


Special Edition

Best Practices for
Building Sustainability of
NGOs for Social Impact
and Change

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Introduction to the Best Practices Series

NGOs often emerge as a response to community needs. They typically begin with a vision to be realised, and efforts are driven by passion and commitment. Program implementation and direction is ever-evolving as the NGO faces and works through ground realities.

It has been EdelGive's endeavour to support these visionaries and emerging NGOs and help them develop solid programs. EdelGive Foundation believes that 360-degree support is critical for these visions to translate into reality. It is thus committed to contributing towards the philanthropic ecosystem of donors, government, civil society, academia and researchers, media, and others. Besides providing funds to an NGO, EdelGive links NGOs to relevant and effective capacity building efforts, to aid its progress and growth.

This series of '**Documentation of Best Practices**' is born out of EdelGive's commitment to enhancing the knowledge and skills of its partners within this philanthropic ecosystem. The findings from this series will be used to aid capacity building of EdelGive partner NGOs (through cross learning); inform donors about existing best practices in the sector, thereby enabling them to optimise funding decisions; and to contribute to the existing knowledge on the development sector in India.

This series explains selected Best Practices that directly help NGOs scale, in size and reach. The papers are a mix of secondary research and interviews with representatives of NGOs, which are recognised for being mature and effective players in the development sector. The Documentation of Best Practices series is a set of five papers:

- a. Paper 1: Best Practices for Building Strong Foundations
- b. Paper 2: Best Practices for Building Sustainability of NGOs for Social Impact and Change
- c. Paper 3: Growing at Scale: Best practices in Scalability
- d. Paper 4: Skilled Futures: Best Practices in Capacity Building and Community Engagement
- e. Paper 5: Convergence to a Coalition: Best Practices in Outreach and Advocacy

The Best Practices identified throughout the series are overarching practices that can be adopted and applied to achieve scale, reach and impact, by any NGO irrespective of sector focus. Each paper outlines a different set of Best Practices relevant to a broader goal. The figure below shows the methodology followed.

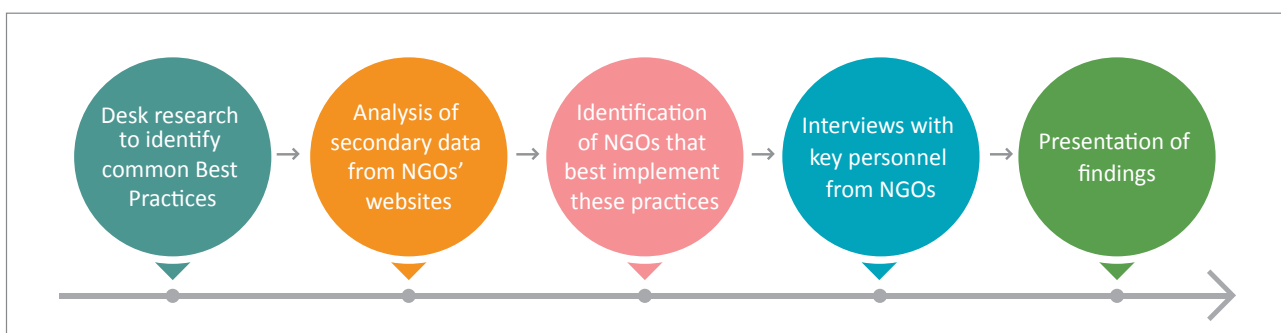


Figure 1: Mapping the Methodology



Best Practices for Building Sustainability of NGOs for Social Impact and Change

NGOs emerge to bridge the gap between the needs of communities, the delivery of goods or services, and bring about social change in this process. It is often unlikely for traditional businesses to satisfy these needs because of the non-profitable nature of these efforts. At times, the State is also unable to meet these needs adequately due to a lack of political will and capacity. An NGO pursues a difficult mission: one that is neither financially sustainable through a for-profit business model, nor one for which there are adequate public funds available at their disposal. Thus, NGOs typically exhibit a unique relationship between operations and revenue. Hence, in this context, it is important for NGOs to develop a sustainable model.¹

Sustainability is a process, not an end. Sustainability involves all the elements and functions of an organisation and is a measure of an organisation’s ability to fulfil its mission and serve its stakeholders over time. The colloquial definition of sustainability is to “keep the business going,” whilst another term used in this context refers to the “future-proofing” of organisations. It is also referred to as “achieving success today without compromising the needs of the future.”²

The focus of this research paper is a two-fold approach to sustainability: from the perspective of what leads to a larger social change (in the environment that the NGO is targeting and operating in) and from an organisational perspective (within the NGO itself). Sustainability involves a theory of change that seeks to bring about a systemic cultural change through adjustments to programs (which is part of **program initialisation**); the way in which organisations plan to ensure the continuation of their interventions within communities after their exit (which is part of mapping **project outcomes**); through governance systems (part of their **organisation**) within an NGO, and through the various **fundraising** strategies used by the NGO.³

Simon Pfister in a 2013 paper borrows from Bob Doppelt’s research wherein he states that leading organisations tailor their theories of change in order to leverage change in a specific social system. These organisations change their culture towards sustainability by focussing on the following⁴:

Leverage Point	What it means for the organisation
Change the dominant mind-set and mental paradigm	The stated and unstated ideas of the majority shape everything that a social system does. In order to change the dominant mind-set and mental paradigm of an organisation, it is important to change the overall frame of reference for the majority of its staff.
Rearrange parts of the social system	Rearrangements of the parts of a system may be achieved by engaging new people with different perspectives and skills, as well as by reshaping the way these people interact to accomplish their work.
Alter the system’s goals	Goals that ignore or give minimal attention to the environment, employee, or community welfare will lead to unsustainable decisions. Establishing the unambiguous purpose of attaining sustainability supports altering the organisation’s goals.
Restructure the rules of engagement	Adjusting the rules that determine how various units of an organisation interact, as well as how information is produced, decisions are made, and resources are distributed, is a prerequisite for adopting a sustainability culture.
Shift information flows	The understanding and decision-making of the people working in the organisation is based on information that they receive, which is why it is important that the information received is focussed on sustainability. If sustainability-focused information becomes dominant throughout an organisation, people are likely to grasp its meaning and commit to change.
Correcting feedback mechanisms	The lack of consistent and credible feedback leads to poor understanding of respective situations and consequently to flawed decisions.
Adjust parameters	Adjusting performance parameters, incentive and reward systems, measurement systems, structures, policies, and procedures changes behaviour of employees and stakeholders regarding sustainability. However, such adjustments will have little effect if the core elements of the old governance system remain intact (i.e., if points one to six remain untouched).

Source: Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs – An integrated Approach for Development Aid NGOs to plan, evaluate, and increase the Impact of Projects and the Sustainability of the Organisation

Table 1: Key Leverage Points on what sustainability means for a particular organization

¹Weerawardena, J., McDonald, R. E., & Mort, G. S. (2010). Sustainability of nonprofit organisations: An empirical investigation. *Journal of World Business*, 45(4), 346–356.

²Wales, T. (2013). Organisational sustainability: What it is, and why does it matter? *Review of Enterprise and Management Studies*, 1(1), 38–49.

³Pfister, S. (2013). Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs – An integrated Approach for Development Aid NGOs to plan, evaluate and increase the Impact of Projects and the Sustainability of the Organisation, (4229), 552.

⁴Pfister, S. (2013). Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs – An integrated Approach for Development Aid NGOs to plan, evaluate and increase the Impact of Projects and the Sustainability of the Organisation, (4229), 552.

It is important for organisations to develop a clear understanding of existing environmental, social, and economic conditions. Thus, achieving its main objectives can be effectively aimed at social change with these factors accounted for. Along with these, other features that need to be taken into consideration are operational, strategic, and normative aspects that are the backbone of any organisation.

Social change is defined as **the transformation of culture, behaviour, social institutions, and social structure over time.**⁵ It includes economic, socio-cultural, and political factors, all of which play an important part in bringing about social change. Change can be either planned or unplanned. Planned changes are intentional and deliberate, while unplanned changes take place due to changes in the environment and are often outside the organisation's direct control. Thus, it is critical for an NGO to be aware of the type of change its work is expected to bring about. NGOs need to continually adapt their functioning via alterations in their internal environment, and encourage change from within by creating organisations that learn.

NGOs operate on two planes pertaining to sustainability and change. In social movements, where **collective action** is at the core of social change, NGOs seek to mobilise individuals in the environments where they work. For any change to occur, individuals must come together and coordinate their actions to meet a common goal. The components of collective action are organisation, mobilisation of resources, common interests, and opportunity. However, these conditions by themselves do not lead to the development of social movements unless there is leadership, a means of regular communication, funding, and material resources, all of which are provided by the NGO.⁶

The second plane is at the level of **individual change**. Here, NGOs that want to effect change at the individual and group levels within the organisation must work towards reducing environmental difficulties for their employees and associates. For an NGO to be truly sustainable and to effect lasting social change, it must successfully navigate through both these planes.

For an NGO like **Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN)**, social change comes in different forms: Exiting the community is interpreted as positive social change for PRADAN. They have an exit strategy that ensures the community they work in (usually villages) is empowered and sustains the change brought in by the NGO. PRADAN has also observed change in the way women in their target communities are now participating in political decision-making processes, and standing up against oppressive structures. There has also been a decrease in early marriages and an increase in the number of women representatives in the Gram Panchayat. Overall, PRADAN has been highly successful in creating and sustaining transformative changes in the communities with which it works.

For **Bright Future**, an NGO that works in skill building and career guidance for the youth, social change is possible only when students start asking questions. By asking questions, students can learn more and eventually build leadership skills they require to bring about lasting social change.

For an organisation like **Aajeevika Bureau** that works with migrant workers, social change has come in the form of a change in public perception regarding migration. Not only has migration been acknowledged as a valid livelihood strategy, but there have also been active interventions in partnership with the State to make the lives of these workers dignified and meaningful.

For **Centre For Advocacy and Research (CFAR)** that works on building community structures in its target areas for social inclusion, social change is evidenced by self-governance and an evolution of organic leadership in these vulnerable communities. Since its inception post the Beijing Platform for Action, CFAR has played an active role in changing the portrayal of women in Indian media. They have not only percolated in the communities addressing issues related to reproductive health and HIV, but also helped communities in institutionalising systems to advocate for their rights.

Thus, while it is important for an NGO to aim for social change, it is just as important to be able to sustain their programs to maintain the continuity of work. Without being sustainable, it becomes increasingly difficult for NGOs to bring about lasting social change. An inbuilt model of sustainability is a crucial feature for an NGO to create impact in the communities and the sectors it works in.

⁵Understanding Social Change: <http://open.lib.umn.edu/sociology/chapter/20-1-understanding-social-change/>

⁶Leat, D. (2005). *Theories of Social Change*. International Network on Strategic Philanthropy







Methodology: How we measure ‘best’ practices

Across various NGOs, the practices that have emerged as the best practices are the ones that help NGOs find a definition of sustainability suited to their localised context. These are a combination of sustainability dimensions and managerial considerations that help NGOs in constantly assessing, reviewing, and increasing their impact.

a. Secondary research

Existing studies in development aid, focusing on the role of NGOs, consistently refer to managerial and organisational considerations, project management, and performance measurement as key factors in sustainability. We used Pfister’s⁷ Sustainable Measurement Framework for development aid NGOs. This framework is based on the understanding that in order to plan, evaluate, and build the impact of the projects/programmes led by NGOs and their sustainability, there are multiple tasks that need to be considered at different levels of their development.

The sustainability tasks are essentially a decision process consisting of the three aspects: ‘Measure’, ‘Communicate’, and ‘Learn’. The task ‘Measure’ compares actions and results with previously agreed-upon intended and expected actions and results, and it also points out unexpected and unintended results. The task ‘Communicate’ allows the information that the task ‘Measure’ collects to flow to project partners and stakeholders that depend on such assessment of actions and results for their decision making. Finally, the task ‘Learn’ fosters discussions among project partners and stakeholders, for them to exchange understandings, initiate further analyses to gain detailed insight, and to draw learning in the form of joint decisions regarding changes, adjustments, refinements, and rearranging of subsequent project steps, project phases, projects as a whole, organisational capacity, fundraising approaches, or the underlying sustainability definitions applicable for the development aid NGO. The task ‘Learn’ shall ultimately lead to feedback.

		Sustainability Tasks		
		Measure	Communicate	Learn
Sustainability Levels	 Project Initialisation	Ensure necessary preparation work, decision criteria	Feedback regarding decisions to project team, partners and beneficiaries	Adjust project preparation, requirements and education for project proposal
	 Project Result	Ensure project supervision, steering and analysis	Feedback to project executives and beneficiaries	Adjust project execution, extension of project approaches, additional project types
	 Organisational Systems	Assess project portfolios, ensure financial statements and managerial accounting	Inform employees, volunteers, board members and stakeholders	Engage in additional project types, adjust human resources and infrastructure
	 Fundraising	Measure and evaluate fundraising activities and donor behaviour	Inform employees, volunteers, beneficiaries and donors including specific donors	Adjust donor portfolio, guidelines for marketing activities, new projects or even new strategies

Source: Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs: An integrated Approach for Development Aid NGOs to plan, evaluate and increase the Impact of Projects and the Sustainability of the Organisation

Table 2: Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs

⁷Pfister, S. (2013). Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs – An integrated Approach for Development Aid NGOs to plan, evaluate and increase the Impact of Projects and the Sustainability of the Organisation, (4229), 552

What makes a 'best' practice?

In Table 3, the parameters for best practices have been operationalised. On the basis of these parameters, secondary data was analysed to create a shortlist of NGOs. These data were collated from the NGO's website, and subsequently verified using secondary data sources.





Best Practice	Why
 Project Initialisation	Project Initialisation is one of the sustainability levels that includes collecting project ideas, assessing and selecting them, as well as detailed planning of projects, including respective design and preparation activities. These include social analysis, financial assessment and other administrative activities. In order to balance efficiency and effectiveness, the processes of Project Initialisation should be streamlined and seamless, but still iterative to ensure adequate project preparation and planning. ⁸
 Project Outcomes	Project Outcomes include monitoring, evaluating, reviewing, and assessing the status of the projects/programmes and subsequently of the organisation as a whole. These processes must happen in an iterative fashion at different stages of the project. The ideal outcomes are ones that are a result of multiple measurements applied over the duration of the projects. ⁹
 Organisational Systems	Organisational Systems are derived from project management theory and are therefore primarily concerned with project management considerations and organisational analysis. As project-level success does not imply organisational-level success, it is essential for an NGO to take additional efforts to ensure sufficient organisational capacity as well seamless project execution. ¹⁰
 Fundraising	Fundraising is a prerequisite for conducting any projects/programmes and for the survival of the NGO. The objective of the sustainability level of fundraising in the Sustainability Measurement Framework is to define how information for donors and on fundraising success is collected, communicated, and how learning is derived. The fundraising level specifically concerns linking donors with projects, i.e., assessing which donors might be willing to support what types of projects and which specific projects. ¹¹

Table 3: Operationalising parameters for Best Practices

b. Identifying Sustainable NGOs in India

We then consolidated information from several sources (academic papers, sector reports, initial conversations with multiple stakeholders) from a long-list of 40 NGOs. One of the first inclusion criteria was to focus on NGOs that work across various sectors that are intersectional in nature. We then mapped and identified key criteria such as organisations with second level managements, with an administrative and compliance team in place, having worked for more than 10 years in order to understand the kind of social change they have brought about. To illustrate and explore these best practices in sustainability in India, several key parameters were used to shortlist NGOs. These are:

- **Program reach (State-level or Pan-India):** Profiling NGOs with a localised presence, state-level presence, or have a pan-India presence.
- **Maturity of NGO (Time since incorporation):** NGOs that are at least a decade old; to understand the social change that they have enabled in their time of being operational.
- **Focus area (Urban, rural, or both):** To contrast best practices between NGOs with a rural focus and those with urban or both.
- **Cross-sectoral nature of NGOs:** NGOs that work in various thematic areas (example: health, livelihood, education, sanitation, women empowerment, media advocacy, among others).

⁸Pfister, S. (2013). Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs – An integrated Approach for Development Aid NGOs to plan, evaluate and increase the Impact of Projects and the Sustainability of the Organisation, p 101

⁹ibid, p 106

¹⁰ibid, p 121

¹¹ibid, p 125

Though this paper discusses 4 case studies in depth, it is important to remember that these best practices are applicable to NGOs across all sectors. Based on the above best practices, the following NGOs were shortlisted:

NGO/Parameter	Program Reach	Time since incorporation	Focus Area	Primary Goals
Bright Future	Mumbai	10 years	Career Counselling of Youth from marginalised communities	To provide a nurturing environment for children and youth from marginalised communities to transform their passion into gainful employment through career guidance, life skill development, mentorship, and placement opportunities
PRADAN	Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, West Bengal	35 years	Livelihood Generation, Women Empowerment, Food Security, Water Conservation, Managing Natural Resources, Grassroots Governance	To enable the most marginalised people, especially rural women, to earn a decent living and take charge of their own lives.
CFAR	Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, West Bengal	20 years	Media Advocacy, Community Engagement, Sanitation, Social Inclusion, Urban Poor, Violence Against Women, Mission Convergence	To create space within communities and the media for dialogues that will impact public opinion and policy and to get adequate social entitlement access of schemes available for the marginalised community
Aajeevika Bureau	Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra	14 years	Migration in India	Services, security and solutions of migrant workers

c. Structured interviews with stakeholders and formulation of case studies

Using this selection of NGOs, we identify and explain best practices through case studies of the NGOs. Subsequently, in-depth interviews with key personnel guide our understanding of best practices associated with sustainability of NGOs and the social change they bring about in the communities they work in. We completed interviews with chief functionaries, executive directors, heads of liaisons/partnerships, and program heads from these selected NGOs in August–September 2018. These included interviews with the following:¹²

- Mr. Kishor Palve (Founder & CEO, Bright Future)
- Mr. Manas Satpathy (former Executive Director at PRADAN), Ms. Smita Mohanty (Staff Member, PRADAN), Mr. Srihari Chity (Team Coordinator, Resource Mobilisation, Communications & Partnerships, PRADAN), Mr. Ajaya Samal (Integrator, PRADAN)
- Ms. Divya Varma (Programme Manager, Centre for Migration and Labour Solutions, Aajeevika Bureau)

¹³We are grateful for the valuable information obtained through these interviews.

- Ms. Akhila Sivadas (Managing Trustee & Executive Director, CFAR)

Limitations:

- Due to limited time and absence of secondary data on some NGOs, our study may have excluded several best practices adopted by NGOs that do not precisely fit the criteria for shortlisting NGOs.
- Our paper is a first look at specific best practices, illustrated using select NGOs in India. It may not be representative of other best practices across sectors and countries.

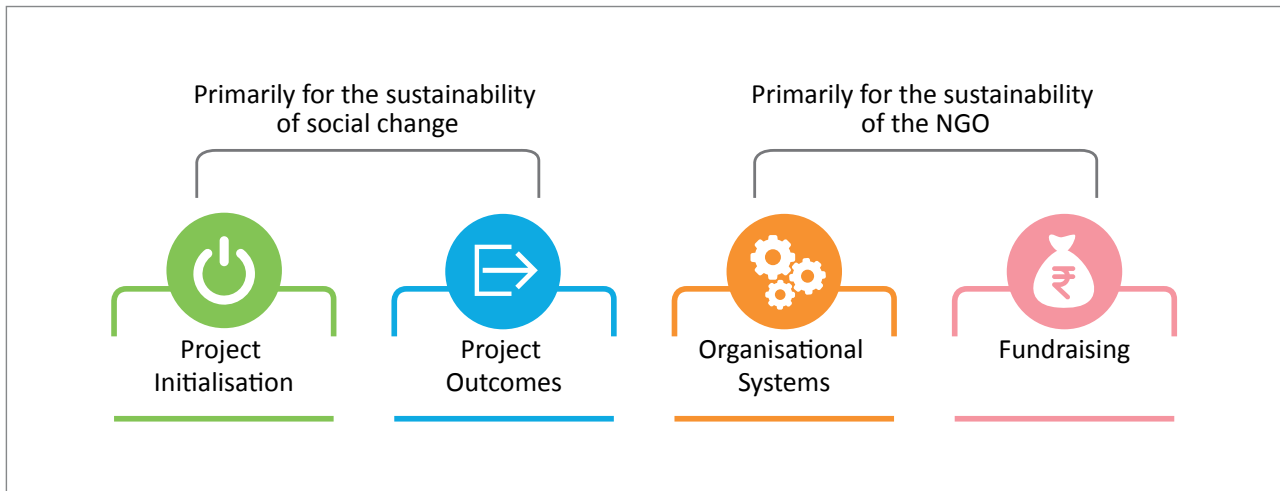


Figure 2: Identifying Best Practices

Project Initialisation

What is Project Initialisation?

- Project initialisation includes collecting project ideas, assessing and selecting them, as well as detailed planning of projects, including design and preparation activities.¹⁴ A thorough needs assessment is a crucial part of the project initialisation stage.

How does Project Initialisation help?

- To achieve the intended project result, the NGO must define specific steps and milestones. For example, undertaking social analyses and financial assessment methodology.
- These steps and milestones are administrative (i.e., they consist of mainly planning activities, such as social analysis and financial assessment, but no implementation activities), which contribute to building strong core processes for a sustainable NGO intervention from the ground up.
- The project initialisation stages are also beneficial for the stakeholders involved, so that they have a clear idea of the project to be implemented and its intended impact.
- The clarity of the project proposal also aids in helping other operations, such as fundraising, to present the same to potential donors as a representative of the NGO's capabilities, thought processes, plan, and vision.¹⁵

"...basically, our action policy works with identifying the problem in the community... and then we try to observe in a different way and use different lenses to understand that."

*– Kishor Palve
(Founder and CEO at Bright Future) when asked about how they devise the methodology for their Drama for Development program.¹³*

Case Study **Bright Future**

What is Bright Future (BF)?

Bright Future works with youth populations to empower them in making informed decisions about their careers, since 2009. BF has two major areas of work: 'Step to Livelihood,' which has two components: Drama for Development (D4D) and the School Program; and the 'Livelihood Program,' which involves youth development and training.

How does Project initialisation contribute to the sustainability of BF?

Specific steps and milestones

- Needs assessments conducted by BF in the community reflected the failure of the education system to guarantee and improve employability.
- BF's vision was to enable each child to develop skills in order to increase their employability. They subsequently planned their 'Livelihood' and 'Step to Livelihood' programs around this vision.
- The Drama for Development (D4D) program started in 2014-15, with the goal of developing skills in youth through drama and interaction. With the aim of career development, BF looks to build career aspirations in the youth and help them achieve these goals. BF was able to build ideas for their initial projects with a clear vision.
- With visible improvements in technical skills among youth in the community, the program was structured in a concrete manner, leading to an increased team size.

Formulating an implementation plan is important for communication within the NGO

- The learning and development team conducts an orientation training of the staff before they go on the field.
- The mentoring program is formulated such that the personnel team goes through the process of mentoring themselves to test its effectiveness before the aspirant goes through it. This creates a feedback system within the team on what works best for this program and accordingly it is tweaked to suit the needs of the aspirants.

¹³The Drama for Development (D4D) program started in 2014-15, with the goal of developing skills in youth through drama and interaction.

¹⁴U.S. Agency for International Development (1994). Fundamentals of NGO Financial Sustainability.

¹⁵Pfister, S. (2013). Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs – An integrated Approach for Development Aid NGOs to plan, evaluate and increase the Impact of Projects and the Sustainability of the Organisation, (4229), 552.

The future plan of action for the project not only conveys the intended outcome/objective to the community, but also to potential donors amongst other stakeholders:

- By creating coherent and well-planned project ideas, the NGO has a clear picture of their progress. This is conducive to building a sustainable NGO and creating social impact in the communities they work in.
- The organisation works on a need-based assessment model, wherein they start with identifying the issues in the community (such as employability of youth and domestic violence); following this assessment, they design an intervention based on extensive research in order to arrive at a solution.

Key Tips and Considerations for Project Initialisation

Key Tip A: *How to develop a project idea*

- Initial research and conducting extensive needs assessment in the target community will help develop project ideas with a view to long-term outcomes.
- Brainstorming sessions with the core staff will help in narrowing down on a specific and immediate problem that needs to be tackled in the community; a full-fledged intervention can then be developed.

Key Tip B: *How to plan for project implementation*

- Identifying key stakeholders in the community will aid in gathering multiple perspectives toward the project.
- Ideally, the intervention strategy should be in sync with the organisation's vision and mission statement.
- The project proposal should have clearly defined objectives, a monitoring and evaluation plan, expected outcomes, and a budget.
- The strategic plan should involve examining the organisation's current situation and its vision of the future. This would help in realising the organisation's goals over a three to five year period.

Challenges and Considerations

- *Having a well-designed project proposal:*
 - ▶ The NGO must not underestimate the importance of a well-written project proposal, for communicating project ideas to the staff, community, and potential donors.
 - ▶ Involving the stakeholders from this stage makes them invested in the project, thus setting it up for success and contributing to their continued investment in the project.
 - ▶ A well-designed proposal accounts for external environmental factors (e.g., political context of the region/state/country, laws and regulations governing funding).

- *Planning for contingencies*

The NGO should account for accidental or incidental changes that might happen while the project is being implemented to prevent any disruption. A plan for contingencies should be in place to take care of any unforeseen circumstances.

Project Outcomes

What are Project Outcomes?

- Project outcomes are tangible, measurable changes in the community that are attributable to the project. This sustainability parameter includes monitoring, evaluating, reviewing, and assessing project statuses (i.e., the current level of achieved resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, or impact of a project¹⁶).

How do Project Outcomes help?

- This ensures that the project produces the intended result and contributes to the sustainability of the organisation along with contributing to social change.
- Simultaneous monitoring, evaluating, review, and assessment must be carried out in an iterative fashion for different projects at various stages and across sectors to ensure there is regular feedback and that desired outcomes are persistent.
- It is a corrective mechanism that, when built into the project design, enables goals to be met.
- When multiple projects and their outcomes are looked at holistically and measured in parallel, an understanding of the progression of the NGO's interventions as well as of the organisation as a whole is gained. This will also ensure that all project outcomes, which have been assessed together, lead to cohesive decision-making.

“At the grassroots, these village women have been trained to collect data periodically from the ground to see the impact of our work ... All of our programs are centralised and are monitored accordingly by the women and that is time to time... what we need and have – and if that is not working we need to find alternative strategy (sic).”

*- Manas Satpathy
(former Executive Director at PRADAN)
when asked about how they measure the impact of their interventions.*

Case Study

Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN)

What is PRADAN?

Over the last three decades, PRADAN has been responsible for creating positive self-sustaining change in rural communities, through techno-managerial support to organisations and through training of professionals. With inputs from the community, PRADAN worked on creating innovative models that lead to an increase in income from agriculture and other allied activities. While the focus was on livelihood to better the lives of people, this eventually led to political participation and women's empowerment in these communities.

How did PRADAN ensure sustainability of Project Outcomes?

Continuous monitoring, evaluating, reviewing, and assessing:

- Each proposal has its own set of output and outcome indicators for communication with the program team, for better execution, and monitoring of the project.
- Community data collectors collect data periodically and feed it into a centralised data analysis program. A half yearly process, this helps measure the impact of the project and accordingly plan strategies to achieve project goals, with analysis reports being communicated to the entire team for feedback.
- M&E happens at three levels at PRADAN: Donor, Organisation, and Community.
- PRADAN has a transparent system, where each individual in the team can monitor the progress of the project.
- The planning and monitoring process continuously evaluates project impact with respect to the initial goals, and progress is measured as per their five-year plans.
- A 360-degree feedback system measures the performance and output of the operation and each analysis provides feedback to the team. This is implemented quarterly, half-yearly, and annually.
- Midterm reviews for tracking project impact help in keeping the donors informed of the project's progress.

¹⁶Pfister, S. (2013). Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs – An integrated Approach for Development Aid NGOs to plan, evaluate and increase the Impact of Projects and the Sustainability of the Organisation

Application to multi-sector projects:

- PRADAN's work is highly diversified in that it includes issues of livelihoods, food security, natural resource management, governance, and social mobilisation. The M&E system is also applied to measure the progress of each of these different projects.
- The M&E happens at regular intervals for all PRADAN projects so that the project team receives feedback for the project they oversee. Simultaneous M&E of different projects provides feedback for the entire organisation to make decisions and course correct to achieve maximum sustainability in their interventions.
- PRADAN employs a holistic approach that involves members of the community, organisations, and government stakeholders. Hence, the different projects impact one another, contributing to the overall goal.

Key Tips and Considerations for Project Outcomes

Key Tip A: *How to monitor ongoing projects effectively*

- Consultation with staff and key stakeholders will aid in formulating indicators for measuring the project outcomes.
- Involving the community in the monitoring process will ensure transparency and will help measure project progress with respect to predetermined goals and indicators. Monitoring at various levels (organisation, community) ensures triangulation of results in terms of effectiveness of implemented strategies to reach desired goals.
- Monitoring should be integrated with implementation so that periodic monitoring can compare short-term results with targets to ensure that the project is on track.

Key Tip B: *How to choose an evaluation technique?*

- NGOs can execute two types of evaluations: in terms of timing and in terms of personnel.
- Timing-based evaluations include interim, terminal, and ex-post evaluations. Interim or mid-term evaluations focus on the indicators of progress and the effectiveness of approach, and propose immediate actions. Terminal evaluations are conducted after the completion of the project and focus on achievement of project results, while also providing an assessment of the likely impact and sustainability of the results. Ex-post evaluations are conducted later than two years after project completion and are designed to measure the impact of a project and the sustainability of its results.¹⁷
- Evaluations based on personnel are External, Internal, and Participatory. Contrary to internal evaluations that involve people from within the organisation in the evaluation process, external evaluations are conducted by people who are not directly involved with the inception, implementation, and daily management of the project.¹⁸ Participatory evaluation involves the stakeholders of the project in its evaluation process.
- It is important for NGOs to be aware of various evaluation models and use assessments that are most relevant to ongoing projects. Depending upon the stage of project implementation, NGOs should decide on the type of time-based evaluation in combination with a choice of the agent of evaluation. For instance, a terminal evaluation conducted after the project completion should ideally be done by external evaluators and should involve the project stakeholders (participatory). This would ensure that project results are measured objectively (external evaluators), and by involving people who are most impacted by these results, it would ensure accuracy of these results.¹⁹

¹⁷Guidelines for Evaluators, UNDP

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Pfister, S. (2013). Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs – An integrated Approach for Development Aid NGOs to plan, evaluate and increase the Impact of Projects and the Sustainability of the Organisation

Key Tip C: *Determining output, outcome, and impact of the project*

- The NGO should make a distinction between intended outputs, outcomes, and impact of a project in the community. Outputs are quantifiable results that can be measured at the end of the project. Outcomes are the changes (short-term and mid-term) that happen because of the project and need to have both quantitative and qualitative indicators of measurement. Impact is the long-term direct or indirect effects of the project and can span over several years.²⁰
- The monitoring, evaluation, review, and assessment systems should account for each of these positive changes by developing separate indicators and measuring progress against these indicators.
- Project assessment indicators should be both qualitative and quantitative, to gain a more holistic understanding of project status and output/outcome/impact.
- Even if/after the NGO has exited the community, long-term assessment of project impact (after some years of project conclusion) will aid in developing successful implementation and monitoring models, which can be replicated across other sectors/NGOs.

Challenges and Considerations

- *Discrepancies in the M&E model*
 - The type of assessment, duration, and parameters chosen must be made clear and a model of M&E must be decided beforehand.
 - Discrepancies in the M&E model may result in inappropriate evaluations and might even reach incorrect conclusions.
 - When selecting external evaluators for the measurement of the impact of an intervention, NGOs must avoid potential conflicts of interest (financial or otherwise).
- *Developing an M&E model for sensitive and multi sectoral projects*
 - Because of the complexity of social sector, it is often challenging to develop a uniform tried and tested M&E model, which leaves this important task to the discretion of individual NGOs
 - In case of multi-sectoral, or integrated interventions, it is often difficult to measure the impact of a specific organisation. Hence, it is difficult to assess which strategies worked and which did not. Continuous evaluations at different stages of the project and comparing the results can help in focusing on the effectiveness of the organisation's strategies and activities
 - In case of sensitive issues such as domestic violence, often there is a culture of silence, which makes it difficult to measure the impact of interventions as well as develop indicators for the same.
 - In such projects, the monitoring and evaluation plans should start with the conceptualisation of the project
 - Collaborating with other NGOs working on similar issues across regions/state/countries can aid in highlighting common issues faced by victims/survivors.
 - A flexible project design with continuous in-depth dialogue with the primary stakeholders will ensure their ideas/perspectives regarding their welfare are incorporated through the project.
 - For instance, a project targeting domestic violence victims and survivors should start with a dialogue regarding their needs which might be safety, employment and/or need for a support system, and then take it from there. This continuous process of dialogue will guide the implementation process and provide feedback on what works, what needs to change, and what is missing from the program.

²⁰<http://www.tacticalphilanthropy.com/2010/06/outputs-outcomes-impact-oh-my/>

Organisation Level

“We have our committees and the subcommittees for recruitment and all. There are proper HR processes in place as we are spread over so many office. About the second level management, it’s all on the document as it’s not possible to work with so many offices where the vertical kicks in. It’s there in terms of strategic and practical planning. And the management can never be vertical. Management is completely horizontal and they are at different levels.”

– Akhila Sivasdas
(Managing Trustee and Executive Director, CFAR),
when asked about the organisational structure and HR processes

What are Organisational Systems?

- While the two previous parameters of Project Initialisation and Project Outcomes are concerned with project management, organisation-level sustainability is concerned with the various managerial and organisational processes within NGOs.

Why are Organisational Systems important for sustainability?

- The success of a project does not necessarily ensure that the entire organisation operates in a successful and sustainable manner. Hence, it is important to measure this parameter independently.
- Sustainability in organisational systems involves ensuring sufficient organisational capacity that allows for seamless project execution and to gauge the organisation’s project portfolio for its balance and continuity.
- Evidence from capacity-building exercises from various NGOs indicates that these activities allow organisations to move beyond strong projects to build truly high-impact NGOs, by focusing on employee skill-building, thereby improving their retention and contribution to the NGO’s core mission.
- To measure the sustainability of the project portfolio and the capacity of the organisation, NGOs need to turn to standard performance measurements for operational performance and financial accounting.²¹

Case Study Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR)

What is CFAR?

CFAR was founded in 1998 with a mission statement to be the ‘Voice for the Voiceless’ in vulnerable and marginalised communities. With 20 years of experience in the social sector, CFAR has set up various community structures across districts from over ten states, to strengthen social inclusion across schemes and social development programmes such as health, social welfare, and livelihood.

How do organisational systems help in the sustainability of CFAR?

- With a core group in place and long-term partners, CFAR has a horizontal management system with a decentralised decision-making process (Figure 3).
- Different committees and the subcommittees are in place, including standardised HR processes to take care of recruitment and other personnel-related functions.
- A tracking system through professional software is in place for all staff and people who have ever been a part of the organisation. This helps maintain a strong personnel database that contributes to clarity of organisational functions. Additionally, it keeps track of individuals and organisations that can be potential partners.
- Facilitating communities to register as independent organisations, CFAR has built long term partners on the ground. These partner organisations collaborate with each other and with CFAR, thus strengthening the process of sustainability of the organisations. Keeping the focus on the community, CFAR, facilitates their relationships, alliances, and collaborations with other community and civil society platforms, and governmental platforms.
- CFAR’s Single Window mechanism is an administrative hub to manage these partnerships, associations, and common processes, ensuring that the community and stakeholders work together to bring about social

²¹Pfister, S. (2014). Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs: An Integrated Approach for Development Aid NGOs to Plan, Evaluate and Increase the Impact of Projects and the Sustainability of the Organisation (Doctoral dissertation).

inclusion. The Single Window mechanism is the site where the community and stakeholders come together to work towards social change.

Capacity Building of organisations and partners

- Based on the understanding that one of the biggest issues in sustainability is a lack of institutional structures, CFAR has focused extensively on building and sustaining community institutions through the process of community engagement.
- CFAR sustains relationships with each stakeholder from the community whom they have partnered with over the years through community platforms.
- CFAR has been a facilitator for vulnerable communities to build their organisational platform and relationships with multiple stakeholders, including the government and media.
- The organisation has focused on capacity building of partner communities to ensure their sustainability as organisations, and to build organic leadership.

Standard performance measurements for operational performance and financial accounting

- There is both an external review mechanism and an institutional evaluation system for the organisation.
- An internal monitoring and control system for internal management information has been started so that the organisation can pioneer new trends of change in terms of organisational processes and compliance mechanisms.
- The finance and record-keeping are managed internally using computerised data to enforce proper regulation in compliance of statutes. This ensures transparency, efficiency and efficacy of funds utilized for social change with external check and validation by independent auditors.

Key Tips and Considerations for setting up Organisational Structures

Key Tip A: *How to decide upon an organisational structure*

- The organisational structure should support the strategic plan of the organisation so that there is optimum allocation of resources and efficient decision-making.
- While deciding upon a management and decision-making structure, the NGO should consider factors such as the number of employees, number of areas of intervention, nature of intervention, and the nature of leadership.
- A horizontal structure works best for organisations that have fewer employees and more areas of work. This requires coordination amongst different departments, with a decentralised and democratic decision-making process. So, for young NGOs, a horizontal structure would work best.
- However, for organisations with more employees and fewer leaders, it makes more sense to adopt a vertical management structure as it gives clarity in terms of the roles of each employee, and a clear hierarchical structure.
- Having a second tier of trained managerial staff, who are well-versed with the NGO and its core mission, will help in ensuring longevity of NGO impacts.
- The NGO should continually evaluate the effectiveness of the current organisational structure, keeping in mind changes in the internal and external environment, and adapt accordingly.
- In case of a lack of expertise within the organisation in setting up internal processes that would contribute to organisational sustainability, it is advisable to outsource this task to relevant experts in the field.

Key Tip B: *Practices to be adopted to contribute to the sustainability of the organisation*

- Transparency in policy and decision-making contributes to maintaining the staff's confidence in the organisation, thus affecting retention positively.
- Providing honest and balanced feedback on the performance of staff with respect to the organisation's goals aids in boosting morale, thus contributing to better performance.

- Team-building exercises lead to an increase in overall synergy within the organisation.
- Building capacity of the staff, especially the second tier of managerial staff to manage flagship projects as well as develop new organisational processes, is crucial for sustainability.

Key Tip C: *How to build and maintain relationships with partner organisations and communities*

- The NGO needs to evaluate the needs of the partner and facilitate the growth of organic leaderships.
- An organization can continuously liaison with partners for enabling sustainable organisational structures, and maintaining long-term relationships.
- If the NGO has programs in multiple communities across different regions, there can be organisational setups in every region to manage the program and build capacities of partners working in that region.

Challenges and Considerations

- *Context of Operation*
Being aware of the larger context of the region/state will not only aid in being mindful of political and legal nuances, but also working with multiple institutions for sustainable change
- *Avoiding top heavy structures*
NGOs can do well to avoid a top-heavy organisational structure, as it can be more expensive and less efficient in terms of resource allocation.
- *Continuous Evaluation of current organisational practices*
 - ▶ The NGO needs to be prepared to tackle both negative competition and complacent cooperation, as it would lead to an unstable work culture within the organisation.
 - ▶ The organisation should be open to change depending upon evolving requirements. For instance, scaling up of projects might need a change in management structure from the horizontal to vertical to streamline procedures.

Fundraising

“Right now we are in a very active fundraising mode, and we definitely look out for organisations... we look at the thematic alignment of the organisation – those who are interested in funding labour issues and then we begin the process of mapping out potential donors.”

– Divya Varma
(Programme Manager,
Centre for Migration
and Labour Solutions,
Aajeevika Bureau),
when asked about
fundraising strategies
to attract potential
donors.

What is Fundraising?

- Fundraising, or obtaining funds from diverse external sources, is required when an NGO initiates a new program or when a current grant or contract ends (Figure 4).

Why is Fundraising important?

- A sound fundraising strategy is important for ensuring the financial sustainability of the NGO, since it involves resource planning for future years. The purpose of fundraising is to secure and sustain funds to meet the organisational goals and objectives.
- It may be undertaken only for programs or activities that are part of the organisation's approved strategic plan, that is, the fundraising should support the organisation's strategic plan.²²
- The fundraising stage specifically concerns linking donors with projects based on their inclination to support certain social issues and causes that are addressed through specific projects.
- Fundraising messages must educate donors about the organisation's project(s) status and its progress. These messages must also be used by the NGO for general education in the community they work in. This builds the sustainability of the NGO by showcasing their work to potential donors and to the communities they work in.
- Regular reporting to donors regarding project outcomes is a practice in ensuring their continued interest in the project, therefore, contributing to sustainability in fundraising.²³

Case Study Aajeevika Bureau

What is Aajeevika Bureau?

Established in 2005, Aajeevika Bureau's vision is to become a leading agency working to ensure secure and dignified lives of communities dependent on migration and labour. Through a network of field-based *Shramik Sahayata evam Sandarbh Kendras* (Workers Support and Resource Centres), Aajeevika Bureau provides a range of services to migrants and their households.²⁴

How does fundraising contribute to the sustainability of Aajeevika Bureau?

- A major proportion of funding for the organisation comes from international donors, and this has gone up from 60% of the total funds in 2014-15 to about 80% in 2016-17 (Figure 5). This is because the NGO received attention from several international donors as they questioned the conventional approach to migration and development in India.
- Proposals and progress reports aid in communicating with potential donors.
- Approaching donors with innovative funding models ensures flexibility in using funds for programs. For instance, the Human Dignity Foundation, based in Ireland has a system of providing one round of conventional funding (target based), followed by flexible funding. This means that instead of submitting a whole budget for program period activity wise, it is done for six months. A consolidated amount is approved for the whole project, which gives some flexibility in adjusting project activities and strategies based on the need of the community.

Fundraising supports the organisation's strategic plan

- The planned nature of fundraising ensures that all contingencies during implementation are taken care of, thus requiring very little change of program goals.
- Most of the programs of Aajeevika have evolved organically and this is singularly the most important factor in deciding organisation and program goals.

²²Slaby, S., Terrell, N., Musau, S., McGunnigle, M., Stillman, K., & Ryan, T. J. (1994). Fundamentals of NGO Financial Sustainability. USAID

²³Pfister, S. (2013). Sustainability Measurement Framework for Development Aid NGOs – An integrated Approach for Development Aid NGOs to plan, evaluate and increase the Impact of Projects and the Sustainability of the Organisation, (4229), 552.

²⁴Aajeevika Bureau 2014. Accessed on August 31, 2018. Retrieved from: http://www.aajeevika.org/about_us.php

Linking donors with projects and donor education

- Aajeevika ensures that the goals and values of a potential donor are in sync with the organisation's mandate and approach.
- The organisation actively maps out donor priorities to align with their different programs; for example, varying programs in urban governance, women's empowerment, and health, intersecting with the larger issue of migration.

Donor Education

- Aajeevika conducts donor education through which there is a creation of awareness and sensitivity in different donors regarding the importance of funding the theme of migration.
- Based on this work, the Tata Trust started an entire funding area on migration, which in turn has nurtured their migrant worker collective over the years.

Key Tips and Considerations for Fundraising

Key Tip A: *How to devise a good fundraising strategy*

- Having a sound budget is imperative to understanding the financial needs of the organisation, thus guiding the fundraising strategy.
- The fundraising strategy should account for both operational (project costs) and non-operational functions (personnel salary and overheads) of the organisation.
- It is important to diversify the sources of funding for the NGO; for instance, seeking support from individual as well as corporate donors will require different communication and dissemination mechanisms.
- Highlighting a specific project or intervention for which funding is required will aid the fundraising process.
- The NGO should remain updated on the economic, legal, and political framework of the state/country of origin so that the fundraising process is a good fit within this structure. For instance, Foreign Contribution Regulations Act (FCRA) guidelines and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Act regulate funding by foreign and corporate donors, respectively.

Key Tip B: *How to approach potential donors*

- Potential donors are likely to notice active dissemination of annual reports of the NGO.
- Advertising the work of the NGO through different platforms aids in the fundraising process. For instance, setting up stalls in college festivals or other such events help in fundraising in two ways: first, by increasing visibility of the NGO, and second, direct fundraising through selling of products made by the communities where the NGO is working.
- Background research of the donors' interest areas and previous history of funding is likely to go a long way in mapping donor priorities. This would help develop a tailor-made fundraising strategy that could go a long way in retaining existing donors as well as cultivating interests of new donors.
- Choosing donors that complement the organisation's value system will help avoid ethical issues and conflict of interest in funding.
- Giving donors feedback regarding how funds were allocated and used will ensure transparency and sustain fundraising efforts.

Challenges and Considerations

- *Being mindful of intended outcome*

While devising fundraising strategies, NGOs should be mindful of the intended outcome of their projects, so that there is no scope for misalignment with donor priorities in the middle of project implementation.

- *Diversification of funding sources*

A high dependency on high funding donors can lead to modifying interventions to match donors' priorities. To address this, the NGO can focus on mobilising local resources by targeting individuals, local businesses, and locally generated income, thus diversifying funding sources to avoid such scenarios.

- *Partnership and Alliance Building*

- For newer NGOs, it can be challenging to get the first round of funds from a donor as they might not have the experience to vouch for the effectiveness of their work. To overcome this challenge, the NGO can consider increasing their experience and exposure by working with partner NGOs (older and better funded) for project implementation.

- The targeting of same issues by multiple NGOs leads to a duplication of efforts and competition for funding. Instead, NGOs within the same sector can focus on local networking amongst themselves to work in cooperation.

- *Maintaining sustainability of efforts*

A fundraising strategy solely focused on providing services and building infrastructure in the community can be unsustainable in the long run. Instead the strategy can focus on empowering local communities to manage their own projects and programmes.

- *Maintaining accountability in fund usage*

A perceived lack of accountability in the NGO sector often negatively affects relationships with donors. To address this issue, the NGO needs to conduct audits and be in constant communication with donors to make them aware of how their funds were utilised.

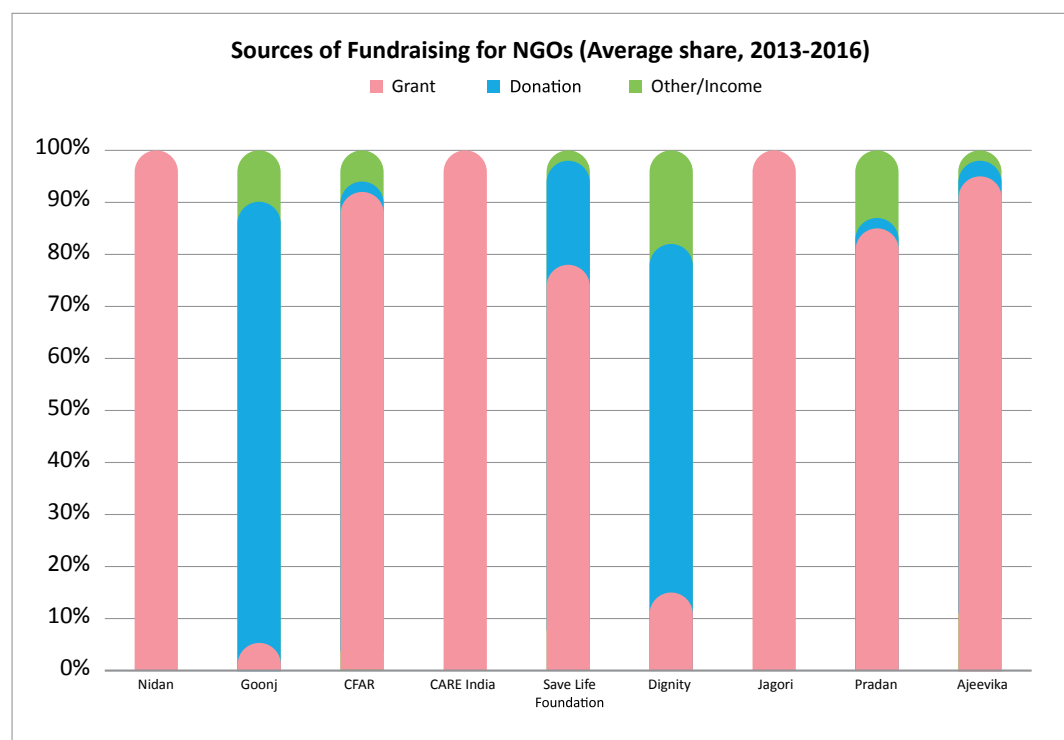


Figure 3: Quantum of funding from different sources. Data from Nidan, Goonj, CFAR, CARE India, Save Life Foundation, Dignity Foundation, Jagori, and PRADAN were sourced from their annual reports. We computed the average income received from each of these sources between 2013 and 2016. These are the organisations we shortlisted and contacted based on the parameters identified.

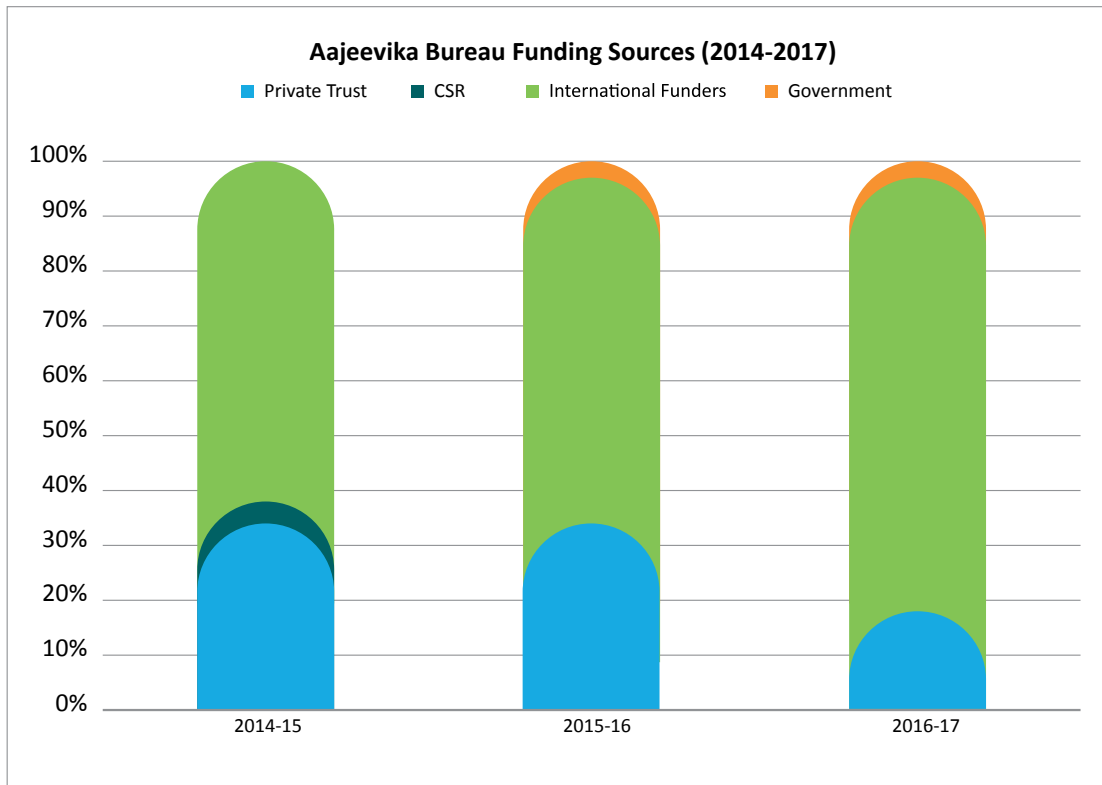


Figure 4: Funding sources (from private trusts, CSR, international donors, and government) received by Aajeevika Bureau (2014-2017).

Key Lessons from Best Practices

Best Practice 1 Project Initialisation

- The NGO should develop the idea of a project from a long-term perspective, which is based on the needs of the community, before initialisation.
- Deciding specific objectives at this preliminary stage aids in identifying key stakeholders and devising appropriate strategies for the realisation of project goals.
- Orienting project personnel before starting the implementation process is essential for proper communication of project goals, strategies, and values of the organisation.
- Involving all stakeholders from the planning stage ensures the smooth progress of the project in future stages.
- With project initialisation, the NGO has a roadmap to effect long-term social change.

Best Practice 2 Project Outcomes

- Measuring project outcomes are a method to ensure the sustainability of the project and the NGO in the long-term. SMART outcomes are specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and time-bound.
- A system of continuous monitoring, evaluation, and assessment at the level of all stakeholders aids in ensuring timely realisation of project goals.
- Different indicators of project outcome help in measuring short-term and long-term effects of the project in communities.
- A gradual exit of the organisation from the community through a change in community leadership roles ensures a smooth transition onto a path of self-sustaining social change.

Best Practice 3 Organisational Systems

- A horizontal management structure with a decentralised decision-making process increases accountability of individual employees, thus contributing to a better organisational process.
- Maintaining long-term relationships with partner organisations and communities strengthens the foundations of the organisation.
- Capacity building of staff and partner organisations ensures a better synergy within the organisation and seamless project execution.
- Regulatory processes and scrutiny reduce the possibility of errors leading to organisational sustainability.

Best Practice 4 Fundraising

- A fundraising strategy that is in sync with the organisation's vision and project goals aid in locating potential donors.
- A well thought out proposal helps in communicating the project idea and requirements to the donors.
- Approaching donors with flexible funding models supports both organisational and program sustainability.
- Donor education creates awareness and sensitisation regarding the importance of funding projects on emerging social issues.

Abbreviations




BF	Bright Future
CFAR	Centre for Advocacy and Research
D4D	Drama for Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PRADAN	Professional Assistance for Development Action

ABOUT EDELGIVE FOUNDATION



EdelGive Foundation is the philanthropic arm of the Edelweiss Group and was established in 2008. Since its inception, almost a decade ago, EdelGive is steadily evolving a philanthropic ecosystem in India. EdelGive works to develop a symbiotic relationship between the different members of the ecosystem viz. investors (donor corporate agencies, partner CSR agencies, and individual donors), investees (NGOs and other sub sets of the NGO sector), and collaborating partners like the government, like-minded agencies, capacity building organisations, and policy experts. EdelGive has fostered the growth of the synergies inherent to an ecosystem, to leverage gains over and beyond its investment, both financial and non-financial.

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ABOUT MONK PRAYOGSHALA



Monk Prayogshala is a not-for-profit academic research organisation that undertakes projects spanning the entire research life cycle, from conceptualising research problems to data analysis through to publication and feedback integration. Prayogshala consists of a team of highly-trained researchers from the social sciences and aims to further the cause of academic research in and from India, and improve the quality and volume of the nation's research output into the global academic research community. Prayogshala has been working with reputed Non-Government Organisations and NPOs to measure research impact and publish their work in high impact research journals.

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*For corporates who are looking to deploy their CSR Funds with great NGOs, EdelGive is eligible to receive funds u/s 135 of the Companies Act and Foreign Funds under FCRA rules.

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