Trust is the Absolute Foundation of Any Partnership: Q&A with Rohini Nilekani

Rohini Nilekani, the Chairperson of Arghyam, has been a key influencer in the field of philanthropy in India, and a strong advocate for creating safe spaces to embrace failure. In this Q&A, she shares her insights on the power of leadership, the importance of partnerships, and the role of trust in achieving a common goal.

Q: You have always stressed on leadership for the society and of the society. So when you think about leadership, how do you look at leadership in the context of philanthropy?

Rohini Nilekani: Leadership is about enabling the grammar of that intent. We all know that we can't do it by ourselves. Leadership is about being a follower of other people's ideas, because we are here to serve and enable them. It's about building a movement of people who can achieve a common goal. And this learning has informed the coming together of Societal Platform Thinking.

Q: You have led the charge in philanthropy in India in many ways – with investments in Societal Platform and the way you have been advocating for the role of trust in philanthropy. Can you tell us more?

Rohini Nilekani: You are an advocate for creating safe spaces to embrace failure, and you have talked a lot about this. So we'd love to hear your perspectives on failure and how you look at failure.

Rohini Nilekani: We really try our best to always do that. Trust is a basic currency we need. You just have to work on creating an imbalance. You have to involve a broad section of society to make sure that every child is given the gift of a reading life.

Q: Since childhood, I always felt very strongly about citizens banding together to do some things. But putting these three things together is quite a challenge, and the way you've grown Societal Platform and the way you've been working with your grantees, you should be partners. "Arghyam said, "So now as a donor, I know that I cannot, cannot, cannot thrust my own ideas and opinions and rigidity on to any organization and with some programmatic kind of backed donation or something very specific, it really makes the organization very rigid, and makes things keep changing, and you need to be able to respond to that changing situation in a flexible manner. Whereas, if you're stuck in a risk funder through trust. Tell us more.

Rohini Nilekani: We started working with publishers, with state governments, and we worked with every single creative artist we could find. It taught us that books are the most powerful way to communicate with children. We decided that we have to unleash the creative energy of all the people in India, because every household is a storytelling household in India. Everybody tells the stories of the epics to their children and grandchildren. So how could we transition from an oral culture to a written culture? And we all know that we can't do this by ourselves. Leadership is about being a follower of other people's ideas, because we are here to serve and enable them. It's about building a movement of people who can achieve a common goal.