



Amrita SeRve in Action

T R A N S F O R M I N G R U R A L I N D I A

AMRITA
SeRve
SELF RELIANT VILLAGE



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

A COMING TOGETHER

Travelling across the length and breadth of India during her annual tours, Amma stops in remote areas along the journey. She has personally seen and listened to the problems of thousands of poor villagers across the nation.

As a result, Amma's 60th birthday was celebrated with the launch of Amrita SeRVE (Self Reliant Village). We were born with the vision to empower villagers with the use of locally available resources instead of depending on outside factors for livelihood.

Mata Amritanandamayi Math (MAM) has identified 101 villages throughout India with the goal to address seven focus areas: health, water and sanitation, education, agriculture, income generation, eco-friendly infrastructure, and self empowerment.

Amrita SeRVE is yet another example of Amma's boundless love and compassion for suffering humankind. We are working with all of Amma's humanitarian activities throughout India and around the world to find solutions for rural India.

For example, farmers' clubs are starting to form in our villages. In Sadivayal, Tamil Nadu, this coming together is bringing new empowerment to the village overall.

For the past five years, the farmers have had difficulty cultivating good crops. The challenge of that goes without saying. Amrita SeRVE has brought 20 farmers together to form a farmers' club and find solutions to what they are facing.

We trained them in organic farming and encouraged them to experiment with it in 35 acres of land. They cultivated paddy and are expecting to harvest the rice by January 2017.



GOPIYA TELLS HER STORY



We know that money is not going to make us happy. Love is our only necessity to make us truly happy.

In our village, we don't have a hospital or medical centre. When someone is not well, it is very difficult to get proper care.

If somebody falls ill or needs medical care, everybody takes care of each other. My husband is a driver, so if somebody needs to go to the hospital for emergency, my husband will take care of them.

There are also a lot of problems for our children. This girl here really likes going to school. But mostly she does some outdoor work to help earn some money for the family.

In many of our families, only the husband works and often they don't have much work. They work as labourers on farms. Some work as drivers. We need some work for the women so the women can also earn.

There is much suffering in our village. Our daily needs are often not fulfilled and sometimes we feel terrible. But on the other hand, we know that money is not going to make us happy. Love is our only necessity to make us truly happy.

Sometimes we feel ups and downs in life, but still we are happy. And Amma is going to take care of our lives now. We now have Amma's blessings and that is all we need.

- Gopiya - Indpur, Himachal Pradesh



UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS



85,70,00,000

people live in rural India.



62%

of India's poor live in the lowest income states— Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Rajasthan.



One hundred and twenty seven crore people live in India, the second highest population in the world. Also due to recent growth and development, it is the fourth largest economy in the world.

At the same time, India is home to the largest number of poor people and 80% of them live in rural areas. How is it that these two extremes exist together in the same borders?

One of the things that can help us see past this divide is that India is also home to the largest number of people who have recently escaped poverty. There are solutions.

Of utmost importance is the agricultural revolution that has transformed the nation over the past few decades. From a country which had a chronic dependence on grain imports, India has become a global agricultural powerhouse that is now a net exporter.

It is the farmers who grow our food. We need to find ways to connect and empower people so everyone has healthy and happy lives. Together, we can build an equitable and peaceful world.



1 in 4 rural Indians is poor.



80% of India's poor live in rural areas.



37%

of rural Indians are illiterate.





MOVING FORWARD

Amrita SeRVE's vision is to teach villagers the skills they need to live in places that are prosperous and self-reliant. Places where people are healthy and educated. Places where people lead lives of dignity in a pollution-free environment. Such conditions will lead us to vibrant cultures rooted in India's age-old, traditional wisdom.

It is almost unnecessary to state that there are problems in our villages when it comes to basic needs like health, food, water and shelter. In some places, the suffering is close to unbearable.

However, in other respects, life in the villages is much better than life in the cities. India's real pulse can be felt more when it comes to traditions, family and community.

We must also remember that villagers are the providers of most of our food supply, and that deserves a sense of gratitude and care.

The vital key to all of this is to move beyond mere words and take action. The following pages explain ways in which this is starting to happen.

A HIGHER UNDERSTANDING

Each year, Amrita University students have the opportunity to participate in rural internships across India.

"Sangeetha, a small girl studying in eighth standard, touched all our hearts with her sweet smile," tells Resya Reghu, a student who served in Byse, Karnataka.

"Being poor, she had no hope of continuing her studies after tenth standard, like most of the students in this village. The hopelessness of the situation did not in any way affect the cheerfulness of that little girl. She was a true face of inspiration for us."

In 2016, more than 200 students and staff travelled to 22 villages from Jammu & Kashmir to Tamil Nadu, from Goa to Bengal—and everywhere in between.

In Harirampura, Rajasthan, students and villagers replaced a mud road with a safer gravel one. In Ransai, Maharashtra, they built a check dam to recharge groundwater supplies. In Byse, Karnataka, children were taught how to plant and care for 40 trees around their school. The list goes on....

Students from foreign universities are also visiting our villages to contribute. As part of **Live-In Labs**, their goal is to find scientific solutions to address local needs. For example in Wayanad, Kerala, they installed a machine to extract oil from lemongrass using solar power.



Amma has one wish. All universities should send their students to impoverished rural villages or city slums for at least one or two months during their education. They would be able to see directly the issues and problems that the poor face. They could then develop solutions and write papers on everything they studied. This would help us to help the poor in the most effective way and, at the same time, awaken compassion in today's youth.

- Amma



ESSENTIAL HEALTH CARE

“This should be my village,” Meenal from Gujarat told Amma. She showed a poster she had made in one of the classes in Amritapuri for village health workers. Its message was how to take a holistic approach to improve the villagers’ health.

Amma replied, “Not only your village, but all villages should be like this.”

The most important goal of Amrita SeRVE’s work is establishing good health in the villages, especially access to medical care. Some villages in India have never even been visited by a certified doctor. Overall, hospitals, doctors, and health care centres are usually distant and, in some cases, completely inaccessible during certain times of the year, like the monsoons.

Along with Meenal, 23 other women from nine different states completed health worker training at the end of February 2016. The goal is to spread awareness about health, hygiene and prevention of diseases such as diarrhea and malaria. The course focuses on mother-child health care.

Urmila Devi—a trainee from Bihar—affirmed that care of mothers and children is essential. There was an instance in her village when four babies were born around the same time, but only one lived longer than a week. The health challenges in Bihar are high. The infant mortality rate is 49 per 1,000 live births. Globally, it is 32 deaths per 1000 and in Europe, it is 10.

In order to bring physicians, pharmacists, and nurses to treat our villagers, we are holding medical clinics and immunisation drives. Our goal is to have one per month in every village. In Bengal, there is a homeopathic doctor who visits once a week.

We are also educating people on how to utilise natural remedies to enable them to access early treatment if symptoms are recognised. In terms of daily life, we are encouraging villagers to address their nutritional needs by growing kitchen gardens to get vegetables for their own food. We are also holding sessions to eradicate substance abuse.



NEW SKILLS, NEW INCOME

“I came to Amritapuri to study how to make things to sell,” says Archana from Uttarakhand. “We learned how to make mats and bags. We are going to teach all of our friends how to do this.”

Archana was among the first batch of students to come to Amritapuri to study tailoring and upcycling. The women learn how to make basic products that will have good sales potential back home.

They also learn a new style called "upcycling" where used materials such as plastic bags are used to create mobile holders, wallets, etc.



WOMEN HELPING WOMEN

The power of women's self-help groups to transform life in our villages is starting to unfold. We have formed **Amrita SHGs** in almost all of our communities with each group consisting of about 10 to 20 women. The idea is for them to achieve spiritual as well as financial independence.

The first goal is to build mutual trust and confidence between members. Then they are encouraged to do livelihood activities as a group. We are also training the women in different skills for income generation.

For example, in one of our SHGs in Byse, Karnataka, the women are experimenting with growing organic turmeric. This is in contrast to the village's usual agricultural practices which involve heavy chemical use.

In an SHG, each woman takes responsibility for one area of action to cover the community's needs in health, education, kitchen gardens, income generation, and so on. Through micro-financing, each member contributes to the pool of funds and they decide together how to distribute loans among the group.



BUILDING A FUTURE

What do technology and toilets have in common? **AMMACHI Labs** has found a way to use technology to address some of India's biggest challenges: water safety, sanitation and hygiene.

The **Rural Toilet Builder** course teaches women basic plumbing skills so they can construct, install and maintain toilets.

“We are not just building toilets,” says Prof. Rao R. Bhavani, Director of AMMACHI Labs. “We are empowering women to transform their communities sustainably.”



THE POWER OF WORDS

“**W**hat used to bother me a lot was that many parents considered it a priority to send their children to graze the cows and goats,” explains Anju Singh, the Amrita SeRVE Fellow in Madhya Pradesh.

These children would not attend school as they were gone from 8 am to 5 pm. No amount of persuasion from Anju’s side could change the parents’ minds. They would ask her, “Who will do this job then?”

Then along came Raju. He was a boy who asked Anju to start teaching reading and writing to him after work. He didn’t want to remain illiterate.

“Before I knew it, the class size had grown. There were 10 children, and I was teaching Hindi to all of them,” says Anju with a smile. Like her work, tutoring and literacy programs are happening for children in all of our villages. **Amrita CREATE** uses tablets to uniquely encourage studies.

“My dream is that all of these children grow up to be responsible members of society. I am also from a village and it’s because my parents

motivated me to complete my college degrees that I am here today. No one should be left behind.”

NO ONE
should be
left behind.

The same goes for adults, and so literacy programs for them are also

taking root. For example, in Guptapada, Odisha—a semi-tribal village community—nearly every adult is illiterate.

Amrita SeRVE wanted to start a literacy program for the women, but at first, none of them would come. They felt they were too busy to learn to read and write. However after explaining the usefulness of literacy, 38 women decided to attend.

After a few days, the class automatically split into three groups, according to the learning capacity and speed of the students. Learning starts with basic letters and moves on up to simple words.

One of the things for which the women are grateful is that now they will be able to read their own prayers instead of having to only hear them recited by others.



TAKING CARE OF

PLANTING TREES TO PURIFY
 During the 2016 tours across India, Amma gave saplings to villagers to encourage them to plant. Most villages have open land where many trees can be grown. "When man cuts a tree, he is making his own coffin," explains Amma. "It is not enough to plant one tree for each one he cuts. He may have to plant at least 50."
 In response, for example, people in Byse, Karnataka have planted 2,000 trees around their community. The same is happening in all of our villages.

MOTHER NATURE

LEARNING TO MANAGE OUR WASTE
 "What is waste?" asked Shivanand, who came from Jharkhand to study in our first waste management course. "How can we dispose of it? Segregate and get income from it?"
 When he told Amma about his ideas, she said to him, "Do it sincerely, and you will succeed."
 Students learned about recycling, segregating, composting, and maintaining cleanliness of private and public areas. The scale of work went from household level to that of the entire village.



CLEANING UP PLASTIC GARBAGE

In Nani Borvai, Gujarat, there is a new commitment to make the village free of plastic waste in streets and fields. Across India, the problem is of epic proportions. A group was formed and they started an Amala Bharatam Team, Amma's campaign on cleaning India of waste. The team also set up 20 zero-cost dustbins throughout the community, spacing them every five to ten houses. This gives villagers a specific place to dispose of waste plastic.



NATURE IS A SOURCE OF POWER

Power from the light of the sun is being used to find a way to provide electricity to remote villages. In Chattisgarh, Amrita Centre for Nanosciences has installed solar lights in homes. In Wayanad, Kerala Amrita Centre for Wireless Networks and Applications has designed a solar energy system that reaches clusters of homes. They have also implemented a system using micro-hydro electrics to bring power to homes in Idukki, Kerala. The flow of water is used to generate electricity.



OUR TEAM Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences (Amrita Hospital) gives health worker training to village women. AMMACHI Labs works in the area of women's empowerment combining traditional ways with new technologies.

Amrita CREATE develops online and tablet learning used in villages for both school and after school tutoring. Amrita Centre for International Programs brings visitors from abroad to aid in sustainable solutions. The Corporate and Industry Relations Department at Amrita University organises student internships in our villages.

The Centre for Wireless Networks and Applications and the Department of Civil Engineering, Amrita University collaborate to develop piped water. Amrita Centre for Nanosciences created a solar panel with no need for battery. Amrita Centre for Cybersecurity uses modern technology to help farmers irrigate their land. The Centre of Excellence in Advanced Materials & Green Technologies, Amrita University has provided technological solutions such as biomethanation from biowaste.

Embracing the World is a global network of regional humanitarian organisations inspired by Amma's humanitarian initiatives.

FINDING PRECIOUS WATER

Access to this desperately needed resource is becoming urgent across rural India. It is estimated that only 18% of people can reach treated water. Unsafe drinking water leads to a broad range of health problems, including viral hepatitis, cholera, jaundice and typhoid. In fact, 1.2 lakh children under the age of five die from diarrhea each year.

To start solving these problems, Amrita SeRVe has constructed the means for borewells, handpumps, overhead tanks and piped water. In eight states, we have built sustainable distribution systems which can give 24-hour access.

In Bihar, for example, there are four new handpumps while two existing ones have been repaired. In Andhra Pradesh, we have built a large-sized tank with small tanks throughout the village so that drinking water is easily accessible. In Kerala, we have built a borewell and community taps. In Rajasthan, there is an overhead tank and then taps in every household.



Our duty towards God is compassion and love towards the poor and needy.

- Amma



Everyone in the world should be able to sleep without fear, at least for one night. Everyone should be able to eat to his fill, at least for one day. There should be at least one day when hospitals see no one admitted due to violence. By doing selfless service for at least one day, everyone should help the poor and needy. It is Amma's prayer that at least this small dream be realised.

- Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi



www.amritaserve.org
info@amritaserve.org
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Amritapuri, Kollam, Kerala
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