

video
volunteers >>

2024-25

ANNUAL REPORT



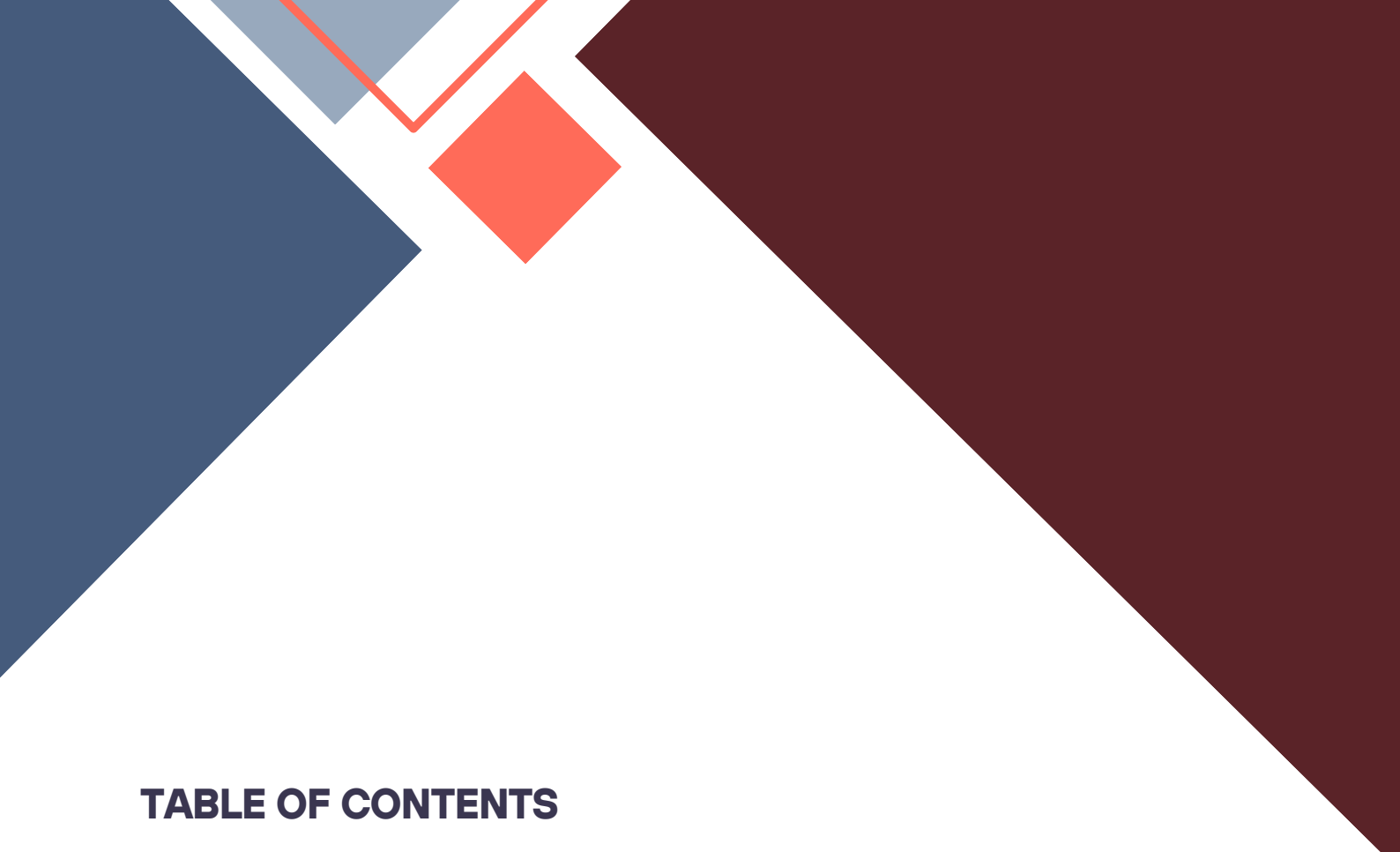
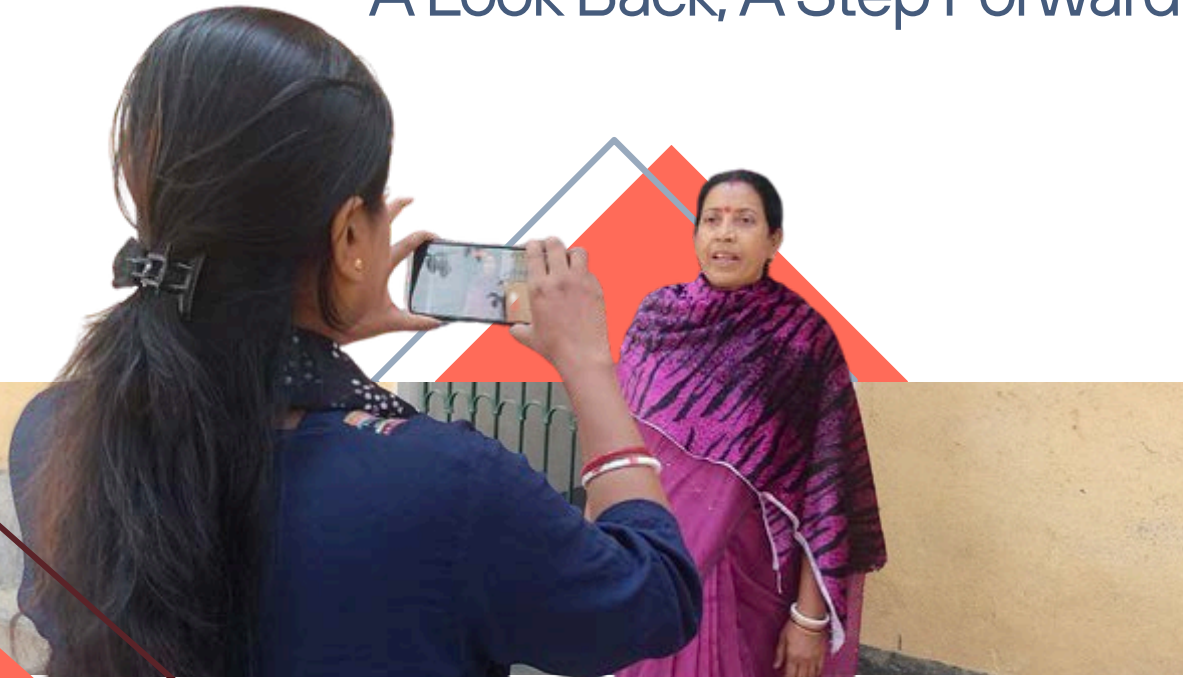


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Reflections on the Year – A Look Back, A Step Forward	03
Buland Bol: Speak Strong – Training Digital Changemakers, Growing the Movement	06
Career Pathways in Community Media – Turning Passion into Profession	09
The Powerhouse Network – Community Content Creators in Action	11
Partnering with Local Officials – Collaboration for Real-World Impact	13
Influence from the Ground Up – CCCs Growing Digital Communities	15
Decoding the Grassroots Story – Insights from a Deeper Review of the Archive	17
Researching Community Voice – Understanding How Stories Shift Systems	19
Tech for Good – Building Tools to Amplify Grassroots Voices	22
The Road Ahead – Scaling Voice, Deepening Impact	25

Reflections on the Year

A Look Back, A Step Forward



This was a year of profound insight and transformation for us at Video Volunteers—insight into the crisis of democracy, and the central role that voice must play if we are to overcome it. Democracies around the world are struggling, and one reason is clear: we have failed to listen to the people at the margins. Too often, poor and excluded communities are spoken for, not heard. This year, we doubled down on our belief that voice is not a luxury—it's the raw material of a just and functioning democracy.

That's why some of our most significant work this year focused on defining and demonstrating the power of community voice. We published five research articles all centered on the theme of community voice. We developed and implemented a new annotation schema to analyze our entire video database. This schema allowed us to tag videos based on attributes that are unique to community media—such as insight, root cause, and agency. We retrained our network of CCs to listen for the kinds of insights that could be recognized by artificial intelligence.

The resulting analysis proved what we have always known: citizen voice contains profound wisdom. These are not just stories of complaint or need; they are stories rich with understanding, vision, and solutions.

This effort was guided by deep reflection and strategic dialogue with our board—and it resulted in the articulation of the Principles of Community Voice, a major step in codifying what we stand for.

Community Voice: Video Volunteers defines ‘community voice’ as the collective expression of insights and concerns from marginalized communities, aimed at influencing decision-making and shaping policies that directly affect their lives. It’s grounded in lived experience and focused on action. Voice is the right to be heard, the ability to shape the systems that affect you, and a vital source of insight the world cannot afford to ignore.

Having done this, we began to explore how technology could help us amplify and organize this voice—especially in the era of artificial intelligence. One of our trusted collaborators and a seasoned AI product manager, Shiva Kommareddi built us a research bot that analyzes video transcripts. We tested AI language models. We connected with peers working on “listening with AI” in India, such as Aapti Institute and built a methodology. We also co-created the AI Impact Lab with our board member Freeman Murray. This experience showed us that apps like chatbots can now be built by people with little or no coding experience. This realization expanded our thinking: AI could democratize access not just to tools, but to power.

We piloted two promising technologies: a WhatsApp-based MentorBot that can respond to the CCs questions using an FAQ-trained dataset, and a new training app that hosts our learning videos and quizzes. Stalin K. spent several months in the field testing these tools—including a training platform and an experiment to see how rural communities respond to ChatGPT. One clear takeaway: when ChatGPT answered people’s real-life questions—like “what should I do if my child’s teacher is bad?”—they felt genuinely heard.

That, too, is voice.



All of this lays the groundwork for our next big leap: the Platform for Voice. This citizen-powered system will allow anyone to record and share stories—starting with voice notes—via mobile tools. These stories will be tagged and analyzed using our schema, turned into insight-rich dashboards, and shared with government, NGOs, and funders to accelerate problem-solving. The platform’s backbone is trust: a process rooted in community relationships, guided by human mentorship, and supported by AI tools that scale without losing context. We believe this platform can show what inclusive, participatory, insight-rich civic infrastructure looks like—and we’re building it in a way that others around the world can adopt.

Together, our work on voice and our exploration of AI have reshaped how we understand our mission. We are clearer than ever that communities don't just need to be heard—they need to be heard at scale and with respect. That is what we are building toward.



Buland Bol: Speak Strong

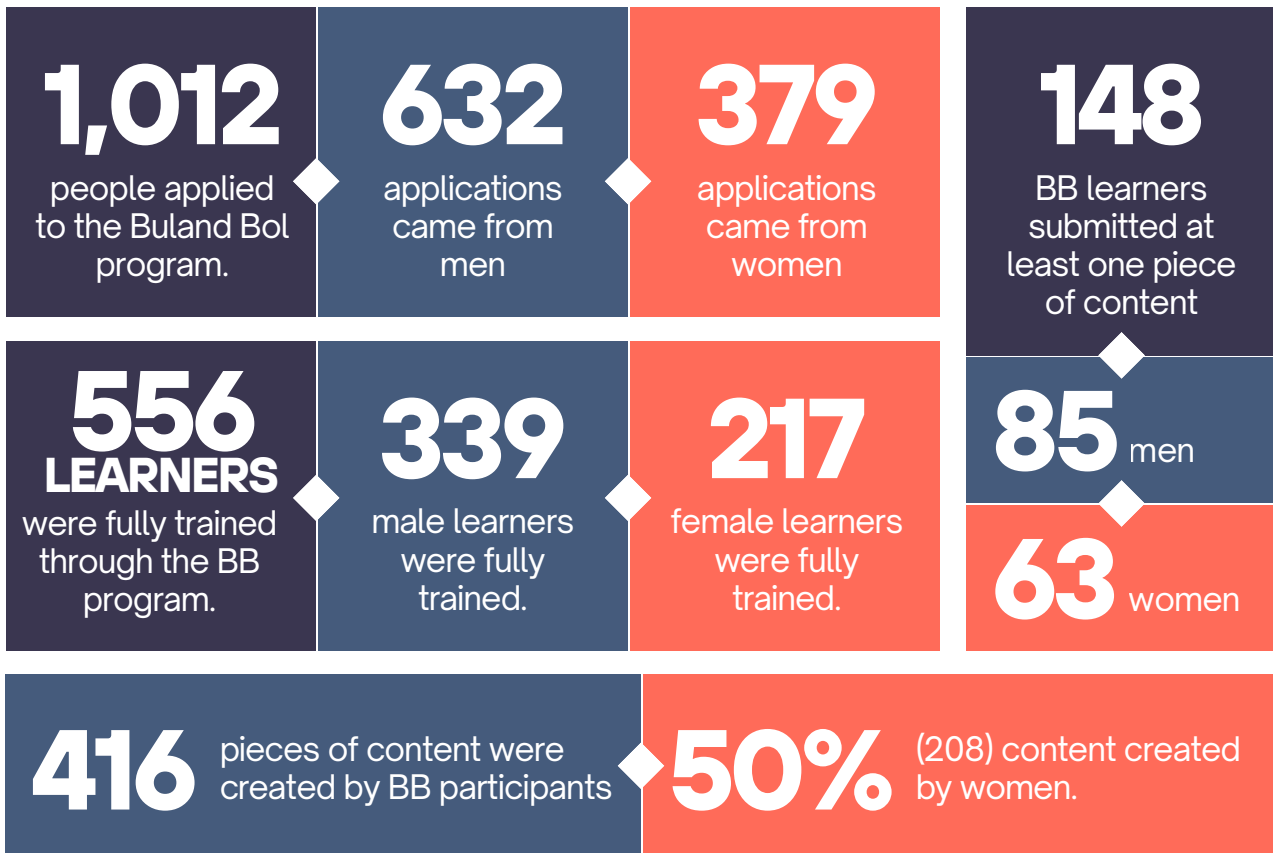
Training Digital Changemakers,
Growing the Movement



Buland Bol (BB) continues as our flagship initiative, equipping individuals from marginalized communities with digital storytelling and advocacy skills to spotlight local issues and drive change. Evolving rapidly into a nationwide movement, Buland Bol empowers participants—many with no prior experience—to document their realities and address community challenges through flexible, online learning.

The program aims to foster a sustainable grassroots media industry and ensure that every village has a changemaker who can broadcast local concerns to the world. In doing so, Buland Bol is redefining who tells India's most urgent stories and how those stories are heard.

In the past year:



Changemaker Spotlights

Real People, Real Impact

Among the many young people who joined Buland Bol with no prior experience in media, Taniya Roy from Balughat, West Bengal, stands out for how quickly she embraced the program's opportunities. At just 20, and coming from a modest background, Taniya was eager to combine her studies in Mass Communication and Journalism with her passion for social change. Inspired by college seniors, she joined Buland Bol in July 2023, starting with online training sessions. By March 2024, her dedication earned her a place as a Trainee Content Creator, and she advanced swiftly—becoming a Junior Content Creator in August and then a regular Community Content Creator within three months. In just her first year, she produced 12 videos tackling urgent issues in her community, from water scarcity to government schemes for pregnant women.

Taniya Roy
Balughat, West Bengal



“

BB helped me discover my potential and gave me the confidence to use my skills for social change.

Before BB, I never imagined using social media in such a meaningful way. Now, I use video making and editing to highlight important issues and engage people in my community.

”

Through her work with Buland Bol, Taniya has quickly become a trusted voice for local concerns, using her new skills to raise awareness and drive real-world impact. Her reporting has played a key role in making government schemes more accessible and shining a light on issues that often go unheard. With the support of VV, Taniya has not only achieved financial independence but has also grown in confidence, setting her sights on further empowering women and continuing her education. Her journey illustrates the ripple effect that is possible when youth from marginalized backgrounds are given tools, training, and a platform for change.



“

I want to continue working on women's empowerment and tackling local community issues. My goal is to complete my master's while continuing to work with VV. I feel stronger and more capable now.

VV helped me acquire new skills and gave me the confidence to believe in myself. It's not just about making videos; it's about making a difference.

”

Career Pathways in Community Media

Turning Passion into Profession



Buland Bol also advanced learners into higher levels of content creation, with participants progressing to more committed roles within the program. This year,

85

learners became **Trainee Content Creators (TCC)**, including **38 women**

45

moved further to **Junior Content Creators (JCC)**, including **20 women**.

This reflects a steady growth in community leadership and digital advocacy.

Changemaker Spotlights

Real People, Real Impact

Reflecting Buland Bol's commitment to developing committed, skilled grassroots media leaders, a growing number of participants advanced this year to Trainee Content Creator (TCC) and Junior Content Creator (JCC) roles. Among these, Mohamad Shamim Ahmad from Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, exemplifies the growth that's possible through the program's blend of hands-on mentorship and community-driven media. With a foundation in mass communication and a passion for writing, Shamim's journey with Buland Bol began in March 2024. He quickly moved from TCC to JCC, using his background and the new practical skills gained in BB to create impactful, solution-oriented videos on pressing local issues.

Shamim's recent projects highlight exactly what an ideal JCC video should achieve—connecting real community problems to the authorities, and following through to drive actual change. His issue video on an unfinished rural road project, and the subsequent impact video documenting the neighborhood's transformation, offer a clear example of the progression from identifying challenges to capturing solutions. These stories, shot with a strong narrative and clear visuals, are now a model for new JCCs.

Mohamad Shamim Ahmad
Hazaribagh, Jharkhand



“Showing problems is as important as finding solutions.”

“By joining Buland Bol, I realized that I am not just a storyteller, but a medium for change.”

See
more of
Shamin'
s Work



[Issue video](#)



[Impact video](#)

Through the Buland Bol and JCC journey, Shamim's work has gone beyond raising awareness—he has learned how to facilitate meetings with officials, involve local leaders, and document not only the problems but also the community-led resolution process. By investing in the skills and ambition of participants like Shamim, Buland Bol ensures that each progression—from TCC to JCC—translates into real-world impact and more voices from the margins leading the way. His commitment to learning, adaptability, and focus on both issues and solutions embodies the spirit of the JCC program and inspires others to follow.

The Powerhouse Network

Community Content Creators in Action



Community Content Creators (CCs), who have advanced from TCC and JCC, are fully trained and work independently under the mentorship of senior, experienced CCs. These CCs, especially the senior most of them, have been associated with us for more than 20 years. This network of CCs continue to serve as the backbone of Video Volunteers' impact this year, driving community-led change by consistently producing compelling videos on local issues.

As of March 2025, the network included 181 active CCs—100 men, 79 women, and 2 trans persons—demonstrating strong gender diversity and inclusion. Among these, 31 Junior Content Creators (JCCs) contributed fresh perspectives and new energy to the collective.

The network's achievements this year speak to its dedication and reach:

873

ISSUE-BASED VIDEOS

were produced, shining a light on a wide range of pressing community concerns across India.

THE TEAM SURPASSED ITS GOAL FOR IMPACT VIDEOS,

publishing 306 stories that not only highlighted problems but also documented meaningful solutions.

A TOTAL OF 1,179 VIDEOS

were created, with 58% produced by men and 42% by women and trans CCs, underscoring continued progress toward gender equity in content creation.

30 ADDITIONAL VIDEOS

were produced by JCCs, and **25 tutorial videos** were made to further strengthen skills across the network.

Most notably, community-produced videos directly impacted

over 3.3 million people—

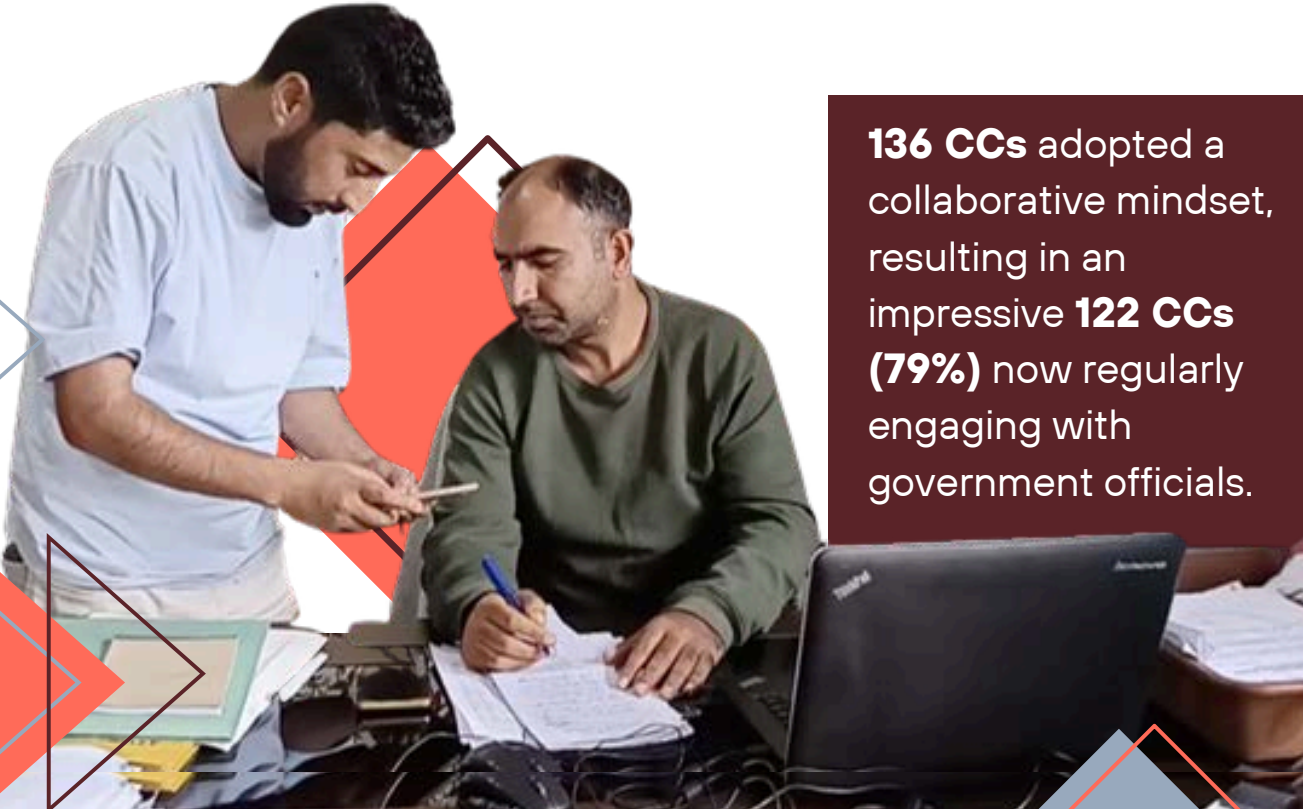
a testament to the reach and influence of grassroots media.

This year's efforts reflect the creativity, commitment, and resilience of the CC network, whose stories continue to inform, inspire, and catalyze real change at the local and national level.



Partnering with Local Officials

Collaboration for Real-World Impact



136 CCs adopted a collaborative mindset, resulting in an impressive **122 CCs (79%)** now regularly engaging with government officials.

The Collab Approach: For the past few years, we have been equipping our Community Content Creators (CCs) to work collaboratively with government officials to address community issues. This approach centers on building trust and maintaining consistent relationships between community members and local authorities. CCs visit local officials armed with a printed report or a digital app that shows the government officials their personal body of work, including the number of videos they have made, impacts they have achieved and government officials who have supported them. The CCs are trained to then engage in a conversation with the officials about their priorities, needs and concerns, and to use this information to ideate together specific issues and videos the official and CC can work on together.

The results of the 'collab approach' in 2024-2025 are clear:

57 CCS (ABOUT 37%) ACTIVELY EMBRACED THE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

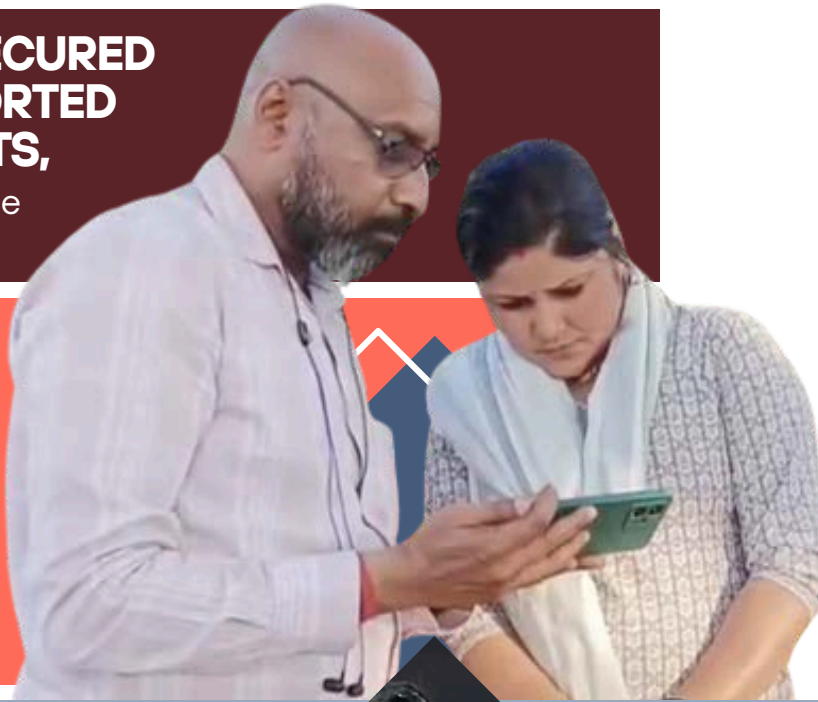
in their work, building new bridges for dialogue and solutions.

32 CCS SUCCESSFULLY SECURED 50 GOVERNMENT - SUPPORTED COLLABORATION PROJECTS,

matching our target and showcasing the tangible impact of partnership.

OVERALL, 136 CCS WERE INDIVIDUALLY ENCOURAGED TO ADOPT COLLABORATIVE METHODS,

laying the groundwork for even wider adoption in the future.

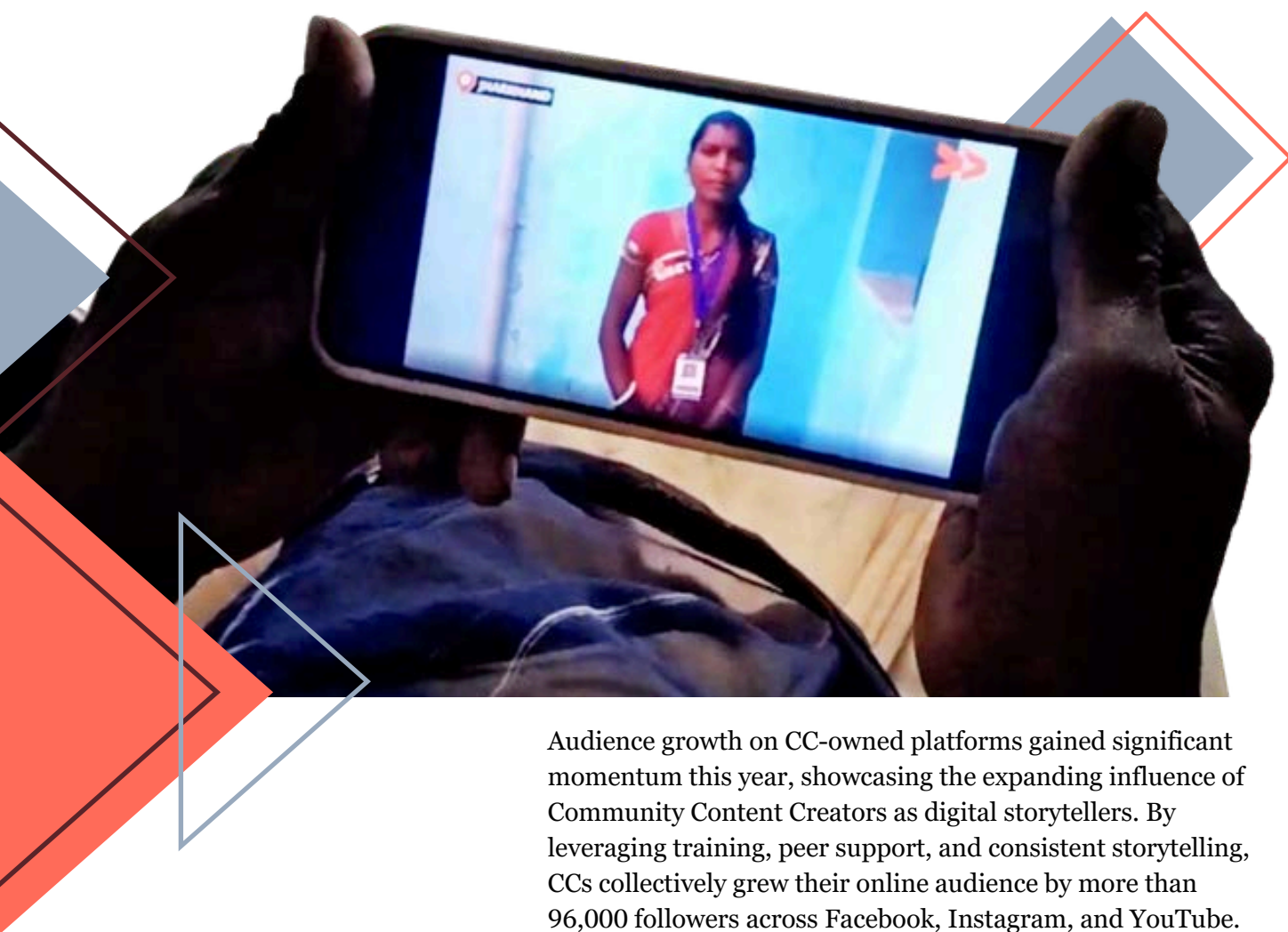


As CCs continue to build these relationships, the Collaborative Approach is proving to be a powerful pathway for translating community needs into action—empowering grassroots leaders to work hand-in-hand with local authorities for sustainable change.



Influence from the Ground Up

CCCs Growing Digital Communities



Audience growth on CC-owned platforms gained significant momentum this year, showcasing the expanding influence of Community Content Creators as digital storytellers. By leveraging training, peer support, and consistent storytelling, CCs collectively grew their online audience by more than 96,000 followers across Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

This milestone is especially meaningful for VV. We believe that when CCs engage communities through their own social media channels, they don't just share stories, rather, they become the focal point for local information, dialogue, and action. Their independent presence on these platforms turns them into local digital hubs, amplifying their reach and impact across regions. As their followers grow, so does the ripple effect of their work, touching millions of lives.



Facebook saw the largest jump, with **CCs gaining 76,308 new followers.**



YouTube audiences expanded by **14,075**



Instagram audiences expanded by **5,771**

reflecting meaningful engagement across multiple platforms.

TOTAL AUDIENCE IN THE YEAR FOR CC-OWNED PLATFORMS

	BASELINE April 24	MIDLINE Dec 24	ENDLINE March 25	Audience Gain in the Year
	369452	426729	445760	76308
	33445	43559	47520	14075
	30586	34002	36357	5771
TOTAL	433483	504290	529637	96154

This growth is not only collective but also highly individual, as several CCs achieved remarkable gains in their own social presence:



Raeesh Ahemad

**+2,722 (Facebook),
+279 (Instagram),
+410 (YouTube)**



Bipal

+483 (YouTube)



Mohd Gulzar

+452 (YouTube)



Sourav Majumder

+1,030 (YouTube)

Other CCs with significant Facebook growth: **Prakash Gupta (+811), Afroza Mahed (+900), Tanuja Kumari (+930), Zainab (+1,034), Shabnam (+1,313), and Mahesh Kumar (+1,579)**

These results highlight not just the program's reach but the growing capacity of individual storytellers to engage and mobilize audiences at scale—proving that, with the right support, grassroots creators can become powerful influencers and changemakers in the digital space.

Decoding the Grassroots Story

Insights from a Deeper Review of the Archive



We have always believed that the communities featured in our CCs' videos are not simply 'complainers'—they are knowledgeable, empowered, and ready to lead. To put this conviction to the test, we analyzed 785 videos that met our content guidelines. The findings reveal just how deep and impactful grassroots storytelling has become:

Key Findings from the Video Reviews:

ROOT CAUSE

87.39% of videos identified the root cause of the problem. Nearly a quarter (**24.41%**) addressed systemic exclusion—citing caste, class, gender, religion, or remoteness.

AGENCY

82.24% featured empowered community members articulating their problems. **65.06%** underscored the importance of citizens' voices.

INSIGHT

86.91% demonstrated clear insight into both the nature of challenges and the solutions required.

**ACTIVE
CITIZENSHIP**

80.21% highlighted community members taking action and reflecting on their own efforts.

ACTION

82.84% of community members—and **84.93%** of CCs—clearly articulated steps needed to address issues. **79%** of CCs now regularly engage government officials to drive change.

CHALLENGES

87.11% addressed the real barriers communities face in solving problems.

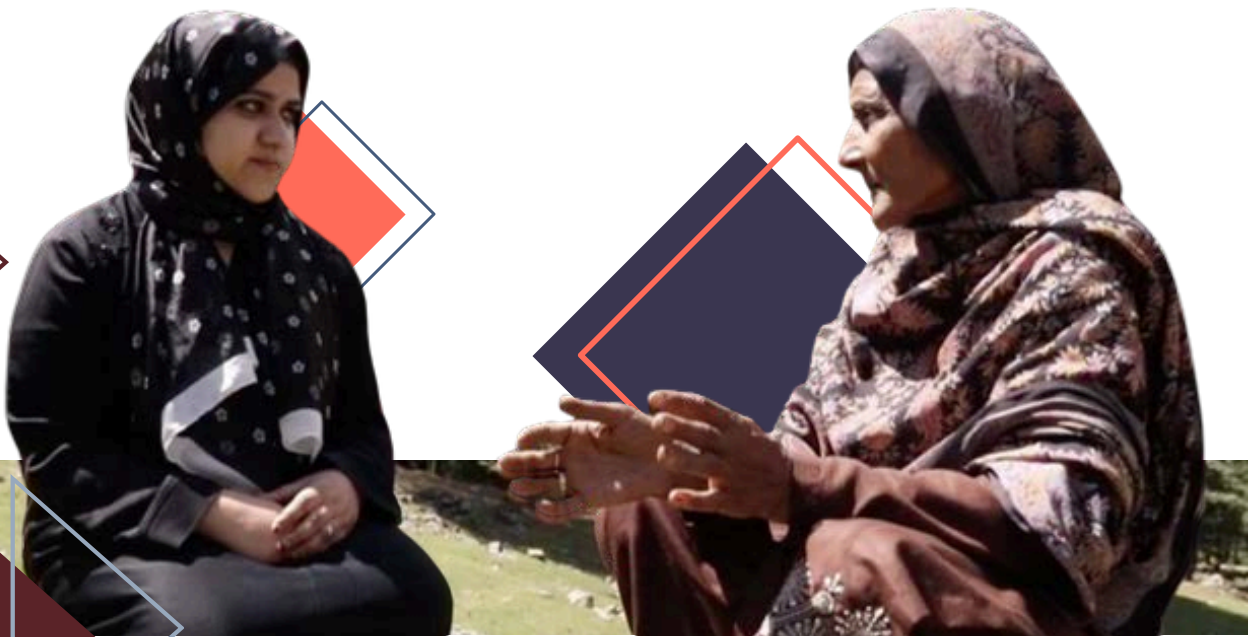
The takeaway is unmistakable:

Listening to community voices is essential for progress, democracy, and social justice. When we listen with empathy and intent, these voices—especially those from society's margins—become powerful catalysts for real change.



Researching Community Voice

Understanding How Stories Shift Systems



The research team at VV has been very active over the past year, publishing five thought-provoking articles that put community voice front and center. As the global development sector increasingly talks about the importance of “listening to communities,” our work asks a tougher question: what does genuine listening look like—especially for marginalized populations who are systematically excluded from policy decisions, media narratives, and public discourse?

This year’s research work focused on defining and demonstrating the power of community voice. We tackled urgent questions through articles such as: how AI can amplify voices at the margins (“No Voice Left Behind”); why first-person storytellers remain invisible on major platforms (“The Power of First-Person Storytelling”); how CCs drive solutions by collaborating with officials (“Partnership Plus Persistence”); the rise of grassroots leaders in digital spaces (“Beyond Likes”); and the realities of building responsive bureaucracy in rural India (“Mind the Gap”).

We had a new breakthrough in research and partnerships this year as we worked with Aapti Institute and others, to develop a methodology for listening to community insight, including developing and implementing a new annotation schema that tags our entire video archive with attributes unique to grassroots media such as insight, root cause and agency. Our CC network received fresh training to listen to the kinds of local insights that, soon, artificial intelligence could help analyze and scale across India.

A major milestone through our ongoing research partnership with Professor Gabrielle Kruks-Wisner (University of Virginia). Her latest study on VV's work in Jharkhand—now under peer review—shows that exposure to VV videos boosts empathy in government officials, drives greater responsiveness, and strengthens upward accountability. The Governance and Local Development Institute at the University of Gothenburg published a related policy brief. Even better, Professor Kruks-Wisner has secured a \$200,000 grant from Project Liberty for phase three of her research (now with Georgetown University), focused on how community media inspires civic action. Our CCs were at the heart of the planning, along with researchers, joining a strategy session with Jharkhand's state government secretary, Manish Ranjan, who has expressed strong interest in collaborating further. For the planning phase, two of the research partners also spent a week in the field in mid-July 2024, piloting this next phase of research with our CCs and staff.

Another academic research project on VV is also gaining momentum. Namrata Acharya, a City College London PhD candidate, published a paper on transformative climate justice based on her fieldwork with us. She will be conducting “community durbars” in tea estates, which she calls hybrid civic spaces, moderated by our CCs that blend culture and climate dialogue, giving communities new tools to fight climate change.

Our own research direction was shaped by deep internal reflection, particularly in response to political developments in the United States. A board meeting was held to consider what the US election revealed about the erosion of voice in global and American contexts.





In December 2024, we helped design and headline a digital democracy symposium at the University of Virginia: “The Uses and Misuses of Technology in Unequal Societies.” Supported by the Digital Technology for Democracy Lab, the event brought scholars from about 16 academics from 8 American universities—alongside Video Volunteers as the practitioner organization. The symposium focused on Brazil, India, and the U.S., and VV’s work was highlighted as a leading example of people’s media uniting communities across divides.

Today, as the world struggles with democratic backsliding and disinformation, Video Volunteers stands out with a proven, scalable approach for rebuilding trust and participation—by putting community voice at the heart of digital infrastructure and decision-making. Our latest thinking on the global relevance of our work is best summarized in the memo “[Video Volunteers Relevance to our Current Crisis.](#)”

Tech for Good

Building Tools to Amplify Grassroots Voices



Our biggest tech breakthrough this year was the creation of an AI-powered research bot that analyzes VV's video transcripts. Developed pro bono by Shiva Kommareddi, CEO of Impact Makers ([LINK]), the bot runs within ChatGPT and responds only with insights drawn from our own content. While it currently works on 400 transcripts, our goal is to integrate all 25,000 videos from the VV archive in the coming year. We have already migrated and cleaned our database on Amazon Web Services, ensuring a secure and analysis-ready archive.



Read our article
**How we Used AI to Hear
Health Beyond Hospitals**,
written and researched by
Heena Singhal, head,
Research and Partnerships.

This bot is trained to analyze transcripts using our custom Community Voice Annotation Schema—tagging for elements like insight, root cause, and agency, and avoiding the “complainers” stereotype. The bot will soon deliver real-time, actionable insights: spotting trends, identifying gaps, and powering advocacy, training, and media campaigns. Our first research report using the bot, on health, was completed in June 2025.

Another milestone was the launch of the AI for Impact Lab, co-created with our board member Freeman Murray. Forty Fellows, most young people associated with NGOs and with no coding background, built and demoed their own chatbots on issues from grievance redressal to mental health. The Lab has boosted VV's visibility in India's civic-tech sector, built a new pool of young tech talent, and proved how accessible these tools can be for grassroots NGOs. We plan a second Fellowship in late 2025, focusing on tools for community-generated data.



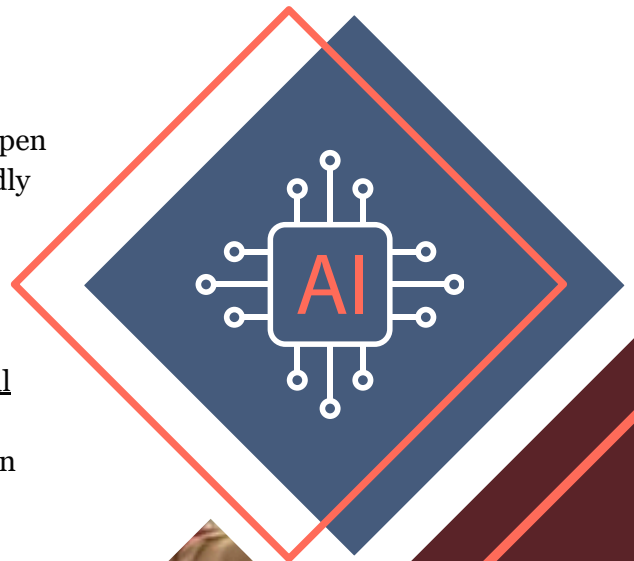
We are also scaling up training through two new platforms. First, we piloted a Moodle-based system for delivering tutorials and quizzes. Second, we developed a WhatsApp MentorBot that answers CC questions using our own FAQ dataset. Both tools were tested in rural communities through focus groups led by Stalin, including direct introduction of ChatGPT to about 100 rural citizens, helping them use it in Hindi on their phones. We found that when AI tools like ChatGPT answer real-life questions, users feel genuinely heard. We are working to integrate the training platform and MentorBot into a single, unified application for our 181 CCs and all Buland Bol participants.

This year, we also joined three new networks to further scale our impact. As part of the UN's Citizen-Generated Data Collaborative, we are shaping global conversations on the responsible use of citizen-generated data. In India, we are active in the Samaaj Data Collective, co-developing training, research, and advocacy for civil society. We also joined the Project Liberty Alliance to network with US-based democracy organizations.

A major new partnership is with Agami, through the OpenNyAI Maker Residency 2025. This collaboration, involving civil society leaders, technologists, designers, and government officers, is co-creating a citizen-first, open grievance redressal system. Our research on user-friendly grievance platforms will be featured in an upcoming article.

Recognizing the risks that come with AI, we joined the RAIL (Responsible AI Impact Lab) Fellowship of Digital Futures Lab, ensuring our work aligns with global best practices for data privacy, ethics, and community-driven design.

Together, these efforts ensure VV is not just building tech products, but actively shaping the future of community-generated data and responsible civic technology—laying a strong foundation for global scale and impact.



The Road Ahead

Scaling Voice, Deepening Impact



Our next chapter is bold: growing from 1,500 to 60,000 content creators and transforming that scale into a new vision for grassroots power. This is more than expansion—it’s a leap toward a future where “voice” is a shared public resource, anchored in thousands of local hubs and recognized as essential to democracy. As we build this vast, tech-enabled network, we remain deeply committed to the CCs who made it possible—equipping them with advanced training, fellowships, income opportunities, and the tools to lead as influencers, organizers, and problem-solvers. Together, we’ll ensure that every new voice strengthens the old, every story drives change, and every community has the power to shape its own future.

