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 16.51 million lives across 36 States and Union Territories of India. Learn more at www.aif-india.org

CONTRIBUTORS

Chandni Wadhwani- Program Head, The Banyan Impact Fellowship
Dr. Bjoern Technau- Program Manager, The Banyan Impact Fellowship
Ankit Pareek- Program Officer, The Banyan Impact Fellowship
Ankita Bisht- Program Associate, The Banyan Impact Fellowship
Shreya Ralli- Director, Communications
Tina Kapoor- Senior Manager, Communications
Priyanka Bhoj- Officer, Communications
AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship for Service in India and the United States
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AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship for Service in India and the United States
The American India Foundation’s Banyan Impact Fellowship is a service leadership program for social change makers from India and the U.S. Our Fellows are passionate professionals who serve at civil society organizations across both countries, working together and building bridges to create positive impacts on the most pressing issues of our times.

The Fellowship looks back at an exciting history of 22 years, and today we are elated to celebrate the graduation of its latest cohort, the class of 2022-2023. This class is a special one in many regards: It is the first one to be fully back in person after more than two years of largely virtual engagements due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also the first cohort that includes service in the United States, thereby adding to the program’s classical model of service in India and amplifying its binational setup and focus on bridge building and intercultural exchange.

As one of AIF’s very first programs, the Fellowship was initiated in 2001 as a disaster response following the tragic earthquake in Gujarat. Since then, the program has expanded considerably, and today, our Fellows work in various thematic areas that include projects focused on environment protection, gender and inclusion, public health, education, cultural heritage, sports, and many more. The impact of their work goes way beyond their 10 months of service, and Fellows have remained close to each other, to AIF, and to the communities they served.

We always enjoy interacting with our Fellows and learning from them when meeting them on the ground. This year, we had the pleasure of meeting five from the current class during our Mission Trip in Hyderabad where they presented key highlights and learnings from their Fellowship projects in the areas of livelihoods, youth empowerment, mental health, health tech, and waste management. It was truly fascinating to learn about their amazing projects first hand and to engage in a live discussion with the Fellows and the audience.

We are excited about the continuous development of the Fellowship Program and its expanding network of friends and supporters. Thanks to our partnership with Atlas Corps, we have launched a new leg of the Fellowship Program for Service in the United States, and we are excited to present the first five Fellows on this new US track in this Yearbook. Also for the first time in 2022-2023, we included a government partnership for Fellow placements in India, and two of our Fellows have served with the Jharkhand State Livelihoods Promotion Society (JSLPS). We have also added a Senior Fellow Track consisting of 4 seasoned professionals in India’s development sector who provided additional guidance to our Fellows and the program team, and they curated sessions on topics such as Social Entrepreneurship, Fundraising, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), M&E and DEI, Proposal Writing, as well as Post-Fellowship Opportunities.

Looking back at this great success story, we are beyond excited to celebrate the 2022-2023 cohort and congratulate our Fellows on their amazing accomplishments during their service. We are very proud of this energetic group of 22 young leaders who have served at different host organizations across India and the U.S. The following pages of this Yearbook provide an insight into their rich experiences while working in various projects on the ground, ranging from upcycling waste materials in Jaipur, Rajasthan over ultimate frisbee programs for boys and girls in Chennai, Tamil Nadu to organic farming in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, and global engagement programs at Northwestern University in Chicago.
We are delighted to share our Fellows’ journey in this Yearbook, and we are excited to continue this journey together with them as part of our alumni network. Congratulations, Class of 2022-2023, and all the very best for your future.

Thank you!

Nishant Pandey
Chief Executive Officer
New York

Mathew Joseph
Country Director
New Delhi
Being involved with the Fellowship program since its inception 22 years ago has been an exciting experience and inspiring journey for us. We are delighted to celebrate the graduation of the 2022-2023 class, and we want to congratulate each and every Fellow for their service in India and the U.S. and the impact they have created while collaborating with each other and their host organizations.

After a 2-year hiatus due to the pandemic, this year’s cohort was finally able to include American Fellows traveling to India again, emphasizing the immense importance of the binational exchange component of the program. Thanks to the newly added U.S. track of the Fellowship Program, our Fellows now serve communities in both countries, India and the U.S., and the current batch of 22 Fellows has contributed their expertise to a total of 20 host organizations - 16 in India and 4 in the United States. We believe that their service in various thematic areas and locations is reflective of the interconnectedness of the social development sector as well as the importance of intercultural exchange and international collaboration to achieve positive change.

The Fellowship Program has evolved to tackle the challenges of the times, including climate change. Today, our Fellows are engaged in new focus areas including environment protection, conservation, waste management, and health education, always keeping abreast of new developments and the most pressing challenges of our time, such as those formulated in the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals of the Agenda 2030.

We thoroughly enjoy meeting with Fellows, current and former, and this year we have had the pleasure to interact with many of them personally, both in India and the U.S. Hearing their stories is truly inspiring, and thus we take immense pleasure in further reading about their journeys in this Yearbook. Their reports speak of the meaningful contributions to U.S.-India citizen diplomacy and the next generation of international leaders working towards more justice, inclusivity, and a healthy future. Congratulations to the class of 2022-2023 for their incredible accomplishments during their service!

We want to thank everyone involved in this program: our funding partners at the Rural India Supporting Trust for their generous support and contribution to fostering the next generation of social entrepreneurs; to the host organizations for doing tremendous work on the ground and for providing opportunities to our Fellows through their hands-on involvement in the field; to our alumni, partners, and friends for promoting the program and spreading its vision; and of course, to our Fellows for their impressive and transformative work, for establishing relationships within
their host communities and with their co-Fellows. Your passion and commitment is highly appreciated, and we want to thank and congratulate you and wish you all the best for the future. We are excited to stay in touch with you on the path ahead and meet again with you as part of the AIF Family.

Thank you!

Lata Krishnan  
Co-Chair,  
AIF Board of Directors

Ajay Shah  
Co-Chair,  
AIF Fellowship Program
Dear Class of 2022-23,

The last nine months have been an incredible experience. It's hard to believe that what began in October 2022 has already come to an end. It seems as if it was just yesterday when we met the first in-person class of The Banyan Impact Fellowship post-pandemic. What began as a virtual Orientation attended by Fellows from different countries gradually evolved into in-person engagements. Meeting all the Fellows in New Delhi gave us a renewed sense of optimism and confidence about what this class can achieve. We take great delight in selecting a diverse and enthusiastic group of Fellows like you who have demonstrated exceptional dedication and strength during their Fellowship journey. Your perseverance, collaboration, excitement, and unity are commendable. The enthusiastic participation of this cohort has presented us with several possibilities to learn from you. You have played a critical role in fostering trust by creating a safe space for your peers and the Fellowship staff. Regardless of the hardships you encountered, you have proven to be a strong fighter. We must recognize that this cohort has surmounted hurdles while working together to create significant changes and preserve the program’s unique history. Fellows, you have left a legacy of solidarity, strong friendships, and optimism in the face of adversity. This legacy as a cohort will serve as an inspiration for future cohorts. Your considerable contribution to your host organization, key beneficiaries, and the cohort at large has had a beneficial influence on the development sector. We appreciate your tireless efforts to help and improve your local communities, as well as to promote our joint purpose of social justice.

As you join the alumni movement and move into an exciting phase of your lives, we hope you will continue to inspire future leaders who will create a lasting effect by becoming extraordinary heroes of our ecosystem. We hope that you will also use the learnings obtained from this Fellowship to advance your career and shape your future adventures. You have made an indelible mark on the Fellowship ecosystem, and we are appreciative of your efforts. Congratulations, Class of 2022-23!

-Banyan Impact Fellowship Team
**HISTORY OF THE FELLOWSHIP**

Since its inception in 2001, the American India Foundation (AIF) has been shaping 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.

What started in 2001 as the AIF Service Corps for young Americans to work in India on disaster relief and long-term rehabilitation grew in its impact and footprint. In 2009, the program was renamed the AIF William J. Clinton Fellowship for Service in India in recognition of the former President’s role in creating AIF. As the program grew, it also took another large step in 2011 to include cohorts from both the U.S. and India working in tandem to create a binational force for good. The tenets that helped form AIF, the deep ties between these nations, are what underpin the fellowship: U.S.-India civic diplomacy to create a “living bridge” and a lasting partnership for positive change.

Over the decades, this program has evolved into an immersive bi-national volunteer service program with immense strategic importance in the U.S.-India corridor. By facilitating exchange and collaboration between young professionals from India and the U.S., the program aims to shape the next generation of leaders committed to positive and sustainable change and create a lasting U.S.-India relationship by broadening the existing constituency of future leaders, civil society, and other stakeholders.

In March 2021, AIF seized the moment to rebrand the program as ‘The Banyan Impact Fellowship’ to reflect the organizational mission, vision, and values moving into the third decade of action. Over the previous decade, the world has changed dramatically, and the importance of strong U.S.-India civil ties has grown ever more important. Additionally, the world is facing global challenges at an unprecedented level that require further investment in this work.

With the largest gift in AIF’s history to help sustain this program, the Fellowship program is now building upon its glorious past and leading for the decade to come as a true catalyst for change.

The program’s new identity captures the essence of the virtues we stand for in a simple yet compelling way. The Banyan Tree is a symbol of strength, resilience, and interconnectedness. We believe that it serves as a powerful metaphor for mobilizing a collective, cross-generational force toward sustainable impact. The process of the Banyan Tree spreading its roots, which over the course of time become trees of their own, is a strong representation of how we want to see this program expand. Each step, each effort, and each individual become agents of positive change, coming together as an ecosystem to support and amplify each other’s impact.

Beginning in July 2022, the Fellowship program has started sending social change professionals from India to work across organizations in the United States for capacity building and leadership development, continuing the program’s aim of fostering long-term relationships between India and the United States. As a pilot, we sent five Indian Fellows to the United States last year.

To date, AIF has selected, trained, and supported 539 Fellows and 238 partner organizations across 25 Indian states to scale impact, catalyze change, and build the next generation of socially-minded changemakers. As the AIF Fellowship Program, formerly known as the William J. Clinton Fellowship, enters its third decade under a new avatar, ‘The Banyan Impact Fellowship’, we are proud to expand on the growth of the existing version of the program and add to it a new segment.

What was birthed in the form of the Banyan Impact Fellowship has now considerably built on its past legacy and evolved into a full-fledged binational program.
We envision the upcoming decade as one of amplified impact, with our passionate fellows taking challenges head-on and striving collectively towards creating a socially just and sustainable world in tune with the current realities that we are faced with. As we continue to expand the scope of our fellowship program to accelerate impact, we invite you to follow this journey into our third decade and witness our life-affirming work. Learn more about our fellowship program at https://aif.org/fellowship/
INDIA SERVICE TRACK & SENIOR FELLOWS TRACK

1. Ashley Benedict
   Lok Kala Sagar Sansthan
   Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

2. Divya
   SAFA
   Hyderabad, Telangana

3. Dnyaneshwar Surwase
   Seba Jagat
   Katalandu, Odisha

4. Erin Nicole Burneson
   Ecowrap
   Jaipur, Rajasthan

5. Hamsini Balaji
   Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society
   Ranchi, Jharkhand

6. Joshilyn Binkley
   Sub-K IMPACT Solutions
   Hyderabad, Telangana

7. Kannan Kaviya
   Youth4Jobs Foundation
   Hyderabad, Telangana

8. Katie Elizabeth Koppen
   Naz Foundation
   Delhi-NCR

9. Megan McKinley
   Pudiyador
   Chennai, Tamil Nadu

10. Nabhas Raj
    Jagori Rural Charitable Trust
    Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

11. Padma Samhita Vaddapalli
    Satya School Special
    Puducherry

12. Phalguni Joshi
    Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society
    Ranchi, Jharkhand

13. Sanaa Munjal
    Tech Mahindra Foundation
    Delhi-NCR

14. Sidharth Hendre
    Kriti Social Initiatives
    Hyderabad, Telangana

15. Silpaa Gunabalavan
    Forus Health Pvt. Ltd.
    Bengaluru, Karnataka

16. Sivakami Prasanna
    India Health Action Trust
    Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh

17. Urvashi Suraj
    ASRA Samajik Lok Kalyan Samiti
    Dewas, Madhya Pradesh

18. Dilip Surkar (Senior Fellow)
    American India Foundation
    Gurugram, Haryana

19. Mohit Raj (Senior Fellow)
    American India Foundation
    Gurugram, Haryana

20. Prashant Anand (Senior Fellow)
    American India Foundation
    Gurugram, Haryana

21. Satyendra Kumar (Senior Felllow)
    American India Foundation
    Gurugram, Haryana
UNITED STATES SERVICE TRACK

1. Manushi Sharma
   Collaborating for Resilience
   Washington, DC

2. Namrata Sehgal
   Collaborating for Resilience
   Washington, DC

3. Pragati Singh
   Girl Up
   Washington, DC

4. Shivalika Gupta
   International Fertilizer Development Center
   Washington, DC

5. Tabish Bilal
   Northwestern University, Buffett Institute for Global Affairs
   Chicago
YEAR AT A GLANCE

Orientation

Midpoint

Endpoint
AIF CEO, Nishant Pandey meeting with Fellows and the Fellowship team in New Delhi

AIF’s Townhall Event in New York, January 2023

Fellow and the Fellowship Team gained insights from on-ground engagement during a site visit

Fellowship team conducted outreach session at TERI, New Delhi

Fellowship team conducted site visit in Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh

Leadership Symposium conducted in Hyderabad in February 2023

Post Orientation dinner with Fellows in October 2022

Fellowship team conducted outreach session for students of Ashoka University, Sonipat

The Fellowship Team conducted a site visit in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh
AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship for Service in India and the United States
The American India Foundation plays a crucial role in building a bridge between two of the world’s largest democracies. Their Fellowship Program, in particular, has created a space for collaborative learning, mutual growth and professional development. Satya Special School has worked with two AIF Banyan Impact Fellows through this program. We have found that the Fellows bring in a diverse and unique range of skill sets, backgrounds, and experiences, enabling our organization to breathe new life into our projects and remain committed to mitigating social and economic inequities.
On behalf of Asra, we are grateful to AIF for providing a Fellow. This is the first time the organization is working with a Fellow under the BIF program. Whatever gap is there in our dairy development project is being worked on by your Fellow, which will be very helpful for us. Currently, the organization has done an LEDP training program for this project with the support of NABARD in which the support of your Fellow was commendable. The organization hopes that the project will be strengthened with the innovative ideas implemented by your Fellow.
EDUCATION
Ashley is a lifelong learner who is always seeking new places and people to connect with. She strives to find the spaces where authenticity and honesty intersect in our individual and communal lives. Her strength is in her dedication and ability to maintain empathy for anyone she meets.
Before the Fellowship, I had already been working in the development sector for over 4 years in a variety of focus areas. Though I had worked with and for underserved communities in previous jobs, it had always been from the outside. When I came to Jaisalmer to work with LKSS, I was immediately enveloped in the Merasi community and was presented with a unique opportunity to live a marginalized life and the impacts it can have on not only the community but each individual. The daily struggles I witnessed, paired with my own awareness of my privilege in the situation, changed the way I approached my work. It was no longer a question of how can I help them? But rather, it became a question of: How can I help them to help themselves?

In the NGO and development fields, we frequently witness marginalized populations becoming overly reliant on outside intervention and aid. When engaging with these communities, the objective should be sustainability and self-empowerment rather than dependency. Training the teachers on lesson plans and building their repertoire of skills was more important than trying to teach the students on my own. Every day, I would push myself and the teachers to think outside the box and discover new things.

Coming out of the Fellowship, I find myself wanting to expand my understanding of what it means to be truly self-empowered and how this intersects with the development sector. More than anything, I am grateful for the opportunity to work with a community of hardworking, dedicated, and passionate individuals who confront hardship every day and have the bravery and strength to stand strong.

Although I produced an entire math curriculum for Merasi School, I would say the biggest influence my work had on the community was the building of confidence in the teachers. Despite the language limitations between the students and myself, as well as the information gap between the teachers and myself, I was expected to begin teaching as soon as I arrived at school. The first few times I tried this, it ended in disaster. Very early on in my project, I realized that what was most important for the sustainability of my project was to build the confidence of the teachers and train them on each lesson plan so that they could move forward and feel capable enough to teach it on their own.

The difference between then and now is staggering. The teachers are not only confidently leading lesson plans but also putting their own spin on them and infusing their own creativity and knowledge into the lessons. Once I got to the point where I could just sit back and observe the teachers teaching a lesson without them looking to me for support, that’s when I knew I had succeeded.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

grant me the opportunity to try something new in my professional career.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

learn about a unique culture and community I would have otherwise never known about.

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

I learned about the spaces in which I thrive and the spaces in which I survive.
Q&A SECTION

How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

My Fellowship experience taught me a lot about perseverance and endurance. When things went wrong, some days it felt simpler to just give up, but I realized over time that persevering and enduring through the tough days may occasionally pave the way for fantastic ideas and experiences to be shared. On challenging days, I made it a point to take a step back and reflect on what made them so tough and how to face these challenges in the future. This experience also taught me a lot about who I am, where I am in my own journey, and the steps I need to take to transcend to a higher level both professionally and personally. The Fellowship taught me a lot about what my own values are as an individual and a professional, such as communication, independence, and consistency.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

Creating over 500 pages of math curriculum for 3 grade levels is in itself a massive achievement. Usually, a curriculum is built and designed by teams of people over a longer span of time, and I was somehow able to achieve it in only a few months. It was an intense, rigorous workload, but I am extremely proud of how far I have come in terms of curriculum design, graphic design, and incorporating cross-cultural elements into the curriculum for better comprehension. Over the course of my project, I was able to enhance my own creative eye when creating the curriculum’s template and designing the layout for each lesson plan, while also figuring out how to be concise and careful in utilizing space for each page. With each new chapter, I found myself learning from the previous ones and building upon what I had learned.

“It was no longer a question of how can I help them? But rather, it became a question of: How can I help them to help themselves?”
Megan McKinley

Pudiyador

Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Megan believes in an equitable world built on questioning, perspective-shifting, and open-mindedness. She focuses her impact on the intersection of holistic development and intercultural relationships. Through her adaptability, perseverance, and inclusivity, Megan has found power in her confidence and individuality throughout her Banyan Impact Fellowship journey.

- Strategic Innovation and Initiatives
- Community Initiatives
- Young Engagement and Mentoring

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Launched and implemented 5 community partnerships in 3 states: MOU agreements and concept notes.
- Responsible for operations for 300+ beneficiaries.
- Developed M&E Framework and collected baseline data from 200+ participants across 9 sites.
- Developed overall programme operations strategy, including the annual operating calendar and annual budget.
- Implemented development and outreach plan, including 3 grant proposals, a social media strategy, quarterly newsletters, communications templates, and a hiring plan.
MORE THAN A DISC: PLAY + EQUITY = PLAYQUITY

JOURNEY

Ever since meeting an AIF Fellow during my first visit to India in 2014, I have longed to be part of the programme and deepen my understanding of the subcontinent. My education and professional career have taken me around the world, yet something deeper has always called me back to India. As someone who comes from rural midwest America, my experiences in India have challenged me to my core about my unconscious biases, belief systems, and understanding of "how the world works."

The opportunity to become a Banyan Impact Fellow came to me at the perfect fork-in-the-road moment in my life. Practically speaking, I had little understanding of what I was getting myself into, but I knew it was the right decision for me. I came into this experience searching for "more" from life: more from my career, my daily routine, my relationships, and more from myself. I felt stagnant, uninspired, and borderline hopeless from "going through the motions" for the last two years in my work and life in the United States while surviving a global pandemic.

My journey as a Fellow has been more transformational than I could have ever imagined. Each day, I have had the opportunity to dig deeper, listen closely, and gain clarity on what it means to be a social impact leader. Social impact is not a quantitative measure or goal that one reaches, but every small decision, discussion, or opportunity gives us a chance to do better and be a better person than the previous day. Beyond professional development, this Fellowship has restored my faith in humanity and demonstrated the importance of each and every person’s duty to be the change they wish to see in the world.

I am leaving this year with a deeper sense of gratitude for the people, places, and experiences that have shaped me into the person I am today.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

Presently, Playquity is in its pilot-to-growth phase and building momentum with the partner communities where they serve. As one of the founding members of their Programme Operations Team, my work has helped establish standard processes, functions, and best practices for the future. In my role, I have shaped and contributed to day-to-day operations, strategic initiatives, partnerships, and benchmarks for the organization.

Beyond my primary relationships within Pudiyador, I worked with nine partner organizations across six states, where I learned about the development sector at large and how the Playquity model influences communities and beneficiaries in a variety of cultural contexts. I had the opportunity to observe and understand the programme’s impact through the lens of grass-roots beneficiaries and executive-level principals.

As an outsider to the organization, my contribution has served as an unbiased and third-party perspective. By adapting my position depending on the participants present, I had the unique position of being an in-betweener who remained both inside and outside the organization at all times. Due to the programme's finite timeline and emphasis on capacity building and sustainability, I had a position of power that no other individual in my organization possessed.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

push me to think deeper, more critically, and never settle for the status quo. Rarely are things as simple as they appear on the surface, and my experience with AIF challenged me to think globally while acting locally.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

work with and learn from a variety of industry leaders in the development sector and understand the importance of implementing people-first and holistic approaches to any social impact project.

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

I am starting to feel more like myself than I did when I first arrived. I have gained independence, clarity, confidence, and lifelong connections.
How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

At the risk of sounding cliché, this year has been life-changing on personal, professional, and spiritual levels. The experience has reminded me of how big and diverse the world is and, simultaneously, how small and serendipitous it can be.

I have felt more present, engaged, and joyful than when I arrived. I have gained lifelong friendships, relationships, and a vast professional network. My Fellowship has given me the vocabulary and the confidence to apply my real-world leadership experience to any arena I find myself in. I have worked with, learned from, and debated with a diverse set of individuals who have shaped my belief system.

This year has reminded me of the power of an individual with a dream, that the key to success is passion and perseverance, and that a labour of love is more valuable than a labour of recognition.

“...this Fellowship has restored my faith in humanity and demonstrated the importance of each and every person’s duty to be the change they wish to see in the world.”

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

My Fellowship journey has challenged me to take ownership and drive initiatives within an agile environment. By combining my project management skills and incorporating an intercultural approach, I have created sustainable structures for an early-stage social impact organization. Every day I have felt like I have contributed my skills, uncovered solutions, and had the opportunity to reflect on my legacy and future goals as a social impact leader.

My proudest professional achievement, however, is the mentorship and capacity-building I have provided for my organization and colleagues. My relationship with Playquity’s first Programme Operations Associate, Jyoti, has been the hallmark of my Fellowship year. Together, we co-created and managed Playquity’s operations, evaluations, and administration. Observing and contributing to Jyoti’s growth as a leader has been both a professional achievement and a personal milestone in my life. She and I had the opportunity to conduct site visits together to all nine Playquity sites, meet with key stakeholders, and learn from one another every day.

My relationships within the Fellowship cohort and at my host organization have given me a network of industry leaders, founders, and overall incredible individuals from whom I have learned an invaluable amount.
Sidharth Manoj Hendre
Kriti Social Initiatives
Hyderabad, Telangana

Sidharth is interested in reading and writing about reforms in the education sector and strongly believes in access to quality education for all. During the AIF Fellowship, he got to meet like-minded people across India and the U.S., which made his Fellowship journey intellectually enriching.

- Young Engagement and Mentoring

key highlights

- Curriculum designing and implementation of the computer literacy programme in 3 government high schools and 1 independent centre, thereby reaching out to 1500+ students.
- Curated a framework for monitoring and evaluation.
- Created a framework and designed the curriculum for the summer camp.
- Implemented a summer camp in 2 government schools by reaching out to 150+ students and volunteer management.
- Created partnerships to implement two initiatives in a government high school and 2 low-income private schools that focus on social-emotional learning and comprehensive sexual education.
JOURNEY

Before the start of the Fellowship, I was concerned about how things would turn out and whether I would be able to meet the expectations of my host organization and AIF, but after entering the system and giving myself some time to understand the people, purpose, and processes, my fears and nervousness vanished.

These 8–9 months of the AIF Fellowship have been truly transformative for me on both personal and professional fronts. Professionally, I got to immerse myself in the realities of the education sector in India by working closely with government school students, and personally, I got the opportunity to meet like-minded people across India and the United States, creating lifelong friends. This journey of being an AIF Fellow hasn’t just helped me hone my core competencies but has also pushed me out of my comfort zone at times, enabling me to create change within the community.

My journey as an AIF Fellow has been about professional development, leadership opportunities, building networks, and widening my perspectives. Over the past nine months, I have interacted with various sectoral experts and civil society organizations, which has added to my knowledge and understanding of a variety of social issues and causes.

I consider myself lucky to have had this opportunity, which allowed me to engage extensively with young people, learn and unlearn from my co-Fellows, and receive incredible support from the Fellowship team when required. Living in Hyderabad with four other co-Fellows and building an ecosystem of Fellows has been an experience in itself.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

I have been working on aspects of youth development with Kriti Social Initiatives in Hyderabad, leading and supervising two projects for my host organization, namely, Project Kaushal-Pratibha, a computer literacy programme for students from government and low-income private schools, and a series of workshops on Social Emotional Learning and Comprehensive Sexual Education.

For the computer literacy programme, I have created a monitoring and evaluation framework to capture the daily, weekly, and monthly reports to identify the gaps and challenges. I work closely with the computer trainers to curate lesson plans and lead their teacher training on effective teaching and learning methodologies. I also contributed to creating a framework, resource management, and volunteer engagement tool for the summer camp that we are conducting this year with around 200+ students in two government schools.

My work has broadly influenced ideation, strategic initiatives, and the effective implementation of the current project. I have fostered a collaborative culture among team members and community stakeholders, which has resulted in more effective problem-solving. With my intervention, my host organization is better equipped to map gaps and challenges and resolve these deficits with a more structured and holistic approach.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

make me more resilient and confident by allowing me to learn from my mistakes.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

immerse myself in the realities of India's development sector, enabling me to create an impact.

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

I got to widen my perspectives on the development sector in India and deepen my knowledge of the Indian education system.
**Q&A SECTION**

How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

It has been a truly transformative journey for me in terms of widening my perspectives on a lot of social issues and putting myself in situations where I get an opportunity to exercise my leadership skills. I learned more about myself, practised self-reflection, and developed a better awareness of my strengths and shortcomings as a result of the Fellowship experience. It has made me more resilient and confident, and it has taken away the fear of judgement. Sessions with the sectoral experts have added value to my experience as they provided me with an opportunity to learn and unlearn by giving me a chance to change my lenses or think differently on a variety of social issues.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

As a Fellow in my host organization, I have been involved in tasks such as monitoring and evaluation, curriculum design, project management, planning, ideating, etc. One of my recent achievements was when I successfully created a framework for the summer camp that we are conducting this year with 200+ students from two government schools.

I worked alongside my supervisor to craft and develop a curriculum for the summer, as well as resource mapping and volunteer engagement. I, along with my other team members, worked on mobilization for the summer camp to enrol students. This entire planning and ideation process for summer camp has helped me hone my curriculum design skills and put me in a position where I can take ownership of the tasks. Managing 50 young volunteers across two schools will be a meaningful, challenging, and rewarding experience for me, as I get to exercise my leadership skills and people management skills for the effective delivery of the programme.

“The Fellowship experience has made me more resilient and confident, and it has taken away the fear of judgement.”
LIVELIHOOD
Divya

SAFA India

Hyderabad, Telangana

Divya is interested in the intersection between livelihood and the socio-legal empowerment of women. Her adaptability enabled her to easily integrate into the host community. During the AIF Fellowship, she made new friends among her Fellows, the Fellowship Team, and her host organization.

- **Research**
- **Strategic Innovation and Initiatives**
- **Community Initiatives**

**KEY HIGHLIGHTS**

- Conducted 6 "Free to be Me" sessions on different topics, including the perspective of the Hijab, the cult of domesticity, and women in public places.
- Successfully showcased the products of 100 women-owned businesses at Dhanak Bazaar.
- Created a plan for market linkages for 10 women entrepreneurs, connecting them with potential buyers and retailers.
I graduated from Tamil Nadu National Law School, Trichy, with the degree of B.com. LL.B. (Hons.) in 2022. I have always wanted to contribute to society and help those in need. Growing up, I saw a lack of opportunities for women to develop their careers in rural and semi-urban areas. This motivated me to apply for this Fellowship. As a Banyan Impact Fellow working with SAFA India on their incubation programme for home-based women entrepreneurs, I had a unique and transformative first work experience. Before the Fellowship, I had a general understanding of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, but I lacked the skills and knowledge to address these issues effectively. However, during the Fellowship programme, I had the opportunity to work closely with a team of experienced professionals at SAFA India, learning about different strategies and best practices for supporting women entrepreneurs.

During my journey, I had the opportunity to develop event planning skills by organizing "Free to be Me" sessions. These sessions were designed to empower women and girls in my community by creating a safe space for them to share their experiences, learn from each other, and develop their confidence and self-esteem. By organizing these sessions, I gained valuable experience in event planning, including developing agendas, coordinating logistics, and managing volunteers. Reflecting on my experiences, I have gained valuable insights into my strengths, interests, and values. I have also identified areas for growth and development and set goals for my personal and professional growth.

Moving forward, I am excited to explore different opportunities in the field of social entrepreneurship and to continue making a positive impact in my community. The Fellowship experience was an opportunity to strengthen the foundation of my skills, knowledge, and experience that will help me further my career goals.

As a Banyan Impact Fellow, I worked with SAFA India to create an incubation unit. I had a significant impact on the organization and its ability to support social entrepreneurs in the community. Through my efforts, I played a critical role in developing the sustainable plan, processes, and resources necessary to establish the incubation unit for home-based entrepreneurs. This involved identifying and selecting promising social entrepreneurs, providing them with mentorship and training, and helping them grow their ventures by connecting them with market and credit linkages. One specific anecdote that exemplifies the impact of my work involves participating in organizing the "Dhanak Bazaar" along with the Women’s Day celebration. In this event, 100 women entrepreneurs were given the opportunity to set up stalls to promote their businesses.

Overall, my work as a Banyan Impact Fellow had a profound impact on SAFA India’s ability to support home-based women entrepreneurs and drive social change in the community. By establishing the incubation unit, I created a platform for scaling up their businesses and formulating their legal structure.

I was also involved in planning "Free to be Me" sessions, which were held every third Saturday of the month. The "Free to be Me" sessions involve group discussions that are specifically designed to provide a safe and supportive environment for women to share their thoughts and feelings about the challenges they face in their everyday lives. These discussions allow women to freely express their opinions and experiences in a way that is comfortable and empowering. To date, six "Free to be Me" sessions have been held, beginning with the first session exploring the local and global perspectives on Hijab. Subsequent sessions covered topics such as the Cult of Domesticity, The Space of One’s Own, Invoking Justice, and Women in Public Spaces. The last session was an interactive, activity-based session that involved both men and women who work at SAFA.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

to give me a chance to develop my professional skills and gain cross-cultural perspectives, which was especially beneficial as this was my first professional work experience.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

explore Hyderabad and make new friends.

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

it helped me learn more about myself and gave me a chance to experience cross-cultural life.
How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

During the AIF Fellowship, I had the opportunity to work alongside Ms. Rubina Fatima Nafees and Mr. Imam Hussain at SAFA India on the livelihood project. This allowed me to gain valuable insights into livelihood programmes and learn about the various challenges and opportunities they present. Through my interactions with colleagues, I was able to develop a better understanding of the expectations and standards of the professional world, which in turn helped me build my confidence and establish my presence in the workplace. Furthermore, I was given the chance to work on creating an incubation programme for home-based enterprises and initiatives that were directly related to the organization's goals. As I contributed to the project and gained new skills, I became more confident in my abilities and felt like a valued member of the team. Over time, I was able to make a meaningful impact on SAFA's mission.

“Reflecting on my experiences, I have gained valuable insights into my strengths, interests, and values.”

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

The Fellowship experience was truly transformative, as it provided me with a journey of growth and learning rather than a single milestone. As I embarked on this programme right after my graduation, it served as my first significant professional experience, and the lessons I learned throughout the process were invaluable. One of the most remarkable achievements of my Fellowship was my ability to establish myself within the professional sphere. This accomplishment holds great significance as it reflects my capacity to adapt to new environments, learn quickly, and make a positive impact in the workplace.

Establishing myself professionally involved various aspects, all of which I embraced with enthusiasm and dedication. I focused on building a strong network of connections, both within the organization and in the industry at large. Through networking events, meetings, and collaborations, I forged valuable relationships with colleagues, mentors, and industry professionals. These connections not only provided me with guidance and support but also opened doors to new opportunities and insights. By successfully establishing myself within the professional sphere during my Fellowship, I laid a solid foundation for my future career.
Erin is a highly relational professional with over 8+ years of experience living and learning cross-culturally. Always looking for opportunities to use her creativity in aesthetics, storytelling, and curriculum development to come alongside projects in the development or social sector, she has delighted in doing so as a Fellow alongside Ecowrap’s Muskaan.

- **Strategic Innovation and Initiatives**
- **Community Initiatives**

**KEY HIGHLIGHTS**
- Developed 2 sustainable up-cycled art forms.
- Trained 7 women.
- Designed 12+ upcycled products.
WOMEN CHANGING THE FACE OF UP CYCLING IN INDIA

JOURNEY

Prior to this Fellowship, I had just wrapped up teaching English to newly arrived Afghan refugees on U.S. Mission Operation Allies Welcome, which had rekindled a desire within me to pursue development work and help women secure sustainable means of livelihood. Having spent the past 8 years studying Indian culture and co-founding a collaborative learning programme to help people from different religio-cultural communities learn with and from one another, it made sense for me to pursue an opportunity that would bring me back to India.

Almost immediately upon arrival at my host organization, I became responsible for leading Project Muskaan. My responsibilities as a Fellow included identifying how waste could be manipulated into art forms that rural women could use to create product lines, training women in the village on these identified art forms, hiring and leading design interns to develop strong product lines, creating a brand identity and platform that would represent the work of our creative partners, and seeking out partnerships and platforms to sell our products. It has been life-giving to be a part of building something from scratch. I have loved that my work has been split between time at the Ecowrap office, at the warehouse, in the village alongside our rural partners, in the wood shop with our carpenter, and at local cafés we hope to partner with. Every day has brought something new, which has kept me on my toes! However, I think I have most loved watching our initial three creative partners grow in confidence, master a craft, advocate for themselves, and begin training and empowering more women. This experience has helped me dip my toes into the development sector in India, and helped me see how my skills and passions can be married in this field.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

Ecowrap began with the vision of creating an ecosystem for effective waste management and a strong resolve: “Mera Desh, Zero Waste.” Ecowrap is a tech-based startup that focuses on the source segregation of solid waste by providing dustbins and offering incentives to restaurants, hotels, bars, and cafes. During COVID, Ecowrap began exploring alternative ways of bringing waste back into the value chain.

Rural women are naturally innovative in the ways they use waste materials, making them some of India’s best upcyclers. Recognising this, Ecowrap’s Muskaan is coming alongside them to provide them with the resources and training needed to cultivate their natural abilities. They are securing livelihood opportunities for themselves and helping others begin to see the value that they see in waste. As the daughter of a former garbage man and lifelong upcycler, joining this project felt like returning to my roots. I quickly identified the need for expanding Muskaan’s market to encompass not just those who are environmentally and socially conscious but also those who have a sharp eye for aesthetics. Early on, I also realized the need to change the original or obvious use of waste materials to expand the range of products we could create. This decision will help secure income for the women for years to come.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was... 

*provide me with the opportunity to help build something from the ground up.*

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to... 

*see my background as a creative, as a facilitator, and as a co-learner intersecting with India’s development sector.*

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

*I have grown into the most authentic version of myself by returning to a place I love and starting work that closely aligns with my values.*
How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

While I am not new to India or to the development sector, I am new to the social sector in India. I am so thankful for the opportunity to get my feet wet. This Fellowship opportunity helped me gain experience in this field within India, which I will be forever grateful for. I have had the opportunity to work alongside rural women, carpenters, other designers, and others in different sectors who are coming together with different motives to accomplish the same goal. This experience has helped me continue to grow as a life-long cultural learner and understand the challenges women entrepreneurs face in an Indian context. It has affirmed my value for servant leadership in the social sector and helped me trust my intuition as a designer.

“This experience has helped me dip my toes into the development sector in India, and helped me see how my skills and passions can be married in this field.”

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

Being able to hold something physically in your hand that you played such an intricate role in designing is an incredible feeling. Knowing that that product is on the cutting edge of shaping the way people perceive waste as well as securing a future for rural women is powerful. I am proud of discovering an innovative art form that the women we partner with have been able to master, take ownership of, and will continue to use to create countless products and opportunities for themselves. “Cane” weaving from plastic water bottles is opening them up to a much wider market and helping rural women lead the way in bringing waste back into the value chain.
Hamsini leads with curiosity, courage to take on new challenges, and experimentation. Through her Fellowship journey, she turned her failures into lessons and embraced uncertainty by letting go of expectations. Her leadership is now based on trust, compassion, and collaboration.

**KEY HIGHLIGHTS**

- Designed a Governance Structure for the new enterprise.
- Designed a Human Resources Structure for the new enterprise.
- Submitted an Organizational Proposal.
- Designed 58 Job Descriptions and Positions.
- Led a Change and Vision Alignment Session for an IAS Officer.
- 2 Consumer Surveys Conducted.
- Conducted 300 Consumer (urban, rural, and semi-urban) Survey.
THE POWER OF RAISING YOUR VOICE

JOURNEY

If I had one sentence to describe my journey through the Fellowship, it would be this: When nothing goes your way, everything falls into and out of place simultaneously. When I decided to pursue the Fellowship, I was at a pivotal and transformational moment in my life where I was questioning a lot of my foundational beliefs about work, the world, and my relationships. Both professionally and personally, the last nine months have been nothing short of the same. For one, I took on the first-time professional challenge of learning the role of government in development, how to navigate their systems, and their relationship with stakeholders in the ecosystem. Secondly, it was also my first long-term project in the field, exposing me to the field realities of the development sector. Thirdly, despite being a diasporic Indian, navigating culture shock was a big part of my journey.

Developing emotional resilience, communication skills, the importance of building trust and connections conducive to achieving a goal, and learning to pivot and make necessary changes dependent on the context of implementation have been my most important lessons along the way. At work, I joined my project at a pivotal point in its journey, where the host organization was contemplating establishing an autonomous entity to brand the products of SHG women. I designed an appropriate human resources and governance structure consisting of job descriptions that the host organization can use as a foundation document to register the company and begin hiring the dedicated resources to build the company. I walk away from this experience with the confidence that I can not only add value to the team through technical outputs but also by challenging them to address gaps in their growth, considering diverse perspectives, and most importantly, aligning their vision to a goal.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

My project involved building an autonomous entity and brand called Palash to market the products of the Self-Help Group (SHG) Women in Jharkhand, which made me enthusiastic and driven to work for the admirable mission and the organization. However, as time passed and awareness grew, the realities of bringing this from concept to reality became clear. I faced multidimensional challenges, from a lack of communication and cooperation to a lack of alignment in vision across leadership, which made it hard to access appropriate resources and create the necessary momentum for the project.

Despite the challenges, I managed to complete my deliverables, and more importantly, I sparked a conversation about potential areas of growth within the organization and how different leaders within the organization can come together to execute a vision. My work will serve as a foundation and catalyst for the company to be registered and for the SHG women to have a brand that is made for and by them. The company will serve as a platform to increase their income multifold by both increasing their capacity for entrepreneurship and introducing them to national and international markets that they otherwise would not have access to.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

to provide me with a space to experiment, learn about my strengths and areas of growth, and create expansive opportunities that will allow me to bring my whole self to work.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

try my hands at implementation, exposed me to true rural India, and gave me the confidence that I, too, can turn an idea into a reality.

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

it allowed me space to redefine my relationship with uncertainty and expectations.
How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

The biggest lesson for me personally has been redefining my relationship with uncertainty and expectations. When I first landed in Ranchi, I had a very defined set of goals. After assessing the environment, it became increasingly evident that it would not go as planned. So then, the question became, "How can I get a project from concept to reality when things do not go as planned?" "How do I learn to create emotional resilience during moments of chaos and change?" "How do I identify opportunities through the change process?" "What experiences are challenges that will help me grow, and which ones are traumatic?" "How do I re-establish a foundation (i.e., beliefs) that will then serve me in achieving my goals?"

These lessons are foundational to my professional and personal life and will always be cherished.

"I walk away from this experience with the confidence that I can not only add value to the team through technical outputs but support them with aligning their vision to a goal."

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

The Fellowship has been a very unique experience, one that only Fellows going through it can understand. From the multitude of challenges that one faces every day to learning to be enterprising in the face of multiple hurdles, it may be a tiresome experience if not directed consciously. There were moments when I wanted to quit, especially initially with the lack of acceptance and openness within the host organization, and I am most proud of acknowledging the complexity of emotions the experience brought, addressing them, and identifying creative growth opportunities for the long term, including redefining my relationship with expectations and uncertainty. Despite the hardships I experience, I am proud of submitting high-quality deliverables that the host organization may utilize after my time as a Fellow. More importantly, it sparked a conversation around potential areas of growth within the organization, mindfully placing leaders to lead a project, and how different leaders can come together to execute a vision. Staying during the course and witnessing the transformation of a challenge into an opportunity for growth for both the organization and myself has been the most satisfying part of the experience.
Joshilyn Binkley
Sub-K IMPACT Solutions Ltd.

Hyderabad, Telangana

Joshilyn is optimistic about the future when she thinks about the tremendous potential that exists to improve our communities and is passionate about leading transformation in the institutions she is able to impact. The greatest gift of her Fellowship is the relationships she has built with those who inspire her.

- Impact Assessment
- Research
- Strategic Innovation and Initiatives
- Technology and Innovation

**KEY HIGHLIGHTS**

- Conducted field visits to branch offices in 5 states.
- Prepared 4 action reports with strategic initiative recommendations.
- Conducted 2 pan India surveys of field staff and loan recipients.
JOURNEY

When I completed my undergraduate degree in 2018, I was sure that eventually I wanted to pursue a master’s in Public Policy, but before continuing my education, I wanted to seek out additional opportunities to work in the development field and grow personally and professionally. Over the following years, I worked at a community action programme and then as an epidemiologist during the pandemic. Joining the Fellowship in the fall of 2022 seemed like the clear next step for me. This new role would allow me to draw on my background in economics, research, and project management, and develop my professional and leadership skills. My goals when I joined the Fellowship were to improve my Hindi, learn more about the realities of social impact work in India, and build on my research and writing skills.

I made tremendous progress studying Hindi in the lessons I took and working in an area where it is widely spoken, but working in regions where only Telugu, Kannada, or Marathi is spoken reminded me of how much can be communicated without a common language. Some of the most striking moments of connection occurred in these situations. Each day of the Fellowship was an opportunity to experience the challenges and successes of social impact work in India firsthand; I was continuously learning. Even in an unfamiliar environment, I felt more confident in what I had to offer and gained a greater understanding of my strengths.

My Fellowship experience accelerated my personal and professional growth. I feel convinced and prepared because I will carry the lessons learned during these months into all my future endeavours.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

Over the Fellowship, I worked on the strategic initiatives team with the microfinance organization, Sub-K Impact Solutions. I helped deepen their impact evaluation and data analysis, improve programmes, and plan and prioritize the future of the organization.

The most valuable experiences I had came from visits to various field sites where my host organization operates; I visited branches in Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Uttarakhand. After the visits, I was able to provide feedback and recommendations to various teams across the organization based on my observations and conversations with staff and the women receiving microloans. This included building an option for everyone to join their virtual group centre meetings directly through their repayment app and providing staff with greater access to relevant, real-time data. These experiences also informed two surveys I designed that have been used to measure the impact and plan programme improvements: one of the loan officers and another of the loan recipients.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

it made me a confident leader and allowed me to develop meaningful relationships.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

explore and build on my strengths.

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

I was able to try, fail, and ultimately succeed in a supportive environment.
Q&A SECTION

How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

Reflecting on my personal growth over the course of the Fellowship a few areas of development stand out. I had a significant level of independence in my work. This gave me the opportunity to bring forward ideas and take responsibility for the execution of my plans. I am now better able to identify how my skills and interests can be utilized to solve a problem. I am better at collaborating to ensure the success of a project. The Fellowship has made me an even more confident person. Experiences like travelling alone for field visits and presenting my work to various audiences put me out of my comfort zone but gave me the chance to have new experiences, learn from the challenges, and ultimately watch myself succeed.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

My host organization provides women who have limited access to financial services with microloans, and over the past couple of years, they have been transitioning to a digital model for applications, repayment, and group centre meetings. Especially when an organization is in a transitional phase, measuring impact and evaluating programmes is critical to ensuring efforts are having their intended effect. Surveys are an important tool for measuring impact. I am very proud of the two surveys that I designed and implemented. In the first survey I designed, nearly six hundred field staff were given the opportunity to share their feedback and recommendations for the future of the organization. In the second one, a statistically significant sample of two hundred thousand women shared the challenges and benefits of digital microloan services and the barriers keeping them from living more inclusive financial lives. The information will help the organization offer even more inclusive and accessible services.

“My Fellowship experience accelerated my personal and professional growth. I will carry the lessons learned during these months into all my future endeavours.”
Kaviya works in the communications and development space. Her strength is content management. She is keenly interested in the tech industry and aims to hone her skills with the experience gained from her Fellowship. Over the course of the Fellowship, she has developed a deep bond with her co-Fellows, colleagues, and the team.

**Key Highlights**

- Created **100 success case studies**, which are soon to be published as a booklet.
- Interviewed **5 winners** of the Global Ability Photography Challenge and published their stories at the State Art Gallery, Hyderabad.
- Handled a post-event press release and helped publish the article on "The Hindu" for the Global Ability Photography Challenge.
- Assisted the team in posting **20+ job** postings and awareness posters on the organization's social media handles.
- Created **2 large datasheets** of NGOs and disability activists for outreach purposes of next year's Global Ability Photography Challenge.
- Filled in **4 applications** for organization awards, out of which 2 were shortlisted.
- Created **5+ youth** training certificate templates for the organization.
JOURNEY

From the bustling streets of Hyderabad, I began a journey of growth and change. Apprehensive but eager to learn, My Fellowship experience began with a nervous start.

Each day, a 17 km commute, Filled with equal parts of apprehension and anticipation, I dreaded the early wake-up call, But relished the chance to learn something new.

From simple tasks to complex challenges, I worked alongside a team of capable colleagues. Creating content, writing newsletters and case studies, And gathering information for a new website.

A Photography Challenge came my way, Daunting at first, but fulfilling in the end, I handled the press with ease, A proud moment for a growing self.

Bonding over shared experiences and food, My colleagues became more than just a team, And by forming lasting friendships with co-Fellows, The journey became more enriching than ever.

Unfortunately, sickness led to a departure during Midpoint, A lesson to prioritize health over all else, And as grad school applications loomed, The process proved draining, but I held on.

As the Fellowship nears its end, I reflect on the transformation within, Grateful for the challenges and opportunities, That made me a more resilient and adaptable person.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the Fellowship team, whose unwavering support and presence have been a constant source of inspiration throughout my journey. Their efforts in organizing engaging webinars have opened doors for me to learn from and interact with numerous external organizations and individuals. Moreover, as time passed, I developed a strong bond with my senior Fellow, a relationship that has enriched my Fellowship experience.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

During college, I was actively taking part in community service through NSS and was a part of multiple programmes, especially in the disability space. I soon identified that I wanted to continue working in the Indian social sector. After graduation, I was selected as an AIF Fellow and was placed in the Youth4Jobs Foundation, which works for the education and employment of persons with disabilities, marking my first full-time real-world experience in the sector.

In the course of nine months, I worked in communications and gained knowledge that shaped my foundational journey. I became proficient in various activities. I took ownership of my tasks and was open to constructive criticism for growth and improvement. In particular, I gathered information and redrafted the entire content for the purpose of creating a new website for my host organization. This content will soon be available to the public once the website goes live. Another significant contribution was the development of an official template for drafting case studies. Initially, the structure was disoriented, and I worked on restructuring the template. Following template approval, I drafted nearly 150 case studies from the various programmes. The organization is now using these case studies for outreach purposes.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

to help me decide on what I want to do next in my career.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

grow professionally and develop new perspectives.

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

I have a better understanding of who I am and what I really want to do.
Q&A SECTION

How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

Since the start of the Fellowship, here are the things that have shaped me.

As this is my first full-time real experience after graduation, it has helped me grow professionally by exposing me to new challenges, work tasks, and interactions with colleagues and partners, all of which have provided me with a new perspective over time. The Fellowship has exposed me to different people from different backgrounds, cultures, and methods of working. This has led me to appreciate new perspectives and mindsets and broaden my understanding of the workplace.

Lastly, working in the Communications and Development Team, I realized what I wanted to do next in my career and accordingly started working on it. I now have a better understanding of my strengths, weaknesses, and overall interests.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

During the course of the Fellowship, I have learned several new things at my host organization. But the most important one was that of designing a website from scratch for my host organization. For website design, we first determined the purpose of the website and its target audience. Next, we researched hosting services mostly based on cloud platforms, decided to use a Content Management System (CMS) or web builder platform, and finalized WordPress for building it.

In the building stages, I learned and developed a site map and navigation structure to organize the content and also to choose a visually appealing design that is consistent with the brand and purpose of the website. We also made sure that the website is accessible to users with disabilities using WCAG guidelines, including those who use assistive technologies. In the final stages, we tested the website thoroughly before launching it, including checking for broken links, spelling errors, and other issues. I am happy to share that the team is in the final stages of launching the new website.
Phalgungi Joshi, a social entrepreneur, has taken up performing gap analysis in the workings of the Farmer Produce Organizations. She is determined, passionate, and resilient, and as such, she has been instrumental in tackling and fixing the loopholes at a departmental level.

**Phalgungi Joshi**

**Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society**

**Ranchi, Jharkhand**

**Strategic Innovation and Initiatives**

- I researched **10 Farmer Produce Companies** (FPCs) to understand their **Uniques Selling Points** (USPs) and advised them to grow their business using their agricultural produce.

- I met **100 women** from JOHAR’s Producer Groups to understand their needs and problems and designed a message drive to help them communicate clearly with the FPC and build a trusting relationship between the Producer Groups and the FPCs.

- Promoted a message to keep different regulatory policies for the effective functioning of Farmer Produce Companies (FPC).
Never in my life would I have imagined moving to Ranchi, Jharkhand, and working here. I never expected Ranchi to be the way it is; it’s the countryside, the malls, the restaurants and cafes, people with different faiths, and a common love for mutton.

When I came here, the first festival was “Chhath Puja,” and it was exactly what I read about when I was a kid. I saw kids running around, playing hide and seek behind the puja setup, and cheekily bingeing on sweets and blessings. I saw women and men doing the ‘Bhorka Aragh,” praying for the well-being of their families, and thanking Chhathi Maiya for blessing their lives on earth. The festival is celebrated for four days, and in those four days, I knew that this journey would be as beautiful as this celebration. The journey was exactly how I imagined it!

In the last nine months, I have met amazing and inspiring women working tirelessly to help people. I had the chance to work alongside women who have worked for and with the Tata Trusts. They have successfully constructed artificial ponds to help farmers and rural communities get access to potable water and for irrigation. They have been recognized and lauded for their efforts by the President of India.

I remember meeting one of JOHAR’s beneficiaries; she shared her story about losing her husband and how she worked hard to achieve her independence. I came across so many painful yet inspiring stories hidden away in the villages of Jharkhand. During the Fellowship, I had the honour of meeting and working alongside these strong women, who have proven their strength and perseverance with their skills.

Meeting them has given me fresh hope, inspiration, stronger motivation, and confidence to believe in myself and continue to walk on this path. What these women have accomplished is brilliant. Because of these women, I took a stand for myself against the injustice I faced. They gave me the strength to believe in myself and stand up for what I wanted to achieve during my Fellowship.

When I was deployed to Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) as a Fellow, I was alerted that I had to help the team design the second phase of JOHAR (Jharkhand Opportunities for Harnessing Rural Growth), called JOHAR 2.0. I learned about the various policies designed by the State and Union governments. JSLPS has policies designed for all employees across different levels. I noticed that policies existed to help the employees travel.

Since my project required a lot of travel around Jharkhand, I was also supposed to be added to one of the policies of the organization. For example, there are procedures in place for all employees to follow when planning their travel and requesting reimbursement. Since JSLPS had two AIF Fellows in their organization for the first time, unfortunately, there were no policies for us. To maintain uniformity, I reached out to the Project Director, the COO, and the CEO to help us design a policy for Fellows so that we could have easy access to arrange our travels, and I am glad that the policy was finally executed in March 2023, which now has a larger influence as a result of my work.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

*it taught me that I am not alone.*
*I have inspiring women that I can look up to.*

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

*grow professionally and develop new perspectives.*

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

*I have become more emotionally aware of my voice and can trust it.*
Q&A SECTION

How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

My journey had a lot of ups and downs during this Fellowship. On the one hand, I felt driven and wanted to work hard in order to earn the Padma Shri in the future, yet on the other, I simply wanted to sleep and do nothing. The journey was a rollercoaster of emotions. Both of these scenarios taught me that I am in control of my emotions, and I was aware of them, so I gave those emotions the space that they needed. I gave myself time to accept, heal, and deal with those emotions. I accepted the change in my life and career and kept working with them. I made sure that I maintained a sense of equilibrium. This Fellowship gave me the opportunity to live in a new city with a different culture, shaped me to be emotionally aware, and reunited me with my voice.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

I chose JSLPS to grow my professional career in monitoring and evaluation by learning from the best teams. When I read about the JOHAR project, I instantly knew that working on it would give me the opportunity to work with the State Government and the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) team. Since I was chosen by JSLPS to help them design the second phase of JOHAR, I knew that I would have to learn new skills and improve my existing ones.

I worked to improve my knowledge of the fundamentals of monitoring and evaluation. I taught myself how to interpret data and analyze it at the same time. I learned how to utilize the different monitoring and evaluation tools, methodologies, and software. Tableau, for example, makes it easier to see and analyze data. I taught myself the fundamentals of Tableau and learned how to handle and update data in MS Excel. I used these abilities to conduct a project gap analysis. I provided answers to existing problems, which aided in the creation of the project’s second phase.

“This Fellowship gave me the opportunity to live in a new city with a different culture, shaped me to be emotionally aware, and reunited me with my voice.”
Urvashi is passionate about community-led development and the power of collaboration to scale impact. With a career that’s been a blend of corporate and social sector experiences, she is grateful for the opportunity to explore inclusive approaches to development and connect with diverse individuals with similar passions through the Fellowship.

- **Impact Assessment**
- **Strategic Innovation and Initiatives**
- **Community Initiatives**

**KEY HIGHLIGHTS**

- Managed a project through which *90 SHG women* from *3 villages* were trained over *15 days* in topics like milk productivity, vermicompost, and financial literacy.

- Demonstrated an average of **28% increase** in knowledge among participants based on pre- and post-tests.

- Developed a **broad Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework** and a Google form for data collection.

- Developed and distributed informative IEC (Information, Education, and Communication) materials on milk productivity, reaching over **500 views** on YouTube.

- Created a dynamic sheet to calculate the quantity of cattle feed required based on breed and milk productivity and trained *2 staff members* on its use.

- Produced **5 case studies** showcasing the successful outcomes of the host organization’s past and current dairy projects.
JOURNEY

As a Chartered Accountant who made a move to the development sector a couple of years ago, I’ve always felt lucky to have gained both corporate and social sector experiences, ranging from financial audits at a Big 4 firm to strategic partnerships at a social enterprise. While my introduction to the sector was filled with learning, my biggest takeaways were the power of collaboration and the importance of trusting one’s instincts. To me, gaining a deeper understanding of community-centric development approaches was a critical prerequisite to being able to do justice to any role in this sector, so I applied for the Banyan Impact Fellowship.

My Fellowship experience has given me the opportunity to understand the challenges of development work on the ground, specifically in a rural setting. I always took pride in my ability to make sense of grey areas instead of just seeing situations in black or white. My experience in the Fellowship, being immersed in a culture that was very different from what I was used to, has given me a greater appreciation for such complexities. Over the last 9 months, there have been multiple times when there was no clear right or wrong; I was pushed to listen more intently, learn from diverse perspectives, and acknowledge that there are often multiple perceived realities. The Fellowship also gave me the space to reflect on myself as a leader, develop my approaches to cross-cultural leadership, and help define my core values.

All in all, my journey as a Fellow has been a humbling experience, and it has only further strengthened my desire to continue working in the sector.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

The dairy-focused trainings facilitated under the project I was managing at my host organization have directly impacted 90 Self Help Group (SHG) members by educating them about the various aspects that influence milk productivity, from cattle breeds to nutrition and housing. Moreover, since dairy and agriculture have an inseparable relationship, the inclusion of a vermicomposting demo in the training programme meant that the women were introduced to a new way of utilizing manure, something that could also prove to be an additional source of livelihood with practise. Some of them have gone on to use the compost in their kitchen gardens and farms.

In addition to chalking out the training schedules and topics and conducting stakeholder meetings, managing the project also involved setting up a monitoring and evaluation mechanism. We realized early on that the participants had difficulty retaining the information. With a low literacy rate, pamphlets wouldn’t work. So to ensure they could use the information, I put together a video of the information and disseminated it through WhatsApp groups. I hope that the knowledge I have gathered and documented through the course of the Fellowship will benefit my host organization and many more beneficiaries in the future as well.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

to push me out of my comfort zone and immerse me in a culture that was vastly different from my own. This forced me to adapt and develop new perspectives constantly.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

forge meaningful relationships with a talented bunch of Fellows having similar passions and aspirations.

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

it helped me understand how ground realities can differ from what one is exposed to in distant offices. I know I'll be a better development professional because I understand that navigating internal and external dependencies takes patience and humility.
Q&A SECTION

How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

The main reason I applied to the Fellowship was to get firsthand experience of developmental issues on the ground, and the Fellowship gave me just that. I was able to gain a deeper understanding of what development meant to the communities I was working with and the very unique challenges of implementing livelihood interventions for rural women. I was reminded time and again of the importance of effective communication, collaboration, and trust in ensuring the success of any community intervention. Eventually, I got comfortable navigating and adapting to unfamiliar situations. This experience has helped me develop a more nuanced understanding of both myself and the sector.

Real diversity comes from the diversity of experiences and thoughts. The time I have spent here while being immersed in a different culture will contribute to the value I bring to any organization where I choose to work in the future.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

Given the nature of the project and my role, I was often faced with the realities of inefficient systems, the effects of traditional gender roles, and the complexities of community dynamics. Over the last nine months, I realized that the success of any development intervention requires careful consideration of all these factors and many others for it to be sustainable. Since I was essentially an outsider in their village and came with zero expertise in dairy, the focus of the project, my topmost priority was to listen, communicate with empathy, and gain their trust. Over time, I established credibility for myself and formed strong bonds with some of the didis (women) there.

Additionally, I have had to be more flexible in my approaches due to the largely unstructured environments I worked in. From designing monitoring tools and training field teams to using them to emphasize the importance of collecting accurate data, many of these efforts went through multiple iterations and required trial and error. Fostering a sense of reliability and trust among my team and the Didis is one achievement I’m most proud of.

“This experience has helped me develop a more nuanced understanding of both myself and the sector.”
Dnyaneshwar is interested in researching gender and caste marginalization in the context of Public Health, culture, and the media. He believes in fluidity and thrives on creating empathy-driven safe spaces. During the AIF Fellowship, he was lucky to have found such people in his cohort, the Fellowship Team, and the host organization.

**Dnyaneshwar Surwase**

Seba Jagat

*Kalahandi, Odisha*

- **Communications and Development**
  - Created 12 progress reports and presentations.
  - Drafted 18 case studies and Facebook stories.
  - Conducted 10+ sessions on capacity building and awareness.
  - Developed content for the organization's website.
Before the Fellowship, I had little experience in Public Health and documentation. I made use of this experience to strengthen the medical system for vulnerable and indigenous communities and the growth of an organization. I wanted to work with an integrated or holistic approach where I could explore the best of my potential in health, education, and livelihood. I applied for this Fellowship and was placed in Kalahandi to enhance my knowledge, capacity, and skills, which I believe I have accomplished. Through my placement, I was engaged in different projects like Primary Health Centre Management, Adolescent Health Programme, Odisha Millets Mission, Core CarbonX, and other small projects. My responsibilities included reporting, preparing presentations, documentation, and case studies; managing social media; designing websites; staff training and capacity building; data storage and management; stakeholder awareness and mobilization sessions; strengthening the public health system, community engagement, recruitment, and networking. This assured me that I was not limiting myself and that I could work to my full ability and talents for the long-term development of the organization and community.

The Fellowship projects taught me to use various digital tools and technologies and apply my expertise to different programmes, which was a great learning experience. I feel confident in my capabilities and skills and in my ability to thrive in any work environment using minimal resources, acute environmental conditions, and astonishing socio-cultural realities. As an ambitious social development practitioner and leader, I feel I have utilized this Fellowship opportunity to grow, learn, impact, and upskill my host organization and myself. One of the most important takeaways for me is the power of creating safe spaces for people, especially adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women from the tribal area of Kalahandi.

The Fellowship has been an interesting experience to learn and unlearn, especially in a grassroots organization like Seba Jagat. With my primary project in Public Health, my journey was a blend of health, education, livelihood, and environment. I have been involved in reporting, documentation, case studies, website designing, training, capacity building, handling social media, co-facilitating awareness sessions, and networking. The community is now able to access government programmes and entitlements through my work in supporting the project and conducting awareness workshops with the community and the organization to enhance the reporting system.

Through various capacity-building sessions conducted for the staff members, I have seen growth in their capabilities to use creative tools like Canva and enhance their documentation and reporting skills. My work has also required me to facilitate awareness sessions on gender, sexual, and reproductive health rights, which has helped the host organization, community, and adolescent groups to challenge the hegemonic patriarchal notions and to break the silence, myths, taboos, and stigmas around sexual and reproductive health. Furthermore, I have co-facilitated the mobilization and awareness sessions on Gramme Kalyan Samiti, Village Health and Nutrition Day, which ensures the health rights of the community.

With the support of the Fellowship team, my organization, and Ms.Tara Casebolt, Assistant Professor at Boston College, I got the opportunity to mentor and collaborate with students from Boston College in their course on Public Health Planning, Practice, and Evaluation. I worked with a group of three students from Boston College. The objective of the collaboration was to help the students understand the Public Health system, connect them to partners in the field, get hands-on experience, and assist with a project.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...  

to give me an opportunity to explore my potential and enhance my leadership skills.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...  

learn and unlearn things, and create a safe space for numerous people in the field of Public Health.

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

I was able to do things I'm interested in, break barriers, and challenge myself.
How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

I wanted to gain professional and personal experiences across various subjects and regions that would be complementary and provide meaningful engagement. This Fellowship, especially my host organization’s site in Kalahandi, fits really well into this bucket. The relationships I have established and the skill enhancement have been both personally and professionally rewarding as a result of this Fellowship. I have met diverse people who introduced me to the vulnerabilities, intersections of marginalization, and ideas to create an equal society. But, as useful as they appear now, I’m hopeful they will become much more prominent in the future. Being a Banyan Impact Fellow is not only a professional advantage for me, but also an opportunity to connect with a diverse group of people, learn about the nuances of intersectionality, and work to create safe spaces for marginalized people while questioning the reasons for their marginalization.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

My primary role as a Fellow at Seba Jagat in Kalahandi was to support the documentation, reporting, and capacity building of the organization’s staff in Public Health projects. Seba Jagat is a grassroot organization, and with its integrated approach, I had the opportunity to get involved in multiple projects at the same time. The most important part of making this work was being proactive. My biggest success throughout the Fellowship, I believe, was demonstrating the gripping impact of my organization’s work in front of numerous stakeholders. This act of mine helped the community avail of and gain access to different entitlements and government schemes. By doing capacity-building and awareness sessions with more than 500 stakeholders, I also upskilled myself by enhancing my leadership, documentation, and reporting skills. Through community engagement in a Public Health project, I was delighted to create safe spaces for adolescents with different socio-cultural and gender identities, safe spaces for pregnant and lactating women, and hand-holding support. Through a work plan and dedication, I managed to balance working on different projects and even volunteering to gain more integrated experience that has allowed me to transform as a better individual.

“Being a Banyan Impact Fellow is an opportunity for me to connect with a diverse group of people, and work to create safe spaces for marginalized people.”
Padma Samhita Vadapalli
Satya Special School
Puducherry

Samhita is a Biotechnology and Genomics Graduate, who is interested in writing, advocacy, and the development of inclusive healthcare interventions. Through the Fellowship, she has reclaimed her passion for building a more inclusive planet by protecting the voices of marginalized communities through sustainable data-driven research.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Conducted a Research Study with 400+ PwD families.
- Established a Genetic Counseling Partnership with Local Healthcare Body.
- Produced a Genetic Awareness Manual and 5 Special Education Manuals.
- Conducted 3 Disability & Genetic Awareness Workshops for PwD communities.
DATA DRIVEN RESEARCH FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PWD COMMUNITIES

JOURNEY

When I first applied to the Fellowship, I was a fresh, wide-eyed graduate with a degree in Biotechnology, looking to explore and understand the developmental sector. Living alone in the seaside union territory of Puducherry allowed me to cultivate flexibility, self-sufficiency, and an appreciation for the city’s simplicity, beauty, and culture. My daily conversations with the locals as well as the frequent tourists exposed me to a multidimensional range of perspectives, voices, and ideologies. From drinking a cup of chai while listening to the waves of Rock Beach to waving hello to the young children at Satya Special School each morning, my day-to-day rituals cultivated a deep friendship and affinity with both the city and its people.

As someone whose exposure to the Indian developmental space was only through the rose-coloured lens of news and media, I got deeply connected to the intersectional and multifaceted problems faced by non-profit organisations catering to PwDs in rural India. This exposure gave me a deeper understanding of rural infrastructure, the rural-urban gap, and the development of more inclusive and accessible disability-focused interventions. My work with PwDs allowed me to learn immensely from the community, form strong connections, and reinforce my passion for ensuring accessible healthcare for vulnerable populations.

My Fellowship journey taught me to consistently believe in the best while preparing for the worst, by balancing positivity with the practical constraints of the situation. Most importantly, my journey demonstrated to me that change, like water, takes its time to carve the bed of rocks it passes through. Yet, slowly but surely, it is occurring, and the marks it makes can alter the course of an entire river.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

Over the course of my Fellowship, I have had the opportunity to work as a research Fellow with people with disabilities (PwD) residing in Puducherry. Through comprehensive survey design and data collection, I have obtained relevant statistics from the parents of PwDs in order to analyze the primary social, environmental, and genetic risk factors for disability occurrence. The purpose of this research was to identify at-risk individuals and direct them to disability-specific interventions and resources.

In addition, I have worked to develop genetic awareness manuals, which provide fundamental genetic literacy for the local communities for improved disability sensitization. I have also met and interacted with local healthcare bodies in order to develop a partnership plan for the provision of affordable genetic counselling services. My experiences allowed me to assess the need for genetic literacy for PwDs in rural India, and gain a multidimensional understanding of the issues that persist in this landscape. My work with this community focused primarily on developing tools and infrastructure to improve the accessibility of healthcare and genetic counselling resources for PwDs and their families.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

to teach me how to adapt to constantly changing situations and expectations.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

learn from spaces that I had never been exposed to before, network with individuals from diverse backgrounds, and explore my own creativity and capabilities.

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

of the knowledge, guidance, and connections that I gained through my work with Satya Special School.
Q&A SECTION

How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

The Fellowship experience proved to be fundamentally transformative for me, on both a personal and professional level. Due to the constantly evolving needs of a non-profit organization, I learned to adapt myself and my working style to suit the call of the hour. Though my primary project was focused on genetics and data analysis, I also worked on a wide range of other professional projects focused on grant writing, fundraising, communications, graphic design, programme development, and infrastructural organization. Being exposed to such projects allowed me to develop a diverse skill set and gain an overall understanding of the management of an organization within the developmental sector. I also had the opportunity to interact and have discussions with seasoned disability rights activists and learn from their perspectives, goals, and ideas. In short, the Fellowship experience shaped me to become a more intentional, adaptable, resilient, and well-rounded individual.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

One of my most rewarding professional experiences was when I had the opportunity to be a part of a disability sensitization workshop for local Panchayat Heads in rural Tamil Nadu. The workshop discussion focused on sensitizing the Heads on the needs of PwDs in their respective villages and providing educational materials for their use. I also had the opportunity to discuss my research project and engage with the locals, who shared personal anecdotes of PwDs in their families and communities. These interactions proved pivotal as they allowed me to realize the intricacies of the need for disability-specific resources in rural India and incorporate this understanding into my research.

“This exposure gave me a deeper understanding of rural infrastructure, the rural-urban gap, and the development of more inclusive and accessible disability-focused interventions.”
Sanaa Munjal

Tech Mahindra Foundation

New Delhi

Sanaa, your next-door 'enthu-cutlet,' is on a mission to make the world more empathetic and bring about change, one cup of chai at a time. The Fellowship pushed her to delve deeper into her passions, function outside the box, and gave her unwavering confidence to be her authentic self.

- Supported the training of 55+ facilitators through the sessions and trainings.
- Kickstarted a pilot of the Champions of Mental Health initiative in 2 locations in Delhi-NCR.
- Trained and upskilled 5 Champions and indirectly impacted classrooms of 30+ students each.
- Collated a list of 50+ resources for the Mind@Ease website.
- Conducted meetings with 15+ partner organizations as part of the partner reconnect.
- Created and edited the Mind@Ease website navigation video.
- Collaborated with 4 students from Boston College and facilitated a community partnership.
When I joined the AIF Fellowship a few months ago, I was constantly plagued with self-doubt. I was always reminding myself that I am a fresher with little to no experience and almost always the youngest in every room, where I found myself feeling like an outsider and struggling to fit in. However, as I reflect on my journey today, I am proud to say that I have grown and evolved in numerous ways, and I am now a bolder and more courageous version of myself.

During my interview for the Fellowship, I read a statement in one of the blog posts that said every individual should experience and work in the development sector at least once in their lifetime, and this could not have been truer. There was one specific thing I sought from the Fellowship, and that was to experience grassroots level work and gain insight into the nuances of the development sector. I am glad to have achieved that and more. The Fellowship turned out to be the most rewarding experience that a 21-year-old fresh out of college could ask for and has been an incredible journey of self-discovery. What I have grown to realize during the Fellowship is that I want to continue working in areas where I won’t crib while working on weekends or when it is Monday the next day. The past few months have been a testament to that, and I am grateful to be doing something that I genuinely enjoy. While I understand that I still have a long way to go, I know that I am on the right path. I am taking away invaluable memories, learnings, and experiences from the Fellowship, as well as the value of resilience and perseverance that will support me in my onward career trajectory.

I have developed a deeper appreciation for the work in the sector that I had not been able to learn about yet, which has piqued my interest even further. Being placed with the Tech Mahindra Foundation, a CSR arm of Tech Mahindra Ltd., also gave me a unique perspective on both the corporate and non-profit sides of the story, somewhat providing me with the best of both worlds. I am also grateful to have had the opportunity to be among experienced individuals and changemakers who have taught me so much.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

to expose me to a rich and diverse array of cultural experiences and perspectives that broadened my understanding of the world.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

learn from a diverse cohort of passionate individuals, engage and interact with professionals, and gain valuable skills to help create social change.

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

I gained the courage to believe in myself, embraced the uncertainty, and was encouraged to take more risks.
How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

The Fellowship has been a turning point in my life that has shaped me in numerous ways into the individual I am today. Being new to the space and unsure of what my calling was and how I wanted to move forward, the Fellowship has been that guiding light to help me gain the essence of the social impact sector. I have been grateful to be surrounded by a community of like-minded and passionate individuals, along with being exposed to new ideas and ways of thinking. I was challenged to step out of my comfort zone, take risks, and learn from my failures, which has helped me take decisions with more conviction and gain self-assurance. Looking back on my Fellowship experience, I can see how much I have grown into being more resilient, adaptable, and open-minded, and I hope to take forward all these learnings in my journey ahead.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

When you build something and see it turn into a reality, that is when you realize that your hard work paid off. During my initial few weeks as a Fellow, I was part of a meeting with a Mind@Ease partner organization, where I was first introduced to the concept of Psychological First Aid (PFA). From that first meeting to finally conducting and being present for an in-person PFA training for the facilitators, it was not only one of my happiest achievements but also something I am proud of. My organization conducted the first three-day training in Hyderabad with several facilitators from across different projects of the Tech Mahindra Foundation. It was conducted by our partner organization, The Brightside Foundation, and attended by over 30 facilitators. I was also grateful to be supported by my host organization to travel to Hyderabad to be present in person and represent the Mind@Ease team in understanding the effectiveness and potentially conducting it across different locations in the country. Personally, it was very enlightening to learn about these unheard and unknown yet vital concepts and meaningfully incorporate them into the Mind@Ease initiative.
Silpaa Gunabalan
Forus Health

Bengaluru, Karnataka

Silpaa is an aspiring physician who is passionate about advocating for health equity. Her work with Forus Health helped her understand the importance of preventative care in low-resource communities. She thrives in collaborative environments and believes in community-driven initiatives to bring about change.

- **Strategic Innovation and Initiatives**

- Developed 6 strategic initiatives to scale up the organization's eye exam programme.
- Facilitated future partnerships with 2 eye care-focused NGOs.
- Gathered qualitative data from 10 industry experts to inform my research.
- Analyzed 4 data sets to identify the feasibility of proposed initiatives.
PROTECTING VISION FOR A CLEARER TOMORROW

JOURNEY

During the summer of 2022, I was unhappy with my job. I wanted to work in Public Health and wanted to live somewhere other than New York. When I was accepted as a Banyan Impact Fellow, I jumped at the opportunity to move to India. Not only would it give me the opportunity to work in Public Health, but it would also give me the time to reconnect with my culture and spend time with my family. I had specific expectations for how the Fellowship would go. I expected to work closely with the community, learn a new language, and develop a greater passion for Global and Public Health.

My experience, on the other hand, was quite different, with an unexpected impact on my personal growth. Moving to Bengaluru at the start of the Fellowship was difficult for me. I had trouble making meaningful connections in Bangalore and often felt lonely. Despite being in completely different parts of the country, I found genuine support from other Fellows. We took comfort in having shared experiences and found ways to reflect on them. While I struggled to navigate my office environment, I eventually discovered how to communicate with my supervisor to receive the support I required. Additionally, I found comfort in being alone and was able to establish a routine for myself.

Working as a Banyan Impact Fellow helped me understand how to navigate the development sector and the characteristics to look for when developing sustainable partnerships. After the Fellowship is over, I will attend medical school and hope to continue to work in the field of public health. Because of this Fellowship, I have a greater understanding of how to promote fairness without endangering vulnerable populations.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

My time with my host organization impacted me greatly. My colleagues helped me develop knowledge about eye care and the business aspect of healthcare. My work focused on gathering information about the programme and using it to develop strategies that I thought would help the organization expand its eye screening programme. Due to the nature of my project, I will not be able to see the impact of my work on my host organization. Yet, I am hoping that the strategic initiatives that I designed will assist my organization in the future and impact vulnerable communities as a result of the emphasis on partnerships with NGOs. The majority of preventable blindness is experienced by low and middle income households due to the cost of healthcare. Hopefully, by making more eye exams available to these populations, eye illnesses will be recognized and treated more swiftly.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

that it encouraged personal growth.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

travel around India and expand my perspective on its diverse culture.

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

it put me in an environment where I was forced to adapt to new situations, and it allowed me to meet some incredible people whose guidance supported my growth.
Q&A SECTION

How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

My Fellowship experiences were both unique and challenging. From not being able to fit in with my host organization to having no friends in Bangalore, I struggled to develop a routine that worked for me. Although it took a few months, the Fellowship experience challenged me to be creative in navigating these situations. I needed to accept the reality that was different from my expectations and figure out ways to adapt to it. For example, my goal for the Fellowship was to understand how to effectively implement Public Health initiatives. However, the work I did with my organization did not focus on community work or direct implementation. I needed to figure out how to achieve my goals outside of my service to Forus Health. Fortunately, the Fellowship introduced me to a group of amazing people who helped me learn more about the development sector by sharing their experiences. I feel that I have become a more flexible and adaptable person because of my experience.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

I am proud of my professional development throughout the Fellowship. My project with my host organization was completely out of my comfort zone. I needed to gain experience with business and creating strategic initiatives. My personal and professional achievements came from understanding how to navigate my project. I returned to the basics by researching how to scale up business solutions and understanding the market for eye screening technology. When I did not receive the guidance I needed to move forward in my project, I took the initiative by exploring different strategies to scale up eye screenings and playing around with data until I could find a method of analysis that worked. Despite the fact that many of my attempts failed or were unsuccessful, in my ultimate mission, I am proud of the risks I took and the courage I showed to adapt to uncomfortable and unexpected conditions.

“Because of this Fellowship, I have a greater understanding of how to promote fairness without endangering vulnerable populations.”
Sivakami Prasanna
India Health Action Trust (IHAT)

Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh

Sivakami is an early-career researcher and development professional who wants to work at the intersection of gender, health, and development. A firm believer in the value of collective learning, her work attempts to incorporate gender and rights analysis into social interventions.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Completed a qualitative research study among recently delivered mothers and frontline workers in 7 villages from 3 blocks of the Shahdol district.
- Completed 32 personal, in-depth interviews.
- Conducted 2 Focus Group Discussions with ASHA Supervisors.
- Strategized 9 recommendations to be incorporated into the project MANCH framework.
- Revamped the Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (Pilot Intervention) in 1 village.
- Documented 8 impact stories of Project MANCH.
- Collaborated as a knowledge partner with 4 undergraduate public health students from Boston College.
“If everyone does a little bit of what they can, it ends up making a big difference.” I heard this during one of my interviews with an ASHA didi, as she was explaining how communities come together to resolve health issues in her village. It was this aspiration to understand a microcosm of this big network and be one of the many people doing their little bit that brought me to this Fellowship.

I chose the Banyan Impact Fellowship at a juncture when I was trying to develop the necessary skill sets needed to become a good researcher and development professional. The Fellowship brought me to Shahdol in Madhya Pradesh, where I worked with rural and tribal communities to understand their difficulties in accessing maternal, newborn, and child healthcare services. Walking into the Fellowship, I had set three goals for myself:

1. Work in the field with the community and frontline workers.
2. Understand the implementation role of the development partner.
3. Deepen my understanding of the intersections of gender and health.

My Fellowship journey with the India Health Action Trust helped me accomplish all three of my goals. This was done by interacting with development professionals, local communities, and frontline health workers. The qualitative research study I conducted and the pilot intervention of instituting Village Health, Sanitation, and Nutrition Committees allowed me to learn through the process.

The experience taught me the significance of values such as patience and determination to create sustainable community initiatives. It reinforced how grassroots experience is a crucial element in understanding the impact of policies and interventions. The Fellowship strengthened my resolve to work as a researcher and development practitioner to bring in gender-responsive and gender-transformative health promotion interventions that accomplish the twin goals of health and gender equity.

During my Fellowship tenure, I was able to work on two major projects. One of them was a qualitative research study among recently delivered mothers and frontline workers in the three intervention blocks of the Shahdol district. In-depth interviews were conducted in 7 villages to understand the disabling and enabling factors that determine a pregnant woman’s access to antenatal care, institutional delivery, and postnatal care. The findings from this study were used to develop recommendations that were incorporated into Project MANCH’s framework to further improve their interventions.

Second, I completed a pilot intervention on reactivating and revamping the Village Health, Sanitation, and Nutritional Committee (VHSNC) in a poorly performing village in the Jaisinghnagar block of Shahdol district. Our intervention increased collaboration between the village’s political systems and the frontline workers of the government. This intervention enabled health governance at the village level. The VHSNC intervention is now being scaled up by the IHAT team across all three blocks in Shahdol.

Both strategies are intended to uncover the fundamental causes of community access to prenatal, intrapartum, and postnatal care. Going forward, this will help target high-risk populations and implement focused interventions that ensure safe and quality healthcare for every mother and child.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

to provide me with an ecosystem of resources that helped me chart out my path in the development sector.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

serve, learn, and grow!

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

it highlighted the significance of interdisciplinarity and multi-sectoral collaborations within the social sector.
**Q&A SECTION**

**How did your Fellowship experience shape you?**

The personal and professional development I have had in the past few months is a sum of many things: field visits, interactions with colleagues, the AIF family, and living in Shahdol. All these experiences helped me understand how public health interventions require multi-disciplinary collaboration across implementation partners, researchers, and health experts.

Through the AIF alumni network, I also got the opportunity to become a knowledge partner for a group of Public Health Students from Boston College, where we developed a module on the significance of community interventions in Public Health.

Most importantly, my placement with India Health Action Trust equipped me and made me aware of the skill sets necessary to begin a fruitful career in the Public Health Sector. It helped me identify my strengths and employ them efficiently to do my job in the best possible way.

“The experience taught me the significance of values such as patience and determination to create sustainable community initiatives.”

**Which professional achievement are you proud of?**

My biggest achievement was creating my own space in the community I worked with. Qualitative research, especially in-depth interviews, necessitates a link being established between the interviewee and the interviewer. The interviewer must create a friendly and safe space where the women can freely talk about their experiences. Knowing that nothing encourages a brisk friendship more than sharing a common language, I expected a fair share of obstacles while navigating the rapport-building process. As a South Indian who learned Hindi in school, my Hindi is very accented and comically textbook. The women I worked with spoke a variation of Hindi with an accent that I had become familiar with over many months.

Surprisingly, what I initially considered a setback became the factor that helped me talk to the women in the villages better. My identity as an outsider made them more trusting and enthusiastic to share their experiences and beliefs with me. In instances where language failed me, body language, gestures, and audio cues helped me create the above-described space. They were able to talk to me and understand me with ease and pleasure. The experience was the most humbling and wholesome of my time in Shahdol.
Katie Koppen
The Naz Foundation (India) Trust

New Delhi

Katie is interested in initiatives promoting Public Health in the development space. Her curiosity and open mind have enabled her to find success in a cross-cultural environment. She is most appreciative of the connections that she made during her AIF Fellowship with her cohort and her host community.

- Engaged in 18 support group sessions.
- Developed donor database.
- Developed 15 programming/workshop proposals.
- Created 2 annual reports and 7 newsletters.

Communications and Development

Gender & Inclusion
COMMUNICATIONS CONNECTION TO INCLUSION, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND LIVELIHOODS

JOURNEY

When I was accepted as a Fellow after graduating from university, I was consumed by two emotions. One was a combination of excitement and disbelief that I would have the opportunity to work in India for the next 10 months, and the other was fear. I had to make a crucial decision: stay in Wisconsin, where my family was, and take the secure, well-paying job that had just been offered to me, which would ensure a stable career, or take a chance that would take me to a new environment and test me beyond comprehension. Despite the voices around me and my own fear that told me I was making a mistake, I accepted the Fellowship.

I arrived in India in October 2022, leaving behind the "safe" alternative for my future. During this time, I can say that I have altogether transformed, and I attribute this to my willingness to take on new challenges, not only by accepting the Fellowship but also by showing up with the intention to learn and thrive in a new environment. Working my first full-time job out of college in an unfamiliar country has provided me with a unique opportunity for development. Seeing the development sector from the grassroot level has opened my eyes to the process of running a non-profit as well as the Indian-specific context surrounding development issues, particularly in the context of Public Health and Inclusivity. Not only have I improved my communication and proposal-writing skills, but I have also improved my interpersonal skills, particularly in a cross-cultural setting. Personally, I have adapted to my new surroundings and challenged myself to explore new hobbies and ambitions, such as running my first half marathon in Delhi. Learning about other Fellows' work and experiences contributed to the overall Fellowship experience and provided me with additional opportunities to understand the social sector in India.

The Banyan Impact Fellowship has emphasized the value of self-determination as well as the strength of our own thoughts and views of ourselves and the world around us.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

The Naz Foundation (India) Trust has been a pioneer in the fight for LGBTQI+ rights since the early 1990s. The group's initial mission was to educate the public about HIV/AIDS, but as it expanded its services, it became clear that it also needed to provide resources for the LGBTQI+ community. I've had the extraordinary opportunity to work at Naz during a period of transition and expansion as they prepare to open Delhi's first LGBTQI+ community centre. In the course of my Fellowship project, I have had the chance to contribute to the LGBTQI+ programme, the HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention programme, and the Aath Kadam initiative. Supporting the LGBTQI+ programme at Naz has included helping to organize events like workshops, support group meetings, social media posts, and even grant applications. Pictures, interviews, and case studies of Naz India's staff, donors, and beneficiaries have helped paint a picture of the organization's work that can be disseminated throughout the community. One of the most memorable aspects of my time at Naz has been the personal connections I've made with members of the local community through these initiatives. Hearing what Naz's services mean to community members has further illuminated the significance of the work that I and the rest of the Naz staff members contribute to.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

*to connect me to a community of people who have similar interests, passions, and hearts, which has allowed me to build meaningful relationships, have continued support, build new perspectives, and achieve greater vision.*

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

*take time to understand myself better, grow, and explore the ways I can contribute to the development sector in the future.*

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

*I was able to immerse myself in a new culture and community, which enhanced my cultural competence and understanding of the development sector broadly.*
How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

Without the opportunity AIF has given me through the Banyan Impact Fellowship, I would not have been able to experience the growth I have experienced over the past seven months. Immersion in a foreign culture and involvement in a Fellowship where leadership, innovation, and a desire to support the society around us are valued have influenced the path I will take in my professional and personal life. The Fellowship has provided me with many learning opportunities and amazing experiences. This has given me the confidence to take on challenges in my career and follow a different path in life than the mould I once felt I had to fit into. This experience has renewed a sense of purpose and desire in me, and I intend to use these qualities to pursue a career that I am passionate about and find meaningful.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

My improvement in grant writing is one aspect of my Fellowship experience that makes me feel proud. Creating communications content that would be distributed to current and prospective donors was quite intimidating to me at the start of my Fellowship journey. As I participated in Naz's efforts over time, I gained a better grasp of how programming functions and who the beneficiaries really are. After I established relationships with community members and learned the ins and outs of my host organization, my efforts became more grounded. I was able to produce content that more accurately reflected the objectives and realities of my host organization by making an effort to connect with, comprehend, and learn about my host community. Writing grants and proposals has been a significant part of this journey. Due to the connections I have built with the community and my passion for the work being done at my host organization, I have not only increased my abilities in this area but have also gained unique insights. In addition to having a stronger awareness of the processes involved when it comes to interacting with and writing content for donors, I'm excited to serve my host organization by producing these proposals.

“
My Fellowship experience has taught me the worth and significance of a sense of community, personal drive, and dedication in order to attain the desired outcomes.

"
Nabhas Raj

Jagori Rural Charitable Trust

Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

Nabhas is passionate about climate change, research, and sustainable development. He believes and hopes to witness the radical transformation of society by the oppressed as opposed to reform directed by those in power. He feels the best gift of the Fellowship journey is his new-found love for the mountains.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Created a centralized database of nearly 800 farmers associated with the project.
- Organised 26 meetings and events.
- Produced 6 case studies and a research report.
SUSTAINING LIVELIHOODS

JOURNEY

My Fellowship journey has been enriching, to say the least. From meeting new people and making friends in the Banyan Impact Fellowship cohort to discovering the terrains of Kangra and experiencing a life and community so different from what I had lived until then, these nine months have been transformative in a number of ways. Throughout my Fellowship, the Fellows have been a major source of support and inspiration—a sort of coming together that happens less and less as we go forward in our lives.

My experience with Jagori Rural Charitable Trust in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh exposed me to a new set of ideas and realities. The grass-roots feminist nature of the organization gave me the opportunity to learn from and interact with experienced development practitioners who are involved in different stages of social work. I would say the biggest takeaway from my nine months here is the interactions I have had with the field staff and the farmers of Kangra, who have considerably impacted my perception regarding organic farming, sustainable development, and community engagement. The ground-level learnings have provided me with a reality check on the right ways to research and combat climate change. The experiences and learnings will be etched forever in my mind as I complete my nine months with the American Indian Foundation and Jagori Rural Charitable Trust.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

The Fellowship has been an opportunity for me to put into practice my skills in data analysis and research. At Jagori, I have been able to utilize my knowledge to give more emphasis within the project on a data-based approach and build a centralized database of activities under the project with detailed information regarding land use, crop types, fertilizer, and pesticide use. This database will serve as a reference point and provide insights for generating new ideas to carry the project forward, backed by data. The organization has been able to utilize the accumulated data for the annual reports as well as in meetings and discussions within the organization and while engaging with other organizations operating in similar areas of work. I believe that the organization will continue its efforts to expand its data-oriented approach for the project.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

to give me the opportunity to be part of a grassroots level project and test myself in a very independent professional space. The learnings from my experience will play a crucial role in my career in the sector.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

experience a work life that brought together an interesting project and an exciting nine months in the mountains of Himachal Pradesh.

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

it has influenced how I perceive people, how I approach work, and so much more. I think the Fellowship is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.
**Q&A SECTION**

**How did your Fellowship experience shape you?**

I arrived as a BIF Fellow in Himachal Pradesh with little experience in the sector and even less experience managing a team on my own. The Fellowship has influenced me in many ways, but perhaps the most notable impact lies in how I was able to collaborate with a team of over a half-dozen grassroots-level staff who substantially had more experience than me. I was able to pilot the project and coordinate activities in different areas of the district. Overcoming the initial hostilities in the staff rooms and establishing a memorable bond with the team will always be a highlight of my story. I feel confident that the experience will add to my path towards being a better development practitioner.

**Which professional achievement are you proud of?**

Being able to complete over 15 qualitative interviews with farmers and learn about the various benefits, challenges, and trends in organic farming, is something I am proud of. Also, bringing together the data to produce case studies and reports in the span of two months was a satisfying achievement. It was amazing to see the information gathered later utilized for a blog post as well.

“Throughout my Fellowship, the Fellows have been a major source of support and inspiration.”
AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship for Service in India and the United States
TESTIMONIALS OF HOST ORGANIZATIONS

Blake Ratner
Executive Director, Collaborating for Resilience

"Partnering with AIF has been a great boost to Collaborating for Resilience, helping expand our engagement with critical partnerships addressing rural livelihoods and social justice through restoration of degraded forests and pasturelands in India. Namrata, one of two Atlas Corps / AIF Fellows we host, brings tremendous creative energy to our work. A natural networker, she’s co-designing a new training initiative, expanding our communications outreach, and nurturing relationships with potential new collaborators in India and beyond."
Our partnership with AIF is helping to advance our goals toward internationalization and builds our capacity to design and implement meaningful and impactful global education programming. As a Fellow, Tabish has already enriched our work and broadened our perspectives while sharing in our efforts to foster ethical partnerships for global learning and community development. He has a unique mix of experiences that are well matched for our community-based global learning programs. He’s had experience as a development worker and community educator and also with fostering global exchange with international youth in India. He’s also well organized and detail-oriented and demonstrates integrity, thoughtfulness, and humility in his collaborations with others. These qualities are also well aligned with the ethos of our collaborative work with students, faculty, staff and community partners.
Manushi Sharma

Collaborating for Resilience

Washington, DC

With 8+ years of programmatic experience in health systems across sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Asia Pacific, Manushi has managed large-scale multi-stakeholder projects for 6+ years and published 9+ articles in peer-reviewed journals. As an AIF Fellow, she focuses on environmental governance, promoting citizen engagement in policy reform for natural system governance.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Analyzed outcome evidence from CoRe partnerships in 5 countries with input from 20 practitioners. This helped amplify the voices of the local community and showcase our partners’ roles.

- Led and contributed to 8 substantive research products that address the lack of evidence in areas such as systems change, multi-stakeholder dialogues for conflict mitigation, and adaptive monitoring, evaluation, and learning of complex social interventions.
BROADENING MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRY

JOURNEY

My journey at CoRe (Community for Resilience) has been an incredible experience that has stretched both my sense of time and my understanding of environmental governance. While six months may seem like a short duration, it feels as though I have been a part of CoRe for an eternity, yet the memory of my first day remains vivid.

Delving into the realm of environmental governance in July 2022 was a leap into uncharted waters for me. Throughout this period, I have undergone profound learning and unlearning, challenging my preconceived notions and expanding my knowledge in ways I never thought possible. CoRe's unique approach, which revolves around working with communities at the intersection of ecological, social, and economic development, has provided me with a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in achieving planetary wellbeing. The small yet agile team of passionate changemakers at CoRe has created an environment conducive to transformative learning.

One of the most enriching aspects of the Fellowship has been the opportunity to engage with global experts in the field. Interacting with these seasoned professionals and learning from their experiences and wisdom has been invaluable. Their insights have broadened my perspective and served as a guiding light in shaping my career path. The Fellowship at CoRe has served as a crucial stepping stone, propelling me forward and equipping me with the knowledge and skills necessary to make a meaningful impact in the field of environmental governance.

Looking back, these six months have been a period of growth, discovery, and personal development. As I reflect on my journey, I am grateful for the immersive learning experience, the inspiring team I have had the privilege to work with, and the invaluable lessons that will shape my future endeavours.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

We are CoRe, a group that brings together people with diverse interests in environmental resources. We work to find innovative solutions that reduce conflicts and prioritize fair and equitable environmental governance. Our mission is to enhance institutions and promote collaboration, and my role involves monitoring, evaluating, distilling outcomes, and documenting good practices.

Through our work, we hope to provide valuable insights into the strategies that can drive systemic transformation. Our evaluation work is significant and will inform best practices in natural system governance. For example, I am collaborating with a network of 84+ NGOs in India to perform network analysis. This will help us understand the key bottlenecks and strengths of this network and ultimately study the winning coalition required to bring about social change. This knowledge can be used in different contexts to understand what factors are conducive to forming social impact networks.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was... provide a unique platform for professional growth and cross-cultural learning.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to... network with a community of thought leaders who are driving sustainable change in different parts of the globe.

This was a transformative year of my life because... it challenged and expanded my understanding of the world while equipping me with the skills and mindset to drive positive change.
Q&A SECTION

How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

The Fellowship programme had a transformative impact on me, expanding my comprehension of the development industry. It exposed me to various projects and initiatives, enabling me to grasp the challenges and opportunities in the field. The programme’s emphasis on diverse cultures and lifestyles nurtured my appreciation for different perspectives, promoting cultural sensitivity in development work. Additionally, collaborating with a diverse group of individuals enhanced my communication and teamwork skills, enabling me to navigate differing opinions effectively. The programme also emphasized adaptability and flexibility, teaching me to embrace change and find creative solutions. Overall, the Fellowship programme broadened my understanding of the development industry, cultivated cultural appreciation, improved my ability to collaborate and communicate, and enhanced my adaptability and flexibility. These experiences have been invaluable in my professional journey within the development sector.

“...The emphasis on many cultures and lifestyles in the programme fostered appreciation for different perspectives, promoting cultural sensitivity in development work."

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

I have developed a comprehensive toolkit that allows for adaptive monitoring, evaluation, and learning initiatives aimed at creating social change. These resources enable comprehensive assessments of partnerships, foster collaboration and communication, and guide informed decision-making for creating meaningful social change. It involves collecting and analyzing data to evaluate the extent to which desired outcomes have been achieved. This process includes defining indicators, designing data collection methods, and employing statistical analysis techniques to measure the impact of the partnership on the intended beneficiaries and target areas. By systematically assessing impact, we can gauge the effectiveness of the partnership and make data-driven decisions to enhance its outcomes.

It includes tools like social network analysis, which allows for the examination of relationships and connections between different entities involved in partnerships. By mapping out the network and analyzing its structure, we can identify key actors, their roles, and their influence within the partnership. It also includes guidance on distilling the outcomes of multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms for conflict resolution in environmental governance to help examine whether the platform has effectively facilitated coordination, knowledge sharing, and collective action among diverse stakeholders. By evaluating the outcomes of such platforms, we can identify strengths and weaknesses, address gaps, and make informed decisions for improvement and sustainability.
With over nine years of experience, Namrata has collaborated throughout India with nonprofits addressing environmental conservation and education, primarily in underserved areas. She is an avid traveller and a photography enthusiast. She is grateful to have experienced diverse cultures and collaborations as a Fellow.

Namrata Sehgal
Collaborating for Resilience

Washington, DC

With over nine years of experience, Namrata has collaborated throughout India with nonprofits addressing environmental conservation and education, primarily in underserved areas. She is an avid traveller and a photography enthusiast. She is grateful to have experienced diverse cultures and collaborations as a Fellow.

**Key Highlights**

- Co-led and launched a training and certification programme with a first cohort of 18 participants.
- Led the design and publishing of a systems change analysis guide and the translation of a multi-actor platform design guide.
- Launched a new initiative named Banyan Academy.
- Directed a documentary.
COLLABORATING, ADAPTING, AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

JOURNEY

When I stumbled upon the Fellowship, as an entrepreneur, I looked for ways that would hone my leadership skills. Serving as a communications Fellow at CoRe helped me achieve my professional goals. It enabled me to lead multiple workstreams, engage with diverse working groups, adjust to a new working culture, and achieve the work-life balance for which I had been striving for years but had failed miserably. Additionally, working out of a co-working space that hosts various non-profits and developmental organizations that address diverse issues has been incredibly motivating.

This Fellowship has indeed supported my holistic development. Living with housemates from diverse cultures was a significant learning experience for me personally. As a hobbyist photographer and explorer, moving to Washington, D.C., encouraged me to document its neighbourhoods and culture. I revived my social media accounts, which helped me connect with like-minded creators and instilled a sense of belonging in me. Halfway through the Fellowship, I got an opportunity to travel to India to launch a programme I am co-leading, engage with field practitioners, and build a narrative around the multi-actor platform approach initiated in a town that would make a significant contribution to the design of the planned community of practice and an online resource library that we have envisioned. I was slightly hesitant at first about how the Fellowship would pan out, but it has been a wholesome experience, to say the least.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

I am serving as a communications Fellow at CoRe. It has been an incredible opportunity where I am designing publications, developing materials for a new programme to be launched as a cross-regional network meant to strengthen the capabilities of civil society and social entrepreneurs, co-leading a training and certification programme, and planning overall communication and outreach activities. I travelled to Anand, Gujarat, to launch the first cohort of the training and certification programme. It was immensely fulfilling to watch the participants share their experiences of how the in-person sessions have enabled and motivated them to share the learnings with their teams.

During the launch week, I was involved in the development of online assets, the design of surveys and assignments, the visualization of participant input, and the modification of presentation material. Additionally, I conducted interviews in person with selected participants to probe their expectations and ambitions for applying the approaches covered in the training to support subsequent outreach and contribute to the design of a planned community of practice. Additionally, I am leading support for the Participatory Digital Attestation platform, an online tool to enable participants, trainers, and the community at large to work together and amplify both individual and collective impact.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

to help me experience diverse cultures and explore new opportunities.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

explore uncharted avenues professionally and get out of my comfort zone personally.

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

I had to unlearn and relearn. And it helped me regain perspective in general.
How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

I’ve been an entrepreneur for six years and chose this Fellowship to enhance my leadership skills. As a communications Fellow at CoRe, I’ve had multiple opportunities to lead various workstreams, communicate with other working groups, adjust to a new working culture, and, most importantly, maintain a work-life balance. I had worked for years to accomplish the latter, but had failed terribly. This time has helped me recover perspective on how to be ambitious while still taking it slow on other days. Sharing space with housemates from other cultures enriched my overall learning experience greatly.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

As a communications Fellow, I have had the opportunity to design and develop materials that are used by diverse groups. For instance, Pathways to Systems Change is a guide that is focused on change in complex systems, which are multi-layered, diverse, and dynamic. And it aims to outline a process and indicate tools that practitioners and organizations can use to identify crucial elements, patterns, or relationships that can help make durable change possible.

The visual language I have adopted for this guide has its roots in another guide that CoRe published years ago, and I developed it further to suit its context. Additionally, I am supporting the translation and design of another practitioner-focused material into Hindi, in collaboration with our partners, to enable wider dissemination and implementation in various regional contexts and support a more diverse network of field practitioners. Developing these materials in collaboration has enabled me to widen my knowledge and expertise, not only in design but also in adaptation and leadership skills.

“This Fellowship has indeed supported my holistic development. It has been a wholesome experience, to say the least.”
Pragati Singh is interested in working in strategy and development in the sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice fields. Her talent for ideation, brainstorming, and problem solving helps her bring novel ideas to life. During the Fellowship, she built an SRHRJ programme from scratch and troubleshooted along the way.

**KEY HIGHLIGHTS**

- Conducted **two sessions** on gender justice and **sexual** and **reproductive health** and rights with over seventy international students in DC. This was for the U.S. Department of State’s YES programme, which brings an eclectic group of youth from countries with a significant Muslim population from across the globe to the U.S. for an exchange year.

- Independently, I joined local activists to lobby on Capitol Hill for the separation of church and state in the U.S. and met **DC Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton** to discuss the **Do No Harm Act**. I shared with her my perspective as an Indian healthcare professional who’s recently lived in the U.S. and has been able to see, compare, and reflect on the status of sexual and reproductive health in both countries. This opportunity came as a part of the SRF conference by Americans United that I won a scholarship to.
BUILDING PROGRAMS IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

JOURNEY

I arrived to find a mystery package on my desk one sunny April morning. A few weeks prior, I had conducted two talks/interactive sessions for a youth exchange programme organized by the U.S. Department of State: The YES programme brings an eclectic group of high school students from countries with significant Muslim populations from across the globe to live and study in the U.S. for an academic year. As a part of their civic education workshops, I engaged with two batches of their students on topics related to gender justice, leadership, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

During my session, I heard about their personal experiences with gender issues in their own countries. We covered topics like mahr, street sexual harassment, women in STEM, and abortion. Some very interesting debates and controversies broke out mid-session. We pondered over questions ranging from why women's clothes don't have pockets to why women have to carry the burden of gender justice work even though most positions of power are held by men. I was blown away by how bright, sensitive, curious, and aware the teenagers were. Following these, they sent me not just a thank you email with some beautiful feedback but also this lovely little gift with a handwritten note. They mentioned how some students shared that they felt inspired and motivated after the session to work on gender issues in their home countries.

It is these on-the-ground engagements that spark joy for me and remind me of my purpose and why I do what I do. Everything else—all the cost and all the challenges—then becomes worthwhile.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

Applying a strategic approach to building a programme in a new thematic area from the ground up has been helpful for the organization to build a roadmap for future use in 1) SRHRJ planning (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights) and 2) initiating any new programme. I've been tying back all current project work and ideas and developing solutions to a needs assessment survey that I designed and conducted with the broader community at the start of my Fellowship. This has provided a sense of coherence and alignment to the overall sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice programme at the headquarters.

Additionally, by providing and adding SRHRJ sensitivity and competence to previously ongoing activations, programmes, and community initiatives, my contributions have overall uplifted the Girl Up programming to be SRHRJ inclusive and aware.

An example of my unique contribution would be the inclusion of the ‘A’ at the end of the LGBTQIA+ acronym in the United Nations Foundation’s language. I started this right from the time of my interview by using ‘LGBTQIA+’ in my own verbal and written communication. As someone who has been leading asexual visibility and advocacy in Asia for a decade, it was pertinent that I bring this value to my host organization too.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

to give me access to a new social network.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

to explore myself better professionally and personally.

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

I got the chance to live and gain professional experience in a foreign country for a year.
How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

The professional exposure to the workings of an international non-profit has widened my understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and limitations of the same and has helped me put in perspective the vision, objectives, and operations of my own social enterprise back home in India.

As someone who had only recently registered my own entity, which also works on gender justice, specifically sexual health and rights, the Fellowship experience came at the right time to give me an insight into what this work can look like in an international and decade-old established non-profit. I was in the middle of building a team and formalizing the operations of something I’d informally been working on for almost a decade when I accepted the Fellowship offer. By the time I go back, I’ll have gained a fresh perspective on project management, organizational development, and the international landscape of sexual and reproductive health and rights issues and corresponding movements.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

Since I was building the strategy and the programme from scratch, I’ve had the opportunity to propose a variety of innovative programmatic ideas on sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice. I applied a knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP)-based approach to design an annual plan for SRHRJ at Girl Up. Thereafter, I designed interventions that improve our beneficiaries' knowledge first, attitude second, and facilitate their application into practice following that. For example, to improve our youth’s knowledge of SRHRJ, I developed a resource hub on our community platform that covers a wide range of SRHRJ issues from across the globe. Then, for the attitude piece, I designed a series of SRHRJ podcasts with global leaders to build their leadership attitude and inspire and motivate them to utilize their knowledge for meaningful action. I’m proud of being able to build structure from a blank starting point. Finally, for practise, I’m building an actionable programme that can be employed after my term is over.

Additionally, I have also been appointed chair of the United Nations Foundation’s Pride committee. This is something I’m proud of because I showed the initiative and energy required for the role and took up the challenge.

“the Fellowship experience came at the right time to give me an insight into what this work can look like in an international and decade-old established non-profit.”
Shivalika is a rural development specialist committed to generating quality evidence for development programmes and policies. During the past nine years, she has progressively engaged with a varied set of stakeholders, including consultants, academia, international donors, and the Government of India, across topics including agriculture, health & nutrition, and energy.

**Shivalika Gupta**

**International Fertilizer Development Center**

**Washington, DC**

**KEY HIGHLIGHTS**

- Coordinated efforts on and contributed to a successful proposal worth USD 36 million in Bangladesh funded by USAID for advancing climate-smart agricultural technologies.

- Led the development of a set of two USDA-funded proposals with a cumulative worth of USD 150,000 to review seed and fertilizer policy frameworks in Malawi.

- Co-led with a colleague from Ivory Coast, IFDC's 50-year impact study, to be completed in 2024 for its 50th anniversary celebrations.

- Visited the pilot plants in Alabama and interacted with scientists for an in-depth understanding of IFDC's on-going research in agricultural technologies.
After spending about 8 years in the sector in India, I needed to take a step back. What started as a passionate commitment to a cause was becoming fuzzy in the week-to-week grind. That’s how I knew I needed distance to regroup my thoughts regarding my vision and long-term goals for being in this sector. And the distance is indeed giving me time to reflect on my journey up until now as well as to build a perspective on what I could create next. This move away from familiarity has created space for me to invest in my capacities, both at work and outside. At work, I decided to broaden my skill set by moving beyond monitoring and evaluation to business development and proposal writing. I am widening the scope of my understanding of global food systems through my engagement with different stakeholders outside of my country.

On a more personal level, I have been making so much progress as a dancer, learning with and from a vibrant community of Latin dancers here in the U.S. I have had a chance to learn Dominican Bachata from a Dominican instructor, and I count that as a real blessing! I, along with other members of my cohort in whom I have found a family far away from home, have grown as professionals and as humans with every high and low of embracing the gift of newness that this Fellowship journey brought with it.

The International Fertilizer Development Centre (IFDC) is a global organization headquartered in Alabama. I am integrated into a small team in Washington, DC, that deals with business development. In addition, I support the newly constituted MELS team spread across Alabama, Kenya, and the Ivory Coast.

In Washington, DC, we are a close-knit group of five people led by Douglas Kerr, Vice President, Business Development at IFDC. While a small team means having a lot of space to contribute and show initiative, it is, at the same time, hard to absorb the vast scope of IFDC’s work, which is spread across continents at once! I spent the first few months filling in wherever my help was needed, embodying the adage that no task is too small. It proved critical in building my understanding of IFDC’s work. Since I come from an M&E background, my direct contribution to the MELS team was in the form of network and knowledge exchange for the new systems and process improvements. Early on, I was tasked with drafting an RFP for assessing IFDC’s impact over the past 50 years since its inception. This has become a full project now that I co-lead it with another colleague based in Ivory Coast.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was...

to bring me to DC for a deeply humbling experience where I am learning to appreciate the little things of joy back home.

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to...

widen the scope of my understanding of global food systems while also giving me time to reflect upon my vision for my future career path.

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

I learned to redefine my own sense of belonging in a new social setting.
Q&A SECTION

How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

The experience is much greater than just professional development. The journey of moving to a new culture that is so different from the one I belong to has definitely grown me in the past seven months while generating acceptance for the newness and the differences. As a South Asian woman, you are not always taught to go outward. My biggest lessons come from my day-to-day communication with a diverse, multicultural team. I am learning to articulate my knowledge and ask questions in a more assertive yet grounded manner.

Outside of work, I have found a supremely diverse community of Latin dancers, and each day with them grounds me further in my own authentic expression. My Fellowship experience is still shaping me, and I feel the best is yet to come. Looking ahead, I can visualize taking back a renewed sense of identity that is stronger, more centered, and more confident.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

My expertise lies in policy research and evaluations. At IFDC, I am expanding beyond my existing skill set and foraying into the world of fundraising and business development. I still remember the first Society for International Development (United States) networking event I attended with my team back in November 2022. I felt lost and intimidated. As a mid-career professional in India, I was used to seeing familiar faces and organizations at most such events. Here, in an alien country, I recognized no one, and the language as well as the jargon were different. Six months hence, names feel familiar, my pitch feels nuanced, and I feel more confident about representing my organization as well as myself.

Within the business development team, I have moved from coordinating different tasks to managing small proposals and am still growing. In terms of contribution, while the grandest has been a USAID-funded proposal worth USD 36 million that we got in Bangladesh to advance climate smart technologies, the most enriching is the current set of two proposals for USDA to review Malawi’s seed and fertilizer policy landscape, having a cumulative worth of USD 150,000 that I manage independently under Doug’s direct mentorship.

I, along with other members of my cohort have grown as professionals and as humans with every high and low of embracing the gift of newness that this Fellowship journey brought with it.
Tabish Bilal is a development sector professional with experience across domains such as education, curriculum and fellowship design, community work and mobilization, prison reformation, rehabilitation, and reintegration, gender-based violence, and disaster management. His strong suits include programme management, partnerships, analytical skills, and operations skills.

**Chicago, Illinois**

**Education**

- **Research**
- **Strategic Innovation and Initiatives**
- **Community Initiatives**
- **Young Engagement and Mentoring**

**KEY HIGHLIGHTS**

- Worked with **10+ student groups** on campus on professional development.
- Worked on the Northwestern GESI programme to assist **43 students** from Evanston and Qatar campuses study abroad in the summer.
- Worked as a teaching assistant for the spring course with **19 students**.
- Worked with **7 site** partners/NGOs/Community based organizations in the Global South with their study abroad programmes.
JOURNEY

I am going to try and divide my story into a few parts, and not to flex my ‘cinema’ knowledge too much, I will make an attempt to use it.

Part 1: E.T.

This Fellowship is my first experience in the West. Just like ET, it was overwhelming. I felt out of place, questioning my decision to leave a fairly comfortable professional and personal setup behind for an ‘adventure’. But like the movie goes, I found help in places I didn’t fully expect. I found a social circle with my colleagues from work and joined a few groups like my football friends, which were essential to settling in my new home.

Part 2: The Intern

The first few days at work felt like what Ben Whittaker (Robert De Niro) must have experienced settling into a new professional domain. In my first few team meetings, I realized that it would be a learning curve for me that would require significant effort. My initial months were spent learning the terminology-semester vs. quarter system, electives vs. core classes, and so on. It was a gradual process, but I believe I got up to speed fairly quickly. Learning about the ‘education abroad’ field has been exciting, and I am particularly keen on exploring opportunities back home.

Part 3: Good Will Hunting

Not to romanticize too much, but one instance that can explain my thoughts here is the very end of the movie, where Will (Matt Damon) figures out one more piece about himself going after his love interest. I feel it too—that I am a more learned version of myself, having experienced a different work culture, watched a baseball game, and most importantly, appreciated a sunny day here in Chicago!

CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOST ORGANIZATION

Like all journeys, the Banyan Impact Fellowship presented me with both challenges and opportunities. Looking back at ways in which I was able to leave my mark, an instance that I can recall was when one of the professors that I was working with for a spring course (International Development in Action) for undergraduate students wanted me to present a model of ‘stakeholder’ mapping in one of the classes. We were able to design a model that was relevant to the class, and the overall experience was fruitful. At the end of it, the professor decided to run this session/activity for future classes as well.

Another instance is when I was able to re-design a management tool for the GESI (Global Engagement Studies Institute) programme (one of the study-abroad programmes at Northwestern). I created a dashboard in MS Excel to simplify the logistics process as we approached the dates for the programme.

As I write this, I am also looking forward to contributing to some of the grant requests/proposals that need to be sent to donors for new initiatives within the GESI programme.
The most powerful thing the AIF Fellowship did for me was... 

*getting me out of my comfort zone.*

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

*I made it through the Midwest winters!*

The AIF Fellowship provided me the opportunity to... 

*network and learn.*
How did your Fellowship experience shape you?

Being part of a student-facing office within a university, my experience with Buffett has been enriching. It has changed my perceptions about how a large education institute functions and the systems that are missing back home in India—student feedback, exchange programmes, and inter-university partnerships, to name a few. More importantly, it has shown me how important it is to work on giving students opportunities to see themselves as global citizens. At a study abroad fair, it was a unique experience to learn about several such programmes and how students can explore themselves, which goes on to help build more globally sound and empathetic leaders of the future.

The knowledge-sharing platform that the Fellowship provides is like no other. After having worked extensively in recent years to bring learning through travel into mainstream education, I am confident that my experiences here will help me better understand the stakeholder landscape consisting of institutions, donors, parents, and students.

Which professional achievement are you proud of?

I got the opportunity to hold a session on ‘collaboration’ for student group organizations at Northwestern University. The Buffett Institute at Northwestern offers a funding opportunity for student group organizations at the Evanston campus in return for organizing a few mandatory activities and attending some leadership sessions. This is an annual commitment for the student group organizations, and in 2023, a diverse cohort of interesting groups came together, including Engineers Without Borders (EWB), NU (Northwestern University) Community for Human Rights, Menstrual Equity Activist, and more.

I took this as an opportunity to share my experiences as a social entrepreneur from the practical perspective of working closely on the ground and introduced a tool called the “Business Model Canvas” for non-profits. As we progressed through the session, we discussed an example of inter-government collaboration from India: the polio eradication initiative involving the Government of India, Rotary International, the UN, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and many more.

At the end of the session, I was assured of the power of young minds and how important it is to provide them with different perspectives and guide them to ask the right and difficult questions, which many shy away from.

“The knowledge-sharing platform that the Fellowship provides is like no other. I am confident that my experiences here will help me better understand the stakeholder landscape consisting of institutions, donors, parents, and students.”
INDIA SERVICE TRACK

» ABHA BHAIIYA
  Jagori Rural Charitable Trust

» ANGRAJ SWAMI
  Ecowrap

» ANILA MATHUR
  Youth4Jobs Foundation

» ANJALI GOPALAN
  Naz Foundation

» CHANDRASEKHAR KUPPUSWAMI
  Forus Health Pvt Ltd.

» CHHAVI BHARADVJ
  Tech Mahindra Foundation

» CHITRA SHAH
  Satya Special School

» DEEPAK UPADHYAY
  Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society

» GURUMURTHY U H
  India Health Action Trust

» HIMANI GUPTA
  Kriti Social Initiatives

» IMAM HUSSAIN
  SAFa

» KAREN LUKAS
  Lok Kala Sagar Sansthan - Folk Arts Rajasthan

» MANICKAM NARAYANAN
  Pudiyador

» PRASHANT KUMAR
  Sub-K IMPACT Solutions

» RUCHI KHARE
  Asra Samajik Lok Kalyan Samiti

» SATYANARAYAN PATTANAYAK
  Seba Jagat

U.S. SERVICE TRACK

» BLAKE RATNER
  Collaborating for Resilience

» DOUGLAS KERR
  International Fertilizer Development Center

» LAKIA POOLE & BAILEY LEUSCHEN
  Girl Up

» PATRICK ECCLES
  Northwestern University, Buffett Institute for Global Affairs
On behalf of the AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship team, we would like to thank the following people for their continuous support towards major events during this programmatic 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.

**SPECIAL THANKS**

- **LATA KRISHNAN**  
  Co-Founder and Co-Chair of AIF’s Board of Directors

- **PAUL GLICK**  
  Executive Director, Rural India Supporting Trust (RIST)

- **SAIFUL ISLAM**  
  Finance Program Manager, Rural India Supporting Trust (RIST)

- **MATHEW JOSEPH**  
  Country Director, American India Foundation

- **ABBY (FLOTTEMESCH) ROBINSON**  
  Chief Strategy Officer, Atlas Corps

- **DR. JOANN HALPERN**  
  Director, Hasso Plattner Institute, New York

- **PRIYANARY**  
  Executive Director, University Alliance Ruhr

- **AJAY SHAH**  
  Co-Chair, AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship Program

- **SHWETA RAWAT**  
  Managing Director, Rural India Supporting Trust (RIST)

- **NISHANT PANDEY**  
  CEO, American India Foundation

- **BIDJAN NASHAT**  
  CEO, Atlas Corps

- **MEREDITH NEWMARK**  
  Senior Director of Operations, Atlas Corps

- **HANNA JEMANEH**  
  Program Manager, Atlas Corps

- **TIM RINGEL**  
  CEO, Meet The People

**FACILITATORS**

- Chandan Gomes
- Cindy Peace
- David Peace
- Dushyant Singh
- Karishma Gaur
- Kanika Singh
- Madhu Shukla
- Naman Goel
- Neha Sharma
- Nalini Menon
- Nilisha Mohapatra
- Padmaja Nagarur
- Shivapriya Sivaraman
- Urvashi Tilak

**ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT**

- Aayush Malik (2018-19)
- Aishani Jaiswal (2021-22)
- Amana Parveen (2021-22)
- Amiya Chaudhuri (2020-21)
- Andrew Kerr (2017-18)
- Anushri Saxena (2020-21)
- Ben Lenzner (2005-06)
- Benita Mahanta (2015-16)
- Deepa Shanadi (2002)
- Diana Chavez (2018-19)
- Elijah Monroe (2010-11)
- Ilika Trivedi (2021-22)
- Joel Joseph (2016-17)
- Josephine Helland (2015-16)
- Maitreyi Nandhakumar (2017-18)
- Mehar Jauhar (2020-21)
- Michael Kinzer (2017-18)
- Mrinal Mohanka (2014-15)
- Nishant Gokhale (2018-19)
- Prakriti Chawla (2021-22)
- Prakriti Pandia (2021-22)
- Ré Phillips (2010-11)
- Sahana Afreen (2019-20)
- Simarjeet Nagpal (2021-22)
- Srisruthi Ramesh (2019-20)
- Subhalakshmi Ganguly (2002-03)
- Tara Casebolt (2013-14)
- Ted Samuel (2012-13)
- Tonmoy Talukdar (2020-21)
- Trishla Bafna (2020-21)

**SENIOR FELLOWS**

- Dilip Surkar
- Mohit Raj
- Prashant Anand
- Satyendra Kumar
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’s Fellowship program have partnered to enhance the capacity and the impact of India’s social sector through the placement of knowledgeable Fellows who impart specialized skills, expertise, and best practices to Indian social service sector organizations. Due to the U.S.-India cross-cultural nature of the Fellowship program, RIST and AIF are assisting in creating a cohesive ecosystem of understanding between these two countries. Our Fellows are the global leaders of tomorrow. During the two pandemic-stricken program cycles 2020-2022, RIST generously agreed to support an all-Indian cohort of Fellows and assisted the AIF Fellowship in establishing the critical infrastructure needed to run a successful hybrid program. RIST’s contributions have enabled the AIF Fellowship to increase accessibility for beneficiaries and advance diversity, equity, and inclusion. This year, we are excited about our renewed partnership with RIST and their support of the Fellowship program for the next 5 years. We are excited to perform meaningful work on the ground with RIST’s support and contribution.

Krishnan Shah Family Foundation

We are grateful to Lata Krishnan, Co-Founder and Co-Chair of AIF’s Board of Directors, and Ajay Shah, Co-Chair, AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship Program, for providing long-term support to the AIF Fellowship program. In March 2021, they announced the largest gift to AIF, a $5 million grant to the Fellowship program. Building on the legacy created over more than two decades, this grant came with a renewed vision for the future. Lata Krishnan’s and Ajay Shah’s historic contribution ushers the Fellowship program into a decade of action, focusing on accelerating impact and supercharging ideas into solutions. Both Lata and Ajay are award-winning technology entrepreneurs, start-up investors, and engaged philanthropists who are passionate about AIF’s mission. We are immensely grateful to Lata Krishnan, Ajay Shah, and the Krishnan Shah Family Foundation (KSFF) for their leadership, vision, and ongoing support. As we now enter the third decade of our existence and journey of creating scalable impact under the renewed avatar of our program, the Banyan Tree, we couldn’t be happier to have the continued support of KSFF in our pursuit of creating a socially just world.