

**Aangan's evolution in institutionalizing child protection in India**  
**– A case study about long-term philanthropic support and a planned phase-out**

Suparna Gupta, Atiya Bose and Chaitali Sheth in conversation with Tom Kagerer

**“Aangan’s goal is to make child protection everyone’s business.”**

Atiya Bose, a former private investigator and Aangan Trust's current CEO of Aangan Trust and Tom Kagerer, Partner at LGT Venture Philanthropy take stock together after partnering over the last 13 years to guarantee safe, supported childhoods for India’s most vulnerable children. This is no easy feat: Across the country, approximately 200 million children are exposed to some form of abuse, 37 million are at risk of child marriage, and 35 million are engaged in hazardous labor. Every 8 minutes a child goes missing and every 15 minutes, a child is subject to a sexual offense – every day!

Founded in 2002, Aangan combines ad hoc prevention measures responding to needs as they emerge, and a systemic, long-term, holistic approach to reducing child harm in India. It sets up prevention, post-harm and advocacy programs for child protection and engages all the stakeholders in a child’s life by involving families, local communities, schools, shelter homes, local police, and government authorities. It makes a child’s safety everyone’s business.

**Trusting long-term partnerships with funders are essential**

LGT Venture Philanthropy Foundation has supported Aangan Trust for over 13 years throughout multiple stages of development. Now, that there is more awareness, there is more funding, and the organization is overall strong, LGT VP is seeking to wind down its support in a collaborative approach. Atiya and Tom sat down with Aangan’s Founder, Suparna Gupta, and COO, Chaitali Sheth, two women equally committed to child protection, discussing what a responsible end of the LGT VP engagement could look like.

LGT VP believes that for philanthropic funding to be truly transformative, it must strengthen the capabilities of organizations delivering effective solutions so that they can drive more significant impact and embed their models in wider systems. With Aangan, the partnership reached a point where LGT VP felt confident to phase out its support because Aangan has developed strong organizational capacities to continue its work of embedding effective child protection solutions in India’s institutions.

**How would speak to the nature of the relationship between AT and LGT VP?**

Gupta speaks to the nature of the relationship: “From the start, LGT VP showed us that they trusted us as people, and they believed in our model. It felt like a partnership of equals, in which each brought a different expertise. Overall, we’re very comfortable approaching LGT VP for all sorts of things.” Gupta chuckles: “A bit too comfortable you might think!”

The aspect of trust is essential to LGT VP’s approach of providing a combination of flexible core funding and hands-on strategic support to its partners to allow them to achieve their common, ambitious goals. Bose adds: “We saw LGT VP’s flexible funding as a testimony of their confidence in us. No matter the topic or request, the response typically was: ‘you know the ground reality and what’s needed better than anyone else, so keep doing the work and we do our best in supporting you in that.’ Belief in an organization's abilities is a very powerful thing – it motivates and moves people to action.”

Respect is another value that is deeply rooted in LGT VP’s approach. Not too long ago, Aangan and LGT VP had a lively discussion on how to further grow their impact as part of the next strategic cycle. Over the lifetime of LGT VP's support to its portfolio organizations, one can often witness strong growth in budget, FTEs as well as the onboarding of additional external senior management talent. Aangan took

a slightly different approach to its growth. The aim has always been to keep the organization lean by embedding their work early in institutions that are well-positioned to better protect children. Kagerer remembers that debate: "As partners on equal footing, we were able to carefully challenge each other's ideas and assumptions." Both parties confirmed that they benefited from looking at it through a different lens which contributed to the learning journeys both organizations embarked on a long time ago. Kagerer emphasizes, that for LGT VP it is important to be a critical thinker and thought partner but not to impose their ideas on their partners. The ultimate responsibility lies with the local organizations and should not be funder driven.

### **Support organizations, their teams, and their strategies – not projects**

Sheth explains: "Our experience showed that children needed us to make the systems work – it was not enough for an NGO to just scale itself and its reach, because that would always be just a tiny drop in the ocean. And this partnership allowed us to do that – this was more than 10 years ago, at a time when people were not talking about system strengthening."

Since 2009, LGT VP has provided Aangan with USD 3.4m in grant funding to strengthen their HR team, financial processes, and program management, and connected seven mid-career professionals to the organization to work for one-year, full-time embedded in the organization as part of the LGT Impact Fellowship. LGT VP's support came at a crucial time to scale Aangan's model. The organization was at a point at which it had shown success in one state, Maharashtra, and the foundation came in and pushed the organization to further increase its ambition level by thinking about national scale. The foundation's flexible core funding allowed the organization to further improve quality and scale of its direct community interventions, while at the same time building up new capacities in the team to think through and implement new areas to drive change on a systemic level.

At the start of the engagement, Aangan had developed a Standards of Care Tool, that helped juvenile homes to identify strengths and weaknesses in the quality of their support, resulting in an actionable improvement plan. The organization was planning to pilot the tool in partnership with three state governments. With LGT VP's support, Aangan introduced the methodology in 13 additional states. Their deeply rooted local knowledge combined with high-quality community-level data, helped them to build up a strong relationship with government partners, resulting in invitations to government committees and national delegations, allowing them to feed in their insights into the policy dialogue.

The same process repeated itself in 2014 when Aangan started its "PACT" program that moved the organization's focus from post-harm to a prevention model, aimed at increasing child safety at child-harm hotspot locations in India. With LGT VP's support, Aangan piloted a community-based harm prevention model in 19 locations to capture learnings honing the solution for further scale.

Today, the organization is active in 900 locations. In Rajasthan for example, the state police integrated the model into their work – a first-of-its-kind model of child-oriented policing in the country. Aangan's work also resulted in the stark mobilization of community women as change agents. Community women trained by Aangan were able to identify child harm risks, directly responding to >17K instances of exploitation or harm. Gupta explains the catalytic effect, LGT VP's engagement had on their work: "Right from the start, LGT VP said: 'think of yourself as an organization with a vision and a holistic plan, not as someone running single projects' - they invested in strengthening critical areas of our organization and allowed us to create an impact on a national level despite being a small team."

The three women emphasize the long-term aspect of LGT VP's work: "The length of our partnership has given us the time to hone our thinking and processes. The time investment is also something we

value. For the first time, we sat together and made long-term plans – 5-year plans with milestones for how to scale the work. It has not only helped us to scale but also to think about scale quite deeply and evolve our own philosophy around what it means to us.”

The foundation further took on the role of sounding board and brainstorming partner. For example, Kagerer proposed instituting unique IDs for the individual families and children with which Aangan worked. This allowed the organization not only to report back to LGT VP but also to use this data repeatedly to analyze their impact and strategy over the years.

### **In the end, it's about increasing accountability**

One key outcome of Aangan's work is its significant role in reforming processes and policies across India and, thus, its capacity to significantly alter culture systemically. “The key ingredient to our model,” Gupta explains, “has not generally been ‘the tool itself,’ but fostering a culture of transparency and holding stakeholders accountable for their actions. Modern regulatory agencies are awakening to this today.” Today, almost every state in India has an inspection committee to monitor children's outcomes!

Yet, COVID hit India badly and showed how vulnerable its communities still are. Enforced travel restrictions, lack of personal protective equipment and the sheer fight for survival in most communities had a profound impact on Aangan's work. In India, more than “26,000 children have become OVAs [Orphan and Vulnerable Adolescent] because of Covid-19; only 274 have enrolled in an institution.”<sup>1</sup> Through Aangan's locally rooted approach, its presence in cut-off communities allowed them to provide immediate relief to distressed families and children through an emotional safety net and a support system.

While the time has come to phase out the collaboration between Aangan and LGT VP, the leadership teams of both organizations sat together in 2021 to discuss the objectives of the final one-year cool-down grant. This final grant is a standard component when LGT VP's engagement cycle comes to an end, aiming to provide a responsibly phase-out from LGT VP's long-term support. After COVID further accelerated the urgency to build stronger communities, Aangan decided to use its fresh experiences, learnings and refined global priorities around community resilience into account to shape the next evolution of Aangan's solution by working on a new 5-year strategy. LGT VP provided funding for the strategy exercise and shared its own thoughts on how Aangan's work can become even more impactful and systemic. Now, at the end of this cool-down grant, Aangan has a board-approved strategy in place and LGT VP is closing its engagement. While the partnership officially ends, LGT VP will continue to introduce the strategy to peer funders in its network that might be keen to start supporting Aangan in its implementation.

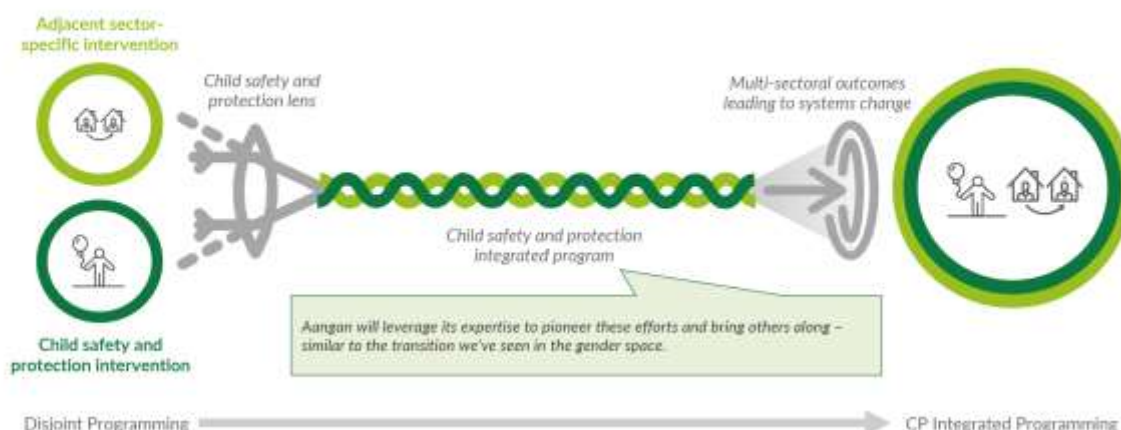
### **On the journey to catalyze 20 years of experience to protect millions of children**

Over the next 5 years, the new strategy aims to reach 3.7 million children in 100+ districts by mobilizing 86k community volunteers to drive last-mile systemic change across India. Aangan's work builds on the conviction, that child safety and protection interventions must be embedded in adjacent sectors to unfold their full potential.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/03/23/who-cares-a-response-to-indias-covid-19-orphan-crisis/>

### Synergy between adjacent sector interventions and child safety can lead to systems change



Working with partners in education, healthcare, and others, Aangan's vision is to replicate for child safety what others did for gender equality: Originally often dealt with in isolation, a gender lens is considered in most development interventions today. According to Aangan's vision, the same should become true for child safety to make child protection everyone's business. If Aangan is successful, the approach of embedding child protection in many other areas of policy and program design would ultimately be the perfect outcome, the organization is working towards.

### About LGT Venture Philanthropy Foundation

LGT Venture Philanthropy is an independent charitable foundation established in 2007 with teams in Switzerland, Sub-Saharan Africa, and India. The Foundation strives to improve the quality of life of people facing disadvantages, contribute to healthy ecosystems and build resilient, inclusive, and prosperous communities. LGT VP focuses on strengthening the capabilities of locally rooted organizations that deliver effective, scalable solutions across health, education, and the environment contributing directly to the SDGs. For more information, please visit [www.lgtvp.com](http://www.lgtvp.com)