



Action Village India

Hand in Hand with Rural India

Gandhi Grassroots Fellows Programme

Empowering young community leaders, practising Gandhian values, and strengthening constructive action across rural India



Partner Organisation

Centre for Experiencing Socio-Cultural Interaction & Ekta Parishad

Submitted by

Action Village India





Project Summary

Action Village India (AVI) is seeking support for the Gandhi Grassroots Fellows Programme, a new initiative designed to nurture young grassroots leaders across rural India.

The programme will support 15 Gandhi Grassroots Fellows across Odisha, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh. Working across approximately 150 villages, the Fellows will strengthen village-level leadership, facilitate community organising, document examples of constructive community action, and encourage wider learning and replication between communities.

The programme will be delivered in partnership with CESC (Centre for Experiencing Socio-Cultural Interaction), a sister organisation of Ekta Parishad. Both organisations are deeply rooted in Gandhian principles of nonviolence, self-reliance, dialogue, social harmony, and community-led change.

Through village meetings, collective organising, storytelling, and local resource mobilisation, the Fellows will help communities strengthen practical local solutions to social, economic, and environmental challenges.

At a time of growing inequality, ecological stress, and social fragmentation, the programme seeks to demonstrate the continued relevance of Gandhian constructive action through practical grassroots leadership.

Action Village India

Action Village India (AVI) is a UK-based charity founded in 1989 that supports rural communities across India to strengthen sustainable livelihoods, social justice, and community resilience.

AVI works through long-standing partnerships with grassroots organisations rooted in Gandhian values of nonviolence, equity, self-reliance, and community-led change. Our work spans girls' education, women's leadership, land rights, disability rights, sustainable livelihoods, and environmental resilience.

AVI has worked in partnership with Ekta Parishad since approximately 2001, supporting grassroots mobilisation and community-led initiatives across several Indian states.

In 2022, AVI was awarded the Gandhi International Peace Award from London's Gandhi Foundation.





Why is the Programme Needed?

Many rural communities across India face interconnected challenges including poverty, environmental stress, social exclusion, economic insecurity, and limited access to resources.

At the same time, many communities are already developing practical local solutions through collective action, including:

- Women's self-help groups
- Grain banks and savings initiatives
- Sustainable farming collectives
- Community-led water conservation
- Youth leadership groups
- Village-level dialogue forums

However, these examples are often under-documented and insufficiently shared between communities. The Gandhi Grassroots Fellows Programme responds to this gap by supporting young people to become facilitators, organisers, and documenters of grassroots change.



Project Objects

The programme aims to:

1. Support 15 young Gandhi Grassroots Fellows across four Indian states.
2. Strengthen village-level leadership and collective organising.
3. Document and share stories of constructive grassroots action.
4. Encourage replication of successful community-led initiatives.
5. Promote Gandhian values of nonviolence, dialogue, and self-reliance through practical action.
6. Develop a fellowship model that can be expanded in future years.

The programme will help communities learn from one another, strengthen local institutions, and build confidence in their own capacity to create change.



About CESCO and Ekta Parishad

CESCO, the Centre for Experiencing Socio-Cultural Interaction, was established in 1989 and is deeply rooted in Gandhian philosophy. It works to promote nonviolence, self-reliance, collective problem-solving, and constructive social action. Over several decades, CESCO has supported grassroots learning and leadership, helping to nurture hope, resilience, and community-led change in marginalised rural communities.

CESCO is a sister organisation of Ekta Parishad, one of India's most significant grassroots people's movements. Ekta Parishad works with rural and marginalised communities, particularly on issues of land rights, livelihoods, dignity, and social justice. Its approach is grounded in nonviolent mobilisation, dialogue, and community empowerment.

Through this programme, CESCO will act as the nodal agency, with guidance from Ekta Parishad's long experience of grassroots organising and Gandhian social action.

Fellowship Model

The key outputs for each of the Gandhi Fellows are as follows:

- Engagement with approximately 20 villages through sustained field presence, community interaction, and facilitation activities.
- Direct contact and engagement with an estimated 7,000–10,000 people across the fellowship area through meetings, campaigns, awareness activities, and collective processes.
- Conducting at least 12 village meetings, with a minimum of one meeting every month in order to sustain dialogue, collective participation, and community decision-making.
- Supporting the formation and strengthening of approximately 15–20 village and farmer collectives to encourage cooperation, local leadership, and collective action.
- Facilitating the development and demonstration of at least 2 model villages that reflect principles of self-reliance, participatory governance, and sustainable community development.
- Drafting and documenting at least 10 detailed grassroots stories, case studies, or narratives that highlight community initiatives, local leadership, and positive change processes.

Fellows will be selected for their grassroots experience, local knowledge, language ability, and commitment to Gandhian values. We will ensure equal participation of both women and men in the fellowship programme.





Fellowship Model

State	Number of Fellows
Odisha	3
Bihar	2
Chhattisgarh	5
Madhya Pradesh	5
Total	15

Training & Support

Fellows will receive structured training and mentoring through CESC.

Training will include:

- Gandhian values in practice
- Community facilitation and dialogue
- Documentation and storytelling
- Grassroots organising
- Ethical community engagement and safeguarding
- Reporting and reflective learning

CESC will provide regular mentoring, quarterly reviews, and programme oversight.

Expected Outputs & Outcomes

Over 12 months, the programme expects to:

- Engage approximately 150 villages
- Reach several thousand community members through village meetings, dialogue sessions, and organising activities
- Conduct regular village meetings and dialogue sessions
- Strengthen village-level collectives and leadership structures
- Support the development of model community initiatives within at least two villages per Fellow
- Document and disseminate at least 100 stories of constructive action
- Encourage stronger local resource mobilisation and self-reliance initiatives

The programme also aims to strengthen confidence among communities to identify and address local priorities collectively.



Monitoring & Learning

The programme will include:

- Quarterly review meetings
- Ongoing mentoring and supervision
- Documentation of village meetings and community initiatives
- Annual Fellow evaluations
- Donor reporting and programme review

Progress will be tracked through indicators such as:

- Villages engaged
- Meetings conducted
- Collectives formed or strengthened
- Participation of women and marginalised groups
- Stories documented and shared

Sustainability

The programme is designed to build leadership capacity that remains within communities beyond the initial funding period. By investing in young people rooted in their own regions, the programme aims to create a growing network of grassroots leaders committed to constructive community action. The stories and learning materials produced through the Fellowship will also support wider community learning and future programme development.

Budget

The total Phase 1 budget is INR 2,950,000, approximately £24,528.

Budget Item	Cost in INR	Approx.
Fellows' stipend, travel, and field engagement costs	2,700,000	£22,500
Training and materials	160,000	£1,333
Monitoring and mentoring	40,000	£333
Administration and audit	50,000	£416
Total	2,950,000	£24,528



Requested Fund Size

Action Village India is seeking support from **The Gandhi Foundation** towards the Gandhi Grassroots Fellows Programme.

A contribution of approximately **£9,833 (INR 1,180,000)** would enable the support of six Gandhi Grassroots Fellows for 12 months, including training, mentoring, travel, field engagement, and documentation activities.

Each Fellow will work across approximately 20 villages, helping to strengthen grassroots leadership, facilitate community dialogue, document local initiatives, and promote practical models of self-reliance and constructive action.

Funding Support	INR	Approx. GBP	Impact
Support for 1 Gandhi Grassroots Fellow (12 months)	196,667	£1,639	Enables one Fellow to work across approximately 20 villages, facilitating community organising, documenting grassroots initiatives, and strengthening local leadership
Requested Funding Support – 6 Fellows	1,180,000	£9,833	Enables six Fellows to work across approximately 120 villages across four Indian states over 12 months

Conclusion

The Gandhi Grassroots Fellows Programme offers an opportunity to invest in a new generation of grassroots leaders who can strengthen community action from within.

By combining practical village-level engagement with storytelling, collective organising, and Gandhian values, the programme seeks to support more resilient, self-reliant, and community-led futures.

Support for this programme will directly enable 15 young Fellows to work across four Indian states, helping communities strengthen local leadership, share practical solutions, and demonstrate the continued relevance of Gandhian constructive action today.

Thank you for your time.

