



WOMEN TRANSFORMING LIVES, COMMUNITIES AND SYSTEMS

#ROADS WE TRAVEL

Azād Foundation

ANNUAL REPORT

2025-26

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THE ROADS WE TRAVEL

WOMEN TRANSFORMING LIVES,
COMMUNITIES AND SYSTEMS

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NOTE FROM THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM

CULTIVATING THE FUTURE



This year was a year of dreaming, questioning, and finding pathways into an uncertain future.

Together, we completed Azad's Strategic Plan for 2026–31—a process of reflection, learning, and collective visioning. As we looked ahead, we were reminded of a metaphor shared by one of our colleagues—for eighteen years, we have climbed mountains that seemed impossible to scale and found roads through dense forests where sunlight barely reached the ground. Today, we stand in a valley. Parts of it are lush and blooming, nurtured by women¹ from marginalized communities who have transformed their own lives and surroundings. Yet, much of the valley still awaits to be cultivated. Our work, therefore, is far from complete.

At the same time, we know this is not an era for comfortable dreams. We live amid deepening geopolitical conflicts, economic uncertainty, and widening inequalities, where wealth and power continue to concentrate in the hands of a few, pushing marginalized communities further to the margins. These realities remind us that gender justice cannot be separated from the struggle against structural inequality and exclusion. Yet even amid these crises, we remain hopeful that the world can change for the better. We choose hope as a responsibility to continue imagining, building, and acting towards a more just and equitable future.

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

This year, we have consciously initiated articulating our work through the intersections of caste, gender, and labour. This has strengthened our analysis on how enabling women to enter non-traditional professions challenges patriarchy and caste-based occupational hierarchies. We also advanced our commitment to transgender persons' inclusion in programs and started responding to the lived experiences of transgender communities through our interventions.

We strengthened our institutional systems through digitization of our training curriculum and the Women with Wheels' (WWW) Management Information System. These initiatives are enhancing the quality of learning, improving program monitoring, and enabling more transparent, evidence-based decision-making across the organization.

During the year, 626 women were trained as professional drivers. With the support of our strategic partner Sakha, many are now employed as two and four-wheeler drivers in India, while others went on to drive heavy vehicles in India and Europe. In the last three years, the job retention rate of women drivers has consistently been 90%, far exceeding urban Indian women's labour force participation of 25.3% (PLFS). Yet, driving is much more than a profession. As women drivers often remind us, it is a tool for crossing boundaries, claiming mobility, and challenging patriarchal restrictions.

This year, we consciously shifted our language from describing driving as a livelihood to

recognizing it as a profession. In doing so, we have challenged class and caste-based hierarchies that privilege certain forms of work over others, while affirming driving as a dignified career path chosen by women who have historically been denied such opportunities.

Around 4,500 women, girls, men, and boys participated in our programs, contributing to more gender-just communities through leadership development, women's access to citizenship entitlements and welfare schemes, entry into non-traditional professions, and efforts to strengthen gender-inclusive community infrastructure. This year, we launched the Centre for Gender and Masculinities, based on our experience that engaging boys and men is essential to build a gender-equitable society.

Policy engagement remained one of the core areas of our work as we continued to influence key stakeholders to expand opportunities for marginalized women to enter, sustain, and grow in non-traditional professions. In Delhi, our engagement with the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) contributed to the development of safe and hygienic washrooms and restrooms for women bus drivers and conductors. In Kolkata, in partnership with a research organization, we assessed over 350 public toilets and spoke with more than 7,000 cis and transgender persons, generating evidence on the urgent need for more accessible and inclusive public sanitation facilities.

We also continued to learn and grow alongside networks and movements committed to social justice, including the Non-Traditional Livelihoods Network, MenEngage Alliance, and several state-level platforms.

At Azad, we have always believed that meaningful social change requires transformation within as much as outside. We therefore remain committed to collective well-being, staff development, and nurturing the next generation of leaders. This year, we completed the Next-Generation Leadership Program (NGLP) with a new batch of mid-level leaders. Also, we are glad to share that a new member has been included in the National Leadership team.

We are deeply grateful to our Board members for their guidance, to the women and communities who continue to teach and inspire us, to our donors for their trust, and to our partners, collaborators, friends, and well-wishers for walking alongside us.

In this annual report, we invite you to travel through the pictorial journeys of Azad's community leaders, women drivers, team, and policy engagement showcasing how each contributes to our larger vision. Each story reflects the achievements, challenges, and lessons that have shaped our journey over the past year.

With gratitude and hope,
Mousumi, Shrinivas and Dolon

THE PEOPLE WE WORK WITH

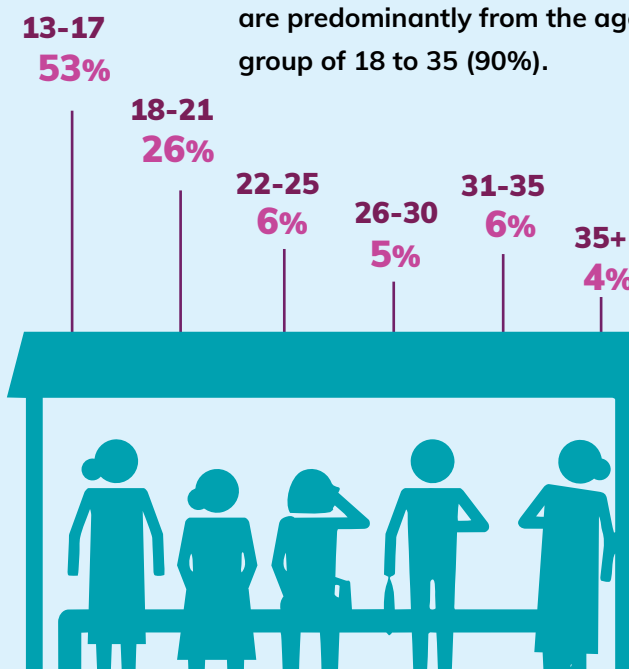
FLAGBEARERS OF GENDER JUSTICE

Azad works with marginalized women and men across all intersections of class, caste, religion, sexual and gender identities in Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata and Chennai directly and with partners in Indore and Ahmedabad.

This section presents a snapshot of the people Azad engaged with in 2025-26, including adolescent girls, young women, men and boys from the Azad Kishori, Feminist Leadership and Men for Gender Justice Programs; and trainees from the Women with Wheels (WWW) program.

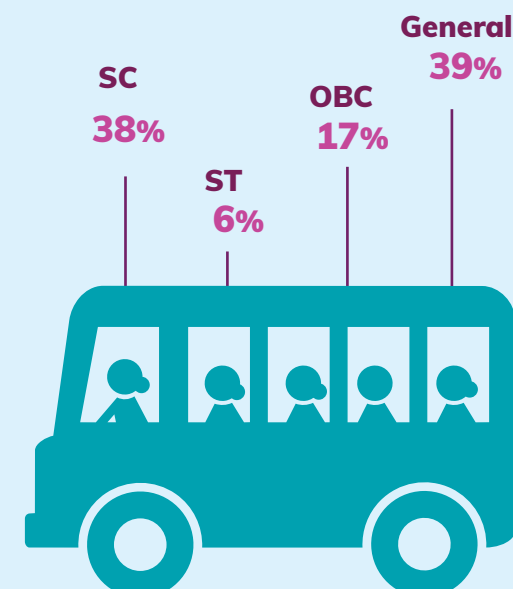
AGE

Azad predominantly engages with adolescents and young adults aged 13 to 25 (85%), with a strong focus on shaping attitudes, non-traditional skills, and feminist leadership during formative and transitional life stages. The Women with Wheels trainees are predominantly from the age group of 18 to 35 (90%).



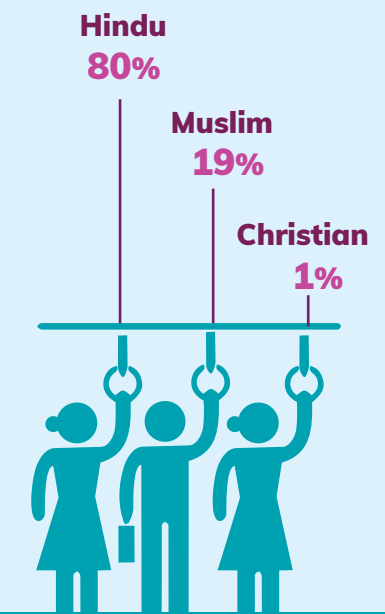
CASTE CATEGORY

61% of the individuals Azad works with belong to marginalized communities (SC, OBC, and ST), with a firm commitment to enable communities historically excluded from access to resources and mainstream opportunities.



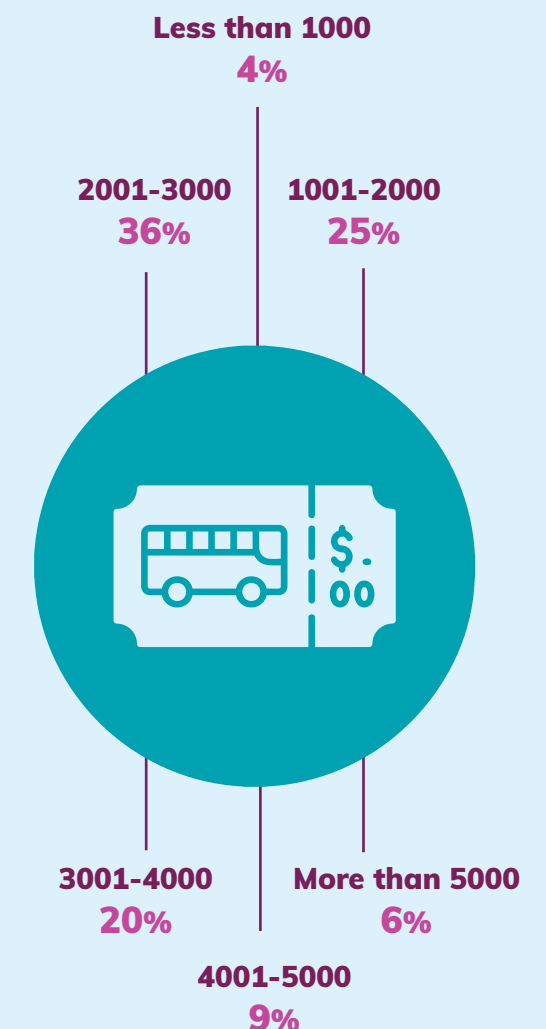
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Azad strives to increase the participation of minority religious communities to foster inclusion through its work. 20% of our leaders and trainees come from minority religious communities.



PER CAPITA INCOME

94% of the individuals associated with Azad fall below the poverty line, while 3% are marginally above the poverty line, as defined by the World Bank, reaffirming Azad's resolve to work with economically marginalized communities.



THE ROADS WE TRAVEL

Azad Foundation's mission is to enable women from resource-poor communities with skills and knowledge to enter and sustain in non-traditional professions (NTPs), empower themselves and build a gender-just, equitable society.

While each of these strategic objectives is distinct, they are woven together through threads and are logically interconnected, leading to a larger tapestry of change.

Azad's strategic pillars are built on:

1

ENGAGE WITH RESOURCE-POOR COMMUNITIES FOR A GENDER-JUST ECOSYSTEM

We build feminist leadership among women, girls, men and young boys in communities to create an enabling environment that supports women to join non-traditional professions, lead violence-free lives, enhance their mobility, exercise agency; and encourage men to share care work and support women's choices.

2

TRANSFORM WOMEN AS EMPOWERED NON-TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONALS

We do this through transformative skill development, combining technical, self-empowerment and professional skills; and ensuring employment of women in the transport sector.

3

SUSTAIN WOMEN IN NTPs BY INFLUENCING POLICIES AND MARKETS TO BE GENDER-INCLUSIVE

We do this to ensure retention of women in NTPs through gender-inclusive infrastructure, decent employment opportunities and adoption of gender-just skill education framework in skill education institutions.

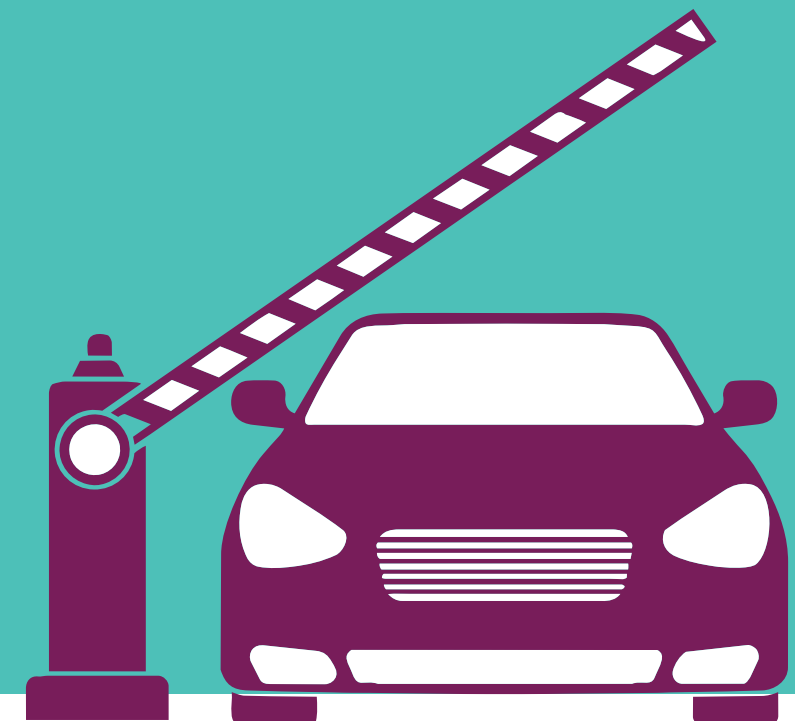
4

CULTIVATE A COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP CULTURE TO ENHANCE EFFICIENCY AND COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING

We strengthen our organization through continuous learning, collective leadership development, inclusive policies, and practices that encourage collaboration, resilience, and collective care.

ENGAGE ENGAGE ENGAGE

BUILDING COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP



AZAD KISHORI PROGRAM

Azad Kishori² Program engages adolescent girls from classes 9th to 12th to build their leadership capacity and enable them to influence peer groups in their communities. Adolescent girls are equipped with the agency to negotiate the age of marriage, challenge menstrual taboos & gender-based violence, choose non-traditional or Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) careers and realize their aspirations.

INDUCTION



LEADERSHIP
BUILDING



MENTORSHIP



ENGAGEMENT
WITH PEERS



ENGAGEMENT
WITH PARENTS



THE AZAD
KISHORI
LEADER
EMERGES



AARTI is an 18-year-old kishori leader. Both her parents are construction workers. Joining the Azad Kishori Program four years ago helped Aarti in deciding a path for herself and identifying the steps to reach her goal. She opted for Biology, Chemistry and Physics in Class 11, and decided that she wanted to be a doctor.

She has seen her family growing more supportive of her since her engagement with Azad. Pressure to do household chores has been replaced by support towards her studies.

Once, Aarti feared voicing her opinions in front of her family. But today she openly talks about her views and feels heard. She shares her learnings on issues like gender, menstruation and career paths with her peers, which makes her happy.

Having passed her Class 12 examination, she aspires to clear NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) and get admission into the MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery) program at All India Institute of Medical Sciences. She wants to specialize as a heart surgeon.

²adolescent

AZAD KISHORI PROGRAM

BUILDING

A SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEM FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS



REACH

220

kishori leaders were engaged in the year across Kolkata (24), Delhi (96) and Jaipur (100)

81

leadership training sessions were conducted on digital literacy, gender, patriarchy, gender-based violence, legal rights and building negotiation skills for decision-making

ENGAGING WITH PARENTS

Activities aimed at enhancing family support and encouraging their active participation in the well-being and lives of adolescent girls:

2688 meetings with parents

81 Choupal⁴ meetings with 648 parents of Kishori leaders and their peer members

TRANSFORMATION

197 alumni kishoris have collectivized into the Alumni Association of Young Girls (AAG) in Jaipur, reporting their transformation:

91% are comfortable travelling alone for work, education or sports training, even during late evenings

40% have completed higher education

18% are supporting their peers with education by helping them opt for STEM and ITI⁵, and complete school

25% are negotiating to push their marriage to pursue education

23% stood up for survivors of domestic violence

THE CONTEXT WE WORK IN

20.1% of women aged 20-24 in India were married before turning 18 (NFHS-6).

India women and girls are 33% less likely than men to use mobile internet (The Mobile Gender Gap Report, 2025).

Women constitute 43% of higher education enrollment in STEM disciplines (AISHE 2022-23), yet their participation in the STEM workforce is only 18.6% (Department of Science and Technology 2023).

Nearly one lakh schools across India do not have toilets for girls, while over 61,000 schools lack functional girls' toilets (NITI Aayog 2024-25), impacting their education.

IMPACT



JAIPUR

32 kishoris passed 12th class
35 kishoris enrolled in class 12
30 kishoris enrolled in class 10
Of these, 10 kishoris opted for science stream



DELHI

14 kishoris passed 12th class
31 Kishoris enrolled in classes 11 and 12



KOLKATA

54 kishoris are studying in classes 11 and 12
1 alumni kishori is pursuing graduation

1844

peer members were reached by kishori leaders through 1691 adda³ meetings with information and support to make decisions regarding their life



LAUNCH OF ALUMNI LEADERSHIP ACCELERATOR PROGRAM (ALAP)

ALAP was launched in Jaipur with the induction of 20 alumni leaders, to support their journey towards becoming youth leaders, mentors, and changemakers in their own communities. These leaders will be equipped to set up and sustain their own organization—led by young girls, for young girls. ALAP also aims to strengthen the broader social sector in Rajasthan by contributing to building the agency and leadership of young girls.

³peer group

⁴community gathering

⁵Industrial Training Institutes

FEMINIST LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Feminist Leadership Program trains young women in feminist principles through a yearlong capacity development, to build a gender-just environment in their communities. These women emerge as dynamic young leaders who work on issues like women's access to citizenship entitlements, social security benefits, non-traditional skill education and employment opportunities; gender-inclusive infrastructure; and prevention of gender-based violence.

INDUCTION

LEADERSHIP BUILDING

ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL GOVERNANCE

ENGAGEMENT WITH PEERS

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

SUPPORT FOR CITIZENSHIP DOCUMENTATION, SOCIAL SECURITY SCHEMES AND COMBATting GBV

INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDING

THE FEMINIST LEADER EMERGES

KHUSHNUMA's journey with the Feminist Leadership Program has been one of learning to lead change in communities independently. In her own life, she gained the confidence to speak and move freely. While as a young feminist leader, Khushnuma has assisted women in accessing documentation and government welfare schemes; combatting violence and participating in the workforce.

One of the women in the community was facing violence by her husband who was an alcoholic. Khushnuma supported her in making a decision and once she decided to divorce her husband, Khushnuma held her hand through the entire process— from filing a police complaint to accessing government legal aid.

Khushnuma realized the need for a creche facility in her community, which would enable women to leave their children and go out for work. With the help of a friend, she set up a creche where 20 children are enrolled today. The centre runs from 10 am to 5 pm, and the families have shared how useful it has been for them.

Looking back, Khushnuma shares, "While struggles have always been there in my life, I now have the courage to face them with a can-do spirit."



KHUSHNUMA
FLP LEADER, DELHI



THE CONTEXT WE WORK IN

India recorded over 4.5 lakh cases of crimes against women, with 31% accounting for 'Cruelty by husband or relatives' (NCRB 2023).

There has been a 19.7% rise in cases of rapes against Scheduled Caste women and girls from 2019 to 2023 (NCRB, 2023).

37% of the population in India does not have access to safely managed sanitation services (UN 2024), poorly impacting women.

Approximately 30% of skilled women acquire skills in beauty-related sectors and over 20% in tailoring (IndiaSpend 2024).



118

feminist leaders engaged across Kolkata (54), Delhi (28), Jaipur (15) and Chennai (21)



REACH

275

bastis covered for the creation of gender-inclusive infrastructure through engagement with local governments.

IMPACT



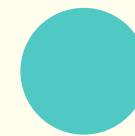
9,575 women assisted to obtain citizenship documents and access social security schemes



525 women assisted with financial linkages



132 women supported to access skill development through Women with Wheels Program (17% of the total women enrolled in Women with Wheels Program)



146 women received critical support to combat gender-based violence, including legal advice, linkage to counsellors and support in filing police complaints



47 community action projects spearheaded by the leaders for gender-inclusive infrastructure creation and maintenance; access to education and public health



340,000

people in the community and 70,000+ women reached with information to access citizenship documents, social security schemes, combat Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and access non-traditional professions

896

peers engaged by feminist leaders over the year to strengthen gender-just ecosystems in their communities.

MEN FOR GENDER JUSTICE PROGRAM

Men for Gender Justice Program engages with young men and boys in the age-group of 14 to 20 years, empowering them to embrace positive masculinity, share the responsibility of household work, support women to adopt non-traditional professions, and challenge gender-based violence.

INDUCTION



PAKHWADA INPUT SESSIONS



PAKHWADA SPORTS SESSIONS



LEADERSHIP TRAINING



ENGAGEMENT WITH FAMILIES



MEN FOR GENDER JUSTICE LEADER EMERGES

ANIKET's engagement with the Men for Gender Justice Program captures his continuous journey of learning, reflecting and questioning injustice.

Growing up, Aniket's view of gender roles mirrored what he saw around him— men working outside while women looked after the home. With perspective building sessions, he began to question this divide and gradually started sharing household work as his own responsibility.

Aniket's father is a small contractor. When he observed the difference in payment to the male and female construction workers, he took up his concern with his father. Personalizing the issue, he asked how his father would feel if his own daughter would be paid less for the same job as a man. Something changed that day and his father has made it a practice to pay all workers equally.

Aniket also intervened when talks of marrying his 21-year-old twin sister started going around in the family, convincing his father to let her complete her education first.

Aniket has redefined masculinity as one that supports rather than one that controls.





Sharing household responsibilities

THE CONTEXT WE WORK IN

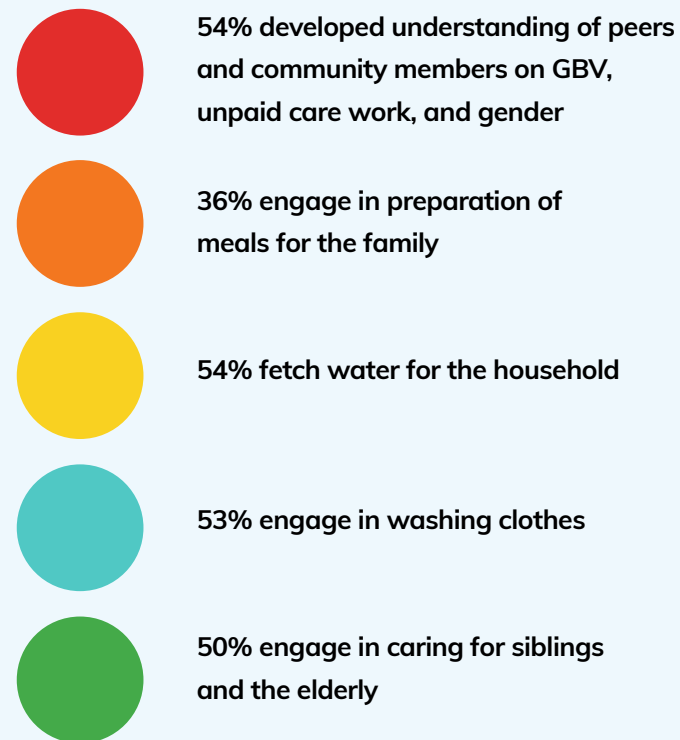
Women spend nearly 3 times more time (289 minutes) on unpaid care and domestic responsibilities than men (88 minutes) (Time Use Survey, 2024).

Cruelty by husband or relatives accounted for 31% of all reported crimes against women (NCRB 2023).

Men make up 72.8% of total suicide victims (NCRB 2023), often linked to unaddressed mental health issues, societal pressures to adhere to traditional masculinity, and lack of support systems.

IMPACT ON ACTION

Based on action tracking survey with 76 leaders



Demonstration at 'Ghar Ka Kaam Sabka Kaam' Campaign

1199

young men and boys were engaged through the year across Delhi (422), Jaipur (454) and Kolkata (323)

76

men and boys underwent advanced leadership training and have initiated efforts to create a gender-just ecosystem within their communities.

IMPACT ON PERCEPTION

Based on impact evaluation conducted with 62 participants from current and alumni batches

IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING ON

GBV

86%

Recognizing different forms of violence against women and girls, ways to challenge and prevent violence.

GENDER EQUALITY

86%

Understanding gender discrimination, unequal power relations, and the importance of creating equitable opportunities for all genders.

MASCULINITY, SEXUALITY AND CARE WORK

57%

Understanding socially constructed gender norms, hegemonic masculinities, diverse identities and sexualities, and the need for shared responsibilities within households.

WOMEN, NTPs AND LEADERSHIP

43%

Understanding women's participation in NTPs and barriers faced in entering male-dominated sectors; leadership skills and decision-making.

684

perspective building sessions were held on masculinity, gender, patriarchy, unpaid care work, and gender-based violence through pakhwada⁶ and sports sessions.



LAUNCH OF CENTRE FOR GENDER AND MASCULINITIES

Azad's experience has consistently shown that gender justice requires not only enabling women, but also transforming deeply entrenched patriarchal norms by engaging men as partners in change. Grounded in this understanding, Azad launched the Centre for Gender and Masculinities —a dedicated space for learning, reflection, and collaboration to challenge hegemonic masculinities.

The Centre aims to strengthen the skills and perspectives of organizations and practitioners working with men and boys through its Gender Equality and Masculinities (GEM) Course; build knowledge and create collaborative platforms on the issue of masculinity. The first cohort of 30 participants was selected for the GEM course from across 13 States and Union Territories. The participants will undergo year-long training around gender, masculinities, gender-based violence, and strengthening facilitation, communication and community mobilization skills.

⁶ fortnightly sessions

CAMPAIGNS AND ALUMNI MEET-UPS

FROM INDIVIDUAL JOURNEYS TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

Azad's change leaders collectivize through the alumni networks and lead gender justice in their communities. Through impactful campaigns, they promoted non-traditional professions for women and gender-diverse people, challenged gender-based violence, strengthened access to citizenship rights and entitlements, and encouraged the equitable sharing of unpaid care work.

Through interactive community-based activities like street plays, puppet shows, rallies, fairs, gender role reversal games, signature campaigns, poster-making workshops, film screenings, podcasts and through social media, we reached:

2,25,000+
INDIVIDUALS40 PARTNER
ORGANIZATIONS11 STATES
IN INDIA

'GHAR KA KAAM SABKA KAAM' CAMPAIGN

Co-organized with the MenEngage India Alliance and the Non-Traditional Livelihoods (NTL) Network, the campaign continued to challenge unequal gender norms around care work. Through community dialogues and digital engagement activities such as the 'Ghar Ka Kaam' Bingo, Azad and its partners encouraged greater recognition of unpaid care work and promoted the equal participation of men and boys in caregiving responsibilities to create a supportive ecosystem for women to enter and sustain in NTPs.



Chennai



Delhi

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

On International Working Women's Day, Azad teams participated in various events and rallies, alongside feminist and LGBTQIA+ groups. Azad also ran a one-week campaign on its social media amplifying community voices, highlighting stories of leadership and transformation.



Delhi



Jaipur



Kolkata

ONE BILLION RISING CAMPAIGN



Kolkata

Jaipur

Young feminist leaders from Azad joined the global One Billion Rising Campaign to challenge violence against women and people with diverse gender identities and promote their inclusion in non-traditional professions.

CHALLENGING MENSTRUAL TABOOS



The Feminist Leaders of Kolkata organized a campaign on Menstrual Hygiene in communities across Kolkata. Through creative activities, the campaign educated women and young girls about menstrual hygiene and enabled them to challenge taboos surrounding menstruation.



Kolkata



ALUMNI MEETS

1,005 alumni from Azad's various programs came together through gatherings held across locations. These events celebrated collective achievements, renewed commitments to advancing gender equality and dignified employment and strengthened solidarity networks, ensuring social capital. The gatherings were organized around significant occasions such as International Working Women's Day, Constitution Day, and Human Rights Day.

Delhi



Chennai



Jaipur



TRANSFORM TRANSFORM TRANSFORM

THE JOURNEY TOWARDS CLAIMING AGENCY



WOMEN WITH WHEELS PROGRAM

Women with Wheels Program enables young women from resource-poor communities to choose careers as professional chauffeurs and riders. It is a transformative capacity building program encompassing technical and professional driving skills and self-empowerment skills, so that their non-traditional profession brings them closer to agency and dignity.

MOBILIZATION
AND ENROLLMENT



TECHNICAL
DRIVING SKILLS



SELF-EMPOWERMENT
SKILLS

UNDERSTANDING
OF GENDER AND
PATRIARCHY



MAPPING
TRANSFORMATION
Badlav Ka Safarnama



PROFESSIONAL SKILLS
Work Readiness



ACHIEVEMENT
OF PERMANENT
DRIVING LICENSE



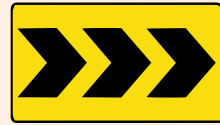
A
PROFESSIONAL
DRIVER & RIDER
EMERGES



Both **TANUSREE**'s father and husband are drivers. Yet, when she first decided to learn driving, she faced resistance. Determined to change her life, she took a second chance.

Her life did change as she didn't just become a professional driver, but an e-cab driver with Uber— an achievement that fills her with pride. Her life has shifted from seeking permission from her mother or husband to making her own decisions. She is no longer answerable to anyone about how she spends her earnings. She often returns home late at night and takes intercity trips for work, all of which her family respects as part of her profession.

She fulfilled her dream of air travel when she was invited to speak at a Women's Day Event in Pune. Her next ambition is to drive a bus or a truck.



MUTHARASI's journey from a cramped house that would flood during rain to a comfortable home sustained by her own earnings is a tale of dreams taking shape. When she joined the driving training program, she lived with her husband and two sons. Her dream of providing a better life for her children motivated her to learn riding and enter the transport sector.

After completing her training, she began working with Delhivery and later with Rapido. She also purchased a two-wheeler on EMI, which she will fully own in the next two months.

As her earnings grew, her husband became increasingly opposed to her work and subjected her to violence. The months of learning about her rights and the confidence gained through independence enabled Mutharasi to make a decision for herself and move out of an abusive relationship.

In just one year, she has repaid nearly INR 2 lakh in debt and now dreams of owning a house and securing a bright future for her children.



THE CONTEXT WE WORK IN

Only 27.6% women in urban areas participate in the labor force compared to 76.2% urban men (PLFS 2025).

Nearly 44% of women who remained outside the labour force cited childcare and personal commitments in homemaking as the primary reason (PLFS 2025).

Only 18.8% women have ownership of a house or land, either alone or jointly (NFHS-6).

22% of the ever-married women aged 18-49 years have experienced spousal violence (NFHS-6).

TRANSFORMATION



100% became primary breadwinners in the family



Out of the 79% trainees who were survivors of gender-based violence, 49% chose to speak out against it



54% increased their mobility by moving independently in public places, at any time of the day



31% began making decisions independently, gaining control over their lives



27% raised their voice in the community by joining in campaigns



IMPACT

796

women accessed transformative skill training by enrolling in the Women with Wheels program across Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, and Chennai

626

women successfully acquired technical and employability skills, securing driving licenses and becoming job-ready

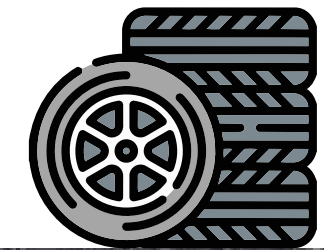
340

women were placed as professional chauffeurs and riders in the e-commerce and transportation industry

STEERING FORWARD THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborations and partnerships have been pivotal to the expansion of Azad's Women with Wheels program over the years. In 2025-26, we continued to strengthen partnerships with civil society organizations and social enterprises that share our commitment to breaking barriers and creating dignified employment opportunities for women in the non-traditional transport sphere.

Together, we facilitated knowledge exchange and contributed to resources, policy engagement, and systemic change.



SAMAAN SOCIETY continued to strengthen its four-wheeler driving training for women, enhancing their professional driving skills, building confidence and creating employment opportunities. During the year, 61 trainees enrolled in the program and 51 trainees successfully received their permanent driving licenses.

So far, 28 trainees have secured employment as drivers in organizations and the private sector, while several others are in different stages of the placement process.

One of the trainees has her own cab and is driving independently, earning an income on her own terms. Such success stories reflect the true impact of transformative training, support, and opportunities, in enabling women to enter non-traditional professions and build sustainable careers.

For many women, this program is the first step towards economic independence and social change.



BASERA enrolled 330 women across multiple driving segments, including two-wheelers, three-wheelers (e-autos), four-wheelers, and Heavy Motor Vehicles (HMV). Of these, 129 women successfully obtained permanent driving licenses, while 108 women secured dignified and remunerative employment. Basera's commitment to inclusion remained central to its work, reflected in the nearly equal representation of Hindu and Muslim women participants, with average household income of ₹13,000 per month. These women transitioned into a range of professional roles including delivery partners, commercial drivers and private chauffeurs.

Basera also expanded its impact through partnerships in Baroda, Silvassa, Jambusar and Pune. Marking a significant milestone beyond borders, it placed 3 women as trailer drivers with Baton Transport in Europe. It continued to strengthen its engagement with the government as the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation's Urban Community Development (UCD) department renewed its collaboration with them for e-auto driving training.



With a 92% retention rate, SAKHA, Azad's strategic employment partner, does more than place women in jobs. It supports them to build long-term careers as two-wheeler, four-wheeler and heavy vehicle drivers in the transport and e-commerce sectors. Actively negotiating with the market, Sakha ensures job opportunities for women are safe and remunerative while opening doors for career progression.

In 2025-26, **356 women were employed** as professional drivers and riders across sectors with partners like Fery, Rapido, Genpact, PWC, Heritage Mobility, Cognizant, Aaj Tak, Myntra, Snap-E Cabs, Lithium, Delhi Transport Corporation, Baton Transport, Porter, Big

Basket, ShadowFax, Even Cargo and Delhivery. Together, these women generated a cumulative income of **USD 555,000+** directly flowing into their households and futures. Women employed in the transport sector through Sakha have witnessed visible career progression from four- and two-wheeler drivers to bus and trailer truck drivers and EV operators. Sakha continued its partnership with Baton Transport, **with 18 women driving trailer trucks** across Europe and **14 more ready to go in the coming year.**

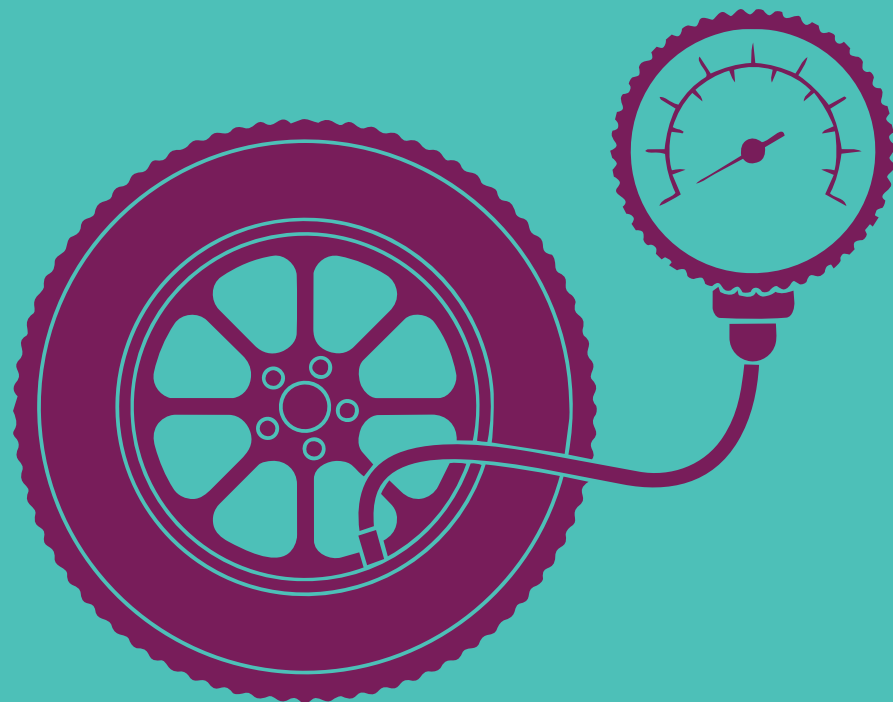
Together, these women are claiming their own identities in families, communities and workplaces; renegotiating the invisible labour of care at home; gaining access and control over their earnings; and investing in their children's futures.

Sakha has also entered a pilot initiative '**Sakha Kathakars,**' in partnership with Folk Tales, positioning women as tourist guides for heritage tours in Delhi. Sakha and Azad will jointly implement this on the ground in the coming year.



SUSTAIN SUSTAIN SUSTAIN SUSTAIN

CREATING EVIDENCE
FOR INCLUSION



RESEARCH, POLICY ANALYSIS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Azad's Research, Policy Analysis, and Communications initiatives focus on conducting evidence-based research and effectively communicating findings to inform policy recommendations, engage with decision makers, markets, networks and various forums for promoting the inclusion of women in non-traditional professions in the transport sector. Azad also holds the Secretariat for the Non-Traditional Livelihoods (NTL) Network, generating awareness and resources for advancing NTPs for women across India.

RESEARCH

Studies such as the 'Status of Public Toilets for Women and Queer People in Kolkata'



POLICY ENGAGEMENT



Policymakers | Delhi



Policymakers | Chennai



Policymakers | Kolkata

Azad began engaging with the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and the Transport Department in 2015 to enable women's entry into the bus driving profession and address structural barriers in recruitment policies. Over time, we conducted research, heard the experiences of women drivers, audited bus depots and found evidence that entry of women into the sector alone was not enough.

We worked closely with DTC through the year 2025-26 for building gender inclusive workspaces through washrooms, rooms to rest, and gender sensitization of its male staff, moving from entry of women in non-traditional spaces to their sustenance. One of the key successes came with DTC's step to construct dedicated restrooms for women in 11 bus depots. Azad visited the newly constructed facilities and got an opportunity to provide feedback based on the needs and lived experiences of women employees, such as provision of attached washroom facilities to improve privacy, safety, and usability.

A roundtable discussion was held for sharing experience of this policy win in March 2026 where participants including DTC officials, drivers, CSO partners and independent researchers joined.

CONSULTATIONS



With stakeholders in Delhi



With stakeholders in Kolkata

RESEARCH

LOOKING AT OUR CITIES AND POLICIES FROM A GENDER LENS

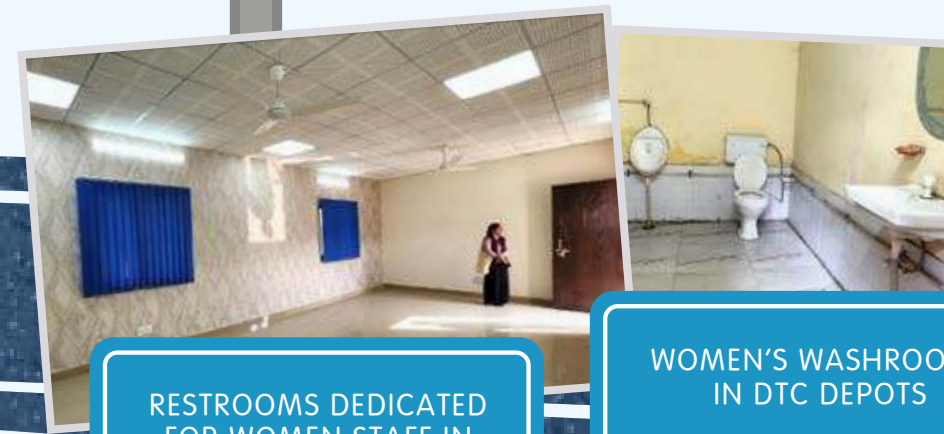
STUDY ON ACCESS TO PUBLIC TOILETS IN KOLKATA

Azad Foundation, in collaboration with the Sabar Institute, undertook a timely study on the status of public toilets for women and queer persons in Kolkata. This study was born out of years of on-ground experience with women drivers and riders in the transport sector, who consistently highlighted the daily struggles they face because of inadequate restrooms, unhygienic toilets, and inaccessible facilities while navigating the city.

Covering **383 public toilets** across the wards of Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) and **7,578 respondents**, the research maps barriers faced by women and queer persons in accessing sanitation: poor cleanliness and hygiene, lack of safety, absence of maintenance, unaffordability, and infrastructural neglect. The study revealed that **10% of the daily income of women informal workers is spent on using public toilets**. It also links access to safe and inclusive public toilets to workforce participation, revealing how lack of such facilities pushes women and queer people out of public spaces and economic opportunities.

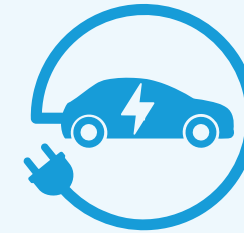
The study recommends reservation of 30% of public toilets for women, a KMC sponsored mobile application for locating public toilets, availability of facilities like handwash, continuous water supply, sanitary napkin vending machines and adequate lighting to make public toilets safe and inclusive for women and queer individuals.

GENDER INCLUSIVE REFORMS



RESTROOMS DEDICATED FOR WOMEN STAFF IN DTC DEPOTS

WOMEN'S WASHROOMS IN DTC DEPOTS



ANALYSIS OF TRANSPORT POLICIES

Azad conducted a review of the following policies in the year:

- TAMIL NADU: State EV Policy and Transport Department Policy Note
- WEST BENGAL: Transport and Logistics Policy and EV Policy 2021

Based on these reviews, recommendations were developed for policymakers for making the policies gender responsive. These recommendations were developed both in English and vernacular languages, based on which we plan to continue our engagement with the Transport Departments in the respective locations.

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Inclusive Public Toilet Infrastructure in Kolkata With Kolkata Municipal Corporation

Based on the study in Kolkata, in collaboration with the Sabar Institute, we initiated engagement with government officials and relevant stakeholders. A stakeholder consultation was organized in September to bring together perspectives from CSOs, academia, media and grassroots practitioners that further enriched the study. A Facebook page: “We Need Clean & Accessible Toilets” was created to enhance visibility of the issue.

Over the year, Azad and Sabar met with the Kolkata Mayor, Borough Chairman, Principal Secretary- Urban Development & Municipal Affairs, and Municipal Commissioner for the development of inclusive model public toilets across the city. It was found that the government has initiated a plan to remodel public toilets across the city, and we plan to closely follow up on this initiative over the next year.



Study on status of public toilets for women and queer persons in Kolkata

Inclusive Workplaces Through Shift in Attitudes Engagement with DTC



Gender sensitization of male DTC staff

One of the recommendations of the study on challenges of women drivers in public transport was the sensitization of male staff to promote inclusive behavior and acceptance towards women colleagues.

Through continued engagement with the authorities, we received approval from the DTC to conduct regular sensitization trainings for male drivers and conductors in September. 4,500+ staff have been trained in the year, with sessions focusing on gender and workplace inclusion and experience sharing by female and male employees.

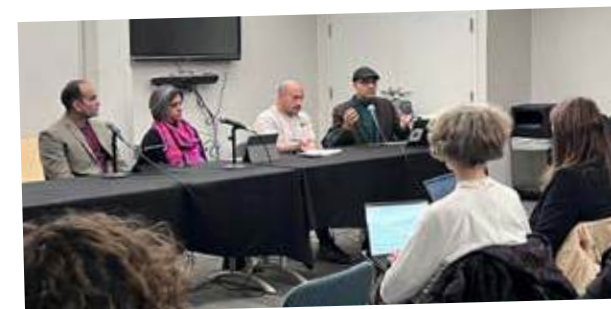


Initiating Policy Engagement in Tamil Nadu

Azad made headway in highlighting its agenda of mainstreaming non-traditional professions for women among policymakers in Tamil Nadu. A meeting was held with the Principal Secretary, Transport Department of Tamil Nadu. The discussion focused on seeking support from the government for inclusion of women in the workforce.

PROMOTING WOMEN'S INCLUSION IN NTPs IN POLICY ENGAGEMENT FORUMS

Azad actively engages with the wider civil society ecosystem through participation in Policy Engagement Forums, contributing to critical conversations on women's social and economic empowerment, masculinities, care work and gender-just ecosystem building. These platforms provided an opportunity to advance the discourse on women's inclusion in NTPs, mainstream the Gender-Just Skill Education (GJSE) Framework, and showcase effective strategies for scaling it across geographies.



70th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70)

Azad, in collaboration with Men Engage Alliance, Breakthrough and Equimundo, hosted an in-person parallel event on “Reframing Masculinities” at the CSW70. Azad contributed with grassroots experiences of challenging rigid gender norms and notions of hegemonic masculinity.



National Convention on Women

Azad was invited for a session on “Power, Policy & Change: From Agenda to Inclusive Action” during the Convention held at Jindal Global University in Haryana.



United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)

Azad co-organized a virtual side event at the HLPF with United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Non-Traditional Livelihoods Network. The dialogue brought together individuals working at the intersection of gender, work, and infrastructure to discuss “Evidence-Based Solutions in Enabling Women's Workforce Participation.”



International Learning Conference on Dignified Menstruation

Azad contributed to a panel discussion on “Engaging Men and Boys on the Nexus of SRHR and Dignified Menstruation (DM)” at the Conference, organized by Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation, Radha Paudel Foundation & Men Engage Alliance in Kathmandu, Nepal.



National Study Conference on Empowering Youth for a Sustainable Future

Azad contributed to the Conference organized by Madras Christian College, SEWA and Department of Social Work (AIDED) in Chennai, highlighting the role of Gender-Just Skill Education in enabling young women to enter and sustain in NTPs.



State Level Consultation on De-Briefing Beijing+30

Azad contributed to the Consultation organized by EKTA, Women's Collective, Justice Shivraj Patil Foundation and National Alliance of Women in Chennai.



Gender, Mobility and Livelihoods at the Urban Adda

Azad contributed to the Urban Adda hosted by Raahgiri Foundation and the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT), focusing on the need for gender-inclusive infrastructure in workplaces.



Women Drivers' Story at 'Your Story'

WWW alumnae shared their journeys of becoming professional drivers in a session hosted by Your Story's Shradha Sharma in Delhi.

Navigating Complexities and Challenges of Livelihood and Entrepreneurship Landscape

Azad joined this conversation organized by Equidiversity Foundation exploring pathways for inclusive livelihoods that address inequality.



Inclusive Livelihood Models for Women Reclaiming Their Lives

Azad contributed to this discussion organized by Invisible Scars, Prayas, and School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University focused on survivor-centred approaches to skill-building.



Anecdotes of Women in the Transport Sector

Azad contributed to a panel on "Breaking Gender Stereotypes: Anecdotes of Women in the Transport Sector," organized by Gurudas College in Kolkata.



DIGITIZING SYSTEMS

In an increasingly digital world, Azad is adapting by digitizing its Monitoring Information Systems (MIS) and Learning Management Systems (LMS). Over the year, the MIS for Women with Wheels and Feminist Leadership programs was digitized, and we have plans to expand it to Men for Gender Justice and Azad Kishori programs in the next phase. This transition aims to improve our program monitoring and evaluation processes.

Under the LMS, we initiated the digitization of training modules. Four modules on Gender and Patriarchy, Learner's License, Spoken English, and On Road Driving have already been digitized and tested across locations, while seven additional modules are currently under development. With this, we aim to scale and expand Women with Wheels which is one of Azad's core priorities for the future.



NON-TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS (NTL) NETWORK

ADVANCING NTPs ACROSS INDIA

NTL Network is a collaboration of 32 organizations and 13 individual members, across 13 states who engage with policymakers, markets, and other stakeholders to bring marginalized women in urban and rural India into livelihoods which have traditionally been closed to them.

Green Shoots Study

The Network initiated a study to document innovative non-traditional professions for women in Indian industrial settings across automobile, manufacturing and mining sectors. The study focuses on motivation of companies for hiring women in non-traditional roles; their efforts and processes; financial costs and benefits involved; and the experiences of women employees within the context of ILO's decent work framework.

The research team has conducted field visits to Titan Manufacturing Plant in Pant Nagar, Tata Steel Plant in Noamundi, and Balmer Lawrie in Kolkata, with a majority of women workforce presence in non-traditional roles. Based on the study, the Network plans engagement with industry and concerned stakeholders, like governments, Trade Unions, etc., for promoting women's employment in similar roles, and making these jobs more conducive for women workers.

Visit to Tata Steel Plant in Noamundi



Network Meetings

The Network organized a general body meeting in October, a practice initiated this year, to enhance member engagement and share updates on the Network's progress, opportunities and plans. 28 participants joined the meeting.

The Annual General Body meeting was held in March 2026 in Delhi, with 32 participants. The discussions revolved around the psychosocial wellbeing concerns and strategies of women and gender-diverse people in NTPs, identifying areas for policy engagement, and planning research initiatives, learning exchange and capacity building. One of the areas identified for policy engagement is the inclusion of gender-just skill education (GJSE) framework in skills institutions.

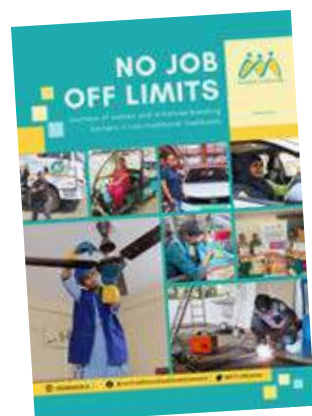
Annual General Body meeting in Delhi NCR



Learning Journey

A 3-day learning journey was conducted in West Bengal in September. Visits were planned to Network member organizations in the region including Anjali-Mental Health Rights Organization, Nari-o-Sishu Kalyan Kendra (NoSKK), Jabala and Azad Foundation. 13 individuals from different organizations and individual members participated, learning about diverse NTP initiatives such as:

- Dhobi Ghar, an automated laundry run by people living with psychosocial disabilities in Anjali-Mental Health Rights Organization
- Marginalized women trained as e-rickshaw drivers by Nari-o-Sishu Kalyan Kendra (NoSKK)
- Women survivors of trafficking rehabilitated through training as security guards, canteen staff and wall painters by Jabala
- Marginalized women trained as drivers and riders by Azad Foundation

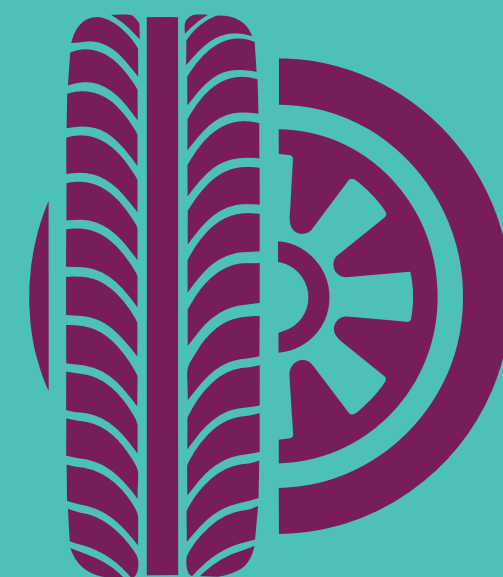


Documenting Journeys of Non-Traditional Professionals

This year, the Network documented the stories of 14 NTP practitioners from across network organizations. The professionals included electricians, welders, four-wheeler and e-rickshaw drivers, mobile repair technicians, and so on. The publication successfully captures the challenges of women entering such professions and how they reclaim their space in different aspects of their lives.

CULTIVATE

BUILDING SKILLS, SYSTEMS, AND RESILIENCE



ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Organizational Development focuses on nurturing Azad's internal ecosystem with collective well-being, building a resilient team with leaders who contribute to the organization and larger civil society, strengthening governance processes and systems, and mobilizing adequate financial resources to fulfil Azad's strategic commitments.

TRAINING ON REPORT WRITING



NEXT GENERATION LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



"The Next Generation Leadership Program has been transformative both personally and professionally. It helped me better understand my own strengths and gaps, reflect on my leadership style, and identify areas where I need to grow. Professionally, it has strengthened my communication, decision-making, and collaboration skills, enabling me to work more effectively with diverse stakeholders and communities. Personally, it has increased my confidence and commitment to inclusive and values-based leadership.

I now aspire to lead with empathy and integrity while ensuring that diverse voices are heard and valued. I see myself contributing to Azad's vision by mentoring others, taking initiative, driving meaningful change, and continuously learning and evolving. The training has reinforced my belief that leadership is not just about guiding others, but also about continuously working on oneself to become a better leader and a better human being."

NEXT-GENERATION LEADERS EMERGE



SUBHASHMITA
DISTRICT LEAD-PROGRAMS, NORTH KOLKATA



LEADERSHIP STRENGTHENING

Azad focused on a continuous process of nurturing next-generation leadership and is currently strengthening its third generation of leaders. This ensures a sustained flow of leaders with feminist perspectives in the organization as well as in the sector. 9 staff members completed three phases of their next-generation leadership training in the year.

GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

During the year, Azad's Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) received and handled one case falling under the scope of workplace sexual harassment. Following a thorough inquiry, strict disciplinary action was taken, including the transfer of the respondent to another centre. The committee also recommended counselling support for the complainant involved. The management took a firm stance, reinforcing a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual harassment—both within and outside the workplace.

TRAININGS ON ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES

Introduction to POSH

Team members across Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, and Chennai participated in training sessions on the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and Azad's sexual harassment policy. These sessions aimed to build awareness around issues like consent, what constitutes sexual harassment at the workplace, the process for filing complaints, available redressal mechanisms, and the principles necessary for maintaining a safe and respectful work environment. It has also been made mandatory to orient every new employee to the POSH Act and Azad's policy during their induction process.



Orientation to New Labour Codes and HR Policies

Sessions on the New Labour Codes and HR Policies were organized in each location. The discussion focused on how changes in labour codes will impact Azad's employees and Azad's plan for implementing these changes.

STAFF CAPACITY BUILDING TRAININGS



Needs for capacity building of the staff are actively identified through conversations with the staff members, their immediate supervisors, and the requirements of the organization. Based on this, different capacity building trainings are organized throughout the year.

COLLECTIVE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

i. Training of Trainers- Driving Faculty

29 driving training faculty members from Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata and Chennai participated in the training on adult learning principles, and learning methodologies for improved technical and empowerment training, along with emotional management and self-care.

ii. Community Engagement Training

42 staff members including Program Implementers, Community Mobilizers and District Leads from across locations participated in the training on enhancing community engagement skills through mobilization activities and fostering a deeper conceptual clarity of gender-based violence and its intervention strategies.

iii. Capacity Building on Report Writing and Documentation

15 staff members from across locations and programs were selected to undergo training on analytical report writing over a period of one year.

iv. Capacity Building with Core Team and National Leadership Teams (NLT)

8 members of the Core Team and NLT participated in a phase-wise training focusing on enhancing their leadership and team building skills.

INDIVIDUAL GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

6 Azad team members across programs and locations were nominated for capacity building training on leadership skills, domain knowledge, and deepening their understanding of issues of gender, patriarchy, masculinity, and intersectionality. The trainings included:

- i. Leadership Accelerator Training organized by Rise Up
- ii. Finance and Accounting Management System organized by Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- iii. Youth Sexuality and Rights Program by Nirantar
- iv. The Ledger of Rights, Equity and Inclusion by The YP Foundation
- v. The Feminist Leadership Journey Exploring Queer Rights, Queer Organizing and the Queer Rights movement in India by Prajak
- vi. Technology Consult Clinic with Empact and AVPN



We are guided by a visionary Board that helps us reflect, grow, and stay true to our values in everything we do.

INSTITUTIONAL DONORS



CSR DONORS



INDIVIDUAL DONORS

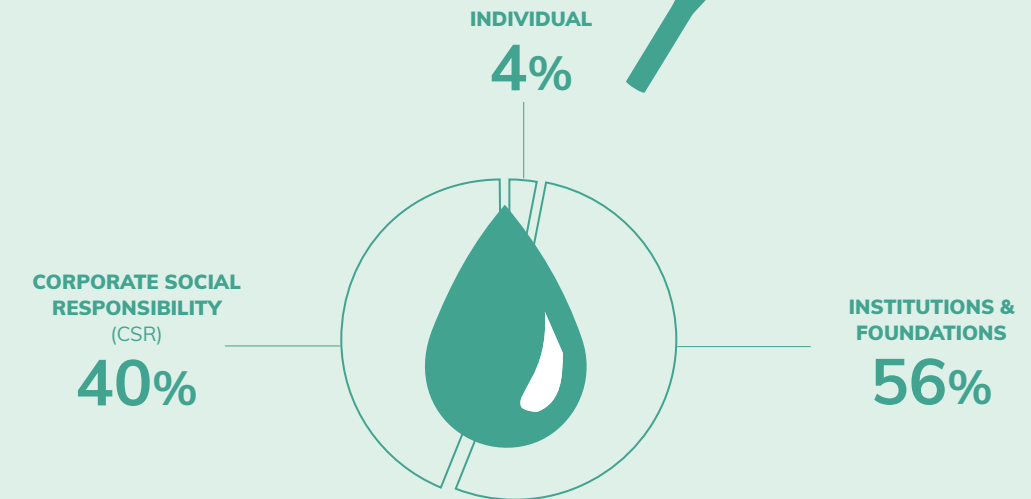
ATISHAY JAIN
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GUSTI LEDER
HARI SHARMA
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MADHUBALA
MANISH VASAVADA
MEENU VADERA
NARAYANA SWAMI JAYAKUMAR
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We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of LYRA Network Pvt. Ltd, S.E Builders & Realtors Limited and Ambuja Reality Development Limited.

We are deeply grateful to all our donors for walking alongside us on the journey towards empowerment and equality. Your unwavering support has enabled us to stand beside resource-poor women as they pursue their dreams and transform their lives.

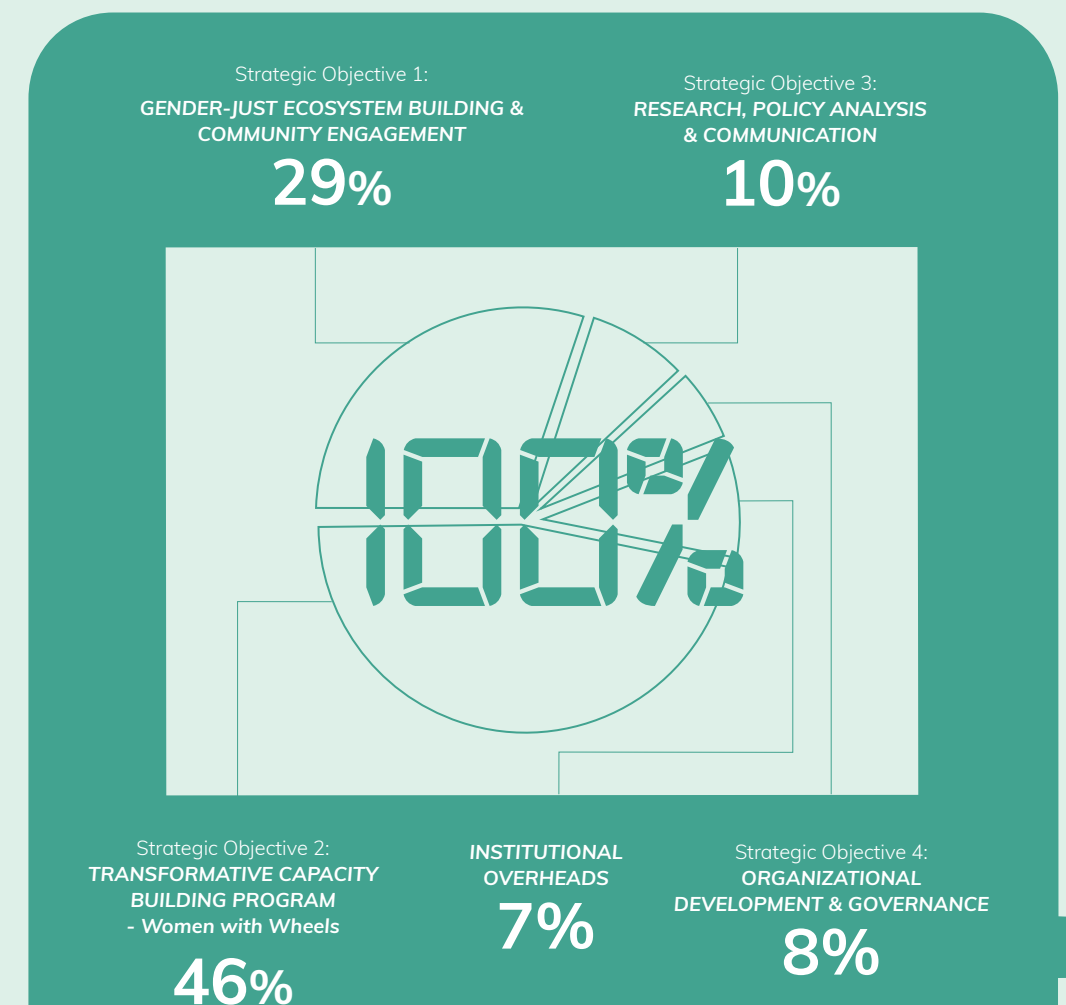
WHERE OUR MONEY COMES FROM

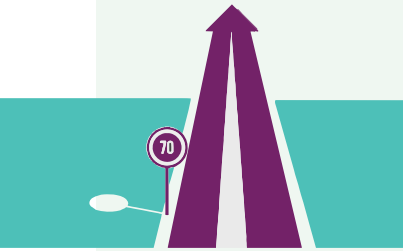
Total income of Azad Foundation in 2025-26 was INR 14.31 crores



HOW THE MONEY WAS USED

Total utilization of Azad Foundation in 2025-26 was INR 14.19 crores





AZAD'S STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2026-31

THE ROAD AHEAD

Azad has developed a roadmap for the next five years through a collaborative and reflective strategic planning process rooted in dialogue and collective visioning. Beginning with a Blue-Sky Thinking exercise, we undertook extensive consultations with team members, community members, Board members, co-travelers, and sector leaders—all of whom shape who we are. Their grounded insights and perspectives helped shape a new strategic vision aligned with rapidly changing national and global realities.

The resulting Strategic Plan 2026-31 charts pathways to scale the Gender-Just Skill Education framework into newer geographies while deepening our impact through strong partnerships and ecosystem-building.

Key initiatives that we plan to work towards in the next phase include:

Community Resource Centres (CRCs)

Physical spaces in communities that will act as support structures and safe spaces for women to share and receive useful information and perspectives on non-traditional professions and seek support to combat gender-based violence.



Digitized Learning Management Systems of the Skill++ modules

Expanding the user base for GJSE framework and enabling more organizations and women to use it.



Create the Azad Non-Traditional Professions Learning Institute

To support new partners in piloting and implementing projects on NTPs in their respective locations.

Strengthen the Centre for Gender and Masculinities

To consolidate and advance our work with young men and boys, while developing a knowledge hub that generates evidence and thought leadership on positive masculinities.



Focus on making Azad's team more diverse and inclusive

With the induction of 30% of staff from marginalized communities in leadership roles.



Publish 'position papers' on the status of women in NTPs

To generate grounded evidence, influence public discourse, and shape policy.

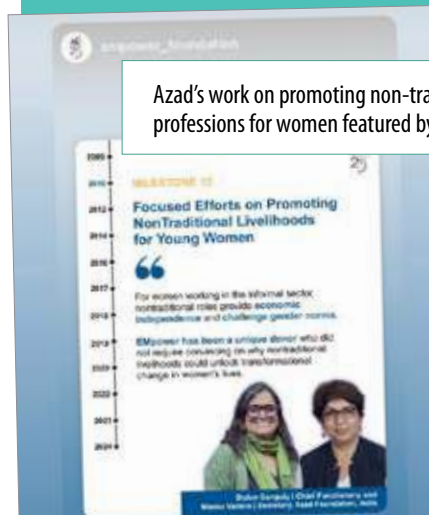


MEDIA FEATURES & AWARDS

Azad received the 'Great Place to Work' Certification



Azad's work on promoting non-traditional professions for women featured by Empower



Azad's Women with Wheels Chennai featured in The Hindu



The study on access to public toilets in Kolkata, in collaboration with Sabar Institute, featured across media platforms like Feminism in India, The Telegraph, Bhaskar English, Indian Express and The Times of India.



COORDINATION OFFICE

93, Nehru Apartments
Kalkaji, New Delhi 110019

SOUTH DELHI

7/17, Ground Floor,
Nehru Enclave, Kalkaji,
New Delhi, 110019

NORTH DELHI

B 5/2, Model Town-1, Near Model Town
Metro Station
New Delhi 110009

EAST DELHI

A-6, Lane Number 1, Near Jagatpuri
Main Red Light
New Delhi 110051

JAIPUR

5-D, Jhalana Institutional Area,
Jhalana Doongri, Jaipur 302004,
Rajasthan

NORTH KOLKATA

P 282/A, CIT Road, Scheme-IV,
Phoolbagan,
Kolkata 700054

SOUTH KOLKATA

11 A/3, North Road, Jadavpur
Kolkata 700032

CHENNAI

2, Srigeer Apartments, 11, Jamalia Nagar
Main Road, Perambur, Chennai 600012



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