

# IFA Fellowships

Social change - to be effective and lasting - must be brought about by the informed, principled and active participation of the people themselves. But it also requires some changemakers - committed people who have the necessary knowhow to be catalysts in this process. Historically, genuine social change has been facilitated by a small number of “volunteers” in the mode of Gandhi.

In our age of mushrooming NGOs, however, such social work has become a commercial enterprise, dependent on grants from agencies that are themselves a product of the very processes that create poverty in the first place. Naturally, such social work is concerned with making the status quo more palatable rather than with changing it. And with handsome salaries and benefits, these well funded groups are able to siphon away from the society’s pool of volunteers. Under such circumstances, even though there are still many inspired people, it is unrealistic to expect them to sacrifice everything for the sake of a better society. They must have some basic minimum level of support. This is where the concept of fellowship comes in.

A fellowship is a grant to individuals who fit the above role. Typically, these are committed young men and women who have some educational background or experience about the issue at hand. Most have demonstrated some abilities by their work in a similar field. The grant is a one year commitment and covers reasonable living expenses including housing and work related travel. It varies from a low of Rs. 2000 monthly in the villages to the high of Rs.15000 monthly in Delhi. The fellowship is given on the recommendation of respected and well known individuals who are known to IFA. Regular follow up is arranged and goals for the fellowship are spelled out. The grant is expected to be renewed for two additional years assuming that there is need and the candidate continues to fulfill the requirements of the fellowship.

## Right to Information Fellowship -1

**Recipient:** Sowmya Sivakumar (Jaipur)

**Amount:** \$3000 per year

**Recommended by:** Aruna Roy of MKSS

**Visited by:** Jyoti and Rajesh in 2005, Surekha and Prithvi in 2005

**Qualifications:** -M.A. (Master of Arts) Economics, Delhi School of Economics.

-B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) Economics, Stella Maris College, Madras Univ.

**Research and Dissemination:** During 2004, she helped with media work in Delhi on the National Rural Employment Guarantee and the RTI bills and was also involved with Rajasthan Election Watch (REW), a group of concerned citizens in the state whose objective is to ensure free and fair elections and to participate pro-actively in electoral reforms. Besides these, she has done various studies on homelessness, famine, urban migration, accountability of local bodies, etc.

**Journalism:** Sowmya has written for several newspapers and magazines including Tehelka, The Hindu and Frontline. She has also worked for the Indian Express, The Economic Times and The Business Standard.

**Fellowship Work:** She is doing media work in support of the citizen’s use of the Right to Information and the Rural Employment Guarantee Acts working with various groups such as MKSS, NCPRI, REW, etc.



## Right to Information Fellowship – 2

**Recipient:** Anjali Bhardwaj (Delhi)

**Amount:** \$4400 per year

**Recommended by:** Aruna Roy and Shekhar Singh of NCPRI

**Visited by:** Rajni and Kailash in 2005, Surekha and Prithvi in 2005

**Qualifications:** -MSc in Environmental Change and Management, Univ. of Oxford.

-Radhakrishnan - British Chevening Scholarship to study at Oxford.

-Masters in Economics, Delhi Scholl of Economics.

-Bachelors Degree in Economics from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi.

**Activism:** Anjali is a volunteer/founding member of *Satark Nagrik Sangathan* (SNS) a citizen’s group for transparency and accountability in Government. SNS helps citizens use the RTI Act to access information from departments such as the Municipal Corporation, Delhi Jal Board etc. It also organizes public hearings and social audits. She has also done similar volunteer work for the group **Parivartan** working towards the same goals.



**Work Experience:** Anjali has worked extensively for the World Bank, most recently as a consultant in studying the status of the RTI in various states in order to identify problems in its implementation. Earlier she worked with their Environment Unit on Household Energy, Air Pollution and Health as well as for Poverty Reduction and Economic Management. She has also worked as a Senior Program Officer for Winrock International India and developed and managed projects for their Natural Resource Management and Clean Energy Units.

**Fellowship Work:** As Secretary of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) Anjali's main goal is to allow NCPRI to build a national network of RTI users, create a repository of RTI related materials (documents, films etc.) and to help monitor the implementation of the national RTI law.

## Rural Journalism Fellowship

**Recipient:** Jagadish Suna, Editor "*Gaon Maati Khabara*"

**Amount:** \$2000 per year (Total \$8000)

**Recommended by:** P. Sainath (Journalist, Rural Affairs Editor of The Hindu)

**Visited by:** Surekha and Prithvi in 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005

**Qualifications:** B.A.LL.B from Sambalpur University.

**Experience and Awards:** Jagadish has done rural journalism in Western Orissa for a number of years and has focused on the issues of rural poverty such as starvation deaths, exploitation of the dalits, tribal displacement, etc. His articles appear in many Oriya newspapers and magazines including "*The Pragativadi*" as well as in some English ones such as the Delhi based, "*The Grass Roots.*" He has won several awards including the National Foundation Media Fellowship in '03 and The Counter Media Award in '01.

**The Work:** IFA first supported his work as part of the rural paper "*Janmadhyam*" that was published from Khariar. Three years ago as the publisher of Janmadhyam moved away from the area. Jagadish maintained his commitment and has continued the work in the form of this new fortnightly, "*Gaon Maati Khabara.*"



## Investigative Documentary on Farmers Suicides

**Recipient:** Suma Josson, freelance film maker from Mumbai

**Amount:** One time grant of \$5,000

**Recommended by:** Record of her films

**Qualifications:** Graduate English Lit. College of St.Teresa, Minnesota, USA.

**Career:** Suma began her career as a journalist but later switched over to the visual media. She has made a number of documentary films. Her '*Bombay's Blood Yatra*' about the communal riots in Bombay won wide acclaim in the country and abroad. Her other documentaries include '*47 Seconds & After: Latur, Osmanabad*', '*Akbar Padamsee & the Last Image*', '*Waste*' (on Gerd Rohling, a German installation artist and ragpicker) and '*One More Day to Live*' (on V P Singh, as a painter) She is also a well known poet and fiction writer and has published in various Indian and international magazines. She has published three books '*Poems and Plays*', '*A Harvest of Light*' (a collection of plays), and '*Circumferences*' (a novel, Penguin). Her debut film was '*Janmadhinam*' which won three state awards, and was screened at various international film festivals including the 1999 Berlin Festival. She was one of the five women filmmakers commissioned to make A documentary '*Trading Images*' on the subject of 'women's space' in a German international co production. In 2003 she made another feature film, '*Saree*' and toured the US along with her documentary on the Gujarat Riots, "*Gujarat: A Laboratory of Hindutva.*" One year later she made another documentary on the issue of Ayodhya called "*Prayers of Peace.*"

**The Work:** The IFA grant is given specifically for documenting the circumstances surrounding the tragic issue of farmers suicides in the Wayanad region of Kerala.



Central to all these fellowships is the fact that, in one form or the other, they are all working on behalf of the poor. So far these have been given to people in India. Eventually, it may be possible to offer this support to enthusiastic people from the US who wish to do similar work in India.