



PROJECT SAAKAAR
IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Executive Summary

This impact assessment examines the effectiveness, outcomes and emerging lessons from Project SAAKAAR. Project SAAKAAR is a post-release rehabilitation initiative of the India Vision Foundation (IVF) initiated in 2023 under its Reintegration and Rehabilitation Programme. The project aims to support released prisoners in rebuilding their lives through dignified self-employment, combining in-kind livelihood assistance with sustained mentoring and family engagement.

The assessment was conducted between October to November 2025, using a mixed methods approach. It covered structured interviews with 10 of the 13 beneficiaries supported under the project. Additionally, interviews were conducted with project managers, along with questionnaire responses received from organizational leadership. Given the small cohort size, the study prioritizes qualitative insights.

The assessment finds that the intervention has enabled meaningful socio-economic recovery and personal transformation among beneficiaries following release. In terms of the social return on investment under the project, it appears that the total resources spent per successful beneficiary represents good value for social good achieved, with an indicative social return on investment ratio being between 1.3:1. Beneficiaries have demonstrated a clear income-recovery compared to immediate post-release period, and the intervention has contributed to enhanced self-esteem, dignity and confidence among beneficiaries. Further, the project's structure and phased design is replicable and holds potential for scale.

Key Findings

Achievements

- Project SAAKAAR has been **effective in reactivating livelihoods** among released prisoners. All assessed beneficiaries showcased transition from unemployment or daily wage work immediately after release to some form of self-employment following support under the project.
- Project SAAKAAR **fills a critical gap within the justice system** whereby it provides a support system to released prisoners to regain livelihood, thus facilitating their reintegration and rehabilitation.
- Project SAAKAAR has led to **restoration of dignity and self-esteem** among beneficiaries, who have reported an enhanced sense of self-pride and confidence post business initiation.

- Project SAAKAAR has led to **income gains among beneficiaries**, however **income stability remained fragile** – with most beneficiaries reporting income sustainability of less than one month, and reflecting vulnerability to health issues, court obligations, seasonal demand etc.
- Project SAAKAAR's **most impactful phase** of its project methodology is the **business planning and approval phase**, enabling realistic livelihood choices aligned with individual skills and local market conditions. This phase also boosted beneficiary confidence for business initiation.
- Project SAAKAAR defining **strength lies in its mentorship-driven model**, whereby majority beneficiaries emphasized that regular follow-up, counselling and emotional support were as important than financial or material assistance.
- Project SAAKAAR has **generated significant social and relational impact**, with beneficiaries reported enhanced self-confidence, dignity and family acceptance following their engagement in livelihood activities.
- Project SAAKAAR has been **successful in preventing recidivism** among supported beneficiaries during the assessment period.
- An indicative **Social Return on Investment** analysis suggests that for every Re 1/- invested, the project generated Rs 1.3/- in incremental income, along with several intangible benefits such as reduced stigma, family stability and lowered recidivism risk.
- Project SAAKAAR's theory of change was largely validated in practice. Certain concerns such as income sustainability, access to advanced training and further financial support for business expansion continued to drag down project objectives.

Areas for Improvement

- Understanding and awareness on particulars of Project SAAKAAR was poor, and requires effort from project personnel to regularly inform the beneficiaries regarding the project methodology, objectives and expectations.
- Project SAAKAAR currently places reliance on self-reported income and beneficiary narratives, and in some cases has also faced challenges in tracking beneficiaries due to migration or change of contact details, limiting the project's ability to further sustained economic outcomes.

- The methodology for Project SAAKAAR is sound but operationally stretched. Intensive home visits, customized planning and regular monitoring – all at present dependent on a small team managing high case-loads. This requires sustained investment in human resources, counselling capacity, and market linkage infrastructure.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen beneficiary orientation and expectation-setting.
2. Support informed livelihood choice through guidance material.
3. Develop a contextualized livelihood planning toolkit.
4. Enhance donor engagement through beneficiary-led outreach.
5. Formalize beneficiary engagement and exit processes.
6. Establish a dedicated Outreach and Marketing Cell.
7. Strengthen human resource capacity for mentoring and follow-up.
8. Introduce phased and flexible financial support mechanisms.
9. Conduct an upskilling needs assessment.
10. Strengthen income tracking and financial monitoring system.
11. Deepen family engagement and stigma-reducing efforts.
12. Institutionalize alumni and peer-mentoring structures.