



ignite

Life Science Foundation

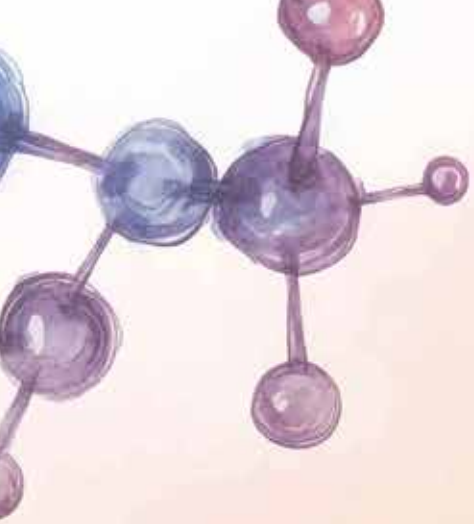
curating science > creating impact

Annual Report
2025-2026

WOMEN IN LIFE SCIENCE

Shaping Inclusive Futures Through
Science, Research, and Innovation

#MakingScienceWorkforIndia



CONTENTS

01

Management
Review

08

Year at
a Glance

22

New Initiatives
of IgniteLSF

23

Donor
Insights

27

Thematic
Commentary

35

Voices of
Change

42

Our
Donors

43

Our Board
Members

44

Our Scientific
Advisory Board

45

Our
Team

47

Our Expert
Reviewers

49

Voices of Our
Community



Management Review

Better Science Begins with Inclusion

Shahid Jameel

Chairperson, Board of Directors
Ignite Life Science Foundation
Fellow, OCIS, & Green Templeton College
University of Oxford

[View Expert Insights](#)

Life sciences exist to understand and improve the human condition, a mission that remains incomplete without the full participation of both men and women.

From Barbara McClintock's discovery of 'jumping genes' in the 1940s and Rosalind Franklin's contributions to the discovery of DNA's structure in the early 1950s, to the women-led teams behind modern vaccines, women have repeatedly proven themselves as capable contributors and essential architects of progress in the life sciences. This includes our friends at Ignite such as Jyotsna Dhawan (stem cells), Gagandeep Kang (viruses and vaccines), and Soumya Swaminathan (tuberculosis and global health), and several other women researchers who work in India.

Shaped by different lived experiences, women's perspectives have expanded the questions that science must ask, from overlooked areas like maternal health and autoimmune disease to more inclusive approaches in clinical trial design that account for dimorphic biological responses.

Yet, despite a rich history of contribution, gaps persist.

Women now earn the majority of life sciences degrees at the undergraduate and even doctoral level in many countries, including in India, but this is not reflected as one moves up the career ladder. Fewer women hold senior faculty positions, lead major research labs, sit on scientific advisory boards, or serve as principal investigators on large grants. The "leaky pipeline" metaphor understates the problem because it is not just attrition, but a structural issue shaped by unequal access to mentorship, funding, caregiving support, and visibility. Women scientists are cited less, funded less generously, and promoted more slowly than male peers with comparable records.

These gaps are not due to differences in talent or ambition, but are the product of systems built around assumptions. When asked to draw a scientist, research shows that children draw men more often than women. Children around ages 5 to 6 typically draw equal numbers of male and female scientists, but by the time they reach middle school, both boys and girls increasingly draw male scientists, reflecting societal and media biases.

Why does inclusion matter? Beyond fairness, science advances through diversity of thought. Homogeneous teams tend to ask homogeneous questions, and blind spots compound when everyone in the room shares the same assumptions. Research has shown that gender-diverse teams produce more novel and impactful findings. In life sciences specifically, where the "subjects" of study are human beings in all their variation, a lack of diversity among researchers translates into knowledge gaps. Historically, women (as also ethnic minorities) were underrepresented in clinical research, leading to real consequences for diagnosing and treating disease. For example, women show differences in diagnostic cut-offs for cardiovascular health (blood pressure, troponin levels, aortic aneurysm, etc.), mental health and substance abuse (alcohol use disorder, psychiatric screening, etc.), and several blood and endocrine disorders. How drugs are absorbed and metabolised by women also differ from men, requiring differences in dosing.

Inclusion, therefore, is not a moral add-on to good science; it is a precondition for it. This is where philanthropy can have a distinctive and powerful role. Government funding structures are often risk-averse and high on inertia, but philanthropic capital can move faster, take chances on unconventional leadership, and fill gaps that institutional funding overlooks. Targeted fellowships, leadership development programmes, and grants earmarked for women-led labs can plug the leaky pipeline at vulnerable transition points from postdoctoral work to independent research leadership, and from mid-career to senior leadership. Philanthropy can also fund the "invisible" infrastructure of inclusion, such as childcare support for conference travel, mentorship networks, or research on the very barriers women face. Done well, philanthropic investment can go beyond supporting individual women to reshaping the norms and structures of science itself. It is better placed at creating durable pathways for the next generation of scientific leaders to rise on merit alone.

Advancing women in life sciences is, ultimately, an investment in better science for everyone.



Privileged for Being Born Male

Ramaswamy Subramanian

Chairperson, Scientific Advisory Board
Ignite Life Science Foundation
Director, Bindley Science Center, Purdue University

[View Expert Insights](#)

I grew up in small towns in South India, the third of four children, sandwiched between two accomplished older sisters and a younger brother who, like me, was considered the family's work in progress. My father was an insurance salesman who worked his way up through sheer persistence. My mother kept the household together with equal, if less recognized, determination. Neither had gone far in formal education, but they were fiercely committed to giving their children every opportunity they hadn't had. The girls, it must be said, made this easy. My older sister was first in her class. My second sister was a rank holder in her board exams, the kind of achievement that gets brought up at family gatherings for decades. The teachers loved them. The neighbours admired them. My brother and I, meanwhile, were described with the far more colorful word: notorious. I was not a bad student, hovered in the respectable top quarter of my class. But we were often reminded that the bar had been set by our sisters, and we were falling short. In hindsight I should have been embarrassed. At the time, I mostly found it annoying.

Here is where it gets interesting and where, only much later, I began to understand what I was witnessing. My older sister earned a master's degree in mathematics. My younger sister studied horticulture (medicine, mysteriously, was deemed not for her, a decision never fully explained). They were bright, disciplined, and capable in ways that should have drawn universities and research institutes to compete for their attention. Instead, the real competition was for suitable husbands. My older sister married as soon as she finished her degree. My younger sister followed shortly after. Their education, I slowly came to realize, had been optimized not for careers, curiosity, or scientific contribution, but for matrimonial eligibility. A master's degree was, in the logic of the time, a credential that improved the chances of finding a better husband. It was not a launchpad.

And the boys? We were left gloriously, blissfully alone. Somehow, I completed my bachelor's and master's degrees, genuinely cannot reconstruct how this happened without adult supervision, but it did. I got a bank job. I chose not to take it. Nobody staged an intervention. When I decided to pursue a PhD instead, my family's response was essentially a shrug of support. There were no negotiations, no conditions, no quiet pressure to "settle down." I applied to doctoral programs across India and traveled by train to every institution that would reimburse my fare, partly for the interviews, mostly for the adventure of seeing new places alone. I stayed overnight in cities where I knew no one. I wandered. I figured things out. It never once occurred to me to ask whether I was allowed to do this. That is the precise texture of privilege: it doesn't feel like anything. It simply feels like life. My sisters could not have taken those trains. The question would never have been asked, because the answer was already understood by everyone except, perhaps, me.

I am proud of what my sisters built, regardless. My first sister created social change and impacted the lives of hundreds of women (and continues to do so). My second sister, the rank holder, the one told not to pursue medicine, went on to earn a PhD and become a professor. She got there, but the long way, against a current that was never supposed to be her fault. What I find myself wondering is not what they accomplished - it's what they might have accomplished with a decade's head start, with the same freedom to be notorious, that I took entirely for granted.

This is what implicit bias costs us. It doesn't always announce itself. It rarely involves a villain. My parents were not malicious, they were loving, well-intentioned people doing what their world told them was right. The bias was structural, ambient, nearly invisible. It looked like music lessons (for the girls) and typing classes (for me, because what use would a boy have for Carnatic music?). It looked like a father carefully saving for his daughters' weddings while his sons were free to miss job offers and catch trains to nowhere. It looked like opportunity, quietly and consistently allocated by chromosome. Now multiply this by every stage of a woman's life. Layer in the explicit bias that still exists in hiring committees, funding panels, and academic departments. Add the unspoken assumptions about who looks like a scientist, who asks a question that gets heard, whose ambition is described as "leadership" and whose is described as something less flattering. When you do the arithmetic, the number you're computing is not an injustice in the abstract - it is a concrete, quantifiable loss of human potential. Cures not discovered. Questions not asked. Fields not transformed. We did not just shortchange my sisters. We shortchanged everyone who might have benefited from what they could have contributed.

I chair the Scientific Advisory Board of the Ignite Life Science Foundation, and I want to be honest about why this issue is so close to me. It is not because I have always been enlightened about gender equity. It is precisely because I have not. It took me years, decades, to look back on my childhood and recognize the invisible architecture of advantage I had been handed. If someone surrounded by capable, ambitious women (including in my career) as I was could miss it for so long, I suspect I am not alone. The science we want to build, the kind that solves hard problems, the kind that lasts, needs every mind we can get. That means asking, at every juncture, who we are quietly redirecting and which trains we are not letting them take.



Women in STEMM

Essential Participation in Scientific Leadership

Shravanti Rampalli

CEO,
Ignite Life Science Foundation

Across ancient India, women's participation in the workforce and in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM) followed similar, but not identical trajectories. In everyday economic life, whether in farming, weaving, pottery, trade, or domestic production, women's labour was widespread and largely unquestioned because it was essential to the functioning of society. Even as their formal social status evolved after the early Vedic period, their economic contributions remained indispensable.

Participation in STEMM, however, followed a different path. Scientific and scholarly pursuits demanded literacy, leisure, mentorship, and access to institutional privileges that were available to only a small segment of society. As a result, women who entered these fields were exceptional rather than representative. Figures such as Gargi, the philosopher; the legendary Lilavati associated with Bhaskara's mathematical tradition; and women practitioners of Ayurveda stand as remarkable examples, but they were exceptions in a landscape where most women had little opportunity to pursue formal learning.

This distinction was by no means unique to India. Across civilizations, women were active participants in agriculture, crafts, trade, and informal economies, because economic necessity demanded their labour. Yet, access to prestigious or credentialed fields remained tightly controlled. The celebrated examples of Hypatia in Alexandria, Enheduanna in Mesopotamia, or women renowned as midwives and herbalists illustrate the same pattern: individual women broke through institutional barriers, while the vast majority remained excluded from formal centres of knowledge and scholarship.

In essence, wherever necessity drove economic life, women worked. Wherever institutions, formal education, and social prestige determined access, women faced barriers. This historical divide continues to echo in the present. India has witnessed encouraging growth in women's participation in the broader workforce, yet representation declines sharply at successive levels of scientific leadership. This "two-speed" pattern, broad participation alongside a narrowing pipeline into positions of influence in STEMM, is not unique to India but remains a defining challenge across much of the world. This year Ignite's Annual Report captures a range of experiences, perspectives and thematic features from highly accomplished women scientists about 'Women in Science'. These scientists are from across the Indian scientific ecosystem including science administrators, science communicators, and science philanthropists who are working to enrich science in India. At Ignite, we are actively dismantling, brick by brick, the personal and structural biases that make it difficult for women to participate in STEMM.

This commitment is reflected in our all-women-led team, strong representation of women on our Scientific Advisory Board and Scientific Review Committee, and the support of a forward looking Board of Directors.

The past year has been especially significant as we work towards unifying the traditionally siloed pillars of academia, industry, and hospitals to address the challenges facing our society and our planet. We believe these three pillars must operate coherently to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world and challenges that India faces with particular urgency. This year, we held two major Special Academic Research Cooperative (SpARC) meetings: one on Climate Resilient Agriculture and another on Smart Solutions from Algae, addressing the critical issues of food security in the face of climate change and CO2 mitigation, respectively. These meetings led to funding grants targeting the challenges identified, along with a White Paper (on Climate Resilient Agriculture) available on the Ignite website for a broader audience.

Tackling big challenges takes team effort. Following the Climate Resilient Agriculture SpARC meeting we issued a call for team grants, and 50% of the awards went to teams led by young women scientists. Within the broader theme of agriculture, one focus area was spices, a culinary staple and herbal medicine in India, and a major export. While India's spice exports have seen strong recent growth, the industry faces serious safety and quality control challenges due to pesticide contamination. Spices have long been central to traditional Ayurvedic medicine, yet the science behind their effects and how combinations of spices might improve health outcomes has yet to be experimentally validated for future medical use. This year, we awarded two grants in this space: one to study the combinatorial effects of spices, and another to develop chemical antidotes against pesticide contamination in spices.

Ignite's mission goes beyond funding basic science, It is about pushing discoveries towards the next logical step: social impact through translation or policy influence. To support findings on the verge of translational impact, we launched Early Translation Research Grants. Of the four grants awarded this year, two are tackling particularly critical challenges: one is developing a rapid diagnostic approach to antibiotic resistance, and the other is working on a novel antibody-based solution to address India's urgent need for a Nipah virus vaccine. The remaining two projects focus on ageing and on therapies targeting inflammation-related disease. Equally pressing is the need to reduce the transmission of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) through animal and environmental pathways, an understanding that will eventually help shape policy to prevent AMR. A women led multidisciplinary team is advancing this work through an Ignite grant.



Indian research remains constrained not only by limited funding but also by the need for substantial investment in the broader growth of the life sciences ecosystem, particularly in advancing opportunities for women in STEMM. In keeping with this commitment, over 40% of our travel grant fellowships this year were awarded to female students. At the recent Algae SpARC meeting, we made a conscious effort to invite young women entrepreneurs, whose work was met with genuine admiration from attending academicians and other stakeholders. While SpARC meetings are convened primarily for domain experts at a high level, we consciously include student participation as part of our broader mission. This provides students with a valuable platform to engage directly with academics, entrepreneurs, potential donors, and other stakeholders. Notably, the female student selected to attend the meeting benefited not only from expert scientific guidance but also from the opportunity to establish collaborative connections with leading researchers in the field. Details of the Ignite activities are covered in a separate section in this annual report.

At Ignite, we embarked on a mission to bring more women into science and address the leaky pipeline of science. We recognize that creating lasting change requires more than good intentions, it demands systemic, consistent effort sustained over time. I am glad to report that we are steadily evolving in that direction. The stories in this report, from young women leading team grants, to students forging collaborations at our SpARC meetings, to entrepreneurs showcasing their work on national platforms, are early proof that this effort is bearing fruit. But we cannot do this alone. Many of you reading this report are likely to be men, and I ask you, in particular, to see yourselves not as bystanders to this mission but as essential partners in it. Share this report with the women in your life. Mentor or collaborate with a young woman scientist. Fund research grants that are led by women scientists. Every seat at the table that opens because of deliberate effort is one less barrier for the next generation to overcome. The leaky pipeline of science will not fix itself, and it cannot be fixed by women alone. We invite you to join us in this work until participation in Indian science reflects the full breadth of its talent.

2025-26

Year at a Glance

Project Verticals

Ignite supports transformative research that addresses some of the most pressing challenges facing society. Our research portfolio spans three core thematic areas:



**Agriscience and
Climate Resilience**

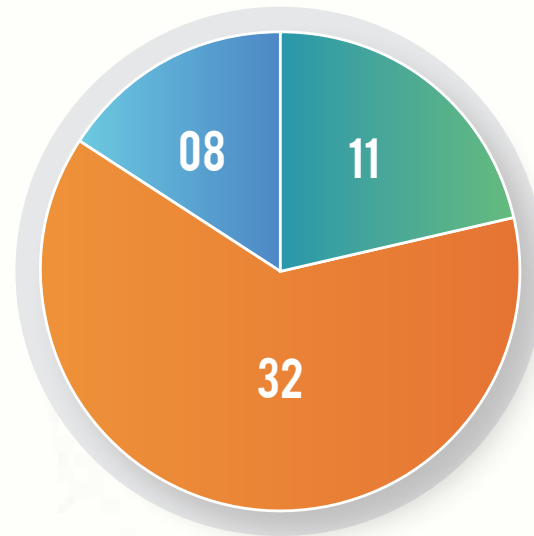


Human Health

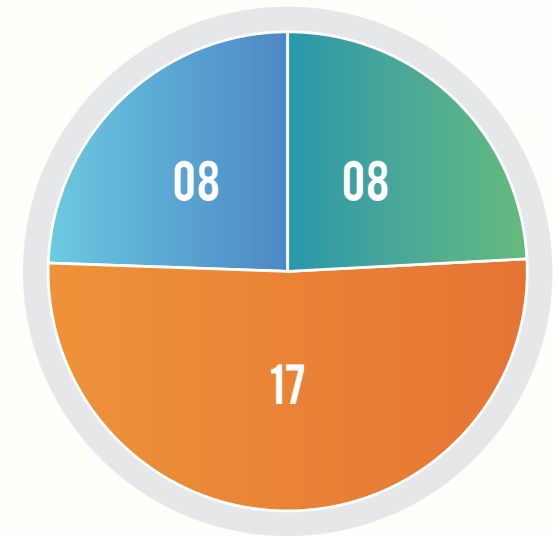


Equipment Grants

DISTRIBUTION OF PROJECTS ACROSS SPECIFIC DOMAINS



51
TOTAL
PROJECTS

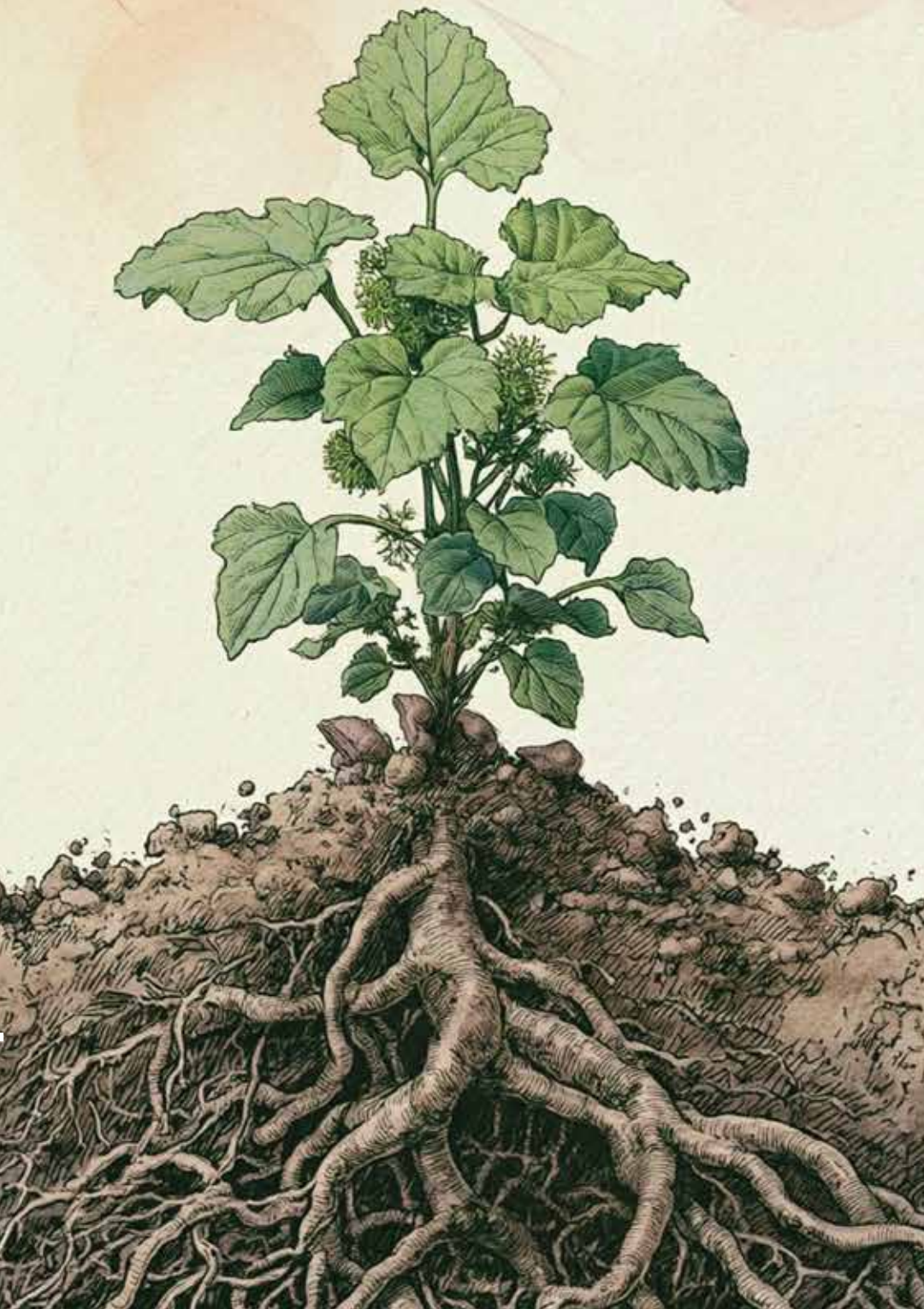


33
ONGOING
PROJECTS

Agriscience and
Climate Resilience

Human
Health

Equipment



In agriscience, we support research that advances sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture by improving soil health, by enhancing crop productivity, and by building resilience to environmental stresses, while promoting resource efficient farming for long-term food and environmental security.

We also invest in research addressing major healthcare challenges, including antimicrobial resistance (AMR), neurodegenerative diseases, drug discovery, and computational systems biology, supporting interdisciplinary innovations that improve disease prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. Our equipment grants strengthen the research ecosystem by providing scientists with access to advanced scientific infrastructure.

To date, Ignite has supported 51 research projects, comprising 33 ongoing and 18 concluded initiatives. This includes 8 Equipment Grants awarded to strengthen research infrastructure and enable cutting-edge scientific discovery. The following section provides an overview of the projects currently supported by Ignite.



Agriscience and Climate Resilience

Agricultural science is essential for building resilient, sustainable, and food secure farming systems in the face of climate change. Research is helping develop crops that can better withstand heat, drought, salinity, pests, and diseases while reducing reliance on chemical inputs and improving soil health, nutrient efficiency, and food safety. The following projects are organized under key research themes that reflect Ignite's strategic focus areas in Agriscience.

1.1 Nitrogen Fixation

We support projects that improve nitrogen-use efficiency through biological nitrogen fixation, beneficial soil microbes, mycorrhizal associations, and sustainable nutrient management. These innovations aim to reduce dependence on chemical fertilizers, improve soil health, and enhance crop productivity.

S.N.	Project Name	Primary Investigator	Co-PI
01	Role of <i>Rhodotorula mucilaginosa</i> JGTA-S1 in the release of its endosymbiotic microbes to modulate rice microbiota and improve nitrogen nutrition by bacterial-fungal-plant three kingdom interaction.	Dr. Anindita Seal, University of Calcutta	
02	Improving rice genetics and its ecosystem through genome engineering and bioagents to reduce dependency on chemical N2 fertilizer	Dr. Kutubuddin Molla, ICAR-NRRI, Cuttack	Dr. M.J. Baig, Dr. Arup Mukherjee, Dr. Totan Adak, Dr. Jitendriya Meher, ICAR-NRRI, Cuttack

1.2 Stress Tolerance

We support projects that develop crops capable of withstanding biotic and abiotic stresses such as drought, heat, salinity, pests, and diseases. These efforts help safeguard crop yields and strengthen agricultural resilience under changing environmental conditions.

S.N.	Project Name	Primary Investigator	Co-PI
01	Deciphering marker - trait associations for blast disease resistance in pearl millet	Dr. Pulluru Sanjana Reddy, Indian Institute of Millets Research, Hyderabad	Dr. Avinash Singode, Indian Institute of Millets Research, Hyderabad
02	Pre-breeding for climate-resilient and disease-resistant wheat by harnessing genes from Triticale × Wheat-derived rye chromatin	Dr. Niranjana M., Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi	Dr. Dharam Pal, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi, Dr. Om Prakash Gangwar, (IIWBR)
03	Generation and evaluation of rice recombinants featuring favourable Na/K homeostasis and enhanced root apoplast resistance to salt stress	Dr. L. Arul, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University	Dr. P. Jeyaprakash, Anbil Dharmalingam, Dr. T. Thirumurugan, Tamil Nadu Agricultural College and Research Institute (TNAU)
04	Introgressing bruchid (<i>Callosobruchus analis</i>) resistance from <i>Vigna radiata</i> var. <i>sublobata</i> into MYMD-resistant Mungbean	Dr. Sudarshan Patil, World Vegetable Centre - SAC	Dr. Ramakrishnan M. Nair, Dr. Ya-Ping Lin, Dr. Thanga Suja Srinivasan, World Vegetable Centre - SAC Dr. Asmitha Sirari, PAU

1.3 Climate Resilience

We support projects that promote climate smart agricultural practices, sustainable cropping systems, and technologies that improve carbon sequestration, resource use efficiency, and long term environmental sustainability. These innovations enable farmers to adapt to climate change while maintaining productivity.

S.N.	Project Name	Primary Investigator	Co-PI
01	Harnessing Mycorrhizosphere Synergies to Regulate Carbon - Nitrogen Balance and GHG Emissions in Maize - Wheat Cropping Systems	Dr. Seema Sangwan, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi	ICAR-IARI, New Delhi: Dr. Mahesh Chand Meena, Dr. Arti Bhatia, Dr. Ram Swaroop Bana, Dr. Ekta Narwal, Dr. Himani Priya, ICAR-IARI, Hazaribagh Dr. Richa Agnihotri, IIT Palakkad
02	Investigation of evolutionary connection between thermotolerance and dispersal syndrome in a model dipteran insect	Dr. Bodhisatta Nandy, IISER Berhampur	



Advancing human health requires innovative research that addresses complex and evolving healthcare challenges. Our Human Health portfolio supports interdisciplinary research that advances the understanding, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of diseases, with a focus on translating scientific discoveries into real world impact. The following projects are organized under key research themes that reflect Ignite's strategic focus areas in Human Health.

2.1 Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is one of the greatest global health challenges, reducing the effectiveness of life-saving antibiotics and making infections increasingly difficult to treat. Addressing AMR requires urgent action to develop new therapies, improve antibiotic use, and strengthen surveillance through coordinated efforts across science, healthcare, and society. To this end we have funded early stage projects in laboratories across the country that can help us understand and design new solutions that can block this epidemic. We support innovative research projects that advance the prevention, detection, and understanding of antimicrobial resistance, helping to develop practical solutions to one of the world's most pressing public health challenges.

S.N.	Project Name	Primary Investigator	Co-PI
01	Tracking AMR transmission risks in rural India across the One Health spectrum.	Dr. Sitara SR Ajjampur, CMC Vellore	Dr. Balaji Veeraraghavan, CMC Vellore Dr. Rameshchandra J. Pandit, Gujarat Biotechnology Research Centre Dr. Rajiv Sarkar, Indian Institute of Public Health
02	Rapid antibiotic susceptibility testing for urinary tract infection using an electrochemical microfluidic device	Dr. S. Pushpavanam, IIT Madras	Dr. Richa Karmakar, IIT Madras

2.2 Neurobiology

Neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's are a growing health challenge in India, causing progressive loss of cognitive and motor function and placing a significant burden on patients, families, and the healthcare system. Currently, with limited treatment options and no known cures, there is an urgent need to invest in research that unravels the underlying causes of neurodegeneration, identifies early biomarkers, and develops effective therapies. The projects we support cover a variety of important research areas, such as creating easier and less invasive ways to detect Alzheimer's disease in elderly people using advanced technology, studying how the brain responds to smells to identify Alzheimer's markers, and developing new treatments to prevent brain damage.

S.N.	Project Name	Primary Investigator	Co-PI
01	Revealing circuit biomarkers in Alzheimer's disease using olfactory stimulation	Dr. Debanjan Dasgupta, IIT Kanpur	Dr. Ashutosh Modi, IIT Kanpur
02	A dual-platform approach combining Raman spectroscopy and proteomics for minimally-invasive biomarker discovery in Alzheimer's disease: A focus on the elderly population of South India	Dr. Baby Chakrapani P S, Cochin University of Science and Technology	Dr. Yoosaf Karuvath, Dr. Tara Sudhadevi, Cochin University of Science and Technology Dr. Keshava Prasad T S, Yenepoya Deemed to be University, Mangalore
03	Hunting for novel pharmacological targets against Huntington's disease	Dr. Bhavani Shankar Sahu, National Brain Research Centre	

2.3 Vaccines and Drug Discovery

One of the key challenges in Indian science is the lack of a strong ecosystem to support the translation of research findings into real-world applications. While applied research is actively promoted, many discoveries remain stalled before they can reach real-world application. The projects we support are advancing innovative therapies for chronic pain, inflammation, and healthy ageing, accelerating promising discoveries toward impactful healthcare solutions.

We are also supporting the development of an mRNA-based vaccine platform for the Nipah virus, alongside research in RNA, based therapeutics and innovative vaccination strategies, including improved approaches for tuberculosis. Through these investments, we aim to accelerate the translation of cutting, edge research into accessible technologies that enhance public health and build India's capacity for future health challenges.

S.N.	Project Name	Primary Investigator	Co-PI
01	Developing a candidate mRNA vaccine against the Nipah virus	Prof. Raghavan Varadarajan, IISc, Bengaluru	Dr. Siddharth Jhunjunwala, IISc, Bengaluru; Dr. Mrinmoy De, IISc, Bengaluru; Dr. Amit Awasthi, THSTI, Faridabad
02	Development and characterization of Nipah virus-specific neutralizing antibodies/nanobodies and their potential therapeutic utility	Dr. Rajesh Kumar, IIT Roorkee	Dr. Dilip Kumar, Ashoka University
03	Development and preclinical evaluation of heterologous prime boost vaccination strategies against tuberculosis	Dr. Garima Khare, University of Delhi South Campus	Prof. Raghavan Varadarajan, IISc Bengaluru
04	Discovery and development of a novel Hv1 channel inhibitor to alleviate chronic pain	Dr. Aravind Kshatri, CSIR- CDRI, Lucknow	Dr. Prem Yadav, Dr. Atul Goel, CSIR- CDRI, Lucknow
05	Optimization of Hydropersulfide-Generating alpha-Mercaptomalonates as Anti-Inflammatory Drug Candidates	Dr. Harinath Chakrapani, IISER Pune	Dr. Siddesh Kamath, IISER Pune
06	Development of a Human Skeletal-Muscle Organoid Platform for Modeling Sarcopenia and Testing Anti-Aging Compounds	Dr. Arvind Ramanathan, InStem	

2.4 Computational Systems Biology

Computational systems biology is an important field that uses computer-based tools to study complex biological systems and their interactions. By analyzing large amounts of biological data, it helps us understand how different parts of living organisms work together. This holistic approach is essential for advancing knowledge in health, agriculture, and environmental science, making it a valuable area for ongoing research and innovation. In a country like India, where resources must be used efficiently, this approach allows researchers to make data, driven predictions, reduce trial-and-error in experiments, and accelerate discoveries in health, agriculture, and environmental science. By supporting this area, we can foster innovations that are not only scientifically advanced but also practical and impactful for real-world challenges.

S.N.	Project Name	Primary Investigator	Co-PI
01	Limits of adaptation in an ecological community	Dr. Supreet Saini, IIT Bombay	Dr. K. V. Venkatesh, IIT Bombay
02	Targeting regulators of phenotypic plasticity to inhibit cancer progression	Dr. Riddhiman Dhar, IIT Kharagpur	Dr. Mohit Kumar Jolly, IISc, Bengaluru

2.5 Spices and Human Health

Spice and Human Health explores how bioactive compounds found in culinary spices influence human health and disease. Although spices have been used in traditional medicine for centuries, modern research is uncovering the molecular mechanisms behind their therapeutic potential. Using advanced tools such as computational biology and network pharmacology, scientists can identify how these natural compounds interact with biological pathways linked to health and disease. We support research that combines traditional knowledge with modern science to generate evidence-based insights, paving the way for new therapeutic discoveries, improved nutrition, and innovative healthcare solutions derived from India's rich biodiversity.

S.N.	Project Name	Primary Investigator	Co-PI
01	Mechanism-based systems-level characterization of Indian culinary spices using network pharmacology approach	Dr. Mohit Kumar Jolly, IISc, Bengaluru	Dr. Nikhil R Gandasi, IISc, Bengaluru
02	Decontamination of pesticides from spices	Dr. Praveen Vemula, InStem, Bengaluru	Dr. Sandeep Chandrashekhara, NIPER Raebareli

2.6 Basic Biology

A deep understanding of basic biological processes is the foundation on which all scientific innovation is built. Even the most advanced medical, agricultural, and environmental solutions originate from fundamental discoveries about how living systems work. As a new and growing focus area for us, we aim to support research that uncovers the core mechanisms of life, laying the groundwork for future breakthroughs across disciplines. Our interest in basic biology includes projects that investigate the fundamental mechanisms of disease, from understanding how the immune system clears bacterial infections to uncovering the cellular processes that drive cancer progression and metastasis.

S.N.	Project Name	Primary	Co-PI
01	Engineering VCP/p97 for Bacterial Clearance	Dr. Anirban Banerjee, IIT Bombay	Dr. Mohit Kumar Jolly, IISc, Bengaluru
02	Fusobacterium-driven EMT spatial mapping in OSCC lymph node metastasis using low-cost combinatorial transcriptomics	Dr. Amit Dutt, University of Delhi South Campus	Dr. Ishaan Gupta, IIT Delhi

03



Equipment Grants

High quality scientific research depends not only on strong ideas but also on access to advanced equipment. To enable researchers to generate reliable data and accelerate discovery, Ignite provides support for procuring essential instruments that strengthen experimental capabilities across laboratories. Our Equipment Grants help bridge critical infrastructure gaps, ensuring that scientists have the tools they need to test hypotheses, validate findings, and pursue impactful research.

S.N.	Equipment Name	Primary Investigator
01	Animal Cell Culture Facility	Dr. Ranjith Kumavath, Pondicherry University
02	Research Grade Motorized Inverted Fluorescence Microscope System	Dr. Koushambi Mitra, IIT Jodhpur
03	Ultra High Centrifugation Facility	Dr. Arun Kumar Upadhyay, IIT Bhilai
04	Flow Cytometer	Dr. Ritu Kulshreshtha, IIT Delhi



Impact and Outcomes: Patents

The achievements of our funded researchers reflect the impact of Ignite's support in advancing scientific discovery and innovation. This section highlights key outcomes from our research grants, including publications, patents, enabled funding, and other notable accomplishments.

AMIT SINGH

Indian Institute of Science,
Bengaluru



Title: Fluoroquinolone derivatives for treatment of active and latent tuberculosis

Patent Number:
570101

Granted:
August 2025

RAGHAVAN VARADARAJAN

Indian Institute of Science,
Bengaluru



Title: Process for preparation of ionizable lipid

Patent Number:
577950

Granted:
January 2026

S.PUSHPAVANAM

Indian Institute of
Technology, Madras



Title: Method and device for bacterial detection and antimicrobial susceptibility testing

Patent Number:
575922

Granted:
December 2025

We are pleased to share that Ignite grantee Deepak Nair, IISc, Bengaluru has incubated the startup eNLife Research, which is developing an AI powered blood test to detect Alzheimer's disease up to 15 years before the onset of symptoms. The startup has raised ₹6 crore in seed funding, led by Piper Serica VC Fund.

Enabled Funding

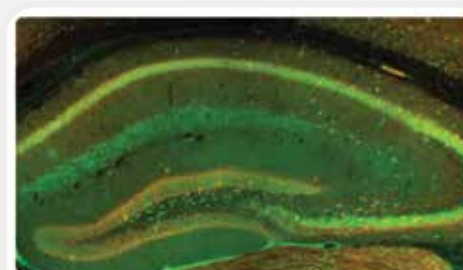
Ignite's support often serves as a catalyst for researchers to secure additional competitive funding, enabling them to expand the scope and impact of their work. Following their Ignite-funded projects, several grantees successfully received support from national and international funding agencies, including:

- 01 **Anindita Seal**
Gates Foundation
- 02 **Eswarayya Ramireddy**
DBT
- 03 **Jagadis Guptva Kapuganti**
DBT
- 04 **Debanjan Dasgupta**
IBRO Collaborative Research Grant
- 05 **Raghavan Varadarajan**
Gates Foundation, ICMR and DBT/BIRAC
- 06 **Srinivasa Reddy Bonam**
ICMR & ANRF
- 07 **Aravind Kshatri**
ICMR & CSIR Mission Project
- 08 **Kutubuddin Molla**
DBT

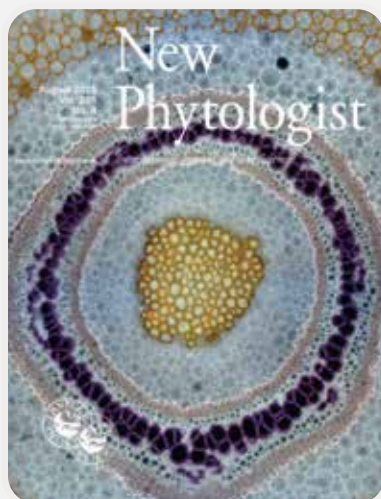
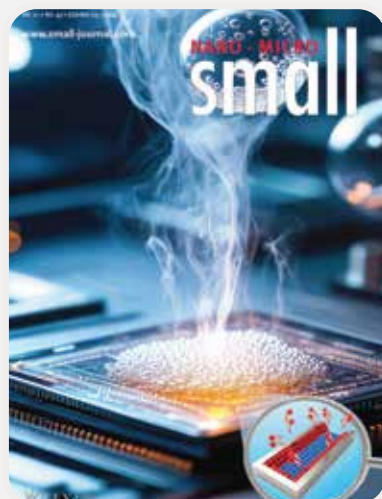
Impact and Outcomes: Research Publications

Our investigators' research has been featured in leading peer-reviewed journals, reflecting the scientific impact of the work supported by Ignite.

[Read The Research & Publications](#)



Frontiers in Cellular
Neuroscience
Non-Neuronal Cells



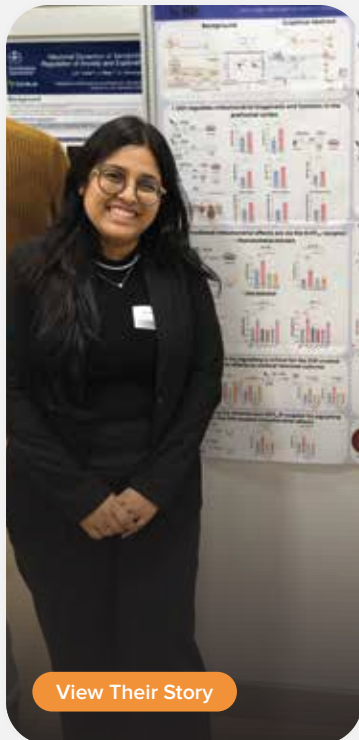
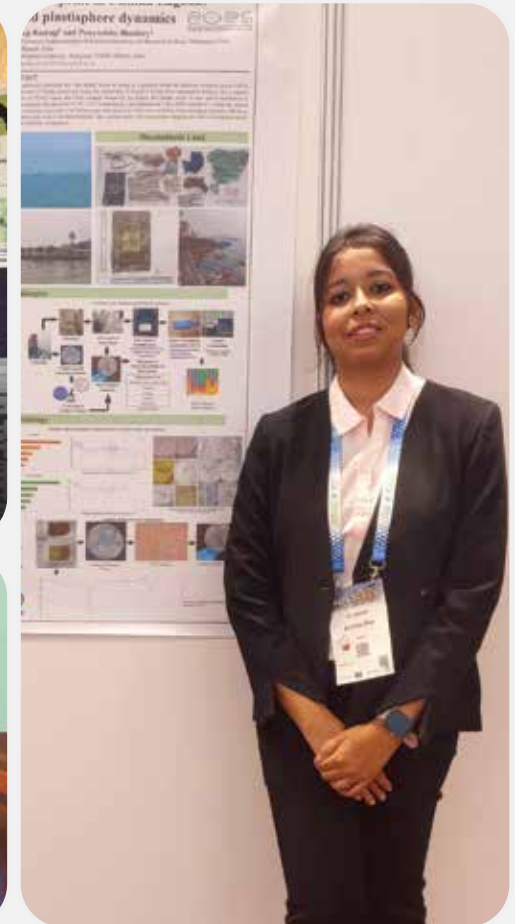
Frontiers in Cellular and
Infection Microbiology
Microbial Vaccines



Travel Fellowships

Supporting young researchers is central to our mission of strengthening India's scientific ecosystem. Our student grants provide opportunities for early, career scientists to gain exposure, build skills, and connect with the wider research community by enabling them to participate in conferences, workshops, and scientific meetings. These programs are designed to empower students from diverse backgrounds and institutions, helping them advance their academic journeys and contribute meaningfully to Indian science.

This year, 60% of our travel grants were awarded to women researchers, as compared to 47% in the previous year, reflecting our commitment to building a more inclusive scientific ecosystem and empowering the next generation of women in science. The Travel Fellowships continue to create meaningful opportunities for early, career researchers. Many grantees reported establishing research collaborations, expanding their professional networks, receiving invitations for future research engagements, and securing postdoctoral opportunities following their participation in scientific conferences.



Eklavya-Ignite Fellowship & C-CAMP-Ignite Travel Grant

S.N.	Name	Affiliation	Topic	Conference Name
01	Ishanee Mazumder	Tata Institute of Fundamental Research	Investigating the 5-HT2A Receptor and BDNF-Mediated Effects of Serotonergic Psychedelics on Mitochondrial Dynamics in Rodent Cortical Neurons	The International Society for Serotonin Research conference: A Serotonin Symphony 2025
02	Kuldeep Sharma	IIT Bombay	A novel RNA thermosensor element regulating teichoic acid biosynthesis in obligate human pathogen <i>Streptococcus pneumoniae</i>	30 th Annual Meeting of the RNA Society
03	Archita Roy	IISER Kolkata	Microplastics and their Ecological Footprint in Chilika Lagoon: Insights into Microplastic and Plastisphere Dynamics	Asia Oceania Geosciences Society (AOGS 2025)
04	Kanika Bisht	CSIR, Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology	Cholesterol Metabolism Dictates the Effectiveness of TB Therapy	Gordon Research Conference, Tuberculosis Drug Discovery and Development
05	Darshan S	National Centre for Biological Sciences	Bat viromes from Peninsular India	BatID 2025-International Symposium on the Infectious Diseases of Bats
06	Delfin L Francis	KIIT School of Public Health	- Occupational Risk Factors and Prevalence of Oral Lesions Among Tea Estate Workers in Tamil Nadu. - Association Between Drinking Water Fluoride Levels and Intelligence Among Children in Tamil Nadu, India	EPICOH 2025 Conference (Epidemiology in Occupational Health, the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH))
07	Vrushali Khedekar	BITS Pilani Goa Campus	Label-free imaging of cellular metabolism during stem cell differentiation	EMBL Seeing is Believing - imaging the molecular processes of life

The Eklavya-Ignite Fellowship and the C-CAMP-Ignite Travel Grant supports students and researchers traveling abroad to participate in scientific conferences, workshops, and other academic activities. This fellowship allows recipients to present their work internationally, learn from global experts, and expand their professional networks. The grants aim to nurture Indian scientific talent on the global stage.

S.N.	Name	Affiliation	Topic	Conference Name
08	Thamizh Mani R	Kasturba Medical College Manipal	Justice Reimagined: Unleashing AI-Powered Forensic Linguistics in Clinical Legal Education for Ethical Innovation and Global Access	International Clinical Journal of Legal Education Conference
09	Anjali Kashwal	PGIMER	Novel Aptamer-based Immunoassay Targeting Gastric Lavage Antigens for Pediatric Pulmonary Tuberculosis Diagnosis.	The Union World Conference on Lung Health 2025
10	Karthikeyan Anandapadmanaban	Madurai Kamaraj University	Flowering Through Time: A herbarium, based phenological study of Terminalia species in the Western Ghat, India	British Ecological Society Annual Meeting 2025
11	Aparna Krishnan	National Centre for Biological Sciences	How do rainforest tree communities with desiccation-sensitive seeds cope with seasonal drought in India's Western Ghats?	British Ecological Society Annual Meeting 2025
12	Vidhi Bhardwaj	Jawaharlal Nehru University Delhi	Cotranslational assembly confers specificity for targeted heterodimerization of TAF12 paralogs in human fungal pathogen Candida albicans	Gordon Research Conference-Protein folding dynamics
13	Sangeetha Naik	Goa University	IOC Training Course and Certification of Identification of Harmful Marine Microalgae	IOC-UNESCO Training Course and Certification of Identification of Harmful Marine Microalgae
14	Yash	IISER Kolkata	Blue-Green Fusion in the Sundarbans: Eco-Engineering Coastal Aquaculture ponds with Mangrove	Ocean Sciences Meeting 2026
15	Manaswini Barik	Tezpur University	Ultrasound-Assisted Green Extraction of Curcuminoids from Curcuma caesia and Their Incorporation into Emulsion Gels for Functional Food Use	6 th Interaction Conference on Food Properties (ICFP6)

Sohan P. Modak Ignite Travel Grant

India hosts a large and diverse pool of research students, many of whom study in universities with limited access to research opportunities. The Sohan P. Modak Ignite Travel Grant addresses this gap by supporting students, especially from Tier 2 and state universities to attend national conferences, workshops, and training programs. The fellowship promotes skill development, fosters collaboration, and helps broaden exposure to India's research landscape, empowering under-represented students to pursue meaningful scientific careers.

S.N.	Name	Affiliation	Topic	Conference Name
01	Nidhi Sapre	Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune	Multifunctional waste resource, based superabsorbent polymers for biomedical applications	APA International Conference on Polymers for Advanced Technology, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India
02	Chandrakanth M	Ashoka University, Sonapat, Haryana	Evolution of Development, Reproduction and Survival under Isocaloric Diets across Life Stages in <i>Drosophila melanogaster</i>	Indian Society for Evolutionary Biologist (ISEB6), IISER Berhampur, Berhampur, Odisha
03	Kanika Nadar	Acharya Narendra Dev College, University of Delhi	Isolation and Characterization of <i>M. fortuitum</i> Phages and Prophage, Encoded Endolysin.	6 th International Conference on Bacteriophage Research & Antimicrobial Resistance, BHU, Varanasi
04	Anirudhan A K	St. Stephen's College, University of Kerala	Kerala Unveiling Hidden Biodiversity: Seasonal Shifts in Water Chemistry and Aquatic Macroinvertebrates of Myristica Swamps with a Future Lens on Meiofaunal Diversity	19 th International Meiofauna Conference (19IMCO), Kolkata
05	Akuleti Saikumar	Tezpur University (Central), Assam	Antimicrobial and pH, Sensitive Electrospun Mucilage/PVA Nanofiber Mats with ZnO Nanoparticles and Anthocyanin for Food Packaging	59 th Annual Convention on Engineering Innovations for Agriculture 5.0 and International Symposium on Mechatronics and Robotics in Pre and Post Production Agriculture, scheduled for November 10, 12, 2025 at ICAR-Central Institute of Agricultural Engineering, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

S.N.	Name	Affiliation	Topic	Conference Name
06	Ankita Chattopadhyay	SRM University-AP, Andhra Pradesh	Exploring the Therapeutic Potential of Bacteriophages Against Patient-Derived Indian Clinical Strains of <i>Acinetobacter baumannii</i>	6 th International Conference on Bacteriophage Research and Antimicrobial Resistance (ICBRAR), 2025 at Banaras Hindu University (Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh)
07	Abhinav Roy	Jadavpur University, Kolkata	An insight into fjord ecosystem using morphological characteristics of benthic foraminifera as proxy	19 th International Meiofauna Conference, Kolkata, West Bengal
08	Aditya Kanade	Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri, Ahilyanagar, Maharashtra	Real-time weed detection in Maize through YOLO models: A machine vision approach for precision weed management	International Seminar on Climate-Weed Nexus: Innovations for Sustainable Farming, 27-28 November 2025, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India
09	Manibhushan Kumar	Tezpur University, Tezpur, Assam	Influence of Pressurized Ohmic Heating (OHPC) on the Cooking Behaviour and Rheology Properties of Rice-A Mechanistic Insight	Food Innovations, Food Allergies and Traditional Foods, FIFATF-25 at Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering and Technology, Longowal (Punjab)

Building Nationwide Scientific Communities through Special Academic Research Cooperative (SpARC) meetings



Generating cutting edge ideas in science requires interdisciplinary brainstorming and participation. In order to promote this in a systematic way, we assemble groups of scientists with overlapping interests to form what we call “academic research cooperatives” as a means to connect silos of knowledge and generate new ideas at the interface.

Special Academic Research Cooperative (SpARC) meetings provide a platform for interaction and innovation by bringing in leading experts and facilitating solutions for the pressing challenges of our nation. This year, 3 projects have emerged from the ITC Agriscience SpARC, and 1 project each from the Spice Pharmacology and Cancer EMT SpARC meetings, respectively. Refer to the Project Verticals section for project details. The interdisciplinary perspectives sparked many ideas for collaborations on new ideas.

Many of these ideas may not have been nucleated if the conversation between specialists from different fields had not been organized. It builds on Ignite’s initiatives in using SpARC as a platform where such interdisciplinary conversations and ideation take place.

Our SpARCs and Workshops

S.N.	Name of SpARC	Date	Venue
01	ITC Agriscience	27-29 April 2025	ITC Kohenur, Hyderabad
02	Spice Pharmacology	4-5 July 2025	National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru
03	Push Translational and Drug Discovery Workshop	31 October - 1 November 2025	Centre for Cellular and Molecular Platforms, Bengaluru
04	Cancer EMT	6-7 March 2026	Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru
05	Smart Solutions from Algae	15-16 June 2026	Della Resort, Lonavala

New Initiatives of IgniteLSF

Enabling the Frontlines of Ecological Discovery: Ancillary Grants for Field Biologists

India's extraordinary biodiversity can only be understood and conserved through sustained field research. From tracking wildlife populations and forest regeneration to documenting the impacts of climate change, field biologists generate the evidence that informs conservation and environmental policy. Yet, despite their critical role, they often face barriers that limit the continuity and impact of their work.

To address this gap, Ignite will be launching an Ancillary Grant for Field Biology, a targeted initiative that complements conventional research funding by supporting essential field-based needs often left unfunded. The program will provide flexible support for long, term ecological monitoring, field stations, skilled local field personnel, operational expenses, and capacity building for young researchers. Recognizing the unique realities of field science, the initiative also aims to foster a more inclusive research ecosystem by addressing the practical challenges faced by women conducting research in remote locations and by enabling safer, more supportive field environments.

By investing in the people and infrastructure that underpin field biology, Ignite seeks to strengthen India's ecological research ecosystem and generate the long-term evidence needed to address emerging environmental challenges. Through this initiative, the foundation hopes to empower field biologists to advance scientific understanding, inform conservation policy, and help safeguard India's natural heritage for future generations.



Empowering Excellence Scholarships Program (EESP): The Ignite - Professor HS Savithri and Professor MRN Murthy STEM Scholarship for Undergraduate Education

Professor Savithri and Professor Murthy's scholarship is supported by the former students, associates, peers, friends, and family who have benefited from their educational and intellectual wisdom of these two outstanding human beings. The scholarship honors Prof. H. S. Savithri and Prof. M. R. N. Murthy, both eminent educators and scientists, whose passion and commitment to education and mentorship have inspired and shaped students' careers from early education through doctoral studies and have contributed to groundbreaking scientific discoveries.

They believe that providing early access to resources for deserving students is key to their long, term success; that financial status should not be a barrier to achieving academic goals; that deserving students should be motivated; and that equity in higher education and research is a prerequisite for diversity of opinion and practice in science.

Their students, friends, and well-wishers have come forward to initiate this scholarship for undergraduate students to cover tuition, hostel fees, books, research, and other study materials (on an actual basis). Financial aid of up to ₹1.5 Lakhs annually is available to successful candidates. The scholarship will be available for the full term of the course (3 or 4 years). Access to mentorship programs, career counseling, internships, and STEM workshops will be organized by Ignite or its partners.





Donor Insights

Women in Science is Imperative for India

Smita Godrej Crishna

Philanthropist

Advisor - Udayachal Schools

Director - Naoroji Godrej Centre for Plant Research

Trustee - Soonabai Pirojsha Godrej Foundation

India is the only country in the world that has made developing a scientific mindset a formal constitutional duty for its citizens!

Nehru saw science as a democratizing force, to solve the problems of poverty, hunger and disease while slowly shifting the public mindset away from communal division and blind faith. India's Constitution also declares that all its citizens have equal rights, yet women are very often marginalized. Our Constitution opens its doors to education, but institutional and societal reforms are deeply required to include women in high and important positions ultimately benefitting our country.

Despite having one of the highest rates of STEM graduates, 43% globally, women make up only about 18.6% of the actual research workforce. This drop off happens because the intense early career years perfectly collide with societal pressures surrounding marriage, childcare and restricted physical mobility.

This could change if age limits are relaxed for women applying for permanent faculty positions, and research grants are seamlessly transferred for a scientist who needs to relocate due to family reasons. Laboratories often lack flexible hours, part-time options, or a smooth re-entry path post maternity. Additionally, rules discouraging couples from working in the same institution usually force women to step down rather than have the man step down.

Women are isolated from informal male networks where hiring, promotions and grant decisions are made, causing representation to drop below 10% at the highest institutional leadership roles. Also, there is gender bias during performance evaluations, which combined with a persistent gender pay gap, drives them to exit research entirely. We do lose out heavily on the work and expertise of excellent researchers and potential leaders in scientific institutions if we do not include many more women in this field. I look forward to the day when these biases are diminished, and men and women get appointments solely on merit.

This is indeed a very unfortunate scenario though happily not at IGNITE, where there is a lot of support for outstanding women researchers, and for many young travel grantees who are women. It is a matter of great pride that the only two women Fellows of the Royal Society working in India, Professor Gagandeep Kang and Dr Soumya Swaminathan, are part of IGNITE.

I wish IGNITE every success, and may our planet benefit from the wonderful initiatives and work it undertakes.

Jai Hind!



From the Lab to
the Boardroom

India's Unfinished Story of Women in Science

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw

Executive Chairperson, Biocon Limited

India has no shortage of talented women in science. Every year, our universities produce one of the world's largest cohorts of women graduating in STEM disciplines. Yet, as careers progress, too few make the journey from the laboratory to leadership, from scientific discovery to entrepreneurship, and from innovation to institution building. This is India's unfinished story.

When I started Biocon nearly five decades ago, I experienced first hand how difficult it was for a woman to be taken seriously as a scientist, entrepreneur and business leader. Those experiences strengthened my resolve but also convinced me that talent alone is never enough. Every successful journey requires an enabling ecosystem: mentors who believe in you, institutions that support you, access to capital, and the confidence to take risks.

Today, many more doors are open for women than when I began my entrepreneurial journey. Now we must focus on opening the doors that matter most: those that lead to scientific leadership, innovation and entrepreneurship.

The future of biotechnology will not be shaped only by scientific discovery. It will be shaped by those who can translate science into affordable healthcare solutions, globally competitive companies, and societal impact. That is why India needs many more women biotech entrepreneurs, not just outstanding researchers. This is where Ignite Life Science Foundation has the opportunity to make a transformational contribution.

Ignite can become far more than a funding organisation. It can become the platform that enables women scientists to become innovators, founders and leaders. By providing mentorship, entrepreneurial training, industry partnerships, incubation support and access to early stage capital, Ignite can help bridge the gap between scientific excellence and commercial success.

Many brilliant scientific ideas never leave the laboratory because their creators lack the ecosystem to translate discovery into enterprise. Ignite can change that. It can help women scientists navigate the complex journey from research to intellectual property, from proof of concept to product development, from laboratory bench to boardroom.

Importantly, Ignite can create something even more valuable than successful companies, it can create role models. Every woman who builds a successful life sciences enterprise inspires hundreds of young women to believe that they too can aspire not only to scientific excellence but to entrepreneurial leadership.

Around the world, we are seeing women increasingly shape innovation ecosystems as founders, investors and institution builders. India should aspire to lead this movement. Our scientific talent is unquestionable; what we need is a stronger innovation ecosystem that enables us to convert knowledge into globally relevant technologies and businesses.

India already has inspiring examples of women who have broken barriers through scientific excellence. Dr. Gagandeep Kang became the first Indian woman elected to the Fellow of the Royal Society in recognition of her pioneering work in vaccinology, enteric diseases and public health. Dr. Tessy Thomas, widely known as the Missile Woman of India, played a pivotal role in the development of the Agni series of strategic missiles and has become a symbol of women's leadership in defence science. Ritu Karidhal, celebrated as the Rocket Woman of India, was a key architect of ISRO's Mars Orbiter Mission and Chandrayaan 2, demonstrating India's capabilities in space exploration. Mangala Mani, an engineer with the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, became the first Indian woman to spend over a year at an Antarctic research station, contributing to India's polar science program under some of the harshest conditions on Earth. These women are not exceptions to be admired from afar; they are pioneers who have expanded the frontiers of Indian science and opened doors for future generations.

The next wave of Indian biotechnology will be driven by the convergence of biology, engineering, artificial intelligence and data science. Women must not simply participate in this transformation, they must help lead it. Diverse leadership produces better science, more inclusive innovation, and stronger institutions.

If Ignite makes women-led entrepreneurship one of its defining missions, it can help create a new generation of globally competitive biotech companies founded by Indian women. That would not simply strengthen India's life sciences ecosystem; it would redefine what leadership in science looks like for future generations.

India's ambition should not be measured by how many women graduate in science. It should be measured by how many women lead laboratories, build companies, create intellectual property, attract investment, and take Indian innovation to the world. That is the opportunity before us. I hope Ignite will seize it with conviction and purpose.



On Being a Role Model

Amil's Dilemma

Jyotsna Dhawan

Member, Scientific Advisory Board, IgniteLSF
Visiting Professor, Institute for Stem Cell Science
and Regenerative Medicine
Emeritus Scientist, Centre for Cellular and
Molecular Biology (CCMB)

[View Expert Insights](#)

As a woman scientist who was fortunate enough to have survived the myriad sinkholes in the leaky pipeline, I am sometimes asked about role models. Usually, role models are considered a good thing and no doubt that could be true, for demonstrating that a woman can determine a path towards a profession, craft or life that they themselves desire. But the idea of role models can also place limitations in imagination and breed conformity. Women scientists must not appear too aggressive, too questioning, too outspoken, too fashionable, too STEM, too likeable, too strict, too feminine, too much! And of course, Indian women scientists must be visibly Indian. All of these assumptions are limitations not freedoms, and all too often self-imposed, a reflection of social expectations, coloring within the lines. Role models in my opinion should show you the possibility of being something, not restrict you to the specifics of what is held up in front of you as admirable or desirable or compel you to be a particular something; they should encourage you to find what it is that you would like to be, open your eyes to a way of being, not in the individual, but in seeing the opportunity to make your way...

My mother Amil was a great role model in that she showed her children the possibility of a different way of being; she had a most unconventional mind and her ideas opened doors for us. Amil turned 21 in 1947 when India gained freedom from colonial rule and like many young people of the time, I think, began to see the new possibilities open to her. She came from a family of modest material means but diverse talents and appreciations, placing great value on education, with a modern outlook. Her mother's family had a voracious appetite for words and a tremendous skill in their deployment, and despite their formal education being curtailed at high school, all the women in that family read everything they could get their hands on, with opinions which they gave freely and quite forcefully, and with a great turn of phrase. Her father was employed as a translator in the colonial government of the Madras Presidency. A necessary and respectable job, but not one where you might expect a great deal of imagination. He did this routine job to support his family, but he had a passion that drove him to seek an unconventional path. He became enthralled by plants, was entirely self-taught and in 1920, on the basis of his popular writing on botany, gained admission to an American college. He travelled the world, was acknowledged as an expert horticulturalist and gave his children the idea that they too were not limited by their perceived circumstances.

My mother was determined to study and work, and in 1951 was one of the first Indian women to be accepted for a PhD at Washington University in far-away St Louis. As a result of her quiet rebellion against being married off, all her sisters also went abroad to study or work. Apart from her intellect, it was her instinctively non-hierarchical way of thinking that freed her and freed us. And yet, she also conformed and accepted the

limitations placed on her by family, not because they were forced on her in a violent manner, but because there did not appear to be options, not straying too far from accepted social norms. She had simply loved her work as a cytogeneticist, delighted in observations of chromosomes when studying the wild origins of crop plant species, and from that mind-expanding experience of her PhD research, she gave us a huge appreciation of the microscopic world, and a joy of looking at things closely, the importance of doing things well for their own sake. She married a man of her own choice, being lucky enough to find the life partner who truly appreciated her. But being married to a rising star in Indian science meant that very soon she felt she had to quit her job and play the supporting role. She did it willingly, had a marvelous marriage and created a stable and joyous, open and welcoming environment for us and her extended family. And yet, and yet.... I always knew that she chafed at not having been able to continue her work, derided herself for not having extended her training towards a life in research, felt she had not lived up to her own ideals as a young woman. So, there was definitely an element of having had to give up this world of scholarship and enquiry, feeling guilty that even though her personal life was so happy and fulfilled, she wanted more, wishing she could continue her investigations into the exploding field of chromosome biology. As a student she had the opportunity to meet many interesting geneticists who had paved the way for modern molecular biology, and she longed to understand and explore what Watson and Crick had thrown open by revealing the structure of DNA.

To me, her life illustrates that social constraints, choices and limitations are not easily defined. Hers is not a story of working against disabling prejudice or barriers placed by ignorance, or family pressure, or repressive forces; rather, of a person who finds themselves limited by their own perception of what is appropriate for a woman in her circumstances, which no doubt is influenced by what society deems appropriate for a wife and mother. She gave us the benefit of her yearning to learn and explore, her open-mindedness and acceptance of unconventional people and choices, her disregard for stereotypes of faith, caste, class or appearance. So, although many women today might not wish to emulate her path professionally, she was an incredible influence on her sisters, children and their friends, and most people who entered our sphere. Simone de Beauvoir wrote in 1949 that one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman. And so it was for my mother, while she defined a quietly defiant path around many of the structures that constrained her, she policed herself for what she believed was needed for a stable family life. I revel in the young Amil, and am eternally grateful for the free and exploratory childhood she gave us, but I am regretful for her lost dreams of lifelong scholarship and discovery. To all the young Amils who are making their way in science, I wish that her dreams give you the strength to guide your own path, through the many difficult choices you will have to make.



Leading the Way into the Future

Women Scientists Will Shine Brighter

Soumya Swaminathan

Member, Scientific Advisory Board, IgniteLSF
Chairperson, M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation
(MSSRF)

[View Expert Insights](#)

I have been often asked what it takes for a woman to succeed in the scientific sphere in India. And, I have been considered rather vocal on this matter. And legitimately so, for this issue needs greater prominence and has been neglected for far too long. Consider this fact: In December 2015, the United Nations earmarked February 11th every year as the International Day of Women and Girls in Science. While the mandatory celebration is a good reminder of the global commitment to rebalance a historical social inequity, progress has largely been slow.

India has the proud reputation of having 43% female STEM graduates, even more than many western nations: UK (38%), USA (34%), Germany (27%). However, what is of great concern is that this translates to only 14% to 27% of the active STEM workforce, reports indicate. While arguably this gap caused by a 'leaky pipeline' is visible in many other sectors as well, it has serious consequences when women leaders are missing at leadership levels in rooms where long-term planning and strategic thinking is on the agenda. Gender insensitivity is a social challenge, and regrettably, the absence of women leaders has diminished policy conversations in matters of health, nutrition, sanitation, childcare, etc., as they are blind spots in male dominated board rooms. Forward-looking leaders have testified in various fora that having women as active members in policy debates has not just transformed thinking but also delivered impactful results because they take a well-rounded, holistic and team-oriented approach to problem solving.

Overcoming the historical baggage of social discrimination is only part of the story. I have also observed that women researchers have been held to higher standards of examination at the workplace, be it in grant applications, peer reviews, or allocation of limited laboratory resources. Unless they assert their rights as equal players, they tend to become second fiddle in matters of scientific inquiry.

For creating a robust and sustainable scientific ecosystem in our country, capable of generating real solutions to grassroot issues that matter to the larger population, we need to harness the dedicated inputs that women scientists bring forth. The onus is therefore upon the current crop of senior leaders who build a platform that recognizes the hurdles before the young woman researcher and enables her to overcome them with active institutional support. This is not a battle for women crusaders alone; good male scientific leaders must become partners in this battle, including offering mentorship to pave the way for the next generation STEM scholars who are otherwise left behind. Breakthrough thinking is necessary in large institutions which are resource rich but have demonstrated poor results. Modifying age-old bureaucratic regulations and instilling flexibility that emphasizes outcome rather than mere activity and

adherence to unnecessary protocol, will provide much needed relief to researchers, both men and women, as current AI technology can be a game changer not just in minimizing processes but also to generate faster and better results.

The beneficial value of science blesses us all in society, none more so than the under privileged and neglected segment at the grassroots. Women researchers must take the lead in bringing them into the conversation with their natural ability to empathize while solving real-world problems with scientific acumen. Take the case of the agriculture sector: did you know that the Indian agriculture sector is witnessing a trend that deserves deeper study? I refer to the 'Feminisation of Indian Agriculture'. Studies have highlighted that the agriculture sector engages 64.4% of all the female workforce of India (and this rises as high as 76.9% for rural women). Interestingly, 48% to 50% of self-employed farmers are women. In contrast only 12.8% women have formal titles to the lands they own or work in. The lack of legal recognition impacts them severely as access to formal government programs largely requires proof of ownership. There are unique challenges that they face as the vast number of rural women are occupied in back-breaking physical, time-intensive routines (weeding, sowing, cleaning, harvesting, etc.). Deeper studies are needed to empower them not just to be more productive but also to ameliorate their physical challenges. Climate resilient crops, better pest management, bio-fertilizers, etc., are solutions that mitigate farm challenges, besides offering occupational relief. The all round impact is too significant to be ignored. Women researchers in this sector are playing a vital role, and many more are needed.

Let me end on a personal note. All children are influenced by their parents. I too have gained immensely from the early exposure to the pioneering projects of my father. But I need to equally stress that the grooming my siblings and I received from my mother, Mina, and her work with mobile creches and other institutions, has shaped my views on how a scientific approach to issues related to health and nutrition of women and children can make an impact on seemingly impossible goals. Today's women leaders in science will be the torchbearers and inspiration for the coming generations in more ways than one can imagine at present as they construct a new road right now towards a better future.

As an optimist, I continue to believe that it takes good women role models to inspire other women in science, and at Ignite we will further this cause to greater degrees.



Women in Scientific Leadership

Why Inclusion Matters

Gagandeep Kang

Director, Enterics, Diagnostics, Genomics and
Epidemiology (EDGE), Global Health Division
Gates Foundation

[View Expert Insights](#)

Science tells itself a story about meritocracy, that the best ideas win, that talent rises. But for most of history, the pipeline has been quietly, consistently tilted. In the 21st century, this is no longer deliberate exclusion, but accumulated assumptions that make practice: about who belongs in a lab, who gets taken seriously at a conference, whose career can survive a maternity leave.

I was lucky, and persistent. I had an institution, and collaborators that met me more than halfway. But luck is not a system, and I have watched too many women not enter science or exit it, not because they were not good enough, but because doors shut when it mattered.

This is not just a fairness problem, it is a scientific one. The questions we ask in research are shaped by who is in the room. In global health, where I have spent most of my career, the diseases and conditions that most affect women and children have historically been underfunded, understudied, and undervalued. When more women lead programmes, sit on committees, and set research agendas, different questions get asked. Different populations get included.

This is not a favour we do for sections of society, it is crucial to building a comprehensive understanding of health and disease. And yet structural change in science moves slowly. Informal networks still carry enormous weight in how funding and recognition get distributed. Funding and review committees and conference keynote lists remain stubbornly gender weighted.

This is where philanthropy can do something that government and academic institutions do not - consciously right the balance by investing in problems that have been ignored and promote the voices that are not heard enough. We can support institutional cultures that do not force women to choose between ambition and personal responsibilities. Philanthropic capital can support the science and the women that are positioned to lead, not just the women trying to survive within existing science. Why philanthropic capital? Precisely because it is not bound by short grant cycles or institutional inertia.

That is not charity. That is how you change what gets discovered, and who gets to do the discovering.



Women in Scientific Leadership

Strengthening the Pipeline

Renu Swarup

Former Secretary, Department of Biotechnology
Ministry of Science & Technology
Government of India

[View Expert Insights](#)

Women empowerment is key to strengthening their participation in decision-making which is most important for socio, economic development. According to research data, it has been noted that empowering women accelerates the economic growth and development of a country. While our focus is on strengthening and empowering the top, we cannot lose sight at the ground level. To build effective women leadership, bring in gender sensitive policies and programmes and see progressive outcomes in decision making, it is imperative that we focus on nurturing women leadership, and also empowering our women at the grassroot level, both technologically and socially.

Leadership development is crucial and critical to empower the women to recognise their own strength and then move forward in leadership positions. Institutional policies are very important to encourage this. It is important to institutionalise gender equality policies at organisational, national and at the international level.

Globally there has been a special focus on trying to address the issues related to Women in STEM and framing key policies which support the development of world class talent in STEM to reduce the Gender Gap. As countries frame STI Policies, it is imperative that the issues of Gender Diversity continue to occupy centre stage, with national and international partnerships also explicitly including this in their agreements. It is imperative to continue this momentum to ensure that we succeed in this very important global challenge of gender equality.

Women have revolutionized science and technology for years; we do have role models - women who have contributed to the growth. Women have played an important role in entrepreneurship since the 17th century and with time we see more women-led enterprises. Since 2000 there has been an increase in small and big ventures led by women.

Women have exhibited their strength as business leaders - more than 20% of financial performers have shown that they have more than 27% women leaders with them. However, at the decision-making levels we have a very minimal percentage of women on Boards as CEO, Director and as head of organizations.

In India there has been a tremendous effort by the Government to support Women in STEM both through policy intervention and programmes which help to boost their career. The Department of Biotechnology and Department of Science & Technology have special programs for training, capacity building and research opportunities for employed and unemployed women scientists.

We have some very interesting examples of women being champions of change both for adoption of new technology and appropriate decision making to implement these on scale for creating an impact. When we look at women in academia and industry again it is imperative to understand what their challenges are and how research efforts have been driven by women, for women. The participation of women in all sectors is changing, we see more numbers now but does this translate to actual numbers at the top and numbers on the ground - not really.

What then is it that needs to be done? It is important to take up the necessary initiatives for women's development to build a strong pipeline and strengthen their skills and capacities specially for mid-career and senior leaders, across the different STEM disciplines. We must also specifically design programmes which help nurture our women at the ground.

My message to the young women in STEM is that you have to carry the baton forward. There are enormous opportunities; you have to recognise your strength within and remember your contribution is critical. **“Each young woman must strive to be a Role model and a Champion for enhanced gender participation ensuring Gender Equality and Gender Equity. To achieve this, it is important that you focus on the four Cs:**

Confidence in your ability, Commitment to deliver, Courage to take risk, and Conviction to accomplish.”

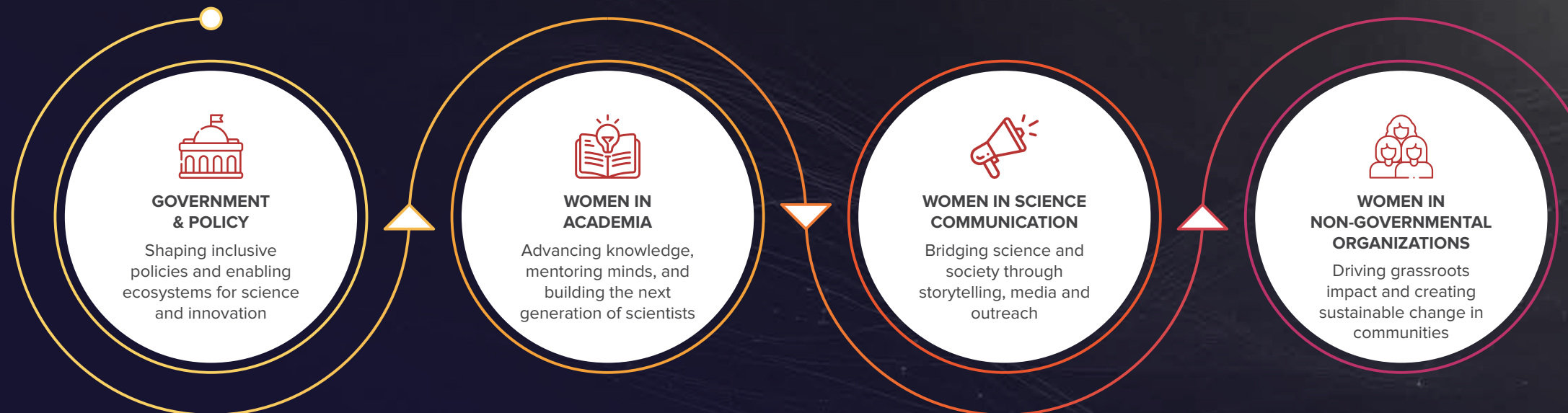
Voices of Change

Women leading change across science, research, innovation and society

Science thrives when diverse perspectives come together to ask bold questions, challenge conventions, and create solutions that benefit society. Across India's scientific and innovation ecosystem, women are leading this transformation, as **researchers, policymakers, government leaders, entrepreneurs, science communicators, educators**, and changemakers, bringing knowledge, resilience, and purpose to every sphere they influence.

This section celebrates the inspiring women across diverse spheres, including government and policy, academia, entrepreneurship, science communication, and the non-profit sector. While each journey is unique, they are united by a shared commitment to excellence, innovation, and societal impact.

Behind every accomplishment lies a story of perseverance, purpose, and the courage to challenge convention. We invite you to discover these voices and the experiences that have shaped them. Together, they remind us that when women lead in science, they do more than transform laboratories and institutions, they inspire generations, expand possibilities, and shape a future where talent, curiosity, and opportunity knows no boundaries.





**WOMEN
ENTREPRENEURS**

Innovating solutions,
building enterprises,
and creating impact at
scale



Radha Rangarajan

Director, Central Drug Research
Institute (CSIR-CDRI),
Lucknow

Women Entrepreneurship: The Next Frontier in Life Sciences

As India's innovation economy grows, **Radha Rangarajan** highlights the transformative role women entrepreneurs can play in shaping the future of science and technology. She advocates that women move beyond being job seekers to becoming job creators, driving innovation, generating employment, and building more inclusive workplaces. As she aptly writes, **"Entrepreneurship has the potential to not only put women in decision-making roles but also transform the workplace for greater equity and diversity."**

[Read Full Article](#)



Shambhavi Naik

Chairperson, Advanced Biology
Programme, Takshashila Institution,
Bengaluru

The Bioeconomy Needs More Women at the Policy Table

Drawing from her journey from cancer biology to science policy, Shambhavi Naik underscores the critical need for greater representation of women in shaping India's bioeconomy. She argues that women are often the primary stakeholders in life sciences as farmers, caregivers, patients, and workers and yet remain underrepresented in policymaking. As she aptly notes, **"The best policy is made when those making it understand the lived experience of all stakeholders."** Her perspective is a powerful reminder that inclusive policymaking is fundamental to building an equitable and resilient scientific ecosystem.

[Read Full Article](#)



Sandhya Visweswariah

Professor, Department of Molecular Reproduction, Development and Genetics, Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru

From Inclusion to Leadership: Strengthening Women in Academia

Reflecting on the underrepresentation of women in academic leadership, **Sandhya Visweswariah** emphasizes that excellence alone is not enough - institutions must actively create environments where women can thrive. From equitable recruitment and mentoring to family-friendly policies and greater representation in leadership, she argues that lasting change requires intentional action.

As she aptly states, **"There must be a proactive drive to recruit and assess women researchers, since women in general do not put themselves forward for awards or recognition."** Her perspective highlights that inclusive institutions are not only fairer but also richer in ideas, innovation, and scientific excellence.

[Read Full Article](#)



Manjula Reddy

Chief Scientist, Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad

Finding My Calling in Science

Reflecting on a career that began with a first encounter in a college chemistry laboratory, **Manjula Reddy** shares how discovering her passion shaped a lifetime in scientific research. Despite balancing family responsibilities and societal expectations, her commitment to science remained unwavering. She encourages young people especially girls to pursue their interests with confidence, emphasizing the vital role of parents, teachers, and mentors in nurturing scientific aspirations.

As she beautifully reflects, **"The pursuit of happiness is most fulfilling when it is connected to a larger purpose."** Her journey is a testament to how passion, perseverance, and purpose can inspire both personal fulfillment and scientific discovery.

[Read Full Article](#)



Sandeepa Kanitkar

Founder Chairperson & Managing Director, Kan Biosys Pvt. Ltd., Pune

The Role of Women in Entrepreneurship and Its Impact on Society

Drawing upon inspiring examples from boardrooms, laboratories, government, and grassroots communities, **Sandeepa Kanitkar** reflects on how women entrepreneurs are transforming India's scientific and economic landscape. She argues that women's leadership extends far beyond building successful enterprises - it creates jobs, drives innovation, strengthens communities, and shapes more inclusive institutions. While celebrating pioneers such as Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Swati Piramal, Tessy Thomas, and countless rural women entrepreneurs, she also highlights the need to address persistent barriers to funding, mentorship, and leadership opportunities. As she powerfully concludes, **"The story of women's entrepreneurship in India is ultimately the story of India itself - resilient, diverse, and constantly reinventing what is possible."** Her commentary is a compelling reminder that empowering women entrepreneurs is not merely an economic imperative, but a catalyst for national progress.

[Read Full Article](#)



Ezhil Subbian

Founder and Chief Executive Officer, String Bio Pvt. Ltd., Bengaluru

Beyond the Startup: The Entrepreneurial Mindset

Ezhil Subbian redefines entrepreneurship not as the pursuit of capital or business ownership, but as a mindset rooted in curiosity, resilience, and the courage to transform challenges into opportunities. She emphasizes that women possess the same qualities that underpin entrepreneurial success and that their growing participation enriches innovation by bringing diverse perspectives and solutions to the forefront. Rather than questioning women's ability to succeed, she calls for stronger ecosystems that provide access to mentorship, networks, capital, and opportunity. As she aptly observes, **"The task before us is to ensure that ambition is never held back by a lack of opportunity."** Her commentary is a powerful call to create an ecosystem where every aspiring woman entrepreneur can turn vision into impact.

[Read Full Article](#)



Akanksha Agarwal

Founding Director, AgroMorph
Technosolutions Private Ltd.,
Mumbai

A Gender-Neutral Lens on Women, Science, and Entrepreneurship

Reflecting on her journey from scientist to entrepreneur, Akanksha Agarwal emphasizes that while scientific knowledge lays the foundation, it is execution that transforms ideas into impact. She advocates for a truly gender-neutral innovation ecosystem where women are empowered not merely through inspiration, but through equitable access to capital, mentorship, networks, and leadership opportunities.

As she insightfully writes, **"Science trained me to ask why; entrepreneurship taught me to ask what next, with whom, and by when."** Her commentary is a compelling reminder that innovation flourishes when talent and determination - not gender - define opportunity, and also when more women are enabled to lead, build, and execute with confidence.

[Read Full Article](#)



Subhra Priyadarshini

Chief Editor, Nature India,
New Delhi

The Stories That Shape Science

Drawing on three decades of science journalism, Subhra Priyadarshini reflects on the power of storytelling to shape how science and scientists are remembered. She argues that highlighting the journeys of women scientists is not simply about recognition; it is about inspiring future generations and creating a more inclusive scientific culture.

As she writes, **"Visibility is one of the conditions that makes success possible. Young people cannot aspire to what they seldom see."** Her commentary reminds us that science communication plays a vital role in ensuring that the contributions, resilience, and leadership of women become an enduring part of our collective scientific memory.

[Read Full Article](#)



Sarah Hyder Iqbal

Practitioner and Researcher,
SHIQ Labs - Activating Science For
Change,
New Delhi

The Voices That Make Science Stronger

Sarah Hyder Iqbal reflects on the vital role of science communication in creating a scientific ecosystem where diverse voices are not only represented but empowered to thrive. She argues that addressing complex societal challenges requires research systems that value different perspectives, lived experiences, and meaningful public engagement. Science communication, she believes, is far more than sharing scientific knowledge - it is about building trust, fostering dialogue, and ensuring science remains accountable to the communities it serves.

As she aptly observes, **"Science does not happen in a vacuum."** Her commentary is a compelling call to reimagine science as a collaborative endeavour where inclusion, engagement, and societal relevance are integral to scientific excellence.

[Read Full Article](#)



Sanchari Banerjee

Senior Research Scientist
Sai Life Sciences Ltd.,
Hyderabad

Beyond Balance: Embracing the Power of Work-Life Integration

Reflecting on her journey as both a scientist and a mother, Sanchari Banerjee challenges the notion of work-life balance, advocating instead for work-life integration - where professional and personal roles strengthen one another.

She emphasizes that women thrive when supported by enabling workplaces, shared responsibilities at home, and strong mentorship. As she beautifully notes, **"We are one person wearing many hats. Rather than striving to do everything at once, we should make thoughtful choices, prioritize what matters most, and extend ourselves grace when priorities inevitably shift."** Her perspective is a reminder that nurturing both careers and families requires not only personal resilience but also supportive ecosystems that empower women at every stage of their scientific journey.

[Read Full Article](#)

Our Donors

Anchor Donor



Corporate Donors



Individual Donors

Ferzaan Engineer, Bhairavi M. Shibulal, Srikumar Suryanarayan, Raghavan Varadarajan, Ashwin Shroff, Ujwala Rao & Pranav Parekh, Rita & Anselm de Souza, Supporters of EESP Scholarship and many more.

Our Board Members



**Shahid
Jameel**

Chairperson

Fellow, OCIS & Green
Templeton College,
University of Oxford



**Anand
Anandkumar**

CEO, Bugworks
Research Inc.,
Bengaluru



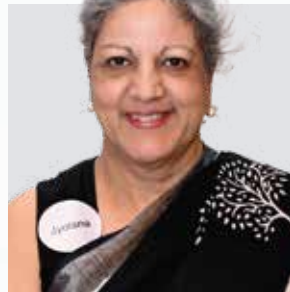
**Bhairavi M.
Shibulal**

Director,
Solis Health,
Bengaluru



**Jotin
Desai**

CEO,
Eyestem Research,
Bengaluru



**Jyotsna
Dhawan**

Emeritus Scientist,
CCMB,
Hyderabad



K. Jayshankar

MD,
Empowered
Learning,
Pune



**Pankaj
Chandra**

Vice Chancellor,
Ahmedabad
University,
Ahmedabad



**Shravanti
Rampalli**

CEO,
IgniteLSF,
Bengaluru

Our Scientific Advisory Board



Ramaswamy Subramanian

Chairperson

Director, Bindley Bioscience Center, Purdue University



Ajay Kohli

Professor, Biology & Life Sciences Division School of Arts & Sciences, Ahmedabad University



Anurag Agrawal

Dean, BioSciences and Health Research, Trivedi School of Biosciences, Ashoka University



K. K. Narayanan

Founder Director, Sthayika Seeds Pvt. Ltd, Bengaluru



Richard Henderson

Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge



Soumya Swaminathan

Chairperson, M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Chennai



Swami Subramaniam

Clinical Pharmacologist & Neuroscientist, Member, IgniteLSF



Satyajit Mayor

Distinguished Professor, NCBS-TIFR, Bengaluru



T. S. Balganes

President Gangagen Biotechnologies Pvt. Ltd., Bengaluru



Venky Venkatesan. T

Director, Center for Quantum Research & Technology, University of Oklahoma

Our Team



**Andrea
Antony**

Program
Manager



**Ambika
Kurbet**

Head, Program
Management



**Anitha
Jonas**

Manager,
Administration
& Accounts



**Ramona
Parsani**

Vice President,
Strategic
Alliances





Our Expert Reviewers

S.N.	Name	Designation
01	Dr. A. K. Singh	Former Director and Vice Chancellor, IARI, Pusa, New Delhi
02	Dr. Bharat Char	Chief Science Officer, Mahyco, Jalna
03	Dr. Chandrima Das	Professor-G, Biophysics and Structural Genomics Division, Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics (SINP), Kolkata
04	Dr. Colin Jamora	Senior Professor and Head, Department of Life Sciences, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Noida
05	Dr. E. V. S. Prakasa Rao	Honorary Scientist, CSIR-Fourth Paradigm Institute, Bengaluru
06	Dr. Gautam Menon	Dean (Research) and Professor, Physics and Biology, Ashoka University, Haryana
07	Dr. George Thomas	Molecular Biologist, Kerala
08	Dr. Giriraj Ratan Chandak	Former Chief Scientist, Sir JC Bose Fellow, CSIR-CCMB, Hyderabad
09	Dr. Imroze Khan	Associate Professor, Biology, Ashoka University, Haryana
10	Prof. Javed Iqbal	Founder and Chairman, Incor Life Sciences, Hyderabad
11	Dr. Jishnu Das	Assistant Professor, Center for Systems Immunology, University of Pittsburgh
12	Dr. Kalyanasundaram Subramanian	CEO & Co-Founder, Differentia Bio, California
13	Dr. Karthick Balasubramanian	Scientist E, Agharkar Research Institute, Pune
14	Dr. M.S. Sheshshayee	Professor, Department of Crop Physiology, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru
15	Prof. Paturu Kondaiah	Former Professor and Chair, Dept. of Developmental Biology and Genetics, IISc, Bengaluru
16	Dr. Prabhat Arya	Co-founder, CSO and CEO, Smagen Pharma, Co-founder, CSO and CEO, Nihita Therapeutics, Ahmedabad
17	Prof. Praveen Kumar Vemula	Professor and Dean of Research, Institute for Stem Cell Science and Regenerative Medicine (BRIC-inStem), Bengaluru
18	Dr. Radha Rangarajan	Director, CSIR-CDRI, Lucknow
19	Dr. Raman Meenakshi Sundaram	Director, ICAR-Indian Institute of Rice Research, Hyderabad
20	Dr. Ramesh Sistla	Founder & MD, thinkMolecular, Bengaluru

S.N.	Name	Designation
21	Dr. Rashmi Rodrigues	Professor, Community Medicine at St John's National Academy of Health Sciences, Bengaluru
22	Prof. Ravi Manjithaya	Professor and Chair, Molecular Biology and Genetics Unit and Neuroscience Unit, JNCASR, Bengaluru
23	Dr. Ravi Muddashetty	Associate Professor, CBR, IISc, Bengaluru
24	Dr. R. Sankararamakrishnan	Professor, Department of Biological Sciences and Bioengineering, IIT-Kanpur
25	Prof. Ramkumar Sambasivan	Associate Professor, IISER Tirupati
26	Dr. Saman Habib	Chief Scientist, CSIR-Central Drug Research Institute, Lucknow
27	Dr. Santosh Chauhan	Senior Principal Scientist, CSIR-CCMB, Hyderabad
28	Dr. Satyajit Rath	Professor Emeritus
29	Dr. Sheetal Gandotra	Senior Principal Scientist, Host Pathogen Interactions, CSIR-IGIB, New Delhi
30	Prof. Subhash Chandra Lakhota	BHU Distinguished Professor (Lifetime) and SERB Distinguished Fellow
31	Dr. Sudhakar D	Professor, Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, TN
32	Prof. Suhaib Siddiqi	Scientist
33	Dr. Surendra Ghaskadbi	Former Scientist G & CSIR Emeritus Scientist Honorary Advisor, Developmental Biology Group, MACS-Agharkar Research Institute, Pune Professor of Practice, Dr. D.Y. Patil Biotechnology and Bioinformatics Institute, Pune
34	Dr. T. S. Lokeswari	Professor (Retd.), Department of Biotechnology, Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research (Deemed University), Chennai
35	Dr. Tina Mukherjee	Associate Investigator, Institute for Stem Cell Science and Regenerative Medicine (inStem), Bengaluru
36	Dr. V. Balasubramanian	Founder & COO, Bugworks Research Inc., Bengaluru
37	Dr. Vasanthi Ramachandran	Vice President-Collaborations, Bugworks Research Inc., Bengaluru
38	Dr. Vineeta Bal	Professor Emeritus
39	Dr. Viswanathan C hinnusamy	Joint Director (Research), ICAR-Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), Delhi

Voices of Our Community



Prathiksha R Bhat

University of Mysore, Mysore

The Eklavya Travel Grant from the Ignite Life Science Foundation made it possible for me to present my doctoral research at the 46th Annual Meeting of the Korean Society of Nephrology (KSN 2026) in Seoul an opportunity I would not have been able to pursue otherwise. The grant structure was clear and straightforward, which allowed me to plan my participation with confidence.

The review and application process pushed me to think about how I communicate my research to a wider audience, which was a useful exercise in itself. The foundation's prompt communication and the clarity of the process made planning straightforward. What stood out most was the foundation's focus on supporting early career researchers from India in reaching international platforms. Making such grants more visible within university departments would help more doctoral students discover and apply for them.



Arunima Acharya

BRIC-National Institute of Biomedical Genomics, West Bengal

Participating in the EACR Congress 2026 was one of the most valuable experiences of my doctoral training. The Ignite Life Science travel grant helped ease the financial burden associated with attending an international scientific meeting, making it possible for me to benefit from an exceptional scientific programme. The Congress exposed me to cutting-edge research in tumour evolution, single-cell and spatial genomics, and precision oncology. Beyond the technical advances, what I found most impactful was the shift in perspective: from viewing tumours as collections of individual cell types to understanding them as dynamic ecosystems shaped by cellular interactions, host factors, and evolutionary processes. These ideas resonate strongly with my own research on the tumour microenvironment in oral squamous cell carcinoma and will influence both the questions I ask and the approaches I adopt in the future. The application process was efficient, communication from the team was prompt and encouraging. For many young researchers, the greatest barrier to international scientific engagement is not motivation but opportunity. By supporting conference participation, Ignite Life Science Foundation is helping bridge that gap and enabling early-career scientists to bring global perspectives back to their own research environments.



Srijita Kundu

LV Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad

The funding team's active support and constructive engagement accelerated both in enabling my conference attendance and expediting the related paperwork. The conference was an excellent venue to share data, receive constructive feedback from experts in the field, and identify potential collaborators working on complementary techniques and model systems.

The travel grant made a direct difference by covering costs that would otherwise have prevented my attendance, allowing me to: a) Present my work to an international audience and refine my study design based on feedback. b) Establish promising collaborations. c) Gain exposure to new methods (e.g., single-cell analysis approaches) that I've already begun integrating into my experiments. A brief anecdote: during a poster discussion I connected with a senior investigator who suggested a crucial experiment. Thank you again for supporting early-career researchers. Your funding not only made this trip possible but also accelerated my progress toward publication and expanded my professional network. Standouts were responsive communication, adaptive reporting and prompt response whenever we needed.



Seema Sangwan

IARI New Delhi

Receiving support for our project, “Harnessing Mycorrhizosphere Synergies to Regulate Carbon Nitrogen Balance and GHG Emissions in Maize Wheat Cropping Systems,” has been both encouraging and motivating. The funding team’s proactive engagement and transparent communication has strengthened our confidence in pursuing interdisciplinary research with potential for sustainable agricultural impact.

The flexibility of the grant enabled us to integrate innovative approaches combining mycorrhizal ecology, soil microbiology, and greenhouse gas mitigation. The regular rigorous review process and **constructive feedback helped us** refine our research objectives, experimental design, and expected outcomes, ultimately strengthening the proposal. Timely **funding decisions and prompt disbursement have facilitated** efficient planning and ensured that project activities can commence without unnecessary delays. Overall, the professionalism, responsiveness, and supportive nature of the funding process stood out. Continued opportunities for networking and collaboration among grantees would further enhance the program’s long-term impact.



Sitara Ajjampur

CMC Vellore

Funds are provided in a timely manner allowing us to keep to the timeline of the project as planned. We used bio-banked samples collected in previous surveys to ask additional questions on AMR/One health in two very different field sites in India and have added on qualitative aspects. As this is using retrospectively collected data and samples, the study design didn’t change, we reworded to hypothesis generating instead of hypothesis testing. The speed of decision-making and fund disbursement was particularly valuable in enabling a quick start. Increase the scale of funding especially if interested in funding One health/Epidemiology and decrease the amount of oversight/feedback needed (especially if the grantee is not early or mid career) to once or twice a year.



Koushambi Mitra

IIT Jodhpur

High-resolution fluorescence imaging is the cornerstone of our research program which focuses on quantitative imaging in living organelles for developing next-generation diagnostics and therapeutics. Prior to this grant, IIT Jodhpur lacked confocal or high end fluorescence microscopy facilities capable of organelle-level imaging, which limited our ability to expand the scope and impact of our investigations.

Immediate and unrestricted access to this advanced microscope has now enabled us to establish an innovative, high-risk, high reward research program. We are now performing extensive imaging experiments involving diverse disease models and multiple replicates. The constructive review feedback is helping us to refine our experimental strategies and identify broader applications of our work. Further, the timely fund disbursement and rapid procurement of the equipment facilitated immediate project initiation, accelerated data generation and fostered new research collaborations. Continued upgrades and expansion of the imaging capabilities of this equipment would increase the breadth and depth of imaging applications and maximize the long-term scientific impact.

Voices of Our Community

"Many of tomorrow's scientific breakthroughs will depend on alternative private funding that is willing to invest where conventional funding cannot."

Anurag Agrawal,
Professor, Ashoka University

[View Expert Insights](#)

"Nature is an important aspect that we need to respect for survival. We need to use traditional ideas brought into reality through scientific research."

Kiran Kumar,
Former Chairman - ISRO

[View Expert Insights](#)

"Viksit Bharat is not a date. It is a journey accelerated by science. Science solves. Science saves. Science secures. Science Builds a Viksit Bharat!"

R. Mashelkar,
Former Director-General, CSIR

[View Expert Insights](#)

"Ignite ensures there is no lack of trust amongst the scientific community, mentors scientists and simplifies bureaucracy."

Shirish Barwale,
MD - Mahyco Grow Group

[View Expert Insights](#)

"We are at an exciting time with biology, AI and data coming together to solve next generation biology sciences."

Anand Deshpande,
MD - Persistent Systems

[View Expert Insights](#)

"We are excited to partner with Ignite to build a stronger pathway from the laboratory to the marketplace, ensuring that promising scientific discoveries are translated into solutions."

Manoj Kumar,
Founder - Social Alpha

[View Expert Insights](#)

"The role of data science in AMR is immense. Ignite is geared towards using the applications of data science in infections."

Saman Habib,
Chief Scientist CSIR-CDRI, Lucknow

[View Expert Insights](#)

"Donors must work to build institutions especially those of interdisciplinary nature and must look at building the ecosystem to support early research."

Amit Chandra,
Co-founder of A.T.E. Chandra Foundation

[View Expert Insights](#)

"Ignite is helping India reach new heights. I hope more people fund Ignite."

Nadir Godrej
Chairperson - Godrej Industries

[View Expert Insights](#)

"We understood that soil, health/nutrition and water are public utility and it gets into farms and there will be value capture. These and much more were areas that we looked at to engage with Ignite."

S. Sivakumar
Head of IT & Agri Businesses - ITC

[View Expert Insights](#)

"Data is scattered and not well structured, and western in nature which poses challenges. South Asian data becomes extremely valuable and it needs to be structured well."

Kaushal Sampat
Founder - Rubix Data Sciences Pvt. Ltd.

[View Expert Insights](#)

"Life science has the opportunity to use different knowledge systems to address massive challenges to leap frog from where we were and where we can go. And this is what Ignite wants to solve."

Pankaj Chandra,
Vice Chancellor - Ahmedabad University

[View Expert Insights](#)

"Ignite has been aggregating various funding sources and we welcome them to partner with us at ANRF."

Shivkumar Kalyanaraman,
CEO- ANRF

[View Expert Insights](#)

"The biggest problems humanity is faced with need multidimensional solutions. They will come from multidisciplinary thinking, multidisciplinary collaboration, and orthogonal skill sets. Ignite builds all this in the operational strategy."

Anand Anandkumar,
CEO - Bugworks Research Inc.

"The convergence of AI and biology represent most fundamental transformations with incredible implications for India and India now has the opportunity to be at the same level as developed nations."

Dr. Jogin Desai,
CEO - Eyestem Research

"Scientific progress finds its greatest purpose when it fuels economic development, creating livelihoods, strengthening communities, and improving the lives of ordinary people."

Srinivas Varadarajan,
Former Non-Ex Chairman - Union Bank of India

"Ignite is a confluence of the best scientific minds in India. The PM's promise of doubling the income of the farmers has sadly fallen short, but others have done so through science and technology."

D. Sivanandan,
Former Police Commissioner, Mumbai

"Encouraging younger students in basic sciences is the foundation and India can be an excellent place for science and innovation."

Kumar Ramu,
COO - QPS Holdings LLC

"Entrepreneurs need exposure to basic science at a younger stage in their lives for them to look at big problems that can be solved with science. We need to expose young minds with broad knowledge for translation of science into business."

Sarang Deo,
Professor - ISB

"Knowledge created in India must create value for India. Retaining scientific know-how is essential to strengthening our economy and securing our future."

Harish Mehta,
Co-Founder - NASSCOM

"Ignite's greatest strength lies in its commitment to interdisciplinary research, supported by a strong scientific team and an exceptional network of mentors. For ITC its the practical feasibility and scalability at the farmer level."

L Prabhakar,
Executive VP & Head Social Investments ITC Ltd.

"We want Della to be a living laboratory where science can move from the laboratory to the real world. With Ignite and the scientific community, we can test algae-based solutions at scale, learn what works in India's diverse environments, and build technologies that create genuine social impact."

Jimmy Mistry,
Founder & Chairman - Della Group

"As a funder and donor we are happy to contribute to a noble cause as that of Ignite."

Dr. Navnath Tarle,
ED -Tufropes India.







Scan to support us
www.ignitelsf.in

Contact Us

ramona@ignitelsf.in | 9823226900

S 15, #14, Bhattrahalli, Old Madras Road, K. R. Puram, Bengaluru, KA 560049

CIN: U85300KA2019NPL125980