



India Programme

Programme Strategy

Supporting equitable opportunities for all

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The India Programme supports efforts to sustainably improve the lives of marginalised people in West Bengal, a state in the eastern region of India on the Bay of Bengal. These include vulnerable workers, Indigenous communities known as Adivasis, and adult and child migrants, whose needs and rights have been neglected for decades.

Our primary grant-making focus centres on two sub-regions within West Bengal where all three groups live – the tea gardens of North Bengal and the Sundarbans coastal region, which also face a range of climate-related and other challenges.

Our secondary grant-making focus is in other districts in West Bengal that are home to one or more of the three priority groups – unorganised workers, Indigenous communities, and migrants. We hope to produce evidence from locations across West Bengal that can inform and influence desired systemic changes at the state and national levels so that all people have a chance to thrive.

“Everyone should have a fair chance at creating a life for themselves in which they can move beyond mere survival to achieve their full potential. Many, however, lack those opportunities simply because of where they are born or who they are.”

Our strategy

Our funding strategy seeks to bring about systemic changes that create a significant difference in communities in priority regions.

Tea garden workers in North Bengal

In North Bengal, the tea garden workers face violation of their labour rights and denial of their basic needs, despite long working hours in hazardous conditions. Many are Indigenous people whose ancestors were brought by British administrators two centuries ago to clear the forests for tea plantations. The workers include children, whom the industry is permitted to employ as young as 12, in conflict with their right to free and compulsory education until age 14.

Funding approach

Our aim is to support tea garden workers and their families so that they can access quality services and claim their entitlements. Keeping the vulnerabilities of the tea garden workers in mind, the India programme will support efforts that:

- assist collectives of tea garden workers to claim rightful wages and entitlements; and
- engage tea producers, state, and national government to enforce the rights of the workers.

Vulnerable communities in the Indian Sundarbans

In the Sundarbans, people live in chronic poverty, subsisting primarily on agriculture, fishing, and non-timber forest products they collect from the vast mangrove forests spread across 40 islands. Frequent and extreme climate events have led to rising sea levels and increased salinity of the land and water bodies resulting in chronic food shortages and loss of income. Vulnerabilities caused by non-climatic

factors add to the risks faced by people living in the Sundarbans. Residents, nearly half of whom are from historically marginalised groups, have had little say in developmental processes that could help them build a world where they can thrive.

Funding approach

Our aim is to support vulnerable communities in the Sundarbans to be heard and be included in decisions that affect their lives. To that end, the India Programme will support organisations that:

- enable greater representation and participation of the local people in governance; and
- improve access to entitlements and quality services that are essential for people of the Sundarbans.

Secondary grant-making focus

In our secondary grant-making focus, we seek to support work that advances the following objectives:

- Unorganised sector workers collectively secure identity as workers, experience fair wages, full employment, and safe, dignified, and equitable conditions of work.
- Adult and child migrants experience safe movement as a result of improved social, economic, and legal (including child protection) services.
- Indigenous communities protect their customary and constitutional rights to preserve their ethnic identity, natural resources, and traditional knowledge.

Types of support

Our grants support individual organisations as well as intermediaries, which allow us to effectively support smaller organisations and community groups. We also support organisations to strengthen their capacities to become more resilient and effective. We work in collaboration with partners and external stakeholders.

We recognise the need to regularly assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the communities with whom we work. We will remain open to committing to long-term support to enable organisations to effect change.

Our guiding principles

The India Programme will be guided by the following cross-cutting principles:

- primary and secondary prevention;
- collaboration, complementarity, and learning among partners and others;
- inclusivity and equity; and
- voice and leadership.

History

We began our grant-making in India in 2011 through the Joint India Programme (JIP), which covered a range of issues and supported projects in the states of West Bengal and Jharkhand. Based upon the learning from JIP, we redefined our strategic priorities and geographic locations to support and create measurable and sustainable change in the lives of the most marginalised people.

General information about Oak Foundation

Oak Foundation reflects the vision and values of its founders. We commit our resources to address issues of global, social, and environmental concern, particularly those that have a major impact on the lives of the disadvantaged.

We have 11 programmes, through which we have made more than 5,000 grants to organisations around the world. Our six main programmes are:

- Environment
- Housing and Homelessness
- International Human Rights
- Issues Affecting Women
- Learning Differences; and
- Prevent Child Sexual Abuse.

In addition, our Trustees support causes that fall outside the remits of the other programmes through the Special Interest Programme.

There are four national programmes: Brazil, Oak Foundation Denmark, India, and Zimbabwe.

With offices in Europe, Africa, India, and North America, we make grants to organisations in approximately 40 countries worldwide.

How to apply for funding

Oak Foundation accepts unsolicited requests for funding through a letter of enquiry. However, please note that the majority of our grant-making is not initiated by our letter of enquiry process. [The submission form can be found on our website.](#)