



## Interview with Sandhra Jose (Vrutti)

Lissa Harris

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**Lissa Harris: Could you start out by introducing yourself and your organization, the problem that you're addressing, and an overview of how you're responding to it?**

**Sandhra Jose:** Thanks for the opportunity, we are excited to be part of this initiative. My name is Sandhra, I work as a livelihood specialist with the economic resilience pilot project that we are currently doing as part of one of our initiatives under the organization, Vrutti, which is a livelihood impact creator. I have with me Mr. Balakrishnan S, he's the CEO of Vrutti and he's a director of the program. Sabyasachi is the program manager for the program economic resilience. Karthik works with the research team over here. Florencia is a communication and marketing expert for the program. Raghu Narayanan is a founder of our organization and he has the key to designing this program, coming up with the idea and then guiding us throughout. So that's the team over here.

We are working on economic resilience pilots. This is a very audacious attempt from our side to build resilience among households and the vulnerable populations that we are working with. To give you a brief background, we have been working extensively with different vulnerable populations in India during COVID. Our organization set up a platform called COVID Action Collab, which is also supported by Skoll. [The platform] gives us an opportunity to work across the country during a time of a crisis, during the pandemic. It was initially started as a response, but later we realized that there are a lot of systemic problems which became more visible during a crisis situation. Not specifically a situation created by a pandemic, but it was a systemic error that already existed and became more visible during the pandemic.

We created a platform called Impact Canvas to look into those kinds of problems and curate solutions for those kinds of problems, which could be implemented at scale. Under Impact Canvas we looked for different kinds of solutions which have the capacity to work at scale, addressing the systemic problems that we have, especially for vulnerable populations. In the case of economic resilience, the idea came through the realization that households do not have systems or mechanisms in place - neither at household level, community level, or an ecosystem level - to address or to face any challenges of this sort. Or any unexpected crisis that is coming



their way. So what could be done for that? Can we look at building the resilience of the household rather than just responding and providing relief during a crisis?

This was the first idea that struck us, and then the whole team came together and designed this idea of piloting and economic resilience at household-level initiative. That's how this whole initiative has come together. We reached out to different partners who are of the same mindset regarding this particular thought and currently we have three field partners who are working with us in three different locations. We have received support from Skoll, as well as from our foundation and with that, we are piloting this particular initiative. It is not a well set initiative, it's more of you rating a model of economic resilience at the household level by the end of the pilot. And then we could go ahead and do it at scale, where we can reach out to thousands of households. This is very basic.

**Lissa Harris: You build on the success that you have with a smaller program and then you are going to expand those lessons ideally to a larger target population?**

**Sandhra Jose:** Exactly. Successes and failures, what we should not do as well. That's how we are planning it.

**Lissa Harris: Are you engaged in direct service to these households or are you working with frontline organizations to build their capacity to do this work? And if it's direct service, can you tell me a little bit more about the people, the populations that you're serving and how you locate them, how you engage with them, how you bring them on board?**

**Sandhra Jose:** Vrutti as an organization is not directly working with the population. As I mentioned, we have three organizations in the field who have been working with the selected set of populations for quite some time and who have an intention to work with them for a long time. We are partnering with those organizations for direct population interaction.

[We are working with populations] in three different locations in India. First is Gulbarga in Karnataka State in India. There we are focusing on farming households, small and marginal farming households with a partner called Head Held High Foundation. They are partnering with us on getting the direct field implementations done. Second is Barwani in Madhya, Pradesh state. There we are focusing on tribal youth in the household that we are working with. We are partnering with TRIF, Transforming Rural India Foundation, who's working on the field level. And the third is in Puri, in Odisha, where we are working with artisanal fisherfolk who are a migrant population from a different place and have settled in this current location for a few generations. Today we are working with a partner called GSP. These are the partners and the populations that we are currently [working] with.



**Lissa Harris: So how do both the households, the population that these partners of yours are serving, and also the organizations that are frontline organizations that you're working with on the ground, how do they benefit from your work?**

**Sandhra Jose:** Even though the final intent of the whole exercise is to get a model, as of now for two years we are planning to work very closely with these populations and these partners. For the populations, in each location we are looking at 2000 households very closely and trying to build their resilience. We started off with understanding the concept of resilience from the household level itself. We realized that resilience is different for different people. What I call my resilience might not be what you would call your resilience. So it is very important for the household to define what their resilience is. We went ahead and initiated an action research survey with samples of these households to understand how they define resilience. At the same time, we were also worried about how we translate the concept of resilience to the household because it's not a simple concept to be easily translated in a survey.

We broke it down into what they would define as a best case scenario, as a worst case scenario, and what their current scenario is. With that, we can understand what their hopes and aspirations for their household will be in the best case and what their fears and what dangers they foresee. In this way, our interventions specifically help them achieve the best case scenario and prevent them from falling into the worst case scenario. The actions research survey helped us to understand the major areas where the households are focusing on with respect to building their resilience. We could identify four resilience components. First one is livelihoods, second is financial services, quality of life, and social mobility. These are the items in which they want their lives to improve or they don't want to go down in these four components. It was very clear.

We started designing interventions, we have a solution circle which is a set of experts who have come together to work towards this cause. And the solution circle also helps us to understand what are the best interventions that would help us in achieving these best case scenarios in these components. These interventions go directly to the household. We design interventions in these four components and then help the household to move forward in these particular components or help create buffers so that they do not fall into the worst case scenario in these particular situations.

**Sandhra Jose:** Right now we are focusing on livelihoods, how can we help them have more sources of income? They are all very small income groups, so if they don't get income for a few days, their life would be difficult. How can they have multiple sources of income or alternate sources of income so that they're not specifically dependent on one source of income. How can they set up an emergency fund so that in case of any shock, they could depend on that instead of



going totally without any money if a shock happens to their household. These are the focuses on livelihoods and financial services. Quality of life is more with regard to access to health, access to nutrition, access to education and other social protection schemes that are available for them.

India is a place where we have a lot of diversity. And we proudly say that, but there is a lot of evil that also comes with it. So the caste system is very strong in the communities that we are working in. So how can the communities who are the most vulnerable move towards being not so vulnerable and be a part of the larger community and be inclusive. Even though the impact needs to be seen at the household level, the interventions are not only focused at the household level, we work at the community level as well on how we can bring the community together so that we create resilient households.

Interventions could be at the community level, but the impact is seen at the household level. Same with the ecosystem, how we can work with different stakeholders in the ecosystem so that the household is insured with more resilience. We are experimenting with interventions at each of the locations, [they are] different because one size does not fit all. So we do different interventions according to their context and requirement in each location. Before I move on, I want to highlight one part. With the actions research [survey], one thing that really clearly came out was that there is a lack of hope with the community. So when we go and tell people that we need to build their resilience, hope building is one thing that we have realized is necessary to deal with because if they are not in a space of hope, nothing we do is going to make sense or be sustainable.

We are putting in efforts to build that hope, that's a totally new area for us and all the partners as well. We are taking all the help that we can get from across different partners, different experts in that field and then we are bringing in different programs for the same. We have initiated a few programs across all the locations and we are looking at the impact and then seeing, okay, is this working or not?

**Sabyasachi:** To add to what Sandhra said, I think hope building is one area where we have used arts as a medium to build hope in the community. Involving them in some arts building activity, where they would paint their own futuristic painting and what situation they would like to see themselves. These are a few of the activities that we did. We also identified walls in the community and we painted them with certain messages targeting different themes - child level, poor nutrition, all those things - and it created a good consensus and vibe in the committee.

**Lissa Harris:** Can you talk a little bit about what makes your approach distinctive from other organizations working in this space on similar problems?



**Sandhra Jose:** This is not a project-oriented approach, we are going ahead and addressing a few existing problems and then exiting from there. It is a very long term and community-oriented and impact-oriented approach that we are bringing in, where the idea is to create a model that could go at scale. Addressing resilience, we have been working with this for maybe a year and a quarter now, so we haven't come across many organizations, at least in the country, where the focus is on building resilience. It's always "there is a problem existing and we are responding to the problem". But what can we do about preventing that problem from happening? In a very comprehensive and exhaustive manner, we are not looking just into one tenant of the household. We are looking into everything that is required for the household to feel more confident to face any shock in the future.

As of now we have that for the non-vulnerable or non-marginalized community, we have that privilege of having different systems around us, which we could access in case of difficulty. But for these people, who have always been marginalized, building system level, community level and ecosystem level capacities to ensure that a single household is resilient, it's a very new concept. Second is the idea of not just implementing this right now, but looking at creating a model that could go on scale. That is also a very different approach as we see now. Usually it is like the organizations do get it done and they run it as their flagship program.

But we are looking at how we can support more and more partners to make households [resilient] in whichever communities they're working with. To build partner capacity that can build the resilience of the population. Right now we are experimenting to see how we can create that model. I feel that that's also a very unique approach that we are taking. At this point, I would like to just reach out to Raghu and Bala because they have more exposure and more experience than me in understanding how this is unique. Bala, Raghu, do you have any inputs on that question, how this is very unique from anything other organizations are doing?

**Raghu Narayanan:** If you look at our larger changes, while we work on the ground with communities, two big changes are required from our side. Every time there is a shock, we come back and try to do something. So the idea is that we can change the framework and the system around looking at resilience. Why are we doing it every time? What is different here was that we had multiple kinds of experts coming from different lenses. And more importantly all the experts realize that the most important expert is the community themselves.

The combination of sector-level experts along with the community experts coming together is one part of how this was actually coming up. Resilience itself was very important. We look at normal, routine increases in income, we call it the statistical means. But what we are trying to address is a variance, that means that every time there is a shock these variances [grow] depth wise and the frequency is increasing. Normal routine development strategies are not addressing



the frequency and the depth of the shocks that are happening today. What we do differently is not about the means, but about the variants. Means yes, all of us are working on it, but can we look at those variants?

The first system was about the family as a unit. Let's take all the partners including us, we all cut the communities into the way we look at it. Farmer community, youth, then the fishing community. The resilience is built when that particular family is looked at as a family. They do it day in and day out. The family is a first system. Second, a lot of support comes from the community themselves, even though there are caste and other things. But there are quite a lot of community-level capabilities that exist, collective agency exists. The interconnected family and community system is going to build resilience. So that's a systemic approach, keeping that as a family as well. That is what came out when the communities, when we went in beyond the expert, we realized that all these are fantastic for economic resilience.

Resilience is all about escaping this place because we don't have a hope about this place. That is why Karthik and Sandhra's point is that we can build services, we can build systems, but the key thing is [to build] the ability and the hope to actually bounce back and then adapt it to a new place. That's why the hope building became very important. The last part of this is about, we are center winners, we always look at what we are good at. But if you put the family at the center and the community at the center, we may have to do five different things that may or may not be my ability as an organization, that is where we all come in as a collaborative. We require three things. I'm good at one thing, but can I work with somebody else to bring all three, to make sure that the pathway is taken for economic [resilience]?

**Lissa Harris: Is there an example of a project or a household in your program that illustrates the impact and the benefit of what your work is doing in these communities?**

**Sandhra Jose:** Yeah, definitely. We are working across three locations and there are 6,000 households that we are trying to cover through the pilots. There are a bunch of examples with regard to different interventions that we are doing. The one that comes to mind is one of the very recent interventions we have started with the fisherfolk community in Puri. We were working with them on how they see their futures, what hope they see for the future, and what are the challenges that they see. Most of the young fishermen who came forward mentioned that the most challenging thing is that they all go in the traditional wooden boats or the small boats to the very deep sea and it's very dangerous for them.

There's a question of their safety. The statistics say that in a month there are 20 to 25 accidents that happen at sea in this particular community. It's not necessarily fatal but they have very severe injuries which stop them from going to sea and getting an income for a few days or a week. So



this is one danger that they're foreseeing. Can we do something about this? So the immediate response was like, okay, can we provide a few life jackets for them, because traditionally the Indian fishermen do not use life jackets. The interventions are very small, but then how do we ensure that they use it and this is a continuous system. So we incorporated that with an emergency response mechanism for them. If a fisherman in your boat is suffering [or having] difficulty or they just fell into the sea or are in a dangerous situation, how do we rescue them?

So we brought in experts and we started training the community on how you can do that in the most scientific format. How can you ensure that? At the end of the session there was a very elderly person who's not going to sea anymore, but he was in the sea for quite some time. He had come along with his grandson and mentioned that if this information was with us, I wouldn't have lost my son. He lost his son in the sea because they were not able to respond. They have their traditional skills, it's not that they do not know anything about it, but we can effectively use the latest scientific information or latest state technologies to support them to sustain their lives until they reach the shore.

This is the kind of new information that should go to them, but that was not available to them. With the case of the wall art, it was as simple as [making] art where you depict how a household should be or the practices that you can have to have a happy household or a resilient household that was close to a school. One kid came back and mentioned domestic violence because most of the women in the survey mentioned that one of their problems was domestic violence. The kid said that I have started talking to my father about not practicing domestic violence at home.

These are anecdotal things that I can immediately think of. In terms of income generation, we are supporting youth to develop vocational skills and get placements. That is adding to the income of the households, more income sources are being created. And we are creating alternative income sources for women as well in small activities where they can be at home and get it done. These are giving us more and more confidence within the community about the activities that we are doing.

**Sabyasachi:** Another intervention we're doing is bank linkages. When we did the action research survey, most of the youths came to us and said they wanted to start a new enterprise, and they don't have guidance on how to approach a bank, how to prepare the papers that are required for a loan since the government of India has many schemes. We did a good amount of bank linkages, we connected them to the bank to help them apply for loans.

**Lissa Harris:** Sandhra, if you could talk a little bit about what insights or lessons can be drawn from your work that other people working in this space might be able to learn from?



**Sandhra Jose:** Oh, there are a lot, starting from the insights that came from action research. As Raghu mentioned, keeping hope at the center was a new realization for us. We always go behind numbers or specific interventions that we have in our mind, but then we forget that very important point, if the community or any individual for that matter doesn't have hope, nothing [else] matters. That is, at least personally, the biggest realization for me working in this sector. Another major identification learning is that communities have a lot of resources with them. They have thought about their lives, about their resilience. So we must work very closely with the community to identify what their capacities are and leverage growth potentials as well.

Resilience is very dynamic and it's a continuous process. If we work for two years, a different problem could arise in the third year when we are not there. It's mostly about building the capacity of the community themselves to respond to any kind of problem. It is not a response to a problem but building the capacity to respond to a problem that is more important. We are devising solutions where members from the community itself could drive the actions and who could be active participants in social listening. Since resilience is very dynamic, we need to continuously listen to the community on how they are perceiving it, and how the concept of resilience is changing for them.

So we are [building the capacity of] the resilient party to do the social listening, to continuously listen to the households and community and then bring inputs to the program so that we can respond and deliver support to the community. Continuous listening is a learning [process] that we are implementing currently. Keeping the community at the center, at every point the community or the household has to come forward and say that, okay, I'm ready to do this. We have created the social contract for the community so that they are seeing it's not any pen, paper contract but we are trying to tell them that, this will be your role that you'll have to play and this will be the support that we are going to bring in. But at the end of the day, this is your story.

**Sandhra Jose:** That kind of community orientation, not expecting them to jump on board just because we go and talk to them about resilience but finding means and ways to educate them on what resilience is and how they can have the capacity in themselves to build that. That's also very important with respect to resilience. The second part is resilience, the term is economic resilience, it does not stick to the economic part of it, it transcends across different things like quality of life, social mobility as I've already mentioned. These all add to their economic resilience. How you have capacity to access a resource is largely dependent on your social capacity to be mobile in the social society that you are in and the quality of life that you have.

It cuts across differences, beyond the economic. These are the major learnings that we've had, but at the same time we have many challenges because of the vastness of the program that we are trying to do and the impact that we are trying to create, we have a lot of implementation





challenges. While curating the model, we are trying to reduce those challenges that we are facing currently so that the partners or the populations that are taking this up in the future can take the easier way forward.

**Karthik:** We are evolving in our understanding of the aspects of resilience. I think Raghu has touched on it, that we are not understanding resilience only in the livelihood aspect. We are covering different aspects. We are also understanding resilience in terms of the systems or the services which they received. We are understanding them in terms of the adaptive or the flexibility they have during a crisis, how the households are adapting themselves to a cyclone or other disasters. Do they have enough facilities to accommodate themselves? Do they have enough food and rations to [sustain themselves] during the crisis or do they have enough bank linkages or financial support during a crisis? Again, we are looking at [this during a] normal time and a crisis time.

We are not looking only from a perspective of finance or livelihood, we are looking at the entire spectrum. The other aspect we were looking at is flexibility, and more of a relief and rehabilitation. These are the ways we are understanding resilience and it's evolving for us. We are also very data centric now and we find that to become a demonstrative model, a lot of data has to be captured and presented to the external goal as evidence. That's another significant learning we are capturing on the ground.

**Lissa Harris:** That leads really nicely into my next question, how do you measure success? What is the evidence that you are making progress? What's the most important evidence that you're looking at?

**Sandhra Jose:** One of the questions that we have is, how do we test resilience? We can't simulate a shock and see whether the household has active resilience. That is one question that we also have. With the experts coming in, we have an understanding of what are the necessary systems or at the household level, what are the necessity systems that we should have in place so that they'll have more capacity during a disaster or a shock that comes to them. We are trying to measure it in terms of what is the progress that they're making in capacitating these particular systems. Right now we are looking at it in terms of livelihoods.

It's not only about enhancing the mean income, but also with access to other services that we have mapped under the resilience component, are we moving forward in enhancing their mean? That is one way that we are measuring it. Second is reducing the variance. How much are we able to build the capacity so that the variance will be reduced during the time of the shock. It's a very varied kind of intervention that will happen at the ground level, but we are trying to measure it in terms of these kinds of components that we have defined for resilience. Each intervention is



tagged to these kinds of indicators that we have identified and are measuring. For example, if we are providing social protection schemes, garment schemes to the community, it'll fall under the risk reduction mechanisms that we are building in. Access to health insurance is considered a risk reduction mechanism because we could fall back on that in case of a difficult health situation.

**Lissa Harris: Sometimes we can learn as much from things that didn't work as things that do. Can you describe something that you tried that didn't work that taught you something important?**

**Sabyasachi:** One challenge is caste and another is linguistics. If you are able to speak a certain language, you will be concentrated into one hamlet. And the people who are aware of two or three languages, they will come and exploit you. This is the nature of how the Indian village or the Indian hamlet works. So whenever we are trying to do any intervention, it is very important that all of them are on one platform and all of them work together.

For example, say if one community knows Telugu - Telugu is one of the regional languages of India - if they're staying in Puri where most of the prevalent languages originate, there's a disconnect. If a group of people know Telugu, but the majority knows Oriya, there's a high chance of exploitation. That's the same for all of the three locations. Maybe they will have a different dialect and when they go into the main market and the open market and people that understand they are coming from a certain community or from a certain village, exploitation happens.

**Sandhra Jose:** These are the daily challenges that we face on the ground. With respect to one major challenge that we had, we implemented a program for youth to build their hope. [The name of the program] means "our dream" in Hindi. It was contextualized for the local community of Barwani, where we are working with tribal youth. Our idea was to work with the youth on hope building and transcend that hope to their households. This was the idea with which we started off the intervention. The intervention was in the form of a game, very similar to Monopoly, the card game that we have. It takes the participants through different stages of their life. It helps them to think of how their life will be five years from now, 10 years from now, what they want to achieve, what are the challenges they see, very realistically.

The game did very well with the youth and so we taught them the importance of asking for help, you're not supposed to know everything, you can always reach out and ask for help, that's how we survived. The next day one of the girls went to the bank and asked, "Hey, I am 18 plus now, I want to open a bank account. So you tell me how to open a bank account." The next day for the game, she came by saying she went to the bank before coming over here and asked them for help. We were very glad that we were able to build that. But taking that to the household level did not succeed for us because youth is not a very powerful element in the household.



There are more powerful elder people or decision makers over there. And then communicating this concept of hope and the experience the youth had to the household level, we were not successful in doing that. We lost it in that translation. Especially if it is a girl, they have less power when compared to a boy in the house. She does not have the capacity to talk to the elders in a way that she could motivate them in most of the households. The change that we expected over there did not succeed.

So we went with the youth because [we were] hoping that they are the most important people to have a hope because the future is there, so it is important not to lose hope at that stage in life. That was our intention, but it did not transcend to the community-level impact that we wanted.

**Bala Krishnan:** I think one challenge I see is also the mindset of all of us, including the design team plus the implementing partners, which we are facing with the resilience framework. We are looking at it for the long-term wellbeing of this community. [If] any disruption happens for this community, they should bounce back. From the household, and the community mechanisms, there are also ecosystem mechanisms established.

The intervention which we planned was to raise the income of the family. In the long term, how can it help in building the long-term wellbeing of this community to bounce back? We want to raise incomes, but it is not about only raising incomes. Any kind of crisis can happen because we are working in a coastal belt, maybe a cyclone, maybe a tsunami, it may be anything. We recently saw the COVID pandemic. How am I building the communities and households to bounce back, if anything happens to them, I think that mindset shift is also the challenge.

**Lissa Harris: Leaving aside the issue of funding, because everyone runs into that as a limitation at some point, are there challenges that you're currently facing or that you faced in the past that you haven't been able to overcome? Opposition from the community or scalability or public reception of your project, things like that, that are broader factors?**

**Sandhra Jose:** The community in most of the cases was very receptive, except for the challenges that Sabya had mentioned. When it's a new community that you're entering, or a new part of the community that you're entering, there is a lot of effort that goes into trust building. And we are talking about things that are not easily comprehensible. We are not telling them, okay, we are going to give you money, you do this. That's very easy to understand. This is very complex, we are trying to break it down and communicate it to them. In that situation, to build their trust is one major challenge. How do we build trust and then how do we build trust among different sections in the community?



We are not here to support only the well-to-do households, but we are here to support you as the most marginalized asset. Building that trust has been one major difficulty, because many times they have been cheated or people have taken advantage of them and then not delivered what they have promised. That is a big hurdle for us to get over. Second is that we have multiple stakeholders, even at the implementation level. Those taking care of the design part and then looking into how we can best implement this. Then there are partners who are at the ground level who are implementing this. Then there are community-level influencers and people who are trying to deliver it to the last mile community. So there are multiple levels of translation that are happening.

There's the challenge of getting lost in the translation of what we are designing and thinking to stay. When it reaches the final household, is it reaching with the same impact that we expected? Same with the communication from there to here, the household communicating regarding their problem. We can't always be with the household and constantly listening. There needs to be a mechanism that we establish for keeping the communication very clear. We are working on that, on building that system of multiple levels of communication stronger.

Currently that is one challenge because listening to 6,000 households and getting all those inputs to our design is a big challenge that we're currently facing. Capacity of all these levels, including ours. We ourselves have their mindset stuck because we have been working in the sector and we know certain ways. We tend to get stuck in that. How do we break from that and then think from a resilience point of view? This is the same with partners, the field team, the community influencers and the community themselves. How do we break that course and come out into the concept of resilience is another challenge that we are facing right now.

**Karthik:** Time is another big constraint, though we are attempting to create multiple models and we are trying to work with different communities or different social problems or economic challenges here. To create a solution, to build trust or to engage key influences and to translate into interventions, it took time for us to even get to that place. The other is information deficit. There aren't established documents or records on a ground level. This community is extremely lacking housing or this community is facing severe safety issues while they're on sea. We are always challenged by information gathering on that. These are other two significant aspects and that's why we are creating a very customized model, tailor-made approaches for each of the communities.

**Lissa Harris:** Could you talk a little bit about how you're working to advance system-level change in your field with this project?



**Sandhra Jose:** We are not only looking at the household, we are looking at the community and the ecosystem. And when we say the ecosystem, it's ecosystem for that community, which definitely includes the first level of ecosystem that they'll have to face. We'll work with three different communities, if some issue is repeating in all the three locations, it transcends into understanding that this is a system level challenge that we are having, it's not a one-off situation of this particular community, but then it needs a system-level addressing. The biggest advantage that we have is this kind of learning, out of all the things that we are trying to do at the household level, if this thing does not happen at the system level, it is not going to happen.

We are looking at the scaling, we are looking at if we can bring in elements of advocacy as well, because we will have inputs that are coming across from different locations and then we will have implementation also happening in multiple locations across a number of households. That level of advocacy that is coming from the intervention is also something that we are looking at for a systemic change. We are doing ecosystem changes at each location, but then overall systemic change, we haven't implemented anything as yet.

**Lissa Harris: What do you think is most needed from other actors in this space, the partners that you're working with, other frontline organizations to advance broader systems-level change on this front?**

**Sandhra Jose:** The mindset of let's not keep on responding to the problems but let's create systems so that they can respond to problems themselves. Changing that mindset and the vision for building sustainability for those interventions that we are doing. That would be really helpful if everybody comes into that. That is a great step that all the partners or all the organizations, all the agencies who are in this space could have, let's not respond to one-off problems. Let's create a system and, at the end, it's a community and they [can respond] themselves.

If they don't have the capacity to respond to their problems, it is going to be difficult. And it does not mean that we are totally taking off. We could move on to the next level of problems. If the community takes care of some of their issues, we could focus on other things where we could come in with support. Opening up minds to believing in the community and keeping them at the center and then handing over capacities to them and asking them to go ahead and do it, and we'll be here to support you. Trusting the community and believing that they'll be able to take things forward is one mindset change that I would recommend.

**Karthik:** Another system response we were looking at is establishing strong linkages with the district model agencies or government agencies, especially with the public health or district authorities. That could be the future. The next version of our CAT 2.2, we are moving from COVID Action Collab to a Community Action Collab. Since collaboration is something we were looking at,



we want to establish more linkages, it's not just systems and processes. What we saw in the COVID situation was that a lot of government officials or agencies didn't come to the last mile. Establishing the linkages or having people to respond is also on the system side we are now expecting. That's a significant change we are going to work on in our future versions.

**Lissa Harris: How do you see your work evolving over the next five years?**

**Sandhra Jose:** The intent of the pilot is to create a model that will go ahead and go into scale. That is a vision or goal that we are working towards right now. This pilot is very specifically intended to build that model. In five years we see that there are more partners coming on board, more communities being supported through this model that we are creating. This collaborative of partners who are coming together to build resilience, being very strong advocates for systemic changes that are required to build resilience for the household level, for the marginalized. The first thing is definitely scaling, reaching more households to build their resilience. Second is building the collaborative through this resilience of different kinds of stakeholders, including community, partners, other agencies, district officials, government agencies, all of them coming together.

These are the two farfetched visions that we have right now. Since it's a pilot, it's a very good time oriented vision that we are working on right now. For the pilot, we want to show that the 6,000 households that we worked with are [more] resilient than [when] we started off. Or they're capacitated to build their own resilience from now on.

*Lissa Harris is a freelance reporter and science writer (MIT '08) based in the Catskills of upstate New York. She currently writes about climate, energy, and environment issues from a local perspective for the Albany Times Union, her own Substack newsletter, and various other digital and print publications.*

*\* This interview has been edited and condensed.*