programs<sup>8</sup> to support innovations and enterprises which promise to bring sustainable development to people on the ground (end-users for enterprises; beneficiaries for philanthropies). Not surprisingly, for social entrepreneurs, philanthropic funding represents the second largest source of finance, after self-financing,<sup>9</sup> carving a huge piece of the pie for themselves in the overall philanthropic capital available, and perhaps even replacing the plethora of NGOs which used to traditionally receive most of the philanthropic support. Typically, raising philanthropic grants on an outcome-oriented, time-bound project basis, these ventures are geared to create market demand, increase product adoption, and optimise the cost-benefit matrix. Little data exists on what happens to these solutions (often subsidised by grant-in-aid) once the project is over. Do people still use them, are they able to become independent, or are we trapping them in another endless cycle of dependency and financing loans? The growing philanthropic preference to support quick unit economics models being propagated by social start-ups also excludes the hard-to-crack sectors or areas needing long-term investments. It is not that social entrepreneurs/ventures have not revolutionised some sectors like education, access to financial services, information sharing etc., or brought efficiency, transparency, and talent to the table; rather, the issue is that they are not amenable to the idea of gradual system change.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Saurabh A. Lall and Jacob Park, 'How Social Ventures Grow: Understanding the Role of Philanthropic Grants in Scaling Social Entrepreneurship', *Business & Society* 61, no. 1 (1 January 2022): 3–44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650320973434>.

<sup>6</sup>Tobias Jung, Susan D Philli, and Jenny Harrow, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Philanthropy*, n.d.

<sup>7</sup>Pradeep Nair, 'The Opportunity for New Philanthropy', *India Development Review* (blog), 29 November 2018, <https://idronline.org/the-opportunity-for-new-philanthropy/>.

<sup>8</sup>Andrew Rogerson et al., 'Why and How Are Donors Supporting Social Enterprises?', *Overseas Development Institute*, n.d., 40, <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/8894.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup>Niels Bosma et al., 'Global Entrepreneurship Monitor', *Social Entrepreneurship*, n.d., 44.

<sup>10</sup>Michael Hobbes, 'Stop Trying to Save the World', *The New Republic*, 18 November 2014, <https://newrepublic.com/article/120178/problem-international-development-and-plan-fix-it>.

This increasing shift towards a techno-managerial, scale heaving, cost optimisation approach also means that activities and practices geared towards long-term social change/justice are no longer in prominence. There is a preference for economic growth over social growth, with an erroneous belief that income increase can by itself bring happiness, prosperity, and equity to people. Funders are moving away from supporting work that requires long-term investment, such as social justice, capacity building etc., and opting for interventions that are economy-driven and have quantifiable impact.<sup>11</sup> However, even for those economic growth models to be self-sustainable, beneficiary agency is key.<sup>12</sup>

### **It is said that money brings freedom; does the money spent to improve beneficiaries' lives bring freedom to them?**

As per the India Philanthropy Report 2020, while philanthropic funding in India grew significantly from 2010 to 2018 (INR 12.5K crores in 2010 to INR 55K crores in 2018), there is little corresponding effect on the prevailing income inequality in the country: 'the Gini wealth coefficient (a measure of economic inequality) has gone from 81.2% in 2008 to 83.2% in 2019' despite the fact that 'economic indicators like per capita income have more than doubled between 2008 and 2018'.<sup>13</sup> This goes to show that the influx of philanthropic capital does not necessarily mean a systemic transformation on the ground. Ingrid Srinath, in an article in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, remarks that philanthropy in India is vastly underdeveloped when it comes to patiently addressing the causes of injustice, exclusion, and exploitation.<sup>14</sup> Models which empower beneficiaries to chart their own development are rare. Most CSR initiatives tend to have a top-down approach, with more than 80 per cent doing interventions without prior needs assessments or consulting the beneficiaries for whom projects are defined.<sup>15</sup>

**The growing restriction by the Indian government on what can/cannot be funded, the ways of funding, and the terms and conditions around it are also making it difficult for funds to go to direct work on enhancing the beneficiary's agency, especially the political and social agency of an individual.**<sup>16</sup> The work of rights-based organisations (such as Oxfam) is repeatedly being restricted under updates to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). Two amendments in particular directly affect work on agency building: (i) revoking permission for the practice of sub-granting to smaller community service organisations and collectives and (ii) capping administration costs at 20 per cent of the overall budget. Coupled with the CSR mandate that caps administration costs at 5 per cent of the budget, this directly impedes organising and movement-building work, which is human resource-heavy and grassroots-bound.

<sup>11</sup>Amitabh Behar, 'Social Enterprise Is Eroding Civil Society', Alliance Magazine (blog), accessed 5 December 2022, <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/analysis/social-enterprise-is-eroding-civil-society/>.

<sup>12</sup>'What Role Does Rural People's Agency Play in Finding Pathways out of Poverty?', STEPS Centre, 24 April 2018, <https://steps-centre.org/blog/role-rural-peoples-agency-play-finding-pathways-poverty/>.

<sup>13</sup> Arpan Sheth et al., 'India Philanthropy Report 2020' (Bain and Company, 29 February 2020), <https://www.bain.com/insights/india-philanthropy-report-2020/>.

<sup>14</sup>Ingrid Srinath, 'Making Indian Philanthropy Matter (SSIR)', *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (blog), 18 April 2020, [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/making\\_indian\\_philanthropy\\_matter](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/making_indian_philanthropy_matter).

<sup>15</sup>Valerie Threlfall, Fay Twersky, and Phil Buchanan, 'Listening to Those Who Matter Most, the Beneficiaries', *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 11, no. 2 (2013): 41–45, <https://doi.org/10.48558/8BWV-8A71>.

<sup>16</sup>Caroline Hartnell, 'Philanthropy in India: A Working Paper' (SDG Funders, 30 September 2017), <https://sdgfunders.org/reports/philanthropy-in-india-a-working-paper>.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The philanthropic ecosystem has been widely analysed, especially from the lens of self-improvement, detailing its challenges and fault lines. For instance, in his essay on the structural problems of the philanthropic ecosystem, Peter Buffet argues that this ecosystem, which has added to injustice and exploitation, must be fundamentally overhauled from its base, and that merely making small changes to the existing structure will not suffice.<sup>17</sup> The author makes some helpful recommendations for overcoming structural obstacles. However, even in a text dealing with something as fundamental as systemic change, there is no mention of something as intrinsic as agency. Whereas it is the everyday agency of the common people to choose and engage with what is best for them and resist what is not that defines and shapes our social changes, not necessarily those historically visible large movements or interventions.<sup>18</sup>

While some texts allude to elements of agency while discussing the challenges and opportunities in the philanthropic ecosystem, agency is rarely analysed substantively or acknowledged as fundamentally important. The discussion mostly stops at considerations of inclusion and fairness. For example, Perla Ni, in 'Fairness, Justice and the Social Sector', talks about helping beneficiaries collectively without excluding anyone.<sup>19</sup> The author stresses that non-profit organisations should focus on the 'common good' values like justice and equality. Nwamaka Agbo, in 'Philanthropy's Responsibility to Movements is about More than Moving the Money', talks about how philanthropy can contribute more towards social movements instead of only concentrating on 'moving the money'.<sup>20</sup> Agbo suggests nurturing genuine relationships with social movements, prioritising trust over transactional relationships, and focusing on creating systems rooted in fairness and liberation. Even when the importance of justice and equity for effective philanthropy is the central theme, a concept of self-determination like agency is not mentioned. For example, Dorian, Burton and Brian<sup>21</sup> emphasise justice, equality, and diversity as a way of philanthropy, but do not mention agency. Paul Valley (2020) has written that 'philanthropy can be compatible with justice, but it requires a conscious effort from philanthropists themselves'.<sup>22</sup> We argue that this 'conscious effort' should keep agency at the heart of philanthropy; without it, any attempt at justice or equity will remain merely lip service.

<sup>17</sup>Peter Buffett, 'The Charitable-Industrial Complex', The New York Times, 27 July 2013, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/27/opinion/the-charitable-industrial-complex.html>.

<sup>18</sup>James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>19</sup>Perla Ni, 'Fairness, Justice, and the Social Sector.' *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.48558/61YS-C608>.

<sup>20</sup>Nwamaka Agbo, 'Philanthropy's Responsibility to Movements Is About More than Moving the Money', *The Center for Effective Philanthropy* (blog), 4 November 2021, <https://cep.org/philanthropys-responsibility-to-movements-is-about-more-than-moving-the-money/>.

<sup>21</sup>Dorian O. Burton and Brian C.B. Barnes, 'Shifting Philanthropy From Charity to Justice', *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.48558/RMZA-A722>.

<sup>22</sup>Paul Vallely, 'How Philanthropy Benefits the Super-Rich', *The Guardian*, 8 September 2020, sec. Society, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/sep/08/how-philanthropy-benefits-the-super-rich>.

Despite its shortcomings, philanthropy is poised to be the key stakeholder in bringing social equity to the world (Foster 2022).<sup>23</sup> Employed correctly, philanthropy has the power to empower the disempowered and, through its efforts, enable the disadvantaged class of society to make their voices heard. It can fill the void left by the government in most cases; however, in order to deliver social justice, philanthropists should act as partners and provide a meaningful outcome for the beneficiaries they work for.<sup>24</sup> Centring beneficiary viewpoints needs to be fundamental. Beneficiaries are the people who are the most affected by any adversity and inequity and possess the most incentives to change the system; however, unfortunately, they are also the ones who are deprived of resources, means, and power to bring about change. They have to ask for help from the same system that, in the first place, silences them.<sup>25</sup> In his paper, Daniel talks about the fundamental problems which beneficiaries face in the majority of cases: a lack of attention from the funding organisations in terms of not focusing on their unmet needs<sup>26</sup> Peter Long, in his essay, mentions that 'research has shown how feedback from the beneficiaries has contributed to improving the systems to a greater extent.'<sup>27</sup>

This working paper argues that the fundamental challenge regarding philanthropies not listening to their beneficiaries needs to be analysed from the lens of agency and disenfranchisement, instead of as just another problem with the philanthropic ecosystem. In 'Shifting Philanthropy From Charity to Justice', it is stated that, in most cases, decisions for underprivileged communities are taken by the philanthropists when they are not even aware of the necessities of the said community in the first place. There should be a systematic overhaul of philanthropy and a new framework where the primary focus should be on social justice which starts by listening to the disempowered.<sup>28</sup> This lack of discussion on beneficiary agency and their missing perspective is one of the significant gaps in the existing literature that this working paper attempts to fill. The onus of bringing in this change, however, does not lie with one stakeholder only; instead, it is a collective effort where every individual should direct their energy towards the betterment of society as a whole.<sup>29</sup> Although most organisations claim they listen to beneficiary needs, this is rarely the case on the ground. Thus, most of the findings are focused on gathering practical approaches and recommendations that can be implemented to enhance the beneficiary's agency in the ecosystem.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>23</sup>William Foster, 'Philanthropy Takes a Stand in Social Movements', Forbes, accessed 5 December 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bridgespan/2016/03/16/philanthropy-takes-a-stand-in-social-movements/>.

<sup>24</sup>Surabhi Sanghi, 'Can Philanthropy Deliver Social Justice?', SOAS Blog (blog), 21 February 2022, <https://study.soas.ac.uk/philanthropy-social-justice-directors-lecture/>.

<sup>25</sup>Jennifer Jordan, 'Philanthropy Fails in Its Approach to Inequality. Here's a Way to Change It. Opinion', The Philadelphia Inquirer, 22 November 2019, <https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/community-funds-philanthropy-donor-wealth-giving-project-20191122.html>.

<sup>26</sup>Daniel Stid, 'The Power of Seeing Things from the Beneficiary's Perspective', The Bridgespan Group (blog), n.d., <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/blog/government-and-philanthropy/the-power-of-seeing-things-from-the-beneficiary's>.

<sup>27</sup>Peter Long, 'Systems Change Should Lift Up Beneficiary Voices', Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.48558/ANQD-R686>.

<sup>28</sup>Burton and Barnes, 'Shifting Philanthropy From Charity to Justice'.

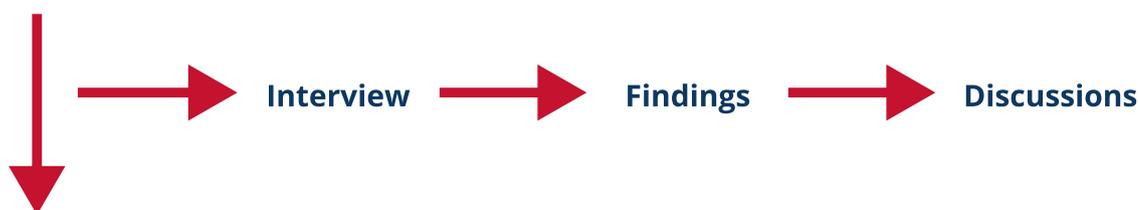
<sup>29</sup>Sandra LaFleur, 'The Collective Work of Building Individual Agency', Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.48558/Q82D-KZ57>.

<sup>30</sup>Stid, 'The Power of Seeing Things from the Beneficiary's Perspective'.

### 3. STUDY: METHODOLOGY USED AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study uses a qualitative methodology to identify the relationship between philanthropy and beneficiary agency. The author began with a literature review, followed by a desk examination of the publicly accessible vision/mission statements of the key organisations in the ecosystem. Subsequently, the author conducted semi-structured interviews of selected key informants from the ecosystem, including decision-makers and representatives of leading donor organisations, on-ground organisations, intermediary organisations, researchers, and beneficiaries themselves. The figure below explains the process of data collection.

#### Literature Review



#### Desk Research

Figure 2 : Research Methodology followed

A total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted in English. Different sets of guiding questions were used for each stakeholder type in a free flow conversational format. The interviewee organisations were associated with a variety of priority areas, including social impact, economic empowerment, rural development, human rights, gender equality, and social transformation.

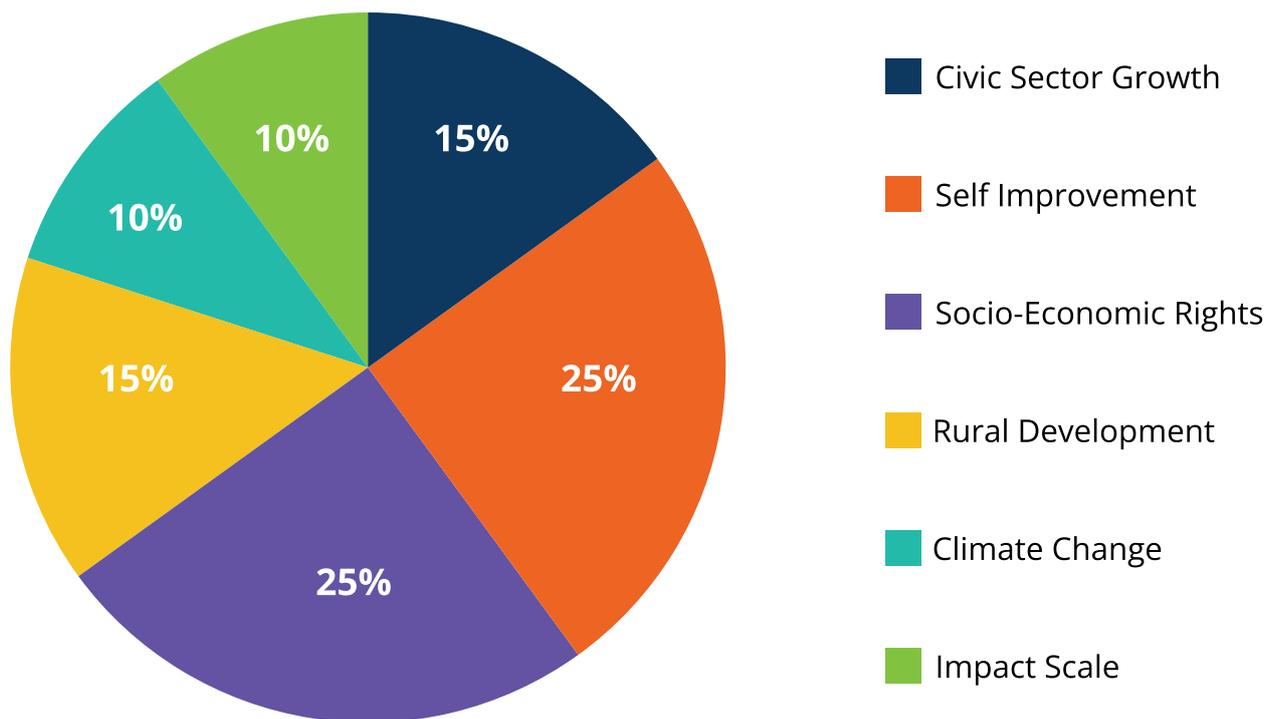


Figure 3 The priority focus areas of the interviewee organisations were very diverse

To simplify the analysis of the various stakeholder groups, for this research, all civil society organisations have been clubbed as on-ground organizations, including community groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, professional associations, and foundations that depend on external donor funds to sustain their work. Intermediaries include all incubators, accelerators, impact consultants, fund advisors, etc. And all forms of grant providers such as family philanthropies, multi-lateral funders, global foundations are clubbed under donors.

To relay key findings and maintain interviewee anonymity, code names for the organisations are used when discussing or quoting them: OG for on-ground organisations (including NGOs and community organisations and social enterprises); DO for donor organisations (including family philanthropies); IN for intermediaries (including ecosystem support organisations), and BE for end beneficiaries.

## 4. KEY FINDINGS

### 4.1 The various interpretation of the term 'agency'

The concept of agency is understood differently by different people depending on the context of their work, their perception of change, and the tools they have to make that change. In talking to several organisations about what agency meant to them, interesting results emerged.

To a lot of interviewees, **agency was directly linked to the capacity and will of the beneficiaries** to bring a change. As an interviewee who works in the field of livelihood says, 'Agency is about having the capacity and confidence to be able to use the abilities you have in a way that will help not just the person to grow, but also the community to make significant changes' (OG3). Similarly, according to a non-profit fundraising professional, 'By agency, I mean the ability to exercise their own will' (IN1).

As the interviews progressed, for most of the interviewees, **individual agency morphed into a form of collective agency towards improving a community or system**. To them, agency is the ability to direct your confidence and ability towards the progress of your community. Their conceptualisation of agency deals with your own growth, on the one hand, but also focuses your attention on creating changes in your community that benefit everyone. To put it another way, agency allows you to think collectively.

As per an organisation that is a global incubator for youth-led social change campaigns and projects, 'Agency for us is all about empowerment and change making. We fundamentally believe that young people are change makers. Often adults, organisations or the system get in their way. So, our focus is how we unlock the agency that already exists in young people to do this work' (DO1).

For an impact investor in the global south, 'the moment we talk about agency to me in the work that we have done, it is related to building the space for everyone to exercise their power, with their own responsibilities. Of course, it's not unlimited power without any responsibilities. But, assuming that everyone knows what is important for them especially if it's people from resourceful communities, it's to reiterate that they know what is best for their life and the work of implementation. [The role of] organisations or NGOs or social enterprise is to facilitate that path, but it's not so much to tell them what the path should be. And the implicit understanding is that just playing the role of a facilitator would enable people to exercise their agency and exercise their power' (DO6).

**In this collectivisation of individual agency into community agency, we observed that it is not the beneficiaries from the community who are leading the change, but the donors' priorities and perceptions that drive the direction of the change.**

Interestingly, an individual's means to express their opinions and views formed a considerable part of our interviewee's perception of agency.

An organisation that works on mobilising peasants and workers to access their government rights said that to them agency means 'allowing people to have a voice in participatory governance' (OG1).

Similarly, to another organisation that works to enhance the dignity of underprivileged people by providing material-based grants in exchange of community labour believes that 'agency means when people are able to convey their opinion without anyone influencing them' (OG4).

### **It is not yet clear whether this voice of the beneficiaries can be political or in dissent of the organisations that are working to build their agency.**

In 'As Politics Creep into Philanthropy, Beneficiaries Come Under Fire',<sup>31</sup> Paul Sullivan argues that organisations that work for the benefit of people are side-lined by donors if they are seen to be involved in 'political issues'. According to him, the elite class hegemonies and produces the narrative of its choice and influence, limiting the voice of others.

A fully evolved agency also means having a say in how the country is governed, being able to hold your elected officials accountable, and being able to express your views without fear of retribution. In fact, an interviewee who works for the recognition, defence, promotion, and realisation of human rights believes that agency operates 'when people have a voice, and they are able to bargain and negotiate with the government better' (OG5).

Thus, we see how different aspects of agency are misconstrued as its whole meaning. For some, agency means having a voice or a say, whereas for others, agency means having the capability and means to bring about a change. In fact, only when a change happens in a beneficiary's life is the agency perceived to be operating. Agency is the fundamental concern in efforts to bring about any change; it is the intrinsic value on which all our other actions such as empowerment and collectivisation rest. However, despite all this, it still remains a concept that is yet not common in development circles. There is a need to differentiate it from the other related phenomena and recognise it as the foundation stone so that it can be treated and understood as a necessity the ecosystem needs to focus on.

<sup>31</sup>Paul Sullivan, 'As Politics Creep into Philanthropy, Beneficiaries Come Under Fire', The New York Times, 16 August 2019, sec. Your Money, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/16/your-money/politics-philanthropy-protests.html>.

## 4.2 How do donors and on-ground organisations engage in/ support building the agency of their end beneficiaries.

In this section, we delve into what organisations do to nurture people's agency and how these organisations support the agency of individuals who are impacted by them either directly or indirectly.

The overlap among 'empowerment', 'capacity building', and 'rights-based' work emerges strongly here, largely because of varying and limited (as discussed earlier) understandings of agency by different people and the intermixing of different work areas on the ground.

The responses received can be categorised into two groups on the basis of the different ways in which agency can be developed: ensuring self-sustainability and collectivisation

### 4.2.1 Ensuring self-sustainability

The ability of their beneficiaries to continue thriving and displaying the impact of a donor's intervention long after the active involvement of the donor has stopped is an important criterion for a donor. Building this ability is often considered to be building agency of their beneficiaries. Capacity building, training, one-time resource investment, market linkages, providing access, and so on are the commonly used tools to build this resilience. This self-sustainability is often interchangeably linked with empowerment by both the donors and the on-ground organisations in a way that once an end beneficiary is self-reliant/empowered, they do not need to depend on others.

For instance, an interviewee who mobilises farmers and labourers say, 'We have facilitated movements and campaigns. Our biggest achievement is that 98% of women are panchayat karyakartas who are working on their own. They are empowered to an extent where they don't seek anyone's help' (OG1).

And while agency is all about trusting people, empowering them to make decisions, and letting them know that they have the agency to make their own choices in life, to build someone's agency also needs work on providing them with the means to exercise that agency.

According to one organisation that works with indigenous people to support grassroots conservation and agriculture practices, 'We focus a lot on training and capacity building activities. Even if it's a project that is supporting farmers with seeds or bio input support to be able to help them get back to farming, there is an equally substantial amount of focus that the farmers should get the training that will allow them to sustain these activities locally. For example: when we are distributing seeds, the idea is that the seeds are distributed through a seed bank. So that farmers know that after the first harvest a part of it has to go back to the bank. This is one way we try and ensure that some of these activities are self-sustaining. Hence, these training and skill-building components are inbuilt into the project'(OG3).

Training and capacity building are important aspects through which organisations can engage in building the agency of people. The emphasis on skill development greatly benefits recipients in terms of not being dependent on anyone. For example, if a donor organisation withdraws funding after a period, recipients might utilise the skills they have gained to support themselves.

#### 4.2.2 Collectivisation

Bringing people together as one voice, one fight, to strengthen the individual needs into a larger collective need of a large section of society is another way in which most of our interviews found value in agency-building work.

An organisation that works on bringing individual home-based women workers on one platform said, 'First of all, when they are organised, that itself has to start with them being empowered with some sort of agency because when they meet other women, they talk and they realise other women like them exist. While meeting other women, a solidarity is built within communities and with that solidarity comes a voice. Initially, you find many home-based workers who clearly say that nobody in my house used to support this line of work. In fact, most of the people as well as the government don't recognise this work. But when these women interact with other workers and the agency brings her the knowledge that she is a worker and contributes immensely to her family, society and national economies, that is the biggest takeaway for an organisation. After that all these women band together to address the issues the community faces. They start collectivising and their agency is built to negotiate with various stakeholders. So, the networks help them in this process and then they are encouraged to use their voice for various issues.' (OGO6)

These women are now aware of the benefits of working. They are now role models for other women in their community, working to improve their own lives and position. So, the primary goal of any organisation is to not only make a difference in the lives of the people they serve, but also to assist them in creating their own peer spaces to discover their collective power.

An organisation that works to safeguard and promote the right to safe housing shared with us an interesting example of how they participate in enhancing the agency of the people with whom they work: 'When we started working with the Gadia Lohar community in New Delhi, we received information about the threat of eviction in one of the settlements. While responding to that, we met people of the community and there was no sense of collectivisation at that point of time. After we did the survey of listing all the settlements, then we formed a group called 'Gadia Lohar Sangarash Samiti' and these people brought people from different communities together. After that, we took it forward by selecting a few groups and trained them on laws and policies. We also asked them what would they want to demand as the Gadia Lohar Community. The result of this collectivisation was that the Chief Minister of New Delhi assured us that no settlement of the community will be demolished and they will be recognised as soon as possible. This is one story of people who had little agency because they were invisibilised completely. Nobody talked about them and nobody spoke about their plight, so suddenly for them to come to the forefront and get together and understand the power of their identity was remarkable' (OG5).

The community which received help from an organisation ended up voicing its concerns to the government. When people have a collective agency, they are strengthened by the mass, and they are more likely to fight for their rights and help themselves.

### 4.3 How much and in what ways do donors include the people/organisation they fund directly in their decision-making process?

Direct decision-making power in issues involving one's own and one's community's welfare is a key element of having agency. It is important to recognise the necessity of the active participation of people/organisations receiving funding in the decision-making process.

Out of all the interviewees in this study, approximately 80 per cent of the organisations did not involve their beneficiaries in any formal decision-making role in their organisation. The remaining 20 per cent used some form of feedback collection mechanisms or hiring some beneficiaries or community representatives in their teams.

This is a great example shared by a lean organisation advocating the right of safe housing for all, wherein the community members' skills are being nurtured to enable them to become community leaders and representatives for the organisation. 'There are people with whom we started working a few years back and today they are community leaders. They are taking the lead in all the issues in the community. Once we help them navigate bureaucratic processes, then they become leaders as well as representatives of their communities. Also, within our organisation, all our field team members were homeless once upon a time and now they are the community leaders. As of now, 60-70% of our staff are community members.' (OG5)

Here is an example of an organisation using promotions to elevate the power and position of their beneficiaries in the organisation, in turn motivating others to aspire to that position. This organisation provides material-based donations to people in exchange for community labour. 'We have around 800-900 women working with us. All these women have found their own livelihoods in our processing centres and also live in these centres. About 70% of these women have been working with us for the last 12 years. They have come as basic material sorting individuals and some of them have assumed the key position in our team' (OG4).

The organisations that have tried involving their communities at all levels of their operations have usually seen quite a success with the model. For instance, an on-the-ground organisation working with indigenous people to support grassroots conservation and agriculture practices said, 'The way we work is slightly decentralised in terms of operations. We have intervention areas divided into seven ecological zones . . . Each of these areas has its own field office and field centres. The field coordinator oversees all the activities and interventions in that area. The entire staff composition right from the senior positions to the volunteers is all the members of the local community. At the local level, all the decisions are done by the local community. We have created community foundations in these indigenous spaces which are governed and run by members of the community' (OG3).

However, redistributing power by creating access can often become tokenistic in that beneficiaries, although included in the decision-making process, are still relegated to the lowest levels of the hierarchy. According to a donor with experience investing in youth- and women-focused organisations, 'A few community organisations have started creating spaces for young people to be on the advisory board. Some philanthropies have been inviting young people to the decision makers in terms of giving out grants as well. With other organisations, right now it seems more tokenistic. But my concern has always been to move away from being tokenistic to actually handing over power. There are limited organisations where they actually have community people on the board and making funding decisions' (DO4).

It is important to learn from organisations that have built a more equal environment for beneficiaries. When beneficiaries have access to decision-making, they can provide good results because they can identify gaps where intervention is required.

## 4.4 Measuring agency as part of the impact assessment (IA) exercise

An impact assessment is generally undertaken to measure the success of different projects and, consequently, decide which intervention should continue to receive funds and which should be discontinued. Impact assessment assists organisations in determining what they are doing well and what needs to be improved. Given how integral impact assessment exercises are to philanthropic fund exchange, interviewees were asked, 'What are some of the different metrics you utilise for measuring the impact of your fund on people's lives?' Through this question, we wanted to understand how and where agency-building work's impact can be measured.

One of the organisations that uses a strategic problem-solving method to solve social challenges explained how they assess the impact: 'We last year created what we call our "outcome goals", meaning in five years' time how this particular work we are doing becomes irrelevant in a particular area. The outcome being this work now sustains without us or work is not needed because the problem is solved, which is harder. So, how do we become irrelevant is that we work backwards from that: . . . in this particular vertical, in five years' time we will be irrelevant or in three years' time, depending on the complexity of the work. Then working backwards on what are our annual goals to be able to get there. So, if it's a seven-year project, then what is our three-year goal or two-year goal or this year's goals? Are we moving forward on that and based on the goal what is our budget to be able to do that? So, we are focusing on whether we are able to achieve our goals or not' (IN2).

Another organisation that focuses on self-development and skilling technology for women to find meaningful work said: '[Our impact assessment] was primarily in terms of objectives, looking at whether the organisation was able to do the task that they meant to do. It was mostly based on statistics and numbers promised against numbers met. Then, inside that organisation, they would define what success meant for them in the coming year. So, if it was a two-year grant, then they would themselves

define what year one and year two would look like. So, for an education programme, it would be x number of students supported, x number of students moved from one grade to the other grade, etc. For employment, it would be x number of women in our case trained for employability and x number internships. So, it was largely a very basic matrix and it was intentionally kept basic so that it doesn't become like a rigorous process for the organisation to constantly keep monitoring and reporting. But I do know that other organisations have other rigorous demands and [I am] not too sure of what frameworks they use. But ours was just an Excel sheet' (DO4).

According to another organisation that supports ideas, individuals and institutions doing ground-breaking work stated: 'We don't directly measure the impact of our brands; rather, what we measure is our learning. In particular, we measure . . . "What is the rate of change of surprise for us in any particular field of work?" If we are continuously being surprised by work in a particular field, there is a lot more for us to learn' (DO3).

While, over the last few years there has been considerable improvement in the practice of monitoring and evaluation, most of the metrics used are to measure the impact of the interventions, ignoring questions about what beneficiaries actually need. Philanthropists wrongly assume that their commercial achievements qualify them to assess and influence judgments in other fields as well, and there is limited research on what happens in the beneficiaries' lives after the philanthropic support ends once the project cycle is over. Therefore, there is a need to study the relationship between the actual long-term impact on the beneficiary's life and the philanthropic support mediated either through NGOs, social start-ups, or a partnership between the two. Ken and Robert (2013) also identified this need, saying that, 'one needs to be an informed donor and help those organisations already doing effective work on the ground'.<sup>32</sup> Such a partnership will do two things: speed up the process of knowing your grantee and provide an additional human resource for a more significant impact.

On the other hand, given the ambiguous nature of the concept of agency itself, several organisations expressed difficulty in pinpointing one phenomenon/metric to measure it. Depending on their focus area, they included exercises such as providing information about rights; organising individuals to come together as 'one voice'; offering advice or counselling services; creating access/linkage to universal human rights; building means, skills and confidence to take decisions within and outside the household; economic self-reliance, that is, decrease in reliance on loans and independently owned income source; or participation in public/community events as agency-building exercises. These exercises then substitute the measurement of the whole of beneficiary's agency whereas even when we consider all of these actions, they will only constitute a part of someone's exercise of agency. Agency, by virtue of its intrinsic nature, cannot be wholly quantified into certain actions or steps.

<sup>32</sup>Ken Berger and Robert M. Penna, 'The Elitist Philanthropy of So-Called Effective Altruism', *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.48558/FTS4-6040>.

## 4.5 Balancing the longer time frame of agency-building work with shorter grant cycles

One of the main challenges of agency-building work is the long time (sometimes spanning lifetimes and decades) it takes to build the inherent sustained agency of someone. According to an organisation working on the right to housing, 'When we approach the new donors, it's difficult to convince them for a long-term commitment because their only question is, "What do you expect to see after many years?" and they expect some drastic changes to happen, but the work we do is slow: building people's capacity takes time. The people we work with have so many challenges in their day-to-day lives and it's important to be patient with them, keep supporting them, and [that] is itself a change' (OGO5).

Organisations were asked to share their experiences on how they strike a balance between working on this long-term vision and meeting short-term needs and demands. According to a family philanthropy focused on environmental challenges and capacity building issues of small NGOs, 'We have 20% of our budget which we call goodwill and, essentially, it's for the quick needs. For example, [if] an NGO was running a course and everything [was] going well, but the funders pulled out, then they [would] get affected. They will reach out to us. So, we keep getting such requests and all of that goes from this 20% goodwill budget, which doesn't affect or impact our everyday work on our overall foundational goal'(DO2).

Donors usually give funding for a particular project with a set time-frame and not every organisation works in such short project mode. To access this project funding, they try to divide their work into multiple fixed projects but often these projects overshoot their defined boundaries and additional funding is required. At that time, it gets very difficult for that organisation to sustain its work without donor's funds and funders should keep this in mind before withdrawing their support after a particular project gets over.

COVID-19 was a global emergency that derailed the budget planning of all organisations and forced them to rethink their models to incorporate both short-term and long-term needs of their community within their budget. According to an advocacy organisation mobilising home-based women workers, 'It's very important for a network which is micro in its operations to have its ears to the ground. If you are going to [ignore] the challenges workers are facing, then your existence makes no sense at all. This is why it's essential to keep the needs of the workers in mind. In times of COVID, we went to our funders and told them that the activities to engage with brands don't make sense. At that time, it becomes the network's responsibility to negotiate the contracts. We did both short-term and long-term things. The short-term things we did was to build databases of home-based workers so that they can be linked to government programmes; we provided sanitary, rations; and we provided access to [mobile] phones. At a larger scale, we did research that focused on the impact of COVID-19 on women home-based workers in South Asia and we spoke to 400 women across eight countries. We captured their experience because the data on them is completely negligible. We build the narrative so that our action research acted

advocacy tool so that worker organisations can advocate with their local or national governments, saying you will have to wake up and realise the rights of the home-based workers' (OGO6).

## 5. TIPS FROM THE FIELD

Interviewees were asked how they thought the larger philanthropic ecosystem needs to evolve so as to centre beneficiary agency and support work which focuses on building different aspects of agency. Some of their key recommendations are:

### i) Exposure visits of the funders

According to an organisation that provides material-based donations to people in exchange for community labour, 'I think grassroots organisations like ours . . . should encourage funders to travel to rural areas in order to look at the work organisations are doing. We have seen people digging wells with their bare hands in areas like Rajasthan. This is the situation in many places in India and funders need to be keen to operate in these places. They should focus on creating a space of equals where beneficiaries are as much part of the conversation as funders. This shift needs to be there'(OGO4).

Funders need to travel to see and understand the ground realities of the beneficiaries they wish to impact—not to see what impact they have created, but what impact they need to create. Sitting in a faraway office, the gap between the funders and beneficiary priorities and preferences is often vast and such exposure trips will help close some of it.

### ii) Measuring impact qualitatively rather than quantitatively

According to an advocacy organisation mobilising home-based women workers, '*Agency is not a tangible thing*; rather [it is] a lifelong thing. Funders usually put numbers on everything. They don't appreciate the effective work you do on the ground. For example, a woman is stepping out of her house in the South Asian context and says, "I will work, I will be a part of a movement of workers—that itself is a power move for women in South Asia. It is not something that comes easily and agency is not something which you can measure through the number of trainings a particular woman has received or, for that matter, the number of speeches she has given. All these things are just vague indicators, but there is so much more which changes. On the contrary, she should be asked how much she is investing in the education of her children or is she treating her daughter at par with her sons. This is the huge change which comes for home-based workers, but funders don't see all of these things and they are more focussed about how many brands are recognising them. So, funders should read about the constituencies we serve and keep up with what the changes are and look at the ground realities constantly. All of this need to come from the funding ecosystem' (OGO6).

When funders put a number on everything, an organisation's effective work on building the inherent capabilities and changes are often side-lined or not recognised at all. A lot of on-ground organisations deal with their funders' fixation on numbers by cloaking some of their important central work as allied activities or breaking their goal into smaller sub-tasks that can be quantified.

Regardless of the improvements the funding ecosystem is making to adapt its impact assessment suitable to measuring ground realities, the impact an on-ground organisation aims to measure and display is still dictated by what the donor community wants to hear and appreciate. So, unless the donors themselves start seeing the benefit of supporting and developing the beneficiaries' agency, the impact of their efforts will not be reflected in the theory of change model and the impact assessment metrics of the on-ground organisations.

### **iii) Opening up decision-making avenues**

Beneficiaries in the philanthropic ecosystem, more often than not, are unable to openly express their ideas since they are not involved in decision-making. The most effective strategy to enable beneficiary agency is to offer funding and tools that allow beneficiaries to make their own decisions. It is also critical to offer advice and mentorship whenever feasible since this can assist recipients in developing the skills and knowledge required for success.

### **iv) Allowing failure**

Just because you have invested in an organisation or a beneficiary or a cause does not mean it should reap the vision one saw with it. Considering the receiver to be a human with a tendency to fail, disappoint, or not deliver results is important to humanise the philanthropic exchange. People will only take bold actions in a culture in which individuals feel safe to fail and attempt new things without fear of judgement or financial consequence.

### **v) Patient capital**

The development of new models is challenging, especially those that meet the needs of the world's poorest people. Patient capital is an indispensable resource that provides a window of opportunity to develop world-changing ideas that can address global challenges and make life better for all. Integrating the approaches of venture capital and philanthropy has brought together two essential elements in impact investment: (i) longer time horizons for achieving sustainable milestones and (ii) higher financial risk tolerance as compared to traditional investments.

## vi) Treating beneficiaries as humans and not subjects

The onset of techno managerial attitude to the development ecosystem means that all work is now looked from the lens of input and output with the end beneficiaries as subjects on whom a theory of change is acted upon to achieve certain outputs. It's only these outputs which matters and every discussion revolve around. This myopic treatment disregards the beneficiaries as wholesome humans with their own desire, agency and brains who might not fit/want the theory of change imposed on them.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Constitution of India recognises that all people have the right to life with dignity and simultaneously 'demand work for their rights enshrined in the Constitution while also making the state responsible/accountable for fulfilling its commitment to adopt a human-rights-based approach to development'. Additionally, by virtue of being a signatory to many international conventions including the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, India is obligated to adopt a human rights approach to development and fulfil its international commitments in this regard.

This rights-based approach stresses the empowerment of local actors while focusing on beneficiaries as the 'owners of rights and leaders of development',<sup>33</sup> who may further be capacitated to lead the path towards promoting equity and social inclusion. In short, in order to truly fulfil both the vision of the Indian Constitution as well as the globally adopted UN sustainable development mandate, the agency of the individual (combination of rights, power and capacity) needs to be front and centre.

The gulf that currently exists between philanthropy, beneficiaries' agency, research, and practice can only be bridged by active and healthy partnerships between donors and receivers. This paper has tried to highlight this gulf and recommend some the actionable ways in which it can be bridged. Unless beneficiaries are considered as participants in the development that collectively all of us wish to bring about, the agency of beneficiaries cannot be realised. They need to be perceived as an equal participant right from designing the theory of change and taking funding decisions to measuring and displaying the success stories.

And while this paper focused on beneficiary agency, the matter of donor's agency is another unexplored area that would be interesting to study, especially in the context of increasing regulations such as the Corporate Social Responsibility Act, 2013, which mandates and often restricts donations, How does this affect the donor's freedom to give, not give, or decide whom and how much to give?

Agency in its totality is a very complex concept and needs to be dissected further to make it possible for the philanthropic ecosystem to adopt it meaningfully.

<sup>33</sup>OHCHR, 'Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies' (n.d.), <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/PovertyStrategiesen.pdf>.

## 7. APPENDIX A

We spoke with numerous organisations with diverse work and background as part of the primary data collection to gain insights into what agency means from different perspectives and how each stakeholder contributes to it. Our research objective was to understand the conventional relationship between philanthropy, on-ground organisations, and the end beneficiaries' agency, creating a framework that will contribute towards better funnelling of philanthropic aid towards beneficiaries' agencies.

Name	Type of Organisation, Focus Area	About the organisation
Rishabh Lalani	Intermediary, civic sector growth	Rishabh is an independent fundraiser. During the last two waves of Covid, he has worked as a volunteer raising nearly 23 crores for relief supporting 110+ causes and organisations. In all, they have made funds worth INR 70+ crores available to the non-profit sector across a range of causes ranging from gender, food and hunger, health.
Peace First	Donor organisation, self-empowerment	Peace First is a global incubator for youth-led social change. They believe every young person—no matter where they come from—should be able to access the resources to make social change, so their programmes are free and open to all young people between the ages of 13 and 25
Majdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)	On-ground organisation, socio economic rights	MKSS is a People's Organisation that works with workers and peasants in the villages of central Rajasthan. They were the pioneers of the RTI movement.
Keystone Foundation	On-ground organisation, self-empowerment	Keystone Foundation has been working in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR) with indigenous communities on improving their lives, livelihoods, and maintaining their unique cultures.

Goonj	On-ground organisation, rural development	Goonj aims to build an equitable relationship of strength, sustenance and dignity between the cities and villages using the under-utilised urban material as a tool to trigger development with dignity, across the country.
Socio Legal Information Centre (SLIC)	On-ground organisation, socio-economic rights.	Socio Legal Information Centre (SLIC) partner with coalitions and social movements in India for providing free legal aid and legal literacy programmes throughout India. Their Human Rights Law Network coalition comprises of NGOs, social movements, academics, students, activists, researchers, judges and lawyers in 24 states in India, dedicated to the use of the legal system to advance human rights, struggle against violations, and ensure access to justice for all.
Urmul Trust	On-ground organisation, rural development	The Urmul trust is working towards social and economic change in the lives of the people in the harsh, inhospitable and interior regions of western Rajasthan. Their focus has always been to keep the people at the centre of every initiative and reinforce the local leadership. My objective is to understand how they operate in such conditions while empowering the local community through their astonishing work.
Rohini Nilekeni Philanthropies	Donor organisation, civic sector growth	Their primary focus is on active citizenship, climate, and biodiversity and gender equity. Through their journey, I want to know how they are enabling collaborations across divides.

Shell Foundation	Donor organisation, climate change	Shell Foundation supports people living in low-income communities to escape poverty and ease hardship. They create and scale business solutions to enhance access to energy and affordable transport as a means to achieve this. I will interview them to understand how they have been sustaining this model of development.
A.T.E Chandra Foundation	Donor organisation, climate change, impact at scale	A.T.E Chandra Foundation is one of India's leading philanthropic foundations, by scale. They work with a strategic problem-solving approach to address social issues in two core verticals: 1) Social Sector Capacity Building and 2) Sustainable Rural Development.
S4S Technologies	On-ground organisation, rural development	S4S Technologies is a decentralised agri-processing platform serving shelf-stable, nutrition-rich, and convenience foods to industrial kitchens and packaged food companies. At the heart of the S4S business model is the solar-powered food dehydration system operated by women micro-entrepreneurs (ME). My objective is to understand how they are using science to unlock value for farmers as well as transform their lives.
Empower	Donor organisation, self-empowerment	Empower partners with local organisations in emerging market countries, and other change-makers, to enable marginalised young people to transform their lives and communities. Through them, we will understand the struggles and challenges in relation to getting funding for the

		kind of work they are doing. Also, how they use agency in transforming the lives of the most marginalised.
South Asia Women Foundation India (SAWF)	Donor organisation, women's rights and empowerment.	SAWF India envisions a world where women, girls, trans and gender non-conforming persons realise their constitutional rights and freedoms to equality and non-discrimination. It will be interesting to understand what role agency plays in this regard.
Home-Net South Asia	On ground organisation, socio-economic rights	Home-Net South Asia is a regional network of home-based worker organisations spread across eight countries. In the years since their inception, they have emerged as a leading voice for home-based workers in the region. Their initiatives, in their member countries, empower home-based women workers and help them improve their lives and livelihoods.
Villgro	Intermediary, rural development.	Villgro was founded in 2001 with a mission to create impactful, innovative, and successful social enterprises. Core to their work is the belief that market-based models are a powerful way to solve social problems and create impact at scale. By capacitating these models with the right resources and knowledge, they are a sustainable way of creating lasting social impact.
Antarang Foundation	On-ground organisation, self-empowerment	Antarang Foundation envisions a world where every young person is passionately, productively, and positively engaged in a career of their choice.

		Through two career focused programmes, CareerAware and CareeReady, the foundation works to bridge the employability gap that exists amongst disadvantaged youth.
Sattva	Intermediary, civic sector growth	At the heart of the Sattva’s work is the ability to collaborate with multiple stakeholders, and co-create inclusive working models that help each organisation achieve its own place in the Magic Quadrant—where its economic value as well as social impact is maximised.
CSEI	Intermediary, socio-economic rights	Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion (CSEI) is concerned with deepening democracy and developing our body politic by enhancing the enjoyment by excluded communities of their social, economic, and cultural (SEC) rights.
Tara	Beneficiary	A beneficiary of Kranti, an NGO which works with young girls from red light areas to help them access a safe environment and education.
Dhanshyam	Beneficiary	A beneficiary of POWERED Accelerator initiative to distribute solar powered lighting system in areas with irregular electricity supply in Maharashtra, India

## APPENDIX B

### Guiding Questionnaires for the On-ground Organisations (Community Trusts, NGOs, Social Enterprises etc.)

Name:

Area of work:

Primary people/group of people you work with:

How long do you typically work with one person/set of people?

What is the primary mode of your work with them?

#### Placing the context of agency amongst the organisation's work

1. What do the words 'people's agency' mean to you?
2. How does your organisation engage in building the agency of the community people it works with? It will be great if you can mention some examples here.
3. What kind of agency building activities does your organisation partake? Could you please indicate what estimated percentage of your organisation's annual budget you spend on the following?
  - a) Providing access to universal human rights?
  - b) Building self-confidence and decision-making power within and outside the household
  - c) Developing economic self-reliance—livelihood training/access
  - d) Enabling public/community participation
  - e) Strengthening political voice
  - f) Other, please specify \_\_

#### Understanding the impact of your work on the agency of the people

4. What kind of impact have you seen enhanced agency bring in the lives of the people you work with? How do you think it benefits you as an organisation and the overall development of the society?
5. How has the reliance of people on you/external support organisations like you altered because of your work, especially your work on building their agency?
  - a) Decreased, as they became self-reliant.
  - b) Increased, as other needs evolved
  - c) Transferred from you to something else? E.g., loans
  - d) Other, please specify \_\_

6. As an organisation do you agree that when people develop a sense of agency then they are able to speak for themselves and make their own choices without relying on anyone?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Depends on a lot of other factors too. Please specify \_\_\_\_

7. How much and in what ways do you include the people you work with directly in your decision-making process? Have any of the people you work with reached a decision-making leadership position in your organisation or in any other allied organisation or started an imitative/organisation of their own? How many?

- A. None, 0%
- B. 0 – 10%
- C. 10–25%
- D. 25–40%
- E. 40–60%
- F. Above 60%

8. Typically, how long does it take for a momentum shift in the people's agency to come in?

- a) 0–3 years
- b) 3–7 years
- c) 7–12 years
- d) 12–20 years
- e) 20 years and beyond

9. Given the longer time duration required for bringing a self-sustained change, in contrast to the shorter-term requirements of daily needs, do you think as an organisation you can strike a balance between meeting the daily needs of people and as well as focus on building their agency?

- a) Yes, but it's difficult
- b) Depends on how much funds we have
- c) No, it's difficult

10. What challenges do you face while doing work around agency building? What importance does the availability of funds play in this work?

## Relationship with Philanthropy

11. As a beneficiary organisation, how do you view philanthropy as an aid?
12. What percentage of your total annual budget comes from philanthropic funds/donations? Typically, what are the sources of these funds?
- a) Philanthropic grants
  - b) Local community donations
  - c) Crowdfunding
  - d) Individual donations
  - e) Project-based funding
  - f) Others, please specify
13. How do you typically spend these funds?
- a) Meeting the immediate needs of the people you work with
  - b) Running specific outcome-based programmes/project
  - c) Meeting resource cost
  - d) Investing in the long-term skills of the people you work with
  - e) Building organisational capacity
  - f) Others, please specify
14. Do you face constraints in spending funds received/receiving funds for agency building long-term activities? What do you think are the reasons?

## Seeking recommendations

In what ways according to you can the combined social impact and development ecosystem effectively focus on agency building and recognise it as of pivotal importance for the bringing about self-sustained change in people's lives in the long run?

## APPENDIX C

### Guiding questionnaires for Donors/Funding organizations

About your organisation

Name:

Area of work:

Primary people/group of people/organisations you work with:

How long do you typically work with one organisation?

What is the primary mode of your work with them? Could you please indicate how your total funding budget is distributed amongst them?

- a) Directly funding the immediate needs of the people
- b) Supporting specific outcome-based programmes/project
- c) Meeting resource cost of an on-ground organisation/movement/initiative
- d) Funding self-sustained growth of the people
- e) Capacity-building of on-ground organisation/movement/initiative capacity
- f) Others, please specify

Typically, what kind of funding instruments do you usually use?

- a) Unrestricted grants
- b) Outcome-based grants
- c) Specified project funding
- d) Impact bonds
- e) Loans
- f) Others, please specify

#### Placing the context of agency amongst the organisation's work

1. What do the word 'people's agency' mean to you?
2. How does building the agency of the people you want to benefit feature in your organisation's vision and goals?
3. How does your organisation engage in/support building the agency of people it impacts (directly/indirectly)? It will be great if you can mention some examples here.

4. What kind of agency building activities does your organisation partake/support? Could you please indicate what estimated percentage of your total funding is spent on them?

- a) Providing access to universal human rights
- b) Building self-confidence and decision-making power within and outside the household
- c) Developing economic self-reliance – livelihood training/access
- d) Enabling public/community participation
- e) Strengthening political voice
- f) Other, please specify

### Understanding the impact of your work on the agency of the people

5. What kind of impact have you seen enhanced agency bring in the lives of the people you work with? How do you think it benefits you as an organisation and the overall development of society?

6. How has the reliance of people or the on-ground organisations you support on you/ external support organisations like you altered because of your work, especially your work on building their agency?

- a) Decreased, as they became self-reliant.
- b) Increased, as other needs evolved
- c) Transferred from you to something else? E.g., loans
- d) Other, please specify?

7. As an organisation do you agree that when people develop a sense of agency then they are able to speak for themselves and make their own choices without relying on anyone?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Depends on a lot of other factors too. Please specify.

8. Typically, how long does it take for a momentum shift in the people's agency to come in?

- a) 0–3 years
- b) 3–7 years
- c) 7–12 years
- d) 12–20 years
- e) 20 years and beyond

9. Given the longer time duration required for bringing a self-sustained change, in contrast with the shorter-term requirements of daily needs, do you think as an organisation you can strike a balance between meeting the daily needs of people and as well as focus on building their agency?

- a) Yes, but it's difficult
- b) Depends on how much funds we have
- c) No, it's difficult

### **Relationship with grantee/people you fund**

10. What importance do you give as an organisation to keep the agency of the ultimate people who get benefited from your work at the centre of your funding philosophy? In what ways do you implement it?

11. How much and in what ways do you include the people/organisation you fund directly in your decision-making process? Have any of the people you work with acquired a decision-making leadership position in your organisation? How many?

- a) 0–10%
- b) None, 0%
- c) 10–25%
- d) 25–40%
- e) 40–60%
- f) Above 60%

12. How do you monitor the effective utilisation of the support/funds you provide?

13. What are some of the different metrics you utilise for measuring the impact of your fund on people's lives?

14. What challenges do you face while funding work around agency building? What are the ways in which someone can raise funds from you for their work on agency building?

### **Seeking Recommendations**

15. In what ways do you suggest can the combined social impact and development ecosystem can effectively focus on agency building and recognise it as of pivotal importance for the long run self-sustained change in people's lives?

## APPENDIX D

### Guiding Questions for the Intermediaries, Ecosystem Support Organisations, Researchers, Consultants

Name:

Area of work:

Primary people/group of people you work with?

How long do you typically work with one person/set of people?

What is the primary mode of your work with them?

1. How do you relate to the word 'beneficiaries agency' in the context of your work? For example, To us, it means the capacity to act—when people have the power to make decisions for themselves and they can choose solutions for their problems without letting anyone limit their choices or influence them.
2. How does your organisation engage in/support building the agency of the end users/beneficiaries (directly/indirectly)? It will be great if you can mention some examples here.
3. What kind of impact have you seen enhanced agency bring in the lives of the people you work with? How do you think it benefits you as an organisation and the overall development of society?
4. Do you believe benefiting communities have a say in the solutions being created for them by NGOs, philanthropists, and the social impact ecosystem? Do they hold decision-making power?
5. What are some of the different metrics you have seen/known funding organisations to utilise for measuring the impact of their fund on people's lives? Does agency/empowerment feature in it in any way?
6. In what ways, according to you, can the combined social impact and development ecosystem can effectively focus on agency building and recognise it as of pivotal importance for the long-run self-sustained change in people's lives?

## APPENDIX E

### Guiding questions for end beneficiaries

Name:

Area of work:

Primary people/group of people you work with:

How long do you typically work with one person/set of people?

What is the primary mode of your work with them?

- 1) How do you relate to the word and concept of 'self-agency'? To us, it means the capacity to act —when people have the power to make decisions for themselves and they can choose solutions for their problems without letting anyone limit their choices or influence them.
- 2) As someone who has benefited from the work of a community organisation like how do you see the organisation has enabled it for you and others?
- 3) Do you believe benefiting communities have a say in the solutions being created for them by NGOs, philanthropists and the social impact ecosystem? Do they hold decision-making power?
- 4) The relationship between benefiting communities and organisations - How does that change with time and the progress of their work/impact?
- 5) How long does it take for a momentum shift in the people's agency?
- 6) Given the longer time duration required for bringing a self-sustained change, in contrast to the shorter-term requirements of daily needs, how do you think organisations should strike a balance between meeting the daily needs of people and as well as focus on building their agency?
- 7) How do you view philanthropy as an aid?
- 8) How do you suggest that the combined social impact and development ecosystem effectively focus on agency building and recognise it as pivotal for long-term self-sustained change in people's lives?

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