

STRATEGIC

PLAN

2026
2031

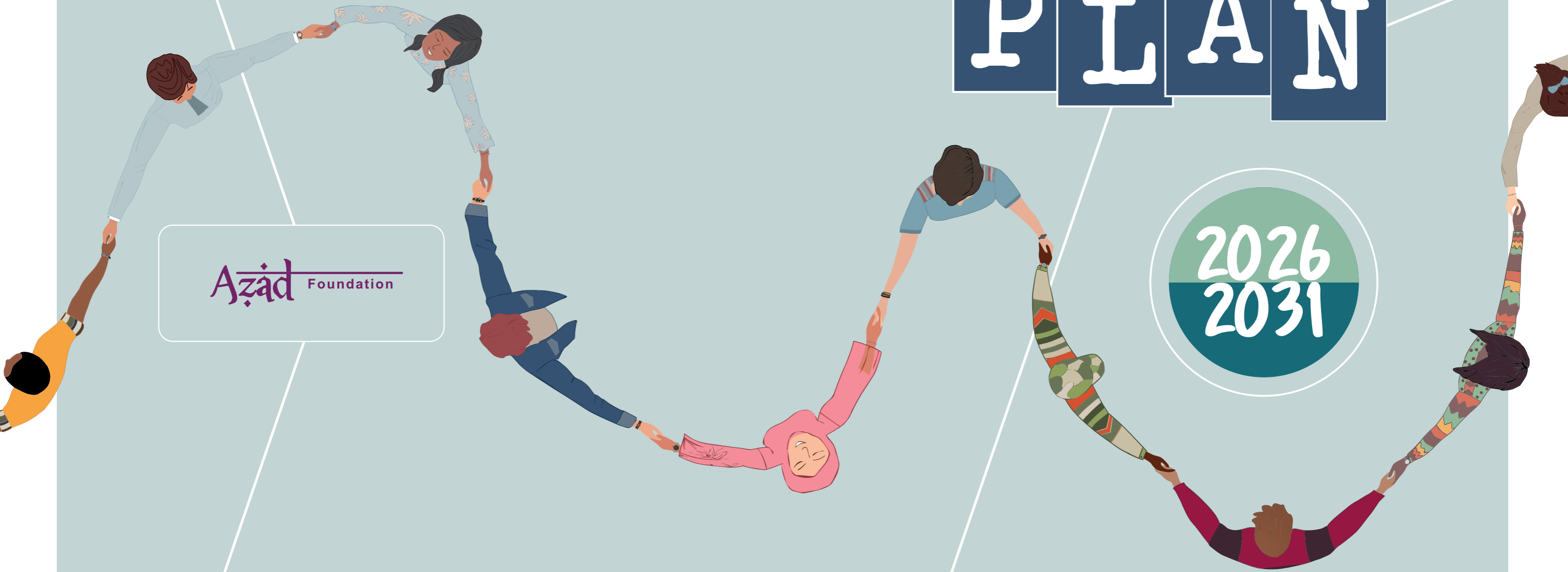


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Azad Foundation



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ABBREVIATIONS

AK	Azad Kishori
APFSD	Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development
CRCs	Community Resource Centres
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
ESRI	Environmental Systems Research Institute
FL	Feminist Leaders
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GJSE	Gender-Just Skill Education
IDTR	Institute of Driving Training and Research
IPE Global	Infrastructure Professionals Enterprise Global
KII	Key Informant Interview
LMS	Learning Management System
MGJ	Men for Gender Justice
NTP	Non-Traditional Professions
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths
WWW	Women with Wheels



DEAD STARS

Ada Limón

...We point out the stars that make Orion...
until you say, Man, we should really learn
some new constellations.

And it's true. We keep forgetting about Antlia, Centaurus,
Draco, Lacerta, Hydra, Lyra, Lynx.

But mostly we're forgetting we're dead stars too, my mouth is full
of dust and I wish to reclaim the rising —

to lean in the spotlight of streetlight with you, toward
what's larger within us, toward how we were born.

Look, we are not unspectacular things.

We've come this far, survived this much. What
would happen if we decided to survive more? To love harder?
What if we stood up with our synapses and flesh and said, No.
No, to the rising tides.

Stood for the many mute mouths of the sea, of the land?

What would happen if we used our bodies to bargain

for the safety of others, for earth,

if we declared a clean night, if we stopped being terrified,

if we launched our demands into the sky, made ourselves so big
people could point to us with the arrows they make in their minds...?

OUR CARAVAN OF HOPE & RESILIENCE

STRATEGIC
PLAN

As our planet goes through turbulent times, shaping and planning our work for the next five years amid such uncertainty is undoubtedly challenging. It is a moment that calls for deep concern, reflection, and responsibility. Yet, as with all difficult endeavours, it also demands hope and clarity of purpose. We therefore embarked on the development of Azad's Strategic Plan for 2026–31 at this critical juncture with mindful resilience and care. It also requires courage and commitment. At Azad, we draw our courage from knowledge and our commitment both from and to the communities we work with. Together, this courage and commitment strengthen our collective competence and enable us to grow as an agile institution.

Working with women¹ and gender-diverse people from resource-poor² backgrounds is always accompanied by unseen barriers. To continue and deepen our work, supporting resource-poor women to choose non-traditional professions (NTPs) and communities and build gender-just ecosystems, we must together uphold the light of hope and love. A Strategic Plan serves as a ray of light – illuminating the path ahead, marking milestones, and helping us discover ground-breaking alleys alongside women.

As the poet Ada Limón reminds us, "...we are not unspectacular things, we've come this far, survived this much. What would happen if we decided to survive more? To love harder?" For Azad, this means being strategic yet supple, deepening relationships, nourishing the ecosystem, and igniting progressive aspirations among the women, men and gender-diverse people we work with.

To prepare for the next five years, we invoked our spirit of collaboration and initiated an open dialogue for strategic planning. Recognizing the need for both structure and process, Azad undertook a consultative exercise with all stakeholders, beginning with a session called Blue-Sky Thinking. The Strategic Plan has been shaped with care by the keen perspectives and grounded voices of our team members, community members, Board members, co-travellers, and sector leaders.

This generative process enabled a cross-section of participants to reflect on our established and emerging understandings, and to reimagine our vision in relation to national and global contexts. What has emerged is an outline of the guiding path we hope to pursue in the coming years, one that bridges the realities of today with the possibilities of tomorrow.

As we look ahead along this path, we are also excited about a significant milestone, marking twenty years of Azad and Sakha in 2028. We look forward to celebrating two decades of our journey with our drivers, community leaders, team members, Board members, donors, and fellow travellers.

You are warmly invited to join this caravan in the pages that follow.

¹We use the term 'women' in its most inclusive sense (cis, non-binary, queer, or trans); for Azad, 'women' are all those folks who identify themselves as such, even though they may have been labelled differently.

²For Azad Foundation, resource poor is not merely a state of financial impoverishment. It recognizes the intersectionality of those who are marginalized and thus the term (resource poor) refers to (someone) disadvantaged by one or several of the following axes of inequality: social and economic exclusion (based on gender, caste, class, religion, ethnicity, race, skin colour etc.); disabilities; sexual orientation and choices; habitat; and political exclusion.



THE PROCESS

A GROUND-UP CO-DESIGN

To realize the imagined or to actualize intent requires grit and grind. And so, in early 2025, our leadership (the Founders, Board Members, National Leadership Team, and the Core Team) gathered for three days to forge this new Strategic Plan via the 'Blue-Sky Thinking' method.

Together, they reviewed fluctuating, evolving landscapes (social, economic, technological), their respective influence upon Azad's mission, and gains during the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan; they also reassessed Azad's ongoing programmes and deliberated on the future of its prime initiatives, while keeping an eye on Azad's core values.

The 'key takeaways' that unfolded from this introspection were: the need for context-driven strategic planning, community-relevant and realistic programmatic evolution, an adaptive yet value-driven approach, the importance of strengthening institutional foundations and stakeholders' ownership of the Strategic Plan.

Building on these, the National Leadership Team and the Core Team decided to adopt a structured and participatory process to envisage this Strategic Plan, one that captures diverse, interdisciplinary perspectives from Azad and its stakeholders. Such a process, we thought, would best reflect our bent towards community-driven co-creation. Besides, it will build ownership of and commitment from the chief actors of our ecosystem towards the implementation of this plan.

AZAD'S ORGANIZATIONAL FUNDAMENTALS

VISION

A world where all women – in particular from underprivileged contexts – enjoy full citizenship, pursue a profession with dignity, and generate wealth and value for all.

MISSION

To enable women from resource-poor communities with skills and knowledge to enter and sustain in non-traditional professions, empower themselves and build a gender-just, equitable society.

FOCAL POINTS

Employment with Dignity



Non-Traditional Skill Education

Gender-Just Ecosystem

VALUES

WE ARE

- Inclusive across social, cultural, linguistic, sexual choices & other differences.
- Secular in our beliefs and actions.
- Respectful of every person and ensure that all are treated with dignity.
- Take responsibility for our learning and our actions.
- Professional about our commitments.
- Transparent and accountable in all our processes.

Our policies and practices are shaped by our values.



AZAD'S APPROACH

OUR BLUEPRINT

Given how structurally excluded women and girls are in the communities, country and society described earlier, Azad chose to respond as a feminist organization—by working with and among urban women who are resource-poor and marginalized by gender, caste, class, religion, colour, and sexuality. We enable them with non-traditional skills and feminist perspectives on gender, law, rights, and sexuality, so that their non-traditional profession³ brings them closer to empowered dignity.

Specifically, Azad works among and with urban communities to ensure women's participation and retention in our Women with Wheels (WWW) programme. To do this, Azad prepares adolescent girls to build their agency for decision-making about education and age of marriage via its Azad Kishori (AK) programme. It also has a special focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) education and jobs. Since deep-rooted patriarchy and masculinity shape men and boys who then become the barriers to a gender-just world, Azad also works with young boys and men in the community through its Men for Gender Justice (MGJ) programme to challenge and change ideas and practices of harmful masculinity. To support women in the community get a wide-angle understanding of their lives, our Feminist Leadership (FL) programme nurtures young women leaders within the communities. They then support their peers via awareness of and response to gender-based violence; they also help with tangible issues (that impact their access to education, non-traditional profession) such as citizenship entitlements and gender-inclusive infrastructure within neighbourhoods. Together, the AK, MGJ, and FL programmes equip community leaders to build gender-just ecosystems so that women and young girls can exercise their agency and autonomy.

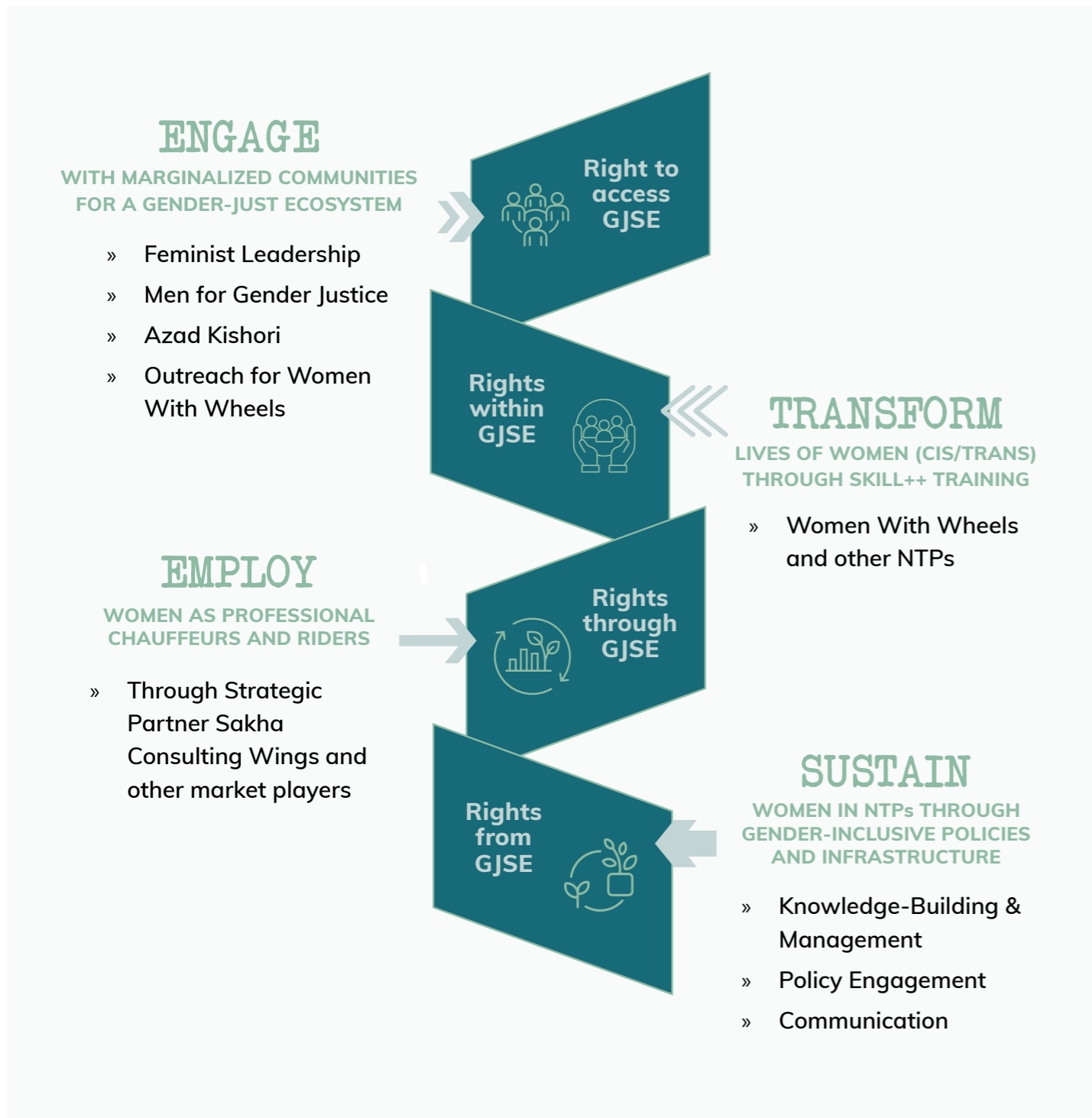
³ Drawing from feminist economic scholarship, we consciously use the term 'professions' rather than 'livelihoods' as a strategic shift moving forward. This signals our intent to move women from non-traditional livelihoods into non-traditional professions, recognizing their work as skilled, dignified, and structurally embedded within the economy and not merely survival-based. The intention is also to enable women's participation and their positioning as primary breadwinners for their families.

1

GENDER-JUST SKILL EDUCATION

A RIGHTS BASED FRAMEWORK

Azad works with its partners within the GJSE framework and integrates it across its programmes; this helps equip women with the values, knowledge, and skills to challenge gender stereotypes and promote equal rights.



2

NON-TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONS

OUR DNA

Among the most crippling impacts of patriarchy on the lives of women is the restriction on their mobility and, thereby, their very selfhood. Women are socialized to believe that the world outside the home is a minefield of obvious threats and hidden dangers. In the garb of protection and safety, the movement of girls and women is curtailed, if not blocked. Evidence-based studies have long established, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic⁴, that the truth is always more complex than the binary of private-versus-public. The family – natal or marital – is and can be as much a site of violence and violations as its public counterparts.

In fact, the oppression of women at home is hidden in plain sight, with a spectrum of endless and repetitive domestic and caregiving tasks that women are expected to perform (housekeeping, cooking, cleaning, washing, and so on) and thereby stay confined indoors.

On the other hand, traditional jobs and income-earning opportunities for women – tailoring, craft, making food items such as papad (savory Indian wafer) and pickles – validate the flawed case for domesticity. That is, only home-based jobs which allow women to first complete their primary duties towards the family (and then earn money) are preferable. Perpetuated generation after generation, such attitudes have kept women from aspiring for more than domesticity or seeing themselves as the ‘breadwinners’ of their families.

Such jobs are utterly unlike vocations such as driving, a non-traditional profession that compels women out of their comfort zone. Driving involves interaction with strangers, navigation of unfamiliar neighbourhoods, and a range of unanticipated situations. Such newfound mobility and experiences give women – eventually – enormous courage, confidence, motivation, and the ‘can-do’ spirit.

As drivers (of taxis, buses, or trucks), women break into the male bastion of driving and thereby dent gendered stereotypes around ‘men’s work’ and ‘women’s work’. By choosing non-traditional work, women help uproot patriarchal values that otherwise go unchallenged when women are seen in ‘safe’ work, especially home-bound work.

Therefore, the rationale behind the focus of Azad is to support women enter the stream of non-traditional jobs such as driving that is one among the many in Non-Traditional Livelihoods Network.

⁴Source: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>.

3

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

Azad Foundation has a multifaceted partnership strategy to expand Women with Wheels that empowers resource-poor women through non-traditional employment in driving, to foster both economic independence and gender equity. At its core, the partnership strategy integrates community mobilization, comprehensive training, sustainable employment, and challenging patriarchal norms through the Gender-Just Skills Education (GJSE) framework. The framework combines modules on technical skills with self-empowerment (on rights, reproductive health, violence prevention, and professionalism).

Since 2015, partnerships have been pivotal to the programme's expansion—not only through Azad's direct presence in Jaipur, Kolkata, and Chennai, but also via collaborations with Jan Vikas/Basera in Ahmedabad, SAMAN in Indore, Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD) in Bhubaneswar, and Humsafar in Lucknow by 2019. Over time, Azad has shifted from transactional partnerships to co-creation where allies contribute to resources, advocacy, and systemic change.

Internationally, this strategy has supported incubation of the model: in Ghana (2016) through an Empower-funded exchange with the Network for Women's Rights, and in Timor Leste (2018) with support from and collaboration with local partners of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education.

In this phase, Azad will continue to expand the Women with Wheels programme and attempt six new partnerships across cities.

Azad structures its work on non-traditional employment for women and its dignity through partnership with Sakha, Non-Traditional Livelihoods (NTL) Network, and other market players.

Sakha, Azad's Strategic Partner, promotes opportunities and markets for women in transport. It negotiates on behalf of women for work conditions that are safe and remunerative and assists women to navigate the demands of professional life.

The NTL Network is a vibrant space of 32 organizations and 13 individuals from 13 States of India. It harnesses knowledge on non-traditional professions and builds policy engagement platforms to promote gender-sensitive markets, skill training in NTP, and gender-inclusive infrastructure. Azad has steered work on non-traditional professions in the country and anchors its Co-secretariat.



THE BIG PICTURE

EXTERNAL CONTEXTS -
TRENDS, TRAJECTORIES & SCENARIO

Such are the intricately linked pathways of human lives that each of its facets – economic, socio-political, financial, climate-induced, or cultural – is bound to impact the other. For Azad, it is the textures and narratives of women's skills, education, and labour that are at the heart of our work. Therefore, we have followed closely certain socio-economic developments so that we can gauge the meaning and effectiveness of our role in the lives of girls and women from resource-poor communities.

For example, by 2030, India is set to become the fourth-largest economy in the world with a projected GDP of \$7.3 trillion, reflecting its rapid economic rise and global standing.⁵ At the same time, it has a ranking of 131 in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index and a position at 143 in the Economic Participation and Opportunity Index (among 148 countries).⁶ While this confirms some progress, it also points to the potential for improvement in the gender gap by unlocking opportunities for women and their economic contribution. Although data from the last Census is dated (2011), other studies – such as those referred to in the following paragraphs – suggest that many indicators of women's development have seen gradual improvement but still require sustained attention.

What follows are certain socio-economic progressions of the recent past and how we see the future unfolding over the course of the next Strategic Plan.

School enrolment for girls has improved significantly in the form of Gross Enrolment Ratio at primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels.⁷ However, 65 per cent of girls aged 15–18 years discontinue schooling due to household responsibilities.⁸ **This highlights the need for further interventions in retaining adolescent girls in education.**

Evidence⁹ shows that over the last 15 years, the prevalence of child marriage has declined steadily over generations. India has made impressive headway in comparison to other countries in South Asia. Yet, 23 per cent of young women are married before the age of 18. **If child marriage is to be eliminated by 2030, continued and substantive emphasis is required.**

⁵Source: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?NotelD=154660&ModuleId=3>.

⁶Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/trending/top-10-listing/top-bottom-10-countries-in-wef-global-gender-gap-index-2025-india-rank-10061927/>.

⁷Source: Press Information Bureau. 2021, Ministry of Education, Government of India.

⁸Source: <https://www.undp.org/india/blog/beyond-boundaries-promoting-non-traditional-livelihoods-women>.

⁹Source: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/ending-child-marriage-a-profile-of-progress-in-india-2023/>.

Most women and girls are steered towards non-technical courses, as is evident from the enrolment at Industrial Training Institutes (ITI). Representation of women and young girls in technical fields is still an emerging phenomenon. For instance, only 8 per cent of female enrolments at the ITIs are in engineering-related courses, compared to 92 per cent for young men and boys.¹⁰ **This indicates a promising space for policy and programmatic interventions to encourage girls in STEM education and skill training.**

The labour force participation rate (LFPR) for urban Indian women rose from 20.4 per cent in the year 2017-18 to 25.4 per cent in the year 2022–23.¹¹ While this is an encouraging development, women continue to be a small section of the workforce. In urban areas, the LFPR for females above 15 years was 25 per cent (June 2025), compared to 75 per cent for males aged above 15.¹² **The participation of urban women in employment needs a strong impetus.**

A large section of women are part of the informal sector, but they have no social security or benefits. On the basis of data (52.2 per cent women are salaried, 6.6 per cent work in casual labour, 25.1 per cent engage in low-productivity activities such as farming, livestock, poultry and so on, 12 per cent are self-employed or unpaid care workers and 1 per cent are self-employed), it can be extrapolated that most salaried women are domestic workers with no benefits or paid leave.¹³ **Creating pathways into more formal and secure jobs can strengthen women's economic resilience and help them claim paid leaves, medical insurance, and other social security benefits.**

Women continue to shoulder a greater share of care and household responsibilities – 289 minutes per day compared to 88 minutes by men.¹⁴ Moreover, 41 per cent of women (15-59 years of age) participate in unpaid caregiving as against only 21.4 per cent of men.¹⁵ **Addressing this imbalance through care-supportive policies and services could significantly increase women's ability to participate in the workforce.**

National data – that over 80 per cent of women require permission from their families to move independently – reflects both safety concerns and patriarchal norms¹⁶ against a considerable crime rate against women in India (66.4 per cent per lakh women in 2022).¹⁷ **Ensuring safer public spaces and transport besides gender-expansive infrastructure can help enable women's mobility and access to opportunities.**

¹⁰Source: Ministry of Skill Development And Entrepreneurship website – dashboard tab – <https://www.ncvtmis.gov.in/Pages/Dashboard/AdmittedTraineeDashboard.aspx>.

¹¹Source: <https://eacpm.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/EACPM-WP-Female-LFPR-India.pdf>.

¹²Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/government-data-show-fall-in-number-of-women-at-work-in-rural-urban-areas/article69816140.ece>.

¹³Source: (the Periodic Labour Force Survey for working age population 15-59 years) <https://ceda.ashoka.edu.in/too-good-to-be-true-steadily-rising-female-labour-force-participation-rates-in-india/>.

¹⁴Source: National Statistics Office, 2024.

¹⁵Source: https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/TUS_Report_2024_28.03.2025F.pdf?download=1.

¹⁶Source: <https://scroll.in/article/829205/80-indian-women-need-permission-to-visit-health-centre-5-have-sole-control-over-choice-of-husband>.

About 29 per cent of women in India (aged 18-49 years) report having experienced physical violence at least once since the age of 15.¹⁸ **Addressing GBV remains essential to enable women's pursuit of professions with dignity.**

Women's access to the internet continues to grow, but at present only 39 per cent of Indian women have access to mobile internet as compared to 58 per cent of men.¹⁹ **Skilling women to use the internet and empowering them to own digital devices is necessary to bridge the digital gender gap.**

The International Monetary Fund projects that India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) could shoot by 27 per cent if women's participation in the labour force matches that of men.²⁰ Bloomberg suggests that closing the gender gap in employment could boost India's GDP by nearly a third by 2050.²¹ **The 'skilling paradox' must be addressed: according to it, women participate in skilling programmes but only a fraction can pursue non-traditional professions (NTPs) due to structural and social barriers such as unpaid care work, workplace safety, clean and hygienic public toilets, dearth of skill-building opportunities, among others.**

1

AZAD HISTORY & TRACK RECORD

The outlook and insights shared in the previous section give Azad its purpose, direction...and hope! It establishes that the world of work is changing fast (and poised to change even further), unlike norms about women's 'duties' at home and to their families (natal and marital) that seem so unchanging for the large majority.

And this is why, over the last two decades, Azad tackled some serious challenges women face—the skilling gap, low workforce participation of women, and of course gender norms that restrict their mobility, safety, and access to resources. With sustained conversations in the communities we work with, and building and honing their leadership skills and training in non-traditional professions, Azad has guided women to enter and continue in the transport sector.

¹⁷Source: https://images.assettype.com/barandbench/2023-12/dc0ba053-a1f0-4e6a-a5f8-e7668ddd2249/NCRB_STATS.pdf.

¹⁸Source: NFHS-5, 2019-21; <https://gipe.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Gender-Based-Violence-A-Shred-of-Evidence-from-NFHS-5.pdf>.

¹⁹Source: <https://www.gsma.com/r/gender-gap/>.

²⁰Source: <https://www.undp.org/india/blog/beyond-boundaries-promoting-non-traditional-livelihoods-women>.

²¹Source: <https://www.undp.org/india/blog/beyond-boundaries-promoting-non-traditional-livelihoods-women>.

Today, more than **5,500 women trained by Azad hold permanent four- and two-wheeler licenses**, and over **4,400 are employed as professional drivers and riders** across Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Jaipur, Indore, Ahmedabad and beyond borders in Europe. These women now enjoy significantly greater mobility, are the primary earners for their families, and over **80 per cent report being better equipped to tackle gender-based violence**. With our feminist leadership and capacity-building programmes, we have also built a robust cohort of **450 young women leaders**—they have assisted over **35,000 women to access and exercise citizenship rights**, and **762 women to navigate gender-based violence**. In parallel, Azad's work with adolescents has nurtured **433 Kishori leaders** who, through a **peer network of 4,000 girls**, are challenging early marriage, continuing their education, and pursuing career pathways of their choice. In the last ten years, Azad's work with young boys and men has groomed more than **500 male leaders** and engaged 4,934 boys to actively challenge harmful gender norms and toxic masculinity through campaigns such as 'Ghar Ka Kaam Sabka Kaam'. By sharing unpaid care work and supporting women in entering non-traditional professions, they are kindling change for individuals, families, and communities.

This journey and the evidence of ground and policy-level shifts have given us the confidence that when we keep our eyes on and stay responsive to the immediate and long-term needs of the community, it impacts them (and us) in many palpable ways. The following segments sum up:

- a. the most striking of all developments in the recent past, as well as
- b. our reflections and responses to those.

Post-pandemic transformations

In the initial years of the previous Strategic Plan, Azad had to prepare itself for its involvement with communities that were re-emerging from the financial, structural, and emotional toll of COVID-19. Community members, especially women, had borne a higher brunt in terms of health, food, job, (gender-based) violence, and unpaid care work. Both girls and women had limited access to digital devices and the internet in a world that had increasingly turned digital.

Economic reconfiguration

The emergence of the gig economy and the rise of e-commerce during and after the pandemic prompted Azad to pivot towards two-wheeler driving training as non-traditional employment for women. However, concerns about income stability, and medical and retirement benefits emerged and persist.

OUR JOURNEY | 2021-2026

The crisis of climate change

Like other systemic issues, climate change does not impact everyone equally. Women, especially those from marginalized settings, are most disadvantaged vis-à-vis the climate crisis. As has been seen, Indian cities experience the two-fold brunt of climate change: extreme heat waves in summer and flooding during monsoons. The last decade alone has witnessed a 19-fold increase in extreme 'heat wave' days; by 2030, climate change is expected to drive a 43 per cent rise in the intensity of extreme rainfall events across India, making the country hotter and wetter. With the inevitable impact of climate imperatives on the transport sector, Azad targets the integration of climate-resilient practices into its training curricula.

AI and automation, a mixed bag for women

While automation and AI present new STEM-related education and job opportunities for women, they also bring serious concerns: (1) exclusion of women due to existing inequalities (women comprise only 29 per cent of the global tech force), and (2) women suffer the larger impact of the employment loss caused by technology. A UN report (Gender Snapshot 2025) posits that nearly 28 per cent of (global) jobs for women are at risk from AI-related developments as compared to 21 per cent of jobs for men. Mindful of this trend, Azad has included specific training modules for women and young adolescent girls on digital trends and STEM courses.

Urbanization and migration

With a projected doubling of the urban population by 2050 (reaching over 800 million²²), India is expected to witness the largest urban growth globally. Pressure on informal settlements in cities highlights the need for inclusive urban policies (for example, access to quality healthcare and education) and portable social protections. Azad is constantly working to tackle these through its change agents who help community members with access to social and financial security schemes and essential citizenship documents such as the Voter Card, Aadhaar, and PAN.

For this new strategic phase, Azad will build on this momentum with renewed ambition and clarity of purpose, while responding to and navigating the complex, uncertain and turbulent but hopeful future. This strategic phase will also be informed by the journey we have had in the last five years and the learnings from the same (2021-26).

²²Source: https://urbantransitions.global/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SUO-India-Designed-Report-UPDATED_12Aug.pdf.

2.1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP BUILDING

In the last phase of our growth, we harnessed the explosion of the platform and e-commerce²³ economy by training women drivers on two-wheelers and prioritizing their digital literacy. This helped them step into new public and personal roles. Besides, Azad's response during COVID-19 (initiatives for food security, GBV, and health support to build resilient communities) affirmed our stakeholders' confidence in our ability to pivot rapidly. Amid the many restrictions of the pandemic, we adapted our training model to a hybrid format so as to maintain our work on the ground. We managed to reach **6,34,703 women and queer persons** through surveys, campaigns, and community mobilization, and supported **1,980 adolescent girls to exercise agency** for their marriage, education, and mobility. **262 Feminist Leaders** got trained to create gender-just ecosystems in communities, and alumni networks were formed and engaged to build solidarity and synergies between programmes. **3,118 women enrolled in WWW** (80 per cent via door-to-door surveys). **1,746 young men** challenged toxic masculinities by sharing unpaid care responsibilities and supporting women's entry NTPs such as driving. Our campaign '#SamantaBandhan' reached **25,596 community members** while '#GharKaKaamSabkaKaam' engaged **1,01,700 people with 45 of our partners**.

Two years back, I was told by people from other organizations that it was impossible to engage with women from the neighbourhood where I worked. "Women there do not come out of the home at all", they told me. I took it as a challenge and worked hard. Four women from that area landed jobs. I felt so proud. - Mobilizer, Kolkata

We were also able to deepen our focus on digital inclusion as well as psycho-social well-being. In the flux of external contexts and internal dynamics of the community, Azad strengthened its community-centric approach—it sustained trust, despite the pervasive repression of the socio-political environment.

²³ Azad has a discerning and sensitive position vis-à-vis the challenges that the gig economy poses for its workers, especially women. To mitigate those, both Azad and Sakha actively negotiate with gig employers to create gender-inclusive working conditions and infrastructure in the gig industry.

2.2 TRANSFORM, TO EMPLOY WOMEN AS EMPOWERED PROFESSIONALS OF NTPS

Our skilling-cum-perspective building work among women, their families, and employers saw tangible progress in the last five years. This assured us, the communities we work with, as well as our CSO partners and other stakeholders about our earnest accountability. As an illustration, a total of **1,197 women were employed** (in the e-commerce, private, and commercial transport sector). **2,000 women obtained permanent driving licences** (across India). Of these, **70 per cent belonged to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 22 per cent to religious minorities, and 60 to 70 per cent were from families that earned less than Rs. 5,000 a month.** 3 per cent of our trainees were single women and more than 80 per cent were survivors of gender-based violence. These demographics and numbers are in line with Azad's focus on women from resource-poor groups. There were also a couple of novel initiations in this strategic planning cycle: of the women trained in driving heavy vehicles (buses and trailer trucks), **18 were employed by Baton Transport to drive trailer trucks in Europe** and over **93 women drivers were employed by the Delhi Transport Corporation.** Slowly but resolutely, women are progressing to acquiring HMV licences (12 women have acquired HMV licences in Kolkata) and visible career progression is being witnessed in driving. Azad also extended the Women with Wheels programme to Chennai. While the growth of the gig economy has created new job opportunities for women, many of these roles remain precarious, characterized by long and unpredictable working hours, low income stability, and little-to-no social security.

The last five years saw us make headway in research, knowledge building and management, communication, policy and partnerships, which further fuelled resource-poor women's abilities to emerge as independent and financially secure women.

2.3 SUSTAIN BY INFLUENCING POLICIES + MARKETS TO BE GENDER-INCLUSIVE

Research and Evidence Building

For a strong body of evidence that supports our argument for non-traditional professions, a team of academics from B.R. Ambedkar University, Delhi, conducted a feminist '[impact assessment](#)' of Azad's programmes. The outcome underlined how women trainees gained confidence, mobility, socio-economic autonomy, and respect from their families for their newfound driving skills, profession, and a place in the larger economy. Another study, in collaboration with Zubaan, explored the complex [inter-relationship between gender-based violence and women's work](#). Azad's study '[Claiming Spaces for Women in Public Transport](#)', studied factors that influence women's recruitment and retention as bus drivers in public transport and offered key insights and recommendations. Azad Foundation, in partnership with Sabar Institute, also carried out [audits of public bus depots in Delhi](#) as well as an audit of the accessibility, safety, and hygiene of [383 public toilets in Kolkata](#).

Policy Engagement

Azad's eight years of engagement with the Delhi Transport Corporation finally helped modify the eligibility criteria for women drivers. This led to the **recruitment of 93+ women drivers.** On behalf of women who aspire to acquire heavy motor vehicle driving licences, we are making similar efforts in other States and engaging with male staff to create more gender-sensitive workspaces for women in NTP. Our engagement with the government of West Bengal resulted in the Pink Cabs initiative wherein **16 women from Azad were given taxis** at a subsidized cost. Additionally, in 2025, we collaborated with the government of West Bengal as part of their fleet of Yellow Heritage Cabs; **20 yellow taxis have since been launched to be driven by women from Azad.**

Strategic Communications

We sustained our efforts to mainstream women's issues in non-traditional professions in local, regional, and global fora. As we developed our communications strategy, we also revamped Azad's website to reflect the evolving nature of the organization, our work, and its context. To consolidate our social media presence, we made a quantum leap in our use of social media. We used these platforms effectively in campaigns such as 'Ghar Ka Kaam Sabka Kaam', 'One Billion Rising (OBR)', besides our regular, on-going work. Through effective communication, we influenced governments and CSOs to adopt NTP for women as a viable employment option.

Network Building and Partnerships

With all the work at the NTL Network, we were able to add to it **10 new members (total members – 45)**, including seven organizations and three individuals from diverse backgrounds across **13 States** during our last strategic cycle.

Azad shaped the NTP discourse by its participation at the Commission on the Status of Women, Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, High-level Political Forum, the Voluntary National Review discussions on Sustainable Development Goals organized by the United Nations and other such fora. Given the importance of skilling as a route to dignified employment, the NTL Network conducted a study on the New Education Policy 2020 formulated by the Government of India. We shared the findings and recommendations at various sustainable development and policy engagement fora in India and Asia.

During the 2021-26 strategic cycle, Azad was instrumental in launching (in collaboration with iPartner and National Foundation for India) the Kamla Bhasin Award for Driving Gender Equality Across South Asia. To carry forward the legacy of Kamla Bhasin, the Award acknowledges the work of cis and trans women who claim space in non-traditional professions as well as cis and trans men who work with men to challenge patriarchy and build gender-just ecosystems. Instituting the Kamla Bhasin Award has been instructive for collaboration and regional solidarity.

The Kamla Bhasin Award is remarkable. There are so many awards given in the name of men. We are proud that Azad is giving one in a woman's name.

– Mobilizer, Women with Wheels, Chennai

In terms of partnerships, Azad joined hands with several networks such as Men Engage India and Global, Nari Diwas Udyapan Manch, Non-Traditional Livelihoods Network, besides other organizations in India and South Asia. Azad has also entered into a strategic partnership with the O.P. Jindal Global University for knowledge building.

Knowledge Building and Management

We digitized the Monitoring Information Systems of WWW programme to make the measurement and evaluation processes more efficient.

Apart from this, we faced challenges in securing resources for research as Azad is not perceived as an independent research organization. This is a critical gap for us because for global and regional policy engagement, we require research that speaks through facts and strategic arguments.

2.4 CULTIVATE, A COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP CULTURE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

This phase saw Azad make a foundational turn to foster collective leadership. Unlike traditional Founder-led structures and conceptions of leadership, we transitioned towards a system-driven, collective leadership model. We believe this will promote an ambience of shared purpose, higher trust and cohesion, and therefore effective teamwork. We consciously worked towards building collective leadership models across all levels of the organization. A key learning during this phase was the importance and need for collective well-being and its integration in organizational systems.

As part of our 'Next Generation Leadership Development Programme', we have instituted a Core Team that comprises our next generation of leaders who have completed a batch of this (above-mentioned) programme. A second batch of nine leaders has also participated in the same programme.

Over the last two decades and particularly in the last five years, Azad's work has helped shift the narrative from 'non-traditional livelihoods' to 'non-traditional professions', challenging the idea of livelihoods as merely a bare minimum means of survival. Instead, Azad frames women's economic participation as an aspirational career journey toward dignity, recognition and long-term inclusion, while addressing the intersecting barriers of class, caste, gender, minority identities and other forms of marginalization that shape women's access to work. Within the transport sector, this shift is visible as women advance from Light Motor Vehicle (LMV) driving to Heavy Motor Vehicle (HMV) driving, with emerging opportunities both within India and internationally, including Europe. These milestones have been made possible through Azad's deep and sustained engagement with communities, focused on building a supportive ecosystem.



THEORY OF CHANGE

OVERVIEW

Our Theory of Change outlines four interconnected strategic objectives—Engage, Transform, Sustain, and Cultivate—that collectively drive empowered and lasting change. It illustrates how our strategic thrusts are linked to key assumptions, learnings, and adaptive approaches, shaping pathways toward meaningful outcomes. Together, these elements converge toward our overarching goal: enabling resource-poor women to enter and sustain themselves in NTPs, while strengthening the ecosystem that supports their agency and inclusion.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

- Accessible State GBV support systems
- Adequate physical infrastructure is available for CRCs
- Continued demand, market willingness, favorable policy environment and sustained donor support
- Digital enablement through smooth technology adoption
- Climate resilient infrastructure and systems for women in NTPs


OUR LEARNINGS


- Creating solidarity networks and support for citizenship rights help women enter and sustain in NTPs
- Engagement with men & boys helps reduce care burden for women & challenges toxic masculinities
- Skill++ approach, engagement with family, trainees and market enable scalable inclusion and retention of women in NTPs
- Organizational strengthening ensures accountability
- Sustained and diverse policy engagement shapes ecosystems


SHIFTS AND ADAPTION


- Rapid adaptation to COVID crisis via hybrid, two-wheeler and EV trainings
- Green livelihoods for women drivers (e-cab, e-scooter roles)
- Community-led crisis response via physical & psycho-social health, food security, safety & livelihood opportunities
- Digital transition for outreach, data collection & training
- Collective leadership and care-centered workplace practices

OUR STRATEGIC THRUST

- 

ENGAGE
with resource-poor communities for a gender-just ecosystem
- 

TRANSFORM
women as empowered professionals of NTPs
- 

SUSTAIN
women in NTPs by influencing policies + markets to be gender-inclusive
- 

CULTIVATE
a collaborative leadership culture to enhance efficiency and collective well-being

KEY OUTCOMES

- Facilitating women’s entry into NTPs by reducing GBV, increasing shared care work, and building gender-inclusive infrastructure.
- Women become non-traditional professionals with enhanced mobility, access to education; build economic agency and improve social capital.
- More women access Skill++ modules through interactive LMS. Data management and monitoring becomes efficient and accurate.
- Research, policy engagement, networks and partnerships built with strategic communication to mainstream NTPs and sustain women in NTPs.
- Inclusive and more diverse ecosystem; resilient organization and financial sustainability with collaborative, value-driven leadership across levels.

GOAL

Resource-poor women access transformative skills, enter and sustain in non-traditional professions (NTPs), and exercise control over their financial resources, bodies, lives, and decision-making.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1



ENGAGE

with resource-poor communities
for a gender-just ecosystem

OPERATIONAL PATHWAYS

- Outreach work (also done by Azad Kishoris, Feminist Leadership, and Men for Gender Justice Programmes)
- Feminist perspective + leadership building of young men, boys, girls, and women via capacity training, exposure visits, campaigns, and mentoring
- Change agents build awareness on NTPs and GBV, shift gender norms among individuals, families, and communities
- **80% young girls** from resource-poor communities are aware of career choices; 50% enter NTPs/STEM professions
- **2,550 boys, young men** build peer networks to challenge toxic masculinity
- The Center for Gender and Masculinities builds capacities of **45 organizations** via four courses on Gender and Masculinities
- **10,000 women from resource-poor communities** choose NTP skill programmes to challenge gendered norms

OUR SHORT AND LONG-TERM PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- **500 feminist leaders enable 55,000 women** from the community to access citizenship rights and social security benefits via citizenship documents
- **4.5 lakh women** from resource-poor communities will have information on NTPs, GBV, and unpaid care work
- **80% young girls** from resource-poor communities complete their higher education and reject early marriage
- Gender-inclusive infrastructure planned for/built to improve women's mobility and access to NTPs
- At least **450 young girls create solidary networks**, ensure safety + decision making
- **80% girls exercise agency** to negotiate marriage, bodily autonomy
- **50% young boys, men** spend 176 minutes in domestic care work to challenge gender norms

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2



TRANSFORM

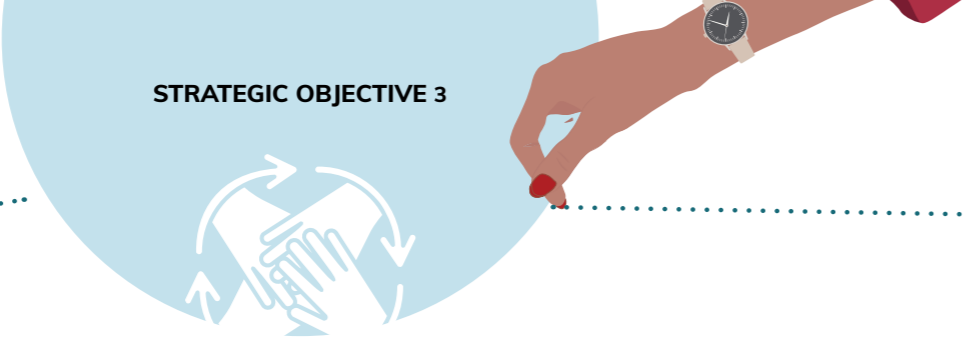
women as empowered
professionals of NTPs

OPERATIONAL PATHWAYS

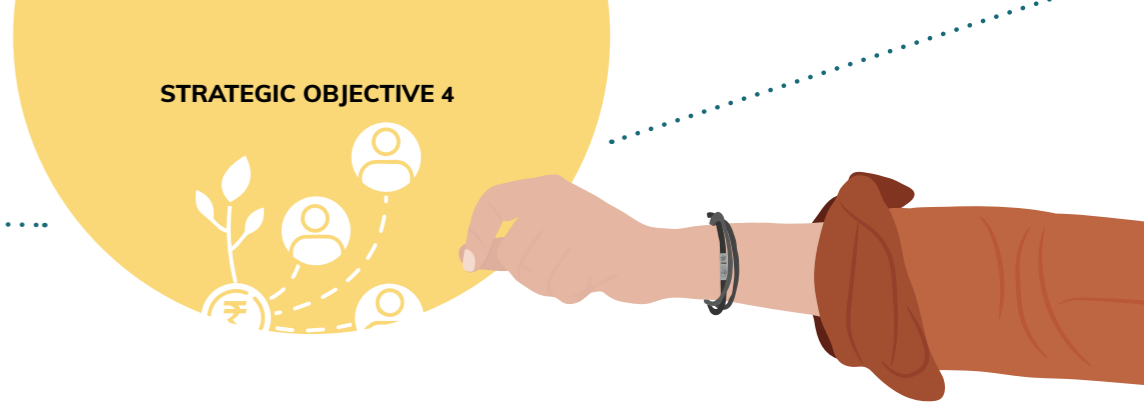
- Skill++ training for WWW and new NTPs to recruit, retain women
- Expansion and scaling of WWW in partnership with the State + CSOs
- Digitization of training modules to scale programmes
- Expansion to Heavy Motor Vehicle, in partnership with the State and market
- Engagement with trainees + families to counter structural barriers (GBV, mobility restrictions, etc.)
- **6,906 women become employed** in NTPs
- **100% women** report enhanced mobility
- **100% women trainees** will have access and support to address GBV
- At least **500 women build alumni solidarity network** to gain social capital
- **14 digitized training modules** enable women in NTPs to access content multiple times

OUR SHORT AND LONG-TERM PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- **8,000 women** gain employable skills to become professionals in driving + new NTPs
- **6 new geographies** adopt Skill++ training for WWW
- **70% women** in NTPs have control over their income + report asset ownership
- Women in NTPs become primary breadwinners of their families
- Women in NTPs build wealth, invest in their childrens' education and family well-being



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

SUSTAIN

women in NTPs by influencing policies + markets to be gender-inclusive

OPERATIONAL PATHWAYS

- Knowledge and evidence building to support women to enter and stay in NTPs
- Evidence-supported policy engagement to build gender-sensitive ecosystems for women in NTPs
- Network + partnership building to mainstream women in NTPs
- Strategic communication to amplify the journeys of young leaders + women trailblazers, influencing policymakers to adopt NTPs
- Knowledge management + focused digitization for programmatic adaptations, data efficiency

OUR SHORT AND LONG-TERM PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Digitized knowledge management systems make monitoring and evaluation efficient
- Evidence-based and data supported research enables policy engagement
- More partnerships challenge structural barriers, women enter and stay in NTPs
- Gender-inclusive infrastructures, adoption of Skill ++ in skill institutions helps more women address structural barriers and join NTPs

CULTIVATE

a collaborative leadership culture to enhance efficiency and collective well-being

OPERATIONAL PATHWAYS

- Continue practicing collective feminist leadership
- Investment in capacities of next-generation leaders
- Inclusion and retention of staff from diverse identities
- Capacity building of all staff in key thematic areas (GBV, intersectionality, digital technology, understanding of self etc.)
- Focus on individual + institutional donors for resource mobilization
- Strengthen staff well-being + collective care via new, improved HR policies and practices
- Digitization of donor, HR, finance and data protection systems for efficiency

OUR SHORT AND LONG-TERM PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Inclusive organizational culture with diverse staff (at least 30% from marginalized communities)
- Strengthen staff capabilities to drive efficient management and achieve strategic objectives
- Secure diversified funding streams
- Resilient organization with collaborative, value-driven leadership across levels
- Financial sustainability by establishing long-term donor relationships, expanding resource mobilization networks, and ensuring consistent funding to support strategic objectives

STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND PRIORITIES

2026
2031





1

**ENGAGE WITH
RESOURCE-POOR
COMMUNITIES THROUGH
ECOSYSTEM AND
NETWORK BUILDING**

WHAT IS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1?

It is our response to

- structural inequalities (women’s unpaid care giving, restricted mobility, and limited access to and control over opportunities and resources);
- gendered social norms (no or little support for higher education, skill-education, or employment, and early or forced marriage) and gender-based violence that target women and their professions, especially non-traditional professions.

WHAT WILL IT DO?

- Engage communities through outreach (surveys, campaigns, home visits, and so on); and
- Immerse young women, adolescent girls, and young men and boys in programmes such as Feminist Leadership, Azad Kishori, and Men for Gender Justice.

WHAT WILL IT ACHIEVE?

- Long-term empowerment via increased agency of young girls and women, improved mobility and reduced GBV through more information and support; in essence, non-traditional lives via non-traditional professions.
- Better social capital for women and young boys who build and deepen their alumni and solidarity networks.
- Support structures such as our community resource centres that will be safe spaces for women to share and receive useful information and perspectives.
- Reduction in early marriages of girls and improvement in their education and careers, especially in STEM subjects and non-traditional professions.
- Better access of women to citizenship documents and social security schemes.
- Improved gender-inclusive infrastructure in communities through action projects by Feminist Leaders.
- Male role models who perform unpaid care work at home and reject toxic masculinity and gender-based violence.
- Azad’s Centre for Gender and Masculinities, a springboard for organizations to support young boys and men inculcate positive masculinities.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1



Community Strengthening

In collaboration with local organizations, Azad will facilitate meaningful participation of community members in joint social action (campaigns and meetings). We will also conduct alumni meet-ups: two annual meet-ups in each location for all four programmes. We will continue to draw adolescents (girls and boys), men, and women from the community to strengthen our alumni networks. This can help introduce more women to NTPs, to our campaign for gender-justice, provide support for GBV, and support women in accessing social security schemes. It can also help build synergy between Azad's programmes (Women with Wheels, Azad Kishori, Feminist Leadership, and Men for Gender Justice).

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Greater awareness of NTPs and unpaid care work, gender-based violence and preventive strategies among **4.5 lakh women**.
- Wider spectrum of employment options for women when **10,000 women** and adolescent girls enrol in non-traditional professions and exemplify independent lives and voices against GBV.
- Alumni networks with thicker synergies between former and current change agents of non-traditional professions.
- Empowered communities via 18 community resource centres that act as resource hubs and mentoring platforms for women in NTPs, and as support systems for GBV survivors.

Nurturing Feminist Leadership

Our four-phased, capacity-building exercise will catalyze community-action projects and local campaigns. We will reach out to women to build gender-responsive support networks in their communities.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Sustained engagement with 7,500 community-based women via monthly *mahila addas* (women's peer meetings) by 500 Feminist Leaders.
- On-ground support for women (55,000) by Feminist Leaders with regard to citizenship documents and social security schemes.
- More (1,100) women in our focus communities motivated to enter non-traditional professions.
- More (15,000) women supported to address gender-based violence.
- Gender-inclusive washrooms and toilets built in the community through action projects led by Feminist Leaders.

During this strategic period too, Feminist Leaders will continue to translate the everyday realities and struggles of women and adolescent girls through the frame of feminism, thereby validating their potential for transformation.



Azad Kishori: Agency for Adolescent Girls

The emphasis on girls' education will persist through leadership and capacity building trainings, exposure visits (especially in STEM and non-traditional skill education), and the strengthening of the alumnae programme. To nurture supportive environments for girls, we will continue to engage with families of Azad Kishori leaders through community meetings and home visits. The Azad Kishori programme will also be started in Chennai, while it continues in Delhi, Jaipur, and Kolkata.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Confidence among (7,200) young adolescent girls to navigate their personal and professional lives after trainings on essential knowledge, skills, and rights-based perspectives (leadership, SRHR, understanding the self, financial management, digital and social media engagement, among others).
- Strong peer and support networks created for and by 450 young adolescent girls from the community.
- 1,000 young girls will choose careers in STEM and NTPs.
- Azad Kishori alumnae (40) emerge as change agents and support their peers to, among others, take up non-traditional professions.

The new strategic cycle will also see cadres of Azad Kishoris acquire a sharper understanding and articulation of their own lives and their socio-cultural contexts, and be more autonomous in their personal and vocational choices.

Men for Gender Justice: Allies and Champions for Gender Equality

Azad will continue its engagement with boys and men to understand their perspectives and help them understand patriarchy and its influence on gender and sexual identities. We will also extend conversations on women's unpaid care work, identification of and challenge to entrenched gender norms, toxic masculinities, power structures, and the promotion of gender justice.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Challenging gendered norms of toxic masculinity and women's unpaid care work by more (2,550) young boys and men.
- Young boys and men (1,00,000) lead/participate in community-based campaigns on unpaid care work.
- Progressive insights on masculinity and women's unpaid care work gained by 45 organizations, after participation in courses of the Azad's Center for Gender and Masculinities.

The Sharp Focus of Strategic Objective 1

Of all our community-engagement related learning from the last Strategic Plan cycle, the most compelling is that:

- to build and strengthen gender-just, community-based ecosystems, we ought to create and sustain our presence and influence in the community itself to actively support women and girls, and
- our perspective-building work among young boys and men needs mainstreaming for it to substantively enable women in choosing NTP skill education.

Based on these two insights, in the forthcoming Strategic Plan period, Azad will (1) create spaces in the community that anchor our discourse and action on non-traditional professions and address gender-based violence, and (2) introduce an innovative initiative to establish a Centre for Gender and Masculinities, aimed at consolidating and advancing our work with young men and boys, while developing a knowledge hub that generates evidence and thought leadership on positive masculinities.

CASE STUDY



OF REBIRTH AND RENEWAL!

We all get knocked down by life at some point. But not all of us swim ashore to tell the tale of the vortex. 38-year-old Tasneem is among the fewest who stand guard by the shore, watch out for those gripped by the current, and lend them a hand.

The vortex that held Tasneem was an abusive marriage, which led to her separation from the husband and, eventually, the myriad hardships of single motherhood. Although she had attended school and worked for an education-focused NGO, these experiences offered no antidote for her personal agony and social exclusion (as a woman, of the minority community).

It was during this bleak phase that Tasneem heard about and signed up for a training for women (Azad's Feminist Leadership programme), with no anticipation of what lay ahead.

This one encounter unleashed an entire spectrum of discoveries for her! The most quintessential was that the causes of her suffering were the regressive notions of patriarchy and gender. It was as if Tasneem got a new pair of eyes to look at herself and the world.

As a survivor of domestic violence, she came across an entire ecosystem of gender-just values, rights, and laws—just the refresh button she needed to tap! With support from Azad, she found a surge of confidence to negotiate with her husband and was able to get maintenance for her children.

This filled Tasneem with belief in herself and the allies she got at and through Azad. And so, she decided to lend her life a service-oriented bend as a Feminist Leader. Her work involved helping resource-poor persons attain, for example, citizenship documents. She also learnt how to organize camps for Aadhaar, among a bunch of other capabilities. All this required her to travel far and wide in the city, including to new and unknown spots (yet another feat for Tasneem).

But her most admirable enterprise has been to help other women step out of their vortex and travel!

Tasneem lived in a neighbourhood of Delhi where women could not travel partly because there was no bus stand in the area. While many men had two-wheelers, women were left in the lurch because public buses could not halt there. Tasneem made it her mission to resolve this and started to mobilize women for the cause. She formed a large group to liaison and advocate, but this structure and method did not help. Tasneem recalls, "I used to get really disheartened but the team at Azad and the women's groups kept me going." She altered her strategy and created smaller groups, each with a distinct focus and authority to engage with. After much leg work for meetings with several officials, patience, and perseverance, Tasneem and her band of women received the approval for a bus stop.

Like Tasneem, many women gained ease and access to a wider world, its opportunities, and hope. Tasneem has since been sought after by NGOs, but she is committed to work at Azad as a community leader. And why not? She embodies (being) azad, with a new lease of life, a second birth.



2

**TRANSFORM AND
EMPLOY WOMEN AS EMPOWERED
PROFESSIONAL CHAUFFEURS
+ RIDERS THROUGH
GENDER-JUST SKILL EDUCATION
AND ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT**

WHAT IS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE **2**?

It is the implementation of the Skill++ framework (advanced technical skills, professional know-how, and self-development modules) that women require to be qualified for non-traditional professions.

WHAT WILL IT **DO**?

- Enable/train women via transformative skill-development programmes (in-person and digital modules) that offer professional and technical skills, and self-empowerment for employment in the transport sector and other NTPs.
- Engage with trainees and their families to address structural barriers such as gender-based violence, mobility restrictions, and so on.
- Expand and scale to new geographies, in partnership with the State and CSOs.

WHAT WILL IT **ACHIEVE**?

- Scale-up induction of women in NTPs and thereby social and financial autonomy for more women.
- Enable women from resource-poor communities to join NTPs and become the primary breadwinners of their families.
- Facilitate women from resource-poor communities to build assets and improve their financial health, and that of their family and community.
- Mainstream the GJSE and Skill++ framework in skill training for NTPs by way of new geographies and new NTPs.
- Manifest better career options for women in the transport sector from light to heavy vehicles.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2



Skill ++ Training

We will continue to capacitate women from resource-poor communities through Skill++ training for their entry and sustenance in NTPs. We will expand and scale our work in new geographies, where the Skill++ training framework will be adopted by CSO and State partners to train women in NTPs.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- 8,000 women gain employable skills to become professional drivers and chauffeurs, and thereupon challenge gendered, patriarchal norms of womanhood and employment.
- Expansion of WWW to 6 new geographies where partners adopt and scale up the Skill ++ modules and model.
- 6,906 women from resource-poor communities gain control over their finances as NTP professionals.

Engagement with Trainees and Families

The WWW programme will continue to engage with women and their families to address structural barriers such as mobility restriction, and gender-based violence. We will support trainees who are survivors of GBV through our linkages to shelter homes, helplines, psycho-social support and legal services, both during the training period and later via the Community Resource Center.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- 100% of women trainees have access to information and support to address GBV.
- Enhanced mobility and confidence among 100% women.
- Women's access to and control over resources and opportunities creates intergenerational advantages.

Expansion to Heavy Motor Vehicle training

More women view heavy motor vehicle (HMV) driving as a viable career pathway. Building on the proven success of women drivers within DTC and the positive experience of women trailer-truck drivers in Europe, this Strategic Plan prioritizes the expansion of HMV training opportunities for women in at least one location, in partnership with State institutions.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- More women are trained to drive HMVs; at least 500 women are facilitated in HMV to become employable, demonstrating a substantive change in the profession of driving.

Digitization

Since scaling and expansion of training are among our core goals, the digitization of Skill++ training modules will be necessary for wider access by women across diverse geographies.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Significant expansion of access by women from diverse locations to non-traditional employment trainings (after digitization of 14 Skill++ training modules) and thereupon an increase in their entry into dignified, income-secure NTPs.

The Sharp Focus of Strategic Objective 2

Our learnings from the previous Strategic Plan reinforced the need for flexible, demand-driven interventions. Therefore, Azad will develop and integrate new modules on electric vehicles, overall well-being, and financial literacy within the Women with Wheels (WWW) programme. In addition, climate resilience will be embedded as a core theme across trainings, to ensure that women drivers are better prepared for emerging mobility and environmental realities.

The digitized Learning Management Systems of the Skill++ modules will give the GJSE framework a broader user base as more organizations and women will be able to use it. As part of our innovation strategy, we will pilot non-traditional professions like mechanics and tour guides to broaden opportunities for women. Moreover, as we expand to new geographies in partnership with other organizations, we plan to create the Azad Non-Traditional Professions Learning Institute to support our new partners in piloting and implementing projects in their respective locations.

CASE STUDY



THE (RE)SCRIPT OF A LIFE

Each choice we make shapes who we become: exercise or sleep, paid work or unemployment. The big choices, though, can split the road of our lives.

Like when Kavitha (name changed) was pulled out of school in ninth grade to earn. Because her porter father, an alcoholic, and her homemaker mother could not make ends meet for Kavitha and her two siblings. Or, when she got married at age 21. Her marriage turned out to be loveless and abusive. And her husband's violence worsened when he joined the police force. He would not let her get a job or visit her parents; he questioned her character and beat her when she resisted.

Depressed and even suicidal at a point, Kavitha made all the efforts she could to change him by being the 'good wife'. When she realized the impossibility of this project, she resigned to her fate. Since he was her choice, her family offered no support. Besides, she had a son with him and no money.

There seemed no escape from the distress caused by these choices.

"Since my husband is a police man, I was afraid of complaining against him. I went to the police station twice to file a complaint against him, but they did not take my issue seriously. He would always say that I will not be able to do anything against him", shares Kavitha.

When a cousin of Kavitha told her about the driving training of Azad, Kavitha was not ready. Besides, the training centre was far from her house.

Kavitha had a 'choice' to make. She decided to make up her mind after meeting the team at Azad's training centre.

That one meeting at Azad made her feel confident and she agreed to take it up! The trainings included, much to Kavitha's relief, sessions on law and violence against women. She recalls, "I started feeling safer. I decided to not run away. I will stay and achieve the life I want."

Kavitha completed her training, got a driving licence, and a job within seven months. She drives for a company called Lithium and earns around Rs. 23,000 per month. She says, “When I drive the car, I feel very proud of myself. I can see a better future for myself and my son. I do not want to depend on my husband for anything.”

Not only does Kavitha manage her finances, but she also supports her mother with her income.

She has regained her self-respect, and this has changed the dynamics of her marriage.

“I took legal action to ensure that my husband does not beat me. He cannot raise his hand on me anymore,” she says. In fact, when she leaves for work, he turns on the car for her.

Kavitha is keen to share what she found via Azad—a new perspective and financial independence. And so, she has bought a car in the hope of starting a travel company that employs women. “I want many women to go through this training and become drivers”.

Kavitha knows too well that each choice is a long journey.



3

**SUSTAIN BY
INFLUENCING
POLICIES + MARKETS
TO BECOME
GENDER-INCLUSIVE**

WHAT IS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3?

It is to facilitate the entry and retention of women in NTPs by influencing the State, industry and markets to nurture gender-inclusive ecosystems.

WHAT WILL IT DO?

- Build requisite research-based evidence on issues that impact women's entry and retention in NTPs.
- Deploy research-based evidence to engage with policy makers and other relevant stakeholders.
- Build relevant partnerships and networks that reinforce the mainstreaming of women in NTPs.
- Leverage strategic communication to amplify the favorable impact of women in NTPs.
- Build better data efficiency and management through digitization that enables real-time decision making for community engagement and NTP skilling.

WHAT WILL IT ACHIEVE?

- Robust evidence on the status of infrastructure in transport hubs and public spaces frequented by women in paid employment.
- Gender-inclusive infrastructure through policy engagement with State and other relevant stakeholders.
- Greater presence of women in NTPs (after adoption of Skill++ in State and privately-run skill institutes) with vital knowledge and skills that address structural and systemic barriers.
- More efficiency in programme monitoring and evaluations, by way of digitized knowledge management systems.
- Strengthened mainstreaming of NTPs, through strategic partnerships, collaborations, and communications.



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3



Research and Evidence Building

We will harness the findings from our research to persuade more women to join and stay in NTPs. The status of gender-inclusive infrastructure, specifically public toilets in cities where we and our partners work, will be a focus of our evidence gathering (in continuation of the previous strategic cycle where New Delhi and Kolkata were the sites of such studies). We will analyze the National Transport Policy and transport policies of the States of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu through a gender lens to offer recommendations to the transport departments. Moreover, we will investigate the interconnections between GBV and professions in the upcoming strategic cycle, and measure changes in communities and families of women in non-traditional professions.

Policy Engagement

To create skilling opportunities and gender-just ecosystems for women in NTPs, we will continue to engage with both State and private skill-training centers, especially in our current locations. Our definitive focus with State governments will be to (1) scale-up the GJSE framework and introduce NTP courses in their skilling institutes; (2) advocate for the implementation of the Institute of Driving Training and Research and other non-traditional skilling institutes for women and queer persons (provisional funds for these are available from the Central Government); and (3) work along with male staff members and drivers in the government's transport departments.



PRIORITY OUTCOMES (FROM RESEARCH AND POLICY ENGAGEMENT) _____

- Gender-inclusive infrastructure (such as toilets and rooms for rest) in geographies where Azad is functional, following infrastructure audits and policy engagement with the government.
- Safer and enabling environments for women trainees of NTPs and their communities, after research-driven insights highlight links between GBV and employment.
- Greater participation of women in the transport sector, thanks to better planning and gender equity in transport policy, and safer and inclusive transport services.
- Scaled-up GJSE framework through the introduction of NTP courses in State and private skilling institutes.
- Better retention of women in NTPs because of engagement with male staff, gender-inclusive infrastructure, and thereby gender-sensitized workspaces.

Network and Partnership Building

Azad will continue strengthening the Co-secretariat of NTL network in this Strategic Plan. It will introduce/scale the GJSE framework in new geographies and organize an international convention with CSOs that work on issues of gender, employment, and safety. Azad will continue to co-organize the Kamla Bhasin Awards with other partner organizations to mainstream women in NTPs and promote positive masculinity across South Asia.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES _____

- More CSOs in India and South Asia adopt NTPs and the GJSE framework; as a result, NTPs get closer to being mainstreamed and women have more access to those within the South Asian region.

Strategic Communications

Over the next five years, Azad will adopt a strategic communication approach that amplifies the journeys of women in non-traditional professions to shape public discourse, build awareness on gender and work, and influence policy and societal attitudes. Through multi-platform storytelling, audio-visual media, communication materials like annual reports, newsletters, calendars etc., national campaigns, research dissemination, and multilingual engagement, Azad will strengthen visibility, deepen community connections, and position NTPs as a pathway to a gender-just ecosystem. Our use of social media will be strategic so as to build (a) awareness and sensitivity on issues of women and NTPs and (b) policy engagement that strengthens the discourse on NTPs.

Azad will continue to partner with organizations for national campaigns such as 'Ghar Ka Kaam Sabka Kaam' and 'One Billion Rising' through podcasts, media posts, virtual and physical events, and narrative building. We will be more creative in sharing research findings and 'impact stories' of women in NTPs, in physical and virtual spaces. Displays such as wall paintings will be used at Azad's training centres to effectively narrate the journeys of our drivers and leaders. To forge better connections with diverse groups and communities and emphasize their intersections with NTPs, we will use regional languages for such material.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES _____

- Greater visibility and social acceptance of women and queer persons in NTPs and the transport sector.
- Positive response from NTP ecosystems, due to stronger, inclusive, multilingual narrative building of the 'women in NTP' phenomenon that further accelerates progress toward gender-just mobility.



Knowledge Building and Management

To capture the actual transformation of women's lives and aid continuous improvement in practice and strategy, Azad will pursue its rigorous evaluation process. This includes impact evaluation studies, journeys of Feminist Leaders and drivers, and mapping the transformation of trainees (through participatory tools such as 'Badlav Ka Safarnama', a reflection exercise conducted after trainings). Such evaluations illustrate our impact on the communities we work with and enable us to share with diverse stakeholders. We will make our evaluation methods more robust by addressing the social desirability bias and explore independent methods of data capture. Internal research studies will also inform our programmes and practice.

Within the new strategic planning cycle, we hope to get closer to digitization, especially for the MIS (Management Information System) of three of our programmes (Azad Kishori, Men for Gender Justice, and the Feminist Leadership Programme).

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Enhanced transparency, stronger learning across programmes, and scalable, impact-driven decision-making, because of more reliable, bias-aware data systems, and digitized MIS platforms.

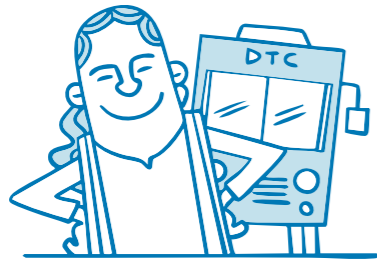
Sharp Focus of Strategic Objective 3

Drawing on over 18 years of practitioner-led learning and practice in women's participation in non-traditional professions, Azad will publish 'position papers' once every two years on the status of women in NTPs that can generate grounded evidence, influence public discourse, and shape policy.

Azad will organize an international convention on NTPs which will enable stronger partnerships and networks to further mainstream NTPs.

We will critically review transport and related policies through a gender lens to engage with policy makers, enabling women to enter and sustain in NTPs.

In this plan, the focus will be to enhance visibility and role model the personal and professional journeys of alumnae drivers through strategic communications.



WHEN PASSENGERS TURN DRIVERS

One of the areas with the most startling gender gaps is heavy-motor vehicle (HMV) transport. Women rarely, if at all, drive public buses or commercial trucks.

Given our passion for erasing such sites of exclusion, to have women in the driving seat—literally and figuratively—how could we not eye this segment of the transport sector!

We realized, though, that training women as HMV drivers will be futile if the transport sector is unable to accept women.

And so, Azad rolled up its sleeves to tackle this systemic challenge: one, to dislodge the fetters that restrict women from driving HMVs, and two, to orient the HMV sector to recruit and retain women drivers.

Back in 2016, Azad started a policy dialogue with the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) to persuade them to reform their recruitment criteria for women to acquire HMV licences. A sustained conversation made it possible: the precondition for the driver's height was removed, the training fee waived, the driving seat redesigned, and stipends introduced for women HMV trainees.

This leg of work led to the **recruitment of over 93 women drivers** in the DTC!

Yet, breaking new ground was, after all, only one part of the overhaul needed.

There emerged a second set of barriers at the workplace—male-centric infrastructure (no safe and rest areas for women drivers, for example) and patriarchal culture—as revealed by women drivers in a study done by Azad at eight depots of the DTC.

Azad responded with a two-pronged strategy for the DTC: (1) proposed gender sensitization workshops (workplace behaviour, safety, gender norms, and positive masculinity) for male operational staff, and (2) physical space (toilets and rooms for rest) for women drivers at bus depots. After follow-up meetings and a presentation about the findings of the depot study, the top leadership of the DTC accepted our suggestions for gender-inclusive infrastructure and sensitization training with male staff.

Since September 2025, Azad has **trained over 2,000 DTC male staff members** (drivers and conductors). For many, it was their first-ever gender-related dialogue; it sparked constructive reflections about workplace behaviour, safety, and the need for a respectful environment for women colleagues and passengers.

So well-received was this endeavour that the DTC embedded Azad's curriculum into its official training modules for all new recruits!

Based on Azad's feedback to the DTC, the organization has also initiated the creation of dedicated rest areas for women at their depots. And, they have invited Azad to conduct an audit of the depots after these spaces have been built and used.

Although the depot-reform is still ongoing, the progress made by the DTC (among India's largest public transport bodies) is already a remarkable story.

It is a model for gender-inclusive overhauls—cultural and infrastructural—of public transport systems and workplaces. The role of evidence-based policy engagement and collaborative partnerships between State and civil society cannot be overstated.

Is it not a bigger and more heartening win when public institutions drive the change, with and for women?



4

CULTIVATE

A COLLABORATIVE

LEADERSHIP CULTURE

WITHIN THE

ORGANIZATION

WHAT IS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4?

It reflects our intent to (a) nurture Azad's internal ecosystem with collective well-being and thoughtful relations; (b) build a resilient and motivated team with effective emerging leaders contributing to the organization and larger civil society; (c) strengthen governance processes and systems to improve efficacy, and (d) mobilize adequate financial resources to fulfill Azad's strategic commitments.

WHAT WILL IT DO?

- Influence the development sector to build a new culture of organizations that work towards collective leadership models.
- Sustain our practice of collective feminist leadership.
- Strengthen perspectives and abilities of our next generation of leadership and staff members in key areas such as gender-based violence, intersectionality, digital technology, understanding of the self, among others.
- Work towards the inclusion and retention of staff from diverse identities.
- Focus on meaningful engagement with individual and institutional donors for better resource mobilization.
- Strengthen the collective care and well-being of staff members through new and improved human resource policies and practices.
- Digitize the systems of donor management, human resource, finance management, and data protection.

WHAT WILL IT ACHIEVE?

- Resilience, with strengthened organizational practices and policies.
- Greater diversity and equity of the workforce.
- Enhanced organizational capabilities and programmes.
- Greater financial resilience and sustainability, supported by deeper engagement with individual and institutional donors and diversified resource mobilization.
- Robust and secure organizational systems and improved accountability, transparency, and efficiency, enabled by digitized human resource, finance, donor management, and data protection processes.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4



Organizational Priority 1

HUMAN RESOURCE STRENGTHENING

Leadership Strengthening

Azad will continue to work towards strengthening its culture of collective leadership. Given our focus on nurturing leadership with multifaceted fortes, we will promote new leaders who can assume different leadership roles. Pathways will be created for staff members to rise across ranks, especially for those from the community mobilization team. We will also strengthen horizontal leadership structures to challenge hierarchical, top-down leadership models and foster the collective growth of staff members rather than concentrating opportunities for one or two individuals.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Diverse, experience-rooted leadership (especially from the community mobilization team) that assures sustenance of Azad's work as well as stronger growth trajectories for their internal progression.
- Reduced hierarchy, with a culture of collective ownership of programmes and shared responsibility.

Capacity Building

There is an array of plans in the pipeline to augment the synergies at Azad. For example, to support the transition of members of the Core Team to national roles, they will undergo capacity building training in leadership, team building, donor engagement, resource mobilization, among other arenas. There will also be consistent support for our next generation of leaders. Our staff too will undergo thematic capacity building (on subjects such as gender, sexuality, intersectionalities), before they engage with LGBTQIA+ communities.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Confident, future-ready, and value-centered cohort of next-generation leaders who steer Azad's vision and scale Women with Wheels, new NTPs and the GJSE framework.
- Enhanced sensitivity of staff members, more inclusive engagement with diverse communities such as LGBTQIA+, and stronger, ethically-grounded programme delivery.



Policies and Practices

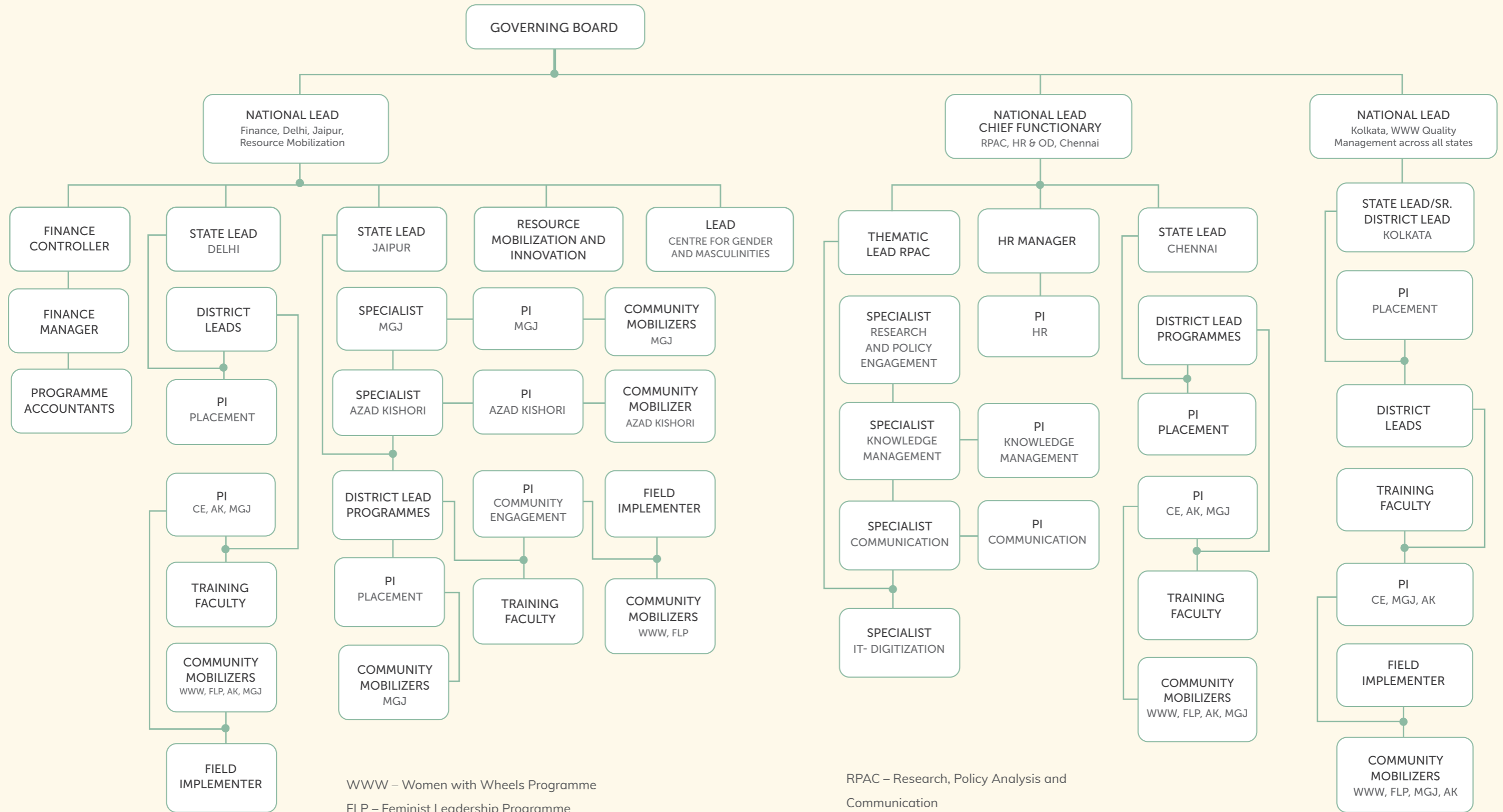
We will build a nurturing and inclusive environment by incorporating policies and practices around the collective well-being of our staff. As part of this, Azad will create a policy on inclusiveness that can make our workplaces and programmes more accessible and diverse. Since we anticipate increasing our staff strength by 20 per cent, we will widen the socio-cultural and gender diversity of our employees (especially in leadership roles) by inducting at least 30 per cent of our staff from communities such as the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, religious minorities, and queer persons. Our intent is that these new recruits can eventually motivate others from their communities to join Azad and make it a safe space for all. We will also strengthen our policy around data privacy for better and secure data management processes. Azad will continue to invest in leadership and create pathways for more members of its core team to assume national roles.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Greater diversity of workforce and leadership, strengthened equity across the organization, greater trust of the community, and sustainable leadership pathways.

Our Organizational Structure

The following organogram indicates the organizational structure designed to support the strategic priorities outlined in this plan. It reflects key functional areas, leadership roles and coordination that enables effective programme implementation, decision-making, and accountability.



WWW – Women with Wheels Programme
 FLP – Feminist Leadership Programme
 AK – Azad Kishori Programme
 MGJ – Men for Gender Justice Programme
 HR – Human Resource
 OD – Organization Development

RPAC – Research, Policy Analysis and Communication
 CE – Community Engagement
 PI – Programme Implementer
 FI – Field Implementer

Organizational Priority 2

DIGITIZATION AND AI

With rapid changes in the tech environment, there is a need to upgrade our own tech abilities. We therefore aim to move towards 100 per cent digitization of our human resource, finance, donor management, and administration-related management information systems.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- Improved organizational efficiency, greater transparency, data security, faster decision-making and more accountable programme and financial management.
- Enhanced coordination, reduced manual work, and a more responsive and professional organizational ecosystem.

Organizational Priority 3

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

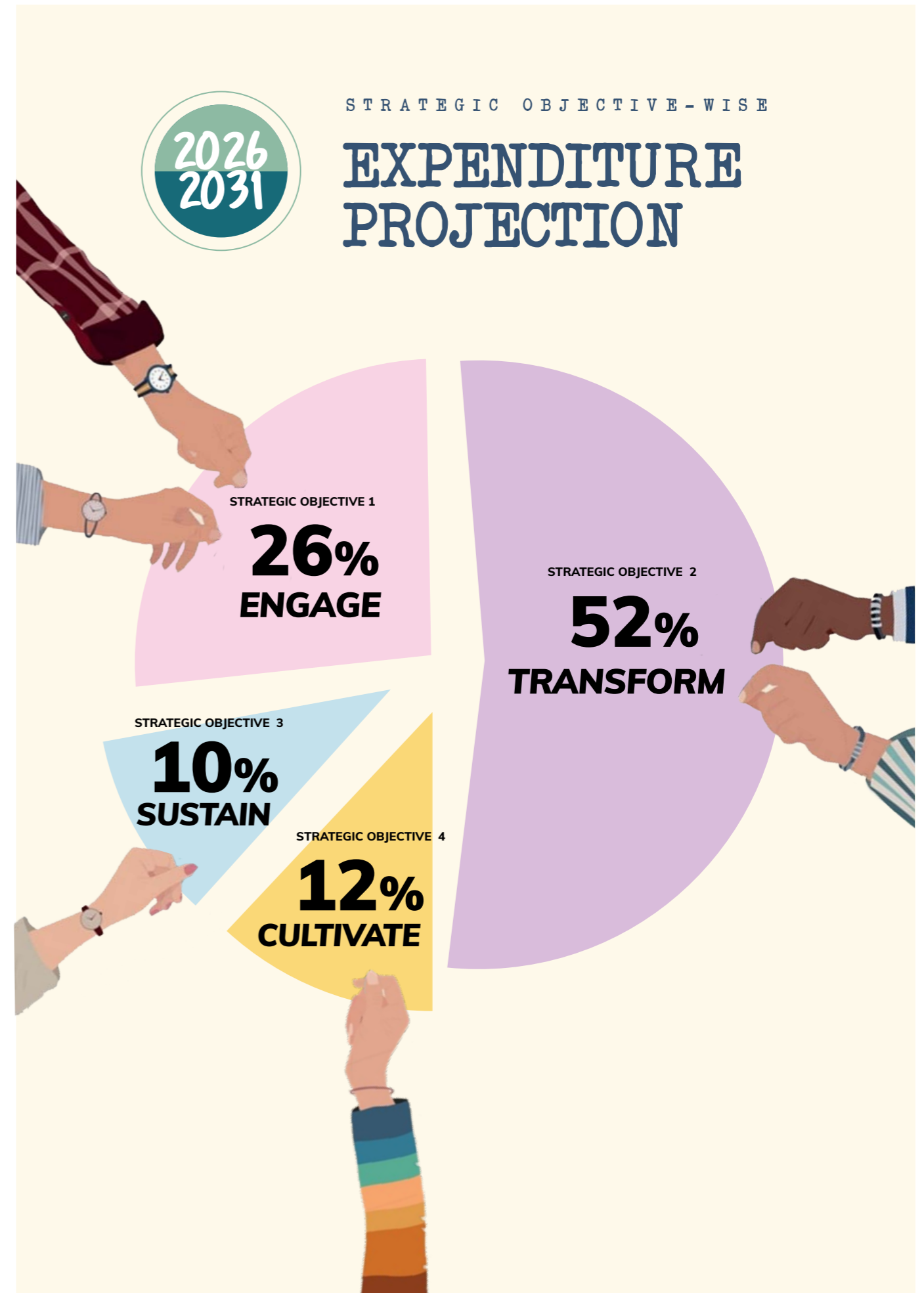
Our core focus in resource mobilization will be to enhance our corporate social responsibility partnerships and engage with diverse CSR funders. We aim to boost individual philanthropy through fundraising campaigns targeted at high-net-worth individuals: from 6 per cent to 10 per cent in the next five years.

STRATEGY FOR RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Our strategy for resource mobilization will be aimed at building multiple and diverse funding sources for greater financial resilience. We will focus on stronger institutional partnerships for higher and long-term commitments. We will also make sustained efforts on fundraising through a dedicated team and a digitized donor management system for resource mobilization.

PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- 50 per cent growth in our financial resources.
- Financial sustainability and thereby more robust programming.



ANNEXURE

ANNEXURE 1 RESULTS-BASED FRAMEWORK

SECTION 1 RIGHT TO ACCESS GJSE

(Focus: building awareness and community leadership for creating gender-just ecosystems)

Organizational Priority 4

LEARNING, ACCOUNTABILITY AND ADAPTIVE PRACTICE

Azad will strengthen its culture of reflection, learning, and accountability through robust internal review and reporting mechanisms. Quarterly internal reviews will serve as structured spaces for collective reflection, enabling the organisation to systematically capture learnings, respond to emerging challenges, and adapt programmes over the next five years. These processes will ensure that programme design and implementation remain responsive to the lived realities of the communities we work with. Accountability to communities will remain central to this approach. Learnings from reviews will be shared back with community members through feedback loops; reinforcing transparency, trust, and mutual ownership of change processes. In parallel, Azad will continue to engage donors through structured reporting, regular meetings, and check-in conversations; ensuring clarity, alignment, and shared accountability. By embedding reflection and learning into organizational practice, Azad aims to move beyond compliance-driven reporting towards a values-led accountability framework that strengthens programme quality, institutional credibility, and long-term impact.



ACTIVITY

Outreach, mass mobilization, and direct mobilization in resource-poor communities (New Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, and Chennai) to raise awareness on NTPs, GBV, and Women with Wheels (WWW) programme among women, girls, and queer persons.



IMPACT

Women experience long-term empowerment with increased agency, improved mobility, and reduced GBV, enabling dignified lives through NTPs.



OUTPUT

450,000 women, queer persons, and adolescent girls reached through awareness initiatives on NTP opportunities, gender-based violence, and prevention strategies.



INDICATORS

Targets: 2026-2031

Number of women with information on NTPs, GBV and unpaid care work. (target: 450,000).

Number of GBV referrals (helplines, legal aid, shelters, and psycho-social counselling (target: 30,000).

Number of 'impact stories' on transformed lives (target: 350 over five years).



OUTCOME

10,000 women, queer persons, and adolescent girls enrolled in NTP skilling, resulting in expanded vocational choices, stronger empowerment, and improved ability to address GBV and pursue professions safely and independently.



ACTIVITY

Bi-annual, alumni meetings for community change agents, leaders, and WWW alumnae across locations.



OUTPUT

Bi-annual meetings organized (10 over five years, per location).



OUTCOME

Ongoing synergies via alumnae networks; cross-learning on strategies/challenges; sustained leadership ecosystem with past trainees mentoring new cohorts; collectivizing and building solidarity between our change agents and drivers' network.



IMPACT

Community resilience builds strong networks that ensure continuity of gender justice work, even in crises.

Our change agents (based on the solidarity of networks) are able to build social capital.



INDICATORS

Targets: 2026-2031

Number of meetings held (target: 40 meetings across 4 locations).

Number of issues discussed (target: 50+).

Number of participants per meeting (target: 200 per location, per meeting).

Meeting minutes documented (100 percent coverage).



ACTIVITY

Train community change agents/leaders (girls/boys, women/ men, queer persons) via the lifecycle approach to advocate for gender justice, help access documents, and negotiate family support.



OUTPUT

500 community women/queer persons trained as change-makers.

250,000 women/queer persons reached directly by leaders for NTPs/GBV. 2,550 young men/boys trained (550 as leaders) on challenging toxic masculinity. 7,200 adolescent girls supported (450 leaders, 6,750 peers) on decision-making (marriage, education, reproductive rights).

40 young alumni leaders trained in leadership skills, SRHR, GBV, regular mentorship with career experts in NTPs, STEM and other fields; internship opportunities.



OUTCOME

Women access citizenship documents/social security (55,000 supported); get information on NTP, gain financial/social resource control.

GBV recognition/support-seeking increases; reduced vulnerability/mobility barriers, community-action projects on infrastructure, sanitation and hygiene are implemented in the community. Young men/boys shift to equitable norms (eg, shared care, GBV advocacy).

Girls reject early marriage, pursue education/NTPs; peer groups mentor others from the community.



IMPACT

Women register and enrol in NTP.

Women exercise full citizenship; reduced GBV/child marriage; norms shift toward girls' autonomy/economic independence; lower unpaid care burden enables paid work.

Gender inclusive infrastructure is built within communities by engaging with local urban governance authorities.



INDICATORS

Targets: 2026-2031

Number of change agents recruited/trained (target: 500).

Number of women accessing citizenship documents (target: 20,000).

Number of women enrolled into WWW through FLP (target: 1100, 20 percent of overall enrolment in WWW).

Number accessing social security/financial linkages (target: 35,000).

Number of GBV survivors supported (target: 1,500).

MGJ - 80 percent participants are able to identify subtle forms of violence in their homes and communities.

Out of them, 60 percent are able to raise their voice/ take action regarding violence against women (target: 550); 70 percent report shared care/GBV awareness (target: 70 percent). 50 percent will spend 176 minutes per day in care work. Number of adolescent girl leaders/peers (target: 7,200); 80 percent of leaders and 60 percent peer members reject early marriage for education/careers.

Number of girls making career choices in NTPs and STEM (target: 1,000). Case studies on leadership transformation (target: 50 across).

Changes from baseline to endline evaluations (target: 20 percent norm shift).



ACTIVITY

Pilot community resource centers (CRCs) across Azad locations.



OUTPUT

18 CRCs established with resource hubs (library and computer center) for peer support on NTPs/GBV.



IMPACT

Safe/inclusive spaces formed; peer groups on education particularly non-traditional skill education/gender equality; improved access to information/materials; collaborative campaigns organized.



OUTCOME

Safer environments via collective anti-GBV action; reduced school dropouts; higher education/NTPs pursuit; sustainable, community-owned hubs for crisis support.

SECTION 2 RIGHTS WITHIN GJSE

(Focus: skilling, employment, and ecosystem support for sustained participation)

ACTIVITY

Establish the Center for Gender and Masculinities

IMPACT

Shift to positive masculinities; the Center becomes a key hub for a critical understanding of gender and masculinities.

OUTPUT

4 comprehensive courses conducted.
Partnership with 45 organizations.

INDICATOR

Number of courses conducted (target: 4)
Number of partner organizations (target: 45).
Number of organizational employees trained (target: 100).
Number of trainings conducted (target: 12 - three phases in each course).
100,000 young boys and men lead and participate in campaigns related to unpaid care work.

OUTCOME

Deeper understanding of gender norms/ positive masculinity among participants; partner organizations integrate courses in their own programmes; joint campaigns/ knowledge sharing.

ACTIVITY

Implement WWW programme in New Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, and Chennai.

IMPACT

Stronger community norms for gender-just ecosystems; women break barriers in male-dominated transport roles and reduce their economic vulnerability.

OUTPUT

Women/family members attend *basti* meetings where they are oriented about WWW.
Home visits are conducted in *bastis* for women interested in enrolling in WWW.

INDICATORS Targets: 2026-2031

Number of women/queer persons attending meetings (target: 1,100 per year, across centers).
Enrolment in WWW/NTPs (target: 5,500).
Percentage of walk out (target: <15 percent).
Percentage completing permanent license training/certification (target: 85 percent).
Percentage reporting enhanced mobility via 'Badlav Ka Safarnama' (target: 100 percent).

OUTCOME

Increased family support for NTP courses such as driving; confident professionals post-training; enhanced mobility, ability to take decisions within the family, speak against violence, claim their identity/ reduced dependence on family.

ACTIVITY

Pilot new NTPs related to transport sector in target cities.

Enter strategic partnerships with the State/NGOs/companies for WWW expansion (national/international).

IMPACT

Community acceptance of women in transport; long-term economic empowerment (financial security, education/health access).
Expanded workforce diversity.

OUTPUT

5,500 women enrolled in skilling for NTP entry (driving + new roles)

New partnerships forged; 4,500 women enrolled via partners in new geographies; 8,000 become employable/skilled through Azad and partners.

INDICATORS

Targets: 2026-2031

Number of women completing skilling/certification (target: 6,000). Number of women sustaining employment >1 year (target: 5,000).

Case stories of employed women (target: 50 per year).

OUTCOME

Women complete training as confident professionals; improved mobility and income in non-traditional professions.

Geographical scaling of WWW; more organizations prioritize women's NTP skilling.

Number/types of employers hiring women in NTPs (target: 200).

Cumulative wealth increase post-employment (target: 30 percent average.), 70 percent with improved asset ownership (target: 70 percent).

Number of partners adopting WWW/GJSE (target: 10).

New geographies included or covered (target: 6)

ACTIVITY

Link trainees to Sakha/other employment.

IMPACT

Women's employment prioritized in the government/corporate sector; viable career pathways in transport.

OUTPUT

6,906 women employed as drivers/chauffeurs in NTP roles.

INDICATORS

Targets: 2026-2031

Number of women sustaining jobs >1 year (target: 5,000).

Number of women joining the workforce from new areas (target: 4,500).

OUTCOME

>1-year job retention.

ACTIVITY

Create NTP Learning Institute to train/handhold partners.

IMPACT

Pipeline for organizations adopting NTP modules; widespread replication across regions.

OUTPUT

Institute established with modules/learning journeys.

INDICATORS

Targets: 2026-2031

Number of modules digitized/adopted (target: 14).

Number of new partners trained (target: 10).

OUTCOME

Hub for NTP capacity training; improved knowledge/innovations; States replicate GJSE model.

 **ACTIVITY**

Placement in all-women/queer workplaces (eg, HMV driving) with the State/companies.

 **OUTPUT**

New partnerships; 500+ women facilitated in HMV to become employable; access to refresher/safety training.

 **OUTCOME**

Streamlined career progression; HMV licenses obtained.

 **IMPACT**

Marginalized women view NTPs as viable long-term careers.

 **INDICATORS**
Targets: 2026-2031

Number of women facilitated to become employable in new transport/HMV roles (target: 500+).

Percentage obtaining HMV licenses (target: 70%).

Number of partner companies adopting inclusive practices (target: 10).

 **ACTIVITY**

Digitize WWW training modules and LMS across locations.

 **OUTPUT**

All modules digitized; LMS adopted universally.

 **OUTCOME**

Anytime/anywhere access; at least 90 percent trainees complete via platform.

 **IMPACT**

Scalable, efficient training for partners/trainees.

 **INDICATORS**
Targets: 2026-2031

Percentage of digitized modules (target: 90 percent coverage).

Percentage of trainees certified via LMS (target: 80 percent).

SECTION 3
RIGHTS THROUGH AND FROM GJSE

(Focus: policy engagement, knowledge generation, and policy influence for systemic change)

 **ACTIVITY**

Analysis of the National Transport Policy and transport policies of the States of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal through a gender lens.

 **OUTPUT**

Drafting the National Transport Policy through a gender-lens; sharing recommendations with relevant government departments for more gender inclusive transport policies in the States.

 **OUTCOME**

Creating space for dialogues with various stakeholders such as political parties/relevant government departments to mainstream the policy in the transport sector.

 **IMPACT**






Strengthened integration of gender equity in transport policy and planning, leading to safer, more inclusive mobility systems and expanded workforce participation of women in the transport sector.






 **INDICATORS**
Targets: 2026-2031






Number of meetings conducted with relevant departments at the national and State level.






Number of documents created on recommendations and shared (target: 1).

Number of stakeholders who receive our recommendations.

<p> ACTIVITY</p> <hr/> <p>Bi-annual status reports on women in NTPs; consultations with stakeholders.</p>	<p> IMPACT</p> <hr/> <p>Mainstreaming of women in NTPs; evidence informs government/private sector policies.</p>
<p> OUTPUT</p> <hr/> <p>Two reports completed; consultations held.</p>	<p> INDICATORS Targets: 2026-2031</p> <hr/> <p>Number of reports published (target: 2). Number of NTP resources shared via website/other social media platforms (target: 50). Number of consultations (target: 20).</p>
<p> OUTCOME</p> <hr/> <p>Azad emerges as a knowledge platform on the issue; findings drive stakeholder engagement for NTP opportunities/sustenance.</p>	

<p> ACTIVITY</p> <hr/> <p>Review State-level public infrastructure via gender-expansive lens; policy briefs; meetings with officials.</p>	<p> IMPACT</p> <hr/> <p>Adoption of gender-expansive infrastructure (eg, toilets/restrooms) by local governments.</p>
<p> OUTPUT</p> <hr/> <p>Studies completed (Delhi, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu); briefs/articles written; consultations held.</p>	<p> INDICATORS Targets: 2026-2031</p> <hr/> <p>Stakeholder feedback per State (target: 80 percent positive). Number of meetings/officials engaged (target: 50). Meeting minutes/press coverage (target: 80 percent). Number of new, women-focused toilets/rooms for rest built (target: 100).</p>
<p> OUTCOME</p> <hr/> <p>Policy engagement with government bodies for gender-sensitive design in public spaces.</p>	

<p> ACTIVITY</p> <hr/> <p>Study on GBV-employment interconnections; internal sharing; policy briefs developed.</p>	<p> IMPACT</p> <hr/> <p>More responsive interventions (e.g., counselling referrals); reduced violence/control with regard to employment.</p>
<p> OUTPUT</p> <hr/> <p>Study completed; findings shared with teams; briefs/materials produced.</p>	<p> INDICATORS Targets: 2026-2031</p> <hr/> <p>Stakeholder feedback on study (target: 80 per cent positive). Number of SOPs/tools/modules revised (target: 10). Evidence of programmatic changes (target: 100 percent).</p>
<p> OUTCOME</p> <hr/> <p>Teams understand links; incorporate GBV-risk assessments/safety planning into programmes.</p>	

<p> ACTIVITY</p> <hr/> <p>Strengthen Co-secretariat of NTL Network.</p>	<p> IMPACT</p> <hr/> <p>Expanded CSO adoption; formalized governance for sustained advocacy.</p>
<p> OUTPUT</p> <hr/> <p>Regular meetings; 80 per cent member participation; evidence documented; guidelines formalized; collaborative events.</p>	<p> INDICATORS Targets: 2026-2031</p> <hr/> <p>Number of new members (target: 20). Number of meetings held/attendance (target: 10 meetings, 80 percent average). Press coverage (number of articles: 30). Number of collaborative CSO events (target: 20).</p>
<p> OUTCOME</p> <hr/> <p>Policy changes via network; more CSOs adopt NTPs/GJSE training.</p>	



ACTIVITY

Digitize Monitoring Information Systems (MIS).



OUTPUT

MIS digitized; dashboard for key indicators created/adopted across locations.



OUTCOME

Dynamic programme review/adaptations; enhanced donor/stakeholder engagement.



IMPACT

Data-driven decisions; transparent reporting.



INDICATORS

Targets: 2026-2031

Number of digitized modules/dashboards/reports (target: 14 modules and 4 dashboards digitized).



ACTIVITY

International Conference on NTPs organized by Azad and the NTL Network.



OUTPUT

One conference on non-traditional professions held in five years with key focus on women in NTPs.



OUTCOME

Increased awareness and knowledge among stakeholders participating in the convention on NTP opportunities for women.

Strengthened networks and partnerships on NTPs.

Recommendations for better outreach for women in NTPs at the regional level.

Policy engagement at respective country level in South Asia.

Better visibility and normalization of women in NTPs.



IMPACT

Mainstreaming of women in NTPs. Women find more opportunities and access to NTPs within the region.








INDICATORS






Targets: 2026-2031

Number of participants oriented about women in NTPs via these conventions (target: 100 participants).

Number of donors who attend and share commitment to invest in NTPs (target: all South Asian countries).

Number of media outlets sharing the news and proceedings of the convention (target: 15).

 <p>ACTIVITY</p> <hr/> <p>Participate in/influence national/ international fora on women in NTPs/GJSE.</p>	 <p>IMPACT</p> <hr/> <p>Greater global/national recognition; policy shifts for women's NTP inclusion.</p>
 <p>OUTPUT</p> <hr/> <p>Invitations to panels/discussions; speeches/papers presented.</p>	 <p>INDICATORS Targets: 2026-2031</p> <hr/> <p>Number of meetings attended/chaired (target: 25). Number of papers/presentations (target: 30).</p>
 <p>OUTCOME</p> <hr/> <p>Increased visibility of NTP challenges/ successes; growth in women's participation.</p>	

 <p>ACTIVITY</p> <hr/> <p>Co-organize the Kamla Bhasin Award.</p>	 <p>IMPACT</p> <hr/> <p>A regional network of NTP practitioners (who create a supportive and gender-just ecosystem for women in NTPs) is built across South Asia.</p>
 <p>OUTPUT</p> <hr/> <p>Co-organize the Kamla Bhasin Award with partner organizations every year.</p>	 <p>INDICATORS Targets: 2026-2031</p> <hr/> <p>Number of nominations and applications received for the KB Award (target : 100 per year). Number of awardees in both categories (eight awards in five years, in both categories). Learning journeys organized for the awardees. Reports of the KB Award.</p>
 <p>OUTCOME</p> <hr/> <p>Strengthen network and partnerships with existing and new partners working with women from marginalized groups. Create a platform for practitioners of NTPs and men/boys who have worked to create a gender-just ecosystem.</p>	

 <p>ACTIVITY</p> <hr/> <p>Develop a Strategic Communication framework to amplify journeys of young leaders and women trailblazers of NTPs.</p>	 <p>IMPACT</p> <hr/> <p>Strategic communication results in favourable ecosystem that promotes NTPs, build more partnerships and challenge structural barriers for women to enter and sustain in NTPs.</p>
 <p>OUTPUT</p> <hr/> <p>Create annual communication material in the form of social media posts and campaigns, newsletters etc. to amplify the transformative journeys of change agents and women in NTPs.</p>	 <p>INDICATORS Targets: 2026-2031</p> <hr/> <p>Number of communication material developed (five annual reports, 10 Azad Parindey (community newsletter). Number of social media campaigns (10). Number of social media posts (500). Number of transformative stories shared (60).</p>
 <p>OUTCOME</p> <hr/> <p>Increased public awareness and institutional recognition of women in non-traditional professions, leading to greater visibility, acceptance, and stakeholder engagement to support their entry and retention in the sector.</p>	

ANNEXURE 2 RISK MANAGEMENT

Potential Risk 1
Economic uncertainties arising from global contexts such as inter-country and intra-country conflicts.

Impact on
 Marginalized women with whom we work and staff members of Azad

Likelihood / Probability
 Medium

Importance
 High

Mitigation Strategies
 As global conflicts rise, supply chains have been impacted all over the world. Oil and natural gas supplies have been declining, and this has led to the inflation of costs. We have factored this variable into our planning by creating 'what-if' scenarios (for worst and near-normal outcomes) as well as best-case scenarios. In the coming months, we will initiate course-correction as needed. Institutionally too, we plan to conduct a salary survey to ensure that Azad is positioned competitively and does not lose out on talent due to rising salary expectations, given the rise in cost of living.

Potential Risk 2
Changing regulatory framework around funding sources leading to diminishing resources for CSOs.

Impact on
 Marginalized women with whom we work and the staff members of Azad

Likelihood / Probability
 Medium

Importance
 High

Mitigation Strategies
 In the last five years, we have already started to source funding from Indian foundations and social responsibility departments of corporate houses. 47 per cent of the funds we raised in the last five years came from Indian donors. We will continue to increase the proportion of Indian funding by reaching out to Indian CSR donors, individual giving, and foundations. We hope to have at least half of our funding from local sources in the next five years.

Potential Risk 3
Challenges in Outreach and Mobilization in the context of Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill 2026

Impact on
 Livelihoods of trans persons with whom we work/ intend to work

Likelihood / Probability
 High

Importance
 High

Mitigation Strategies
 The bill may create fear, reduced visibility, and access barriers, limiting outreach, mobilization and participation of trans persons in programmes and staff roles. It might further marginalize trans persons by restricting access to dignified livelihoods, identity recognition and safe participation in public life. To mitigate this, Azad will partner with trans-led organizations for trust building and outreach. We will create safe, inclusive spaces with support systems for the people from gender-diverse communities.

Potential Risk 4
Changing nature of technology and impact on job market.

Impact on
 Marginalized women with whom we work

Likelihood / Probability
 Medium

Importance
 Medium

Mitigation Strategies
 As the nature of technology is constantly changing and this impacts the communities with whom we work, we will create better work opportunities for women in NTPs and strengthen their skills in NTPs. We will adapt technology and also enhance the capacities of the communities to adapt to technology.

Potential Risk 5

Climate change leading to an increasing number and severity of natural disasters.

Impact on

Women with whom we work, including WWW trainees

Likelihood / Probability

High

Importance

High

Mitigation Strategies

It is evident now that climate change is leading to more and severe natural disasters. These affect the poor the most as they cannot recover quickly. When the financial burden on the family increases, Azad's trainees feel the pressure to get jobs and income. We are working on our curriculum to ensure that training is completed in the shortest duration possible without compromising content or quality. We have in the past raised funds to support communities through such disasters. We are confident of being able to do the same going forward, provided that the impact is over limited geography and population. As part of our small contribution towards supporting the environment, we have initiated a transition to E-vehicles to reduce carbon emissions.

Potential Risk 6

A global calamity such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact on

Marginalized women and queer persons with whom we work

Likelihood / Probability

Low

Importance

High

Mitigation Strategies

In the last two years of the pandemic, we have learnt to be agile, resilient and quick to adapt to the rapidly changing context. We will continue to be prepared for such eventualities by exploring more options within the transport industry such as two-wheeler riding, bus driving, and so on. We will also explore other non-traditional options for women in new locations.

Potential Risk 7

Push back to work related to women empowerment and gender justice from the populist conservative movements.

Impact on

Marginalized women with whom we work

Likelihood / Probability

Medium

Importance

High

Mitigation Strategies

We will continue to work with communities and strengthen our leadership to build the potential and requisite skills amongst young women, men and adolescent girls to become change agents in their communities to challenge patriarchal ideas.

ANNEXURE 3

SUSTAINABILITY

At Azad, sustainability is multidimensional because we interact with structurally marginalized individuals, families, and communities to enable them to transform their lives and create a gender-just society. For us, sustainability can be achieved by building feminist leadership among women and men so that they create gender-just communities around themselves, especially via non-traditional skill training to resource-poor women, facilitating their joining and continuation in non-traditional professions. We measure sustainability through certain indices: women and queer persons' control over their incomes, their violence-free lives, exercise of citizenship rights, male challenge to toxic masculinity, their equal participation in unpaid care work, and support for women and queer persons' participation in paid workforce. The impacts of such interventions are interconnected and ripple across multiple facets to sustain transformation.

Azad cares about the interconnections between sustainability of women in a green economy, particularly green transportation, and the health of the planet. This is why we have introduced e-bikes and e-cars in our trainings. In this strategic planning cycle, we also plan to train women to drive e-auto-rickshaws (three-wheelers).

Climate Change has had a tumultuous impact on the everyday lives of women drivers. Unseasonal and heavy downpours lead to flooded and unsafe roads, and extreme heat makes driving work even more difficult. Women have to face the impact of climate change at home too, when their neighbourhoods are flooded and heat waves make their homes unbearably hot. In this strategic planning cycle, Azad will introduce in its driving training certain modules on climate resilience and dealing with climate change.

Psychosocial well-being and empowerment are important indicators of sustainability in Azad's work. When women drivers start earning a decent income, they invest in the education or skill development of their daughters and siblings. When opportunities open for other generations, it empowers their families and communities as well, thereby increasing their well-being manifolds.

ANNEXURE 4

PARTICIPANTS

AT THE STRATEGY CONSULTATIONS

The synergy between all our programmes makes the impact of Azad's work sustainable. When a woman driver enrolls her son in MGJ so that he learns gender-sensitive behaviour or when a feminist leader admits her daughter to the AK programme so that she continues education and learns to negotiate gender biases, it lends our work multidimensional sustainability. Community engagement and leadership development will remain central to ensuring the long-term sustainability of our work.

The work of Azad is sustained through research, communication, and policy analysis. We will continue research and policy analysis with local and national governments as well as industries to create gender-inclusive workplaces and transport policies. Our efforts to mainstream NTPs and Skill ++ framework is also important for working towards sustainability which will be our endeavour to achieve through policy engagement. Azad's global advocacy efforts to promote non-traditional skill-building through the GJSE framework will make our work sustainable, extensive, and engender larger changes. Our efforts through the NTL Network and partners will help widen our outreach of the NTP concept and make it sustainable through other CSOs in different geographies.

Community Members or leaders and alumni (199 in all) from all our four locations of Chennai, Jaipur, Kolkata, and New Delhi.

Staff of Azad Foundation. Community mobilizers, programme implementers, faculty members, District Leads, members of the Finance and Human Resource team, the Core Team (including State and Thematic Leads), and of the National Leadership team (in all, 89 participants from all four locations).

Civil Society Organizations and Partners of our Ecosystem. Organizations working in related domains such as gender, employment, governance, and rights-based policy engagement (67 participants from across our four locations).

Thought Leaders and Co-travellers such as researchers, sector leaders, policy analysts, communication specialists, corporate leaders, legal experts, and academicians; seven 'key informant' interviews (in-person and online) were conducted by members of Azad's leadership and Core Team.

Consultations with all the above-mentioned stakeholders were held between May and September 2025. For each of the stakeholder groups, Azad first offered a presentation to outline its vision and mission our journey from the last five years, as well as the external contexts. Following this, participants received 'discussion guidelines' for focused group discussions. Their responses and suggestions were recorded and then consolidated across locations.

The most remarkable ideas that emerged from all the consultations across locations were synthesized by the leadership (thematic and programmatic leads) of Azad. They also crafted the salient elements of the new strategy. This was followed by more deliberations and reflections. The fine-tuned outcome of all of the above work eventually led to this, the new Strategic Plan.

Key Informant Interviews

Bimla Chandrasekhar (Ekta Resource Center for Women)
 Gagan Sethi (Development Educator and Organizational Development Expert)
 Paul Divakar (Human Rights Advocate)
 Pramada Menon (Tarshi and HCF)
 Rajesh Tandon (PRIA)
 Ratnaboli Ray (Anjali – Mental Health Rights Organization)
 Soumya Dhanaraj (Good Business Lab)

Consultations with Civil Society Organizations**JAIPUR**

Aasra Foundation
 Ajeevika Bureau
 Ambhuja Foundation
 Anita Mathur (Activist and Consultant)
 Center for Advocacy and Research
 Chetna
 Ekjut
 i-India
 Magic Bus India Foundation
 Mamta
 Maruti Suzuki Driving School
 Nalini Foundation
 National Federation for Women
 Piramal Foundation
 Pravah
 Rajasthan Prateesheel Mahila Federation
 Riseup Together
 Safetipin
 Sakha Consulting Wings
 Sakshi (Consultant)
 Samarth Foundation
 Vikalp
 Vishakha
 Vividha
 The YP Foundation

NEW DELHI

Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion
 CEQUIN
 Institute of Social Studies Trust
 ETASHA Society
 National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights
 National Foundation for India
 Nazariya Queer Feminist Resource Group
 Safetipin
 Sakha Consulting Wings
 South Asia Forum for Women
 UN Women
 Urban Catalysts

KOLKATA

Anand Bazaar Patrika
 Amra Pradatik
 Jabala
 NOSKK
 Praajak
 Prayaas
 Sabar Institute
 Equidiversity
 Samikshani
 Swayam
 Talash

CHENNAI

Geeta Narayanan (Independent Consultant)
 BRAVOH Movement
 Centre for Child Rights and Development
 ECTE Foundation
 Ekta Resource Centre
 ROOTS
 The Tamilnadu Domestic Workers Welfare Trust
 VAANAM
 Women's Collective



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