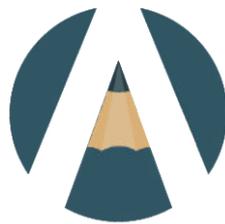




IN REVIEW

The Atma Accelerator

Summary of an Impact Assessment
commissioned by Atma and executed by
Dr. Florence Ruby, PhD



A T M A
AN ACCELERATOR FOR EDUCATION

Executive Summary

At Atma, we believe that grassroots NGOs are doing the hard work of bridging gaps in the Indian education sector, and are doing it well. Our role as an accelerator is to help our partner organisations strengthen their internal systems, improve programme delivery, and reach more students.

Over the years we have partnered with a diverse group of organisations, each with its own model for delivering better education to its chosen demographic. This comparative perspective has given us a strong appreciation for the value of careful impact assessment; the current report presents the summarised results of a comprehensive historical evaluation of our own core programme, the Atma Accelerator, in its first nine years of operation.

Conducted over a six-month period in mid-2016, the evaluation involved detailed written questionnaires, quantitative data collection tools, and extensive interviews with all but three of our graduated partners, as well as conversations with Atma staff members past and present. The major aims of the evaluation were (1) to develop a balanced overall picture of our partners' satisfaction with the Accelerator and their perception of its impact and (2) to identify areas for improvement.

The main body of this report is divided into two sections. The first, 'Findings', organises the evidence to answer three key questions:

- I) How effectively are we delivering our model?
 - II) How do our partners benefit from the model?
- And finally...
- III) The Accelerator: is it working?



The second section, 'Takeaways', considers these same sections again and investigates any programme gaps brought to light as we answered each.

According to our partners, the Accelerator *does deliver* on its key mission of building organisational capacity; the report highlights the strong relationships with partner leaders that led to focused strategic planning and the development of critical systems, many of them implemented by Atma volunteers whose work several partners found invaluable. The stand-out Accelerator strengths explored in 'Findings' are expressed in the following statistics:

- 100% of interviewed partners appreciated the skills, positive attitudes, and quality of work brought by their Atma volunteers.
- 93% of partners thought Atma was able to identify and help resolve the important challenges faced by the organisation.
- 70% of partners reported an important or critical impact on their ability to reach and scale.
- 100% of partners would recommend Atma to other organisations.

Where the statistics pointed to lower partner satisfaction, the complimentary qualitative responses allowed us to identify key challenges. As described in 'Takeaways', some partners noted:

- 1) Setbacks during transition from the initial to a new Partnership Manager.
- 2) Gaps in management of volunteer timelines and insufficient preparation of short-term volunteers.
- 3) Insufficient funding support to allow for focused implementation of partnership projects.
- 4) Limited networking between partners.
- 5) Education sector knowledge among the Atma team and volunteers insufficient for advising on best practices and programme quality.
- 6) Formal leadership workshops and trainings not part of Accelerator offerings.
- 7) Lack of evidence on the impact of the organisation's programmes.

To conclude this report, we offer 'Notes from the Team', a selection of responses to the evaluation that showcase how its results have informed Atma's day-to-day work and will continue to do so as we pursue our mission of building bigger, better, and stronger education organisations.



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Introduction

About Atma

Atma empowers education NGOs to grow bigger, better, and stronger in a lasting way, in turn converting school drop-outs into graduates equipped to thrive. Using a systematic management approach, Atma leads NGOs to scale up, expand their reach, and dramatically enhance their capacity to educate and empower children and their communities.

Our **vision** is quality education for all children. Our **mission** is to build the capacity of education NGOs towards sustainability, scalability, and, in turn, the delivery of high-quality education to more students.

Atma believes that:

- Bridging the education gap is going to take a movement, not just one bright idea.
- In creating an inclusive education system, we must allow every child to exercise their right to education.
- In the long term, the government school system must function for all.
- For education to be meaningful in the lives of students, it needs to point towards meaningful employment.

Atma runs two main programmes: the Accelerator and the Network. The current report presents an impact assessment of the Accelerator, our flagship programme now in its tenth year of operation. The Network, an online extension of Atma's expertise in capacity-building, launched in 2014 and is now a repository of 500+ guides, tools, and example documents.



About the Atma Accelerator

The Atma Accelerator Programme provides strategic and hands-on support to high-potential education NGOs and social enterprises. Over the course of a 3-year partnership, each organisation receives a mix of strategy building, access to resources and networks, project implementation support, training and skill development, and monitoring and evaluation support. The Accelerator Programme broadly includes the following inputs:



1200 hours of support



provided by 1 dedicated Partnership Manager



and at least 3 volunteers, annually

Through the Accelerator, we've reached



50 organisations



71,000 indirect beneficiaries

On average our partners have experienced, during partnership, a



4.2 x increase in beneficiaries



4.0 x increase in budget



2.6 x increase in locations



Commissioning the Report



In early 2016, Atma conducted a thorough exit process with five soon-to-graduate partners which included a survey on their satisfaction with the Accelerator. Atma recognised an opportunity to conduct a similar survey with earlier graduated cohorts. The planned project soon evolved into a full impact assessment of the first nine years of the Accelerator.

To take on this project, Atma enlisted Dr. Florence Ruby, who came to us with strong skills in survey design, having received her PhD in Cognitive Neuroscience from the University of York on the basis of extensive research projects in psychology and neuroscience. She has been the recipient of national and international scholarships including the Hasekura Fellowship and the Erasmus Scholarship.

On behalf of Atma, she conducted the evaluation over five months and completed an extensive report that was shared internally and became the basis of conversations around next steps in developing the Accelerator. This document summarises the contents of that report and presents them for an external audience.

Acknowledgements

Atma would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Dr. Florence Ruby for volunteering her time and expertise to design, carry out, and write up the assessment on which this summary document is based. Her dedication to quality throughout the process was highly appreciated both by the Atma team and the partners interviewed.

We would also like to thank Pooja Warier, Amit Murugkar, Karen Braganza, and Paige Walker for their sharp and thoughtful feedback towards the structure and design of the current Review.

Above all, Atma is indebted to the sixteen Accelerator graduates whose detailed, insightful responses to our surveys made this project possible. In participating, they have turned the tables and given us the tools to accelerate our own programme development. We hope that future partners will experience a higher quality Accelerator thanks to the lessons from our early cohort.

Design of the Evaluation

Evaluation Aims

Since its inception in 2007, Atma has made considerable additions and improvements to the Accelerator Programme in an ongoing effort to provide the most relevant and effective support to our partner organisations. The evaluation presented in this document is a continuation of these efforts, with two specific aims:

- To evaluate the different components of the Accelerator Programme: estimate their relevance and effectiveness; highlight areas of improvements; and offer recommendations.
- To estimate the impact of the Accelerator Programme: assess the extent to which the Programme was able to build capacity and promote growth in our partner organisations.

Methodology

The process for the original evaluation conducted by Dr. Ruby included:

- A thorough internal orientation to the Accelerator Programme with members of the Atma team.
- Extensive discussions with team members around the outcomes to be evaluated and measures to include.
- Selection of partners to interview.
- The design of three surveys (one for partners who graduated in 2016, one for those who graduated in or before 2015, and one for partners who could not be interviewed face-to-face).
- The collection of data from the leader(s) of each selected organisation.
- The design of a fourth survey for Atma Partnership Managers, and interviews with three of them.

Surveys were administered in two parts:

- A face-to-face or phone interview to collect qualitative data &
- Questions sent prior to or after the interviews for quantitative data.

The surveys combined multiple-choice ratings with open-ended questions and invited partners to provide organisational data (number of beneficiaries, budget, etc.) as well. Partners were informed that the information shared with the data collector would remain confidential and would not be reported back to any Partnership Manager with whom they had directly worked. No comments or data presented in this document are linked with specific organisation names, except where permission has been specifically granted.

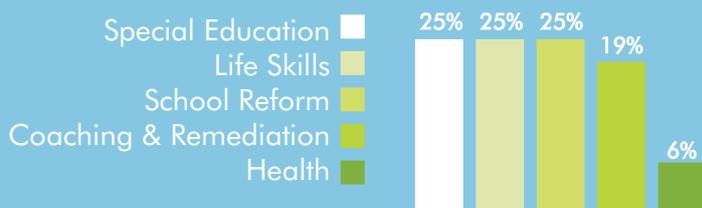
Minor modifications and additions to the surveys in the early stages of the data collection process meant that a few pieces of quantitative data could not be obtained from all partners. Additionally, certain organisational data was not available for Muskan, Umang, and Reality Gives.

Participants

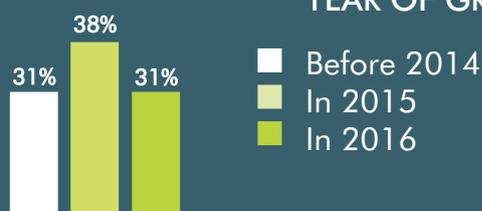
Nineteen organisations have graduated from the Accelerator Programme since its launch, of which sixteen were approached to participate in the survey. Organisations which graduated before 2011 were not included because the Accelerator was still in its early stages of development when they were partners: their feedback is less relevant to improving the Programme as it exists today.

The sixteen organisations interviewed are all located in Mumbai or Thane District. They include an organisation whose founder was named a 2013 Ashoka Fellow, another recognised as a finalist for the Thomson Reuters Foundation 2016 Trustlaw Impact Award, and the inaugural winner of the Edupreneur Quest competition. These partners have been supported by such noted international and national bodies as the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, the Global Fund for Children, Macquarie Foundation, DBS Foundation, British Gas, Central Square Foundation, and Tech Mahindra, and Dasra.

ORGANISATION'S FOCUS



YEAR OF GRADUATION



LIST OF PARTICIPATING PARTNERS

Apni Shala

Avanti Fellows

Bright Future

CHIP Mumbai

Foundation for
Mother
& Child Health
(FMCH)

Masoom

Mimaansa

Muskan

Oscar

Reality Gives

Sahyog

Sol's Arc

Udaan

Umang

Vidya

St. Willibrord
International
School



Findings

How to read this section

In considering the results of the impact assessment, we seek to answer three questions:

- 1) How effectively are we delivering our model?
- 2) How do our partners benefit from the model?
- 3) The Accelerator: is it working?

This section is thus organised into three parts, each addressing one of the above questions. Part I considers key Accelerator components– Partnership Managers, volunteers, resource linkages and project implementation– and our partners' satisfaction with them. Part II checks whether Atma is achieving its mission of helping organisations become “bigger, better, and stronger” by looking at changes in organisational capacity against seven indicators. Part III takes a step back to address the Atma model overall.

1 HOW EFFECTIVELY ARE WE DELIVERING OUR MODEL?

1.1 PARTNERSHIP MANAGERS

93% agreed that PMs **kept them on track** towards achieving long term goals

74% of partners **felt supported** by the PM if unexpected difficulties arose

67% considered **one-on-one coaching** by the PMs to be critical/very useful



The Partnership Manager (PM) is the partner's main contact point, mentor, and champion within the Accelerator. The relationship between partner and PM is key to the success of the Programme.

Partners tended to report a **strong, positive, and fruitful relationship** with their PM. Both PMs and partner leadership reported the importance of:

- Building **trust** and showing a genuine **interest** in supporting the organisation.
- Ensuring a **good fit** between PM and partner in work style, personality, etc.

However, respondents indicated that the **transfer of a partnership from one PM to another**, which occurred when a PM left Atma, **delayed the progress of the partnership**: the new PM took time to invest in a relationship with the organisation and its leaders. In addition, gaps in the transition process resulted in the **repetition of some projects**.

1.2 VOLUNTEERS

Atma volunteers provide many of the resources necessary for project implementation. On average, **each organisation was appointed 10 volunteers** in their time in the Accelerator.



100% of PARTNERS

recognised the **critical skills and positive attitudes** of the volunteers

were satisfied with the **quality of work** provided by the volunteers

Very positive feedback from the 15 partners who rated the Volunteer Programme indicated that **Atma was able to source and supervise volunteers** exceptionally well. In fact, 25% of the interviewed organisations hired one or more Atma volunteers onto their full-time teams.

However, inflow of volunteers did not respond adequately to the needs of the partnership in terms of skillsets and timelines. **Unexpected volunteer exits** delayed partnership projects and resulted in repeated work. Some **short-term volunteers** were either inadequately prepared to jump into project work immediately, or lacked the flexibility to deviate from their timelines if unexpected difficulties arose.

A few partners reported that having **volunteers with special knowledge of the sector** would have enhanced the quality of certain types of projects.



"I always felt I had an advisor [in the PM] so I [was] more confident as a leader. Atma helped [us] make more confident steps when we were trying to achieve a goal."

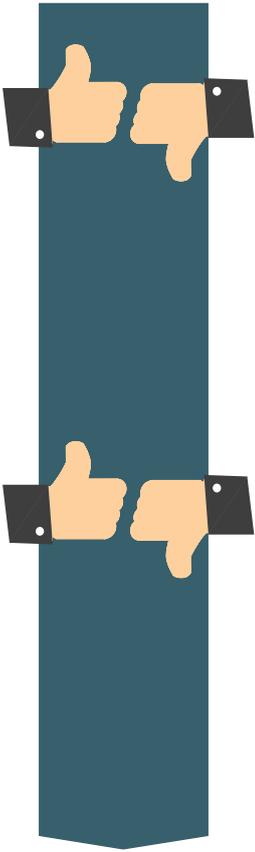
–Swetha Raganathan, Apni Shala Co-founder

"They may not know the organisation but they're always well-prepared for what the work is and what the scope of that is."

"...All of them were a very committed lot."

–Megha Dharnidharka, Training & Finance Coordinator and
Manisha Naik, Executive Director of Sahyog

1.3 RESOURCE LINKAGES



50% of the organisations interviewed reported that Atma introduced them to **funding linkages**

However, only 27% indicated that the support was very useful or critical, suggesting that more support is required to link organisations to potential donors. However, this gap is partly attributable to the fact that some organisations with stable sources of income did not report a funding need.

47% of partners reported that the **introduction to new networks & resources was critical or very useful**

RESOURCES
75% of partners were connected to skilled professionals during their time with Atma. Support was provided in accountancy, communications, and human resources.

NETWORKS
50% of partners reported having been introduced to other partner organisations; this led to collaboration and knowledge transfer.

1.4 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION



93%

of partners agreed or strongly agreed that Atma was able to **identify and help resolve the important challenges affecting the organisation**

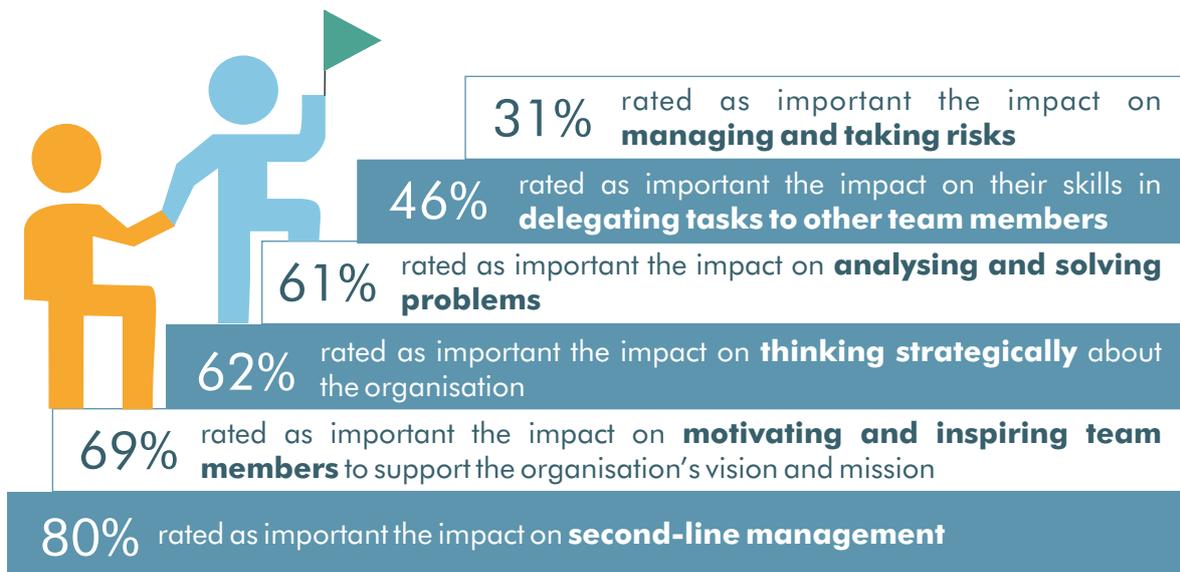
Support provided towards **strategic planning, human resources, marketing & branding, monitoring & evaluation, and programme design** was particularly useful for many organisations. Partners also reported that Atma projects were *relevant* at the time of implementation.

While Atma's support successfully built partners' organisational capacity, **relatively few inputs were given into improving the design and quality of partners' programme delivery**. Only one interviewed organisation reported having received extensive support in curriculum design. The Atma team's strong knowledge of the education sector has not historically included in-house expertise in curriculums and teaching models.

2 HOW DO OUR PARTNERS BENEFIT FROM THE MODEL?

2.1 LEADERSHIP

The Accelerator Programme impacted the leaders of the organisations across two broad areas: **second-line management** and **leadership skills**. Many founder-driven organisations came to appreciate the importance of second-line management, and gained the skills to define organisational structure, recruit skilled professionals, and improve accountability. Leaders themselves honed their strategic thinking towards a broad vision, practiced effective communication and team management, and learned to trust their teams.



2.2 NETWORK AND VISIBILITY



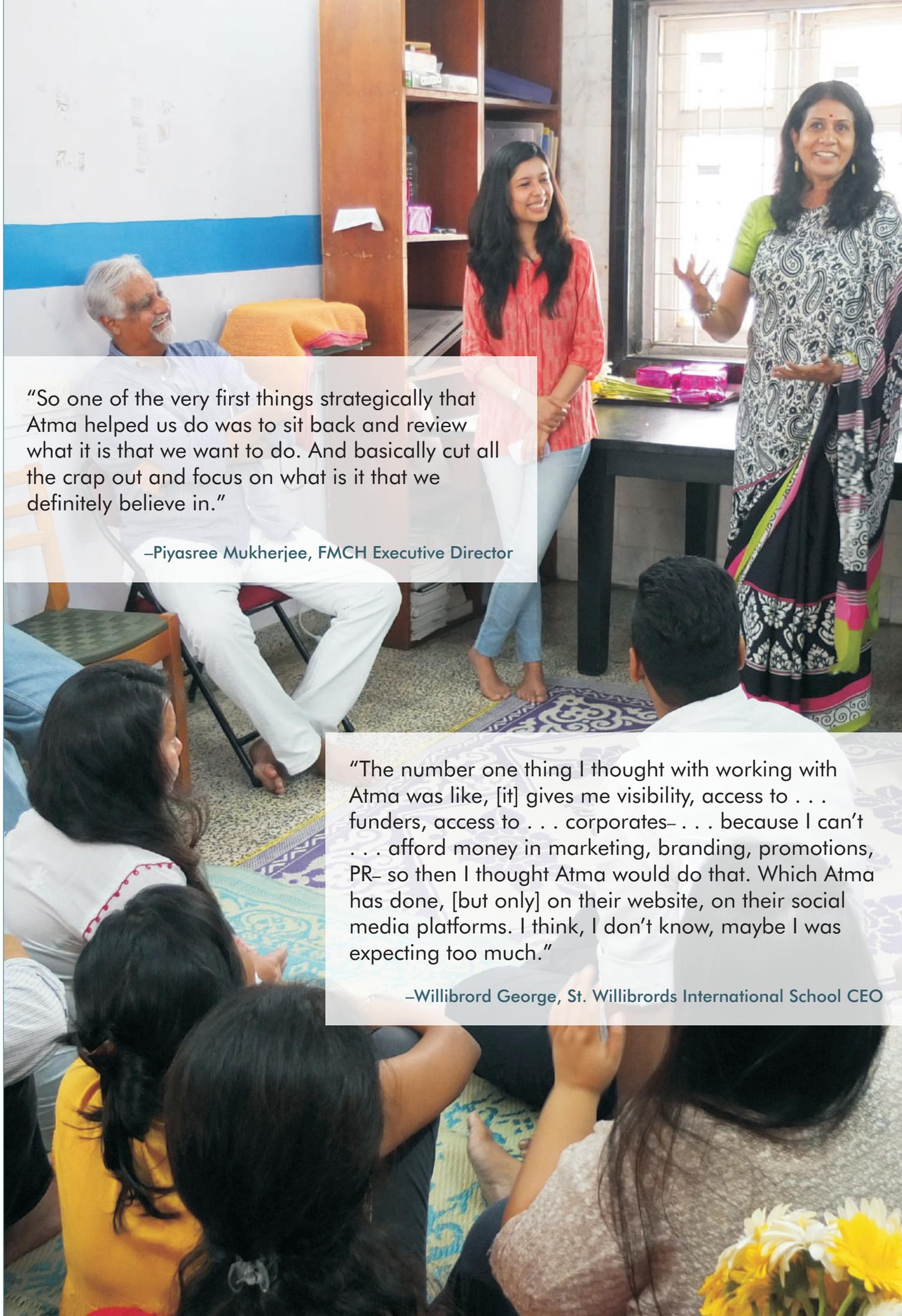
53%

of partners agreed that working with Atma allowed them to **spread their ideas and raise awareness** in their communities



60%

of partners agreed that working with Atma allowed them to create a **support network** of funders, volunteers, community members, and other NGOs



“So one of the very first things strategically that Atma helped us do was to sit back and review what it is that we want to do. And basically cut all the crap out and focus on what is it that we definitely believe in.”

–Piyasree Mukherjee, FMCH Executive Director

“The number one thing I thought with working with Atma was like, [it] gives me visibility, access to . . . funders, access to . . . corporates- . . . because I can’t . . . afford money in marketing, branding, promotions, PR- so then I thought Atma would do that. Which Atma has done, [but only] on their website, on their social media platforms. I think, I don’t know, maybe I was expecting too much.”

–Willibrord George, St. Willibrords International School CEO

2.3 FUNDRAISING CAPACITY



38% of partners reported a critical or important impact on their fundraising activities

- This support translated as:
- **Better management** of the fundraising pipeline (e.g. when and how to apply for funds, how to use funds, etc.).
 - **Improved communication** with potential funders (e.g. pitch desk, proposal writing, donor management etc.).
 - **Development of knowledge** through workshops and projects completed.



50% of partners reported a critical or important impact on their actual fundraising pipeline

There was significant variation in funding needs across partners. Several **organisations with strong financial resources already in place** rated Atma's impact on fundraising capacity as "Not Applicable". On the other hand, several other organisations expressed a wish to have received **additional fundraising support during times of financial stress.**

2.4 REACH AND SCALE

A key aspect of Atma's vision is to help organisations reach more beneficiaries. By supporting our partners to clarify strategy and overall vision, put in place strong systems and processes that allow for programme repetition, and systematically pursue long-term goals, we empower organisations to scale.

70% of partners reported a critical or important impact on their ability to reach and scale

Over the course of the Accelerator, our partners saw on average, growth of



4.2 x Beneficiaries



4.0 x Budget



2.6 x Locations

Several partners mentioned that their objective when joining the Accelerator Programme was to **strengthen and develop organisational capacity**— i.e. "put the house in order"— rather than to necessarily increase their reach. Importantly, some also indicated that the **impact of the Programme towards scaling may occur following graduation** and not during the partnership; this should be taken into account in subsequent Programme impact assessments. The following numbers reflect the growth from graduation to date of those interviewed partners who graduated prior to 2016.

Since graduation, our partners have seen on average, growth of



2.6 x Beneficiaries



7.4 x Budget



1.8 x Locations

2.5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROTOCOLS

60% of partners reported a critical or important impact on their organisation’s M&E capacities

Interviewees highlighted that Atma was able to:



Raise awareness of the importance of M&E processes (e.g. benefits of M&E data for attracting donors and iteratively improving programmes).



Develop skills towards building the organisation’s own M&E tools later on (skills include identifying success indicators, measuring outcomes, keeping records, etc.).



Implement M&E processes and trackers.

However, a number of respondents reported that they would have appreciated **more conscientious effort towards ensuring the full uptake of planned M&E systems**. In some cases, systems designed by Atma were too complicated for staff usage without further training. In other cases, not enough time was given in an M&E project to allow for proper implementation. Further, some partners would have liked better coaching in how to use data collected through the new M&E systems, especially towards showcasing long-term outcomes and impact.

2.6 SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

Systems and processes include calendars, internal trackers, manuals/guides that promote organisational structure, and any other protocols that reduce repetition and automate operations.

90%

of partners reported a critical or important impact in this area through the development of key systems for overall smooth functioning

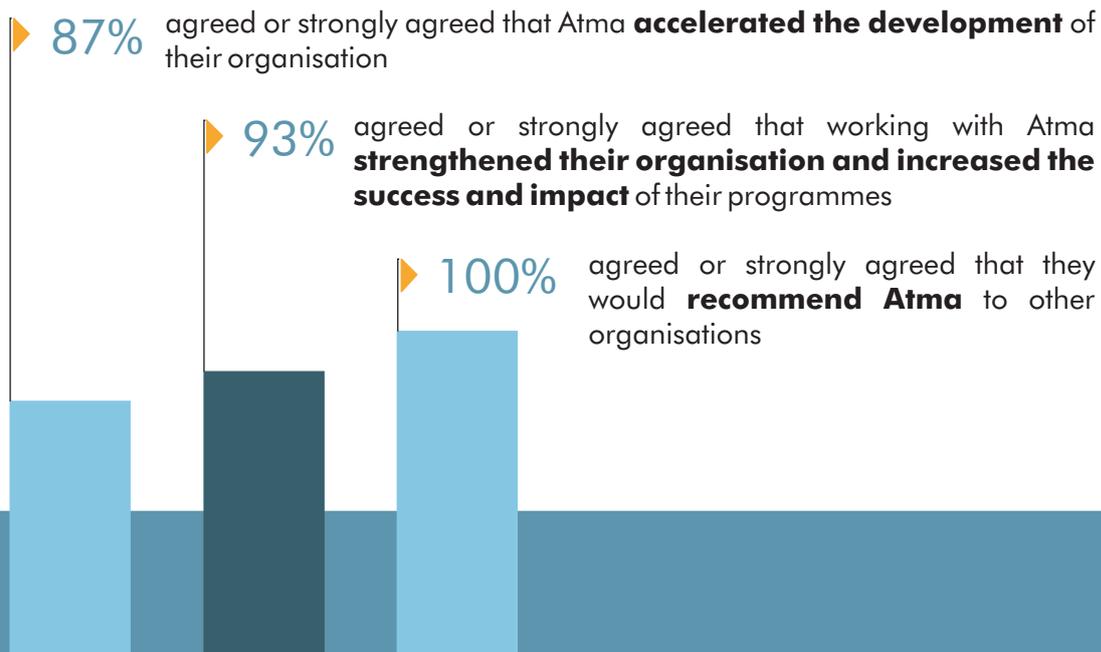


In some circumstances, **systems developed were not actually impactful** because the organisations were unprepared to implement them. This occurred due to lack of time, manpower, skills etc.

3 THE ACCELERATOR: IS IT WORKING?

3.1 OVERALL SATISFACTION

Overall, the Accelerator Programme is able to support partner organisations to **become stronger, better able to tackle challenges, and more likely to survive.**



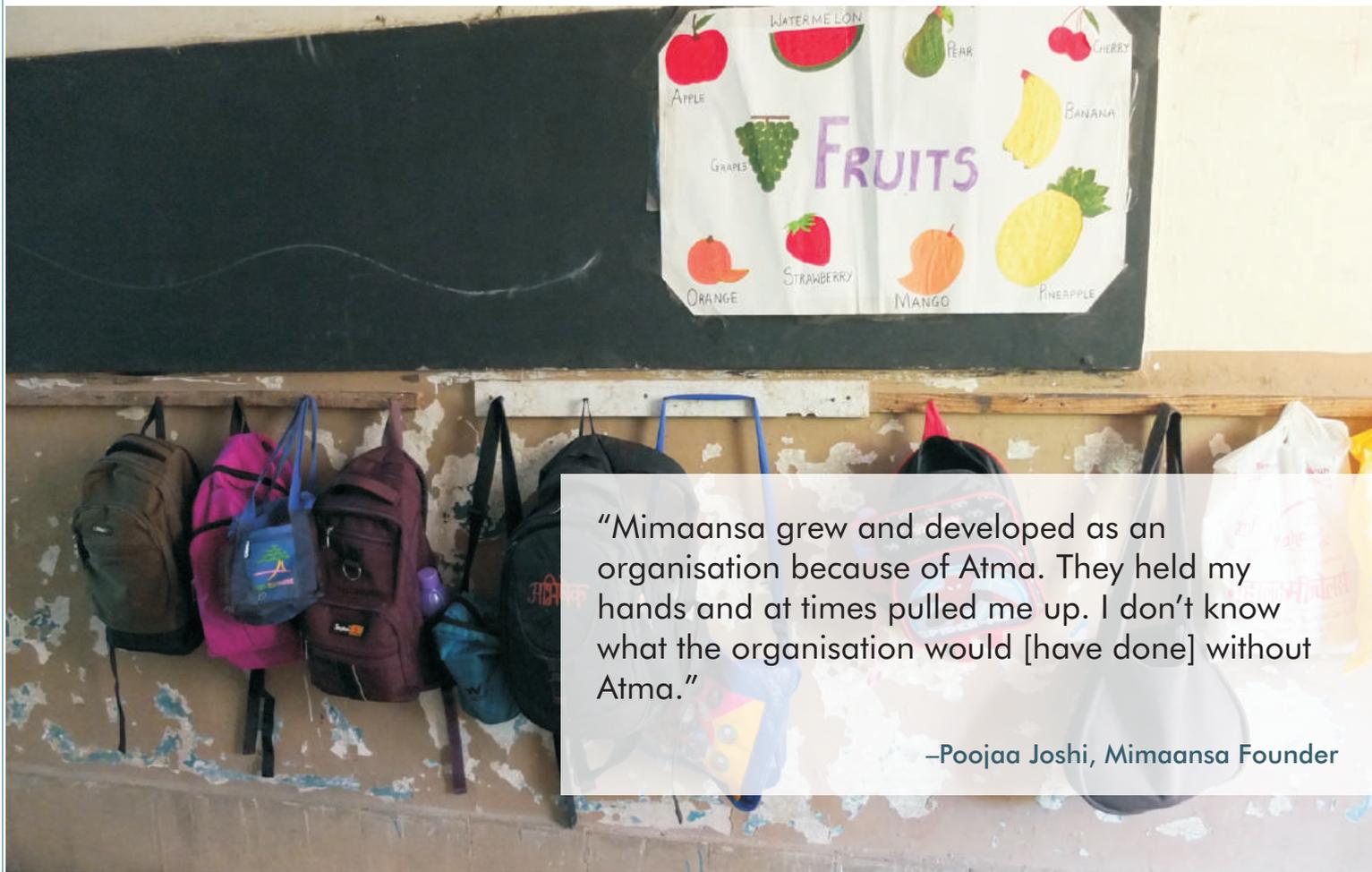
3.2 CAPACITY-BUILDING AND LONGEVITY OF CHANGE

80%

of partners agreed that working with Atma increased the **confidence** they have in their work and their **ability to resolve organisational challenges**

Of those interviewed partners who graduated prior to 2016, nearly all reported **continued use of systems & processes designed with Atma** in the year(s) since graduation.

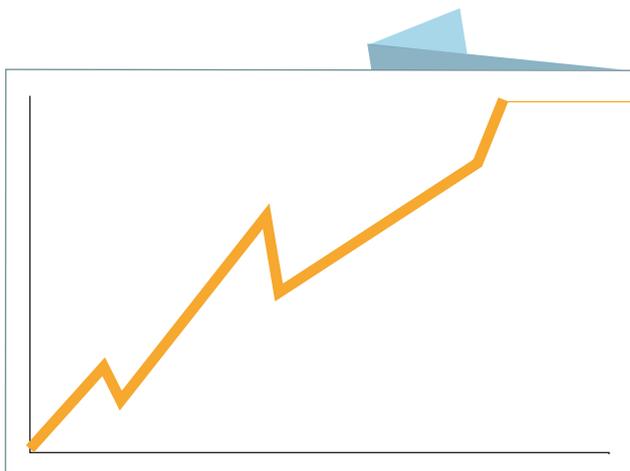




“Mimaansa grew and developed as an organisation because of Atma. They held my hands and at times pulled me up. I don’t know what the organisation would [have done] without Atma.”

—Poojaa Joshi, Mimaansa Founder

3.2 CAPACITY-BUILDING AND LONGEVITY OF CHANGE (cont.)



90% agreed that the **skills gained during the Accelerator** were an integral part of their organisational practice till date

Their organisational data also shows that **tangible growth experienced during partnership, in terms of beneficiary reach and budget size**, has continued following graduation.

A few partners mentioned the difficulty of transferring knowledge to other staff members, especially if staff turnover is high. The Atma Network could be used as a medium to promote knowledge transfer and skill development.

3.3 PARTNERSHIP DURATION



83% of partners regarded the time of graduation from the Programme as **appropriate** (neither too early, nor too late)

A few organisations **graduated earlier than expected** in cases where the organisation had advanced beyond the need for further support from Atma.

One partner felt that **graduation had occurred too early** and described that the transition from one PM to the next led to delays in project completion.





Takeaways



How to read this section

The previous section, 'Findings', organised the evidence from the original evaluation to answer three questions about the quality and impact of Atma's work with its graduated partners. In this next section, we reflect on those answers and outline how we are using them to improve Accelerator offerings and performance.

Specifically, we lay out seven key challenges noted in the evaluation and describe Atma's plans to address them. Atma's programming has changed since the time of graduation of the survey respondents; where these changes have already addressed the challenges highlighted, we note our progress.

1 HOW EFFECTIVELY ARE WE DELIVERING OUR MODEL?

1.1 PARTNERSHIP MANAGERS



Setbacks during transition from the initial to a new Partnership Manager

Due to the length of the programme, PMs may have to leave Atma before the completion of all associated 3-year partnerships. To the extent possible, transitions should not diminish the partners' experience of the programme, nor significantly slow the momentum of partnership achievements, especially given that the relationship with the PM is a core component of the Atma model.

Recommendations

- Thoroughly **document all partnership projects and data.**
- Thoroughly **prepare both the partner and the new PM** for transition.

Progress

In March of 2016, Atma prepared a "**Partnership Manager Transition: Standard Operating Procedures**", a thorough guide detailing the steps recommended for a smooth handover. The document covers both logistical and relational best practices and includes as appendices prepared checklists and templates to ensure that the SOP recommendations are followed. Atma has implemented this SOP once thus far, and in the subsequent Quarterly Assessment (conducted each quarter to track partner satisfaction and project completion) the relevant partners reported smooth transitions and no knowledge gaps with their new PMs.

1.2 VOLUNTEERS



Gaps in management of volunteer timelines and insufficient preparation of short-term volunteers

Atma's high-touch model relies on volunteers to support project implementation across an array of assignments. Volunteers are recruited for their skills and matched with skill-specific projects. The evaluation has indicated that volunteer exits prior to completion of projects have significantly affected both project quality and timeliness.

Recommendations

- Assign volunteers to projects that may be completed in less time than the volunteer has committed, allowing a **buffer for delays.**
- In the case that a volunteer leaves early or before project completion, offer plenty of **support to transition the project to a new volunteer or to the PM.**
- Assign short-term volunteers to partner **projects that have clear action plans**, or to Atma internal work that does not directly involve partners.

Progress

Revising the Volunteer Programme has been a major focus of the past six months. The Volunteer Programme

- now has **limited acceptance of short-term (<3 months) volunteers.**
- emphasizes the importance of thorough **volunteer preparation** (building familiarity with the partner and previous partnership work) before new volunteers begin projects directly with partners.

1.3 RESOURCE LINKAGES



Insufficient funding support to allow for focused implementation of partnership projects

Experience has shown that a partner's financial insecurity limits the attention they have available to devote to organisational development. Only 50% of partners reported having been even introduced to funding streams. Of these, only half reported that these linkages were very useful. (Refer to page 14 in 'Findings'.)

Recommendations

- Make **fundraising a priority early** in the partnership.
- Provide **funds directly** to the organisation through an Atma Fundraising Programme.
- Increase **networking opportunities** with potential donors.

Progress

Atma recognises the need to help young organisations through periods of financial stress that take energy away from delivering quality programmes and building organisational strength. In the last couple of years, **marketing projects** have been standard in the first quarter of partnership. We also run CSR workshops to familiarise our partners with the grant application process, and fundraising-related webinars, offered through the Network, on topics like FCRA registration and strategy planning.



Limited networking between partners

Atma has seen that many organisations in the sector use similar models and struggle with a common set of challenges. There is great potential for efficient sector-wide growth through knowledge sharing. Given our extensive and strongly-rooted connections with former and current partners, Atma is perfectly positioned to facilitate this growth. Despite this potential, only 50% of partners reported having been introduced to other partners and only 47% reported a very useful introduction to new networks and resources.

Recommendations

- **Design workshops** where graduated organisations can meet and work on common projects.
- Conduct an **education and/or special education conference** to provide networking opportunities.

Progress

Atma has increased its offerings of **special workshops**, conducted both independently and in partnership with other organisations, on such topics as 'approaching CSRs' and 'social media best practices'. In the next six months, Atma will be launching **Gati: A Consortium on Education for Individuals with Disabilities**, a body to connect practitioners towards common problem-solving, provide access to outside expertise, and spread best practices.

1.4 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION



Education sector knowledge among the team and volunteers insufficient for advising on best practices and programme quality

At the core of Atma’s model is the belief that our partners are already delivering high-quality programmes that are responsive to the needs of their target groups. We provide the management experience and systems approach to capitalise on existing performance. Atma has taken a less dedicated approach to promoting educational best practice. Given our vision of ‘Quality Education for All’, this is a major area for improvement.

Recommendations

- Hire an **in-house education specialist**.
- Recruit **external consultants** if projects require strong sector expertise.

Progress

Given that the majority of our current partners operate in the space of education for individuals with disabilities, Atma particularly recognises the need for in-house expertise in this sector. In May of 2016, Atma hired to the M&E team a **researcher who has spent the last four months investigating the PwD education in Mumbai** (Atma will be publishing a report on the same in the next six months). In addition, the Consortium mentioned above has been developed specifically to gather and develop sector knowledge and disseminate best practices. Finally, in October 2016, Atma hired a Programmes Director with six years of experience at Pratham Education Foundation and Pratham Institute of Literacy Education and Vocational Training.

2 HOW DO OUR PARTNERS BENEFIT FROM THE MODEL?

2.1 LEADERSHIP



Formal leadership workshops and trainings not part of Accelerator offerings

The assessment showed fairly positive results in leadership development. However, some partners sought or expected more formal trainings beyond the coaching provided in the normal course of partnership. There is potential for Atma to respond to this need.

Recommendations

- Identify the **specific training needs** of the staff members.
- Provide **formal trainings in addition to the non-structured coaching and mentorship** that is inherent to the partnership.
- Increase **networking opportunities** with potential donors.

Progress

Atma recognises this opportunity for improved programme offerings and looks to **increase leadership training structures over the next two years**. However, due to the strong coaching and mentoring already in place (and positively reviewed in the current assessment), programme additions in this area are of a lower priority as we work to address other key challenges raised.

2.5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROTOCOLS



Lack of evidence regarding the impact of the organisation's programmes

Strong, focused M&E systems allow an organisation to measure its outcomes and develop an evidence-backed understanding of how its programmes are working. Over time, M&E and impact assessment guide an organisation towards better programming and service delivery. While partners have reported that Atma has helped them appreciate the importance of M&E and impact assessment, the evaluation revealed gaps in implementation of M&E systems. (Refer to page 18 in 'Findings'.)

Recommendations

- Conduct one **impact assessment of the programmes during the partnership.**
- Ensure that **M&E support starts early in the partnership** to allow sufficient time for the design, implementation, and modification of M&E systems.

Progress

In the past two years, Atma has built a **dedicated M&E team** with greater capacity. This has enabled us to develop both our own systems and those of our partner organisations. We aim for excellent tracking and reporting but do not plan to conduct impact assessments on our partners' programmes due to conflict-of-interest concerns.

3 THE ACCELERATOR: IS IT WORKING?



In the corresponding section of 'Findings' (see pages 19-21), we asked if, overall, the Accelerator is working. According to our partners, the answer is a confident "yes". The Programme delivered on its mission of accelerating the development of organisations and helping them to become stronger and more impactful. All partners reported that they would recommend Atma. Against this portion of the evaluation, there are no particular challenges we would like to highlight.



Conclusion

In the two months since completion of the evaluation, we have used its findings as the basis for conversations around next steps in building the Accelerator. Each team has discussed and reflected on the results towards their own team's work. We present some of their reactions in the next section, 'Notes from the Team'.

Overall, we have been glad to note that many challenges highlighted in the evaluation have been ones already known to Atma and against which we have made progress in the time since our earliest cohorts graduated. In this sense, the evaluation validated much of the strategic development that Atma has implemented in the past two years. Novel challenges were carefully considered, particularly if they related to core components of our model such as volunteers and resource linkages.

In keeping with the spirit and recommendations of the report, Atma will focus in the next year on (1) network linkages, (2) partner funding, and (3) internal monitoring and evaluation:

- 1) A new programme launching at the end of 2016, the Gati Consortium for Education for Individuals with Disabilities, will facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration between our partners and other sector players.
- 2) Over the past three quarters, we have expanded our business development team and multiplied our efforts to raise funds directly for partners.
- 3) We are bolstering the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of Accelerator outcomes and partner satisfaction so that in future, an impact assessment like the one presented here is part of a continuum of formal feedback provided by our partners.

We are grateful to all contributors for the opportunity to take stock of the work we have done so far and to carry forward lessons learned as we promote, alongside our vibrant partners, the vision of Quality Education for All.



"A review of the the Atma Accelerator has been long-pending. This has been integral to filling in gaps in what we can communicate to Atma's stakeholders. We can now say confidently: this is what we're doing well, this is where we're facing challenges and this is what we're doing to mitigate further challenges or make progress."

–Chirag Sutar, Communication Manager

"As far as a report goes, it was both enlightening and critical. This is what I would consider an essential insight into learning how to efficiently use our resources. This assessment holds true for both current and upcoming projects; an insight like this is most meaningful to Atma's endeavors."

–Sunil Mishra, Impact Assessment Coordinator



“The report managed to do a brilliant job of highlighting the strengths of the Accelerator, for sure. But simultaneously, it also brought to light the challenges faced and in doing so, validated our concerns while marking out for us directions for improvement. So now with sufficient evidence, we can be convinced of discontinuing certain approaches and strengthening certain others.”

–Elena D’souza, Partnership Manager

“I found this document to be immensely insightful for its ability to shift focus from simply marketing the (Volunteer) Programme well to the skill and experiences necessary for matching the volunteers. From the perspective of the Programme again, what is brought to the forefront was the need to sensitise and train volunteers before they begin their partner projects, making projects more fruitful and lasting for our partners.”

–Roseann Dutton, Volunteer Coordinator