PROJECT KHEL
WE SPEAK PLAY!

ANNUAL REPORT

2025-26



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WE SPEAK PLAY.



FOREWORD

THE GROUND WE STAND (AND PLAY) ON

At Project KHEL, our fourteenth year on the maidaan has been a testament to a truth we have anchored since our inception: the playground is not just a transient escape from the world, but the definitive space where young people build the muscle to reshape it.

We have always played the long game. Lasting change does not happen in a one-off workshop; it takes root across seasons of showing up, passing the disc, unpacking difficult moments, and learning to share space as equals.When children step onto our grounds, they do not just run and score—they discover voice, negotiate identity, and challenge the everyday norms of gender and exclusion. We see this quiet revolution every day: in the boy who steps up from disruption to lead his peers with purpose, in the girl who trades self-doubt on the sidelines for the joy of owning her space, and in the young athlete who battles family pressures just to arrive on the field before the rain starts.

This year, our community expanded the boundaries of what intentional play can build:

- **Over 900 Children in Deep Learning:** Reached 661 students across eight schools and learning centres through Made in Maidaan, alongside 248 athletes training across eight FrisB(arabar) centres.
- **1,083 Coaching Sessions Powered by Youth:** Delivered through the leadership of 14 homegrown Youth Coaches, who began as players and returned as mentors to protect the field for the next generation.
- **A Record-Breaking Chilly-O 2025:** Hosted India's largest development-sector Ultimate Frisbee tournament, scaling by 216% since 2023 to bring together 380 athletes from 24 teams across 9 states with zero financial barriers to participate.
- **Uncompromising Everyday Gender Dialogue:** Engaged hundreds of young minds—from over 250 schoolboys examining masculinity to dozens of girl leaders exploring power and agency—ensuring conversations on gender remain woven into every game we facilitate.
- **Grassroots to Global Voices:** Cultivated facilitator and coach leadership across India and internationally, from national fellowships to youth representation in Turkey, proving that when we invest in our mentors, our children thrive.

None of this growth belongs to us alone. It belongs to our PLAYducators who hold space through heat and rain, our partners and funders who believe in our steady, multi-year journey, and the children who show up every week to teach us what courage looks like.

As you flip through these pages, we invite you to see the classroom we see—one without walls, built on trust, play, and belonging.

With gratitude,
Akshai
Founder-Director, Project KHEL

THE ANATOMY OF PLAY.



HOW THE FIELD TEACHES, HOW CHANGE TAKES ROOTS

PLAY IS HOW WE LEARN.

We use play intentionally—not simply to make learning fun, but to create spaces where children can experience, explore, question and make meaning for themselves.

EXPERIENCE COMES BEFORE EXPLANATION.

Our sessions follow a simple but powerful cycle: Engage → Do → Reflect → Transform. Children experience something, make sense of it together, and carry that learning into how they think, act and relate.

THE FIELD IS A MICRO-CLASSROOM FOR THE WORLD.

On the maidaan, abstract concepts become physical choices. Young people actively practice how to take up space, make room for others, communicate without violence, and navigate disagreements in real-time.

PLAYDUCATORS HOLD THE SPACE.

Our facilitators are not teachers delivering top-down answers. They are active listeners and observers who ask the right questions, protect emotional safety, and learn alongside the cohort.

WE LOOK FOR GENDER IN THE EVERYDAY.

Gender equity is not a separate, academic lesson. We pay attention to the subtle, everyday ways gender structures language, space, roles, and assumptions—using the games themselves to gently challenge these patterns.

PLAYING THE LONG GAME.



TIME, TRUST, AND THE MULTI-YEAR ARCHITECTURE OF CHANGE

We believe meaningful change cannot be rushed; it requires sustained seasons of showing up, building trust, and layering repeated experiences.

- **MOVING FROM EXPLORATION TO IDENTITY:**
In our foundational Made in Maidaan cohorts, children meet twice a week for three years. The journey is carefully sequenced, moving from exploring pluralism and difference in the first half to anchoring a deep sense of self in the second, with gender as an overarching theme.

- **SPORT AS A VEHICLE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY:**
Through FrisB(arabar), Ultimate Frisbee becomes a self-governing ecosystem. Operating without external referees, players must directly practice conflict resolution and self-management, while the Spirit Circle holds mixed-gender teams equal and accountable for their actions on the field.

- **CREATING A SAFETY NET BEYOND SPORTS:**
As trust deepens over the years, our engagement expands beyond the boundaries of the field. We layer on academic support, financial literacy, career mentoring, and long-term navigation choices as our athletes grow.

- **DEMYSTIFYING TABOO CONVERSATIONS:**
Through targeted frameworks like ab BAS!, Teen Talks, and Red Spot, we leverage years of built trust to create judgment-free spaces where young people can safely process difficult realities around safety, relationships, sexuality, and menstruation.

- **THE ULTIMATE TRANSITION:**
From player to leader: Our multi-year timeline allows children to grow into the very mentors who protect the space for the next generation. The cycle is complete when a child steps onto our field to play, learns over years to lead, and returns as a peer leader or homegrown Youth Coach.

The long game, for us, is not simply about keeping children in a programme for longer. It is about giving them enough time, trust, and practice for new ways of thinking, relating, and participating to become entirely their own.

MADE IN MAIDAAN.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

At Project KHEL, we see the playground as a space where children practise being in the world—learning how to take space, make room for others, navigate differences, handle conflict, and make choices.

- **Learning by doing:** Social and emotional skills are not taught as a checklist. Children experience them through play, reflect on what happened, and get opportunities to practise again.
- **A journey that grows:** Our three-year curriculum moves through two interconnected journeys—Learning to Live with Difference (Pluralism) and building a stronger Sense of Self.
- **Gender as a lens:** Gender runs through the programme rather than sitting in a separate lesson. Mixed-gender play challenges stereotypes and segregation, while intentional same-gender spaces create room to explore boundaries, emotions and safety.
- **Taking space, making space:** Over time, we want children to become more confident in speaking up, listening, disagreeing without dominating, and making room for others.

The goal is simple: to help children become more self-aware, empathetic, inclusive, and confident in navigating themselves and the world around them.



IMPACT – MADE IN MAIDAAN



10 FACILITATORS



789 HOURS OF PLAY-BASED ACTIVITIES



TOTAL 661 CHILDREN

327 GIRLS  334 BOYS 



9 PARTNER INSTITUTIONS



1 GOVT SCHOOL

4 LOW INCOME SCHOOLS



1 GOVT AIDED SCHOOL

2 PERI-URBAN SCHOOLS

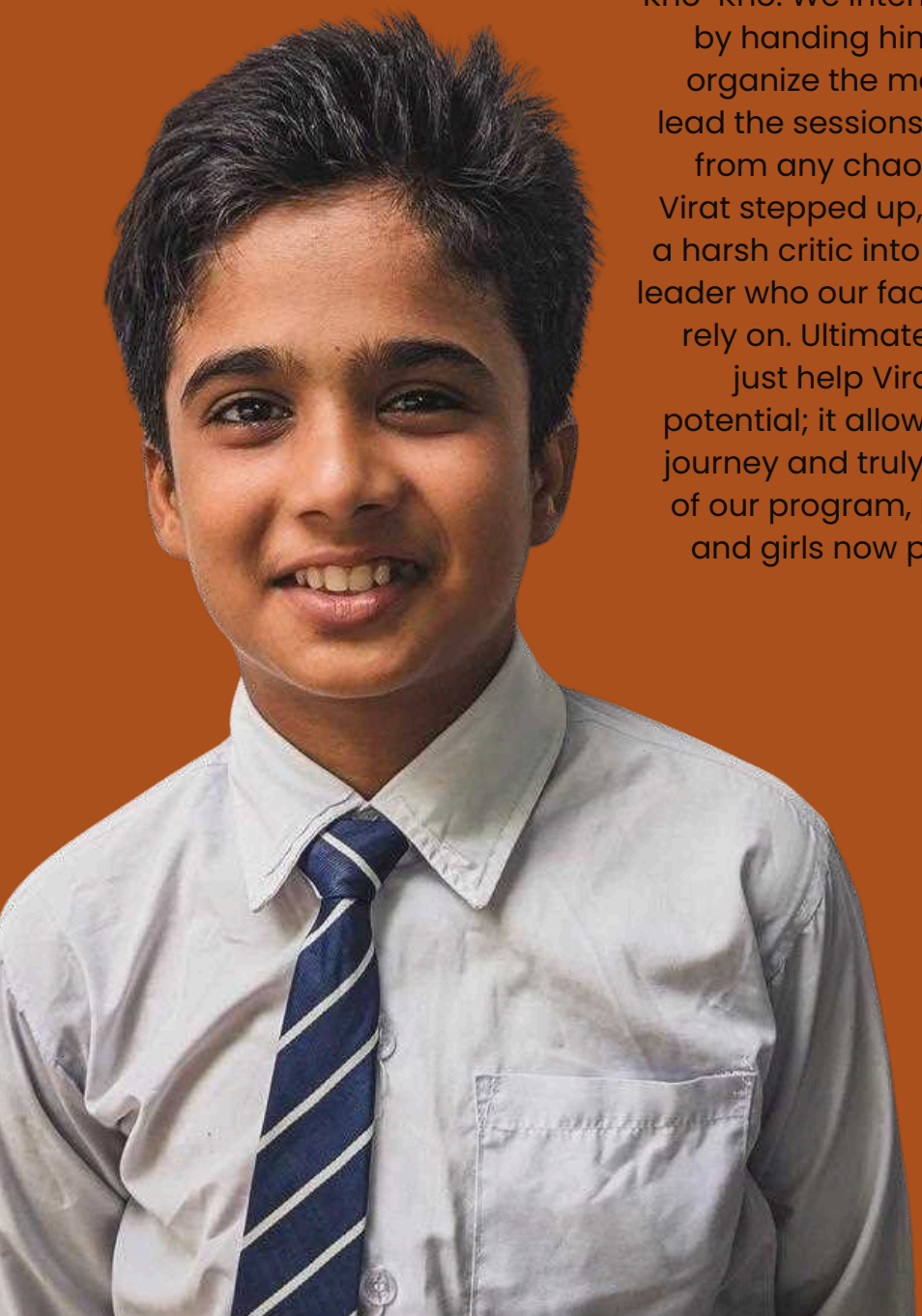


1 AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

STORIES OF CHANGE

VIRAT: ON FINDING AN ANCHOR THROUGH PLAY

When Virat first joined Project KHEL, he was a sharp, confident child who used his brilliance to challenge our facilitators, effortlessly checking out or disrupting sessions the moment he felt an activity lacked preparation. Recognizing that his fierce standards stemmed from an unmet need for purpose, our team looked for an anchor to engage him and found it in his deep love for Kho-Kho. We intentionally leveraged this passion by handing him the reins—challenging him to organize the matches, manage his peers, and lead the sessions. To protect the game he loved from any chaos that might steal his playtime, Virat stepped up, completely transforming from a harsh critic into a responsible, deeply invested leader who our facilitators and his peers came to rely on. Ultimately, your support did more than just help Virat find his voice and leadership potential; it allowed him to look beyond his own journey and truly appreciate the inclusive heart of our program, proudly reflecting on how boys and girls now play, participate, and belong as equals on the very same field.



NANCY: FROM STAYING BACK TO STEPPING UP

When Nancy first stood on our field, she shrank into the sidelines, using a quiet excuse of a stomach ache to protect herself from a play space she believed wasn't meant for her. Shaped by the heavy, intersecting weights of caste, gender, and poverty, she carried a learned self-exclusion that made her feel invisible. Her world unlocked the day we caught her laughing freely during dodgeball and showed her the photograph; seeing her own unfiltered joy served as a powerful mirror, helping her realize she was beautiful and belonged. Supported by our facilitators' consistent care, Nancy grew from a hesitant observer into a courageous leader who crossed social barriers to encourage dominant-caste peers, call out unfairness, and organize games. Ultimately, she achieved the truest measure of change: the girl who once believed she had no place on the field became the very person making sure everyone else had a space to belong.



FrisB(ARABAR)



GROWING THROUGH SPORT, LEADERSHIP AND INDEPENDENCE

At Project KHEL, Ultimate Frisbee is more than a sport. It becomes a space where young people take responsibility, test their independence, build relationships and learn to lead.

- **The game teaches the skills:** With no referees, players take responsibility for fair play, manage disagreements and practise the Spirit of the Game. Mixed-gender teams share the field as equals, while the Spirit Circle creates space to reflect and hold each other accountable.

- **The world gets bigger:** Players move from local games to inter-centre tournaments and eventually national travel. Each step builds confidence and practical independence—from managing money and navigating unfamiliar places to using public transport and meeting people from different parts of India.

- **Support beyond sport:** For consistent players, our engagement extends beyond the field through academic support, financial literacy, career preparation and conversations that help them navigate life beyond KHEL.

- **From player to leader:** Over time, young people can choose to take on greater responsibility—as mentors, centre leaders and Youth Coaches. The journey is simple: a child joins to play, a player learns to lead, and a leader creates space for someone else to play.



IMPACT - FrisB(arabar)

14 YOUTH COACHES



1083 COACHING SESSIONS

TOTAL 248 CHILDREN

84 FEMALE ATHLETES

164 MALE ATHLETES

8 COMMUNITY CENTERS

6 OUTSTATION TOURNAMENTS PARTICIPATED IN

5 LOCAL TOURNAMENTS HOSTED AND PARTICIPATED IN

TOURNAMENT RESULTS:

PODIUM FINISHES:

Sakkath, Bengaluru, Jun ‘25
- Udta Kebabs (Women) - Tournament Runners-up(Silver)
- Udta Kebabs (Women) - Spirit Champions (Gold)

CHILLY-O, Lucknow, Aug ‘25
- Awadh Pilot – 2nd in Spirit (Silver)
- Flying Nawabs – 3rd in spirit (Bronze)

Beach Nationals, Chennai, Oct ’24
- Udta Kebabs (Elite Division) - Tournament Runners-Up (Silver)
- Flying Nawabs (Intermediate Division) - Tournament Champions (Gold)
- Flying Nawabs (Intermediate Division) - Spirit Champions (Gold)
- Star Pilots (Intermediate Division) - Tournament 2nd Runners-up (Bronze)
- Silent Eagles (Challengers Division) - Spirit Champions (Gold)
- Flying Discs (Challengers Division) - Spirit Runners Up (Silver)

YU Invitational, Delhi, Jan’26
- Udta Kebabs - Tournament 2nd Runners-up(Bronze)



STORIES OF CHANGE

JITENDRA: FROM SHOWING UP TO STANDING UP

Driven by an unmatched dedication to the frisB(arabar) program, Jitendra balances working at a tea stall with being the most reliable, punctual presence at our LMG sessions every single Sunday.



While other working children struggle to show up consistently, Jitendra never misses a session—even sacrificing his daily earnings at the tea stall on days he wants to play. His deep commitment to the space became beautifully clear the day a session was at risk of cancellation due to low attendance; without being asked, this junior-group boy took it upon himself to rally the community, running door-to-door to call other children so the play could continue. This sense of responsibility has unlocked incredible personal growth off the field as well; after gentle, consistent conversations with his facilitator about his health, Jitendra successfully cut down his heavy, daily tobacco/supari habit from six packets a day to just one. Through the simple joy of ultimate frisbee, Jitendra has not only found a safe space to grow out of harmful habits but has emerged as a deeply reliable anchor who protects and builds the play space for everyone around him.

MAHI: FROM STUGGLE TO STRENGTH

When our LMG centre first started, Mahi was a shining, exceptionally talented anchor of the frisB(arabar) program—punctually gathering other children for practice and taking on deep ownership of the space. However, behind her brilliant gameplay lay a distressing reality: her family consistently mistreated her, deploying endless tactics and piling on household chores to block her from attending the practices she was so passionate about. Every time Mahi complied, they demanded more work or created new barriers, pushing her into an exhausting cycle where she resorted to lying just to steal a few hours on the field, which only brought down further abuse at home. Caught in this systemic trauma, Mahi began to revolt through her own small means—getting into verbal fights at home, delaying her return, and suddenly showing up late to our sessions because she was lost in long conversations on the road with dropped-out friends, simply searching for a place to escape. Recognizing that ultimate frisbee was her vital safe space, our facilitators, Sapna Didi and Krishna Bhaiya, stepped in with immense empathy; while building a direct relationship with her family proved incredibly difficult, they poured their energy into working with Mahi, helping her understand that she didn't have to fight a losing battle with aggression. Instead, they are equipping her with the patience and strategic negotiation skills needed to navigate her rigid domestic structure without losing her safety net. Mahi's fierce commitment to this journey beautifully crystallized on a recent rainy day: after an honest, grounding conversation with her facilitators about her recent lapses, she broke through her exhaustion and arrived at the field before anyone else, proudly elcoming the team through a light drizzle with a triumphant smile, declaring, “Didi, aaj hum time par hain!” (Didi, today I am on time!).



CHILLY-O 2026: EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH ULTIMATE FRISBEE

Founded in memory of Arun, a young athlete and community leader, Chilly-O brings together non-profits across India that use Ultimate Frisbee to empower young people.

Today, it is India's biggest national Ultimate Frisbee tournament exclusively for the development sector. Over two days, youth leaders, coaches, and players travel from across the country to compete, learn, and build community.

Why accessibility matters?

Many young athletes from grassroots communities never get the opportunity to participate in a national sporting event. For many teams, travel, accommodation, and participation costs create barriers that are impossible to overcome.

Chilly-O removes those barriers.

In 2025, we ensured every participant received:

- Free participation
- Free Accommodation
- Free Meals, refreshments & hydration
- Free Tournament merchandise (jerseys and bottles)

Journey so far:

2023 → 2024 → **2025**
12 → 14 → **24** Teams
120 → 230 → **380** Players
3 → 4 → **9** States

216% Growth in Participation Since 2023.



GENDER I


DAY 01
Gender, Love & Social Expectations
ISHQ
PROJECT KHEL
ISHQ
IRAADE
INKAAR
BREAK UP BINGO!
DAY 02
MASCULINITY, BREAKUPS & POSSESSION
INKAAR
DAY 03
ACCOUNTABILITY, CONSENT & MOVING FORWARD
AB AAPKE PAAS BEHTAR, RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS BANANE KE TOOLS HAIN—HUM UMMEED KARTE HAIN KI AAP INKA ZIMMEDAARI SE USE KARENGE.
IRAADE
CERTIFICATE OF
ISHQ
IRAADE
INKAAR
PROJECT KHEL

LEARNING TO SEE GENDER IN THE EVERYDAY

Gender Eye (or Gender I) helps participants examine their own relationship with gender and notice how it shapes everyday choices, interactions, and expectations. The training is designed to be non-threatening, non-judgemental and reflective, creating space to question rather than prescribe.

- **See gender differently:** Notice how gender shows up in language, behaviour, relationships and who gets to take space.
- **Question what we have learnt:** Explore the assumptions and stereotypes we carry without turning the conversation into a right-or-wrong exercise.
- **Reflect, then respond:** Build the ability to recognise gendered patterns in everyday situations and make more conscious choices.
- **A lens, not a lesson:** Gender Eye is not a one-off sensitisation session; it is a way of looking at the world that feeds into our wider programmes and work with children, facilitators, teachers and organisations.



IMPACT - GENDER I

- **Understanding Gender & Identity:** At Ignite 2025, organised by Kick Off Solutions, **27 young women athletes and youth coaches** explored the relationship between **gender and identity**.

- **Working with Masculinities:** Through Mard Bano Yaar, we engaged **257 boys** at La Martinière College, Boys' School across a series of workshops **exploring masculinity** and what it means to be a boy today.

- **Exploring Gender through Play:** Our workshop on Ishq, Iraade, Inkaar (Love, Intentions and Rejection) engaged **28 boy athletes**, using play and activity to open conversations around **gender and behaviour in the context of romance**.

- **Building Practitioner Capacity:** We worked with **9 facilitators** from Savera Foundation through a **gamification** workshop.

  We also partnered with the Girl First Fund for a 3-part Training of Trainers focusing on **gamification, building an understanding of gender, power, and violence**, followed by a focused workshop on self-love, reflection, and growth, with **28 participants from 8 organisations in Jharkhand**.

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEAM

This year was marked by continued learning, reflection, and leadership within our team. Through diverse learning opportunities, our facilitators strengthened their skills, deepened their understanding of children's needs, and brought new perspectives to their work with children and communities.

1

FACILITATOR LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Swati and Sapna participated in EMpower's facilitated learning journey in Jaipur, creating space for reflection, peer learning, and strengthening their practice. Pawan and Sapna also completed the Girls Positive and Safe Coaching Pathway, deepening their understanding of gender-sensitive coaching, safeguarding, girls' participation in sport, menstruation, body positivity, physical safety, and mental health.

2

GLOBAL EXPOSURE AND GIRL-CENTRED PROGRAMME DESIGN

Roshni, our Youth Coach, travelled to Turkey to participate in a conference hosted by Suna'nın Kızları, focused on girl-centred programme design. The experience offered valuable global perspectives on designing programmes that respond to girls' needs, experiences, and aspirations.

3

YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY-ROOTED LEARNING

Sapna was selected as a fellow for Gramya Manthan, Youth Alliance's immersive leadership programme. Through engagement with rural communities, the programme encourages young changemakers to question assumptions, learn directly from lived experiences, and explore new approaches to leadership and social change.

These opportunities go beyond individual growth—they strengthen the way we work with children. By investing in our facilitators' continuous learning, we are building a team better equipped to listen, adapt, and create safe, responsive spaces where children can learn, grow, and thrive.



PARTNERSHIPS & SUPPORT

This year, continued partnerships and new collaborations helped us strengthen our programmes, share our learnings, and create more opportunities for young people.

1

CONTINUED SUPPORT FROM OUR FUNDERS

We are grateful to TGF and EMpower (FCRA) for their continued support, and to Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies (RNP) for their continued partnership as a domestic funder.

2

BUILDING CAPACITIES ACROSS ORGANISATIONS

In partnership with GFF, we led a three-part capacity-building series for facilitators from GFF partner organisations in Jharkhand, sharing learnings and strengthening programme practice.

3

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Through our fellowship partnership with KickOff, we facilitated a workshop for their fellows, while KickOff provided scholarships for three of our girl frisbee athletes.

Together, these partnerships help us strengthen our practice, reach wider communities, and create meaningful opportunities for young people to thrive.

INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATIONS

Our gratitude to the other institutions that we partnered with for various programmes -

- Community Welfare School
- Arya Kanya Inter College Pathshaala
- Vardaan International Acaedmy
- Bal Bharti School
- Pramodini Junior High School
- Indian Public Inter College
- Iqtidar Bano Public Inter College
- Prakash Bal Vidya Mandir
- Prayaas (Modern Academy)
- La Martiniere College
- Kickoff Solutions
- Savera Foundation

Our communitiies in

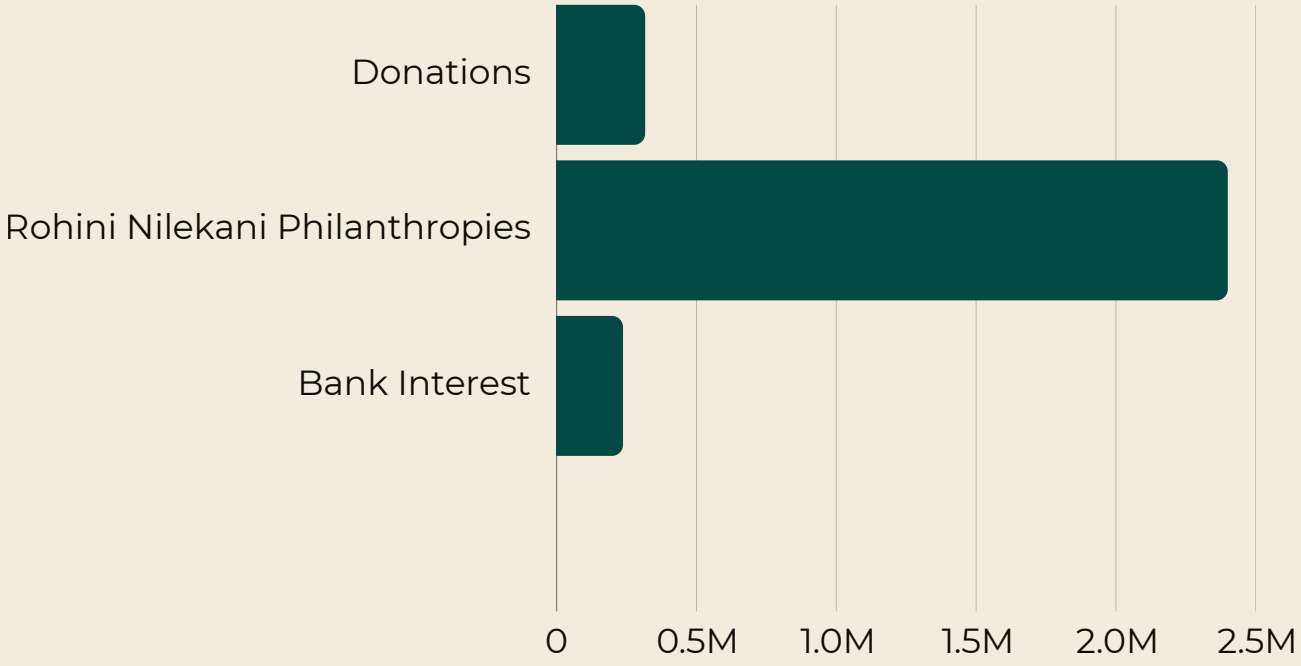
- Itaunja
- Virat Khand
- Vipul Khand
- Viram Khand
- Malhaur
- Arjunganj
- Hazratganj

Acknowledgement

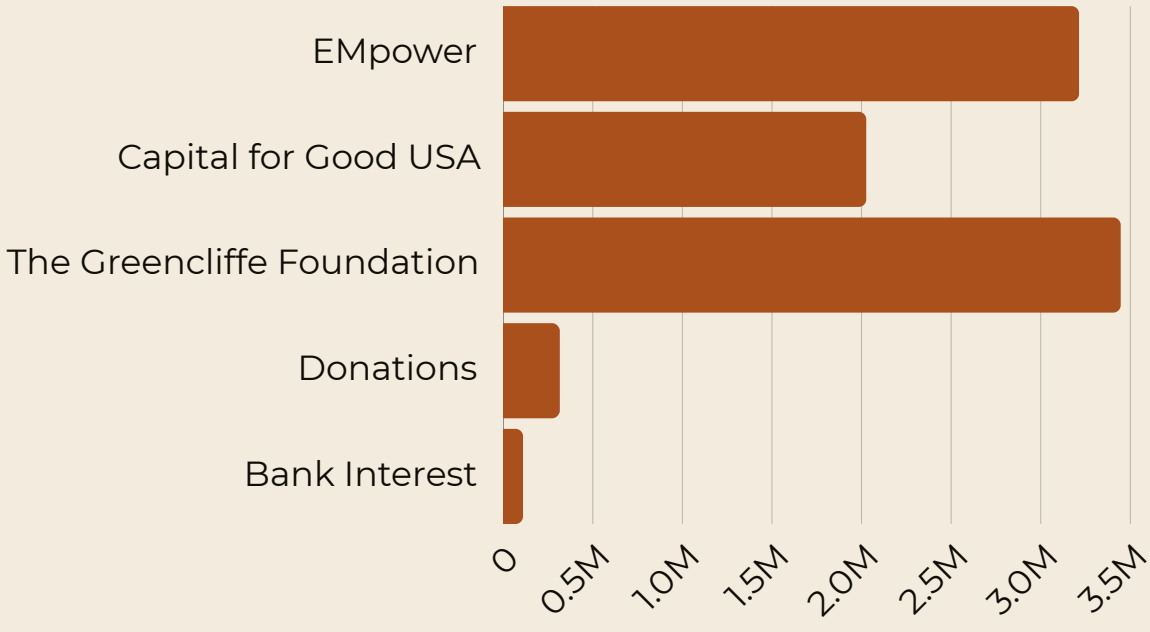
To every donor, partner, mentor, volunteer, and friend — thank you for believing in our mission. Your support continues to inspire us to dream bigger, work harder, and stay rooted in community. Together, we are nurturing movements of care, leadership, and change.

FINANCES

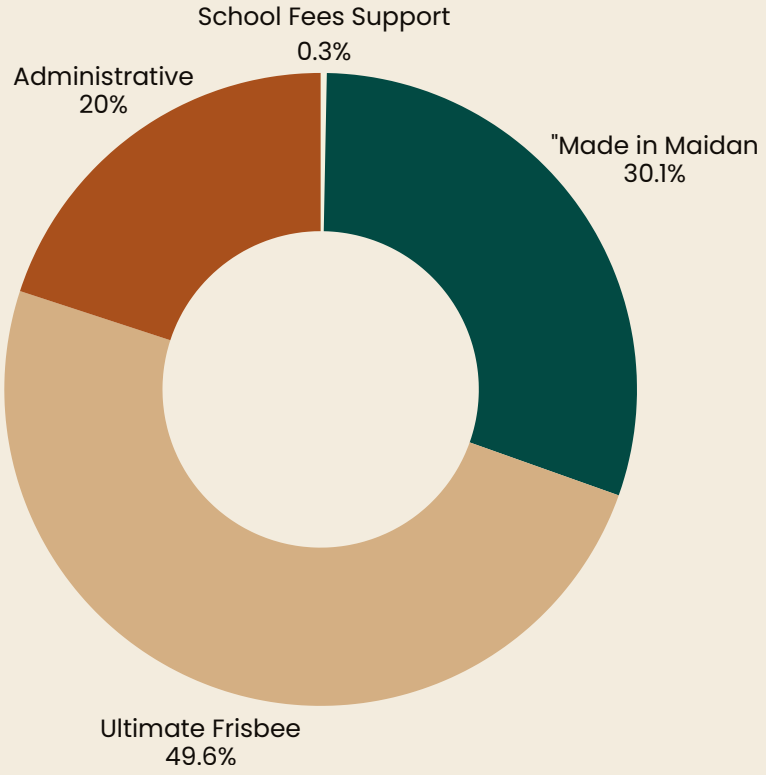
INCOME SOURCES (DOMESTIC): RS. 29,53,745.32



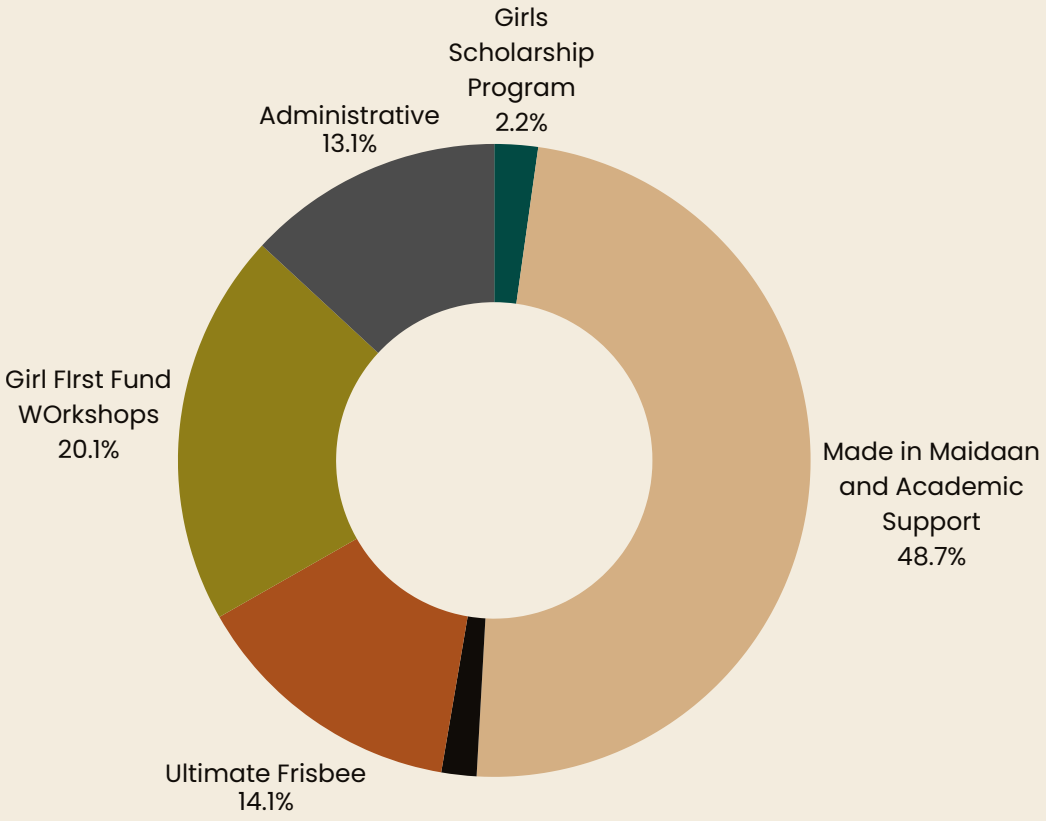
INCOME SOURCES (FCRA): RS. 91,11,632



DOMESTIC FUNDS EXPENSES: RS. 37,79,697



FCRA FUNDS EXPENSES: RS. 85,57,432




PROJECT KHEL
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