

LISTENING TO COMMUNITY LEADERS:
**NEW DATA FOR GENDER
EQUITY PHILANTHROPY**

FINDINGS FROM RISE UP'S 2022
EXTERNAL EVALUATION



Photo source: Rise Up

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rise Up is a global non-profit that partners with women, girls, and allies who are transforming their communities and countries as part of a global movement for justice and equity. Rise Up builds power with local community leaders ("Leaders") – innovative and determined advocates with deep experience supporting their communities and organizing for change to advance gender equity in health, education, and economic opportunity.

Rise Up partnered with Dalberg Advisors – a strategy consulting firm focused on strengthening inclusion and sustainability globally – to lead an external evaluation of Rise Up's work between 2017-2022. The evaluation focused on the question: "How can we most effectively support local community leaders to help them achieve their goals in gender equity policy and social norms change?" Over the course of four months, the Dalberg team conducted focus groups, interviews, and surveys with members of Rise Up's global network of more than 750 community leaders in 14 countries.

Dalberg Advisors and Rise Up's research generated new evidence and recommendations for the gender justice movement, decolonization efforts, and philanthropy, in addition to producing concrete learnings for Rise Up. Key findings include:

- 1** Rise Up Leaders report that no single form of support is sufficient for their work. They urge philanthropic funders to provide a bundle of (i) advocacy training, particularly in global best practices as applied in their specific country context, (ii) technical assistance and coaching to effectively launch their campaigns and navigate setbacks, and (iii) full cost funding, in the form of grants that allow them to do their work and also to take full advantage of the training and technical support.
- 2** Leaders report wanting to work with fellow Leaders – collectively and cooperatively. They urge funders not to see individual issues or organizations in silos but to fund peer networks and strategic information sharing.

- 3** Leaders report that providing small to mid-size, recurring grants (such as \$10-20K per year) to local organizations can make a significant difference in their ability to drive policy and norms change for gender equity and justice. This is especially true if grants are predictable 3-5 year commitments that are delivered without abrupt pivots or exits in response to the emergence of new crises. Local Leaders urge funders to provide such grants, and highlighted that often even just \$3-5K in additional funding could make a difference to their work.

- 4** Leaders ask funders and other external supporters to support them in taking calculated risks (e.g., to test out community-driven advocacy ideas) in the service of increasing impact. Leaders report that such strategic risk-taking prepares them to make the difficult decisions inherent to gender equity advocacy work.

- 5** Leaders advise funders to invest in rigorous monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) approaches that help both the funder and the Leader learn what works. For example, Leaders advised investing in MEL processes that are context appropriate (e.g., reporting systems that are verbal not just written), sophisticated (e.g., approaches that unpack the inherently non-linear, non-attributable nature of gender equity advocacy work), and bi-directional (e.g., finding ways for the Leader and their team to learn alongside the funder).

Across all these five areas, local Leaders ask funders – and all external parties – to shift their gaze towards community-based advocates. They ask to be treated as the strategists and experienced professionals they are, not as grantees whose capacity needs to be built.

These recommendations cohere with the broader literature around approaches to feminist funding (advanced by, for example, organizations like AWID, Shake the Table, and the Gender Funder CoLab). Rise Up and the Dalberg team hope that this contribution to that broader literature can further inform and spark discussion and action towards supporting community leaders committed to advancing gender justice and creating a more equitable world.

INTRODUCTION PURPOSE

Despite progress in the fight for gender equity, major, systemic barriers prevent women, girls, and gender-nonconforming people from realizing their full potential. Around the world, millions cannot fully engage in the economy, are underrepresented in government, education, and leadership roles, and lack access to economic opportunity, education, and essential health services that ensure bodily autonomy and reproductive rights, among others.

Locally based community leaders and their organizations play an integral role in expanding rights, building resilience, and strengthening movements for gender equity. From guaranteeing the right to education for over 7 million girls in Kenya, to protecting almost 4.5 million women and girls in Nigeria from domestic violence, to ensuring the health and safety of 951,000 children in India,^{1,2,3} local Rise Up Leaders (defined as non-elected individuals with a vision and plan to affect change in their communities) are successfully bringing about gender-equitable policies and norms within their communities and countries. Leaders work in their individual capacities as heads of organizations, and as part of broader social movements. Yet often these Leaders and organizations are not adequately supported. For example, despite successes, only 1% of gender-focused official development assistance was committed to women's rights organizations from 2017-2017.⁴

Building on over a decade of experience effectively supporting local Leaders, Rise Up is scaling its efforts to reach 540 new Leaders by 2025, expanding the organization's global network to include almost 1300 Leaders. Rise Up was founded in 2009 on the belief that communities themselves hold answers to their toughest, most intractable problems; and that local community Leaders have visions for gender equity⁵ that – if resourced and supported – can transform individuals, households, communities, and societies. To date, Rise Up has supported more than 750 Leaders and organizations to advance community-based solutions and resilience by providing leadership and advocacy training, grants, and connection to a global network. The model has proven **highly successful**, resulting in over 120 new and improved laws and policies impacting 135 million people through legislative progress. For example, **Hameda Deedat**, a Rise Up Leader in South Africa, **successfully advocated** for a policy that protects 1.2 million workers in South Africa from workplace gender-based violence and harassment.¹

Rise Up has set an ambitious vision to expand its impact. It is embarking on a Learning Journey to deepen its understanding of what works best to support local Leaders and organizations driving change by shifting policies and norms towards greater gender equity. The first step in that journey is detailed in this document – key findings from an external evaluation to identify what is working well in Rise Up's model and potential areas for improvement.

1. Rise Up. [2021 Annual Report](#), 2022

2. Rise Up. [Project Alert on Violence Against Women](#)

3. Rise Up. [2020 Annual Report](#), 2021

4. [AWID. Toward a Feminist Funding Ecosystem](#), 2019

5. Gender equity and equality are critical to Rise Up and the work of Leaders. However, Rise Up prioritizes a framework of gender equity, in recognition of the historical and systemic factors that disadvantage some people and groups over others in achieving similar outcomes.

FINDINGS ON LEADERS' EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS

Across interviews, focus groups, and surveys, Rise Up Leaders outlined how they drive impact in practice and the role that extrinsic supports from Rise Up play in that process (see Figure 1 below).⁶ Specifically, Leaders explained that:

- **Doing this work is not easy and requires tapping into and expanding intrinsic assets that no external entity can ever confer upon a Leader, such as lived experience, resilience, and urgency to act.**
 - » For example, **lived experience provides Leaders with deep contextual understanding of their issue area**, which allows them to identify root causes of problems or entry points for change.
 - » Furthermore, **resilience is critical to advocacy work**, ensuring Leaders persist amidst the inevitable ebbs and flows of policy advocacy and norms change.
 - » Finally, **urgency to act** compels Leaders to challenge deeply entrenched social norms.



A Leader recounted how their experience has informed their approach, sharing, *"As a lawyer, I have seen law failing when it comes to reflecting the realities of communities... Often the law does not aim to heal the injustices of the past, but tends to perpetuate it further. It is important that we use a different approach."*

A Leader also shared that even amid seemingly insurmountable odds, they continue in their work, writing, *"A few cannot change a system that is built on patriarchal roots and thrives on misogynistic power dynamics. If there needs to be a systems change, then it requires mobilization... As far-fetched as that dream may be, helping achieve 1% of it would be a step in the right direction."*

- **Extrinsic support is critical to ensuring Leaders can fully tap into these intrinsic assets, and needs to be delivered through a strategic bundle of supports (e.g., trainings, hands-on technical assistance, flexible and recurring grants, and strong local and global networks), delivered in a manner that is partnership-oriented and not transactional.** Together, these extrinsic supports have a compounding potential for Leaders, as trainings help build their leadership and advocacy skills, hands-on technical support allows them to troubleshoot challenges that arise, grant funding supports them with implementing their projects and applying their learnings, and networks enable Leaders to learn from one another and build a sense of collaboration across the movement. The powerful impact of this bundling can be seen in Leaders' overall rating of the Rise Up model, with **80%+ of Leaders surveyed saying that Rise Up helped them grow as a professional, increased their confidence in advocating for change, and strengthened their sense of agency.**

More details on the importance of these bundled supports are included below.

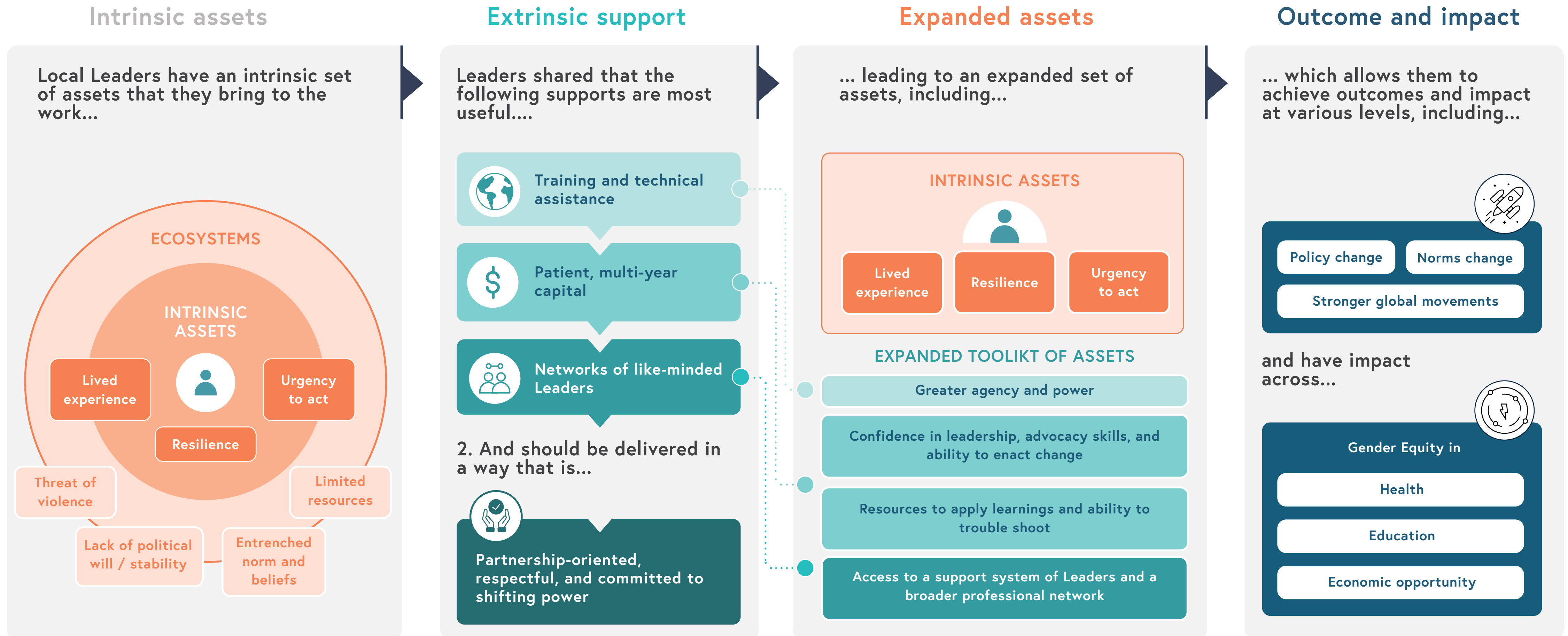
- **Notwithstanding these internal and external assets and supports, this work is hard, non-linear, and conducted in the face of substantial, tenacious opposition.** Of Leaders surveyed, 75% said their work is under-resourced, more than 30% face political instability and lack of political will, more than 25% encounter entrenched harmful practices and beliefs, and at least 10% face threats of violence. For example, Leaders cited a lack of funding and data, frequent governmental regime changes, resistance from local officials, stigma, and threats from fundamentalist groups, among other barriers, as key challenges in carrying out their work.
- **There are multiple examples of Leaders overcoming these barriers and effectively using these extrinsic supports to drive impact at scale.** Rise Up Leaders have advocated for over 120 policies and laws to impact 135 million people since 2009.⁷ This includes Leaders who have protected the rights of 4 million girls in Malawi through a national ban on child marriage, advocated for increased government funding to provide 3.8 million women and girls access to digital skills training and employment opportunities in Nigeria, increased access to health services for 1.8 million girls in Guatemala, and many other projects impacting millions of women, girls, and gender-nonconforming people throughout Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and the United States.

6. **Methodology:** Data is drawn from a survey of 220 Leaders from 14 countries. The survey was administered in June–July 2022 and issued in English, Spanish, and Hindi. Among Leaders surveyed, the top areas of focus were education, ending violence against women and girls, and youth leadership and participation. 90% of Leaders surveyed work in advocacy change, with 89% indicating they work primarily through their organization. Over half of respondents indicate they do their work through engaging with government officials, community mobilization, partnerships, and training colleagues.

7. Rise Up. [2019 External Evaluation Report](#). 2020

FIGURE 1: HOW RISE UP SUPPORTS LEADERS ALONG THEIR IMPACT PATHWAY

The following graphic outlines how Rise Up's support helps Leaders to fully leverage their intrinsic assets, expand their toolkit, and increase their impact.



FINDINGS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RISE UP'S MODEL

Dalberg's evaluation found that Rise Up's model is highly effective in supporting Leaders to drive impact as per Figure 1. Leaders rated the importance of Rise Up's overall support in advancing their goals as 8.5 on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being "critically important." Furthermore, nearly 40% of 220+ Leaders surveyed indicated that they could not have advanced their goals without Rise Up's assistance. Overall, these findings hold across Leaders of different genders, races, ages, and for those who do and don't receive grant funding, suggesting that Rise Up consistently provides a quality experience to Leaders. For example, across race, gender, age, and cohort, most Leaders rank all four key aspects of the model below as "very useful."

For each element of Rise Up's bundle of support, Leaders rated its overall usefulness and highlighted a range of specific benefits:

1
HIGHLY TAILORED TRAININGS



Rise Up Leaders attend a Leadership & Advocacy Accelerator that offers highly tailored training to the country context focused on leadership, norms change, and ways to impact laws and policy change through advocacy. Leaders highlighted these trainings as the most critical aspect of Rise Up's support, with **>90% of Leaders finding them very useful to their work.** Leaders emphasized that the strong core curriculum and relevance of the training to their specific context was especially useful for building strong leadership and advocacy skills.

2
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT



After attending the Rise Up Accelerator, Leaders receive one-on-one thought partnership and accompaniment from Rise Up Country Representatives, including technical support and coaching with proposal development, fundraising strategies, project reporting, monitoring and evaluation, strategy implementation, and public speaking. **74% of Leaders found the hands-on technical assistance (TA) very useful to their work.** Leaders specifically cited that ongoing TA helped them put learnings into practice and noted the critical role that Rise Up country-based staff play to help Leaders execute their projects, pivot amongst strategies, and troubleshoot unanticipated setbacks.

3
GRANTS



After the Rise Up Leadership & Advocacy Accelerator, Leaders can apply for Rise Up funding. Approximately one third of Leaders receive seed funding between \$10,000 - \$80,000 to be used over the course of one year. Of these Leaders, **73% said that grants were very useful in supporting them in their work.** 40% of Rise Up grantees noted that this funding made up over half of their total project funding and played an essential role in their ability to implement their project.

4
GLOBAL NETWORK



As Leaders matriculate from the Accelerator and advance their projects, they join the Rise Up global network, which provides access to ongoing resources and opportunities and forges connections among Leaders and broader networks. **76% of Leaders say that being a part of this network is very useful in advancing their work.**

Leaders also indicated that **the effectiveness of the model lies not just in what supports the Rise Up team provides to Leaders, but how they provide those supports.** Leaders repeatedly emphasized that the less tangible aspects of Rise Up's delivery model set the experience apart, including the way Rise Up creates an environment conducive to learning and risk-taking, as well as the patience, respect, and humility of Rise Up staff. For example, Leaders remarked,

"The spirit of Rise Up is positively contagious."

"The staff are incredibly supportive... The local Rise Up staff have been extremely helpful in supporting and encouraging the work on the ground."

Many Leaders also indicate that Rise Up is a transformational experience, with one Leader recounting,

"The fact that they believed in me... I sent out so many proposals and started thinking I just don't have the wherewithal, but Rise Up helped my confidence and so I stayed."

These intangibles play a crucial role in Leaders' sense of power-building, support, and agency.

Together, the combination of Rise Up supports – and the way that Rise Up delivers them – creates a catalytic model that equips Leaders to more effectively fight for change. The success of the model hinges upon finding the right Leaders, equipping them with tailored tools and training, resourcing them sufficiently, and integrating them into a network of collective action.

84%

of Leaders shared that Rise Up has helped them **feel more confident advocating for change**

79%

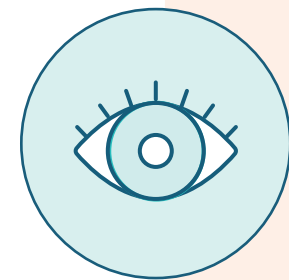
say Rise Up gave them a **greater sense of agency and power** in their work

40%

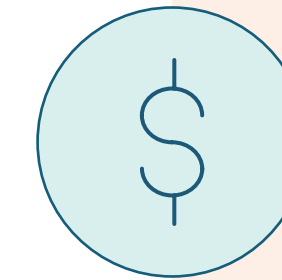
say they **could not have accomplished their goals** without Rise Up's support

These insights not only illustrate the effectiveness of Rise Up's model, but also underscore the imperative of providing Leaders with the right mix of supports to navigate their complex environments. Additional knowledge, support, funding, and networks can make an invaluable contribution to Leaders' ability to continue their work and achieve large scale impact.

Though Rise Up's support to Leaders is overall highly effective, the evaluation also surfaced a few considerations to help ensure that this support continues to evolve in tandem with Leaders' needs. These opportunity areas include:



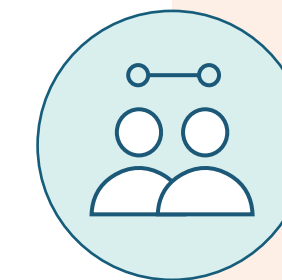
Growing the focus and sophistication of support as Leaders take on new and complex challenges: Leaders are navigating increasingly challenging political environments, and they need more sophisticated extrinsic support.



Grants to fund the true and full cost of doing the work: 75% of Leaders shared that additional funding was an essential support. Leaders also shared that they would benefit from longer funding cycles, ideally over a 3-5 year period, covering the true and full costs of the work, such as childcare and travel support.



Strategic technical assistance and accompaniment to overcome unexpected setbacks: Leaders emphasized that one-on-one thought partnership and brainstorming was essential to pivoting strategies in response to new challenges, including regime changes, lack of political will, and other unpredictable threats.



Networks that promote collective action and counter rising coordination from the opposition: Leaders expressed a widespread desire to strengthen their sense of connection across Rise Up and the broader gender equity movement.

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Based on the learnings, Rise Up will share relevant insights publicly to accelerate learning and action among partners and funders serving local Leaders.



We welcome your feedback and partnership in this work. If you would like to partner with Rise Up as part of their Learning Journey, annual Leader survey, or have any questions on this work, please contact **Dr. Denise Raquel Dunning** (ddunning@riseuptogether.org) or **Josie Ramos** (jramos@riseuptogether.org). If you would like to speak with the Dalberg team that led this work, please contact **Shruthi Jayaram** (shruthi.jayaram@dalberg.com).