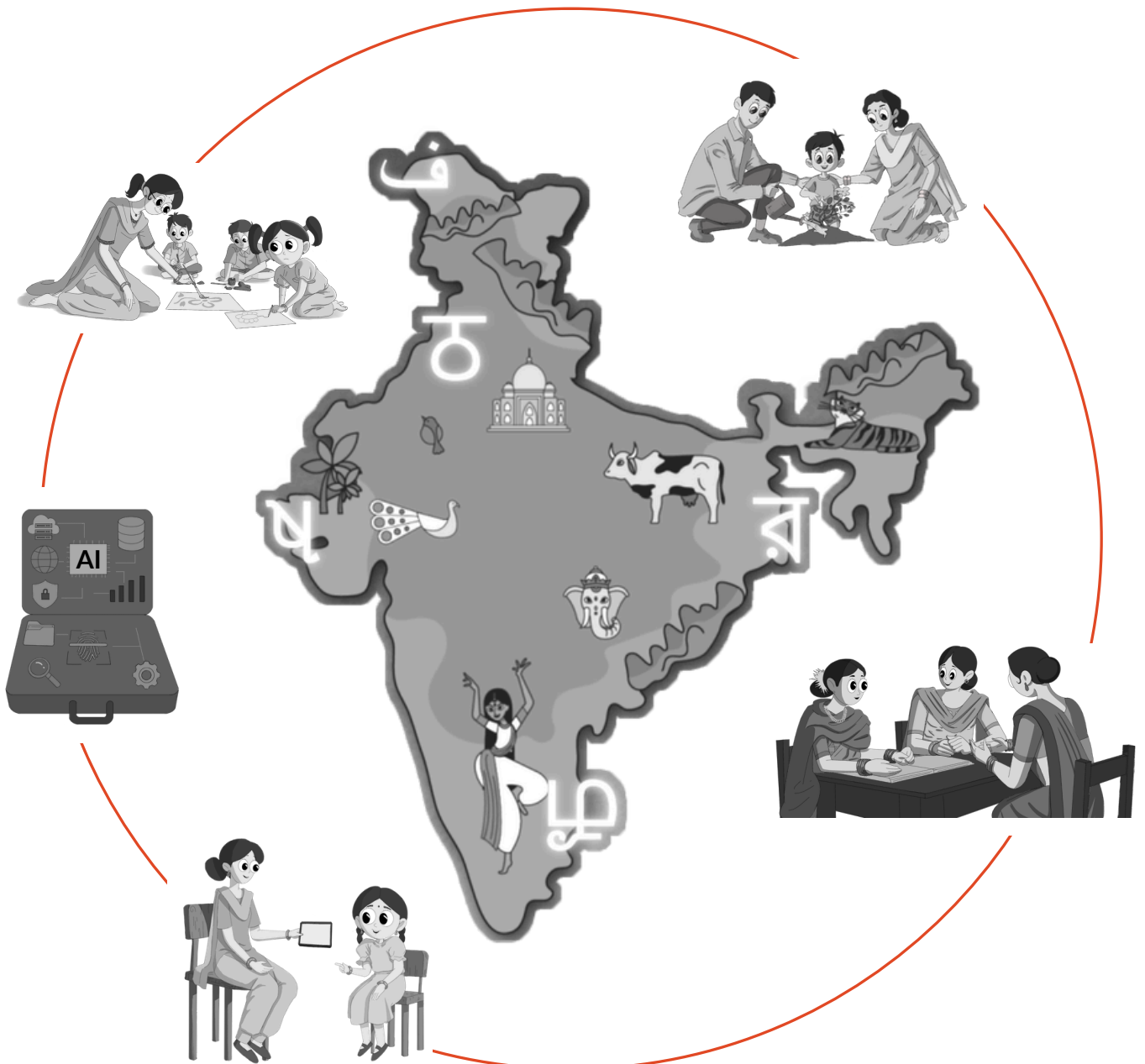




Hriday Dialogues 2025

From Fragmented Funding to Shared Care: The CareVerse as a Field-Building Pathway for Child Protection in India

A White Paper Interweaving Findings



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A white paper interweaving findings from a closed-door resource-holders' dialogue co-curated by Protsahan and Antara Advisory (11 December 2025)



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CONTEXT AND SUMMARY

Why a resource-holders' dialogue?


India's child protection ecosystem faces a critical paradox: deep resource needs met by well-intentioned but fragmented support. Funding flows are often distributed across thematic silos—education, health, or gender—each with distinct timelines and metrics. For frontline organisations, this fragmentation translates into capacity constraints and short-term outputs, at a time when continuity and trust are essential.

Protsahan's fifteen years of frontline work confirm that trauma and chronic neglect undermine the effectiveness of philanthropic investments that assume a child's readiness to learn or participate in society. Child protection outcomes only strengthen when care functions as a cohesive system.


The Dialogue and the Design

In December 2025, Protsahan and Antara Advisory convened a closed-door dialogue to examine these constraints and explore how philanthropic resourcing could shift from isolated interventions to trauma-informed system-building at scale.

This dialogue served as a critical design input for CareVerse: an emerging online–offline public infrastructure intended to strengthen frontline capacity, generate practice-based learning, and align policy and resources.



The CareVerse aspiration is rooted in evidence: early testing of its interventions demonstrated a **48%** increase from baseline in the knowledge, **8%** increase in practice (improved confidentiality, referrals & early identification), and overall **23%** improvement in performance of frontline careworkers.




Purpose of this White Paper

This paper consolidates insights from the dialogue into a proposition for funders to join Mission CareVerse. It outlines why current resourcing patterns fall short, describes the evolving CareVerse architecture, and sets out practical pathways for resource-holders to participate in building the shared infrastructure required for durable child protection in India.


THE PROBLEM REFRAMED: TRAUMA AS A BINDING CONSTRAINT ON THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

India's vision of a Viksit Bharat rests on the promise of its demographic dividend. However, that dividend is not guaranteed. Current data reveals that India's child population (0–14 years) has already peaked, and is now steadily declining to approximately 354 million children.¹ As this cohort shrinks, the value of each child to the nation's future increases; we can no longer afford to leave any child behind to the cycles of trauma and neglect.


The crisis is not limited to extreme cases of violence. It encompasses a wide spectrum of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)—including physical and emotional abuse, chronic neglect, household dysfunction, and witness to domestic violence. For children in marginalised households, these experiences are compounded by a cycle of systemic poverty, social exclusion, and housing instability. This layering of adversity creates a binding constraint on their development – where there is a constant threat, the child's brain prioritises survival over learning and thriving.



The stakes are highest for adolescent girls—the heart of a "women-led" development model. Globally, one in eight girls (over 370 million) has experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. In India, an estimated 16 million children need urgent care and protection, yet the true scale of abuse remains obscured by a lack of age-disaggregated data.




When foundational safety is absent, the assumption that young people can act as agents of transformation breaks down. Trauma is not just a social ill. It is a cognitive and developmental barrier that impairs attention and regulation, essential for learning.



Several resource-holders noted that they fund education and skilling programmes, yet encounter the same barrier on the ground—children who cannot consistently attend, engage, or retain learning because their lives are shaped by instability, violence, or neglect. This is a recurrent constraint on outcomes that trauma-informed care is positioned to address.

"Centering care from the earliest stages of life remains largely absent in policy circles and sectoral discourse, pointing to a critical gap which overlooks a child's first ecosystem protection as a core component of care."

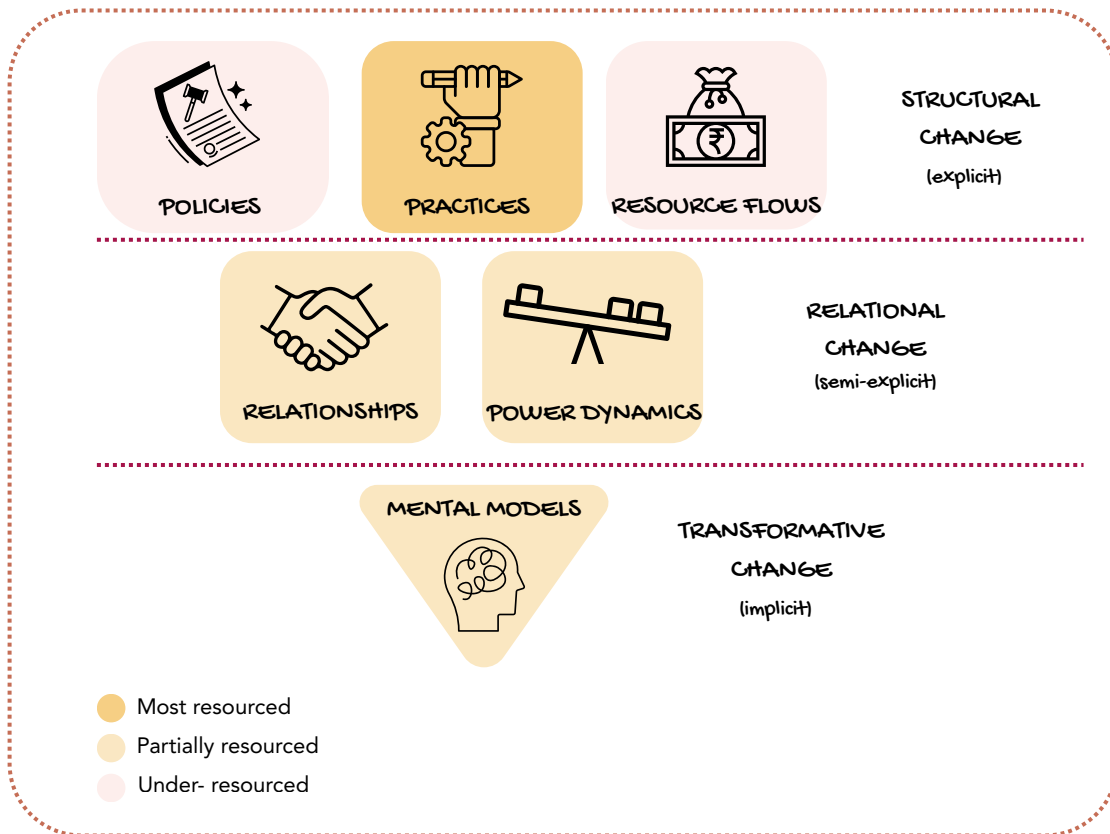
- Leading philanthropist embedded in private sector and policy engagement.



Without a trauma-informed child protection system, i.e the essential enabling infrastructure, our vast investments in education and skilling will yield diminished returns. To achieve real impact, we must ensure children are safe enough to learn, relate, and grow.

WHY EXISTING APPROACHES FALL SHORT: A SYSTEMS VIEW

India's child protection ecosystem is diverse, with many committed actors—from grassroots leaders to legal experts—but it lacks systemic coherence. While there is a shared understanding of the challenges, action remains siloed. Applying the Six Conditions of Systems Change framework² reveals that while we have the explicit parts of the system (policies and programs), the implicit drivers—resource flows, power dynamics, and mental models—remain fragmented and under-resourced.



The Six Conditions of Systems Change - tracking resource availability for each driver

The Resource Constraint: A Widening Gap³

The mismatch between national ambition and fiscal reality acts as a primary driver of ecosystem fragmentation. Public finance for child protection reveals a trend of cautious incrementalism, rather than a transformative approach needed to meet the true scale of the challenge:

- **The Shrinking Share:** While the Union Budget 2026-27 saw a modest absolute increase in child-related spending, the share of the Core Child Budget has steadily declined from 3.3% in 2018-19 to just 2.47% in 2026.
- **Under-resourced Infrastructure:** Mission Vatsalya, the flagship scheme for child protection, received a marginal 3.3% increase (₹1,550 crore). This is insufficient to move beyond crisis management toward a proactive, trauma-informed system across India's 700+ districts.
- **The Gap in CSR:** This public sector trend is mirrored in private giving. Currently, over 55% of India's CSR spend is concentrated in education and healthcare. Child protection is frequently sidelined as a "niche" concern, despite being the foundational safety net that ensures education and health investments actually yield results.

The Measurement Trap

Current child protection metrics privilege transactional outputs (for example, cases registered or files closed) over the transformational outcomes required to break cycles of harm. This ignores the most critical lever for long-term impact: prevention. True prevention is not merely the absence of danger, but the presence of protective factors—resilience, trust, and agency.

Trauma-informed care is, therefore, the bedrock of primary prevention; by healing the trauma experienced by a child, we prevent the secondary crises of school dropout, re-victimisation, and the intergenerational transmission of violence.

To move forward, we must shift our metrics from blunt counts of services delivered to measuring systemic readiness and a child's psychological safety—the only true indicators that a cycle of trauma has been broken.

The Justice and Technology Deficits

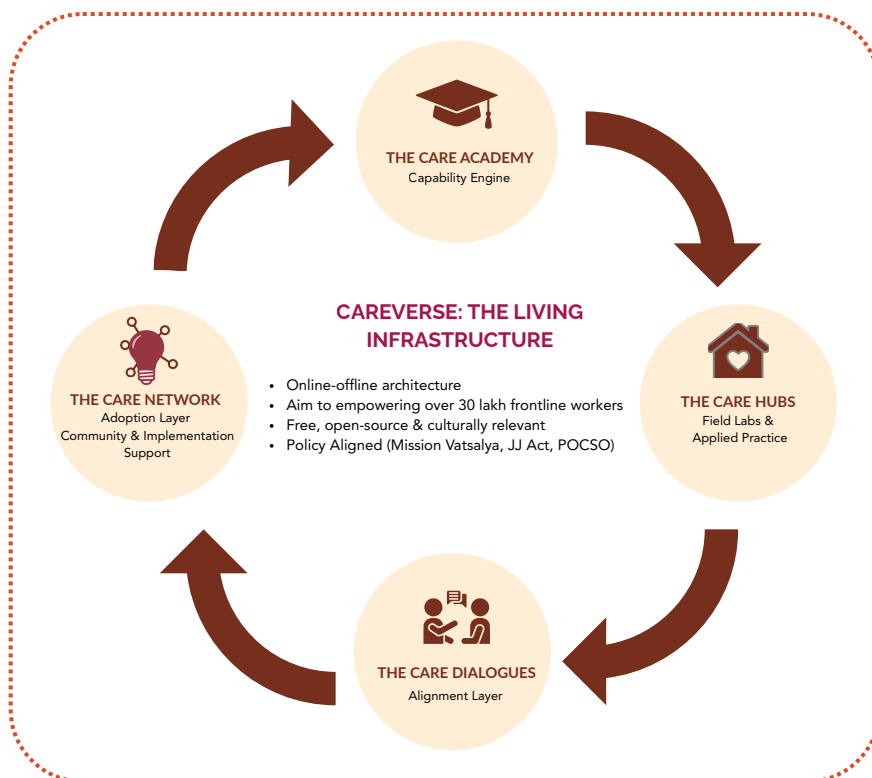
Two other critical pillars remain peripheral rather than integrated:

- The Justice Gap: Legal aid is often under-resourced and disconnected from childcare pathways. When justice is a standalone silo, it fails to function as either a deterrent for offenders or a mechanism for survivor healing.
- Technology Gap: Technology and AI currently appear as isolated projects, rather than embedded infrastructure. We lack a digital backbone that supports real-time referrals, frontline supervision, and continuous learning across the ecosystem.

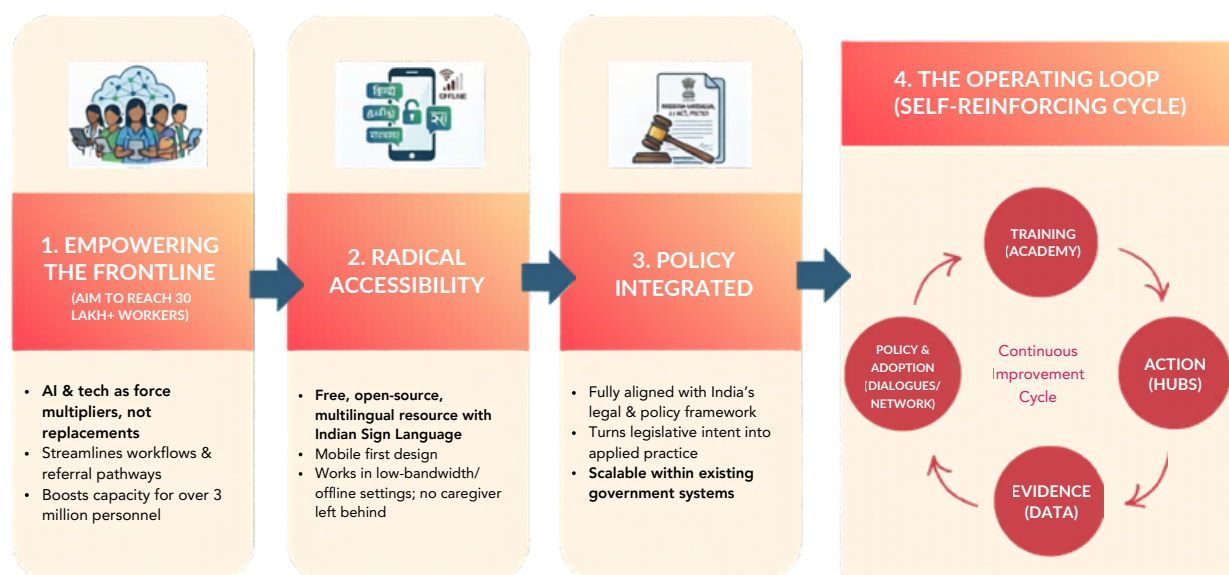
THE CAREVERSE: A PATHWAY TO STRENGTHEN INDIA'S CHILD PROTECTION ECOSYSTEM

CareVerse is a living infrastructure designed to unify India's fragmented child protection ecosystem. It bridges the parallel lanes of care, justice, and policy by channelling institutional intelligence into a single, cohesive operating loop.

Rather than a static platform, CareVerse is a dynamic online–offline architecture that democratises access to high-quality knowledge, strengthening every node of the care ecosystem—from the frontline worker to the policymaker.



CAREVERSE: KEY DIFFERENTIATORS - BUILT FOR SCALE & IMPACT



EVIDENCE AS INSTITUTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

A trauma-informed system cannot be static; it must continuously learn, adapt, and prove its credibility. In CareVerse, evidence is not merely a retrospective reporting tool—it is active institutional intelligence designed to enable three critical outcomes at a systemic level:

1. Enabling Effective, Safe Action at the Frontline to Unlock Agency

Evidence must first serve those closest to the problem. By capturing what works in diverse field settings, CareVerse translates abstract principles into concrete, validated workflows, with the aim of reaching over 30 lakh frontline workers.

- **Strengthening Hubs and Networks:** Data gathered from practice directly feeds back into strengthening Care Hubs (refining demonstration models) and Care Networks (improving peer-to-peer support).
- **Safety by Design:** Evidence helps co-design the essential protocols—safeguarding, consent, red-flag escalation, and role-based access—that allow trauma-informed response for sexual and gender based violence cases against children and girls to be delivered safely. This ensures that even as the system scales, the dignity of the child remains protected through rigorous, embedded guardrails.

2. Driving Iterative Learning and Continuous Improvement

The ecosystem currently struggles due to slow, under-resourced learning cycles. CareVerse uses evidence to create a rapid operating loop where field intelligence leads to improved practice.

- **The Feedback Loop:** Insights from the ground run through regular learning reviews to directly inform updates to the Care Academy's training modules, playbooks, and supervision standards.
- **Evolving Practice:** This ensures the infrastructure is a living system, constantly adapting to emerging threats (e.g., online safety, climate exigencies, geopolitical shifts) and integrating new best practices rather than remaining stuck in outdated methodologies.

3. Enabling Better Decisions at Scale: Aligning Policy and Capital

Finally, evidence provides the ground truth necessary to align high-level resources with grassroots reality. Data streams will serve as critical inputs for government partners, helping to institutionalise trauma-informed capacity within state systems. By providing rigorous data on what works, CareVerse enhances the reach and effectiveness of flagship programs like Mission Vatsalya, guiding policymakers and private funders to allocate capital where it will have the most catalytic impact.

JOINING MISSION CAREVERSE: PATHWAYS TO ENGAGE

Systemic change requires diverse forms of philanthropic capital. CareVerse is designed to accommodate varying risk appetites and time horizons, allowing funders to engage where their strategic priorities align best with the architecture.

Our model translates complex systems-change frameworks into four actionable pathways of change: Conversations, Capacity, Consensus, and Capital.

Change Pathway	Focus	CareVerse Alignment
Conversation	Convening the field to surface lived realities and operational constraints	Care Dialogues & Network
Capacity	Treating frontline capability as critical infrastructure, not overhead	Care Academy & Hubs
Consensus	Co-create shared norms standards for the system	Care Dialogues & Academy
Capital	Underwriting the vital enabling infrastructure	Core System Building

Funder Personas: Where Do You Fit?

Joining Mission CareVerse is a choice of entry points. Funders can lead in one area or blend roles as the partnership matures.

FUNDER PERSONAS: JOINING MISSION CAREVERSE



The Capability Builder: Invests in frontline readiness. Funds cohort-based learning, supervision tools, and the organisational capacity required to sustain trauma-informed practice.

The Community Action Partner: Supports the **Care Hubs**. Funds the trauma-informed empowerment centres R&D sites where practices are tested, refined, and grounded in the lived integrity of the field.

The Bridge Builder: Focuses on the connective tissue. Funds the translation of field learning into national standards, policy momentum, and institutional uptake through **Care Dialogues**.

The Scale Partner: Drives adoption and replication. Funds the **Care Network** to provide implementation support, ensuring that as CareVerse expands, quality and learning travel with it.

CALL TO ACTION: INVESTING IN SHARED INFRASTRUCTURE

CareVerse is an invitation to move beyond funding isolated child protection programs and start resourcing shared infrastructure. It is a call to back the architectural shift required for care, justice, and policy to finally cohere around the child.

For resource-holders, joining Mission CareVerse means making high-leverage commitments aligned with your strategic persona:

<p>As a Capability Builder</p>	<p>Back frontline readiness as infrastructure, not overhead. Underwrite cohorts, supervision, and the organisational capacity required to sustain trauma-informed practice through the Care Academy.</p>
<p>As a Community Action Partner</p>	<p>Support iterative learning by resourcing Care Hubs in Delhi and helping build more hubs PAN India. Fund these sites that generate grounded evidence on what works, what fails, and the real cost of delivering safe care under constraints.</p>
<p>As the Bridge Builder</p>	<p>Invest in coherence between care and justice. Enable Care Dialogues to translate grassroots learning into shared national standards, safeguarding protocols, and scalable referral pathways.</p>
<p>As a Scale Partner</p>	<p>Provide patient, flexible capital for the Care Network's adoption layer—supporting partner onboarding and the feedback loops essential for protecting quality as reach expands.</p>

MISSION CAREVERSE FUNDER'S CHEATSHEET

CARE ACADEMY
(Capability Engine)
The Capability Builder



CONVERSATION
Convening & connecting



- Convening practice leaders to define training needs.
- Sharing academy learnings in sector forums.

CARE HUBS
(Field Labs)
Community Action Partner



- Surfacing lived realities from field tests.
- Facilitating Hubpolicy dialogue.

CARE DIALOGUES
(Alignment Layer)
The Bridge Builder



- Hosting cross-sector roundtables (Hriday Dialogues)
- Facilitating justice-care forums.

CARE NETWORK
(Adoption Layer)
The Scale Partner



- Convening partner peer exchange.
- Feedback loops (State-NGO)

CAPACITY
Frontline infrastructure



- Funding cohort-based training fellowships.
- Developing digital toolkits & supervision modules.

- Resourcing physical sites & staffing.
- Funding action-research projects.

- Training facilitators for advocacy.
- Building evidence translation capacity.

- Providing implementation support.
- Building onboarded partner capacity.

CONSENSUS
Shared standards & protocols



- Standardising trauma-informed curricula.
- Aligning certification with national norms.

- Validating field protocols for adoption.
- Agreeing on 'ground truth' indicators.

- Drafting national safeguarding standards.
- Translating evidence into policy norms.

- Driving adoption of shared protocols.
- Establishing common reporting frameworks.

CAPITAL
Flexible, long-term capital



- Long-term underwriting of operations.
- Funding R&D for new methodologies.

- Flexible funding for Hub experimentation.
- Covering operational costs of demo sites.

- Funding secretariat & logistics.
- Supporting long-term advocacy campaigns.

- Flexible capital for network expansion
- Underwriting digital platform growth.

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- 2.Adapted from: Kania, John, Mark Kramer and Peter Senge. "The Water of Systems Change". FSG, 2018. <https://www.fsg.org/blog/new-article-water-systems-change/>
- 3.This analysis of the widening fiscal gap and the trend of declining proportional priority for child protection draws on a multi-year review of Union Budget data and independent fiscal assessments. Key sources confirming that the Child Budget share has declined from its ~3.3% peak (circa 2018-19) despite modest absolute increases in 2026-27 include: Child Rights and You (CRY) analysis of Union Budget 2026-27 (reported via The New Indian Express, Feb 3, 2026); Better Care Network, India's Child Protection Framework: Achievements, Shortcomings, and Roadmap for Reform (Jan 2026); HAQ Centre for Child Rights, Budget for Children 2024-25 Analysis; PRS Legislative Research, Demand for Grants Analysis: Women and Child Development (2025-26); and historical public expenditure analyses by the Centre for Budget Governance and Accountability (CBGA) and the Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (CBPS).

ANNEXURE 1

Curated reflections from participants present during the Closed-Door Dialogue.

"Grassroots organisations are often seen as vehicles for scaling and service delivery, discounting the fact that they have the sensing and visioning power to generate a system-level architecture for change. Ultimately, this forecloses the possibility of open exploration and deeper engagement with an issue and constrains the catalytic potential of philanthropy."

- Anand Sinha

Senior Regional Advisor, South Asia for the David and Lucile Packard Foundation

" Grassroots organisations are best positioned to generate a theory of change because of their proximity to "how change happens". Funders, on the other hand, are best positioned to generate a theory of philanthropy— a pathway to ensure that their capital is invested in the most effective and catalytic ways. As a "neural network" for India's child protection ecosystem, the CareVerse is poised to guide philanthropies from intent to impact, deeply rooted in contextual knowledge, lived experiences, and practice of frontline care workers."

- Aparna Uppaluri

Founder and Principal Advisor at Antara Advisory

"Centering care from the earliest stages of life remains largely absent in policy circles and sectoral discourse, pointing to a critical gap which overlooks child protection as a core component of care."

- Aradhana Dalmia

Chairperson, FICCI-YFLO Delhi

"In the field of child rights and care work, learning is integral. The most profound advocacy begins with a willingness to unlearn the systems that fail our children, so we can co-create the ones that truly hold them."

- Harpreet Sandhu

Chief Human Resources Officer, India Mortgage Guarantee Corporation & Protsahan Advisory Council Member

"Protsahan holding this space through grassroots work is a way of shifting power. Understanding mental health perspective changes when you understand where trauma begins. There is a deep need to share this with different stakeholders and other grassroots organisations. It may be difficult, but we can all work together to achieve this."

- Heera Singh

Program Director, India, EMPOWER Foundation.

"Perhaps, the question is not how to bring voices from the margins into systems change discussions, but to question instead why systems are not designed to listen to them in the first place. We must move towards activating this core potential and supporting grassroots organisations in translating lived experience into visible, usable knowledge across multiple levels of change-making like resourcing, policy making, movement building and academia."

- Ishita Chaudhary

Independent Consultant

"At its core, the CareVerse is a responsive architecture. A system that listens and observes without the weight of judgment and creates a sanctuary where grassroots wisdom thrives."

- Kiran Khalap

Managing Director and Co-founder of chlorophyll, Protsahan Board Chairman

"...they (grassroot organisations) have the superpower of being so close to the issue and being able to help the stakeholders that need to be part of that network understand and see the issue. Grassroots organisations like Protsahan can play a magnificent role as system orchestrators in their domains of expertise."

- Maria Zapata

Executive Director, Ashoka ASPIRe

"At Adobe, we shifted the narrative of giving into a decentralised movement of care. Giving employees the autonomy to direct their own funds transforms them from passive participants into active architects of change. It is a radical act to shift our mental models, empowering every individual to lead with their own heart and agency."

- Mudita Lal

Country Lead - Corporate Social Responsibility, Adobe

"We need to focus on funding for the future. About three million girls in India are currently trapped in cycles of trauma and gender based violence. There is a need to shift our attention to confront the magnitude of the problem we have, which is to ensure that the future generations and other girls do not experience what, unfortunately, these three million have gone through."

- Mukul Rastogi

Independent Consultant and Advisor in Human Resources and the Social Sector, Protsahan Governing Council Member

"Grassroot organisations are the innovation labs of India. The nimbleness with which grassroot organisations function makes them highly collaborative and adaptive in employing local methods to solve the same problem in two different geographies. "

- Nikunj Jhaveri

Philanthropist and Co-Founder, H.E.L.M. Initiative

"What works may not always work at scale, and that requires us to think about the ecosystem that we are trying to strengthen, its barrier conditions and who it ultimately serves. Only then can the ecosystem move from fragmented efforts to a vision co-shaped by unique strengths."

- Polina Nezdiiikovska

Community Development Lead, Think Collective, Centre for Exponential Change

Strategic investment in the social sector functions like a stone cast into a pond. In order to have experienced caregivers, trauma-informed teachers, trauma-informed Anganwadi workers, investments need to be catalytic and willing to support admin costs like rent, accountants, etc. and not see people as costs or overhead."

- Puja Marwaha

Chief Executive, CRY(Child Rights and You) & Protsahan Governing Council Member

"If we want to rebuild systems, we need to start from the margins and reach the centre; it is imperative to foreground knowledge from the margins".

- Raj Mariwala
Director, Mariwala Health Initiative

"Careverse was not designed in a consulting room. It was built from two decades of frontline work in India's urban slums, shaped by lived realities, case evidence, and hard field lessons. System orchestration is not an abstract theory for us — it is a daily practice. Organisations like Protsahan have already been doing this work. Careverse simply names it, strengthens it, and makes it scalable."

- Sonal Kapoor
CEO, Protsahan India Foundation

"Resource holders often operate with a limited and insufficiently pluralistic understanding of what constitutes evidence; quantitative data is routinely privileged while lived experiences are sidelined. This reflects a broader paucity of imagination in how we define, value, and use evidence. This narrow framing often leaves us stuck in static theories of change. Therefore, we need to employ a really thoughtful approach to periodically, iteratively revisit what we know and what we understand. Reframing theories of change to function more like a sextant—tools for navigation that are continually revisited, refined, and reoriented as we learn."

- Suneeta Krishnan
India Country Office Deputy Director, Strategy, Planning & Management, Evaluation, Gates Foundation

"While funding, we inherently separate organisations into thematic areas. Funders need to understand the needs of a community, and that it might fall into multiple thematic areas. True impact isn't found in the rigid boundaries of a thematic area, but in our agility to meet the emergent needs of the communities we serve."

- Vardhana Puri
Paul Hamlyn Foundation

"We need to recognise that not every grassroots organisation is built to scale, but every grassroots organisation has value to add in the greater ecosystem that Protsahan is creating. It is a key player, bringing enormous knowledge with practice."

- Vijayalakshmi Arora
Child Protection Specialist at UNICEF New Delhi

ANNEXURE 2

List of attendees and their affiliation in alphabetical order by first name.

Name	Affiliation
Anand Sinha	David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Aradhna Dalmia	FICCI-YFLO Delhi
Harpreet Sandhu	India Mortgage Guarantee Corporation
Heera Singh	EMPower Foundation
Ishita Chaudhary	Independent Consultant
Kiran Khalap	Founder chlorophyll Protsahan Board Chairman
Maria Zapata	Ashoka ASPIRe
Mudita Lall	Adobe
Mukul Rastogi	Protsahan Governing Council Member
Nikunj Jhaveri	Philanthropist
Polina Nezdikovska	Centre for Exponential Change (C4EC)
Puja Marwaha	CRY (Child Rights and You) Protsahan Governing Council Member
Raj Mariwala	Mariwala Health Initiative
Sangeeta Bhattacharya	Dasra
Suneeta Krishnan	Gates Foundation
Vardhana Puri	Paul Hamlyn Foundation
Vijayalakshmi Arora	UNICEF

About

ANTARA ADVISORY



Rooted in the Global South, Antara is committed to building knowledge through deep listening, humility and generosity. Antara seeks to build a space to support social change actors who are navigating complexity with courage, through a unique pathway derived from experiences across philanthropy, academia, and social impact.

Using research, deep inquiry, rigorous analysis, and thoughtful action as a tool of understanding and translation, Antara imagines futures that are more just, regenerative, and brimming with possibility through

Antara offers strategic advisory, leadership accompaniment, research and knowledge development, and impact measurement services.



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