LEADERSHIP REVIEW
The year hasn’t been kind, but it was certainly impactful and worth remembering.

As I reflect on my first three months at India Alliance, I am overwhelmed by the resilience and resolve demonstrated by everyone in our ecosystem to overcome a challenging year. Our investment in bright people and robust business processes helped us to seamlessly enable high-quality, impactful biomedical and public health research across India during the year.

For this annual report, we have chosen a theme that symbolises the catalytic role of Science as a constant source of Solutions to maintain the well-being of our Society. The ‘hand’ symbolises India Alliance as an enabler, providing a collaborative framework for researchers and public health experts across the globe to pursue and excel in biomedical research.

We are grateful to our visionary funders and distinguished committee members for their valuable support to position India Alliance as a world-class funding organisation, empowering researchers to excel in biomedical, clinical, and public health research.

We are extremely proud of our grantees and the continued impact of their research in areas of unmet medical needs with key advances in improving the well-being of our society. We aspire to expand our funding footprint across the country and continue nurturing the research ecosystem built around innovation, diversity, and collaboration.

My heartfelt thanks to my colleagues and their supportive families for keeping us on track with our granting cycle and ensuring timely disbursement of funds to mitigate any disruption of ongoing research across the country. I would like to thank Shahid for his influential leadership in building and nurturing an internationally reputable organisation over the past seven years.

As we end the year, India Alliance looks forward to taking Indian science, research, and innovation and its connect with the society to greater heights.

Dr. Vasan Sambandamurthy
Chief Executive Officer
COO’s Message

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Unprecedented change and extraordinary adaptation marked the year. Thanks to our team members, their families and our esteemed funders, trustees, committee members and awardees.

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Our growing team, with the guidance of the committees, enabled 55 awardees set the stage for taking up new projects. We contributed to greater awareness of people on COVID-19, built new partnerships – Research on Research Initiative (RORI), Essence, Research Triangle International, knowledge partner of Lancet’s Citizen Commission, reached out to underserved regions through webinars, workshops and training programmes.

India Alliance’s processes were evaluated again by the rigorous Good Finance Grant Process (GFGP, www.globalgrantcommunity.com) audit and successfully met the prescribed standards. GFGP is an international quality standard, developed in collaboration with the African Organisation for Standardisation and a global community of grantors and grantees, used in 43 countries across five continents.

During the year, we also had our longest-serving CEO, Dr. Shahid Jameel, demit office and transition his responsibilities to Dr. Vasan Sambandamurthy. Thanks to Shahid for his stellar role in India Alliance’s growth. But as they say change is inevitable, we at the same time, extend a very warm welcome to Vasan.

There’s more good news that has been added to our infrastructure story. India Alliance moved to a larger premise in Hyderabad setting sail for an exciting 2021.

Vishweshwer Perka
Chief Operating Officer
look to India’s formidable capacity and capability in vaccine production to support greater equality of access to this weapon of choice in the fight against COVID-19. So, we can reflect with pride on the wisdom to establish this fellowship programme for India. We are confident that this cohort of rising talent will make a difference to India and to the world.

We can also reflect on the changes at Wellcome and at India Alliance. Wellcome launched a new strategy, placing support for discovery science right at its heart. It now also has a clear mandate to address the challenges of infectious diseases, mental health, and the impact of global warming on human health.

We are confident that the work of India Alliance is consistent with this strategy and as India Alliance evolves, it will determine both, what is important for India and how its funding can maximise India’s contribution to global health.

We said a farewell to Dr. Shahid Jameel, who not only left India Alliance in great shape for his successor, but also, over the last year, demonstrated the thought leadership of a world-leading virologist at a time when we all needed to listen to scientific voices we could trust. We wish him well as he takes on new challenges and thank him for the many years of service. This leaves the final word to welcome Dr. Vasan Sambandamurthy, the incoming CEO. He brings fresh ideas and the experience he has gained in the pharmaceutical sector.

Wellcome appreciates its partnership with the India Alliance staff, the DBT, the fellows and institutions and all committee members, all of whom constitute the India Alliance community.
In the last 12 years, DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance (India Alliance) has gained immense recognition in the funding ecosystem for scientific mentorship and career advancement of young researchers in biomedical research. In the process, it has set global benchmarks in its transparent, global peer review process to identify, fund and nurture the brightest minds in the country.

Biomedical Research Career Programme (BRCP) continues to play a pivotal role in catalysing interdisciplinary partnerships and in expanding its footprint to build scientific leadership across institutions in India and abroad.

Of special note is the launch of Team Science Grant (TSG), which provides an enabling mechanism to fund high-risk, high-reward ideas by bringing together a team of interdisciplinary researchers with complementary skills, knowledge, and resources to address important health challenges in India. The Clinical Research Centre (CRC) programme has enabled establishment of virtual multi-institutional partnerships to bridge knowledge, resource, and mentorship gaps through cross cutting or vertical research themes, within India and abroad.

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Perspectives on India Alliance

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Success isn’t always about numbers. How many lives have you touched and positively changed is what success truly is about. There comes the role of India Alliance in our society. Its work truly deserves the much-overused adjective, ‘transformative’. India Alliance has used its sustained, secured funding to skilfully establish a world-class system to identify, fund and nurture the brightest and best biomedical, clinical, and public health researchers in India. I am proud to be associated with such a trust that holds up the light for the society.

What makes India Alliance different is we don’t just stop at finding the gem. We go on to polish it and bring out the sparkle that can outshine others in leadership skills too. Our awards process is focussed on excellence and benchmarked against the highest international standards, making our fellowships highly prestigious. The package of generous funding, mentorship and multidisciplinary skills development through our workshops and conferences, provides the optimal vehicle to drive forward researchers’ careers from early stage to international leadership.

Standing on this foundation, India Alliance recently expanded its horizons by launching innovative new programmes to fund Clinical Research Centres and Team Science Grants. As we scale up our ambitions through this new decade, we plan to diversify our funding base. This is essential to secure the long-term future of the Alliance as an independent force for good and excavate the scientific potential of India’s best researchers and their creative ideas. I am humbled by the achievement of our fellows over the last decade and inspired by the impact on population health that India Alliance-funded fellows, teams, and centres will deliver through this new decade.

Professor Ajit Lalvani
Imperial College, London, UK
A researcher’s career is filled with questions. They range from scientific questions one asks while dealing with personnel in laboratory to those in the organisation. One of the biggest challenges is obtaining funds for the problems you propose to address, primarily if you are in academic institutes where core funding is low. This is where India Alliance provides the ideal situation for researchers.

The areas of interest are defined only broadly by India Alliance and are evaluated purely on their excellence and the researcher’s competence. I was fortunate to be a member of the Selection Committee for Intermediate and Senior Fellowships.

I saw for myself how a team of excellent scientists professionally reviewed, evaluated, and recommended the grants. We had peer reviews from international and nationally recognised scientists to help us in our decisions. Critical reviews, timely release of funds every year, extraordinary meetings where Fellows receive praise as well as constructive criticism, go a long way in enthusing excellent young researchers in this country to aspire for a Fellowship.

By emphasising the need for collaborations, the Alliance has taken a step forward in providing opportunities for scientists to work together, to ensure novel and significant impact in improving human health and the society.

**Dr. Sandhya Visweswariah**
Indian Institute of Science

India Alliance has taken a step forward in providing opportunities for scientists to work together, ensuring significant impact in improving human health and the society.
India Alliance is not just a group of people with shared interest in science, it’s a community that shares the idea of providing wholesome health gains to the society. To work in this direction, India Alliance over the last 12 years has created a unique cohort of committed and dynamic scientists in India.

There are reasons why this is unique. The process of selection, which is rigorous and fair, and the different career stages of the selected clinical and basic scientists in different bands of Fellowships, gives India Alliance the edge.

The development of ideas and the progress of scientific enquiry are fitful, not least because experiments just may not work, and dead ends happen; it can also be fitful because of the process involved in the administration of grants.

Here, the governance ensures that Fellows are funded adequately, fairly, and transparently for the required time. Wellcome’s initiatives include the training of physician scientists and capacity building in institutions to handle research funds and facilitate their Fellows.

The new initiatives in Team Science and Clinical/Public Health Research Centres are very appropriate here. The challenge is for this cohort to expand its interaction with others in the scientific world, without creating a sense of exclusivity. While Fellows do meet and discuss their work in very exciting and engaging annual meetings, perhaps one might consider how a widening circle of scientific engagement might occur.

Dr. Anura Kurpad  
St. John’s Research Institute
Efforts to improve research administration and management also stand out, as doing good science requires involvement of a team of individuals and structures that go beyond the laboratory and the field. Taken together, India Alliance’s focus on investing in people, relationships, and structures that enable rigorous science is truly commendable.

Dr. Suneeta Krishnan
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Over the past decade, India Alliance has grown from an initiative that offers research Fellowships to a comprehensive programme supporting a diverse group of researchers and research centres, providing research and research management training, and promoting team science.

The Alliance’s success could be gauged by the impressive 900-plus highly cited and largely open research manuscripts that have been produced. However, among the unique contributions of the Alliance to India’s scientific ecosystem is its Public Engagement programme, which is especially relevant considering the growth of mis- and disinformation and mistrust in science and scientists.

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