Activities 2014 - 2015

Transforming Rural India
Amrita SeRVe was launched by our beloved Amma during Her 60th birthday celebrations. Two years have passed and now we have proudly welcomed more than 500 villagers who traveled to Amritapuri from 15 different states all over India to receive Amma’s darshan.

Most of the villagers have traveled outside their villages for the first time in their lives. They have chosen to make long journeys by train, in order to meet their Amma, who is the reason for all the change that they are beginning to see and experience in their villages.

Teams from the ashram and Amrita University have been working with these villagers during the past two years in our focus areas of Health, Education, Water and Sanitation, Agriculture, Eco-Friendly Infrastructure, Income Generation and Self Empowerment.

Amrita SeRVe is now active in 21 states of India. In every state, there is a cluster of 4-5 adjoining villages, with the work being focused first on 1 village within that cluster.

Following are some of the tasks accomplished in the past year in our seven areas of focus.

Amrita SeRVe - Activities in 2015

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Health

1.5 million children around the world die from diarrhea every year. Health workers trained at the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences are working hard to bring awareness in their villages. Children succumbing to diarrhea here is becoming a thing of the past.

The average extremely poor household spends upto 6% of its monthly budget on health in rural India. With the help of alumni of the Amrita School of Medicine, free and ongoing health clinics were initiated in Kerala, Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and several other states.

Thirty health workers were trained from the five states of Uttarakhand, Chattisgarh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Kerala. In most rural areas there are no doctors. These health workers have given preventive and simple diagnostic services in their villages.

Regular medical camps were initiated with the help of the alumni of the Amrita School of Medicine in states such as Kerala, Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. Regular health camps are also conducted with local medical teams in Chattisgarh and Maharastra.

Education

Amrita SeRVe is working to ensure that children in all our villages begin to receive quality education. UNESCO places India fourth from the bottom worldwide in terms of the number of out-of-school children (1.7 million). Vidyamritam scholarships are enabling children from needy families in our villages to remain in school.

Children in our villages are learning important lessons for life through the use of modern technology. Tablets are being used to show the children how our current day computer resources can aid them in their lives.

After-school tuition centers were started in all villages to ensure that children receive quality education and do not drop out of school. India still has one of the highest drop-out rates in the entire world. Tuition teachers were trained in the use of tablets and innovative learning programs.

Amrita University students went as part of Live-in-Labs program to our villages during their summer vacations. They helped out at the tuition centers and also enrolled recipients for the ashram’s Vidyamritam Scholarship.
It is estimated that women worldwide spend an estimated 40 billion hours per year fetching water for household use.

In Komalikudy in Kerala, a borewell was dug to provide an impoverished rural community with easy access to piped water near their homes.

Children are learning to bathe regularly, cut their nails, wash hands frequently and otherwise remain clean. Teenage girls are being introduced to reusable sanitary napkins even as they learn the importance of menstrual hygiene.

A borewell was dug to supply drinking water to the village of Komalikudy in Kerala. This runs through a hydro power source. Water distribution networks were set up in Rajasthan and Odhisa. Drinking water filters were introduced in Kerala and Rajasthan.

Forty-two percent of the world’s population lives without a toilet at home. Women’s groups in our villages are learning to make their own toilets. With their example inspiring the rest of the community, open defecation may end sooner rather than later.

Farmers worldwide use more than two million tons of chemical pesticides each year, causing damage to the environment and people’s health. Amrita SeRVe is bringing this awareness to farmers around the nation and teaching them how to make natural substitutes.

Awareness sessions were conducted for villagers from several states and in Tamil Nadu, a certificate course was offered at Amrita University campus for farmers from all neighboring villages.

India is the largest user of groundwater in the whole world. Indian farmers are its biggest consumers. Contours and trenches were dug on a farm in Ettimadai in Tamil Nadu to teach the principles of rainwater harvesting to farmers.

A very successful organic farmer for 20 years, Subhas Sharma has a 21-acre farm in Tiwasa village, Yavatmal, Maharashtra that pays attention to soil, water and seeds. Our village coordinators were fortunate to attend training at this farm that has trenches, contours, 200 trees and very healthy crops.
“If we plant trees, this planet will become a paradise,” says Amma. “A tree is like a house that we construct for Mother Earth.” It is on this note that we are planting trees in all our villages to green them. Trees also help regulate the micro-climate of the village.

WHO estimates that 4.3 million people die every year from inhaling smoke during cooking. That is more than the number that succumb to AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, combined. Using local resources, the Amrita SeRVe team is beginning to make improved cookstoves in our villages. The traditional clay appliances are known as the smokeless chulha. Smoke is directed out of the cooking area via a chimney.

The Amrita Kuteeram project was started in 1998 and in the years passed, tens of thousands of poor people have been given free homes to live in. Now the Amrita Kuteeram team is building homes for the poorest families in our villages, bringing them relief.

A microgrid of solar panels lit up the lives of residents of the Valaramkunnu hamlet in Wayanad district in Kerala. Rooftop solar panels with integrated battery storage brought much relief to the villagers in Komalikudy in Idukki district in Kerala.

### Income Generation

Empowering women groups to learn a skill through which income generation is possible even from home is one of our goals. Tailoring machines have been distributed and tailoring teachers have been appointed in several Amrita SeRVe villages.

Training was also given in making artificial jewelry to women in our village clusters. Income generation training especially emphasized the use of local resources such as jackfruit which is plentifully available in Karnataka.

Dhokra is an ancient technique of metal casting practised in the Bastar region in Chattisgarh. The artwork is painstakingly done by hand, using an alloy of brass, nickel and zinc. Our village youth learned this skill to make antique-looking artifacts to sell.

Our village in Uttar Pradesh is home to several families who make an income using the potter’s wheel. Their deft fingers give shape to many useful items for household use. Amrita SeRVe visited these potters to help them get better incomes through improved products.
Self Empowerment

Self Empowerment is key to Amrita SeRVe's work. We are helping to form self-reliant groups, especially of women and children, to tackle problems in all the focus areas.

Our village in Rajasthan, formerly known as Hariya ki Dhaani, is now Harirampura. Residents of this village came together to obtain the status of a revenue village for their hamlet, with our support. Similarly, we are extending support to our villages to avail government developmental schemes.

International Yoga Day on June 21 was observed in all our villages. Youth and children are being encouraged to make yoga a part of their daily lives. Village youth are being trained in Amritapuri to become yoga teachers.

Throughout our villages, we are helping bring traditional knowledge about the uses of medicinal plants, rainwater harvesting and natural farming to the forefront and reviving such practices.

It is also important to combat habits such as consuming alcohol, chewing tobacco and eating gutka by showing videos about the ill-effects on health.
At least one child from every family must first serve in rural areas for one year after graduation. These young people should live among the poor and understand the problems they face and try to find solutions to help them. - Amma

The Amrita SeRVe Fellowship Program was launched this year. Graduates from different disciplines have signed up and undergone training to spend 1 year in our villages. Amma says that we can uplift the poor through this effort and the country can grow holistically.

We envision a world in which Indian villages are thriving, have locally self-sufficient economies, and are able to preserve age-old cultures and traditions.

This Fellowship provides opportunities for Indians, as well as those from other countries, to really learn about the needs, values and resources of Indian villages today. Fellows are trained to be facilitators (instead of executors) of change. They bring the community together and help develop the plan and timeline of developmental activities according to villagers’ priorities.
Villages are India’s foundation—her very life force—and it is society’s responsibility to take care of them. In fact, it is our villages that sustain us by providing us, who live in cities, with the nourishment we need in order to survive. It is time to acknowledge that our villages are our very foundation and move forward with one heart and one mind to protect and serve them.

- Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, Amma

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