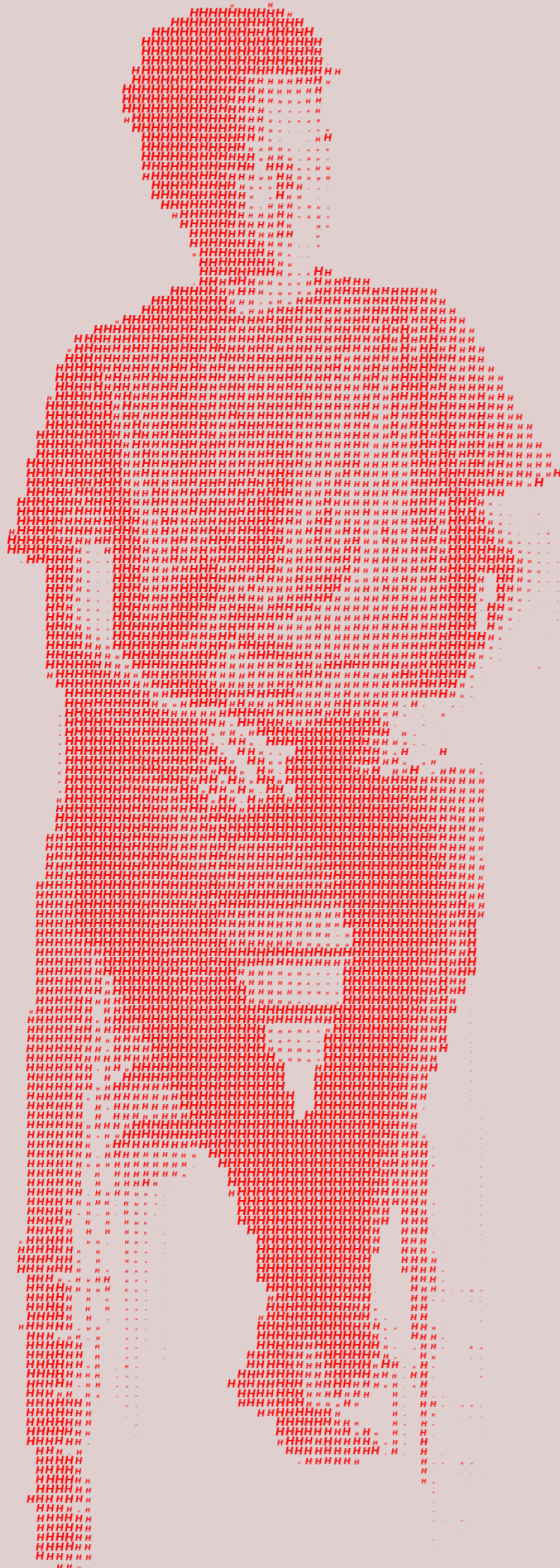




HEAD HELD HIGH FOUNDATION

ANNUAL REPORT

2024
-2025



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Message from the Board of Trustees



At the Head Held High Foundation (HHHF), we believe real transformation goes beyond individual empowerment—it requires reshaping the environments people live and work in. While we’ve helped thousands of young people unlock their potential, we know that for lasting outcomes, we must address systemic challenges. We are now transitioning to a place-based model, which rather than isolated individual interventions, focuses on transforming entire communities locally. By anchoring our work in specific rural districts, we aim to create stronger local ecosystems, sustainable livelihoods, and community resilience—scaling not just in numbers, but in meaningful, lasting impact.

This strategic shift means moving from short-term projects to long-term systems change; from individual training to structural job creation; and from scattered efforts to integrated, ecosystem-led solutions. By scaling up in this way, our goal to positively impact one million households by 2027 will be more efficiently achieved at district levels.

To support this vision, we aim to harness digital commerce, data technology and AI to help us identify barriers, personalize learnings, and empower rural communities—especially women—by opening new pathways in skilling, entrepreneurship and participation.

This next phase of our journey is about enabling economic mobility and social inclusion at scale. With the continued support of our partners and stakeholders, we are committed to building a future where every individual can thrive with dignity and purpose.

*Madan Padaki,
Managing Trustee*

Board of Trustees & Advisors

Anand Sudershan, Anish Kumar, Madan Padaki, Prasad Menon, Puneet Jetli, Rajesh Bhat, Rakesh Sharma, Shalini Sarin, Shiv Kumar, Subhash Khuntia, Sunil Savara, Tushar Gandhi, Vijay Bhat, Vivek Talwar

Our Patrons

Ashwin Damera,
Chaitanya Kalipatnapu

Our Strategic Plan

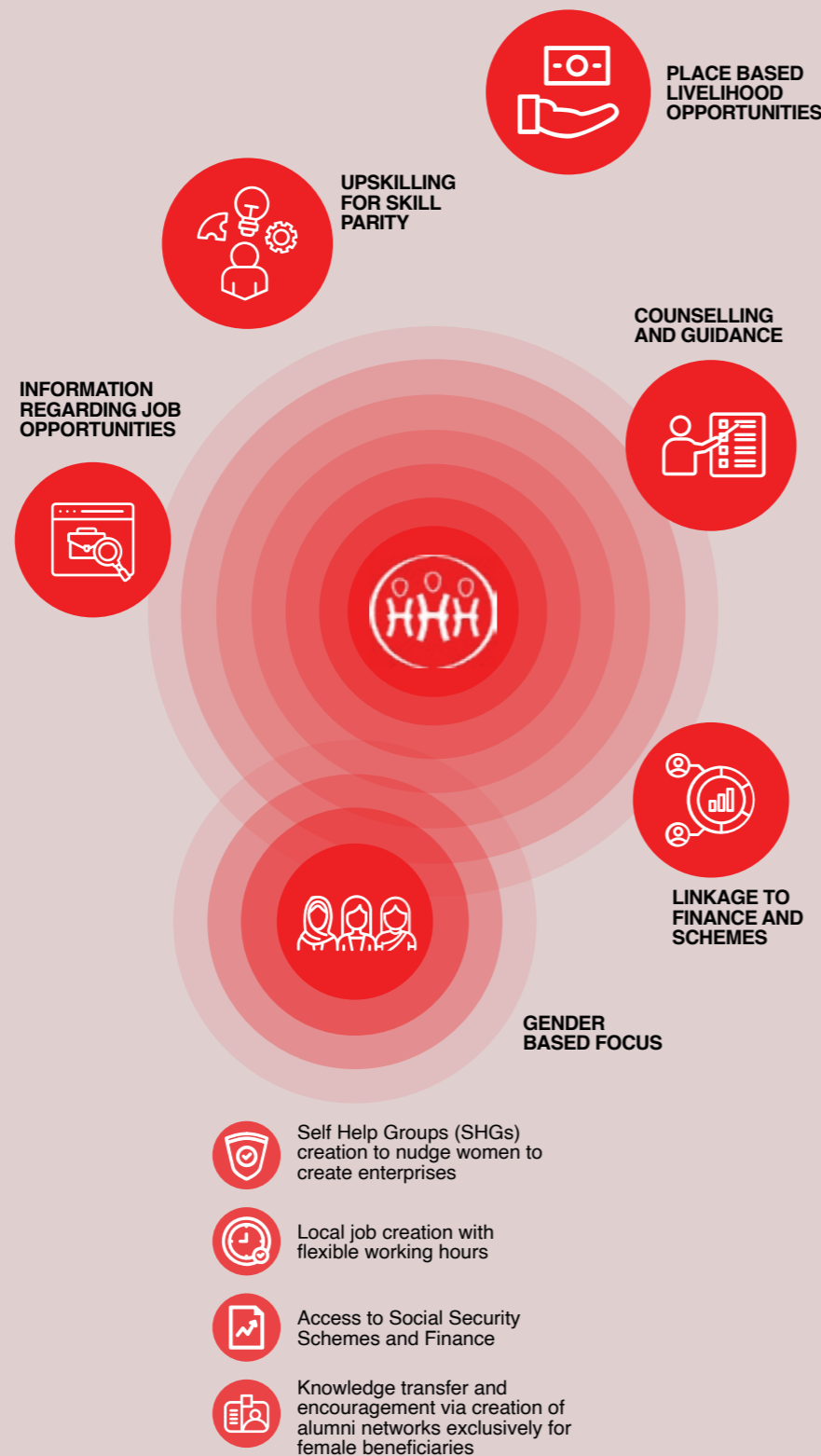
Reflecting on our journey, the past years have been marked by deep learning and evolution at the **Head Held High Foundation**.

Our early work focused on equipping rural youth with foundational life and work skills.

Insights from a decade-long impact study (2009–2019), tracking our program alumni, highlighted six key areas for deeper focus and gave shape to our current strategy:

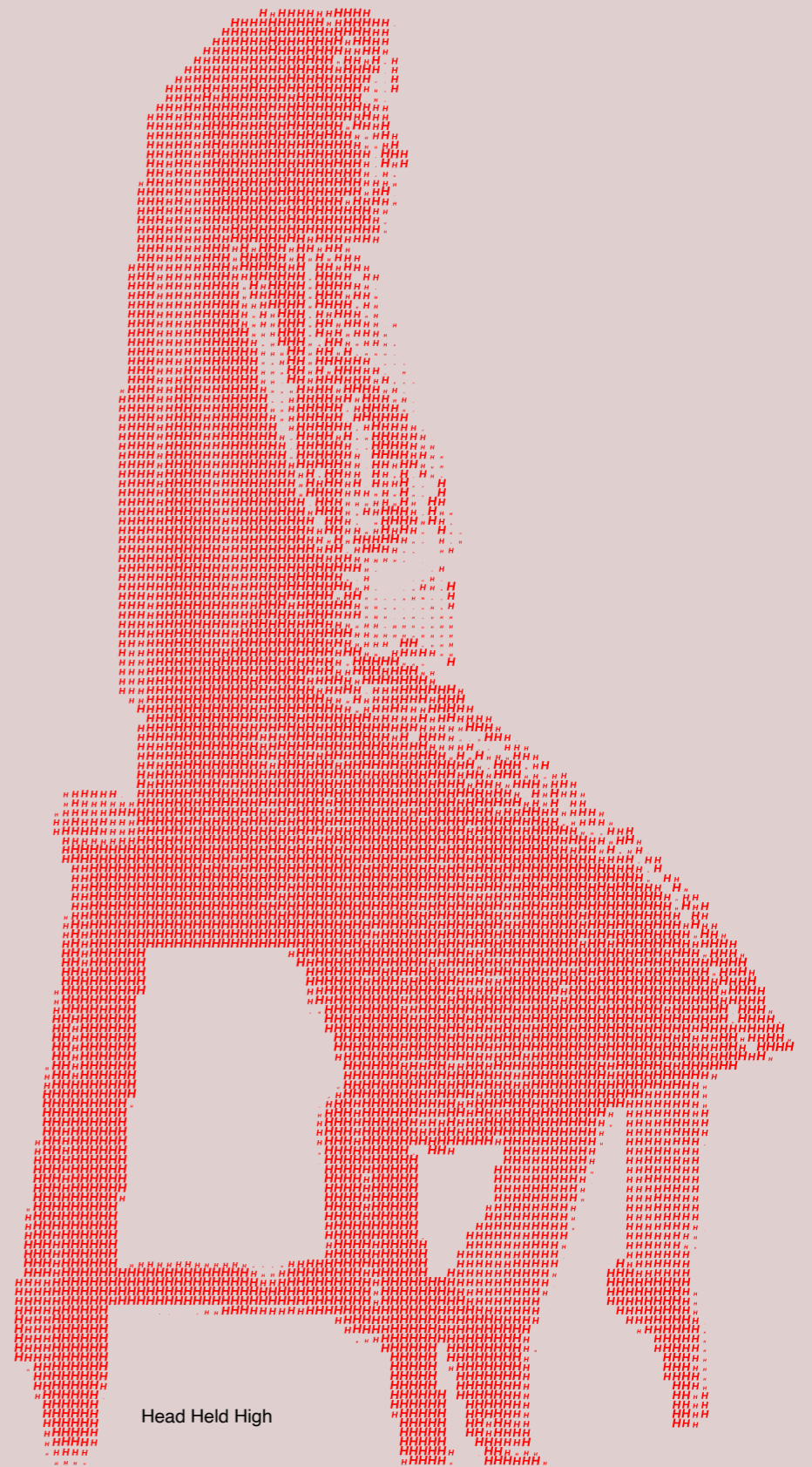
While impactful, this approach remained individual-centric, a limitation that has prompted a nuanced strategic shift. We now take a more holistic view which involves working at three levels:

- **Micro:** Empowering individuals and families.
- **Meso:** Strengthening communities through place-based models.
- **Macro:** Influencing broader systems including government and the development sector.

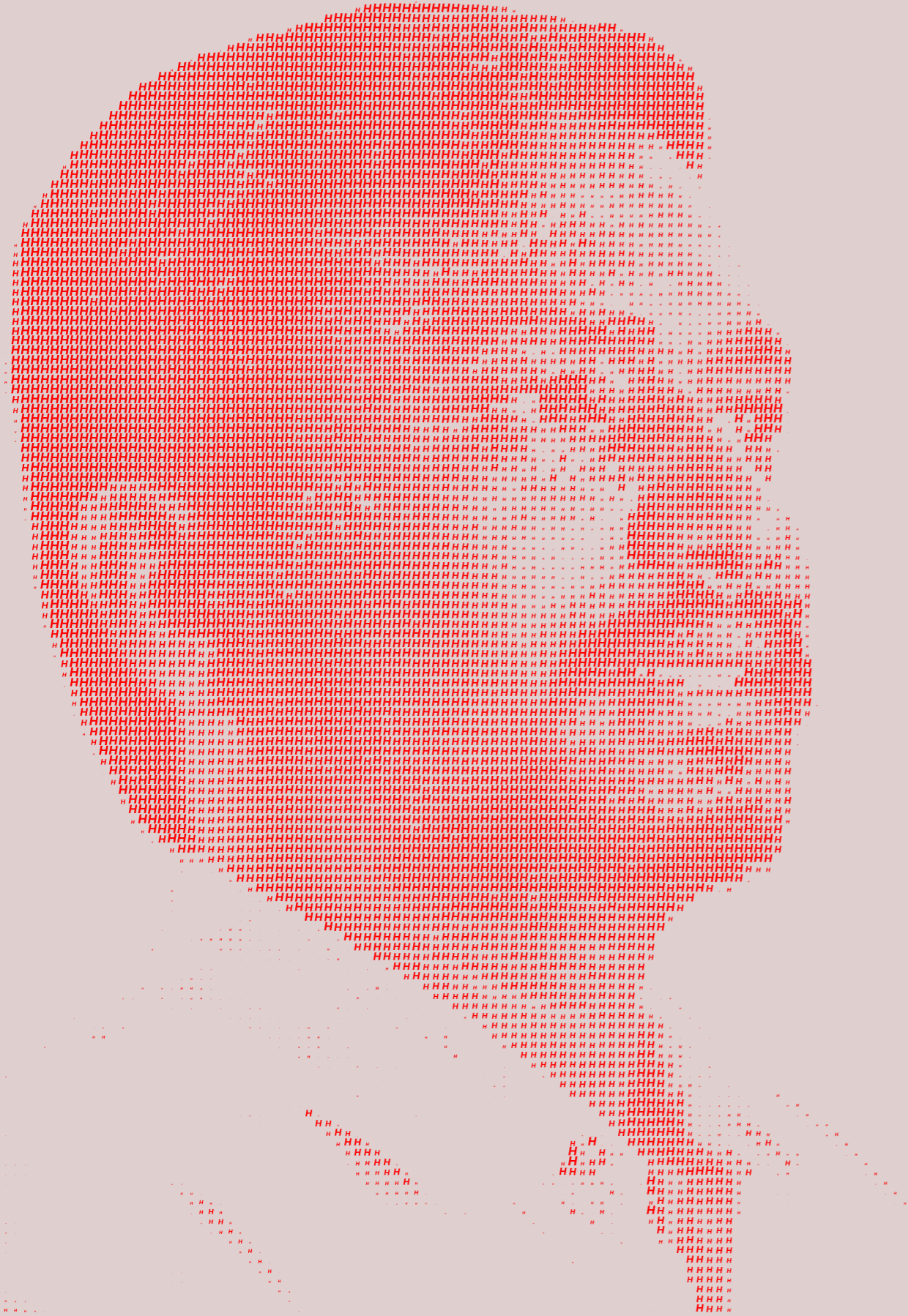


Our programs are aligned with the real needs of rural youth, women and vulnerable households.

By aiming for long-term, sustainable change, not just for individuals but across entire communities, we aim to deliver meaningful impact to reach our target goal of **one million households by March 2027**.



Our Vision, Mission, and Purpose



Vision

Our vision is to eradicate rural poverty globally, beginning in India.

Our view is that the world is full of abundance and richness. There is enough and more for everyone on our planet. Poverty simply makes no sense in such a world of abundance.

At **Head Held High (HHH)**, we implement multiple initiatives with the intent to creatively hand-deliver this abundance to under-resourced communities.

Mission

Our mission is to enable local socio-economic mobility for under-served rural communities.

‘Local’ reflects our commitment to decentralization and to empowering change from within. It emphasizes solutions rooted in community knowledge, needs and aspirations.

Through close collaboration with communities, we implement region-specific interventions that drive meaningful, sustainable impact grounded in lived experiences.

Purpose

Inspired by the idea of abundance, we build capabilities, connect opportunities, and strengthen resilience among marginalized rural youth and their communities—empowering them to live with dignity and confidence, with their **heads held high**.



Our Approach and Work

Target Groups

We focus on socio-economically under-resourced individuals and communities, operating across rural and semi-urban geographies with a strong on-the-ground presence.

Our key beneficiary groups include – Youth, women, and communities.

Focus Areas

Our impact framework centers on Capability, Opportunity, and Resilience. All interventions are designed around these pillars to address the unique needs of each group we serve.

Capability is the foundation upon which individuals and communities rise. At Head Held High, capability isn't just about imparting skills; it's about igniting a mindset shift to create agency—unlocking the inherent power within individuals to dream, act and create a generational change.

Capability is about bridging the gap between “I can't” and “I can”. It enables individuals—whether unschooled youth, rural entrepreneurs, or women—to reimagine their identities, recognize their self-worth and effectively engage with the labour markets.

At its core, capability ensures that every individual becomes not just a beneficiary of change but an active driver of their own transformation and that of their communities.

Opportunity turns capability into action. It is about creating pathways for individuals to leverage their skills in meaningful ways – pathways that allow individuals to apply their skills meaningfully, unlocking avenues for economic independence and community impact. It's about recognizing the unique potential of every individual and ensuring that no potential goes untapped.

In the context of rural development and social livelihoods, opportunity is deeply tied to micro-

entrepreneurship and social enterprises. Head Held High focuses on enabling individuals, particularly women and youth, to build small businesses and income-generating activities rooted in their local contexts. Through hands-on support in market linkages, resource mobilization and business development, Head Held High equips them to navigate challenges and seize opportunities that align with their aspirations.

Resilience is the ability to sustain progress despite adversity. This impact stream recognises the collective impact of poverty on households and lays emphasis on the effectiveness of addressing their needs collectively. We thus aim to facilitate household transition towards economic resilience.

This model maximizes impact by addressing challenges in a comprehensive manner—such as linking families to financial services, promoting savings and credit access and ensuring entitlements reach every eligible household. This collective approach enhances the financial independence of families while enabling them to weather economic shocks, secure their livelihoods and invest in future opportunities.

Impact Areas

Our work spans seven interconnected domains:

1. Education and skills training
2. Community empowerment
3. Financial security and inclusion
4. Gender equity
5. Human capability development
6. Sustainable and inclusive economic growth
7. Systemic change

Our Approach

Our strategy is built on four core pillars:

1. Relentless focus on impact
2. Collaborative systems change to drive collective outcomes
3. Context-based learning – informed by Capability Theory and the Theory of Multiple Intelligences
4. Place-based models that integrate:
 - Evidence-based capability building
 - Strategic advocacy and policy support for credentialing and financial inclusion
 - Deep partnerships to drive mindset and behaviour change

Our Interventions

To address the multidimensional nature of poverty, Head Held High has developed MARG (Mera [My] Aspiration and Response Generation)—a tailored, needs-assessment tool that evaluates family poverty using indicators of health, education, social protection as well as income. Each assessment results in a personalized Poverty Elimination Plan (PEP) for the household. Based on our core pillars (Capability, Opportunity, and Resilience) – we implement five key interventions:

i) Capability

a. Make India Capable (MIC)

Targets low-schooled and unschooled rural youth, equipping them with life and work skills to join the formal workforce and participate in the local economy.

“Before this program, I never imagined I could build a career beyond my family’s traditional work. With the training and support I received, I started a new journey as a Logistics Coordinator at American Diesel.”
– *Satyam, Barauni*

b. Future Ready Guidance (FRG)

Offers career counseling and 21st century skills to help youth transition from education to employment. FRG empowers young people to navigate an evolving job market with clarity and confidence.

ii) Opportunity

c. Antarprerana

Combines the Sanskrit words for “inner” and “inspiration.” This program supports women taking their first steps into entrepreneurship by providing skills, confidence and resources to launch sustainable livelihoods.

“This program gave me the clarity to turn my passion into a business and take my first step as an entrepreneur.”
– *Vaishnavi, Karimnagar*

iii) Economic Resilience

d. Asset-Based Resilience Building

Supports vulnerable households by fostering asset creation and community collectivization. The focus is on long-term stability through access to entitlements and household-level economic assets.

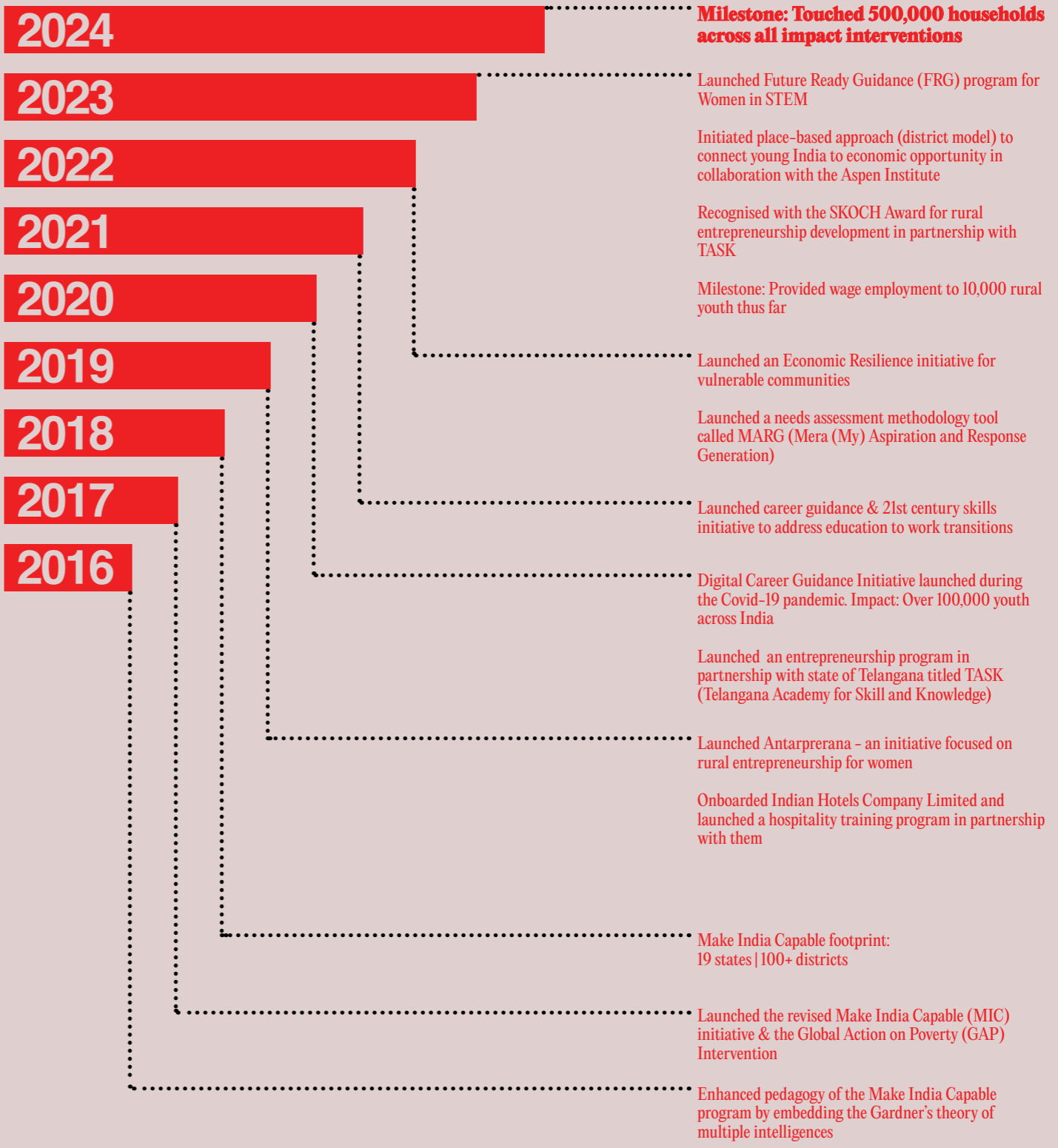
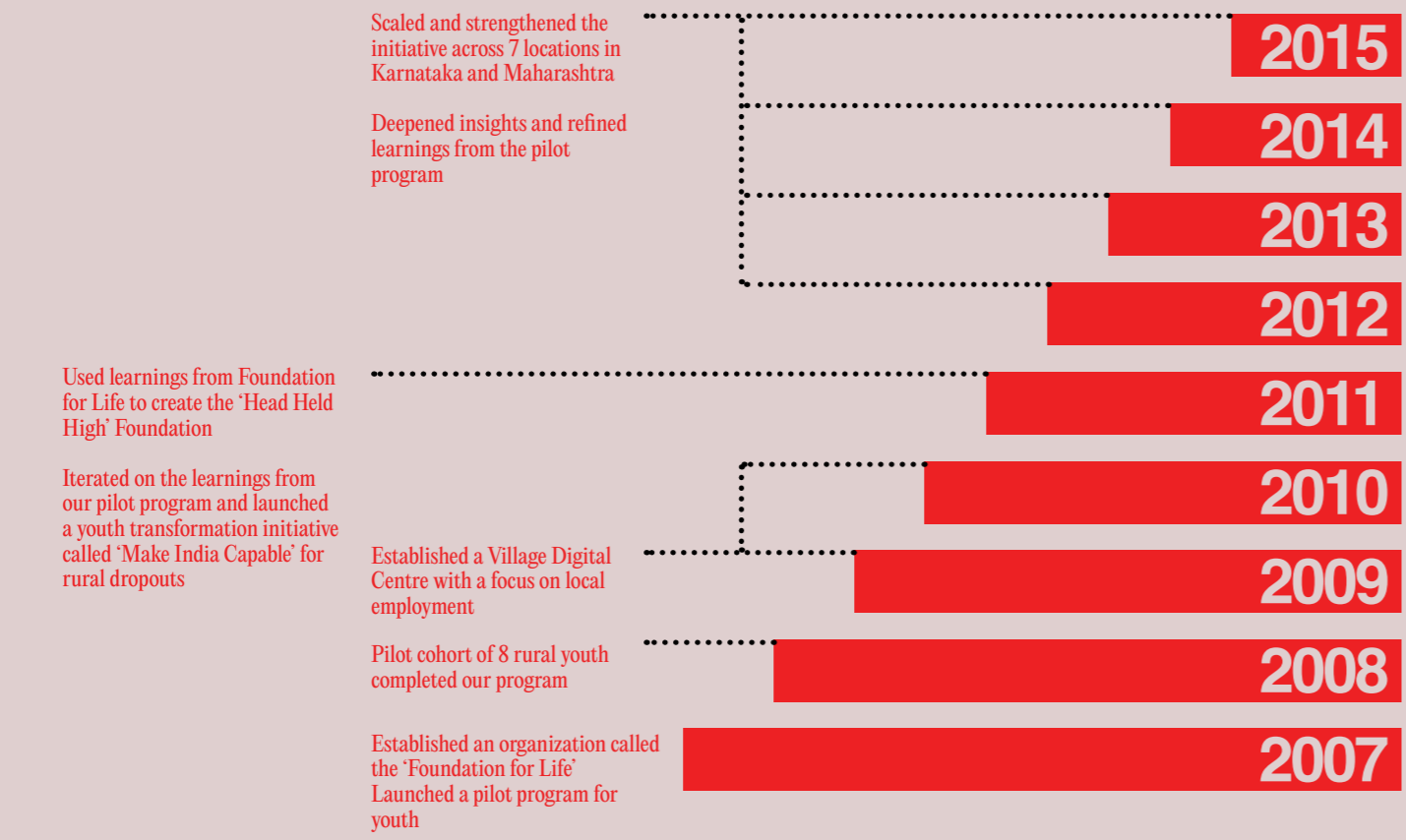
“No one had ever helped me access government benefits before. The Foundation’s visit changed that.”
– *Mahendra Reddy, Shamshabad*

e. Global Action on Poverty (GAP)

An ecosystem for socially-driven changemakers. GAP amplifies their efforts by enhancing leadership, sharing resources and accelerating the impact of initiatives targeting poverty.

About HHH - The Journey

In 2007, we launched our pilot program with only eight rural adolescents. Their transformative experiences by the end of our 180 day program gave us the confidence that we could use our proof of concept to executive multiple other planned initiatives and interventions. Our journey thus far:



Impact over the years

Outreach

22
States

114
Districts

40%
Aspirational Districts

5,07,000+
Households impacted through interventions

Opportunity

16,000+
Youth provided wage employment

3,300
Entrepreneurs created

1000+
Women supported through setting up of women collectives

510
Artisans/social sellers supported with market linkages

Capability

75%
Households supported earning <INR 84,000 per year

2,80,000+
Youth provided career guidance & counselling

4,00,000+
Training hours completed

1,30,000
Women empowered

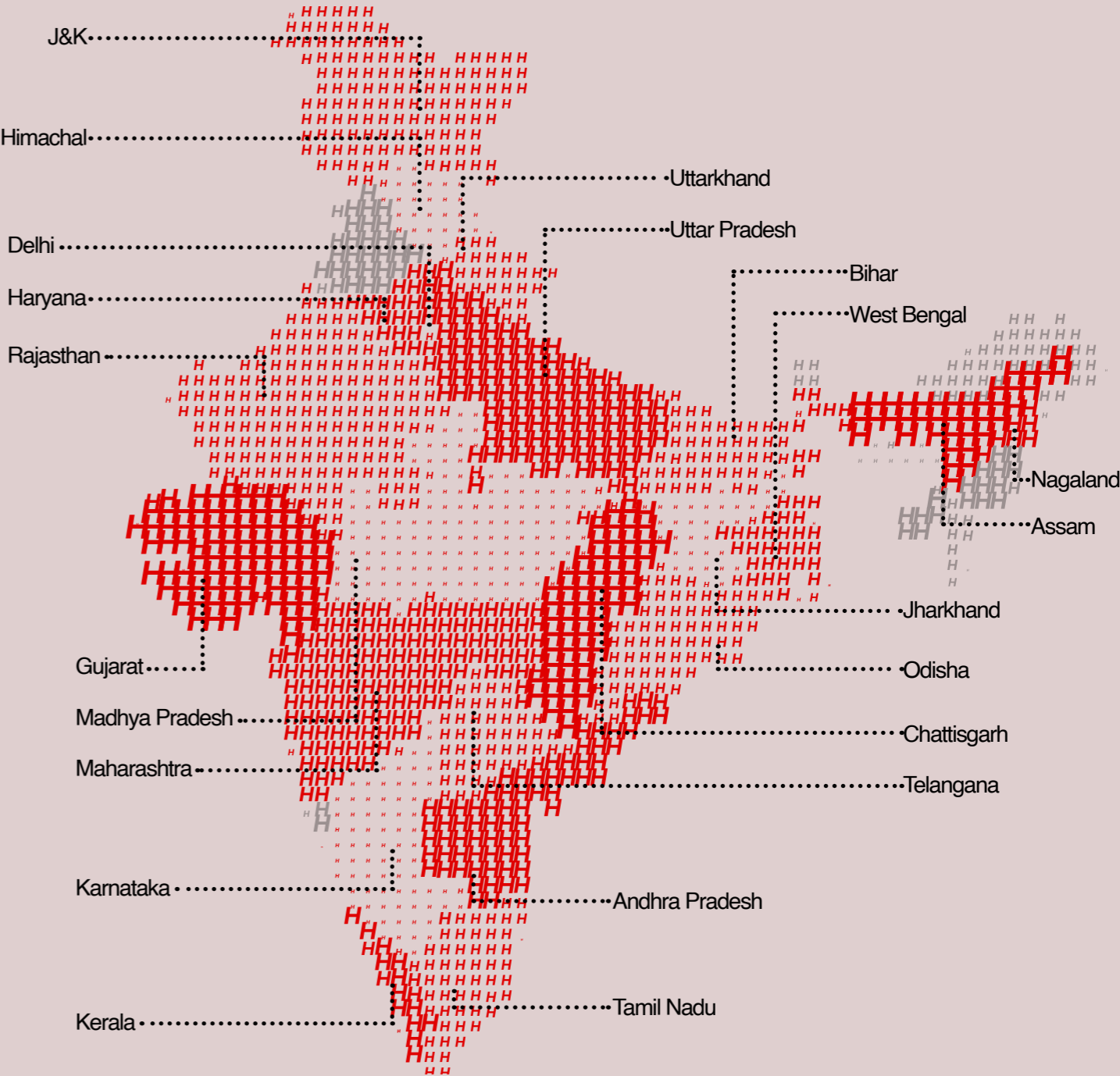
Resilience

25,000+
Youth provided with life and work skills training

28,000
Teachers trained in career guidance and counselling

92,000+
Households supported with social protection access

INR 1760 Crores
Total value of social protection access provided



Year in Review (FY 2024–25)

This year, Head Held High directly impacted 1,21,240 rural households by delivering skills, opportunities and financial access (cumulative 5,07,679 as of March 2025). Future Ready Guidance alone helped 51,108 households prepare for employment and entrepreneurship.

Key programmatic milestones included training 80,104 youth (71.64% women), facilitating 6,091 job placements (60% women), and unlocking ₹379.19 crore in economic entitlements to build resilience. Women’s entrepreneurship support reached 35,250 – with over 13,500 receiving future-ready guidance. Annual household income saw a nearly 3x increase post-training, from \$913 to \$2,578. We scaled high-demand skilling programs: 3,451 youth trained in hospitality, 640 in IT—with FY 2026 targets set to double those numbers. Inclusivity remains central: 73.14% of our beneficiaries are women, 81.42% from SC/ST/OBC* communities, and 37.14% from low-income households (earning < ₹24,000 annually).

*SC (Scheduled Castes), ST (Scheduled Tribes), and OBC (Other Backward Classes) are categories recognized by the Indian government to identify historically disadvantaged groups and provide them with affirmative action through reservations in education, jobs, and politics. These classifications aim to promote social equality and uplift communities that have faced systemic discrimination.

Outreach

1,21,240

Households directly impacted by delivering skills, opportunities and financial access

51,118

Youth provided career guidance & counselling

24,847

Youth supported on entrepreneurship awareness

18

States

87

Districts

35%

Aspirational Districts

35,250

Youth provided life & work skills training

Resilience

6,851

Women supported in entrepreneurship

Opportunity

6,091

Youth provided wage employment

592

Entrepreneurs created

₹1,32,000

Annual median income for youth provided wage employment

₹86,400

Annual Average Business Income post completion of program

Capability

38,324

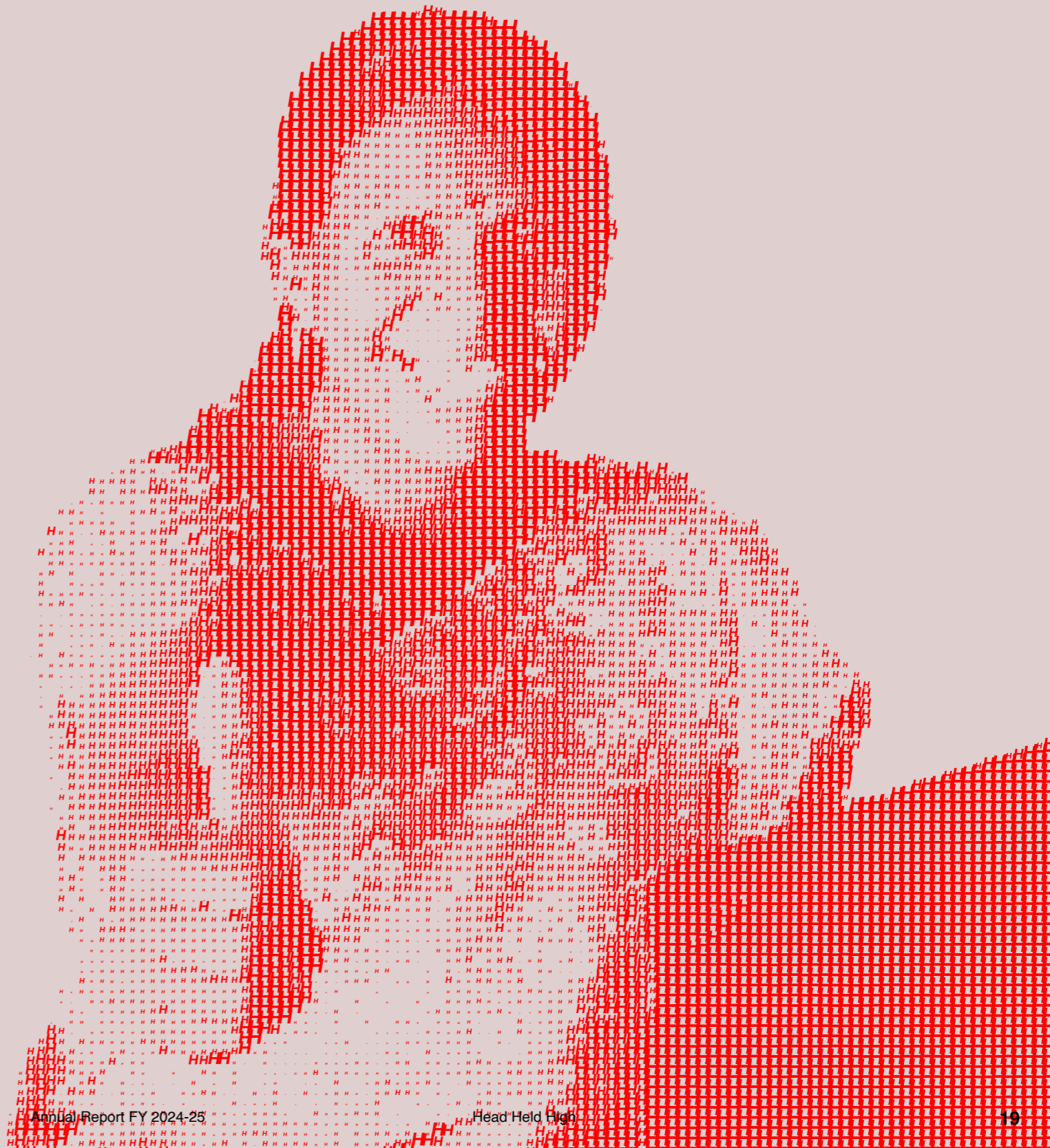
Households gained financial access and social protection

379.19 cr

Total economic value of social protection access provided

₹77,605 → ₹2,18,705

Income rise post-training



The Innovation Corner

Innovating for Impact: A Bold Vision for Rural Prosperity

At Head Held High, innovation is not about technology alone — it's about

reshaping possibilities for communities on the margins. In FY 2024–25, we embraced bold, future-facing solutions to ensure that rural India leads — not lags — in the journey toward inclusive, sustainable economic progress. This is a blueprint for a new economic

architecture that shifts power to the people, opens markets to micro-entrepreneurs, and builds ecosystems of opportunity that deliver real, measurable change.

Making Digital work for All

Digital Public Goods and Open Commerce

We are placing rural entrepreneurs — especially women — at the centre.

Through **Digital Public Goods** and integration with **ONDC** (Open Network for Digital Commerce), we are democratizing e-commerce. Local producers and sellers can now access national and global markets, without intermediaries or barriers.

This is a scalable model for digital inclusion that connects artisans, farmers and micro-businesses to demand-driven markets, credit and growth tools.

Sharing Power: The Place-Based Model

Community-Led Transformation

True impact happens when power is shared—not imposed. Our **Place-Based Approach** brings decision-making closer to local communities. Through grassroots leadership, local governance and tailored economic strategies, we are building trust, capacity, and durable change.

This is how transformation scales—through locally owned, globally relevant and systemically embedded solutions.

YouGRAF: Measuring What Matters

Youth Growth Aspirations & Future Readiness

We're reimagining how youth progress is measured. YouGRAF goes beyond job counts — it tracks how young people think, aspire, and prepare for the future. It captures what youth truly value: purpose, adaptability and opportunity. By aligning these insights with

industry needs and policy frameworks, YouGRAF will ensure going forward, interventions designed are as ambitious as the youth we serve.

A Bold Future: Scaling Innovation for Economic Justice

The tools we are building today — digital commerce access, grassroots leadership, youth intelligence — will become the engines of a new rural economy.

This is an ambitious movement for economic justice, dignity, and agency at scale...and we're just getting started.

Our Partners



Message from the CEO



This year, we moved beyond running programs—we took a step toward reimagining what’s possible. Across rural India, our work is no longer just about addressing poverty, but about building pathways where communities shape their own futures with agency and confidence.

Atmanirbhar Bharat is more than a policy—it’s a movement led by the ambition of India’s youth, women and entrepreneurs. Our mission is to match their talent with opportunity, access and structural support.

Our approach is rooted in opportunity-led networks and federated action—building systems that empower communities to drive their own progress. We integrate digital public goods, market access, place-based development and future-ready skills to ensure impact that lasts.

Through ONDC, rural entrepreneurs are entering the digital economy with visibility and competitiveness. Our place-based approach puts decision-making in local hands, while YouGRAF redefines how we measure success—capturing aspirations, readiness and economic pathways.

This is a scalable playbook for inclusive, opportunity-driven growth. It equips individuals, enterprises and communities with the tools and networks to build a future of their own making.

Our model is compound—combining economic progress with dignity, well-being and long-term resilience. It’s not only about jobs – it’s about prosperity rooted in self-reliance and community leadership.

Viksit Bharat is being built now—in villages, small towns and grassroots enterprises. Our role is to accelerate this transformation, amplify its impact and ensure no one is left behind.

*Pankaj Singh Thakur,
Chief Executive Officer*

Stories of Change - A Glimpse Into Transformation

Reema's Journey of Resilience and Rise in Tech

Reema, a 21-year-old from Yelahanka, Bangalore completed her B.Sc. in Artificial Intelligence from Maharani Cluster University and has emerged as a beacon of resilience and determination. After losing her father at the age of 16, her mother became the sole breadwinner, supporting Reema and her younger brother, who is currently pursuing his undergraduate studies. Despite these challenges, Reema firmly believed that education was the key to building a better future. With a strong interest in robotics and the rising demand for AI professionals, she chose to specialize in Artificial Intelligence, aspiring to make a meaningful impact in the tech industry. As the first graduate in her family, she carries a deep sense of responsibility to both support her family financially and to serve as a role model for her brother.

Through her college, she enrolled in a cloud computing course offered by the Head Held High Foundation, where she received technical training and placement support. Her commitment was evident in every session, and the hands-on experience she gained prepared her for the competitive job market. Equipped with new skills and confidence, Reema secured a role at Kloudmate (Redloop Technologies Pvt. Ltd.) as an Associate Developer, earning 15,000 INR per month. She is now optimistic about her future, determined to achieve her personal goals while bringing stability to her family, and her journey continues to inspire those around her.

Laxmi's Journey Towards Starting Her Own Beauty Business

Laxmi Lavanya, a 26-year-old MBA graduate, has always dreamed of becoming a businesswoman, a goal that seemed challenging given her family's lack of business acumen and background. Now recently married and living with her husband, a private sector employee, Lavanya remained determined to carve out a unique identity for herself.

Her journey took a hopeful turn when a HHH mobilizer connected with her through a community outreach initiative. Intrigued by the opportunity, she quickly enrolled in a training program that offered hands-on exposure to various products and taught her to think and act like an entrepreneur. From business planning and marketing to product development and customer engagement, Lavanya embraced each lesson with

enthusiasm.

The skills she learned not only sharpened her confidence, but also gave her the necessary skills and tools. She is now preparing to launch her own beauty parlour — an idea she had long envisioned. Moreover, creative products like candles, soaps, and paper bags will be sold at the salon as well. What once felt like a distant dream is now within reach, and Lavanya is ready to bring it to life with purpose, pride, and a strong sense of self.

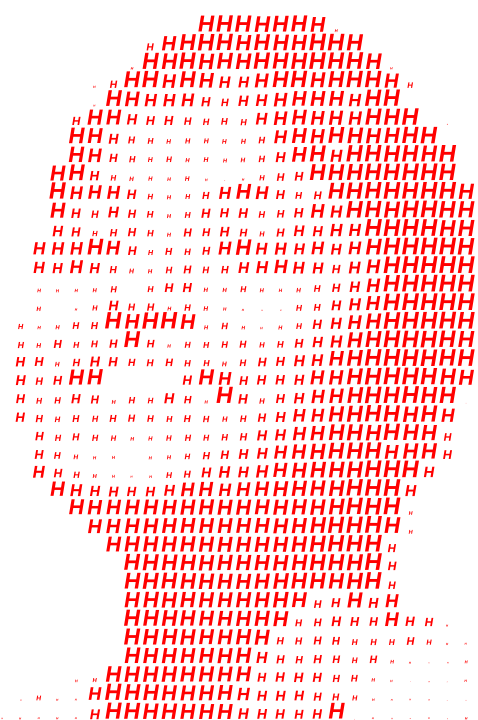
Prajwal's Journey to a Promising Banking Career

Prajwal, a 20-year-old from Khamgaon, Maharashtra was shy and lacked self-confidence. His father works in a welding workshop and he was initially apprehensive about his future and worried about finding a decent job to support his family. At his university where he is pursuing his undergraduate studies (Bachelors in Commerce), he shares

the sentiment of most of his peers - negativity and uncertainty about what the future holds. While pursuing the final year of his studies, Prajwal was working in the recovery department of a local firm. Although he was employed, he found it difficult to grow in his role or enhance his skill set. He aspired for more but lacked the direction and confidence to take the next step in his career.

His turning point came when he enrolled in the Future Ready Guidance Program (offered at his university itself as an additional offering). He opted in assuming that it would be useful. While he went in not knowing what to expect, the program exceeded his expectations. The comprehensive learning experiences bridged the gap between education and employment. Through focused sessions on Banking Process Management (BPM) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM), he developed a clear understanding of the industry landscape. The Tally 9.0 ERP training further strengthened his technical capabilities.

Additionally, Prajwal received specialized support in resumé building, interview techniques, frequently asked questions, and group discussions—all of which contributed to a noticeable boost in his self-confidence and communication skills. With renewed clarity, preparation, and determination, Prajwal successfully cleared his interview and was offered the position of Relationship Manager at IDFC Bharat Bank. Today, he is a confident young professional, ready to take on new challenges and grow in the banking sector. FRG was paramount in providing him with the necessary skills, broadening his worldview and thereby facilitating a shift in his mindset.



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