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Building a 21st Century Nonprofit Sector – Why We Invested in ISDM

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When Covid-19 reached India's shores in March 2020, causing an unprecedented economic and humanitarian crisis, [it was nonprofits that rose to the occasion and ensured that many Indians](#), especially the Next Half Billion, could tide over the immediate distress caused by the pandemic.

Nonprofits contributed through direct relief as well as in terms of awareness creation. They raised funds, used technology to help get better on-ground data & enabled access to govt interventions – [GIVE India](#) raised and disbursed nearly \$30M through its India Covid Relief Fund (ICRF), supporting over 5.6M Indians through income support, food and ration, and essential health supplies; [RCRC](#), a coalition of nonprofits, used the geospatial platform of the India Observatory to track migrant movements back to the security of their homes; and organizations like Gaon Connection and Radio Mewat disseminated information and ran interactive campaigns to create awareness of best practices.

In short, the nonprofit sector helped ensure that food was available during the lockdown, that there was access to credible information about the pandemic, and that our doctors and essential workers got PPE kits and masks. While the Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the work of nonprofits, this is something that the sector has been doing, quietly and steadily over the years – Akshaya Patra delivers lunch to 1.8M children daily and Pratham's outcomes-focused teaching model touches over 8M children.

There are over **3.3M such nonprofits in India, deploying upto \$8.5B in philanthropic capital**, and seeking to create 'a meaningful life for every Indian'. That said, the nonprofit sector in India is sub-scale relative to the challenges that the country faces and to the nonprofit sectors of other countries. When it comes to budgets, India's largest nonprofit is one hundredth the size of United Way, the largest nonprofit in the US, and one fifth the size of BRAC, Bangladesh's largest nonprofit. Further, at a macro level, the sector contributes < 1% to the GDP, compared to 5.4% in the US, and employs 0.4% of the workforce, compared to 10% in the US.

At the heart of this challenge are issues related to the "nuts-and-bolts" of running nonprofits, the everyday organizational practices related to hiring and retaining top talent, financial planning, storytelling and marketing, fundraising, use and integration of technology, data-driven decision making etc.

Setup in 2016, the Indian School of Development Management (ISDM) aims to strengthen the leadership and management of nonprofits in India. To that end, it will cultivate a knowledge and capacity building ecosystem on 'Development Management', a discipline at the intersection of 'development perspectives' and 'management principles' that uniquely equips professionals and organizations to thrive. This will be done through three pillars –