Mapping Community-Based Initiatives Supporting Women's Well-being in Delhi

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2

Abstract

This working paper seeks to explore the different ways that community-based initiatives adopt to support women living in underprivileged colonies in New Delhi, access economic, educational, physical and mental well-being. This research examined three collectivising initiatives – a nongovernmental organisation, a voluntary project, and a livelihood program supported by a philanthropic grant to work with women from marginalised communities. In doing so, it mapped the role of the initiatives in raising critical consciousness among women about their socio-economic position, self-esteem, agency and rights. Experiences of empowerment were constructed in line with Freire's model of conscientisation that suggest that a fundamental shift in power and the dismantling of oppressive structures happen when people are aware of their lived realities and realise their capacity to shape strategies for altering their position in society. The selected initiatives lay out strategies that other community-based initiatives can adopt for sustainable impact. This is based on the principles of co-construction, helping women make informed decisions, and act as a driver for social change.

By identifying relevant community-based initiatives, the paper aims to contribute in locating women's empowerment agenda in the philanthropic landscape of India. Further, it hopes to chart out the social impact that these initiatives create, presenting their participation as important stakeholders in supporting women in their economic and mental well being. Thus, the paper strives to foster a philanthropic ecosystem that supports community-based initiatives to enhance their capacities in addressing women's issues.

Keywords: Women, Community Philanthropy, Equality, Livelihoods

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Introduction

Over the past few decades now, several government and organisational efforts – CSR initiatives, International non-government organisations (NGOs) — have focused on programs aimed at gender equality and women empowerment. However, efforts at the local and grassroot levels that are increasingly visible, point to an active participation of these stakeholders in accelerating women's empowerment at a micro level. Several NGOs organise vocational training programs for skill development, *silayi* centres training young girls. They run workshops on financial literacy, gender sensitisation campaigns, menstrual and reproductive health awareness sessions, all aimed at supporting women in their social and economic well being. These initiatives emphasise on an action-oriented approach where results are produced by the enhanced participation of women in economic activities, better decision making capabilities and engagement in community development projects. These grassroots organisations encompass local NGOs, self-help groups, religious organisations' funded programmes and community-based efforts that lay out their aims and objectives, mission and vision with women at the centre.

In the report, *Community Based Collectives for Women's Empowerment* (2017), the findings highlighted the potential realised by collectives and the collective action in building women's leadership skills and ability to lead change in their lives and the lives of others around them. In fact, collective action brings about chang.es in women's experiences of agency (Mansuri and Rao, 2013).

This brings us to the core of this paper. It wants to understand the work of these local, grassroots level women-centric initiatives that are based on collectivising and collective action, and hold deep knowledge of the intersecting experiences of women. Organisations that focus on the position of women and work on "consciousness-raising, coalition-building, and advocacy" have the potential to script systemic change that will aid gender equality movements across the world (Girard, 2019).

In this context, the paper examines the role of community-based initiatives in raising critical awareness and building solidarity networks to create safe spaces for women to experience a better livelihood, education, health and mental well being.

The purpose of this paper is to present the narrative accounts of three community-based initiatives that use non-traditional methods and approaches to construct empowering experiences for women in communities. In doing so, it lays emphasis on the importance of philanthropy to support such grassroots initiatives that struggle to find philanthropic funding as they are smaller in scale,

are largely run and managed by women and the social change they
aim for is a long term vision which can not produce measurable results in a shorter time period. These initiatives need support that is flexible, believes in the purpose of the initiative and trusts the process the organisations take in reshaping the communities along with women that they work with.

Understanding the Landscape of Philanthropy and Women's Empowerment—Review of Literature

Philanthropy and Women

Philanthropy and giving, for women and girls in particular, has garnered the attention of donors, funders and corporates in the past few decades (Otis & Jankowski, 2006). Even in India, there is an increased emphasis on 'philanthropy and giving for women and girls' (Aggarwal, Sridhar & Bhattacharjee, 2021). The initiatives supported by these funding sources have focused on women's rights, economic empowerment, and reproductive health among several other areas. In a report released by the OECD Development Centre, *Insights on Philanthropy for Gender Equality* (2019), it has been noted that more than 100 women's funds provided grants to support these areas of intervention. Feminist scholars have found that global donors in the philanthropic sector focus on two broad areas, economic empowerment of women and women as stakeholders in solving the poverty problem of the nation and contributing to the development agenda (Dale et. al, 2018; Mesch, et. al, 2011; Miller & Jones, 2019).

Girard (2019) critiques the overemphasis and preoccupation of the philanthropic sector with 'impact and short-term projects.' She suggests that while these projects might aim to create better opportunities for women and deliver results, they distract people from the larger objective of bringing about systemic changes. Now, philanthropic initiatives launch time bound projects with set objectives, funding and a predetermined outcome. While they aim to 'empower women', they are largely problematic as they believe that "investing in the individual capacities of women delivers economic growth, boosts the national GDP, and works to end poverty" (Girard, 2019). Gender equality is an important area to be addressed by the philanthropic sector, but the use of funds and grants to better impact women's lives remains an area to be worked upon (OECD, 2019).

As philanthropy has expanded its investments in communities, critiques of the field have also increased. Political theorists have suggested that big philanthropy

is fundamentally a top-down undemocratic exercise (Reich, 2018). Social initiatives are now integrating corporate strategies rather than strengthening community relations (Hess et al., 2002; Garone, 1999).

In a review of literature on philanthropic giving in India, it has been found that not much attention is paid to gender, caste, and ethnicity, as important identity markers in women's lives (Nolina, Hembrom and Nag, 2021).

Role of Community-led philanthropic initiatives

In India, it is estimated that there are approximately two million social enterprises, and of these, more than 600,000 are dedicated to advancing the well-being of women and girls as primary beneficiaries (Arthan and The Rockefeller Foundation, 2022). However, the allocation of funding for initiatives led by women remains a source of concern. According to a research study conducted by Dasra (2016), which examined over 300 social organisations in India, a significant majority of them exhibit a notable gender imbalance in leadership roles, particularly in positions at the managerial level and above. This gender gap becomes more pronounced as organisations expand in size, resulting in an alarmingly low representation of women in the workforce within the impact sector.

On the other hand, community-led philanthropic initiatives believe that change is most effective when it comes from within (Charities Aid Foundation, n.d.). Community initiatives led by women or exclusive to women participation seek to disrupt mainstream philanthropy by shifting power into the hands of communities and privileged community self-determination (Hodgson and Pond, 2018). Community foundations can promote social change through several key strategies, including providing financial support to non-profits and community groups, convening stakeholders to facilitate collaboration and dialogue, and engaging in advocacy and policy work. They have the potential to be highly effective agents of change, and can help address a wide range of social issues, from poverty and inequality to environmental sustainability and community development (Hodgson and Pond, 2018). Women's philanthropy is often overlooked and undervalued, despite the critical role it plays. This is partly due to the fact that women's philanthropic initiatives are often informal and based on relationships rather than formal structures or organisations. Smaller, local community-led organisations are often in a better position to lead community-level initiatives and directly address issues that impact women, such as rights and political empowerment. They can help women become informed citizens and reflect on their position in society critically.

Social and philanthropic initiatives aim to enhance development design strategies and programmes so women can better access resources and opportunities, and feel empowered. There is an emerging opportunity for new forms of "funding for gender equality" that can result in organised ways of philanthropic giving in India (Aggarwal, Sridhar and Bhattacharjee, 2021). Contributing to charity and giving for women's empowerment have taken on innovative forms. For instance, Internet Saathi is an initiative that aims to reduce digital illiteracy among rural women, which has positively impacted 15 million women across 17 states in India, and improved their economic well being (Venkatachalam, 2018). Research studies have explored giving to girls and women as an emerging area of philanthropy (Dale et al., 2017). They have also studied the organised efforts of giving in the form of corporate engagement for women's economic empowerment (Parekh et al., 2019), and gender equality.

The economic aspect of empowerment is widely recognised by scholars. It is believed that economic participation will lead to an increase in self-esteem, respect and generate a sense of empowerment (Torri and Martinez, 2014).

Conceptualising women's empowerment

In a liberal feminist approach, 'economic, legal and personal changes' would be sufficient for individuals to become empowered, and such a process does not require the political organisation of collectives in which such individuals are located (Ferguson, 2004). Scholars have advocated for viewing women's empowerment beyond economic emancipation by assessing the change in social structures that impact their lives. Empowerment which is liberating has to do with questioning, destabilising, and then transforming the gendered patriarchal society. It focuses on women's actions as a collective to address the patriarchal structures, however, it does not disavow their personal experiences of empowerment (Sardenberg, 2008). It signifies change, choice and power (Mayoux, 1998). It also means a process through which people, who are at the bottom of the power structure, are able to change their circumstances and begin asserting control on their lives (Jhabvala, 2001). Empowerment doesn't mean giving resources or inputs on certain things. However, it is about addressing the discrimination women encounter in their lives. While empowerment might have different meanings for different people, scholars have identified the term with the capacity to make effective choices (Medatwal, 2013), and gaining control (Batliwala, 2007).

This study applies the lens that empowerment is shaped by 'women in the margins' themselves as they act as decision makers directing their own path. Empowerment is a process through which 'individuals and organised groups are

able to imagine their world differently and realise that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in poverty' (Eyben et al., 2008).

Freire's concept of critical consciousness suggests that 'critical consciousness encompasses the awareness of alternatives to oppressive gendered cultural norms and other forms of oppression' (Buisson et al., 2022). Conscientisation is a process of critical awareness and consciousness-raising among people belonging to marginalised communities. Through becoming aware of one's social and political contexts, people can take action to transform their communities and address systemic inequalities and injustices. Freire (1996) argues that dialogue is essential for reaching critical consciousness. Building on his work, it has come to light that the 'power within' can be transformative in a collective action.

When individuals form a collective and develop a critical understanding of their social reality by engaging in a process of action and reflection, they are in a better position to address oppressive systems, and orders that result in inequalities and injustices. In Freire's model, empowerment would mean a process of creating spaces for women to share their stories, voice their concerns, and collectively reflect on the challenges they face as a group.

Figure 1: Freire's model of Conscientisation from Jamil (2022)
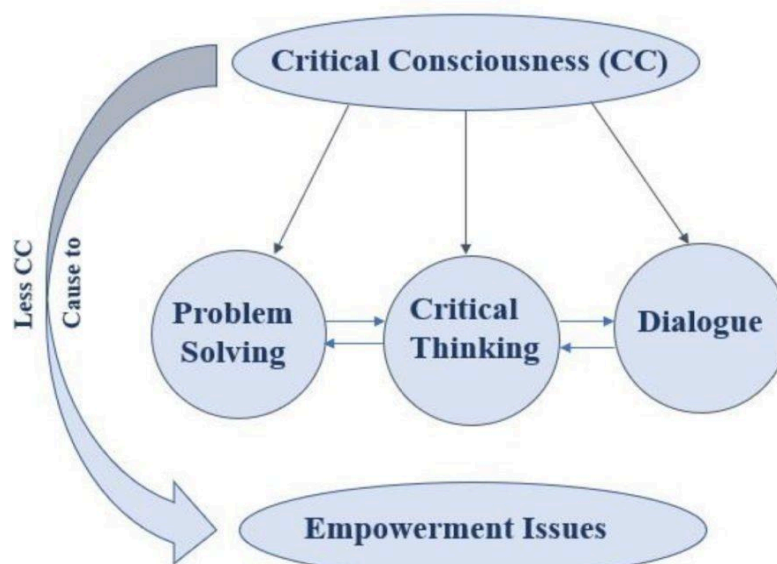
Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To explore the framing of women's empowerment by community-based initiatives
- To examine the specific strategies employed by community-based initiatives in promoting empowerment of women in the underprivileged colonies of Delhi.
- To understand the perceptions of women participants regarding the impact of community-based philanthropic initiatives on their lives.
- To assess the challenges and barriers faced by community-based initiatives in achieving their goals of gender equality and empowerment of women.

Research Questions

- How do community-based philanthropic initiatives define empowerment of women?
- What is the role of community-based philanthropic initiatives in driving gender equality and empowerment of women?
- How do women participants perceive and take part in these initiatives?

Research Methodology

Delhi, as an urban centre, offers underprivileged communities opportunities for economic and social mobility. It has been the centre of many philanthropic initiatives that have focused on women, and offers a wide array of local, grassroots NGOs, self-help groups, and religious enterprises opportunities to work with women. Being a woman resident of Delhi, and a researcher who has explored different geographical sites in the city—rural and urban, authorised and unauthorized colonies—I come from the vantage point of studying the familiar. This has enriched the contextual understanding of the everyday lives of women, the challenges they encounter and their needs in this urban space. This paper examines three community-based initiatives for women in Delhi.

The initiatives have been recruited based on the inclusion-exclusion criteria, which are that they should be community-based, local and grassroot. They must be operational in Delhi and working with women, with their primary vision/programme statements emphasising women empowerment.

As an exploratory study, it adopts a qualitative approach. Initially, a screening tool was prepared and used to identify initiatives in randomly selected colonies in Delhi that are women centric and have a larger goal of bringing about meaningful changes in their lives. This screening tool included details such as the name of the organisation, its vision and mission statements, geographical area, overview of the programmes and beneficiaries, and other such details like organisational details, focus and strategies adopted which will give us a bird eye's view of the philanthropic initiatives for women in Delhi.

From these, three initiatives—an NGO, collectives, and a community-based livelihood project, which were found suitable for the study, were recruited using a purposive sampling technique. This strategy is the most feasible for focused research. Three founders and two co-founders of the women's collectives and organisations along with five to six women participants from each initiative were interviewed for the study, using an interview guide. The interviews were about an hour long and were recorded for the purpose of data analysis, with consent from the participants. A review of relevant articles and reports was followed by data collection through in-depth interviews with women's collectives and initiatives supporting women in underprivileged colonies in New Delhi.

The three initiatives are :

Insha-e-Noor – "It is a collective of women started as a response to the 2008 quality of life finding that only 11% women in the Nizamuddin Basti had their own source of income. It focuses primarily on livelihood generation. Insha-e-Noor is now registered as a producer company with around 80 women associated directly or indirectly with it." (Insha-e-Noor website)

Rafooghar —" It is an attempt to establish a safe and nurturing creative place where women who live on the margins and have faced discrimination and social exclusion for years can gather and find space and time for themselves. Embroidery, a familiar medium that is often dismissed as a trivial pursuit, is used to delve deeper into the themes of identity, agency and mobility, and to demonstrate its power as a form of therapy, creative expression and empowerment." (Rafooghar Instagram Page)

Women's manifesto – "It is an initiative by a group of women from diverse backgrounds, who joined hands with a vision of holistic development and welfare of humanity in general and women in particular. Women's Manifesto, a national level society, was formed in 2014. It works for the educational, social and economic empowerment of women. It strives to protect the dignity of women, providing them with legal aid, and assisting them in the fulfilment of basic needs such as food, cloth and medicine." (Women Manifesto's Website)

Findings and Analysis

The role of philanthropy supported community-based initiatives in fostering social change for women

Several community-based initiatives in Delhi are grassroots, local and operate with small groups of women living in different communities. They run within localised networks and emphasise on co-creation, involving women in the design and implementation of their different programmes. Co-creation fosters a sense of better ownership, active participation of women and a greater sustainability of the initiative. For instance, Insha-e-Noor, started as a livelihood training center where women could learn different crafts and master the art of stitching and embroidery. Its evolution from a training center to a producer company was facilitated by the desire of women to earn and convert the not-for-profit model into a for-profit business model. The idea that economic independence will lead to better decision making, changes in social norms and that gender justice is needed for empowerment, runs well within the initiatives. Insha-e-noor started when there were no livelihood opportunities for women in the community. It emphasised on the need for taking employment to women than asking them to come out of their communities to work. This has helped more women access income sources. It revolved around the need to bridge the gap between necessity and availability of work, recognising the care work responsibilities of women in the community.

This highlights how community-based initiatives can foster a business opportunity shaped by the aspirations of its women members giving them a livelihood opportunity as a collective. More than 80 women are directly or indirectly associated with the initiative. Mina, a woman in her mid-forties joined the initiative about 12 years ago. She did not have any means to earn at that time. She is now working with Insha-e-Noor and has become a board of director at a producer company, incubated at Insha-e-Noor. She shared, *"Earlier in the community there were no employment opportunities for women, through the efforts of this initiative women came out of their houses and recognised their skills. 80–90 women are working at this time. First, they taught us livelihood skills and then gave us an opportunity to make a living out of it."* (Interview at IeN)

"IeN began as a training centre—if the women had not wanted to earn—it would have remained as a training centre till it was needed. It was the women's desire to earn that facilitated the creation of an enterprise. The form—in terms of a producer company and other operations, setting up systems, capacity

enhancement etc., is where professionals come in—again after discussion with the members."

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(Interview, IeN Founding Member)

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Women who are associated with the initiative since its beginning have become responsible leaders maintaining accounts, managing production, taking part in exhibitions and day to day operations. This has not happened in a day. Rather, it is the result of constant mentoring, engaging and having conversations with women about their aspirations and dreams.

The three initiatives have diverse programmes that emphasise on holistic development and support for women. For these initiatives, while women are at the centre, they also take into consideration the role of the family and society in shaping the women's everyday life. They also endeavour to improve the ecosystems that the women are a part of.

> *"People used to think bad about women coming together here for work, then a lot of ladies joined the center and the biases and reservations within the community were removed."*

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(Interview, IeN)

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> *"Initially, I used to wear a veil even at home due to the joint family setup. There were issues with coming home late, but over time, my mother-in-law supported me, enabling me to continue. During my learning phase, I arrived late once, and my husband slapped me. Later my teacher explained the reasons for the delay, counselled my husband and told him that I wouldn't be late again. This led my husband to permit me to keep coming here."*

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(Interview at IeN)

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Women often have less access to information about government schemes, their legal rights and other constitutional frameworks. Women manifesto, with its community sessions, works on promoting equitable access to information within the community. The group of women educate each other and often engage in discussions that make them aware of their rights as equal citizens in the country.

Alternate framing of empowerment

"Empowerment for Insha-e-Noor is the ability to make informed choices/decisions. True empowerment is the ability to understand and make

decisions from a position of strength and knowledge." (Interview, IeN Founding Member)

"We believe in recognising education as the base for empowerment. We focus on educational empowerment of girls through awareness generation, academic counselling, guidance, and admission facilitation from grassroot level to higher educational pursuits. The process of empowerment is incomplete without means of livelihood and financial empowerment. Empowerment of women and girls from poor and marginalised communities leading to improvement of their lives, livelihood and health is essential for the development of the nation."

(Interview, Women Manifesto Founding Member)

"We at Rafooghar, when we think about empowerment, we identify with the meaning of empowerment in what Surabhi, founder of Basanti – women at leisure, a photo project — writes. She states that leisure is a portal to know ourselves. And it is this knowledge, followed by self-acceptance, that lies at the heart of feminist liberation. Oppressive structures are built on the premise of not letting people be themselves and dictating who they should become by controlling mundane aspects of their lives. A culture of leisure could be an antidote to these oppressive structures; a state of just existing without having to earn the right to exist."

(Interview, Rafooghar Founding Member)

The founding members of the three initiatives give insights into the diverse perspectives and frames of empowerment in the socio-cultural, economic, and geographical contexts. The critical components of empowerment include informed decision making, access to education and livelihood, self-awareness, and knowledge about the structural and systemic constraints that lead to inequality. Empowerment comprises an enabling ecosystem that emphasises on education, and economic, physical and mental well-being.

In Freire's framework, empowerment is not just about learning skills and gaining knowledge, but it involves critical awareness and the ability to alter one's socio-political reality. The emphasis on informed decision making by Insha-e-Noor, stresses one to be critically aware of one's circumstances.

Empowerment at Women's Manifesto is expressed in gaining an education, which in Freire's framework, is a critical tool for conscientisation, enabling women to be aware of their socio-economic position, and be able to act in a way that can transform their lives. Freire's model prioritises recognising one's agency and capacity to break through oppressive structures. For Rafooghar, this happens

when women build a critical consciousness about themselves, their surroundings, understand their rights and assert themselves. There is an interconnectedness between the different components of empowerment that community-based initiatives in their own capacity are leading.

Education and financial independence are the most recurring themes in interviews with women at these initiatives. In an interview at Women's Manifesto, a woman said that for her women empowerment means "*to encourage and support women, to uplift women, to ensure the rights of women, and no discrimination against them.*" Another woman at Rafooghar shared that, "*The most important thing in this life for women is to get an education, and gain financial independence.*"

In another interview with a woman at Insha-e-Noor, she said, "*According to me, a woman is empowered when she is able to stand on her own feet, is able to earn, she gains a voice, confidence of doing work and her opinions also start to matter.*"

For many women the sense of empowerment comes with economic independence. A woman remarked, "*If a woman can fulfill financial responsibilities and others as well in the house, then she becomes truly independent.*"

At Rafooghar, women bring their children along with them. There is a separate room where a few volunteers organise art and craft and learning classes for children, so that the women can take part in the workshops without worrying about leaving their children alone. Rafooghar is built on the idea of mending, creating a safe space for women in the communities where they can come and express themselves freely. After becoming members of the initiatives, women have experienced a sense of enhanced self-esteem and confidence. In interviews some women said:

"*Now, I am able to speak to people easily and can go out on my own. Now I am able to take a stand at home as well, earlier I was not able to give my opinion. Now I can say this thing should happen like this.*" (Interview at IeN)

"*I have become more comfortable in talking with people and especially now I can interact with foreigners. I have also learnt financial work like generating bills and other accounts, working on a laptop or computer. My brothers and sisters appreciate that I have learnt accounting work or my participation in exhibitions.*" (Interview at IeN)

When women from within the communities, who are at the margins of the socio-economic life come together to form a collective and are supported by right philanthropic efforts, they have the potential to start an alternate framing of empowerment. Women challenge the traditional notions of power, and agency, crafting their own understanding of empowerment from their everyday experiences. Philanthropy that supports grassroots collectives and initiatives then leads to a body of knowledge that centres the voices and knowledge of women. It is based on a bottoms up approach rather than a top down approach.

Channeling philanthropy to foster spaces of friendship, solidarity and critical dialogue through collectivising

"When women struggling with poverty, marginalisation and invisibility, organise collectively, they amplify their voices, strengthen their leadership, and overcome injustice." (TEWA)

Traditional philanthropy directs the supporting partners to implement projects that they have designed, pushing the grantees to impose their programmes on the beneficiaries. This can result in unhealthy and undemocratic structures that may not aid in altering the systemic barriers and arrangements that create challenges for women to access equal opportunities to develop and grow.

Grassroots initiatives that emphasise on collectivising and co-creating with women from the communities build a solidarity network that is based on the principles of shared values, respect, trust, helping and volunteering. Women taking part in such initiatives often build friendships with other women. Some of the women from across the three initiatives described how they met women whose lives and stories have inspired them. These informal social capital that women access through these initiatives help them in peer learning, access information about government welfare schemes, engage in collective production and gain better bargaining power and so on.

When initiatives bring women together in collectives, they organise workshops and training sessions in a group setting. One of the core ideas across the three initiatives has been to engage women in dialogue and critical reflection on topics such as family, gender roles, patriarchal structures, mobility, livelihoods and even political issues affecting their lives. We have seen that at the core of Freire's model of empowerment is the idea of dialogue. When people engage in critical thinking and dialogue about their positions, challenges and everyday reality, it gives them the power and agency to alter any oppressive and unequal structures.

The initiatives lead discussions with women on topics such as violence against women, or economic inequality and help them voice their opinions and

perspectives, to engage in a healthy conversation with other women members. This helps women in not only reflecting on their own thoughts but also respecting and understanding the conflicting opinions of others.

At Rafooghar, women do embroidery, share their experiences and perspectives in a safe and supportive environment, gain a deeper understanding of the issues facing women, develop critical thinking skills leading to a sense of agency and empowerment. They discuss their personal and family issues and issues concerning women in general, and seek support from the collective.

"I shared my entire life journey with everyone over here and they patiently listened to it and supported me. I shared my personal life issues with everyone in the workshop. I felt very nice and light. All of them were very supportive towards me. I have made friends here, women who understand my situation. I am separated, and other people often judge me. But here everyone is supportive. It's a safe space."

(Interview at Rafooghar).

In fact, one of the ideas of Rafooghar is also to engage women from diverse religious communities to engage in a dialogue to understand the religious values and practices of each other in order to achieve the goal of communal harmony. In one of the sessions, women embroidered their dreams on a piece of cloth. During this session on dreams and aspirations, a woman shared that her dream is to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca to which another woman from a Hindu community responded that it is similar to the pilgrimage they also make to several holy sites for Hindus. This sort of solidarity based on shared values and respect towards one another is sought through mediums such as embroidery and dialogue. In these   times when we are witnessing growing intolerance, philanthropy has a greater role to play in supporting initiatives such as Rafooghar that are taking on the task of collectivising women to engage in difficult conversations.

Gaps in Philanthropic Support—Struggles and Challenges

Some of the challenges that the initiatives struggle with are access to resources, funds and grants, community engagement, ensuring active participation of women, shorter timelines of certain funded programs, constructing an impact matrix and making the initiative sustainable.

Funding and access to resources remain a major challenge for micro initiatives that do not have a long term grant or sponsorship. For Insha-e-Noor, which is supported by the Aga Khan Trust, funds have not been the primary concern to run their programmes. On the other hand collectivising efforts at Women's Manifesto

and Rafooghar rely on grants, and individual donations. In absence of a regular source to fund their programmes, these initiatives are struggling to imagine their future pathways. They then adopt different strategies such as short-term fundraising campaigns through paid workshops, attending fundraising events and participating in exhibitions to sell products made by women to secure smaller funds and sustain their programmes and so on. These initiatives also often rely on volunteering and charity donations. They want to foster a network of women to become self-reliant by urging individuals and communities to donate to the cause.

Community-led initiatives at times struggle to keep the women motivated and actively participate in the programmes and workshops especially when there are no monetary benefits or incentives. Women are occupied with care work and household responsibilities which makes it difficult for them to take part consistently. They often miss workshops or work because of household responsibilities and sometimes take breaks to visit their hometowns, breaking the flow of work planned by the initiatives.

"Keeping the members motivated, especially when the enterprise is unable to provide them with enough work, and inculcating in them a sense of ownership is a challenge."

(Interview, Insha-e-Noor Founding Member)

There are also challenges related to the focus of the programmes run by the initiatives. For livelihood initiatives, engaging women in producing products that will attract sales, marketing, financial literacy, keeping up with the market and forging partnerships across corporate and other entrepreneurial levels is often challenging. For those that focus on raising self-awareness, physical, mental and economic well-being of women through educational programmes, major challenges revolve around resistance to change, patriarchal structures creating barriers for women to actively participate and in decoding the value of the programmes as they are interested in economic returns. While the initiatives are equipped with forming strategies or coming up with solutions to these challenges, lack of adequate funds prevents them from doing so.

Community-based initiatives aim for social change that cannot be produced in the short term. Documenting the impact is a test that leads to further challenges in convincing donors/funders about the relevance and importance of the initiative as the impact matrix appears weak. Sustainability of the initiative is also a concern and dilemma that the founders struggle with. When they want to withdraw from the community and let the women take full charge of the initiative, it becomes difficult. Women are dependent on the leaders to provide hand

19

holding support and there is a fear that the initiative might collapse if the support is withdrawn. Absence of a sustainability plan results in long-term dependency on external support before the initiative becomes fully community owned.

Recommendations

Needs of Community-based Initiatives

Focus Areas of Intervention	Needs of the Community-based Initiatives	How Can Philanthropies Support the Initiatives?
Livelihoods	Access to infrastructure	Fund the creation of community-based livelihood centres
	Access to grants	Provide grants and low interest loans
	Access to market linkages	Provide access to global markets
Skill Development	Access to training modules	Skill development modules
	Access to financial resources	Support funding for trainers
	Infrastructure	Support establishment of training centres
Education	Infrastructure	Sponsor community-led educational initiatives, scholarships for women
	Access to networks and collaborations	Support partnerships
	Access to digital infrastructure	Provide low cost digital infrastructure
Health	Access to healthcare facilities for the community	Fund health clinics
		Support awareness programs

Mental Well Being	Partnerships with mental health experts	Flexible funding rather than project funding
	Innovative mediums/programs	Provide catalytic funding
	Programs for inclusivity	Funds supporting inclusivity

Conclusion

An analysis of the three philanthropic initiatives, out of many in Delhi, that were setup with a vision to support the economic and mental well being of women, and to strive for gender equality, the unique projects they have started and the partnerships they forged, shows that in the context of working with, and supporting women access better educational and livelihood opportunities, has proven advantageous in building networks, creating cooperative communities and increasing the motivation of the participants, and factor into the organisations short term and long term efforts. These initiatives indicate the potential for creating critical consciousness among women, enabling them to recognise their social, economic, and political realities. By fostering awareness and critical thinking, women would be better equipped to challenge existing power structures and advocate for their rights.

Freire's emphasis on dialogue and participation finds resonance in the three initiatives that promote women's active involvement in providing inclusive spaces where they can voice their concerns, share experiences, and actively participate in shaping programmes that directly impact their lives. At the same time, the research highlights the challenges and needs of these community-based initiatives so that they are able to sustain themselves and continue to co-create empowering experiences for women belonging to marginalised communities.

Supporting women's collectives to create pathways for social change and growth and the development of women's socio-economic position, has to be made a priority by the philanthropic organisations interested in promoting gender equality. Powering communities through philanthropic support to women's collectives is the need of the hour.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

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