About the American India Foundation
The American India Foundation is committed to improving the lives of India’s underprivileged, with a special focus on women, children, and youth. AIF does this through high impact interventions in education, health, and livelihoods, because poverty is multidimensional. AIF’s unique value proposition is its broad engagement between communities, civil society, and expertise, thereby building a lasting bridge between the United States and India. With offices in New York and California, twelve chapters across the U.S., and India operations headquartered in Delhi NCR, AIF has impacted 6.7 million lives across 26 states of India. Learn more at www.AIF.org

About the AIF Clinton Fellowship Program
The AIF William J. Clinton Fellowship for Service in India builds the next generation of service leadership committed to lasting change for underprivileged communities across India, while strengthening the civil sector landscape to be more efficient and effective. Since inception, AIF has placed close to 500 Fellows in service at 216 host organizations across 25 states of India.

Contributors
Fellowship Cohort, 2020-21
Shreya Ralli, Director, Communications and Advocacy
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Katja Kurz, Program Manager, William J. Clinton Fellowship for Service in India
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INTRODUCTION

This year is a special one for AIF. 2021 marks the beginning of the 20th anniversary of AIF and the Fellowship program. On January 26, 2001, the Gujarat Earthquake struck—an enormous tragedy for the state and for India. With the aid of allies, Gujarat would be eventually rebuilt, yet the earthquake had lasting effects on education, health, migration, and livelihoods. It was in these aid efforts that Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and United States President Bill Clinton joined forces in mobilizing the Indian diaspora in the U.S. to form the American India Foundation in the spring of 2001, with a mission of strengthening the U.S.-India bridge to make a tangible difference on the ground in India. In the aftermath of the earthquake, AIF launched the AIF Fellowship program to offer young people the opportunity to support local communities in post-disaster rebuilding, and to build strong ties between civil society in both countries to foster mutual understanding and long-term collaboration.

Since the program launched in 2001, a total of 500 Fellows have served with 216 partner organizations across 25 states of India. The impact of the Fellowship far surpasses the projects that Fellows and host communities work on during the program. A survey conducted in 2017 found that nearly 75% of Alumni have continued in a career of service. Nearly 40% of Alumni work in the development sector while another 36% collectively work in allied professions, e.g. having started their own non-profits, working in public service, and continuing to volunteer with communities. Alumni have made an impact across sectors and disciplines. The largest number of Alumni work in education, followed by health, economic empowerment, and social and legal services. Many more work in government, arts and culture, human rights, environmental conservation, gender studies, and disaster relief.

Every year, we publish the Yearbook to document the journey of the AIF Fellows during the course of their service with communities in India. The Yearbook is a collection of stories, achievements, and reflections. It gives us immense pleasure to present the Yearbook 2020-21, which covers the journeys of 11 local Indian AIF Clinton Fellows who served with 10 AIF partner organizations across 9 states of India during an unprecedented year of the pandemic. Our Fellows worked on various social issues related to COVID-19 relief in the fields of public health, education, and livelihoods. In the following pages, we’ve summarized the Fellows’ work, highlighted their accomplishments, and indicated how their service has contributed towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during a critical year.

At this unique moment in history, with the program completing 20 years and the Fellowship cohort overcoming a myriad of unprecedented challenges to make an impact during the COVID-19 pandemic, we would like to express our heartfelt sense of appreciation to our supporters who have made the AIF Fellowship program possible this year. We sincerely thank the Rural India Supporting Trust (RIST) and the Krishnan Shah Family Foundation (KSFF) for supporting all 11 Fellows of the current batch. To the graduating class of 2020-21: We would like to congratulate you on the successful completion of the Fellowship in such difficult times. Navigating a hybrid program, with constant changes due to the COVID-19 situation in India, you displayed great perseverance and spirit for service that was wonderful to see. It was indeed an inspiration to witness your journey, to see you navigate the virtual environment and find innovative ways to work with your host organizations with relentless energy to support COVID-19 recovery of some of the most vulnerable communities.
This cohort is even more special because you are the last batch under the AIF William J. Clinton Fellowship for Service in India banner as the program transitions into an ambitious third phase with a major expansion, which calls for an even larger celebration as it also coincides with our organization’s 20th year anniversary and the birth of the program’s new avatar in the fall of 2021. Your indomitable spirit despite the pandemic stands as testament to the strength of this program, its Fellows, and its community partners. Your resilience, dedication, and ingenuity will keep on inspiring everyone at AIF even after you move on to your next endeavors. We trust that the Fellows in the upcoming years shall learn from your journeys and continue to work along the high bar you have set during this unprecedented year. On behalf of everyone at AIF, we thank you for your service and wish you all the best for your future.

Mathew Joseph
Country Director
New Delhi

Nishant Pandey
Chief Executive Officer
New York

American India Foundation
July 2021

Over the last 20 years, the AIF Fellowship program has been at the helm of creating a "living bridge" between the United States and India. Through service, we’ve made powerful investments into the U.S.-India citizen diplomacy by shaping the next generation of leaders to become inclusive and socially minded innovators and effective advocates for the U.S.-India collaboration to solve our most pressing challenges. This year especially, the AIF Fellowship created an “innovation lab” for Fellows and host communities to tackle the challenges of COVID-19 recovery through collaborative, creative, and inclusive solutions. It has been a tremendous privilege for us to witness the program grow from its inception in 2001, and to see first-hand the impact it has had on Fellows, alumni, and partner communities. This pandemic brought us unprecedented challenges and required a novel, unique approach. We are blessed to have supported a cohort of 11 dedicated local Indian Fellows eagerly responding to the call to serve their country during this challenging time.

AIF and the Fellowship program were founded in 2001 in response to a natural disaster, with a desire to serve, learn, and lead together. Twenty years later, this mission could not be more relevant as we’re battling the COVID-19 pandemic.

For this, we are also excited to launch the AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship, the new phase of the AIF Clinton Fellowship program. At the cusp of the program’s third decade, we’re at a crucial stage of growth and expansion to accelerate and amplify collective impact in response to this call to action. It’s time to accelerate our impact and to make bold investments, doubling down on our efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. We are the generation to end extreme poverty, combat climate change, and conquer injustice. Laying the groundwork to meet our ambitious goals, we’re expanding the program scope and demographics, and are launching evaluation for action and advocacy. The Banyan tree is a symbol of strength, resilience, and interconnectedness - a powerful metaphor for mobilizing a collective, cross-generational force towards sustainable impact. We believe this new program will continue to serve communities and allow for excellent work to happen. Seeing the work of our Fellows this year, we know that our program is as strong as ever.

To the cohort of 2020-21, we’re proud of what you’ve achieved during this defining moment in our collective history. Your selfless service, resilience, and dedication is an inspiration. In a world where COVID-19 has caused great losses, we are in awe of what young minds such as yourselves can accomplish even in the most adverse settings. Throughout the pandemic, we remained dedicated to our community partners on the ground and to providing an opportunity for Indian Fellows to serve. Sending a cohort of U.S. Fellows to join you in service was not possible due to travel restrictions, so instead we enlisted a cohort of Alumni mentors to support you during your Fellowship journey and to contribute to a vibrant U.S.-India exchange in a virtual capacity. This cross-cultural experience between Americans and Indians is what we personally feel is so powerful about the Fellowship program, so we were pleased to find that this could be retained in this innovative way amidst the pandemic.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the AIF Fellowship program. We’ve been involved since AIF started and are so proud of everything that our Fellows and partner organizations have achieved over the years. To the 500 Fellows who’ve served: we are so thankful for your service and your leadership. You’ve had the courage to make a difference. To our 216 partner organizations on the ground: we are grateful that you’ve given the opportunity...
Meeting all of you together for the first time during our first-ever virtual Fellowship Orientation was a time we felt so proud to have selected all of you as Fellows during this unprecedented year. We realised during the Orientation that this is a cohort that will never give up in light of the challenges they’ll face. We were right! We were so astounded to see the level of energy you all brought from Day 1 - that energy never subsided. After that, whenever we met virtually for any session, event, or check-in, it was no less than meeting in person. The safe space and the warmth you provided to one another and to the AIF Fellowship Team was exemplary.

This batch is special in many ways. You’re the first batch that served in a hybrid capacity and that didn’t meet in person during the program; you’re the first all-Indian cohort of Fellows; and you’re the final batch under the umbrella of AIF’s William J. Clinton Fellowship for Service in India before the program expands into its third phase with a new entity in the fall of 2021.

You are leaving a legacy behind. A legacy to serve no matter how difficult the situation is, a legacy of staying connected and supporting each other even if you’ve not met in person, a legacy of making the best out of all available resources, a legacy of finding positives in everything, and a legacy of overcoming obstacles with great resilience. This is something the upcoming batches will learn from and look towards for inspiration.

All of you have contributed in many ways to your host communities, to AIF and to the cohort during this unprecedented time. Even if the contribution seemed small in the local context, it has ripple effects in the development sector. We will remember this batch as the one that fought against all odds, and that came together to serve and learn with communities battling against the pandemic. We have no doubt in our minds that you’re going to lead the way forward in your careers inspired by this year’s journey. Wherever you go next, we know that you will give meaning to the three pillars of serve, learn and lead on which this Fellowship is founded.

It has been an incredible honor to support and mentor you through this Fellowship journey. We look forward to seeing how the experiences of this year will continue to shape you, and what decisions you are taking that are informed by your service as AIF Clinton Fellows.

Congratulations and best of luck!

Amanpreet, Chandni Wadhwani, Katja Kurz
The AIF Clinton Fellowship Team
HISTORY OF THE FELLOWSHIP

AIF’s Fellowship program shapes the next generation of leaders committed to positive social change while strengthening civil society in both the U.S. and India and identifying innovative solutions to tackle the most pressing challenges we face. Born from a desire expressed by young Americans to assist the post-earthquake rehabilitation of Gujarat in 2001, AIF launched the Service Corps with a pilot class of 21 Fellows. In 2009, AIF renamed the program in honor of President Bill Clinton and the role that he played in the founding of AIF, from ‘AIF Service Corps’ to ‘AIF William J. Clinton Fellowship for Service in India’. Since 2011, Indian Fellows have served alongside the U.S. Fellows in a binational cohort. The AIF Fellowship is a 10-month volunteer service program that brings together young professionals from the U.S. and India to serve with grassroots community and civil society organizations across India. AIF Fellows work on scalable and sustainable projects with host communities. Over the past 20 years since its inception, AIF has sent 500 Fellows to serve with 216 partner organizations in 25 states of India.

Due to international travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, AIF decided to suspend the program for the U.S. Fellows for the 2020-21 cycle and instead selected a small cohort of 11 Indian Fellows to support communities in COVID-19 recovery. The program was conducted in a hybrid model (i.e., partially virtual and partially in person if and once possible) to ensure Fellows’ and community members’ health and safety during the pandemic, with highly individualized support and robust safety and emergency measures in place. Given the program’s history and mission, AIF remained dedicated to supporting COVID-19 recovery efforts with community partners on the ground while offering a platform for dedicated young Indian leaders eager to serve their country during a critical time of need.
YEAR AT GLANCE

- Orientation, Fellowship Begins
- Midpoint, Thematic Conferences
- Endpoint, Public Seminars

Session with Dr. Niranjan Saggurti
AIF Spring Gala March 14, 2021

Alumni mentoring

Alumni Slack
Academia after Fellowship
Adaptability_Teamwork
Aga Khan Foundation_Virtual Visit
MANSI Sahiya_Virtual Visit
Geriatric Care Unit at MAST_Virtual Visit
Ms. Shivangi Singh and Ms. Trishla Bafna are the 2nd batch of the AIF Fellowship to join the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) providing their expertise towards the gender and entrepreneurship program for the Tibetan community in India and Nepal. Despite the disruptions of COVID-19, the CTA had the opportunity to host both the AIF Fellows at its headquarters based in Dharamsala and both the Fellows provided their expert inputs towards their respective areas of Fellowship despite unforeseen challenges. CTA is a proud partner of the AIF Fellowship which assures professional resources to organizations in the development sector and we look forward to greater and continued cooperation.

Tenzin Norsang (Mr.)
Central Tibetan Administration
Journey

In 2020, when I was accepted into this Fellowship, I was afraid that I would not be able to live up to the expectations of an AIF Fellow. However, if I say that these fears vanished as soon as it began, it would be a lie. The Fellowship was a series of curveballs, from the pandemic situation changing for the better (so much so that I was ready to move to the host site), to very dramatically taking a turn for the worse. From field programs at my host organization coming to a halt, to me taking part in theatre training that pushed the limits of my introverted nature, everything was an adventure. Working from home ensured that I stepped out of my comfort zone and made an extra effort to connect with my host organization, virtually.

I was initially fearful because I was beginning the Fellowship expecting to make immediate changes. However, I came to realise that change, especially in the development sector, takes years and often begins in barely perceptible ways. If I could go back in time to the beginning of the Fellowship, I would tell myself that the Fellowship is only the first step of a long and meaningful journey in the development sector and, like the enchanted golden snitch in Harry Potter, it “opens at the close”.

Partnership Story

Prajwala Sangham does critical interventions on gender and caste sensitisation, using art, theatre and movement as their primary methodologies. I was caught off-guard when on one occasion, I was asked to join in their theatre practices. As an introvert, I was intimidated at first. However, my colleagues were always supportive, pushing me to experiment. I went on to host an international playback theatre event, with over a hundred participants including the co-founders of playback theatre.

Amiya is interested in writing and researching on gender and caste marginalisation in urban spaces. Her strength is her sense of humour and she thrives in warm, jovial company. During the AIF Fellowship, she was lucky to have found such people amongst her co-Fellows, the AIF Fellowship Team and her host organization.
How did the pandemic shape your experience?

My first meeting with my host organization eased my trepidations about working virtually. All my colleagues, from accountants and office staff to my supervisor, had gathered in front of the screen to introduce themselves to me through songs and performances. While poor bandwidth and low-quality gadgets hampered some of the sessions with children to some extent, I am grateful for the times I was able to connect on topics such as gender-based violence and COVID-19. Additionally, despite not having met my co-Fellows in person, we forged strong bonds over shared moments of laughter and of course, stress over deadlines!

What was your most rewarding professional experience?

I played a key role in the conceptualisation of my host organization’s ‘Dalit Drum’ project. During my coursework in Sociology, I had pursued research on the urban Dalit community. My host organization was therefore, a great fit for me. Not only did the work focus on Dalit communities, but, I also got the chance to learn immensely from my colleagues who were from the community.

During the Fellowship, I was asked to plan a 3-year project to provide a platform to Dalit artists, poets, musicians and intellectuals, to connect with their community while spreading the message of empowerment to the larger public. Brainstorming ideas for activities — from residential artist retreats to academic seminars — and then fine-tuning these as per the needs and sentiments of the community, was a memorable learning experience. I now look forward to consulting assignments such as interviewing elders of the Dalit community on their oral histories.

This was a transformative year of my life because....

I realised the extent of my privilege in being able to work in a supportive environment and stay safe in the midst of the devastating pandemic.

The Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to...

Equip myself with practical and employable skills needed for development sector work in India.

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Journey

When I finally moved to my host organization after working virtually for months, I was shocked to see the very active social scene. In all my previous organizations, I had the reputation of being the work-obsessed perfectionist who never bothered with socializing. I was always known as the recluse. However, I decided to push myself out of my comfort zone. It took all my energy at first but I learnt to be in the company of my office folks from 9 AM to 9 PM on the weekend after spending 9 to 5 with them during weekdays. Today, I am known as the most popular person in the Ministry of Education, CTA. I receive comments like — "I have worked here for 10 years yet, you have met more people on a weekend" or "Is it any wonder that people in the Ministry of Education always seem to be clamoring around your desk? Even the President postponed his session in parliament to meet you."

I was surprised by my transformation and how quickly these people became a family to me. This transformation was only possible because the people in my workplace are some of the most accepting, kind, compassionate and loving human beings I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. I feel truly blessed.

Partnership Story

As part of my Fellowship, I got the opportunity to work on several meaningful projects with long term impact on my host community. I created a Gender Mainstreaming report for the Ministry of Education, CTA which included a Gender Mainstreaming Checklist, created in accordance with that of the United Nations.

I also developed an activity-based gender education curriculum for students in Tibetan schools in India and; formulated the idea of Tibetan entrepreneurs imparting experience-based knowledge on Entrepreneurship through video format.

SHIVANGI SINGH

Education and Gender

As an Introverted, Intuitive, Thinking, and Judging (INTJ) personality type, Shivangi identifies with the stereotype of the reclusive writer dealing with crippling self-doubt and on a perpetual spiritual quest. Through her transformational Fellowship journey, she overcame many challenges to earn the title of the ‘Most Popular Person’ in her workplace.

100% OF THE EMPLOYEES OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OF THE TIBETAN GOVERNMENT WERE GENDER SENSITIZED THROUGH 15 DIVERSE SESSIONS

3 RESEARCH REPORTS, 2 LARGE SCALE KNOWLEDGE DATABASE AND 2 BASELINE SURVEYS GENERATED

2 LARGE-SCALE CURRICULA DEVELOPED ON GENDER EDUCATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR ALL TIBETAN SCHOOLS ACROSS INDIA

25 PEOPLE INTERVIEWED; AND 200 STUDENTS AND 100 SCHOOL STAFF MEMBERS SURVEYED

REPRESENTED THE HOST COMMUNITY AND SPOKE ABOUT THEIR ISSUES AT A UNICEF USA EVENT IMPACTING 500+ PEOPLE ACROSS 7 COUNTRIES AND 5 CONTINENTS

PRESENTED THE FELLOWSHIP PROJECT WORK TO TIBET’S FORMER AND NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENTS

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Bringing a gender perspective to a government system

Journey

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I also developed an activity-based gender education curriculum for students in Tibetan schools in India and; formulated the idea of Tibetan entrepreneurs imparting experience-based knowledge on Entrepreneurship through video format.
This was a transformative year of my life because….
I pushed myself completely out of my comfort zone. While I had the reputation of being a recluse in all my previous workplaces, I became a social butterfly at my host organization.

The Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to…
Understand the Tibetan culture, learn more about the history of the community and learn first-hand about the challenges this community faces.

How did the pandemic shape your experience?
For me, the Fellowship started virtually and it was only after the AIF Midpoint Conference that I moved to my host organization and city. The sudden change was like starting the Fellowship all over again. The change of place was not easy. It required me to adjust to a completely new office with people I had not interacted with before while working virtually. I felt thrown into an alien setting at first, however, soon enough, I fit in like hand in glove. The workplace turned out to be a perfect fit for my personality. The social setting required me to push myself out of my comfort zone. Just as I got used to it, there was another lockdown and my schedule was completely disrupted all over again. However, my colleagues were most helpful and I regained a sense of balance.

What was your most rewarding professional experience?
While I worked on different aspects during my AIF Fellowship, I am most proud of two projects. First, I worked on developing a Gender Education Curriculum for all Tibetan schools across India and the second was formulating the idea of Tibetan entrepreneurs imparting experience-based knowledge on Entrepreneurship (as per NCERT curriculum) in a video format. I picked two instead of one because both had the same theme — planning and developing a plan for education in the future. I aided the Ministry of Education, CTA, in developing two curricula for education of their students. I enjoyed the process of laying down the groundwork for these projects to run. It feels amazing to know that Tibetan youth will learn gender sensitivity through a curriculum that I created. Similarly, I feel fulfilled knowing that they will benefit from the video-based education in entrepreneurship.

“The most powerful thing that the AIF Clinton Fellowship did for me was to help me build a meaningful relationship with the Tibetan community.”
SNEHARSHI DASGUPTA
Education

Strategic Innovation and Initiatives

Sneharshi is interested in working on issues related to livelihoods, education, culture and heritage. The past eight months of the Fellowship has opened new opportunities and avenues for him within the development sector to explore more on specific skill sets within these thematic areas. Furthermore, this experience helped him build on his communication, leadership, and research skills.

‘Preserving the Adivasi legacy’

Conducting 10 in-depth field interviews

Researching and documented best practices of work implemented by other museums across the globe

Designed a digital museum accessibility plan

Bhasha Research and Publication Centre

Gujarat

Making inroads for digitalising an indigenous museum

Journey

Coming from an urban setting, albeit having experiences of travelling to rural India, I was unaware of a lot of challenging and remote spaces that exist within the country. Tejgadh was a unique experience. The Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh is located in a forest (close to the road — making it accessible) wherein most individuals speak only the local language. The place however, faces other challenges such as access to basic services like clean water. The local population around the Academy aims to be self-reliant and grow their own food, being less dependent on the market. There is also significant migration to the cities in search of work.

My journey from Kolkata to Tejgadh was an eye-opener. I learned about the history and development of the Adivasi Academy, the scholars who had visited and worked in this space over the years, and the kind of work that had been done which led to the Academy’s recognition as a Centre for Excellence by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India and UNESCO. I was inspired by knowing the amount of work and dedication it took for Dr. Ganesh Devy, Founder of the Adivasi Academy to set up this space in Tejgadh. As a young professional, it was a unique and an extremely inspiring experience.

Partnership Story

My project focused on the museum at Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh, understanding its development trajectory, and suggesting recommendations for the way forward. I worked on providing detailed case studies on initiatives and strategies of work undertaken by museums across the globe. This was also an opportunity to revisit ideas to improve visitors’ feedback, the reach of the museum and brainstorm ways to meaningfully engage with other relevant stakeholders.

CONDUCTED 10 IN-DEPTH FIELD INTERVIEWS

RESEARCHED AND DOCUMENTED BEST PRACTICES OF WORK IMPLEMENTED BY OTHER MUSEUMS ACROSS THE GLOBE

DESIGNED A DIGITAL MUSEUM ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

Partnership Story

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How did the pandemic shape your experience?

The pandemic significantly affected my Fellowship experience as my work was largely with museums and the work that goes behind making these spaces. All museums including my host organization’s museum were closed since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. For each step of the Fellowship process, I had to adapt to the changing circumstances of the pandemic. For instance, instead of physically visiting other indigenous museum initiatives in India, I conducted secondary research on the internet and prepared reports in order to better understand initiatives similar to my host organization’s museum. This required a lot of planning, improvisation and strategizing. I reached out to individuals working with museums to better understand the structural shift that is being witnessed by museums across the globe.

What was your most rewarding professional experience?

I had always read about the issues faced by the marginalised population in India — be it related to livelihoods, education or healthcare. However, I had limited understanding in this context. The fieldwork at Tejgadh and the museum gave me an opportunity to experience the place, interact with the locals, understand the ongoing work, and learn and unlearn on a day-to-day basis. The situation is far more complex and cannot be imagined solely in a rural-urban context.

Being part of AIF and placed in Tejgadh with the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre’s Adivasi Academy, allowed me to conduct in-depth research, document, interact and witness first-hand some of the persistent problems faced by the indigenous people. I contributed towards the development of Bhasha’s Vaacha Museum of Voice by reinvigorating the museum as a space for indigenous voice and memory. Consequently, I designed a roadmap for Vaacha to implement and revitalise a unique approach to itself — both in the physical museum and its upcoming digital space.
Journey

My selection into the AIF Clinton Fellowship program was like a dream come true. After my master’s program, I was looking for opportunities to blend classroom learning with the field component to make a positive impact in the lives of children. Shaishav provided me with this space to design life skills and sports sessions for children. During my community visits, I noticed the field team using the conventional approach of marking children’s attendance and surveys on paper despite everyone having access to tablets. My supervisor encouraged me to streamline the entire process online to ensure transparency, efficiency and accountability. This experience helped me develop resourcefulness, data visualization techniques as well as become tech savvy.

My field visits to AIF’s Digital Equalizer (DE) and Learning And Migration Program (LAMP) amid the ongoing pandemic in Dang and Surat respectively have been an enriching learning experience as I was able to witness first-hand the adverse consequences of school closure and migration on children's learning outcomes. I have captured my takeaways from the exposure visit in a three-part blog series on AIF’s website.

During the four-month stay at my host organization, the cultural immersion which I experienced was greatly fulfilling as I celebrated the colorful festival of Holi and Uttarayan for the first time with children from the Sindhi community as well as documented lives of local artisans. As I embark on the next phase of my life, I feel grateful to the AIF Clinton Fellowship program for giving me this amazing opportunity to grow personally and professionally.

Partnership Story

My Fellowship project at Shaishav focused on three major components: designing, implementing and reviewing activities for the education programs. I designed more than 30 life skills modules and 25 sports activities for children in Bhavnagar, as well as developed a broad curriculum framework for ‘Aaranyakshala’, an alternative space for tribal children in Narmada. I trained the field team over Zoom to conduct life skills sessions with ‘Balsena’ children in the communities and physically coordinated activities at the zonal sports meet.

‘Instilling life skills and play among children’

UTSARGA MONDIAL

Education

UTSARGA MONDIAL

Education

Communications and Development

Utsarga is passionate about reforming the education space in the country through systemic intervention. The grassroots experience during the Fellowship helped him develop resilience, poise and determination to stand up to challenges and learn from opportunities. He aspires to contribute to the public policy space to create large-scale social change.

Shaishav

Gujarat

DESIGNED 30+ LIFE SKILLS MODULES AND 25+ PHYSICAL EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

CONDUCTED 4+ WORKSHOPS ON LIFE SKILLS AND SPORTS SESSIONS WITH THE FIELD TEAM TO IMPACT THE LIVES OF 500+ CHILDREN ACROSS 20 COMMUNITIES

STREAMLINED A NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY ON KOBO TOOLBOX

CREATED A M&E LIFE SKILLS TOOLKIT

Bridging the social inequalities through education

Partnering with Shaishav – a Journey
How did the pandemic shape your experience?

My initial project required me to work in the tribal areas of Narmada District, however, due to travel restrictions amid the ongoing pandemic, I was asked to work from Shaishav’s head office in Bhavnagar. This change of location did not as such affect the modules which I had prepared while working from home because children of elementary age still remained my primary target audience. But, once I got the opportunity to attend the life skills training in person within my host community, as well as interact with the field team, I was able to better contextualize the modules. My brief stay of four months in Bhavnagar allowed me to build a rapport with staff members at Shaishav and the larger community. After moving home during the second wave of the pandemic, I was able to better adapt virtually given my experience of having lived in the host community and the support extended by my colleagues in Shaishav.

What was your most rewarding professional experience?

I am proud of hosting four zonal sports meet which witnessed a collective participation of more than 300 children from across all 20 communities in which Shaishav has actively been working to spread awareness on life skills and gender rights. The physical education activities such as relay races, group juggling, paired skipping and pyramids fostered teamwork, coordination and athleticism in children. Overall designing sports modules, training the field team, coordinating and implementing the activities across different venues was an enriching learning experience as I got the opportunity of planning and executing the entire event.

Another professional achievement which makes me equally proud is the Balghar project for which I drafted a concept note, streamlined and updated a needs assessment survey on Kobo Toolbox as well as analyzed the field data. The reiterative process of tweaking the survey questionnaire helped me develop tenacity and I was able to further improve on my analytical and computation skills while handling large data sets.

The Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to...

grow my network and connect with like-minded individuals who are deeply committed to work for social justice.
It has been a pleasure working with the AIF team, especially with our AIF Fellow Aman. We have forged partnerships that will go beyond the term of the Fellowship. Aman integrated into the IWWAGE team seamlessly, he took on responsibilities within different vertices of work and has worked on multiple teams and projects. This has been a difficult year for everyone; we have had to shift the way we do things and the timelines of work. We are truly grateful that AIF was extremely understanding of our constraints and worked with us to make this the most fruitful experience for Aman and us. I also commend Aman’s spirit in being flexible and taking continuous change in his stride. I hope there are many such partnerships in the future!

Kaliat Ammu Sanyal  
IWWAGE - an initiative of LEAD at Krea University

Livelihoods
‘Every constraint is an opportunity if dealt with an open mind’

Journey

As a recent postgraduate, I was ambitiously looking to start a career in the development sector. I got the AIF Fellowship opportunity to work on a pilot project for gender integration and mainstreaming. I considered this as a training ground to explore and experiment with existing theories and frameworks that guide the development sector at large. I learned to effectively utilize technology and the virtual space for greater learning while serving during the most unprecedented times.

The project on gender integration and mainstreaming expanded my knowledge and skills, especially in research, monitoring and evaluation. It also aided my understanding on certain technical concepts such as time, poverty, spatial poverty traps and intersecting inequalities from a gender lens, along with the implications that they hold in women’s daily lives. I became aware of subtle ways through which gender biases emerge in our day-to-day conversations and writings, and how it eventually settles down in our thoughts and actions. Being part of a Process and Impact Evaluation Study on the implementation of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013, allowed me to deeply reflect on what it takes to build safer workplaces for women and the role of different stakeholders in the same.

As I complete the Fellowship, I feel more confident and better equipped to take a deep dive into the vast ocean of the development sector with a compass guiding me towards my vision and mission.

Partnership Story

My Fellowship involved a pilot project for gender integration and mainstreaming. I conducted an ethnographic research study for measuring context-specific incremental changes in women’s lives over a period of time. Although, I could not have a direct field engagement with the host community, I believe my support in redesigning the training curriculum of the non-farm livelihood vertical of National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) from a gender lens will contribute in some way to the host community when imparting training in the future.

Strategic Innovation and Initiatives

Aman is very curious, always seeks new ways of doing things. This curiosity infuses him with a great sense of dynamism to travel into unexplored paths in and beyond professional life and this serves as an all-time inspiration for him to keep moving.
Q & A

How did the pandemic shape your experience?

Due to the pandemic, my project work shifted completely online, something that I was prepared for since the first day. This helped me immensely in planning out things ahead. There were challenges initially in adapting to the online mode of working, but having a strategically designed approach in advance not only helped to overcome these challenges but also opened new avenues of exploring the underdeveloped areas of engagement that can be implemented online. For example, brainstorming on conducting a digital ethnography pushed me to think out of the box and chart out possible ways of doing such a study. I strongly believe that every constraint is an opportunity, and if utilized with an open mind and focused action, can lead to bigger outcomes. I found the Fellowship to be a path-breaking experience in terms of diving into new horizons of learning.

What was your most rewarding professional experience?

The professional achievement I am most proud of is redesigning the training modules of the NRLM Non-farm Livelihood vertical from a gender lens. The work was very special to me as it helped me realize the ‘subtle ways’ through which gender-stereotypes are reinforced in our writings, conversations, and illustrations. Reviewing the module from a gender lens brought out some important observations that I could share having reflected upon the gendered dimensions in promoting and running of the enterprises. These observations will feed as inputs into the redesigning the curriculum that will be more gender-sensitive, address women’s practical and strategic gender needs and help in gender mainstreaming and integration across the NRLM verticals.

This was a transformative year of my life because....

I tackled the unknown and uncertain, both at the personal and professional front with a great zeal to serve, learn and lead.

The Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to...

Rigorously push, test and implement my knowledge base, abilities and skills in the development sector as a whole and especially in gender equality and integration.

“The most powerful thing that the AIF Clinton Fellowship did for me was Learning while doing.”
Sustainable strategies for a green and gender equal society

Journey

The AIF Fellowship matched my aspirational career path by giving me the opportunity to learn while serving in a strategic role on a sustainable agriculture project of my host organization, Srijan Foundation. At the Fellowship, I quickly immersed myself in reading proposals, watching videos, having engaging discussions, performing field exposures and conducting project landscaping. This helped me develop deep insights and design visual presentation, brochures, digital content, grant proposals, annual reports for a few projects and learnt to effectively engage with the internal team and the partners of Srijan Foundation.

During times of stress, low motivation and doubts, my cohort of peers, alumni mentors and the AIF Fellowship team consistently helped me navigate through this unprecedented journey. I gained perspective on different things during these months, and was also able to resolve other people’s doubts and shaped my personality as a social development leader. I am now able to see public policies in a more holistic manner and can recognise the importance and role of varied pieces which help in attaining them.

Partnership Story

I was placed as a strategic initiative lead at Srijan Foundation to work with women farmers in two districts of Jharkhand. My broad work on the project began with research, followed by planning, discussions, getting field exposure of intervention activities and engaging through focus group discussions to create strategies. The focus group discussions with women farmers to co-create ideas and support in review meetings gave me immense insights to match my responsibilities and shared goals as an AIF Fellow.

Shashi is a strategic social development leader who is intensely passionate about working in the space of public policy, from its formulation to implementation. Being a communication practitioner, he strongly believes in the power of storytelling and social documentaries to transform lives in the Indian context, especially those in the rural segments of the nation.

SHASHI KUMAR
Livelihoods

Strategic Innovation and Initiatives

Shashi Kumar

Livelihoods

From focus group discussions to strategies

Jharkhand

Srijan Foundation

2 GRANT PROPOSALS AND 2 CONCEPT NOTES DRAFTED
3 PROJECT ANNUAL REPORTS DESIGNED, 1 ORGANISATIONAL ANNUAL REPORT DESIGNED
1 VIRTUAL DRIVE CREATED FOR ALL OF THE PROJECT RESOURCES
2 QUESTIONNAIRES DESIGNED AND ORIENTED SESSIONS FOR ORGANIZING FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION

Partnership Story

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How did the pandemic shape your experience?

I was fortunate to start my Fellowship at my host site in person while also participating in the virtual AIF Orientation process with my cohort. This was possible due to the low number of cases in the state and proximity of the site from my home. I started by researching my project topic through reading proposals, and having discussions with my supervisor and other team members.

I engaged with community members during field visits, maintaining all precautionary measures, such as wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing. For the first six months, these office engagements, discussions and field exposures were all part of the Fellowship, until the surge of COVID-19 cases during the second wave led to a more remote set-up.

My AIF Fellowship followed a hybrid version which used both virtual and on-site engagement in the project.

What was your most rewarding professional experience?

The efforts that I put in to sustain my approach of creative expression were received very well by the seniors at my host organization. On many occasions, while working with people there, I observed the challenges they faced in documentation and designing content. I used my passion for designing to support co-workers with design skills, allowing them to creatively express themselves.

I even hosted and facilitated a session on “Introduction to Designing” for 18 senior leaders and professionals at Srijan Foundation. I used creative designs to invite them for the session, and then asked them to share their best designs as well. Moreover, I conducted several engaging activities to highlight the significance of design in social development work. I introduced ‘Canva’ to them and demonstrated how to build exciting designs and answered their queries. I enjoyed helping others learn a new skill, which made me feel happy and excited.

This was a transformative year of my life because....

It allowed me a chance to closely observe the nuances of social development projects.

The Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to...

Grow as an organisational leader.

“The most powerful thing that the AIF Clinton Fellowship did for me was provide me with a platform to lead various strategic initiatives at my Host Organization.”
SHIVRANJANI GANDHI

Livelihoods

Research

Shivranjani is sensitive, empathetic, curious, and anticipating yet, trying to live in the moment. She is passionate about causes from life situations that have impacted her personally while she is holding space for others and learning how to best support them in their life journeys.

Rehabilitation and reformation for prison inmates

My journey with the AIF Fellowship has truly been more important than the destination. At the beginning, I was nervous. Just the way I am with most things! But this time I learned how to reflect, adapt and understand my experiences before moving forward. I embraced the opportunity to go to Dehradun and conduct a needs assessment for a homeless shelter with my team whom I met for the first time during the trip itself. I learned to take it one day at a time. I was grateful when I got the opportunity to interact with varied stakeholders in a prison facility when the first wave of the pandemic settled down.

During the second leg of the Fellowship, I saw my challenge of working from home as an opportunity by expanding my project to an international scale and started reaching out to interesting stakeholders worldwide.

Further, I designed a tool to measure the impact of programs conducted to prevent gender-based violence. These experiences truly tested my resilience and made me believe that we have the power to choose what has control over us and that we can adapt to any situation.

Partnership Story

At the AIF Fellowship, I was deployed to work on the rehabilitation and reformation project created in conjunction with the India Vision Foundation. For the first time, I was able to visit the prison in Bhondsi, Gurgaon, where we conducted workshops on preventing gender-based violence on topics such as Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO), sexual consent, domestic violence, dowry, and power dynamics. This was an immensely enriching and insightful experience for me.

Collated a database with over 100+ organizations working in criminal justice reform and gender

Created a M&E toolkit with over 8 case studies and 80 survey questions on domestic violence

Led 2 workshops on domestic violence, power, and privilege independently in Bhondsi Prison, Gurgaon, India

Created tools for a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy for Second Chance Fellowship.

20 case studies covering varied COVID relief initiatives such as direct cash transfers, vaccination campaigns.

8 informational interviews with potential partners and 2 content sharing partnerships successfully managed.
How did the pandemic shape your experience?

During the Fellowship, my project was tweaked several times. In fact, at times, I feel, my project became as unprecedented as the pandemic itself. Initially, I was expected to design and conduct an extensive monitoring and evaluation strategy for diverse projects, something I was very enthusiastic about. However, given the circumstances, I was unable to visit the prisons. Instead, I developed a toolkit for “Project Unlearn”, which works towards preventing gender-based violence. The cherry on the top was the field experience I gained while working on a reformation project in Bhondsi prison before the second COVID-19 wave. I was able to fulfill my goals efficiently and feel content about having made a meaningful contribution to my host organization.

What was your most rewarding professional experience?

One professional achievement I am most proud of will undoubtedly be my journey and travel to the Khandwa district in Madhya Pradesh during the Pagdandi Yatra. I was initially nervous to travel after the long and never-ending lockdown, but was fortunate to become a part of an amazing group of individuals and learn from their experiences. I was able to push myself mentally and physically, and contributed to tasks I did not imagine being able to carry out earlier. The tough tasks became not only attainable but also fun and collaborative. We received the opportunity to travel in a makeshift tractor trolley and had several thought-provoking and eye-opening discussions with the members of Korku Tribe in Satpura Forest. We visited several villages and listened to community issues. The case studies and focus group discussions gave us a taste of local realities. The problems at the grassroots level became blatant and apparent through this perspective. I learned immensely about resilience, teamwork, cooperation and community through my interactions with my team members and community.
It is a pleasure to be a part of the AIF Fellowship programme. Despite the pandemic period with the support of the AIF Fellowship, we could achieve some tangible achievements both in the community and within the organization. Vision mapping by rural adolescents facilitated by the AIF Fellow, Anushri, and incorporating those findings in MGNREGS action plan or through Livelihood Mission was really a useful experience. Moreover, village volunteers and field staff hosting meetings on Zoom and Google Meet or using Canva for reporting and preparing case studies is extremely gratifying. We are really thankful to the entire AIF Fellowship Team as well as Anushri. This partnership is extremely useful for grassroots civil society organisations (CSOs) like Seba Jagat.

Rosnara Mohanty
Seba Jagat
ANUSHRI SAXENA
Public Health

Strategic Innovation and Initiatives
Young Engagement and Mentoring

Anushri is a young professional who was looking for a platform to explore her true potential and the AIF Clinton Fellowship came to her at the right time. It helped her break out of her comfort zone to earn the most memorable experience of serving on the ground during a global pandemic.

Journey

‘I challenged myself to serve on ground during a pandemic’

My Fellowship story is incomplete without mention of my AIF mentors, the alumni, my host organization and various resources like access to a counsellor and International SOS, provided to us as Fellows. When the Fellowship kick-started in November, I was thoroughly inspired by the professionalism and support extended to us by the CFP (now BIF) team in helping us grow professionally and facilitating our travel arrangements. As it was my first visit to Odisha, and my host organization, Seba Jagat, was located in a remote area in Kalahandi, around 400 km away from Bhubaneshwar, my Host Supervisor offered to come pick me up in a cab. As I met her in person for the first time, and started talking, I realized that I shared many similarities with her. She and her husband, the Director of my HO, were very warm and welcoming. Early on, I got to visit different locations in Kalahandi and attended Block Level meetings spearheaded by my HO. This proved to be a formative time for me as I built rapport with my colleagues and learned about their work in the social sector over the years. During transit, I got to visit different indigenous communities and facilitate community needs assessment with them.

At the end, I feel like a transformed person who is more embedded in the social sector with better knowledge about how projects translate at the ground level. The Clinton Fellowship has impacted my career in many ways.

Partnership Story

Within a month of joining my host organization in person, I witnessed and contributed towards a small impact in the lives of indigenous people from a remote village of Dedhousi. We learned that the people there had neither toilets nor tap water, and inadequate electricity. However, we came to know that their biggest concern was having a rice mill; otherwise the women would spend five hours every morning separating rice from husk by pounding it with a heavy pestle. We raised this issue to the head of the block administration (the Block Development Officer) and they are currently in the process of approving the rice mill, and handing it over to selected self-help groups for management.

I undertook workshops on reproductive and menstrual health with women and adolescent girls from the community, by showing them a 20-minute video in Odia language by Menstrupedia, followed by a discussion. I conceptualized community needs assessment in a remote village using participatory methods as well as ideation and brainstorming as suggested by my AIF alumni mentor.

FACILITATED PARTICIPATORY METHODS WITH 112 COMMUNITY MEMBERS
HELD WORKSHOPS ON REPRODUCTIVE AND MENSTRUAL HEALTH WITH 77 ADOLESCENT GIRLS.
CAPACITY BUILDING OF 25 HOST ORGANIZATION STAFF MEMBERS
12 HOME VISITS WITH FRONTLINE WORKERS AND SEBA JAGAT VOLUNTEERS
6 VIDEOS ON PROJECT ACTIVITIES
“The most powerful thing that the AIF Clinton Fellowship did for me was to offer me an opportunity to serve the indigenous communities by working on the ground during the pandemic.”

This was a transformative year of my life because....

It gave me many firsts: first time living on my own, away from family; first visit to Odisha and learning the Odia language; first time in a remote area, first interaction with indigenous people of India.

The Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to...

work with a grassroots organisation, become a part of the AIF Fellowship community and get relevant work experience in the development sector.

How did the pandemic shape your experience?

The COVID-19 lockdown and risk of infection in inter-state travel, delayed my visit to my host organization by two months. Initially, I worked on my project proposal virtually. After landing in Odisha in January of 2021, I regularly did field visits. As the second wave of the pandemic hit in April 2021, the field work was put on indefinite hold. I chose to stay at my host site, worked on proposals and networked with professionals to seek partnerships on behalf of my host organization to carry out relief and rehabilitation work. I also lent a hand to my colleagues in preparing dry ration kits for about 500 people from the particularly vulnerable tribal groups. I am fortunate to have gotten a chance to work on the COVID-19 relief and rehabilitation work.

What was your most rewarding professional experience?

The AIF Fellowship programme ensures our professional development from the start. I see a lot of change in myself in these 8 months. I learned to network with people, ask questions, speak in public forums, work on Microsoft Excel and Canva, quantify and present my work as well as strategize my career development, thanks to the monthly reports we submit to the AIF Fellowship team. I also got to visit AIF’s Digital Equalizer (DE) site in Ganjam, Odisha, which gave me first-hand insight about project management and implementation in the domain of education.

At my host organization, I got a platform to share, develop and initiate my ideas. One professional achievement that I am proud of is the ability to prepare project proposals, case studies and video documentation. I am sure these skills will help me build partnerships between organisations and communities in the future to bring about social change.
‘Got a panoramic view of complexities in health sector’

Tonmoy TALUKDAR
Public Health

‘Got a panoramic view of complexities in health sector’

Journey

Right since my childhood, I had always been passionate about the health sector. A part of my project involved working with Tuberculosis patients. While undergoing treatment for TB, one’s nutrition intake must be high for the body to cope with the intense treatment and keep up with strong medications. During the AIF Fellowship, I came to understand the complexities of working in the health sector. For instance, while I tried my best to convince a patient to consume nutritious food, unfortunately, he could not afford to do the same. This made me aware of the interconnectedness of health with livelihoods, along with other sectors in the realm of development.

I was also part of the multiple ration distribution drives to provide temporary nutrition relief to the needy and managing these drives was equivalent to a capstone project of a management degree.

Being placed in a different state that is so culturally different from my home state brought its own set of challenges. At first, I found it extremely difficult to adjust to the culture. There were many breakdown moments for me where I wanted to give up. However, pulling through those moments has allowed me to become a better version of myself. The AIF Fellowship has been the biggest blessing that I could have asked as a 23-year-old. It has empowered me to aim better, do better and be better.

Partnership Story

My programme – ‘eArth Swasthya’, focused on increasing identification of TB cases in five Panchayats in Kishanganj district of Bihar and improving the testing rates for same in partnership with the local health administration. I was involved in strategizing, coordinating and implementing the health programs on Tuberculosis and COVID-19. I also oversaw content creation, designing and facilitating capacity building sessions on English language, digital literacy and other health topics for the local team.
How did the pandemic shape your experience?

My Fellowship experience in the context of the pandemic was challenging and yet filled with many learnings. The journey started on a virtual note. My technical skills and communication skills — both written and spoken — were tested to the core. It made me realize the skills which needed further improvement. Once I came on ground, things were different; I felt more comfortable. Experiencing such a hybrid model allowed me to understand the positives and negatives of both the virtual mode and working from the ground. Due to the onset of pandemic, my project remained dynamic as we always had to be on our toes to support the local communities in their fight against COVID. Serving communities during a pandemic has been a highly fulfilling experience.

What was your most rewarding professional experience?

On World Tuberculosis Day, my host organization conducted an awareness session on TB for the students of class VIII and IX of a local government middle school in Churli, Bihar. I, along with a colleague of mine, ideated and designed the entire structure of the session. Keeping in mind a child’s perspective and designing the session’s structure was challenging, but it was equally fun. More than 90 students attended the session. Facilitating the session in a different cultural context was the best part of the day. I explained the disease of TB, its symptoms, treatment, prevention methods etc. I also got the chance to show the kids what a microscope and a sputum box looked like. As soon as I showed them a picture of a microscope, the glow in the kids’ eyes was worth noticing. The icing on the cake was when the students got a 100% score in a small test on ‘TB’s knowledge’ that we conducted after our training session.

This was a transformative year of my life because....

The challenges brought upon during the Fellowship duration helped me grow personally and professionally, making me a more self-aware, empathetic, confident and a mature person.

The Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to...

understand the complexities of development work.

“The most powerful thing that the AIF Clinton Fellowship did for me was to give me exposure to some of the most pressing challenges in the development sector; questions that I would like to explore, and work towards finding their answers and implementing on the ground.”

Q & A
It has been an absolute delight working with Mehar and the AIF team. Mehar has infused a breath of fresh energy to our team and has exceeded all expectations with the value she has added to the project. She stands out with her willingness to learn new things, her commitment to excellence, and her drive to go the extra mile. Throughout this difficult year of COVID-19, the entire AIF team has been extremely cooperative, and has managed to be so without being intrusive. Our deep gratitude to Chandni, Amanpreet and the entire AIF team for their patience and support. We look forward to hosting more Fellows in the years to come.

Debadideb Datta
Sustainable Communities India Pvt Ltd
MEHAR JAUHAR
Climate Sustainability, Innovation & Technology

With a resilient motivation for service and a never-ending faith in humanity, Mehar hopes to endlessly continue the pursuit of compassion and perseverance. Stronger than before, with a deeper drive to be better as she grows, Mehar promises to do more than her part in enabling the unconditional truth of the equality of being, the harmony of nature and the kindness of peace.

Journey

I started this journey with immense excitement and slight apprehension, and I can confidently say that this has been an experience like none other. My Fellowship project gave me an opportunity to explore the nuances of the climate sustainability sector keeping in mind the barriers faced and opportunities that may be leveraged by each stakeholder in the ecosystem. It has given me a comprehensive understanding of the energy efficiency landscape in the South Asian and South-East Asian countries which further allowed me to enable my host organization in creating pathways for implementation and replication of innovative business models for industrial energy efficiency in the region.

This journey has been an enjoyable, insightful and memorable ride especially due to the constant support, encouragement and mentorship that I received at every step from my host organization, wherein though working virtually I was always made to feel like a vital cog of the host family. Also, the unconditional support of the AIF Team and my Fellowship cohort has been my pillar of reliance throughout.

Today, I feel stronger than I was before, with a deeper motivation for service and never-ending faith in humanity. I am eager and keen to take forward the learning from this Fellowship and further explore the field of sustainable development and climate resilience especially in the context of post-conflict and recovering societies within the arena of peacebuilding.

Partnership Story

My Fellowship project aimed to ensure accelerated adoption of energy-efficient technologies through innovative business models in India as well as South and South-East Asian countries. I contributed by conducting a thorough landscape opportunities assessment of the industrial energy ecosystem within the region through primary stakeholder conferences in Bangladesh and Indonesia as well as comprehensive secondary research. I also created the action framework for adoption of decentralized renewable energy to empower rural livelihoods and combat the issue of energy poverty while also implementing a program that ensures green livelihood opportunities for the youth and endeavours to enable industries in adopting sustainable manufacturing practices.

Promoting energy efficient business models in industry
How did the pandemic shape your experience?

My Fellowship experience was shaped in a challenging yet memorable way, given the context of the pandemic. The AIF Fellowship experience for me was maintaining a sweet balance between “resilience” and “reliance”. The resilience to face every day head-on, acknowledging that navigating every barrier on the way is an experience I will thoroughly learn from. While doing so, remembering that the burden of “resilience” is not my own and there is always “reliance” that I can find comfort in — reliance on my cohort, the wonderful team at AIF and especially my host organization which truly became my family.

What was your most rewarding professional experience?

The professional achievement that I am the proudest of is successfully moderating and organising stakeholder conferences in Bangladesh and Indonesia. The events hosted a veritable set of stakeholders representing the domains of industry, government, finance, the energy sector, technology vendors, international organisations and relevant institutions implementing energy efficiency within the region. The conferences also garnered valuable insights and learning about the potential for industrial energy efficiency in the countries, which in turn also led to the launch of the “Industrial Energy Efficiency Opportunities Assessment in Asia” at the international webinar organised by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL). The event witnessed participation from experienced stakeholders and experts representing the energy ecosystem in the South and South-East Asian region including the countries of Bangladesh, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand.

This was a transformative year of my life because….

The unconditional support and mentorship I found at my AIF Host organization and the community therein, which though geographically sparse given the pandemic ensured my belief in my abilities to effect change and serve as a vital cog as part of their family.

The Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to…

Understand the critical nuances within the space of climate sustainability through the combined all-encompassing lenses of society, economics and environment.

“The most powerful thing that the AIF Clinton Fellowship did for me was acknowledge that one’s resilience is endless when it leverages the power of reliance.”

Q & A

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‘Discussing ‘gender’ in a totally different culture’

Trishla is a curious, quirky feminist who loves to read, write and dance. The Fellowship has made her delve even deeper into the complexities and intersectionality of gender and societal norms affecting communities. Patience and courage to keep asking difficult questions has been a part of her professional and personal growth during the course of this journey.

Journey

I find myself quite fortunate to have found my area of passion in life as well as to be working in it. The development sector is not without its own frustrations; the dichotomy between institutional policy and grassroot impact being the most stark issue for me. Having worked with large-scale organizations in the sector, while extremely enlightening, had left me feeling a bit dissatisfied. I was craving to work with communities and creating a tangible impact. The AIF Fellowship seemed to be the ideal answer to my dilemma. It was a perfect blend of having the resource and organizational capacity for long-term impact through the Fellowship projects as well as the opportunity for effective community interaction through the amazing host organizations.

Even with the ongoing pandemic, both the different learning sessions from AIF as well as my Fellowship project with my host organization adapted to the virtual environment very effectively. I benefited immensely from both the AIF Orientation and Midpoint sessions, imbibing learnings from the imminent guest speakers of the sector, from the brilliant AIF Fellowship Team as well as, of course, from my cohort.

My experience with CTA has been rather fulfilling. While I started virtually, I was lucky enough to migrate to my host site mid-way through the Fellowship. Having an individual project was a huge responsibility and while nerve racking at times, it has served to teach me so many invaluable lessons about both myself as well as my work. My journey has been made memorable because of the extremely interesting nature of my work, the warmth and love from my host organization as well as the constant support and guidance from the AIF Fellowship Team.

Partnership Story

I was placed at the Women’s Empowerment Desk (WED) at CTA. My project had different aspects of gender I was working on, which was both an incredible learning experience and a chance to fully utilize my skills and capacities in this field. I conducted a Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) research study with 1500 community members across Tibetan settlements in India. I also worked on the accountability and integration aspects of Gender Mainstreaming (GM) after discerning these to be the significant causes for the gap between theory and implementation of GM Framework within the organization. I also worked on the accountability and integration aspects of Gender Mainstreaming (GM) after discerning these to be the significant causes for the gap between theory and implementation of GM Framework within the organization.

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How did the pandemic shape your experience?

The pandemic has been instrumental in shaping my Fellowship journey. I have had a hybrid Fellowship experience starting virtually and then moving to my project site midway. Both experiences have been unique in their challenges and learnings alike.

Working virtually, I was really surprised and amazed at both AIF’s and CTA’s adaptability and resilience. While network issues and forming connections proved to be a challenge at times, CTA made commendable efforts like sending a welcome package for me at home.

Coming to Dharamshala was amazing in terms of meeting my colleagues and working directly with the community. A challenge was having to play catch up with the work culture in the middle of my Fellowship. Nevertheless, I was again welcomed very warmly and soon felt a part of the community. My productivity and engagement with the project definitely received a positive boost being physically present in my place of work.

What was your most rewarding professional experience?

Most of my professional experiences have involved team work with established lines of supervision. This Fellowship gave me the wonderful learning opportunity to be a supervisor. One of my project deliverables was to conduct a research study on the status of SGBV within the Tibetan community in India. To this end, we recruited 20 field officers to carry out the survey in different Tibetan settlements across India. It was an amazing experience to orient these officers to my survey questions so as to encourage their ownership over the questions to conduct surveys effectively. I also had to learn the art of leading while being approachable for a successful research outcome. I am very proud of my ability to balance between being firm to get the job done as well as being compassionate enough to understand and troubleshoot issues. It was not an easy journey, especially with the distance and the pandemic wreaking chaos over our plans. However, we were all resilient and passionate about our cause, determined to attain the goal we had set. Personally, I truly realized the importance of patience, active listening and constructive criticism while being in a supervisory capacity. It has been a very enlightening journey.

Q & A

This was a transformative year of my life because....

It helped me grow holistically, both at a personal as well as professional level.

The Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to...

Immerse myself in a different culture and community while working on the most universal issue of gender.

"The most powerful thing that the AIF Clinton Fellowship did for me was that it made me believe in my potential."
Project supervisors acknowledgment

Kaliat Ammu Sanyal
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Special Thanks

On behalf of the AIF Clinton Fellowship team, we would like to thank the following people for their support to major events during the year. Their engagements and insights enriched the Fellowship program and proved to be monumental in driving Fellows towards greater heights of personal and professional growth.

Lata Krishnan
Co-Founder and Co-Chair of AIF’s Board of Directors

Ajay Shah
Co-Chair, AIF Clinton Fellowship Program

Paul Glick
Executive Director, Rural India Supporting Trust (RIST)

Prachee Sinha
Program Manager-RIST

Beena Pallical
General Secretary-Economical and Educational rights wing. National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)

Manish Joshi
Education Team (TVET), UNESCO, New Delhi

Dr. Niranjani Saggurti
Director, Population Council India Office

Dr. Urvashi Sahni
Founder and CEO- SHEF (Study Hall Education Foundation)

Our Supporters

Rural India Supporting Trust

The Rural India Supporting Trust (RIST) was established in 2007 as a family-based grant making organization. RIST’s goal is to assist in alleviating poverty and improving the quality of life for communities in India. RIST partners with value aligned, publicly supported organizations to achieve its goal. Since 2017, RIST and the AIF Clinton Fellowship program have partnered to enhance capacity and the impact of India’s social sector through the placement of knowledgeable Fellows who can impart specialized skills, expertise, and best practices to Indian social service sector organizations. From 2017 - 2019 the RIST supported AIF Clinton Fellowship has dispatched ten Fellows to Uttarakhand and other under-served regions of India on an annual basis. Due to the U.S.- India cross-cultural nature of this project, RIST and AIF are assisting in creating a cohesive ecosystem of understanding between these two countries. The Fellows who participate are on their way to becoming the global leaders of tomorrow. In order to create a higher level of program impact, an “eleventh month of service” was added to the existing 10-month program model. This is an opportunity for recently returned Fellows to use this extended program time to strengthen the Alumni network, enhance the impact of India’s social sector through the placement of knowledgeable Fellows who can impart specialized skills, expertise, and best practices to Indian social service sector organizations. From 2017 - 2019 the RIST supported AIF Clinton Fellowship has dispatched ten Fellows to Uttarakhand and other under-served regions of India on an annual basis. Due to the U.S.- India cross-cultural nature of this project, RIST and AIF are assisting in creating a cohesive ecosystem of understanding between these two countries. The Fellows who participate are on their way to becoming the global leaders of tomorrow. In order to create a higher level of program impact, an “eleventh month of service” was added to the existing 10-month program model. This is an opportunity for recently returned Fellows to use this extended program time to strengthen the Alumni network, enhance the impact of the Fellowship program, create innovative program practices, help train the incoming cohort, and engage the broader public. In the second phase of the RIST- AIF Fellowship partnership, RIST committed to support eight Fellows each year from 2019 - 2022. During the pandemic, RIST generously agreed to support an all-Indian cohort of Fellows during the 2020-21 program year and assisted the AIF Clinton Fellowship in establishing critical infrastructure needed to run a successful hybrid program. RIST’s contributions have enabled the AIF Fellowship in increasing accessibility for persons with disabilities and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in all program practices.

Lata Krishnan and Ajay Shah

We are grateful to Lata Krishnan and Ajay Shah for providing long-term support of the AIF-Fellowship program. On March 14th, 2021, they announced the largest gift to AIF, a $5 million gift to the Fellowship program. Building on the legacy created over 20 years, the gift carries a bold vision for the future. Lata Krishnan’s and Ajay Shah’s historic gift ushers the Fellowship program into a decade of action, focusing on accelerating impact and supercharging ideas to solutions. Under the avatar of the AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship, the next phase of the program will invest in a cross-generational force of change makers building an equitable and sustainable world. The new name embodies this promise: the Banyan tree is a symbol of strength, resilience, and interconnectedness. It’s a powerful metaphor for mobilizing a collective force towards sustainable impact. Lata Krishnan is the Co-Founder and former President of AIF, and serves as Co-Chair of AIF’s Board of Directors. Ajay Shah serves as Co-Chair of the AIF Fellowship program. Both are award-winning technology entrepreneurs, start-up investors, and engaged philanthropists, passionate about AIF’s mission. We are immensely grateful to Lata Krishnan, Ajay Shah, and the Krishnan Shah Family Foundation, for their leadership and vision.