

NORTH - EAST REGION COMMUNITY LED GATHERING



SEPTEMBER 2025

Rebuild's North-East Region Community-Led Gathering marked a significant milestone as **21 partner organizations came together in Shillong** for four transformative days. Building on the foundation laid during the virtual gathering and the first in-person meeting in Guwahati, this gathering represented an exciting evolution—it was entirely **community-led**, co-created from the very first step by the partners themselves.

The gathering opened with Manosha Diengdoh from Grassroot and Rilanglin Kharpur from Faith Foundation leading the group in establishing ground rules together—a powerful symbol of shared ownership. The community committed to **principles that would guide the days ahead: being non-judgmental, being kind to one another, maintaining punctuality, and having a zero tolerance towards sexual harassment. Most importantly, everyone pledged to respect all these agreements.**

This collaborative approach to even the smallest details reflected **the gathering's core philosophy—when we co-create from the very first step, we not only drive collective impact but also become the collective impact.** Over four days, the community dived deep into organizational strengthening, celebrated a wellbeing day free from work conversations, and visited peer organizations for mutual learning.

What followed were days filled with honest conversations about second-line leadership, impact narratives, compliance challenges, child protection, and theories of change—all anchored in the understanding that sustainable solutions for the Northeast must emerge from within the region itself, honoring its distinctive contexts while building on its remarkable resilience.

The gathering reinforced what this community has come to embody: **a collective commitment to learning, mutual support, and the recognition that the region's complexity and diversity are matched only by the strength of its organizations and the people who lead them.**

SECOND IN LINE LEADERSHIP

Deep Jyoti Sonu Bramha and Shannon Massar anchored session on Second in Line leadership. The session focused on the importance for leaders to have the vision and openness to grow and shape organizational culture. Founders shared strategies for nurturing leaders through empowerment, systematic identification and training, local recruitment for deeper community connection, and creating safe spaces for mistakes and learning. Second-line leaders expressed needs for respect, voice in decision-making, alignment with organizational values, co-creation opportunities, and mentorship from unbiased external leaders.

Deep quoted, ***"In 30 years, many of us will be in our 90s. The question is not whether we need second-line leaders—it is how we prepare them to carry forward what we have built."***



A Call for Collective Action to Build Future Leadership: Way Forward

The session concluded with concrete proposals for collaborative leadership development. Suggestions included identifying and nominating second-line leaders across organizations, co-creating training curricula, and establishing peer-to-peer support systems. One participant proposed: ***"We could plan for a series of capacity training. We can even co-curate the syllabus... we could make a plan out of this."***

Organizational visits were suggested to share working systems and processes. SATRA's Executive Director, Nani Kumar Saikia, shared his organization's approach: ***"We formed a five-member senior management team. They are our second-line leaders. Almost every decision, they are taking... they are developing in terms of community connection and planning of the organization's future... My role is as coordinator, but the entire decision-making is done by them."***

The underlying message was clear—organizational sustainability depends not just on funding or compliance but on the quality of human bridges built between current and future leaders. The success of the development sector's next 30 years would be determined by investments made today in nurturing, mentoring, and empowering the next generation of leaders.

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"The founder's journey can feel lonely—carrying responsibilities that others do not always see. Building peer networks where we can share honestly, learn from each other's struggles, and support one another is not just helpful; it is essential for sustainability."

*Shannon Massar,
Faith Foundation*



IMPACT NARRATIVE

The impact narrative session addressed the persistent funding challenge facing NGO leaders who must distill decades of meaningful work into compelling 2-3 minute pitches for time-constrained donors. The session emphasized that ideas drive sustainable social change, establishing storytelling and articulation as critical skills for organizational survival. Participants explored a comprehensive narrative framework structured around three core elements—the "Why" (unique selling point and motivation for solving specific problems), the "How" (methodologies, partnerships, and assessment processes), and the "What" (specific problem definition supported by data and evidence). The discussion highlighted essential practices including baseline surveys, external impact assessments, focus group discussions for proposal development, and strategic audience identification to match organizational stories with donor interests.

"The world is run by ideas. If an organization has an idea that can create social sustainable change, that alone can build its narrative."

Mayfereen Ryntathiang, GRASSROOT



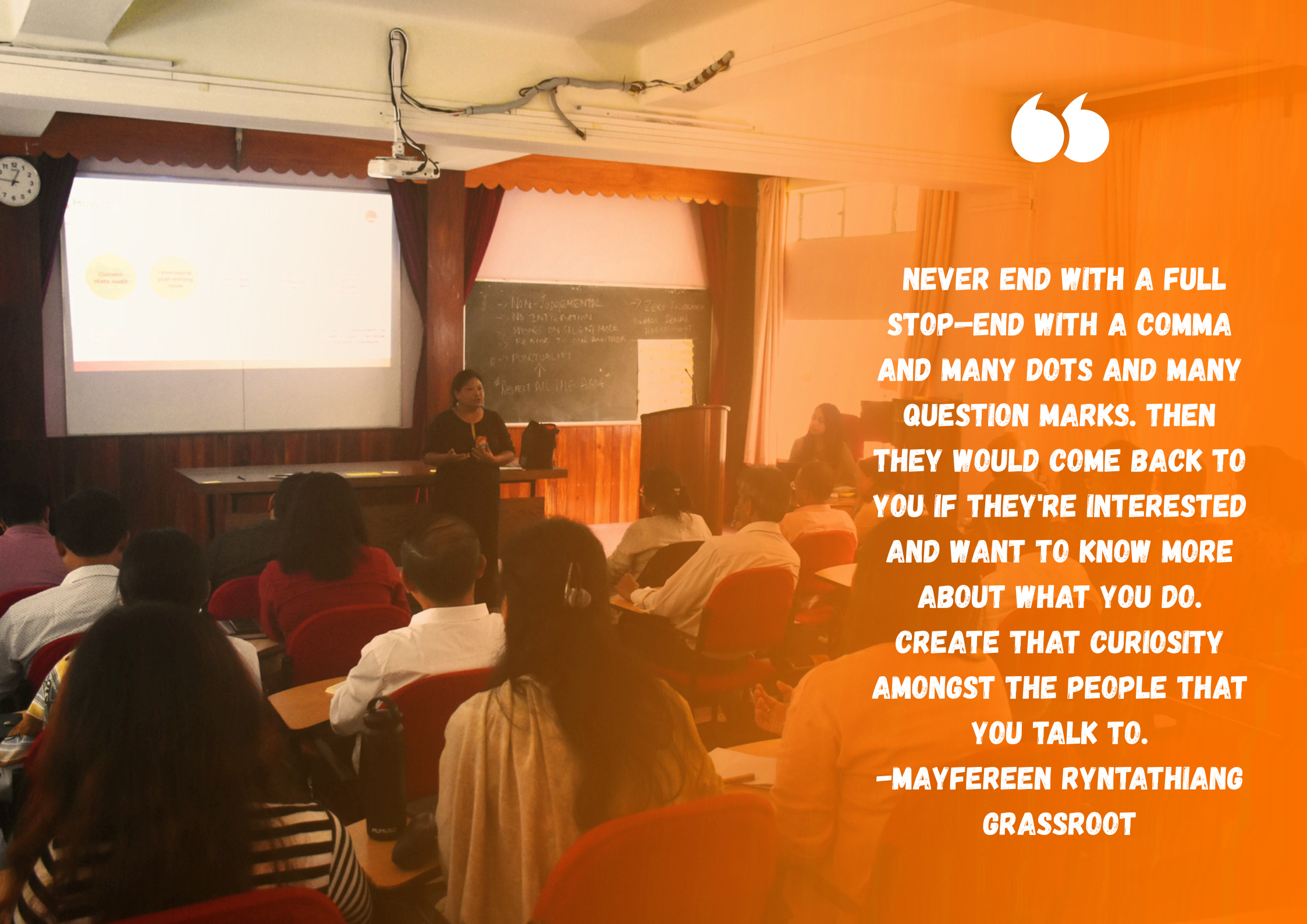
Essential Mindset Shifts

- **Be conscious of time** - both yours and the funder's
- **Value authenticity over numbers** - genuine commitment resonates more than statistics
- **Focus on impact, not journey** - funders want outcomes, not process details
- **Strategic targeting** - pitch the right message to the right donors

Way Forward: The session concluded with emphasis on creating curiosity rather than closure in presentations, valuing authenticity over numerical impact, respecting time as a mutual resource, and using beneficiary testimonials as powerful validation tools, with participants recommending a dedicated one-day workshop for deeper exploration of pitching strategies across diverse funding contexts to bridge the gap between organizational expertise and effective communication.



**NEVER END WITH A FULL
STOP—END WITH A COMMA
AND MANY DOTS AND MANY
QUESTION MARKS. THEN
THEY WOULD COME BACK TO
YOU IF THEY'RE INTERESTED
AND WANT TO KNOW MORE
ABOUT WHAT YOU DO.
CREATE THAT CURIOSITY
AMONGST THE PEOPLE THAT
YOU TALK TO.
—MAYFEREEN RYNTATHIANG
GRASSROOT**



ORGANIZATION COMPLIANCES

The compliance and governance session explored the rapidly changing regulatory landscape, emphasizing that all organizations must navigate complex administrative requirements alongside strategic operational decisions. Participants addressed critical challenges, including FCRA utilization account approvals.

Way Forward: The session covered systematic approaches for allocating staff costs across multiple projects through monthly timesheet documentation, dividing statutory payments proportionally for shared staff, and establishing strong internal controls through annual policy reviews and monthly financial monitoring that includes tracking income and expenses, project budgets, bank reconciliations, and payment verification.

The session successfully balanced technical compliance requirements with practical operational needs, providing participants with both specific guidance and broader frameworks for ongoing compliance management.



COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

The communications policy session explored the strategic imperative of developing comprehensive frameworks that extend beyond mere compliance to become living guides for organizational accountability. The session structured policy development around four essential pillars—Internal Communication, External Communication, Branding and Materials, and Crisis Communication—while addressing common challenges like policy fatigue, implementation gaps, and generic copy-paste approaches that fail to reflect organizational contexts. Participants examined critical components including structured internal reporting protocols, clear approval chains for external content, donor branding requirements, and crisis response mechanisms with designated spokespersons. The discussion emphasized mandatory integration of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, protection protocols for vulnerable stakeholders, and the importance of distributed governance structures with independent oversight to avoid over-reliance on Executive Directors.

"For starting a communication policy, there are four basics. First is internal communication. second is external communication, third is the branding of your organization which includes your boiler plates, your logos etc. And fourth, which is the most important, is crisis communication. These four are key elements of structuring your communications policy."

*Bhaswati Bora
Grameen Sahara*





**WE OFTEN SAY, "IF YOU CAN'T
TRUST ANYONE, TRUST 1098."
CHILDREN MUST BE TAUGHT
EARLY ON THAT IN TIMES OF
DISTRESS, WHEN EVEN FAMILY
OR CAREGIVERS FAIL TO
PROTECT THEM, THEY CAN
ALWAYS RELY ON CHILDLINE 1098
—A LIFELINE WHERE HELP
REACHES THEM
—KISHORI BARUAH
UTSAH**

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

We often say, " safeguarding and protection policy session distinguished between proactive safeguarding to prevent harm and reactive protection to respond when children have already been harmed, establishing that robust policies represent an organization's formal commitment to protecting children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

The session emphasized five critical reasons for child protection policies:

- building trust with trauma-affected children through consistent safety
- commitments, reducing risk through clear boundaries and protocols,
- creating safe environments across organizations and communities,
- ensuring confidentiality to respect children's privacy and dignity, and
- spreading awareness so policies become living protective frameworks rather than mere documents.

The discussion covered India's comprehensive legal framework, including the Juvenile Justice Act, POCSO Act 2012 with mandatory reporting requirements, Child Labour Act, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, and the National Policy for Children 2013, while emphasizing the critical role of Childline 1098. The session outlined essential policy features including the best interest of the child as the paramount principle, zero tolerance for abuse, mandatory codes of conduct for all staff and volunteers, non-discrimination across caste, religion, gender or economic status, and comprehensive organizational safeguarding measures covering human resources, media consent protocols, program design risk assessments, and emergency preparedness.



Participants engaged in practical risk assessment activities to evaluate anticipated risks across child-focused programs, identify mitigation strategies, and assign responsibility for implementation. The session concluded by reinforcing UNICEF's definition of child protection and emphasizing that every interaction with children must be rooted in respect, dignity, and care, with zero tolerance for maltreatment in any form while empowering children through awareness, legal safeguards.

ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY OF CHANGE

The organization maintains strategic alignment between their founding vision and long-term goals through structured frameworks that explain how and why change happens. Participants learned the backward mapping process, starting with clear long-term goals and working backward to identify conditions, steps, and strategic linkages from inputs through outputs and outcomes to ultimate impact, while establishing measurable indicators to track progress. The session distinguished between simpler project-level theories and more complex organizational-level theories, which require multi-layered action plans. It emphasized how a well-defined Theory of Change acts as a strategic filter to prevent mission drift when funding opportunities fall outside core focus areas.

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"Anything and everything should be questioned with the five W's and one H—what does the organization want to do, why, where, when, who, and how? Once we figure out the theory of change, then we can devise the strategy as per the changing PESTLE. But theory of change remains there. We revise the log frame, we revise the strategy, we revise our activities—but the theory of change provides the roadmap that stays constant through change."

- Pranami Garg, NEAID



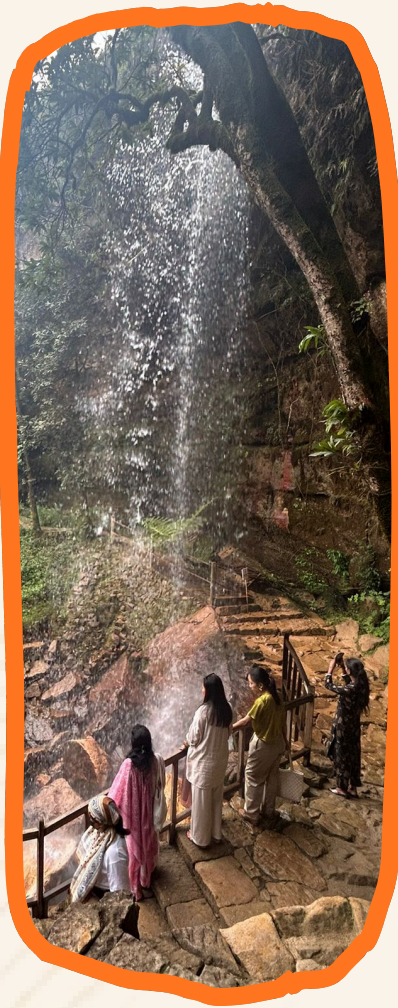


Participants examined the 5Ws and 1H framework to translate vision into practical strategies, explored stakeholder mapping to prioritize engagement, and learned development phases including preparation, participatory planning with staff involvement, implementation, and institutionalization.

The session concluded by emphasizing that Theory of Change must be a living document that evolves with organizational learning and changing contexts, actively guiding decisions and adjusting strategies while fostering internal coherence, supporting data-driven decision-making under resource constraints, and preparing organizations to stay mission-driven and relevant in shifting environments.



WELLBEING DAY



The 4-day DASRA Partners Gathering in North-East Region proved to be a powerful convergence of learning, reflection, and community. Participants engaged deeply with themes of institutional strengthening, leadership development, and programmatic resilience, gaining insights that could directly benefit their organizations. A dedicated wellbeing day offered a refreshing pause—blending nature, rest, and cultural immersion—highlighting the importance of self-care in sustaining impactful work. The exposure visits, especially to the Garden of Caves and the Grassroot Foundation, left a strong impression with their natural beauty and community-centered initiatives. Collectively, the experience emphasized the value of peer learning, holistic development, and the need for continued capacity-building in areas like legal compliance and ecosystem preservation.



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The learnings were such that it can be utilized for the betterment of our organization. The wellbeing day was such a great initiative to relax and enjoy the scenic beauty.

*Wabangla
Sisterhood Network*



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Every moment was worth it, a place of peace, beauty, and awe. The visit to Grassroot was truly a wonderful experience and a valuable learning opportunity.

*Manea
InSIDE North East*

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Wellbeing Day was a deeply enriching experience that reminded me how closely our mind, body, and emotions are interconnected. Taking time to pause, breathe, and reflect helped me understand that each day offers an opportunity for self-care, growth, and a gentle reset. This experience has inspired me to approach life with greater awareness, compassion, and intentionality

*Dina D,
Prodigals Home, Nagaland*



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It was a much-needed break to rejuvenate and to celebrate our sister organization's achievement. A perfect blend of wellness, community connection, and natural beauty

*Azungla James
Sisterhood Network*



EXPOSURE VISIT – FAITH FOUNDATION

As part of the exposure visit, leaders from the various NGOs had the opportunity to engage with Faith Foundation, a child rights organization dedicated exclusively to the prevention of child sexual abuse (CSA) and support for survivors. The visiting leaders were deeply impressed by the impactful work being carried out and held in-depth discussions with a counsellor and an outreach educator from the team.

A significant focus of the exchange was the Personal Safety Education Program (PSEP), which Faith Foundation implements across schools in multiple cities. This program is thoughtfully designed to engage children of various age groups in conversations about body autonomy, physical and emotional changes, safe and unsafe touch, identifying and expressing emotions, and understanding healthy versus unhealthy relationships.

The discussion also delved into the critical processes followed by the organization when disclosures of abuse arise, providing valuable insight into their sensitive, structured approach to handling such cases. The visit offered an important learning opportunity and highlighted the urgent need for more such initiatives across the region.





IT WASN'T JUST A VISIT—IT WAS A CALL TO ACTION THAT SHOWED THE LEADERS THAT PREVENTION IS POSSIBLE WHEN WE INVEST IN EDUCATION AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS.



EXPOSURE VISIT – GRASSROOT

As part of our exposure visit to Grassroot, we engaged with a dynamic community-based organization that has evolved from a democratic governance initiative into a comprehensive development platform. Our visit provided insights into their early work promoting political accountability—such as publishing candidate affidavits and advocating for the NOTA option—as well as their transition into health advocacy and community empowerment in Meghalaya. We witnessed how Grassroot blends modern systems with traditional practices, particularly in maternal and child health, supporting traditional birth attendants (dais) and promoting hygienic, culturally sensitive healthcare methods.

The visit also highlighted Grassroot's innovative livelihood and knowledge preservation programs. We explored their community tourism initiatives, like the eco-friendly guest house, and learned about their efforts to document and promote traditional medicine. Meeting with women involved in food processing and cooperative formation offered a deeper understanding of the organization's work with vulnerable groups, especially single mothers. Overall, the visit showcased Grassroot's commitment to inclusive, sustainable development rooted in local culture, indigenous knowledge, and community ownership.





WHAT STOOD OUT MOST WAS GRASSROOT'S DEDICATION TO PRESERVING THE RICH CULTURE, TRADITIONS, AND NATURAL HERITAGE OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES OF MEGHALAYA, IT'S TRULY ADMIRABLE. VISITING THE KHASI SPA AT LAITMAWSIANG WAS ANOTHER HIGHLIGHT; LEARNING THAT GRASSROOT SUPPORTS THIS INITIATIVE MADE IT EVEN MORE SPECIAL. KUDOS TO MAYFEREEN AND HER ENTIRE TEAM, WISHING THEM CONTINUED SUCCESS IN ALL THEIR EFFORTS.

-KISHORI BARUAH

UTSAH

WAY FORWARD

As the gathering drew to a close, participants shifted focus toward concrete steps for sustaining and deepening their regional collaboration. The network committed to a structured rhythm of engagement: virtual meetings in December followed by an in-person gathering in January-February, creating a pattern that balances accessibility with the irreplaceable value of face-to-face connection.

Recognizing the financial and logistical burdens imposed by conflict situations across the region, particularly in Manipur, participants acknowledged the need for inclusive meeting strategies that account for travel restrictions, safety concerns, and disproportionate costs faced by organizations in volatile areas. The network pledged to collectively explore solutions that ensure no partner is excluded due to circumstances beyond their control.

Mental health emerged as a priority thematic area, with partners agreeing to expand programming in this severely underserved sector. Organizations already working in mental health offered expertise and support to those beginning this work, creating peer learning pathways that leverage the network's collective knowledge. Additionally, the group committed to developing organizational disability policies, ensuring intentional focus on persons with disabilities across all sectoral work.

Second-line leadership development crystallized into actionable plans. Virtual meetings will be curated specifically for emerging leaders to facilitate sessions, creating low-stakes learning environments where mistakes become teaching moments. Founders and directors offered mentorship across state boundaries, with detailed mentor-mentee matching to be finalized through individual outreach. This reflects growing recognition that organizational sustainability requires deliberate succession planning and the difficult art of letting go while remaining available for guidance.

The network will maintain connection through shared learning on organizational systems, communication policies, and facilitation skills. Collaborative regional proposals addressing shared challenges will be explored, recognizing that North-East region organizations amplify their impact when speaking with a unified purpose while honoring the distinctive contexts of individual states.

As participants prepared to depart, the gathering's significance became clear: this community of organizations is committed to learning, mutual support, and the understanding that development approaches must emerge from within the region. The solidarity strengthened across these days has continued building on the momentum towards sustained collective action, grounded in the recognition that solutions for the North-East region will be as complex and as diverse as the region, but will be resilient as its communities themselves.

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"The gathering was not only a platform for knowledge building but also a space for bonding, reflection, and inspiration. It reaffirmed the importance of collaboration and peer support among civil society organizations."

*Vikhuli Achumi
Pro Rural*





Access more pictures and videos from the gathering [HERE](#)

Access detailed Session Notes [HERE](#)

Access contact details of the leaders [HERE](#)

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