NIA-ILLUNET FOUNDATION CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM

JUNE-AUG 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Illunet Foundation, in collaboration with Nia, ran an entrepreneurial capacity building and financial literacy program for gig and contract workers living at Nia Studio facilities in Hosur, Tamil Nadu.

For Nia, an Elevar portfolio company, this program was a natural extension of their mission of enabling migrant workers to relocate easier by creating an ecosystem designed in their interests - one focused on compounding the value of their work.

With this as the context, Nia and Illunet sought to provide Nia Members with a capacity building program targeted at multiplying the value of their income with effective savings and financial management, the fundamentals of innovative entrepreneurship, and good digital literacy.

The project comprised of a combination of in-person and self-learning modules and the 4-batch pilot program was conducted at the Nia's Studio in Hosur with a total of 38 participants.

The 2-hour sessions were conducted on a single day and participants were then added to a WhatsApp group where content on the self-learning AI modules was shared.

PROJECT EVOLUTION

The initial program was designed as a set of 4 in-person sessions per batch covering a total of 3 modules (15 chapters in total).
This design was later modified to 1 in-person session per batch followed by self-learning modules and engagement via a WhatsApp group – this change in design was driven by the on-ground reality of participant availability and intended to strengthen the program's overall impact.
The final prorgam was delivered to 4 batches of residents at the Hosur centre with a total of 38 participants going through the program.

22 MAY '26
Program pitched

03 JUL '26
Session 1

14 JUL '26
Session 2

24 JUL '26
Session 3

31 JUL '26
Final session

CURRICULUM DESIGN

The program was modified to be 1 in-person session covering financial literacy and an introduction to entrepreneurial mindsets followed by self-learning modules on AI disseminated via a WhatsApp group.

1 **FINANCIAL LITERACY**

- UPI and mobile banking fundamentals
- Income tax filing
- Personal financial planning (monthly expenses, emergency fund, long-term savings)
- Saving vs. borrowing
- Tools for saving

2 **ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSETS**

- Identifying business opportunities
- Being proactive vs. reactive
- Personal vs. business expenses
- Revenue vs. profit
- Formal vs. informal loans
- Scaling businesses

3 **AI**

- What is AI & types of AI tools available
- Using AI in everyday life
- Basics of prompt engineering: AI vs search engines
- AI as a tool for upskilling

In-person
Based on an assessment of participant needs and areas of interest, the program was designed with a primary focus on financial literacy. Also covered was an introduction to entrepreneurial mindsets.

Interactive videos and independent learning tasks
An area of interest as expressed by participants. Videos and tasks for self-learning were shared with participants. Questions were answered during the in-person sessions.

ENGAGEMENT

We sought to design high-engagement interactive sessions using videos, quizzes, and conversation. A variety of videos were produced on the subjects of financial literacy and AI. EH360 videos were shown to illustrate what an entrepreneurial journey might look like, and quizzes were used to check participants' understanding of the fundamentals of financial literacy. These were supplemented with conversation and question-answer time that allowed participants to freely express their understandings or doubts. Game-based learning gave the sessions a reliable structure, while the conversation kept participants engaged throughout.

A total of 38 participants went through the financial literacy, introduction to entrepreneurial mindsets, and fundamentals of AI training program, across the four batches.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Male to female ratio	1:0, excluding involved female facilitator
Majority employment Representation	TVS, Ather
Family involved in agriculture	>95%
Unemployed/Employed	3/38
States represented	Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu
Age Group	19 - 25 years

Participants' financial aspirations were identified and addressed in the following ways:

SHORT-TERM

- Stable income
- Monthly savings (for future + to send to family)

➤ Discussed responsible financial behaviour, how to compound savings, and how to maintain savings for the long term. Emphasised importance of tax knowledge. Introduced the concept of "making your own work", or entrepreneurship/multiple sources of income as an income source that is independent and liberating.

LONG-TERM

- Govt. jobs (predominant)
- Own businesses
- House/land ownership
- Permanent employment

➤ Established importance of long-term savings. For entrepreneurship/permanent employment, discussed the importance of identifying a need. Sought to demystify starting a business: focused on planning for scale rather than large loans. Emphasised importance of filing income tax returns to build a credit score and future loan eligibility.

SESSION OUTCOMES

The proposed session outcomes were divided into short, medium, and long term outcomes.

The short-term outcomes as described in the project proposal were: Participants develop foundational financial literacy and begin using tools for financial planning. They gain working familiarity with AI-based tools and online learning resources. They demonstrate applied business skills through the development of a simple business plan. They leave with a concrete, actionable sense of what steps they could take next - and with greater confidence in their own capability and value. For Nia, early engagement with the Jogo and Jambo platforms (created by Nia to help residents start their entrepreneurial journey) signals the beginning of a measurable shift in how residents participate in the ecosystem.

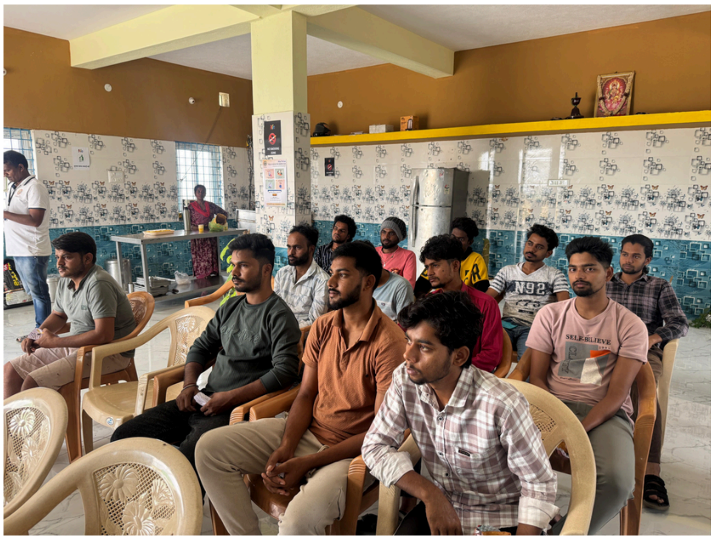
Given that the primary focus of the in-person session conducted with each of the batches was financial literacy, we can say. with confidence that every participant who went through the program left with a foundational understanding of financial literacy including but not limited to: how to stay protected from financial scams; the importance of filing income tax returns; the basics of budgeting the financial planning; and goal-based saving for short and long-term goals.

AI-focused self-learning modules were shared with the participants over a WharsApp group and attempts were made to elicit participant engagement on the group although with limited success. However, participants were encouraged to download the videos and activity templates shared with them so it is possible that engagament with the AI modules will continue as participants develop curiosity about AI.

The objective of participants engaging with the Jogo and Jambo platforms as entrepreneurs was dropped.

As a direct result of the nature of migrant labour, opportunities to follow up with residents to track medium and long-term outcomes will be limited.

SESSION OBSERVATIONS



Most participants were initially shy and hesitant, but began to participate once a conversational rapport was established. Each session contained 4-5 participants who were particularly enthusiastic, and these participants tended to have two things in common: some existing awareness of savings schemes, loans, etc, and clear aspirations for the future. Other participants grew more engaged when their specific concerns were targeted: i.e. the batch of the final workshop showed particular interest in compounding savings, and became engaged once savings accounts, mutual funds and other savings plans were discussed.

We also faced some language barriers. Over 90% of the participants were Hindi speaking, but a minority did not speak Hindi, so sessions were conducted in both Hindi and English. This slowed facilitation somewhat.

In terms of financial literacy, awareness in some area was more evident

- UPI payments and related risks/scams
- Safety from a variety of banking scammers
- Risks of investing in stocks

A large number of participants were not aware of important basics such as filing income tax returns even when earnings are below the income tax threshold, using mobile banking, or using various methods to make long-term savings less accessible in case of impromptu recreational expenses. Most preferred gold and land as a form of savings investment, and were curious when introduced to the concepts of mutual funds or locked savings accounts. A few participants expressed interest in entrepreneurship and AI, mostly as pathways to better employment. We introduced these topics to them in a practical context.

FUTURE SESSION FACILITATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Participants identified as being enthusiastically engaged could be called upon in the beginning and encouraged to explain concepts to their peers

- Introductions should focus on helping participants feel personally connected to the session. We conducted an ice-breaker where participants were asked to state their names, hometowns, current employment, and one economic aspiration that they had.

- Rather than sticking to a strict script, facilitators could choose to spend more time on areas of interest or concern. This may vary based on audience.

- When sessions are conducted in English, vocabulary should be simple, and abstract ideas illustrated with examples to avoid confusion.

FUTURE AREAS OF FOCUS

TAX FILING RESOURCES

Participants were unaware of the significance of filing IT returns, and didn't know that Returns must be filed irrespective of the tax bracket.

CONNECTION TO SAFE INVESTING

Large interest in mutual funds as a way to make their savings lucrative. Boosting confidence in investing has potential to help gig workers not currently aiming for entrepreneurship,

ENABLING LONG-TERM SAVING

Small savings tended to be used up quickly for recreation. We identified mutual funds and gold etc as a way of making savings less liquid, but a clear gap in awareness that small amounts of money can be used to start saving.

AI SKILLS FOR EDUCATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

General awareness of but low engagement in AI is likely due to not thinking of AI as a useful tool. Participants can be taught to use AI for learning (health info, job related skill building, tax advice, etc), and introduced to orgs designing AI for this specific customer segment.

CONCLUSION

The Nia-Illunet Foundation Capacity Building Program successfully delivered foundational financial literacy and entrepreneurship training to 38 participants across four batches at the Hosur studio. While the program evolved significantly from its original design, adapting to on-ground realities, its core objective of equipping participants with practical financial knowledge was met.

The pilot has generated valuable insights: financial literacy, delivered in an engaging, conversational format, resonates strongly with this audience. The appetite for knowledge around savings, investing, and tax filing is real and largely unmet. These learnings, alongside the facilitation recommendations documented here, provide a strong foundation for future iterations of the program.

The primary structural challenge of resident turnover will need to be taken into consideration and accounted for in the programme design going forward if medium and long-term outcomes are to be tracked and demonstrated.