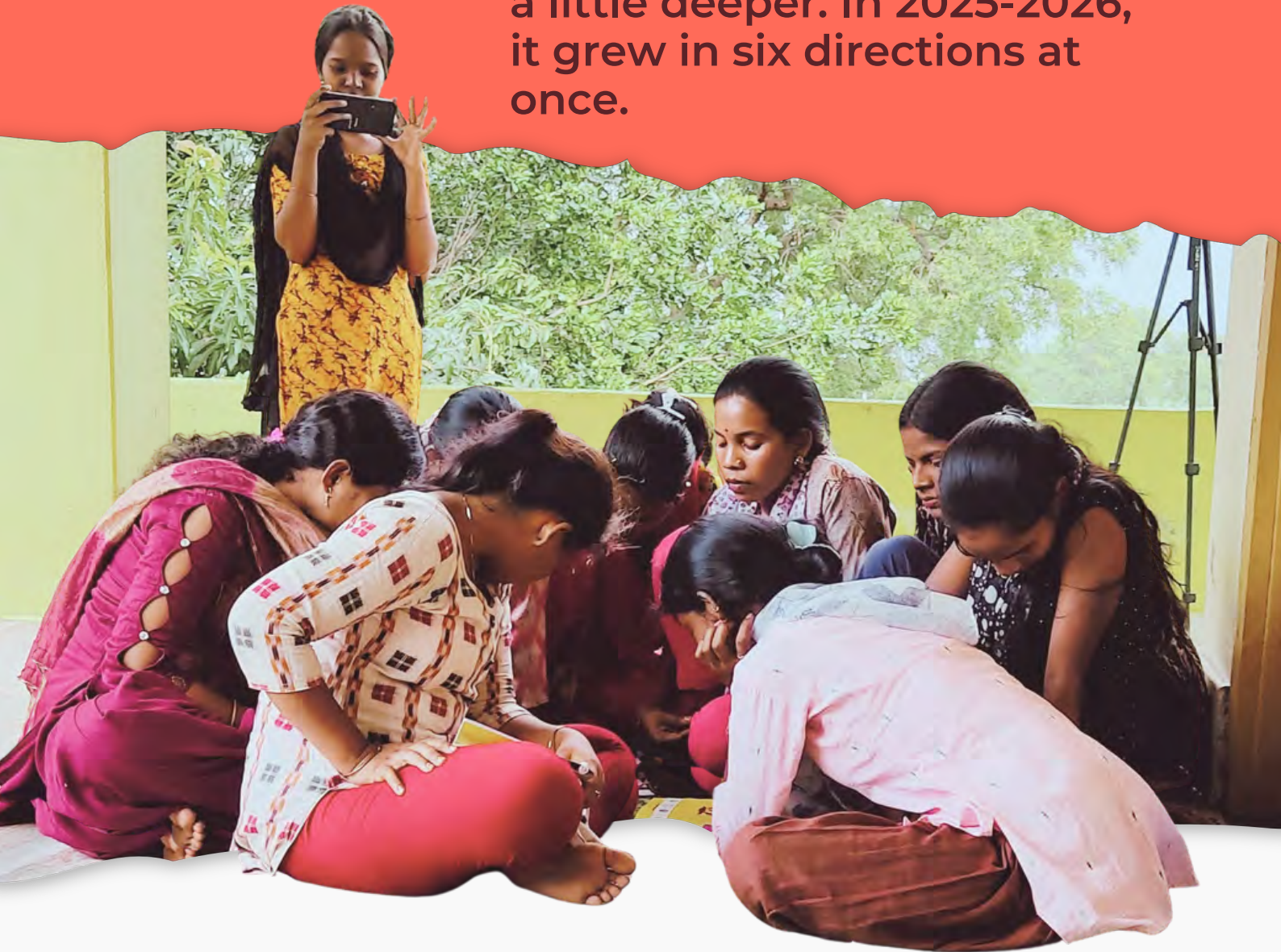


BUILDING A WORLD THAT LISTENS



Every year, the work grows a little deeper. In 2025-2026, it grew in six directions at once.



We launched KhelBadal, a program that brought 600 young women into public storytelling for the first time, many of them speaking out despite fear, backlash, and silence. We completed transcription and translation of 6,000 community videos across Indian dialects, and our archive of 30,000 stories began speaking back to us in ways we had not heard before. Research that started as a study became a published tool that reshaped how government grievance portals are actually designed. We shared our work at Cornell, the World Bank, CUNY's journalism school, and a UN General Assembly side event, not as observers, but as practitioners with two decades of proof. And we secured our first grant to take our model to the United States, where a new chapter is just beginning

This report is an account of that year.

VOICE

The People Behind the Work



Our Core Work

Our network of **183 Community Content Creators** remained deeply active. This year they produced **1555 videos** that document issues faced by **12.5 million** people across India. We **solved 361 matters** that **impacted 4.2 million** people.

In 2025, we did more than ever to find community changemakers, trained them, and made sure their voices reached the people and institutions that needed to hear them.

BULAND BOL

Buland Bol (Speak Strong) is a nationwide movement of grassroots digital changemakers from India's most marginalized communities, empowering people with no prior media experience to document local realities and drive change. In 2025, **626 individuals—over 67% women—were trained.**



A Nationwide Movement to Speak Strong

This year the program received **1082 applications** from **20+ states and Union Territories**. Centered on **Dalit, Adivasi, minority, and OBC communities**, Buland Bol ensures that stories from India's most unheard regions are told by those who live them. To date, participants have produced **2,000+ pieces of content**, and in 2026 we plan to expand the movement by **1,000 more changemakers**.

KHELBADAL

Buland Bol opened the door and KhelBadal pushed it wider.

KhelBadal (Change the Game) is a grassroots initiative that enables young women across India to **challenge everyday patriarchy** through short-form video storytelling. Over the past one year, **891 young women, 254 men and 11 transgender** —mentored by 15 grassroots women leaders residing in their areas—have created more than **7300 social media reels/content**. Many of these participants overcame fear, backlash, and silence to speak publicly for the first time. We have secured funding for this work till November 2026, by which time we would have trained 1500 people.



Changing the Rules for Women's Voices

The program is also a pilot for building healthy local 'voice ecosystems' where a lead storyteller nurtures a community of volunteer storytellers. This model can help rebuild trust in the media from the ground up.

Together, Buland Bol and KhelBadal represent VV's deepest belief: that the **most powerful voices in India are often the ones who have never been handed a microphone. Our job is to hand them one.**

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026

Video Volunteers celebrates International Women's Day in a big way. This march 8th, **across 9 states**, including Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Jharkhand, our Community Content Creators organized events that **drew around 5,000 people**. No two events looked the same.



When the Movement Showed Up

In Lahunipada, Odisha, **Bideshini Patel brought together over 1,500 people** for a women's kabaddi tournament and football match. In Raipur, Chhattisgarh, **Rajesh Gupta organized a literary celebration** where retired women poets who had been writing for years but rarely performed in public finally had a room of their own. In Srinagar, **Urvat-il-Wuska gathered 25 women** near Lal Chowk and, for many, it was the first time they had spoken openly about their lives. In Gumla, Jharkhand, **Shanti Baraik organized a street play** that drew such a crowd that an audience member livestreamed it on Facebook. In the Sundarbans,

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026



Krishna Mondol brought women and girls together for an evening that ended with everyone asking for more gatherings like this one. In Bhind, **Laxmi Kaurav filled the streets with plays and songs** carrying one clear message: building a gender-equal society is everyone's responsibility. In Morena, **Jyoti Kadam celebrated young women football players from the district** who have gone on to compete at the national level. In Varanasi, **Shabnam organized the event**, and in Puri, **Surmitra** did the same.



It is worth highlighting that each event was organized and led entirely by CCs, in their own districts, in their own way.

ACTION

Change on the Ground



STORIES THAT STAYED WITH US

Six Videos from 2025 Worth Your Time

Behind the numbers in this report are people. Here are six stories from our network this year that capture what community media actually looks like when it works.

STORIES THAT STAYED WITH US

In Puri, Odisha, **Sumitra Braik** documented how 1.5 lakh people were being forced to travel elsewhere for basic medical tests because the local health centre had no working ultrasound or X-ray machines. After the video was made and an application submitted to the District Collector, both machines became operational within months. [Watch the story.](#)



In Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, **Md Shamim Ahmad** captured what two months without electricity looks like in a tribal village of 200 people. Women working in darkness, children studying under oil lamps, repeated visits to the electricity department that went nowhere. A video, community meetings, and collective pressure later, a new transformer was installed. [Watch the story.](#)

In Rajsamand, Rajasthan, women in the Bilawas Bhil settlement were walking kilometres every day to fetch water, sometimes queuing through the night. Three of five government handpumps sat broken for years. The community documented the crisis, filed an online complaint, and sent a memorandum to the administration. All three handpumps were repaired. Around 300 to 400 people now have water when they need it. [Watch the story.](#)



STORIES THAT STAYED WITH US



In Sundargarh, Odisha, **Bideshni Patel** followed Koili Naik of the Paudi Bhuiyan tribe into a forest that is disappearing. For this community, the forest is food, medicine, and identity. As trees vanish, so does everything they depend on. This is not a story about one woman. It is a story about what is lost when a people's connection to their land is severed. [Watch the story.](#)

In West Champaran, Bihar, **Tanju Devi** documented a Tharu community facing eviction from land their families have lived on for nearly four decades, to make way for a newly declared tourism site. No legal notice. No compensation. No rehabilitation plan. The villagers are not asking to stop development. They are asking to be treated as people first. [Watch the story.](#)



In Nagpur, Maharashtra, **Tanzil Sheikh** reported on a proposed underground coal mine that threatens the water, forests, and livelihoods of nearly 50,000 people. Wells are already running dry. Forest land is being cleared. Several gram panchayats have rejected the project by refusing NOCs. This is a community that has decided that development cannot mean their disappearance. [Watch the story.](#)

THE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH



when citizens and government work together

For a long time, the relationship between community media and government officials was understood as inherently adversarial. A CC would walk into a government office with a video documenting a problem, and the official would brace for accountability. That framing was not wrong, but it was incomplete.

In early 2023, VV began testing a different idea. What if CCs walked into those same offices not just with a problem, but with an offer to help solve it? What if the meeting began not with a demand, but with a question: what are you working on right now, and how can we help?

This became the Collaborative Approach. CCs were trained to treat their interactions with officials as

spaces for co-creation, where community knowledge and government authority could each make the other more effective. Two tools supported this shift. A community app, a simple digital dashboard showing each CC's body of work, their videos, their impacts, the officials they had worked with, gave CCs a way to introduce themselves as trusted community partners rather than watchdogs. A printed brochure outlined specific ways collaboration could work and could be left behind in the official's office.

The approach has grown steadily every year. By the end of 2023, 45 CCs had secured 67 collaborative projects across the country. In 2024-25, 32 CCs secured 50 government-supported collaboration projects. This year, 61 CCs achieved 100 collaborative projects. The numbers tell a simple story: when you give communities and officials a reason to trust each other, they do.

Here are two of those stories from this year.

Shabnam Begum, Uttar Pradesh



In Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, Shabnam Begum was working with the Block Development Officer of Cholakpur when she was assigned two projects, both focused on persons with disabilities. For the first, she went into the community, walked door to door, and identified 17 individuals who were eligible for disability pensions but had fallen through the cracks of a system that rarely goes looking for the people it is meant to serve. She gathered their details, compiled the list, and submitted it to the officials. All 17 received their pensions.

For the second project, the BDO asked her to identify persons with disabilities who did not own a permanent home. Shabnam went back into the community, found 7 such individuals, documented their situations, and handed the list to the relevant department. The process of constructing houses for all seven has now begun.

What makes Shabnam's work significant is not just the outcomes, as real as they are, but what it reveals about the gap between a scheme existing on paper and actually reaching the people it was designed for. The

biggest hurdle in implementing welfare schemes is often the most unglamorous one: finding the beneficiaries. Shabnam did that work. She did not raise awareness. She did what the system could not do on its own.



Navita Devi, Bihar

In Navita Devi's panchayat, many residents did not have MGNREGA job cards, which meant they had no access to the rural employment and wages the scheme provides. Making it worse, some people were being charged 300 rupees to have their cards processed, a fee that does not exist and should never have been asked for.

Navita met with the MGNREGA Programme Officer, laid out the situation, and proposed a two-day camp at the panchayat level. The Officer coordinated with the Block Development Officer and gave her the green light, but the success of the camp depended entirely on whether people would show up. That part was on her.

She went door to door across the panchayat, explaining what the camp was for, what documents people needed to bring, and why this time would be different from the announcements that had come before and led nowhere. People came. Over two days, job cards were created for approximately 2,000 people.

What made this work was not the official's authority or the scheme's design. It was the community's trust in Navita, built over time, that turned a government camp into something people believed in enough to attend.

EVIDENCE

What the Stories Tell Us



UNCOVERING COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Listening at Scale

As our network of storytellers grew, so did our archive. And in 2025, we began asking a harder question: **what do 30,000+ community produced videos actually tell us, if we know how to listen?**

We launched a major research initiative to unlock the collective intelligence embedded in our archive. Using low-cost, ethical AI and qualitative analysis tools, we demonstrate that citizens are not merely sources of complaints, but holders of lived knowledge, insight, and solutions. At a time when qualitative data is critical to

effective policymaking, VV is finding ways to listen at scale—grounding social change and public decisions in community-led, participatory evidence.

To establish the value of community narratives, we published [five research articles](#) showing why unmediated lived experience is a powerful form of evidence, one that reveals root causes, local power dynamics, and community-led solutions often missed by conventional data systems.

We deepened **academic and field-based partnerships** with researchers from the **University of Virginia, City University of London**, and others, examining how community media shapes not just **policy and institutions**, but **communities themselves**.

In partnership with the **Aapti Institute**, we developed and published an [ethical methodology for analyzing community voice](#), including a **coding framework** for our full archive across **health, climate, governance, and gender**.

We made community media machine-readable at scale by completing AI-powered transcription and translation of 6,000 videos across diverse Indian dialects. Building on this, we created a custom Research Bot (with Impact Makers) to surface hidden patterns, intersectional trends, and locally articulated solutions. Applying this tool, we published an [article on our archive of health videos](#), and identified intersectional trends we had missed otherwise, demonstrating the real-world potential of AI-assisted qualitative research.

We completed an audit of our tech processes and fully cleaned the database. Our tech team was assisted by a professional data analyst volunteering with [Data Changemakers](#). VV's archive was moved onto Amazon Web Services by our technical team, where it will be much safer.



COMMUNITY VOICE & CITIZEN-STATE RELATIONSHIPS



We believe research is meaningful if it changes something. This year, we focused heavily on understanding **whether community voice actually shifts the relationship between citizens and the state.**

Professor Gabrielle Kruks-Wisner of the University of Virginia has studied Video Volunteers for nearly seven years. Now in collaboration with **Georgetown University**, the research examines the impact of community media on local audiences and explores, in **Jharkhand and Mumbai**, what motivates citizens to become community content creators and citizen journalists.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE HANDS OF COMMUNITIES



Learning, Understanding and Speaking Back to the System

The question of who gets to use new technology and how is a question we have always been interested in. For this, we conducted a study on AI use in rural India, exploring how CCs and the communities they serve apply AI for research. We developed training materials in collaboration with a tribal girls' college and documented patterns of community-level AI adoption.

We also published a study assessing how CCs use government grievance redressal portals, examining usability and accessibility from a community perspective, and shared these insights at the **Open NyAI Maker Residency with Agami**, where they informed the prototyping of more inclusive government grievance tools. This is what it looks like when community voice shapes design, not the other way around.

COMMUNITY STORIES & CLIMATE JUSTICE



We are supporting research in tea garden communities on the role of community media in advancing transformative climate justice. VV is one of three organizations being studied as part of this research, led by a PhD scholar from **City University of London**.

We also joined the **Climate Narrative Hub**, a coalition of leading Indian NGOs working to counter climate apathy through story-first, community-led narratives.

INFLUENCE

where the
work travels



RIGHT TO VOICE IN THE U.S.

Bringing Lessons from the Global South

For two decades, VV has worked in contexts where formal institutions failed to hear citizens. This year, we began asking whether those same lessons apply closer to home for many of our supporters.

America is facing a crisis of voice—not because people are silent, but because institutions no longer know how to listen. In response, we began adapting our community-voice model—built over two decades in India—for the U.S. context, where trust in media and

democracy is deeply eroded. Our work brings lessons from the Global South, where marginalized communities have long created their own pathways to influence when formal systems fail.

In 2025, we published a major thought paper on democracy and community voice and engaged with U.S. organizations including **#unifyUSA**, **the Culture Project**, and **the Media & Democracy Project** to explore how lived experience can meaningfully shape civic, media, and cultural systems. Early collaborations are already taking shape. **Stay tuned** as this work moves from dialogue to action.

The big news: we recently secured two grants totaling \$50,000 from the Eugene M. Lang Foundation and the Prince Charitable Trusts to create a community media project in the US, inspired by our India work, in partnership with Paul Creager, a civic media public school teacher from Minneapolis who spent 2014-2015 as a Fulbright scholar with Video Volunteers.

The project will start with a Summit of the organizations in Minneapolis that work on citizen journalism, and we have a great new volunteer, Jeannine, for the US work.

INFLUENCING THE VOICE ECOSYSTEM

Shaping How the World Listens

None of this work exists in isolation. In 2025, Video Volunteers played a growing role in shaping the broader ecosystem around community voice, citizen-generated data, and participatory media, locally and globally.

VV became a member of the **United Nations' Citizen Data Collaborative**, a UN Statistical Commission-mandated initiative working to legitimize citizen-generated data as a complement to official statistics

and as a credible input for tracking progress on the **Sustainable Development Goals**.

In India, VV was an active partner in the **Samaaj Data Collective**, which seeks to integrate citizen-generated data into government decision-making. VV's archive served as the primary use case for a new citizen data analysis tool, with **13 organizations** exploring how community insights can be analyzed and scaled for public use.



We also engaged deeply with academic and global policy audiences. **Jessica was a Visiting Scholar at Cornell University** delivering a public talk titled **“Why Voice Matters: Lessons from India for America’s Future”** and initiating multiple research collaborations across four departments. VV shared its community voice model and AI-enabled approaches to listening at scale through **talks for the World Bank’s CIVIC Catalysts network, where we’ve also put in a proposal for joint work on improving the hyperlocal information ecosystem**, as well as a talk at the **CUNY Media Studies** department at Queens College, and a talk at the **UN General Assembly side event** hosted by **Goonj** on disaster preparedness and climate resilience.

Finally, VV continued to center community leadership in public discourse by **hosting the webinar “Empowered Voice, Empowered World,” led by Community Content Creators**, and by partnering with **GivingTuesday** on the national **#BornGenerous** campaign—supporting young people in India to create community-led digital stories on social change.

WHAT COMES NEXT



Twenty years ago, we believed that if you gave ordinary people a camera and the confidence to use it, they could change the systems that shaped their lives. That belief has been tested in thousands of villages, in dozens of states, across two decades.

Everything you have read in this report points in one direction. More people want to tell their stories. More institutions are beginning to listen. And VV is building the infrastructure to make that connection happen at a scale the world has not seen before.

What comes next is building on that proof. **We aim to grow from 1,500 to 60,000 citizen storytellers over the next 3 to 5 years, creating the world's first living archive of everyday democracy in action.** More women leading local voice ecosystems. More communities using their own stories as evidence. More institutions that have learned to listen.

We are immensely grateful to all of our supporters who have made this work possible, and would love to hear from you.

Write to us at
info@videovolunteers.org

The archive we are building is not just a record of problems. It is a living document of how communities understand their world, what they know, what they need, and what they are capable of.



Video Volunteers is a global organization dedicated to advancing the right to voice. VV amplifies marginalized voices to ensure social change and policymaking are grounded in community-led, participatory insights from the ground up.

