



COLLABORATION IN PRACTICE

**STARLING INDIA COLLECTIVE
PILOT 2023 - 2024**

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Introduction

BACKGROUND

This review was commissioned by the Starling India Collective, a collaborative of six partner organisations (Breakthrough, Centre for Catalyzing Change, GivingTuesday, Haiyya, Milaan and Pratham Education Foundation) who have come together to co-design and co-deliver a leadership and community building fellowship for hyper-local leaders from grassroots communities in India.

The Starling India Collective was convened by GivingTuesday, a global movement that promotes a simple idea: everyone, everywhere has something to give, and every act of generosity counts. The fundamental belief behind GivingTuesday is that hyperlocal changemakers are best placed to understand and bring their communities together to respond to the many challenges faced by them. When those distributed leaders creating hyperlocal change are linked by common values, they create an interconnected global network through which systems change is actually made possible.

Those leaders of the GivingTuesday movement are from over 100 countries and tens of hundred of communities - all connected by a common set of values centred around generosity. They have the agency to interpret the movement in their individual contexts in a way that feels most appropriate and most authentic to them. However, these leaders are not acting in isolation, they are deeply interconnected even as they are able to act in autonomy, in creating what the movement has come to look like in different places and communities. The values that accompany the distributed leadership model - those of co-ownership, collaboration, respect, equity - are the hallmark not just of the GivingTuesday movement, but also of GivingTuesday's programs like the Starling India Collective.

THE STARLING INDIA COLLECTIVE

The Starling India Collective (SIC) aims to facilitate a shift in the way grassroots leaders see themselves and their positions within their communities, where leaders recognise themselves as influencers who can lead positive change in their communities. A space for peer learning, deep reflection and network building among grassroots leaders is aimed at fostering a thriving civil society that is informed by community voice and action and rooted in radical generosity and shared humanity.

After a convening process led by GivingTuesday from November 2022, in April and May 2023 all partner organisations came together for a co-creation process to discuss all aspects of the design and delivery of the SIC. By leveraging the expertise, perspectives and resources of each collaborating partner and combining elements from organisations' existing strengths, the SIC curriculum has been co-designed to ensure the cohort has access to a wide range of knowledge and resources to realise their individual projects and goals.

The first cohort of the SIC comprised of eleven women from the grassroots communities that five out of the six partner organisations work within and are leaders in their own right. Aged between 17 and 37 years, they come from across six states in North India and mostly work on girl and women centred issues in their communities.



Introduction

THE LEARNING JOURNEY

The curriculum contained six modules, each designed by one partner organisation and delivered virtually.

Module 1: Leadership
Milaan | August

Part 1: Why is leadership important?

Module 2: Storytelling
Breakthrough | September

Part 2: What are the skills that I can leverage as a leader?

Module 3: Data
Pratham | October

Module 4: Building Transformative Leadership for Collective Action
C3 | December

Part 3: How can I leverage these skills towards community building and growing my project in my community?

Module 5: Relationship building
Haiyya | January 2024

Module 6: Community based resource mobilisation:*GivingTuesday | February 2024*

Each module contained 3 parts:

Input session: Knowledge, skills, resources and tools for cohort members based on the learning outcomes of the module

Home assignment: an activity for cohort members to practically apply the knowledge received in the input session

Peer connection and Q&A: A space for cohort members to connect with each other, ask questions, share feedback and experiences

REVIEW APPROACH

As Starling India Collective is a pilot, the partners were keen to conduct a review of the program and the collaborative approach to inform future decisions.

The two key objectives of the review are:

- To understand the experiences and learnings of the program cohort.
- To understand the experiences of the partners and what it means to work as a collaborative.

This primarily entailed qualitative in-depth interviews with the eleven fellows in the cohort, as well as the members of staff that were involved in the process from the six partner organisations. These were carried out at the start of the Starling India Collective in September 2023, and then in March 2024, after the delivery of all six modules.

This review was designed and conducted by Laxmi Chhaya, an external consultant.

THIS REPORT

The report explores how taking a collaborative approach is fostering co-ownership, equity and trust among the six partner organisations, as well as in the cohort.

This report intends to mindfully explore how the Starling India Collective may have contributed towards achieving the desired fellowship outcomes and does not claim sole causality.



Key Insights

1

MUTUAL RESPECT AND TRUST AMONG PARTNERS IS IMPERATIVE FOR EQUITY IN COLLABORATION.

Partners gained immense value from being a part of the collaboration in multiple ways.

Being in a collaborative process offered a space for partner organisations to meaningfully consider, design and experience what co-creation looks like in practice:

- Mutual respect and trust was necessary to share and distribute power between the partner organisations that went beyond their organisational size or years of experience. The process enabled everybody to own all the various pieces (rather than some of it), while having the flexibility to bring in their own unique strengths, perspectives and experiences.
- For some partners this collaboration presented an opportunity to create or pilot specific content and develop new ways of teaching it. This could be translating content for online teaching or to contextualise it for a different audience.
- Partners found it useful to see the practice of different facilitation styles, especially the approach taken by GivingTuesday as a convenor, and have since been exploring how this can be applied in their own work.
- All partners are cognisant of and value the generosity demonstrated by other partners - from sharing resources and tools to opening access to a wider network of organisations and communities and leaders. They recognise that together the 'whole is greater than the sum of the parts'.

Overall, the collaboration enabled scale and diversity in the cohort across culture and geography, and in the modules, that otherwise would not have been possible.

All recognise the potential to leverage and network with other partner organisations.

Though this was not actively explored by the partners during the program due to time and capacity, they recognise the potential for learning and/or working with some or all the other partner organisations and the opportunity to understand some of the different approaches that can be taken to address diverse issues on the ground.

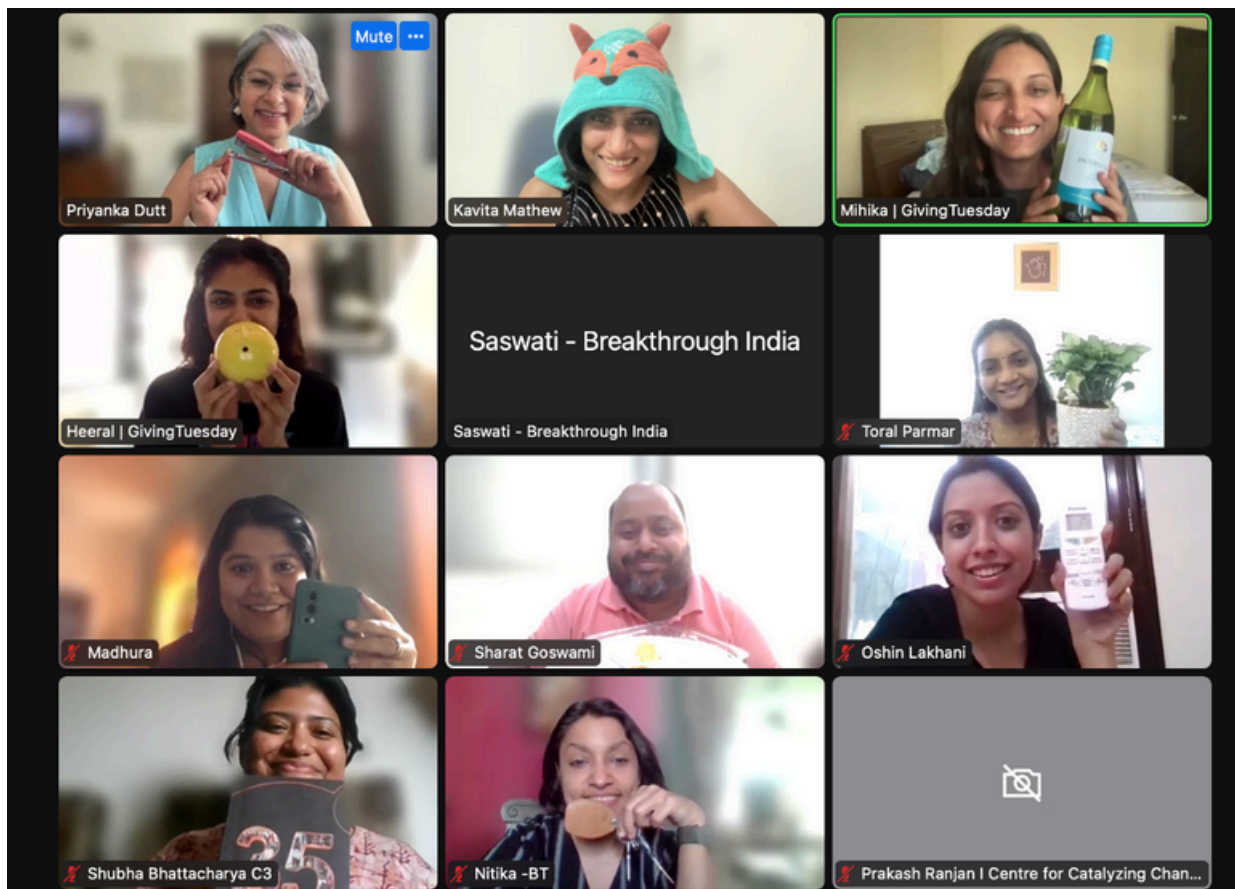
"There was lots of learning around how to initiate, build and keep a collective together. People were willing to offer, willing to step back and to keep commitments."
Partner Organisation

"Gained perspective that collaborations can work, and can be respectful, no mudslinging and no stepping on each others shoes."
Partner Organisation

"Next time one person from each organisation is to be held a little more responsible to create more check ins with all the other partners and have more touch-points between organisations."
Partner Organisation



Key Insights



All value the need of a convener in shaping the collaborative approach.

As the convener, the GivingTuesday team were informed by the values of their movement such as co-ownership and equity when facilitating the process. Their care in preparation and planning beforehand gave clarity on the process and set the tone for partners on how to work together, while maintaining a responsive and emergent mindset. Their facilitation style allowed the partners to feel equal and creating safe spaces to share transparently. With intentional dialogue prioritised from the start along with preparation from GivingTuesday on how collective decisions could be made, there was a strong sense of togetherness among all the partners.

While collaboration is familiar, co-ownership is still a new way of working and will need support to be established.

While the partners express a desire to take initiative, they share a sense of unsaid dependency on the convener i.e. to set up interactions between the collective and/or with the cohort. This dependency continues post the fellowship, where GivingTuesday is seen as the 'lead' partner in initiating and facilitating dialogue for Starling 2.0 and to engage the existing cohort after the program. Co-ownership may need to be further fostered through facilitation, particularly in the first few iterations of the program. This could be supported by exploring co-sourcing the funding to the program.



Key Insights

2

THE FELLOWSHIP GIVES ACCESS AND CONNECTION TO A WIDER COMMUNITY OF CHANGEMAKERS.

The fellows value the diversity in the cohort and partners and saw this as a strength. Through the program they remained open-minded and keen to learn from each other's experiences and work, as well as from the partner organisations. Being a part of this wider community, also supported them to be aware of their own capabilities.

MEET ANJUM

A 'mukhiya' (village chief) of a village in Bihar, Anjum found solidarity and confidence through the fellowship.

Anjum is a 37 year old woman living in a rural village of Bihar, where she is the mukhiya. As a housewife and mother living in a conservative community, she has often felt discouraged by societal norms. While her dream is to educate and create awareness around family planning, she often felt she wasn't taken seriously and especially lacked the confidence to speak to men and the elders in the community.



Through the program, Anjum has found belonging and acceptance in a broader community of changemakers, which has helped her to feel more confident. Anjum shares developing a deeper empathy of her community by hearing the experiences and work of other changemakers. By developing a set of tools relevant to her work, along with a new vocabulary for these tools, she feels stronger and empowered in herself to work more confidently in her community.

Anjum used the learnings from the program to reflect on her work in family planning and the power or privilege she may have in terms of knowledge and information on related government schemes, laws and benefits. While being elected as a mukhiya, she had a position, the cohort and modules helped her to understand how to get better results.

"There was a freedom to give feedback and share our thoughts and nobody felt bad. We all felt we are part of an important community."

"I thought about how to make a bridge between different people and use my power in a controlled way."



Key Insights

3

FELLOWS CULTIVATED A RESOURCEFUL AND ABUNDANCE-CENTRED MINDSET.

The program expanded the fellows perspective on the types of resources available to them and how to approach getting them. Fellows share learning practical and relevant ways to reframe their immediate communities as a supportive eco-system.



MEET BAALI

A teacher based in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh learnt how to think about and values the resources around her.

Baali is 30 years old and from the Gondi tribe herself, she teaches young children Gondi to help preserve the language and culture. As an independent social worker, she feels she has always struggled with outreach and getting support.

Through the program modules, Baali shares that she now understands how she can work with people nearby to get what she needs. She has learnt to recognise and value the people who can help in small ways.

Baali has been reaching out to organisations, networks and individuals to request books for her library project. Baali reached out to a girl that lives nearby who went on a trip and was grateful when she bought back 10-12 books for the library. Baali has learnt that starting small is acceptable, positive and can be achievable. Being able to use the tools that Baali has learnt from the modules has encouraged her to dream bigger and understand what steps she can take to achieve her goals such as develop books in the Gondi language and how to be inclusive by also teaching children from non-Gondi background.

"Here I learnt that I should share my work more freely - what is happening and my goals - this is a platform to gain support and spread my work and gain recognition."

"I hadn't thought the things I need could be near me or hadn't thought about my past networks and how they could help me to arrange books. I thought it would be much harder."



Key Insights

4

A TRUST-BASED APPROACH SUPPORTED FELLOWS TO ADAPT AND APPLY THEIR LEARNINGS WITHIN THEIR OWN CONTEXTS.

Trust is a core anchor across the program and the fellows were supported to feel they already know how to address the challenges within their communities. This was demonstrated across the cohort in the numerous ways they were able to adapt and apply what they learnt in their own individual ways.

MEET NARGIS

A student living in Delhi found multiple ways to put what she learnt into practice within her own work and community.

Nargis is an 18 year old student that is actively involved in raising awareness on safety and equality for women. Some of the challenges she faces in her social work is the time it can take to build trust with communities and also keeping children engaged.

While Nargis was somewhat familiar with the subjects at a high-level from previous trainings, from the fellowship, Nargis felt empowered and trusted to be able to take her learnings from across the modules and apply them to her work in the way that she views as best - no matter how small.

Nargis has learnt to approach her work it in a more systematic way and plan ahead. From knowing when and how to use data to reviewing and reframing the relationships and resources around her, the program has provided her with a toolkit of tangible and relevant practices to support her personal growth and community work.



“Emotionally I was able to share openly and fearlessly in the sessions.”

“In a recent debate on gender and violence, I used what I learnt on data and prepared numbers to help me speak.”



Key Insights

5

GENEROSITY WAS EXPRESSED AND RECEIVED IN DIFFERENT WAYS, CREATING A RIPPLE EFFECT.

FOR PARTNERS

- ➡ For partners, the value of generosity was emphasised from the start of the collaboration
- ➡ Partners feel they now have a language to describe their existing practice of generosity
- ➡ All partners felt generosity through the open sharing of each others expertise, resources and materials
- ➡ As a value, generosity can be adapted to align with a partner organisations other principles e.g. equality

FOR THE COHORT

- ➡ Many fellows took part in and enjoyed celebrating the day of GivingTuesday.
- ➡ Some see generosity as a mindset that can be practised anytime and means being helpful, even if there is nothing to gain in return
- ➡ Generosity is also seen as a way to practice humility and empathy towards others

The continuity of 'generosity' as a thread running through the program enabled fellows to cultivate a deep connect with it as a value. Generosity is a value that was introduced at the orientation in-person workshop and then regularly re-visited through the peer connection sessions and celebration of generosity and community on the day of GivingTuesday in November 2023. Despite there not being a specific module on generosity, it was front of mind for many of the fellows as an important learning and/or practice in their lives.

"I realised my own generosity. We have so much to give, but didn't know what."

Fellow

"Generosity is being demonstrated by all these organisations coming together and sharing resources."

Partner Organisation



Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that the Starling India Collective is a deliberate and unique approach to creating social change through a distributed leadership model, focusing on co-ownership, trust and equity.

With shared trust and respect at the core, both within partner organisations as well as towards the cohort, the Starling India Collective reimagines the ways in which collaboration can exist in practice across multiple levels.

- Partners experience the impact of bringing together diverse skills, resources, and perspectives towards a common goal. Having room to adapt and iterate their modules based on their knowledge and experiences within the community, allows them to feel further ownership in the process.
- The fellows share the advantages of being part of a diverse cohort, and also learning from a diverse range of organisations, that they would not otherwise have access to. They demonstrate strong shifts in confidence, primarily based on acquiring relevant knowledge and practical tools, which they were able to adapt and apply within their own contexts. The development and application of these new skills has built and expanded the cohorts approach towards leading shifts in their communities and supported them to explore alternative ways with confidence .



GOING FORWARD

In the future, there are a few key areas the Starling India Collective can consider to strengthen their approach:

- While collaboration is a familiar concept, co-ownership is a new way of working and may need to be fostered through facilitation, particularly in the first few iterations of the program. This could be supported by exploring a co-sourcing funding approach to the program.
- There is an opportunity for the partner organisations to come together in structured ways during the design of their module content, as well as during the delivery of these modules.
- The fellows seek more peer to peer learning through the program to be able to learn from each others experiences and approaches. There is an opportunity to develop facilitated and structured spaces for the fellows to connect with one another during and after the program to support their continued learning and connection.

For more information and resources about the Starling India Collective write to starlingindia@starlingcollective.com

