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## IISc faculty receives grand challenges grant for equitable AI use.

IISc is the winner of a [Grand Challenges](#) grant – an initiative fostering innovation to solve pressing global health and development problems and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Dr **Shashi Jain, Centre for Society and Policy**, will pursue an innovative global health and development research project focused on [Catalyzing Equitable Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Use](#), titled **“Enabling Equal Finance Access for Rural Customers in India”**.

When harnessed equitably and responsibly, AI has incredible potential to help solve some of the world’s toughest challenges and reduce global inequality. Supporting AI research in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) will help ensure that AI technology is tailored to local health, education, agricultural and other contexts and designed with the needs of the world’s most vulnerable at the center.

The project team comprises Co-Investigator Dr Uma Urs from Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK; Mr Shripad Jadhav, President at Kotak Mahindra Bank; and Akaike Technologies, a multimodal AI company assisting enterprises in adopting generative AI faster. The project objective is to create SAATHI, an AI-powered financial advisory system. SAATHI stands for scheme access, attention, training, help, and inclusion; it will either function as a standalone service provider or augment a human service provider. It will receive and answer customer voice queries in the local language and provide audio answers in real-time and in the same language about the latest financial schemes so that rural customers can benefit from faster and more accurate information for decision-making.

Project SAATHI is one of nearly 50 Grand Challenges Catalysing Equitable Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use grants announced by the Gates Foundation to support LMICs in harnessing AI’s power for good and to solve the urgent need for LMIC participation in the co-creation process of this technology as it rapidly evolves. The project’s findings will contribute to building an evidence base for testing AI large language models (LLMs) that can fill vast gaps in access and equitable use of these tools. Each grant represents an opportunity to solve or mitigate a real challenge experienced by communities, researchers and/or governments in low- and middle-income countries.

To receive funding, Dr **Shashi Jain** and other Grand Challenges winners submitted their concepts which outlined their bold idea in response to the [Catalyzing Equitable Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Use](#) request for proposals. More than 1,300 proposals were submitted from around the world.

## **About Grand Challenges**

Grand Challenges stem from the idea from over a century ago that crowdsourcing a defined set of unsolved problems can spark innovation and accelerate progress. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and its Grand Challenges funding partners use Challenges – launched in 2003 as open requests for grant proposals – to focus attention and effort on solving pressing global health and development problems for those most in need. Together they have awarded over 3600 grants engaging a diverse pool of problem solvers in over 100 countries and fostering a global innovation ecosystem where it will have the most impact. The foundation and its Grand Challenges partners will continue to launch RFPs to support innovators from around the world in tackling the hardest, most urgent Grand Challenges. To learn more, visit [grandchallenges.org](http://grandchallenges.org).