

Impact Assessment of Learning & Development Programs in India

MARCH 2025

Table of Contents

Section 1 - Executive Summary	03
1. Study Overview	03
2. Participant Demography	04
3. Key Findings	05
Section 2 – Landscape of L&D Programs	07
Section 3 – Assessment of L&D Programs	09
Section 4 – Program Effectiveness	11
1. Alignment & Satisfaction	11
2. Effectiveness of Training Methods	12
3. Networks and Collaborations	14
Section 5 – Program Impact	15
1. Impact at Individual level	15
2. Impact at Organisational level	16
3. Impact at Sector level	19
Section 6 – Recommendations	21
1. Intermediaries	21
2. Donors	23
3. NGOs	25
Section 7 – Annexures	27

Section 1 - Executive Summary

1. Study Overview

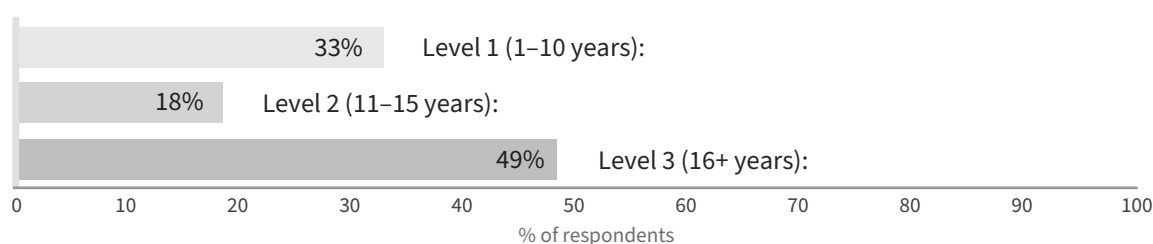
The Indian social sector has witnessed significant growth over the past decade, underscoring a need for well-structured Learning and Development (hereinafter referred to as L&D) programs that strengthen leadership, enhance organisational capabilities, and drive systemic impact. Recognizing this need, A.T.E. Chandra Foundation (ATECF) commissioned this study to assess the current landscape of L&D initiatives in the sector, evaluate their effectiveness, and identify what works and what doesn't. The insights from this study seek to achieve the following objectives:

- **Evaluate the Effectiveness of L&D Programs**
Assess the impact of L&D initiatives on participants' personal growth, leadership development, organisational capabilities and ecosystem.
- **Identify Gaps and Best Practices**
Analyse what aspects of existing L&D programs work well, where challenges persist, and how they can be improved to better serve the sector.
- **Inform Future Investments in L&D**
Provide data-driven insights to drive greater investment in L&D from key stakeholders—donors, NGOs, and intermediaries—and to shape long-term, high-impact solutions for the sector.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the study surveyed 357 professionals across 30 L&D programs, conducted 39 in-depth interviews with select participants, and gathered insights from 8 organizational leaders. For the analysis, participants were classified into 3 categories based on years of experience:

- **Level 1 (1–10 years):**
Early-stage professionals (Associates, Managers) focused on execution, operations, and skill-building
- **Level 2 (11–15 years):**
Middle management professionals (Senior Managers, Program Leads, Functional Heads) overseeing teams, managing projects, and contributing to strategy
- **Level 3 (16+ years):**
Senior management professionals (CXOs, Directors, Heads of Verticals) driving organizational vision, policy, and large-scale impact

Fig. 1: Respondents from each level



Impact was measured at individual, organisational and sectoral level.

2. Participant Demography

The survey captured perspectives from individuals with varying levels of experience, organizational affiliations, and professional roles, ensuring a well-rounded understanding of challenges and achievements in the nonprofit sector and beyond.

Fig. 2: Gender Distribution

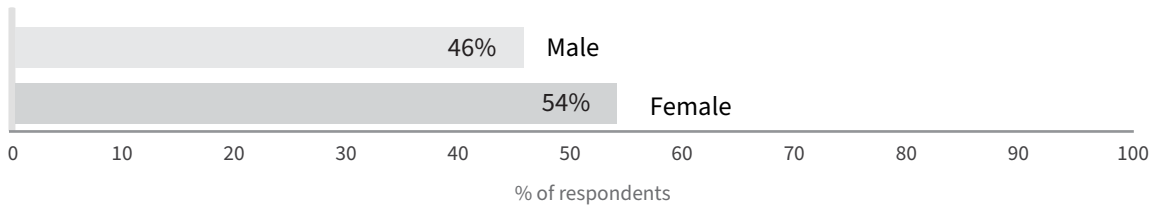


Fig. 3: Organizational Affiliations

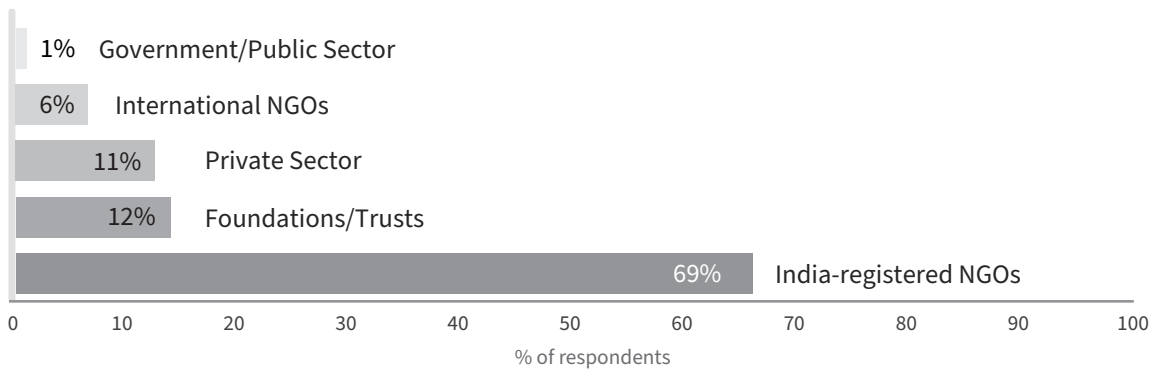


Fig. 4: Designations of Participants

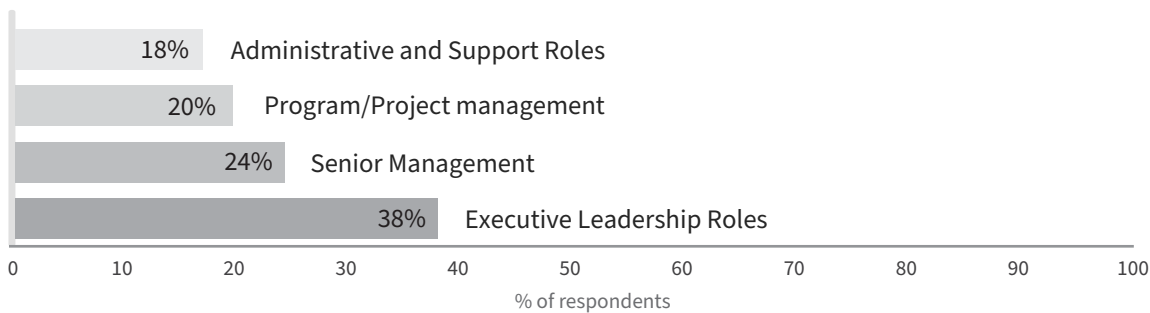
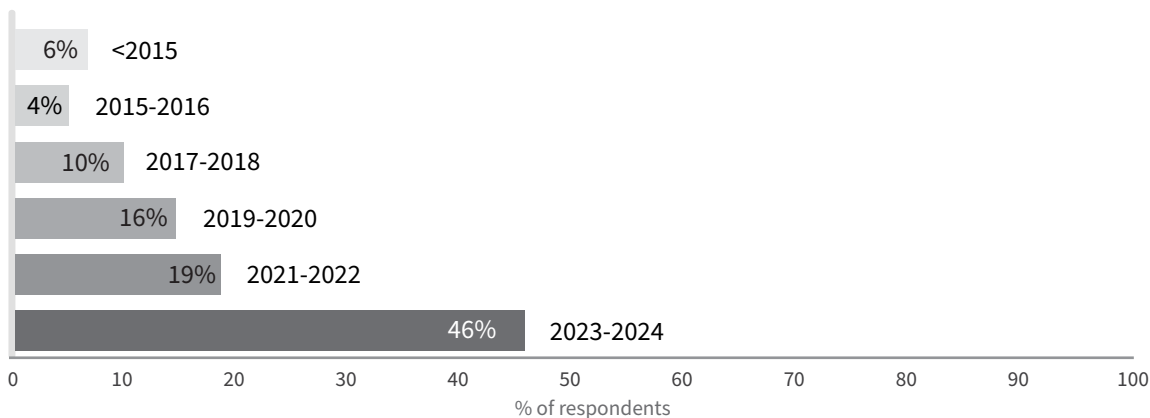


Fig. 5: Year of Attending L&D Program



3. Key Findings

Key successes and high-impact areas

1. Effective teaching methods & facilitators

Participants rated pedagogy 4.28/5 and facilitator expertise as 4.34/5 across all experience levels, highlighting the effectiveness of expert selection by intermediaries. Case study-based learning was highly effective and insights from senior leaders and field experts were particularly valued for shaping perspectives and deepening understanding.

2. High impact on mindset transformation & enhanced leadership capabilities

68% of participants reported moving from an execution-focused approach to strategic, reflective, and adaptive thinking, while 66% reported overall enhanced leadership. Exposure to diverse perspectives has strengthened critical thinking, self-awareness, and participatory leadership, enabling leaders to move beyond reactive decision-making toward long-term, sustainable impact. By integrating strategy, adaptability, and resilience, these programs are equipping leaders to navigate complexity and build future-ready organisations.

3. Strengthening domain-specific skills & practices

L&D programs have driven tangible organisational improvements, with 58% of participants adopting new processes and best practices and 45% reporting enhanced domain-specific skills in areas like fundraising and HR. From streamlining operations and refining internal structures to expanding donor bases and strengthening storytelling for donor engagement, participants have gained practical insights to enhance organisational effectiveness.

4. Strengthened organisational culture & resilience

L&D programs have strengthened leadership, with 46% improving people management and team-building skills and 42% fostering a more resilient organisational culture. Participants have adopted structured feedback systems, improved cross-team collaboration, and aligned their teams with organisational vision, fostering adaptability and a culture of continuous growth.

5. Increase in collective action and collaboration:

L&D programs have enhanced sector-wide collaboration, with 55% of participants improving collective action and 49% deepening partnerships, leading to stronger networks and shared problem-solving. Additionally, 46% reported greater sectoral resilience and resource-sharing, highlighting how these programs equip leaders to drive cooperation, innovation, and long-term sustainable impact.

Gaps, challenges & opportunities

1. Gaps in alignment & practical application of resources

Participants rated clarity on program objectives at an average of 3.8/5, indicating that many joined without a clear understanding of expected outcomes. Additionally, the availability and practical application of resources were both rated at 3.96, suggesting room for improvement in ensuring that learning materials are both accessible and directly usable in real-world contexts. Strengthening pre-program communication and enhancing hands-on, application-based training could bridge these gaps for greater effectiveness.

2. Limited organisational shift on critical areas

L&D programs have had minimal impact on critical organisational areas, with less than 25% of participants reporting progress in employee retention, regulatory compliance, impact measurement, second-line leadership development, and digital readiness—despite high demand for tech enabled solutions.

3. Limited contribution to systemic change

While L&D programs have strengthened individual & organisational capacity, their influence on broader systemic change remains limited. Only 26% of participants saw an impact on policy influence, and just 22% felt empowered to challenge entrenched social norms and power structures like caste and gender dynamics. Furthermore, only 11% reported initiating or scaling community projects, such as infrastructure development, highlighting the need for deeper engagement on these aspects.

4. Heavy Focus on Senior Management, Limited Access for Middle Management

L&D programs in the social sector are heavily skewed toward senior leadership, with 49% of surveyed participants being senior professionals. Early-stage professionals made up 33%, while mid-managers—critical for organisational stability and leadership pipelines—were significantly underrepresented at just 18%. This trend persists across 30 leading sectoral programs, revealing a gap in leadership development opportunities for middle management professionals.

5. Limited post-program engagement & alumni support:

While L&D programs meet participant expectations in delivery, they fall short in sustained engagement. Alumni networks remain underdeveloped, with a rating of 3.62/5, highlighting the need for stronger post-program connections and ongoing value creation. Additionally, networking and collaboration opportunities are insufficient, scoring 3.85/5, and there is little structured handholding post-program—limiting long-term impact and peer learning.

Section 2 - Landscape of L&D Programs

Through an extensive web search and responses from survey participants, over 100 organizations offering L&D programs were identified. These organizations can be classified into following four broad categories:

1. Consulting firms (for-profit organisations, offering consulting services)

Primarily offer leadership and organizational development programs for mid to senior management professionals, often with short-term, online or blended formats.

2. Universities (educational institutions)

Provide strategic management and governance courses, typically for senior executives, with a mix of in-person and blended learning.

3. NGOs (not-for-profit organisations)

Focus on grassroots leadership and social entrepreneurship, offering programs in multiple languages with a community-centred, hands-on approach.

4. Training Institutes (institutes built for professional training)

Emphasize transformative leadership for emerging leaders and senior professionals, with immersive, residential workshops and a focus on personal development and systemic change.

Fig. 6: L&D Programs attended by Intermediary Type

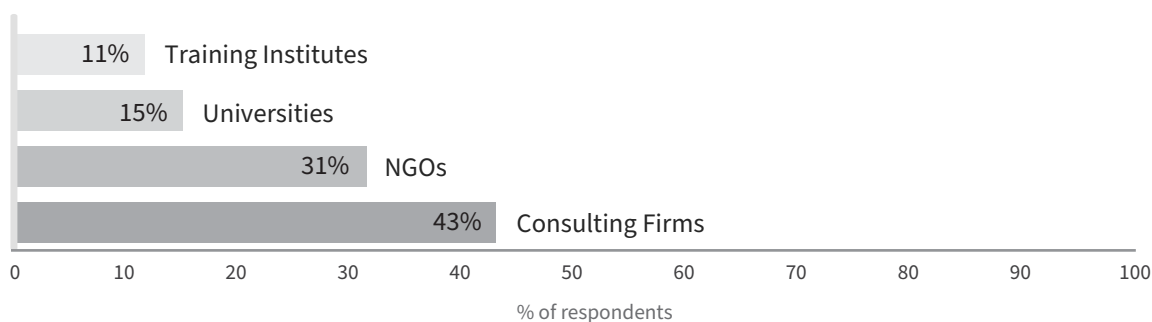




Table 1: Types of intermediaries and their offerings

Program Features	Categories	Consulting Firms	Universities	NGOs	Training Institutes
 Target Experience Level	Senior management professionals	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Middle management professionals	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Early stage professionals			✓	✓
 Program Duration	Less than 1 year	✓			✓
	Up to 1 year		✓		
	Up to 2 years			✓	
 Type of Delivery	Online	✓			✓
	In-person		✓		
	Blended			✓	
 Languages	English	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Regional			✓	✓
 Geographic Coverage	Regional			✓	✓
	National	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Global	✓	✓		✓
 Cost	High-cost	✓	✓		
	Low-cost			✓	✓

Section 3 – Assessment of L&D Programs

The assessment of L&D programs was conducted on following 2 key dimensions:

1. Program Effectiveness

These indicators assess the overall quality of program and its delivery



Alignment and Satisfaction

- Clear Objectives
- Aligned Content
- Sector Relevance
- Meets Participant Expectations

2. Program Impact

These indicators assess the impact of programs on individual , organisational and sectoral growth



Individual Level

- Influenced mindsets
- Enhanced leadership capabilities
- Improved domain-specific skills and knowledge
- Enhanced technology and digital readiness
- Improved communication and conflict resolution
- Advanced career progression



Effectiveness of Training Methods

- Engaging Teaching Methods
- Expert Facilitators
- Resource Availability
- Practical Application
- Effective Feedback Mechanisms
- Inclusivity and Accessibility



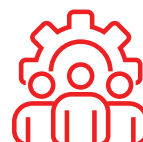
Organisation Level

- Adoption of new processes and best practices
- Strengthened impact management
- Developed second-line leadership
- Strengthened regulatory compliance
- Strengthened organizational culture



Networks and Collaboration

- Opportunities for Collaboration
- Alumni Support



Sectoral Level

- Increased collaborations and partnerships
- Improved resource sharing and innovation
- Enhanced stakeholder engagement
- Increased collaborative action
- Challenging social norms and power structures
- Contributed to policy changes

Fig. 7: Program Evaluation Criteria & Impact Framework

Significant correlations

- This research revealed strong positive correlations between program effectiveness (as rated by participants) and impact across individual, organizational, and sectoral levels ($p < 0.01$, moderate positive correlation).
- Programs with higher effectiveness ratings were linked to greater individual, organizational, and sectoral impact.
- Additionally, the study highlighted significant correlations between the levels of impact indicating individual development drives organizational improvements, individual performance contributes to sectoral goals, and organizational progress fosters sector-wide change.

Section 4 – Program Effectiveness

This section will delve into participant feedback on key aspects of the L&D programs they attended. It will explore their alignment with the program objectives and overall satisfaction, assess the effectiveness of training methods in enhancing their skills and knowledge, and examine the role of these programs in fostering networks and collaboration within the sector.

1. Alignment & Satisfaction

This aspect evaluates participants' understanding of course content, alignment with program objectives, relevance to sector trends, and overall satisfaction with the learning experience.

Ratings on Program Relevance and Participant Satisfaction

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Overall

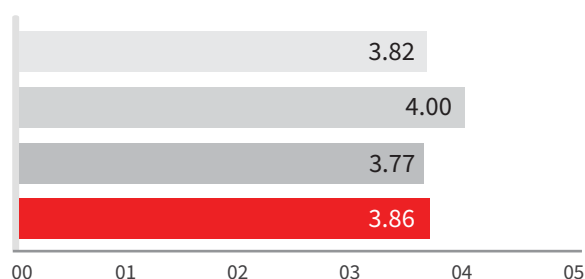


Fig. 8: Understanding of the L&D program objectives and learning outcomes

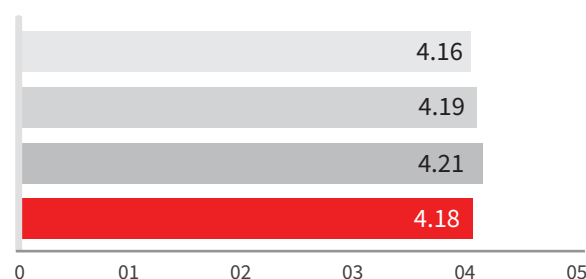


Fig. 9: Alignment of L&D program content

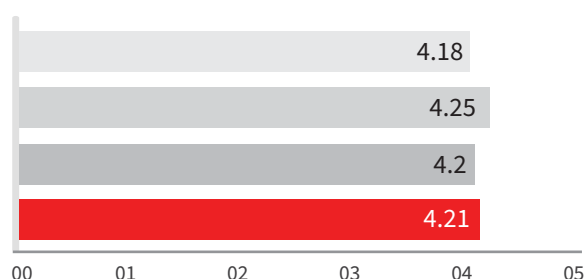


Fig. 10: Relevance of the L&D program content

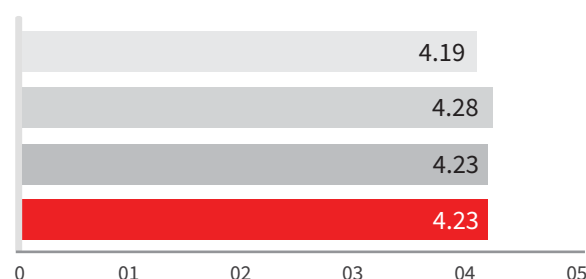


Fig. 11: Satisfaction with the L&D program

Key insights

1. Stronger alignment for middle management

Middle management professionals (Level 2) found L&D programs most relevant to their needs, reporting the most positive learning experience, whereas Senior and Early-career professionals (Level 3 & 1 respectively) comparatively struggled with clarity on program objectives before joining.

2. Referral-driven enrolment lacks clarity

With 65% of participants joining L&D programs through referrals from leadership, peers, or word of mouth, most do not thoroughly explore program objectives beforehand—resulting in a lack of clarity about learning outcomes resulting in comparatively lower ratings on those aspects. Hence, it is critical for intermediaries to follow a thorough scouting and selection process to avoid mismatch of expectations. Some of the best practices include:

- **Pre-Enrolment Orientation**

Host mandatory webinars or info sessions before enrolment to clearly outline program objectives, expected outcomes, and participant commitments.

- **Structured Application Process**

Ensure applicants articulate their learning goals through a written application, so that they understand and commit to the program’s purpose.

- **Pre-Enrolment Interviews**

Conduct short interviews before selection to assess participants’ expectations, clarify program objectives, and ensure alignment with their professional needs.

2. Effectiveness of Training Methods

This aspect evaluates the effectiveness of teaching methods, quality of facilitation, accessibility and inclusion, availability and practical use of learning resources, and the impact of feedback mechanisms.

Ratings on Program Relevance and Participant Satisfaction

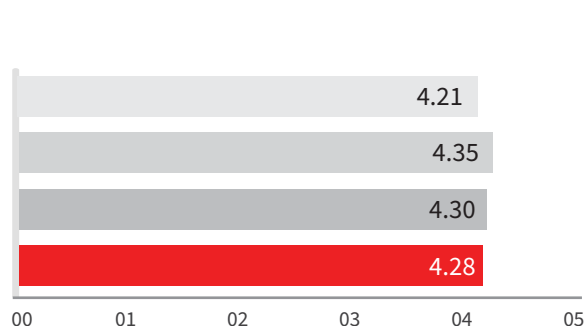


Fig. 12: Effectiveness of teaching methods: interactive activities, discussions, and group exercises

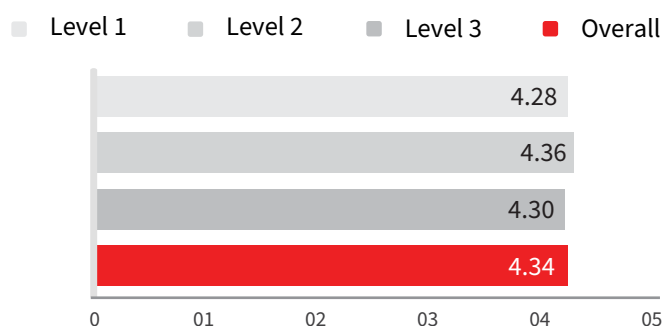


Fig. 13: Expertise, clarity, and engagement of facilitators/trainers

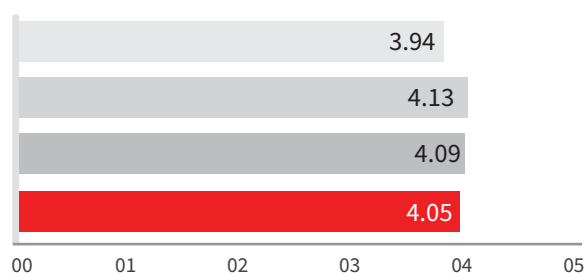


Fig. 14: Availability of supplementary materials, tools, and templates.

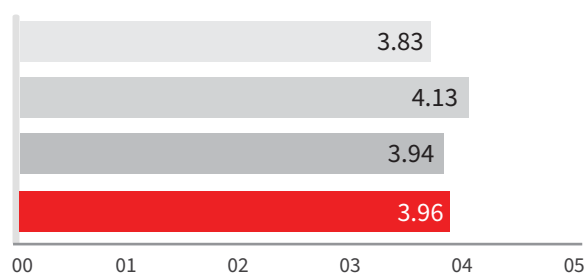


Fig. 15: Practical application of supplementary materials, tools, and templates

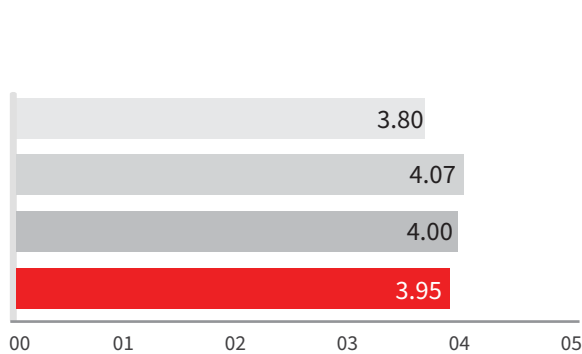


Fig. 16: Accessibility and inclusivity of the L&D program for individuals with diverse learning needs

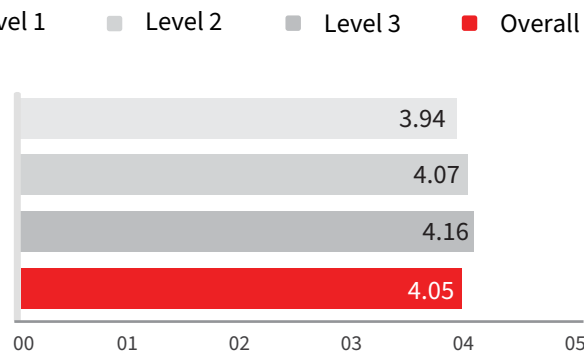


Fig. 17: Effectiveness of assessments and feedback mechanisms

Key insights

1. Effective methods and high-quality facilitators

Professionals across all levels rated the effectiveness of teaching methods and facilitator expertise 4 and above, highlighting the value of both the delivery format and the quality of facilitation.

2. Limited Accessibility and Practical Application for Early-Stage Professionals

Early-stage professionals face challenges with resource availability, their real-world application, and program accessibility. They emphasise the need for high-quality toolkits, templates, and grassroots-relevant case studies, along with improved language accessibility, to enhance learning effectiveness. For example, If the topic is on creating a diversified donor base; participants would prefer having template that help them capture donor profiles and guidelines on what good diversification would look like.

“

The knowledge gained was more about exposure to a different standpoint or worldview. The case studies we discussed and the dialogues with peers during the course provided powerful insights. Many of us were leading projects or heading organizations, so the rich experiences shared among us were incredibly valuable. The course gave us the opportunity to engage with Harvard professors, and their perspectives. The case studies, and the frameworks we explored added immense value to our understanding."

Nitin Desai, CEO, Navam Innovation Foundation

“

The faculty they brought in were genuinely impressive. Even two years after the program, I still remember many of their presentations and the insights they shared. Their ability to communicate complex ideas simply and effectively contributed significantly to my learning and left a lasting impression."

Nita Luthria Row, Director, Adhyayan Foundation

3. Networks and Collaborations

This aspect evaluates the opportunities for networking with peers and sector experts, as well as the strength of alumni support provided by intermediaries.

Ratings on Satisfaction with Networking and Alumni Support

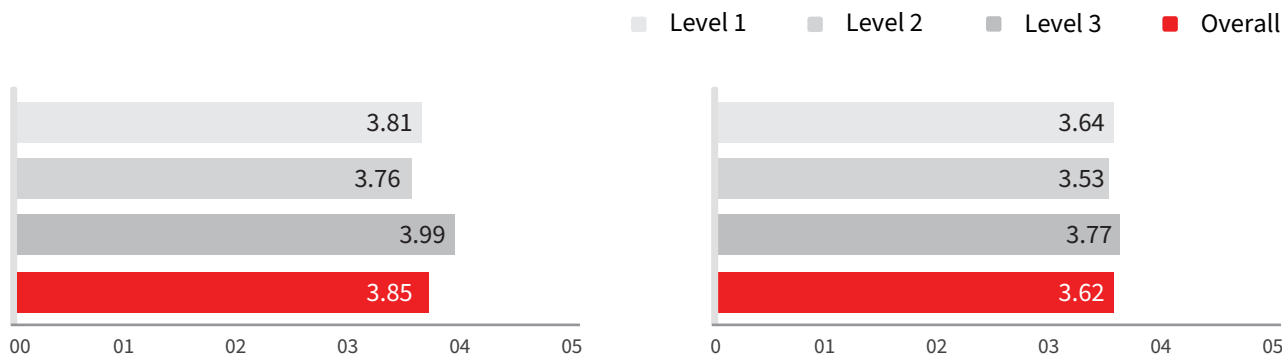


Fig. 18: Opportunities for collaboration and networking with peers and industry professionals

Fig. 19: Alumni Support

Key insights

1. Need for post-program engagement

Networking and collaboration received the lowest ratings among all program support aspects, revealing a critical gap. Participants highly value connections with peers and sector experts and seek continued engagement beyond the program.

2. Role of intermediaries in sustaining networks

Participants have expressed a clear interest in informal discussions and knowledge exchange. Intermediaries can play a proactive role in fostering alumni interactions and creating structured opportunities for ongoing collective learning within cohorts.

Section 5 – Program Impact

This section explores the impact of these programs at three levels—individual, organisational, and sectoral—highlighting participant growth, strengthened leadership, and broader sectoral growth.

1. Impact at Individual level

This aspect evaluates personal and professional leadership capabilities, strategic thinking, decision-making skills, domain expertise, and career progression.

Impact reported at individual level

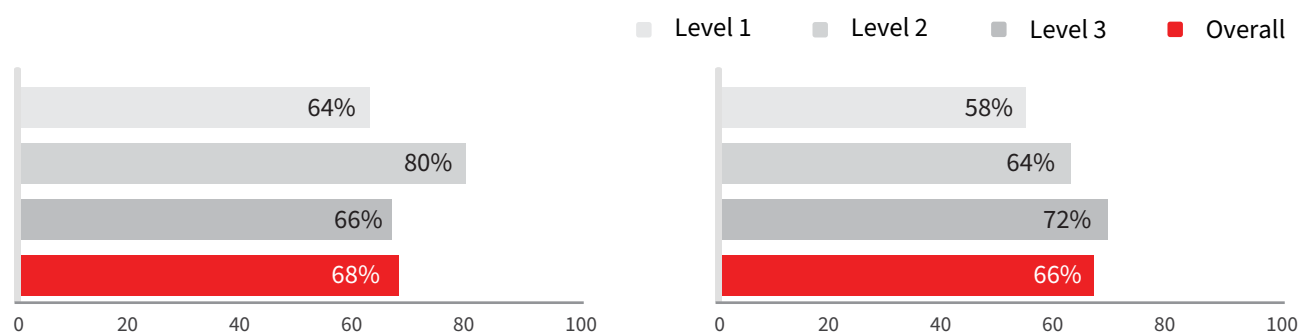


Fig. 20: Influenced mindsets and way of thinking

Fig. 21: Enhanced leadership capabilities

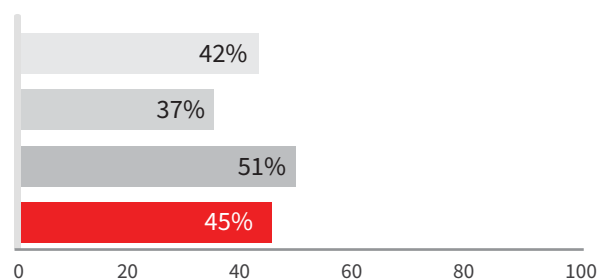


Fig. 22: Improved Domain Specific Skills and Knowledge (Fundraising, HR, etc.)

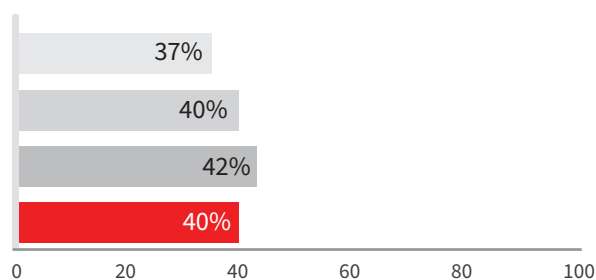


Fig. 23: Enhanced Problem-Solving Abilities

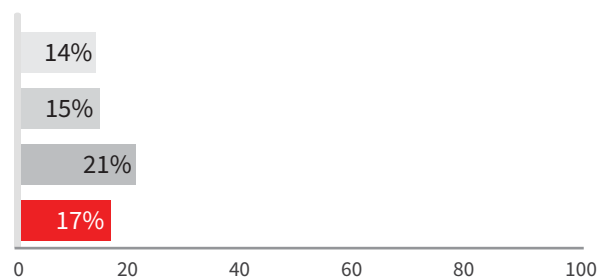


Fig. 24: Enhanced technology and digital readiness skills

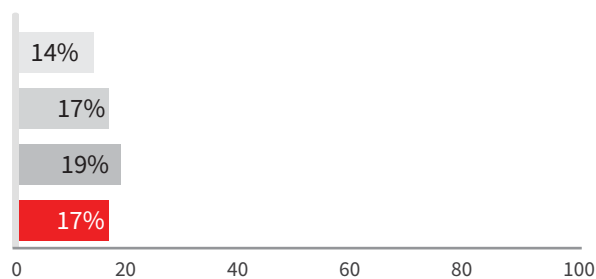


Fig. 25: Advanced career progression marked by promotions, new roles, and expanded responsibilities

Key insights

1. Mindset & Leadership Transformation

Overall, 68% of participants reported a shift in mindset, and 66% noted enhanced leadership capabilities, fostering strategic thinking and self-awareness. This impact was most pronounced among Middle management professionals (Level 2), where 80% experienced mindset transformation.

Participants reported shifting from reactive, task-based approaches to mission-driven, strategic thinking, leading to better alignment with long-term organisational goals. Reflective exercises, such as 360-degree feedback, enhanced self-awareness and empathy, improving leadership effectiveness and team engagement.

2. Improved domain-specific skillset

45% of participants reported stronger capabilities in fundraising and HR. In fundraising, they developed a deeper understanding of the funding ecosystem, including how to craft compelling pitches and stories. On the HR front, they gained insights into organisational design, policies, and people management practices—equipping them to build stronger, more structured teams.

3. Enhanced Problem-Solving skills

40% participants reported enhanced problem-solving skills and shared that tools and frameworks introduced in the programs helped them navigate crises, adapt to change, and strengthen this aspect, fostering resilience and collaborative decision-making.

4. Gaps in Technology & Career Advancement:

- The least impact was observed in technology and digital readiness skills, highlighting a need for stronger integration of tech-driven tools.
- Career progression impact was lower across levels, with Level 1 i.e. early-stage professionals rating it the lowest, indicating a need for structured growth pathways.

“

Before this, I used to look at people from a very different perspective... I learned that you are not alone, you are representing a whole bunch of people. Your words, your thoughts are the exposure for them.”

Dilip, Co-Founder, Anubhuti

“

The course encouraged us... to be clear about what we want to achieve, with whom we want to work, where do we want to work, what methods will we use and what will be our time frame”

Sapna Kedia, Assistant Director for Gender and Social Development, International Center for Research on Women

2. Impact at Organisational level

This aspect evaluates the organisation’s growth through system and process adoption, enhanced people management and succession planning, a strengthened organisational culture, improved measurement practices, and policy compliance.

Impact reported at Organizational Level

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Overall

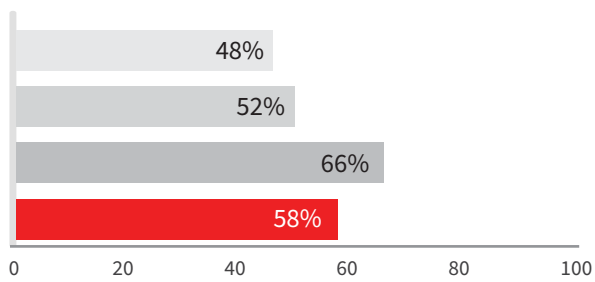


Fig. 26: Adoption of new processes and best practices

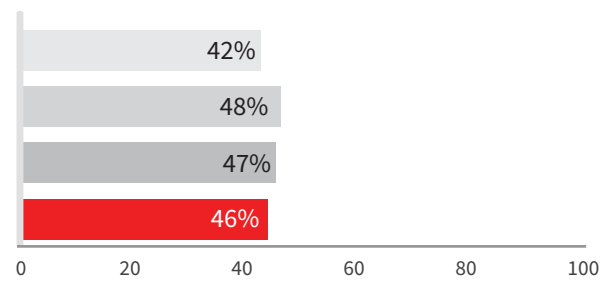


Fig. 27: Improved people management and team building

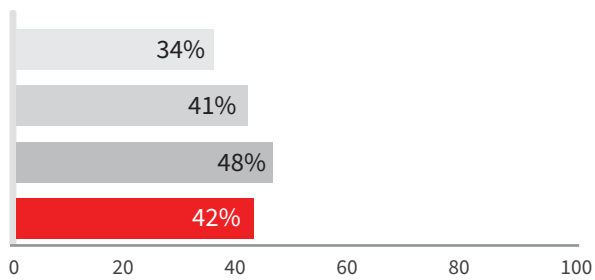


Fig. 28: Strengthened organization culture and resilience

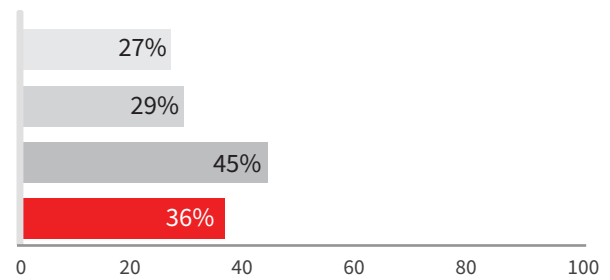


Fig. 29: Greater efficiency in program delivery

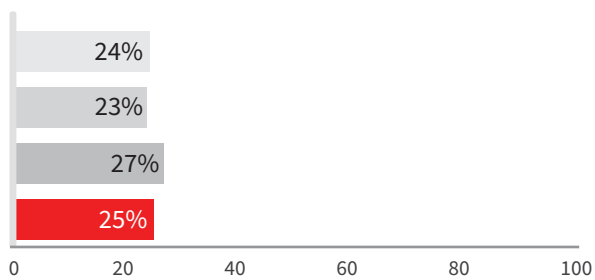


Fig. 30: Developed a second line of leadership

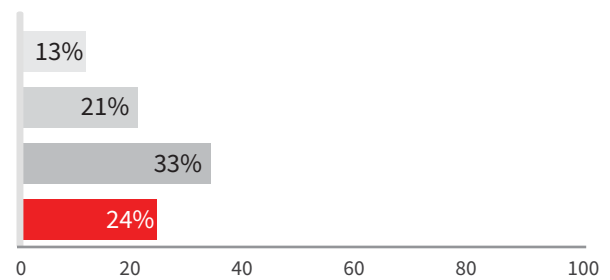


Fig. 31: Strengthened impact management and measurement practices

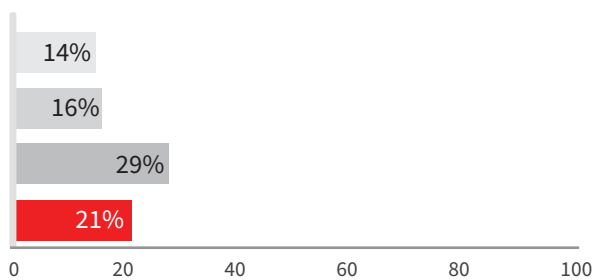


Fig. 32: Improved fundraising efficiency and cost management

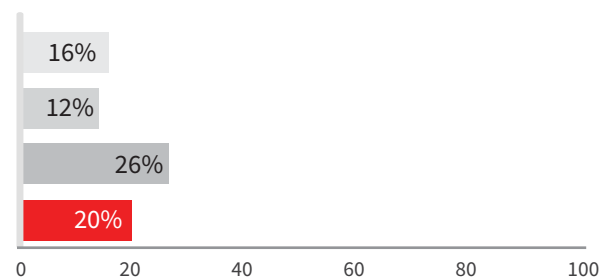


Fig. 33: Strengthened Regulatory Compliance

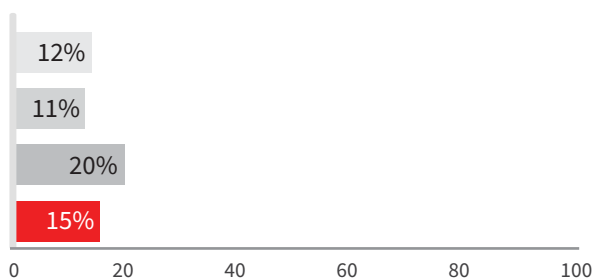


Fig. 33: Improved employee retention rates

Key insights

1. Strengthening organisational processes and teams

- L&D programs have significantly driven the adoption of new processes and best practices, with 58% of participants reporting improvements in overall efficiency and strategic decision-making.
- 46% of participants reported significant improvements in people management and team building, particularly in organisations that formalised recruitment and appraisal systems and established structured feedback mechanisms, fostering a culture of accountability and continuous growth.

2. Varied impact across leadership levels

- Senior management (Level 3) reported the highest organisational impact, driving improvements in process adoption, culture, and efficiency. Middle management (Level 2) saw moderate gains in new process adoption and resilience but faced challenges in translating fundraising skills and knowledge into gains at the organisational level. They also reported challenges in ensuring employee retention. Similarly, early-stage professionals (Level 1) reported the least visible impact on funds raised, employee retention, and impact measurement at the organisational level reflecting their limited influence.

3. Building second-in line remains a key challenge

- Only 27% of Senior management professionals (Level 3) reported progress in building a second line of leadership, while 23% of middle management echoed similar challenges. This highlights succession planning as a critical gap that requires greater focus and support.

4. Limited progress observed in impact measurement practices & fundraising efficiency

- Individuals are building key domain skills—like navigating the funding landscape, storytelling, HR structures, and people practices—but often struggle to apply these at an organisational level. As a result, only 24% reported improved impact measurement and 21% saw better fundraising efficiency. Bridging this gap requires programs to support both individual learning and focus on organisational implementation.

5. Challenges in compliance and employee retention

- Strengthened regulatory compliance remains a challenge, with only 20% of participants reporting improvements in this area.
- Impact on employee retention remains limited, with only 15% of participants reporting success, highlighting the need for stronger talent management and long-term engagement strategies. This calls for better retention approaches at NGOs, including creating career trajectories, spaces for implementation of learnings and deeper engagement.

“

I started rebuilding CWS with a team of 15 and a \$100,000 budget; now we're 115 people with a \$2.5 million budget. The program gave me the tools to manage HR, leadership, and conflict resolution during this critical growth phase.”

Krithi Karanth, CEO, Centre for Wildlife Studies

3. Impact at Sector level

This aspect evaluates the depth of collaboration, collective action, and overall resilience through resource sharing and innovative practices. It also assesses impact on policy influence, efforts to challenge social norms, and the scaling of community projects.

L&D Programs' Sectoral impact

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Overall

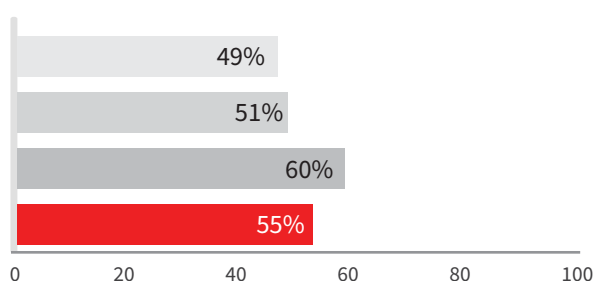


Fig. 34: Improved capacity for collective action

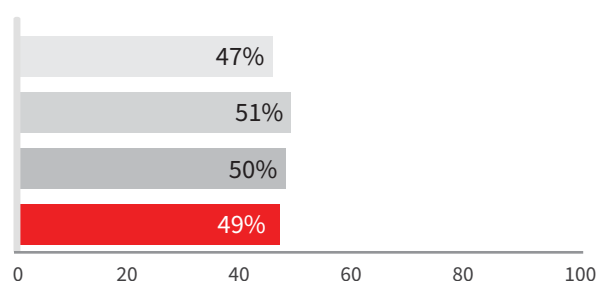


Fig. 35: Increased the number and depth of collaborations

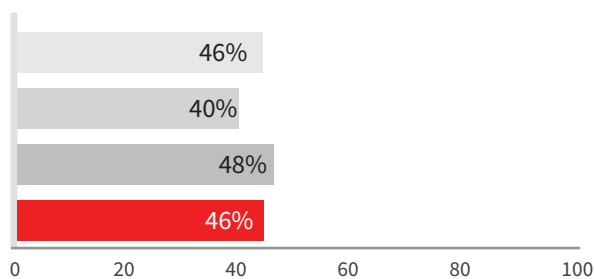


Fig. 36: Overall resilience and resource sharing

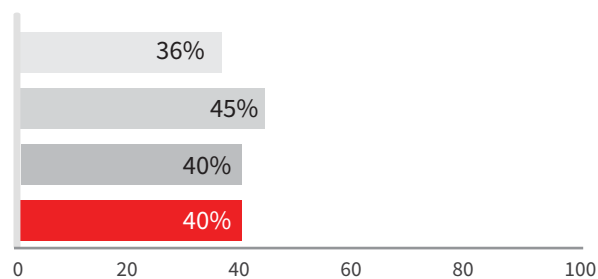


Fig. 37: Fostered innovative practices and solutions

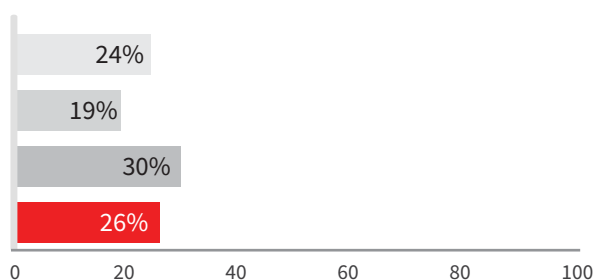


Fig. 38: Contributed to policy influences and changes

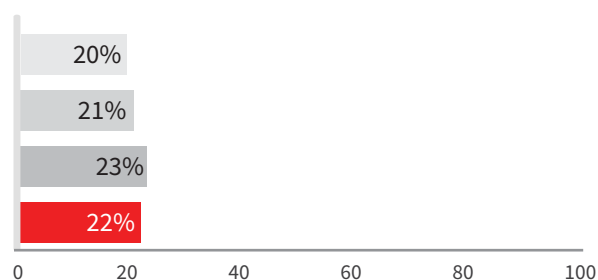


Fig. 39: Enabled challenging of social norms

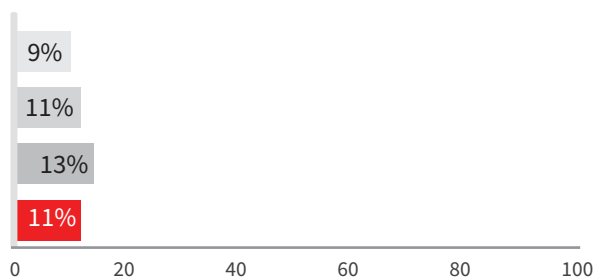


Fig. 40: Initiated or scaled community projects

Key insights

1. Improved collective action, collaboration & organisational resilience

- Overall, 55% of participants reported increased capacity for collective action, while 49% noted deeper collaborations. They highlighted a shift from working in isolation to partnering with other organisations. This shift has also facilitated resource and expertise sharing, strengthening collective efforts to tackle sticky challenges and build organisational resilience.
- Participants reported enhanced stakeholder engagement, leading to improved relationships with government bodies, boards, donors, and communities, resulting in more strategic partnerships and alignment with organisational goals.

2. Fostering innovation

- Overall, 40% of participants reported improvements in fostering innovative practices, with Middle management (Level 2) showing the highest progress compared to Early-career (Level 1) and Senior (Level 3) professionals.
- Participants have initiated resource sharing and knowledge exchange, giving other organisations access to tools, frameworks, and open-source materials reducing duplication and encouraging innovation.

3. Limited impact in policy influence, grassroots leadership & systemic impact

- Only 26% of participants reported impact on policy influence, and 22% noted progress in challenging social norms and power structures, highlighting the need for more targeted efforts to drive systemic transformation.
- Scaling community projects and fostering local engagement saw the lowest reported impact at 11%, indicating a gap in driving this change. This may be due to most leadership programs targeting NGO leaders from Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities, underscoring the need for tailored programs for grassroots leaders.

“

We collaborated with another organization that focuses on mental health and maternal health in rural areas... We brought community leaders together and trained them, and now we're taking some of their participants to international events."

Abhijit Barse, CEO, Slum Soccer

“

Learning the "tips and tricks" on how to align with government systems—ensuring that you're not seen as challenging them, but rather enabling them to do their work more efficiently—was invaluable. This knowledge provided a clear understanding of how to build these relationship.

Anjali Hegde, Executive Director, Udayan Care

Section 6 – Recommendations

To drive meaningful change in the sector, this section offers strategic recommendations to enhance Learning & Development (L&D) initiatives. By addressing critical gaps and unlocking opportunities, they aim to equip leaders professionals at all levels to build stronger organisations. The recommendations are tailored for key stakeholders—Intermediaries, Donors, and NGOs—to ensure targeted and effective transformation.

1. Intermediaries

1. Cultivate skills for systems change and advocacy

L&D programmes should aim not just to strengthen individual skills but also to prepare professionals to lead long-term change. This means helping them develop the ability to scale their impact, whether by strengthening their organisations or by working with others, such as government bodies, community groups, and civil society organisations.

In addition to technical skills, these programmes should encourage a mindset that looks beyond the day-to-day responsibilities of one organisation. Leaders should be supported to understand systems, navigate partnerships, and influence policies and programmes that can improve outcomes for communities in a lasting and meaningful way.

2. Align programs to role-specific needs

L&D programmes should be designed to reflect the distinct needs of professionals at different stages in their careers, as well as the maturity level of their organisations.

- **Early-stage professionals (L1)** seek to strengthen foundational skills such as leadership and communication.
- **Middle management professionals (L2)** typically look for deeper expertise in areas like fundraising, strategic communication, and measuring impact.
- **Senior management professionals (L3)** require support in driving systemic change, forming strategic partnerships, raising funds, and building organisational capacity.

Additionally, the nature of support required may also vary depending on whether an organisation is in early-stage, stabilising, or looking to scale. A deep understanding of the target participants' roles, experience, and organisational contexts would be essential to ensure relevance and effectiveness in programs.

3. Build in components of personalised mentorship and immersion-based learning

Application of learnings is just as important as the learning itself. Participants shared that personalised support, and real-world insights help them connect theory to practice. They recommended the following approaches for the program:

- **Personalised Mentorship:** Integrate regular, structured mentor interactions into the programme, with the option to continue post-programme based on mutual interest. Strengthen the mentor pool by building a network aligned with the programme's vision and outcomes.
- **Immersive Learning:** Include exposure visits or deep-dives into key topics through field-based learning. These experiences help ground concepts in practice and deepen participants' understanding of complex challenges.

4. Prioritise unique needs of middle management

Middle management is a broad and often overlooked segment, that comprises of professionals at different stages in their leadership journey, from first-time managers to senior managers. They are particularly at the risk of professional stagnation without adequate support. Intermediaries must recognise this diversity and tailor learning journeys accordingly.

- First-time managers need support in delegation of responsibilities, operations and building confidence in their leadership.
- Senior managers benefit most from guidance on team building, conflict resolution, cross-functional collaboration, and strategic thinking.

Intermediaries can build homogenous cohorts, with content and delivery that is customised to specific needs to ensure relevance, growth, and a lasting outcome.

5. Enhancing accessibility and inclusivity

For professional development to be truly meaningful, it must reflect the realities and contexts of its participants. Many leaders bring deep grassroots experience but face barriers when accessing learning, either due to language, format, or corporate centric examples that feel disconnected from their ground realities.

To address this, intermediaries can build and use local case studies that showcase the journeys, challenges, and successes of home-grown leaders. These stories not only make learning more relatable and accessible but also inspire the next generation of leaders across diverse local geographies.

6. Emphasise peer Network & Alumni engagement

Participants have expressed the value and need of having a strong network of peers. Strong networks foster support and can enable long-term collaboration and shared growth beyond the duration of the programme. Intermediaries need to think of the following when designing programs:

- **Peer networking and learning:** Design programs that intentionally create space for participants to build peer connections and learn from each other's experiences. Facilitated group discussions, peer-led sessions, and collaborative projects help deepen this engagement.
- **Alumni Engagement:** Build an alumni network to keep participants connected even after the programme ends. To enable regularity, intermediaries can create learning circles, share community updates, and enable alumni-led sessions to extend the value of the program and establish a vibrant professional community.

7. Importance of technology in increasing organisational efficiency

L&D programs can encourage the use of readily available technological tools through their participants. While this may not necessarily be a separate module, they can emphasize on their importance in enhancing efficiency.

2. Donors

1. Allocate a minimum of 10% of the grant for leadership and talent development

Donors should provide at least 10% of their grant solely for leadership or talent development. This investment is essential to equip NGO professionals with critical skills such as strategic thinking, communications, financial resilience, governance, and people management. Flexible funding can be provided towards:

- Engaging experts who can coach and mentor senior leaders to navigate complex challenges.
- Nominating professionals for high-quality learning programmes that support their growth.

By making these dedicated investments, donors can help strengthen leadership and enable NGOs to build institutional capabilities.

2. Directly fund L&D programs to expand access

Donors can expand their support beyond grantees and invest directly in cohort-based L&D programs. Funding intermediary-led, cohort-based initiatives allows learning programs to be subsidised and made accessible to the wider sector, especially those from smaller, grassroots organisations who lack the resources to participate. In the long-run, this will help strengthen the sector.

3. Support diverse learning needs at varying levels

Donors should fund L&D programs that cater to varied learning needs across experience levels. The study indicates that early-stage professionals benefit most from on-the-job training and mentorship, while middle-management benefits from a mix of self-paced courses, structured learning, and mentorship. For senior management formal training and long-term mentorship /coaching are reported to yield better results.

Donors need to keep an open mind with regards to the format of learning programs to support holistic capacity building in organisations.

4. Commit to multi-year L&D investments.

To drive meaningful and lasting change, donors need to move beyond supporting one-off training initiatives and commit to multi-year funding for L&D; ideally for a minimum of three years. This applies to both: directly supported grantee-organisations as well as intermediaries delivering structured programs.

Long-term investment enables a sustained learning journey and allows continuous feedback loops. It also helps institutionalise knowledge and expertise within organisations. In a dynamic sector, ongoing learning is critical to ensure that the talent stays relevant and adapts to complex challenges.

5. Champion L&D by documenting Impact and Influencing Peers

Donors who invest in L&D are well-positioned to advocate for it. By actively sharing evidence of success, they can amplify the value of their investments, play a catalytic role in influencing their peers to prioritise L&D in their giving strategies and create a culture that fosters leadership and capacity building in the social sector. This can be done through:

- Documenting the impact within grantee organisations: Tracking and capturing the tangible improvements in leadership, decision-making, effectiveness, organisational resilience etc. that result from L&D investments.
- Disseminating insights within donor networks: Using platforms such as donor convenings, reports or blogs to share what's working. Donor endorsement that is grounded in data and real outcomes can inspire more funding for L&D.

3. NGOs

1. Ask your donors for investment in L&D.

To secure donor support for leadership and learning, NGOs must position L&D as a strategic priority. This can be done through:

- **Carrying out a needs assessment to identify talent gaps:** A mapping of current capabilities, challenges, and aspirations across teams helps build an evidence-based case for investment in L&D. This shows donors that the ask is rooted in actual needs and aligned with organisational goals.
- **Integrating L&D into the core budget, not as an overhead:** Position L&D as essential to achieving programmatic outcomes and program sustainability. Including it as a core line item in financial plans signals its strategic importance and increases the likelihood of donor buy-in.

2. Align L&D investments with resource and organisational needs

Professional development is essential at all levels of experience, but a one-size-fits-all approach does not yield the desired results. NGOs can address this using the following approaches:

- **Map the right program to the right professional:** Once a talent needs assessment is complete, it is important to identify programs that are tailored to different professional experience levels. This ensures that growth in individual capacities links to growth in organisational capacity.
- **Encourage real-time application of learning:** Encourage participants to apply their learning to live projects and challenges within the organisation to ensure application of learnings and increase relevance of training. Tracking immediate outputs will encourage accountability for both participants and intermediaries.

3. Build a leadership pipeline by investing in middle management

Organisational resilience depends on strong leadership at the second and third rank (n-1 and n-2) in the event of transitions and changes. This includes a segment of middle management who plays a crucial role in holding organisational vision, culture and drives execution. Targeted investment in middle management will build continuity and a strong pipeline of leaders who have the potential to step up and drive larger decisions.

4. Build teams, not only individuals.

For L&D to truly drive organisational change, it's important to move beyond individual development and focus on building the capabilities of teams. NGOs can:

- Invest in L&D for multiple team members since it accelerates adoption and institutionalisation of learning. It also enables shared understanding, peer reinforcement, and quicker integration of practices into daily work.

- Carefully identify participants based on interdependencies, team dynamics, and alignment with program goals to maximise relevance and impact of L&D.

5. Provide resources, time, and team support for knowledge sharing and application of learnings

For learning to translate into real change, NGOs must enable participants to implement their insights meaningfully within the organisation. This can be done through:

- **Creating spaces for implementation:** NGOs must provide participants with the time, resources, and autonomy to translate their learning into action. This translates into financial and non-financial support, trust and flexibility to adapt and embed new practices.
- **Offering mentoring support during implementation:** Provide access to mentors or coaches who can guide participants as they apply their learning, helping them troubleshoot challenges, and sustain momentum.

Section 7 – Annexures

1. Study Details

1. Research Methods and Sample Size

Achieving the first objective of understanding the landscape of Learning and Development (L&D) programs, involved extensive web searches and expert interviews. This was substantiated by data collected through an online survey, where 357 respondents participated, providing details on the kind of L&D programs they attended.

For the second objective of building an open-source assessment framework, a detailed review of existing frameworks and research was conducted. The review included social sector L&D frameworks, and other relevant evaluation studies to ensure a wide range of applicable strategies. Additionally, qualitative interviews with experts and sector leaders were conducted to gather practical insights on how existing frameworks could be adapted for the purposes of this study.

To achieve the third objective of evaluating the effectiveness and impact of L&D programs, and the fourth objective of identifying gaps in these programs, the online survey was supplemented with in-depth qualitative interviews. From the 357 survey respondents, 38 participants were selected for detailed qualitative interviews to further explore their experiences with L&D programs. Additionally, interviews with 8 organizational leaders provided higher-level perspectives on building an Organizational culture for L&D and the strategic gaps and challenges to access L&D initiatives. These interviews helped identify specific areas where L&D programs were succeeding, as well as areas where there were clear gaps in meeting participant needs, particularly in terms of access, relevance, and impact.

These methods fed into achieving the fifth objective, which was to detail out L&D programs' future strategy in the L&D space. These recommendations focus on areas where innovation could be introduced, where organizations (intermediaries, NGOs, donors) could adapt to evolving trends, and how they could better meet the changing needs of the social sector through targeted L&D programs

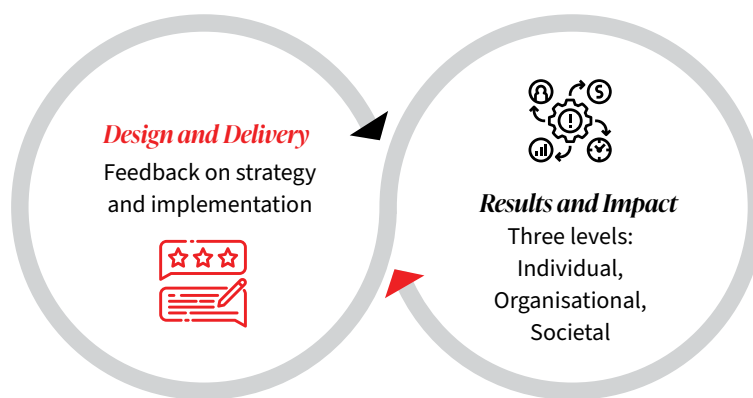
2. Hypothesis

The hypothesis driving this study is that programs which do well across performance indicators will demonstrate a greater impact at the individual, organizational, and sectoral levels. Specifically, those L&D programs that achieve high participant satisfaction, diverse participation, strong peer learning environments, and the integration of mentorship and feedback systems are more likely to generate:

- **Enhanced individual professional development**, reflected in improved skills, leadership capabilities, and career progression.
- **Stronger organizational performance**, marked by the adoption of best practices, development of leadership, and improved financial and people management.
- **Sectoral advancements**, such as increased collaboration, policy influence, and contributions to systemic change.

This framework ensures that L&D programs are designed to not only be effective in achieving short-term learning goals but also in driving long-term, sustainable improvements within organizations and across the sector.

Fig. 41: Study Hypothesis



3. Limitations

- **Sampling Limitations**

While the study included a diverse group of participants, the sample size of 357 respondents may not fully capture the wide variation of experiences across the social sector. The focus on 15-20 programs may have excluded other relevant programs or organizations that could offer additional insights, particularly those in remote or underserved areas.

- **Self-Reported Data**

The study relies heavily on self-reported data from surveys and interviews, which can introduce bias. Participants may have overestimated their satisfaction with the programs or underreported challenges they faced, potentially skewing the results.

- **Geographical Bias**

Although the study attempted to include a range of geographical locations, including rural, urban, and mixed settings, there may still be an overrepresentation of urban-based programs, especially in areas where internet access and resources for conducting the study were more readily available.

- **Focus on Short-Term Impact**

The study focused primarily on the immediate impact of L&D programs, which may not fully capture the long-term effects of these programs on individual careers, organizational growth, or sectoral change. Longitudinal data would be needed to assess sustained impact.

- **Program Representation**

The study identified L&D programs offered by NGOs, consulting firms, universities, and training institutes, but may not have accounted for smaller or informal training programs that could be just as impactful but were not captured through the chosen sampling methods.

- **Generalizability**

As the study is focused on L&D programs within the social sector in India, its findings may not be generalizable to other sectors or regions, limiting the broader applicability of its conclusions.

2. Notes to the insights

1. Individual impact

- i. Enhanced leadership capabilities includes what participants reported on the following:

- Leadership capabilities
- Their decision-making ability

- ii. Enhanced problem solving includes what participants reported on:

- Communication abilities
- Conflict resolution and strategic thinking skills

2. Sectoral Impact

- i. Enhanced stakeholder engagement includes what participants reported on:

- Enhanced board engagement
- Increased engagement with community

3. LD Programs Masterlist

To access, visit the site below :

https://www.ategroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/LD-Programs_Masterlist.xlsx

4. Assesment Rubric Tools

To access, visit the site below :

https://www.ategroup.com/wp-content/uploads/brochures/Assessment_Rubric_and_tool.xlsx

5. List of L&D programs that participants reported on

1. Acumen Academy - The Acumen Fellowship
2. Amani Institute - Leadership for Growth
3. Blue Ribbon Movement - Developing Leaders and Designing Cultures
4. Bridgespan India - Achieving Strategic Clarity
5. Bridgespan India - Creating Adaptive Plan
6. Bridgespan India - Designing Strategy
7. Bridgespan India - Developing Second Line of Leadership
8. Bridgespan India - Investing in Future Leaders
9. Bridgespan India Non-profit Development Program - Executive Strategy
10. Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy (CSIP)- Resilience Strategies for Nonprofits (RSN)
11. Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy (CSIP)- Strategic Nonprofit Management - India (SNMI)
12. Common Purpose - American Express Leadership Academy
13. Common Purpose - India Leadership Academy
14. CORO - The Grassroot Leadership Development Program (GLDP)
15. DanaMojo - dana Vrddhi
16. Dasra Leadership and Development Program
17. Dhvani Foundation - Nirantara
18. Dhvani Foundation - VOICE
19. Harvard Kennedy School - Strategic Fundraising for Non-profit Leaders
20. IIMB - Organizational Excellence through Leadership
21. India Leaders for Social Sector (ILSS) - Board Governance Program
22. India Leaders for Social Sector (ILSS) - Emerging Women's Leadership Program
23. India Leaders for Social Sector (ILSS) - Fundraising Program
24. India Leaders for Social Sector (ILSS) - Leadership Program (LP)
25. India Leaders for Social Sector (ILSS) - People Practices Program
26. PHICUS, IIMB, Dr. Reddy's Foundation - Aritra
27. Pravah India - Saansta
28. PRIA - Organizational Development Program for Non-profit Organizations
29. Sambodhi - Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning for Development Professionals
30. Others

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