

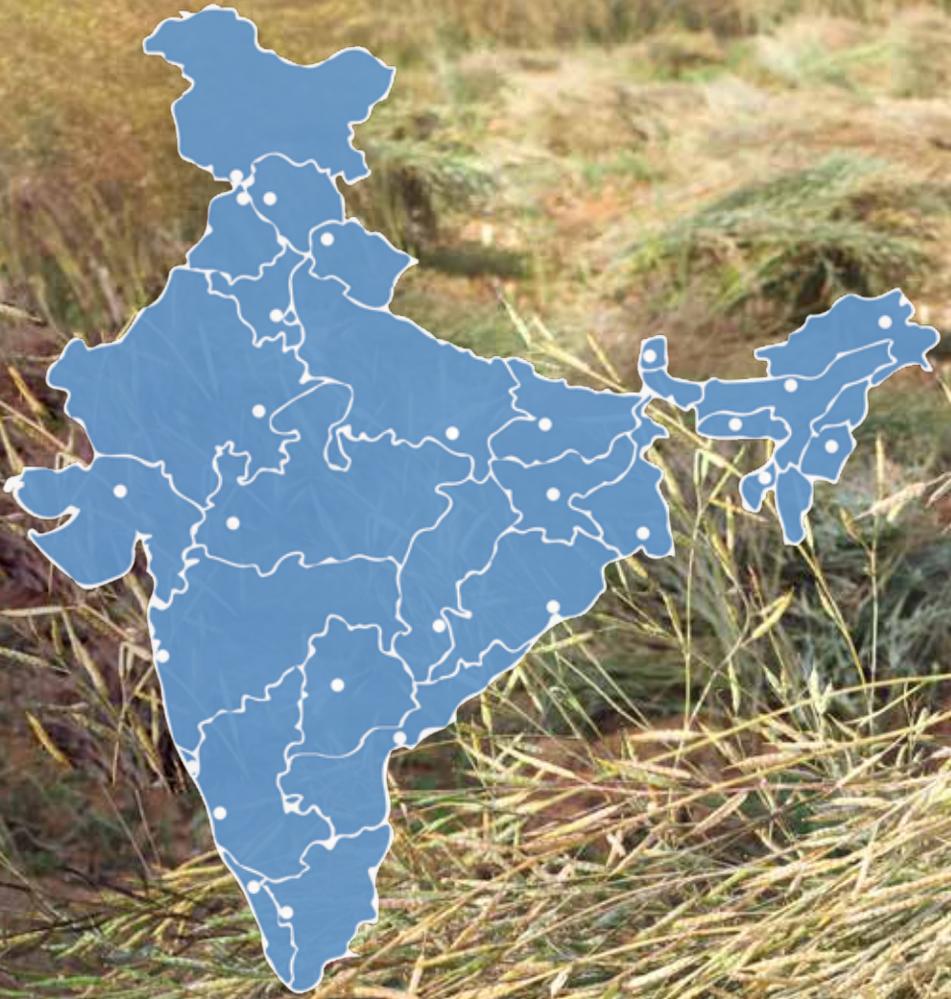


AMRITA SERVE



SNAPSHOTS





OUR VILLAGE CLUSTERS

Amrita SeRve has identified clusters in 27 states and is now actively working in 21 states of India.

In every state, there is a cluster of three to five adjoining villages, with the work being focused first upon one village within each cluster.

Amma is guiding. Our teams are serving and learning.





THE

Amrita SeRve was launched during Amma's 60th birthday celebrations in September 2013 and ushered in sustainable development in village clusters across India. Our work is aligned with *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*.

Since then, we have focused on areas in which to begin a series of changes that starts from basic needs

and then leads to a state of true empowerment.

Amrita SeRve's vision is to teach villagers the skills they need to live in communities that are prosperous and self-reliant. These are places where people are healthy and educated and where they lead lives of dignity in a clean, pollution-free environment.

Such self-reliance will lead us



BEGINNING

to vibrant cultures rooted in India's age-old traditional wisdom. Because villagers are the providers of most of the nation's food supply, these steps can lead to a sense of community and gratitude throughout the entire country.

In the past, all villages in India were self-reliant. Villagers grew their own food and made all the items

that they needed themselves. There was a blacksmith and a carpenter in every village. People knew how to build houses. The focus was on using resources available locally. Now the whole world is realising that reliance on local resources is key to sustainable development. *Amrita SeRVe* wants to bring back the spirit of self-reliance in each one of our villages.



Today migration from villages to towns and cities is increasing day-by-day. There are many material problems in the villages that need to be solved.

However, in many other respects, life in the villages is much better than life in the cities. India's real pulse can be felt more in the villages rather than our urban areas. The goal of *Amrita SeRVe* is to encourage village youth to stay back in villages and not migrate to cities.

Some of our village clusters are in remote areas (Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Bihar); others are not far from big cities (Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha). Each place has unique challenges. However, some problems, such as the lack of quality health and education services, are ubiquitous.

India has the world's largest rural population—68% of our overall

population of 1.25 billion—and our *Human Development Index* is low, primarily because rural areas lack access to good healthcare and education.

We have started work to ensure that these conditions change for those living in our villages. Dedicated tuition teachers and health workers are at the forefront of this effort.

Take Krupamma. The only person to have completed college in her village, Krupamma is now the *Amrita SeRVe* tuition teacher in our village in Andhra. She is trying to ensure that other children follow in her footsteps and aspire for higher education.

Like Krupamma, our tuition teachers have grown up in the *Amrita SeRVe* villages, and are grateful to be part of Amma's team working for change.



Since 2013, research centres of *Amrita University* have worked hard to ensure that *Amrita SeRVe* meets its goals for health and education. *The WNA Center* helped implement water distribution networks while *AMMACHI Labs* built toilets. *Amrita CREATE* is providing curriculum and training support for the tuition centres that have been started all over the country.

Amma says that one child from every family should first work in a rural area for one year after graduation. This will help awaken compassion in the youth and our country will grow holistically.

Accordingly, with Amma's blessings, the *Amrita SeRVe Fellowship Programme* was launched in May 2015. The programme has attracted many dedicated young men and women, who are now living in our villages and serving.

Amma has inspired many retired men and women to actively volunteer with *Amrita SeRVe*. Several are now mentors to the Fellows.

Others are concentrating on beginning income generation programmes or combating the practices of chewing gutka and consuming alcohol. There is a lot more that needs to be done. We have only just begun.

In the coming months, work will expand from 21 villages to many more. As per Amma's instructions, priority was first given to one village in each cluster within each state.

The idea is that the first community will serve as the base for expanding the reach to the four to five villages. Many more will come to know about Amma. Many more lives will be touched by Her Grace.

FOCUS AREAS



Seven focus areas have been chosen as a means to ensure that true development occurs in all facets of life. Without our basic needs met, we cannot grow to become truly fulfilled beings. When true fulfillment occurs, the benefit of that can spread to people beyond our own communities.





1. HEALTH

The first issue to address is health, as this is the very means by which life continues. The *World Health Organization (WHO)* defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely as the absence of disease or infirmity. As such, our plan in the villages is to promote the holistic wellbeing of all, beginning with a focus on physical health needs.

One of our first goals is to deal with malnutrition, as this is a grim reality in India's villages. This problem can be addressed by encouraging villagers to start kitchen gardens where they can grow vegetables for their own needs.

We are also training community health workers who are residents of the communities. Hospitals, doctors, and healthcare centres are usually distant from villages and, in some cases, completely inaccessible during certain times of the year like the monsoons.

In addition, we are organising medical clinics and immunisation drives. The goal is to have a medical clinic with visiting physicians once a month.

The final goal in the area of health is to help eradicate substance abuse. Addiction-free villages are a pathway to overcoming the darkness that envelops some communities, and even leads to high suicide rates among some of India's farmers.



2. WATER & SANITATION

Of course, a healthy body needs access to constant and clean water, as that is essential to physical survival. Along with that comes the need for hygienic, sanitary conditions in villages to prevent disease.

Our goal is to ensure that both of these become the common occurrence in everyday life, as opposed to the lack thereof, as this is resulting in deplorable living conditions throughout India. Each year, around 37.7 million people are affected by waterborne diseases (viral hepatitis, cholera, jaundice, and typhoid are examples) and about 1.5 million children die from diarrhoea.

In addition, India is the largest user of groundwater in the world and is being threatened by rapidly depleting groundwater supplies. There is an urgent need to recharge groundwater, especially by farmers who are its biggest consumers. Our emphasis is to encourage groundwater recharging and to revive rainwater harvesting techniques.

From the practical level, contaminated drinking water is a big problem. In Kerala, Odisha, and Rajasthan, impoverished rural communities were provided with easy access to piped water near their homes.

Also, in Kerala, the piped water supply is now powered by hydropower. In West Bengal and Maharashtra, we installed borewells for community water supplies.

Another crucial challenge in our rural communities is maintaining cleanliness of surroundings and drains in villages. According to the *World Health Organisation (WHO)*, 626 million people practise open defecation in India.

In order to begin to provide toilet access, women's groups in *AMMACHI Labs* are teaching village women how to build their own toilets right from the base requirements of masonry skills. The construction training that this provides for the women can also lead to a new way to earn money.



3. EDUCATION

People might live until 80 or 90, but Amma tells us that they will learn the most important lessons in life before the age of 10. *Amrita SeRVe* is working to ensure that children in all our villages begin to receive quality education. Our goals are to strengthen village schools, achieve zero drop-out rates, and provide opportunities for higher education.

In 2014, *UNESCO* reported that 11.9 million children age 6-13 are out of school in India. This is 6.4% of primary school age children and 5.7% of lower secondary school age children.

Our focus is to introduce a holistic, value-based curriculum that includes project-based learning and even nature activities. When it comes to economic support for the education of poor children, *Vidyamritam Scholarships* are currently being availed by more than 50,000 students nationwide.

Amma teaches that the real goal of education is not to create people who can

understand only the language of machines. Children in our villages are learning important lessons for life through the use of modern technology.

One of the first crucial tasks is to provide afterschool tutoring and, in order to do this, we are making use of tablet-based learning programmes. Next comes upgrading village schools to Standard XII.

In addition, we are offering free teaching support in villages to ensure that students remain in school. We are also conducting intensive bridge camps to help dropouts resume school, providing coaching support to students who want to enroll for higher education, and initiating classes for adult literacy.

As per Amma's suggestion, *Amrita University* is organising *Live-in-Labs* rural internships for students from *Amrita University*. Internships are also being organised for students from international universities.



4. AGRICULTURE

The Green Revolution was hailed as a means to ensure food security for the nation and reduce dependence on imports. It brought additional farmland under cultivation, but at a great price to the environment. There is an urgent need to replace chemical methods of farming with techniques that are more in harmony with nature.

With this in mind, our goals are to promote natural ways of farming, end dependence on chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and increase agricultural yield. Natural farming nurtures the soil and ensures continual groundwater recharge. In order to support it, we promote trees on farm boundaries, emphasise seed-saving, and are working on providing irrigation facilities.

One of the most important next steps is to work on repairing soils that have degraded from years of chemical

farming. Another step forward is to encourage the cultivation of additional crops, especially those that require less water. An emphasis remains on dairy farming and cow breeding, as cows play an essential role in natural farming.

Finally, we are encouraging farmers to grow kitchen gardens in order to have access to a food source that is completely natural. In India, most farmers grow paddy or wheat or some cash crops on their farms, and do not bother to cultivate even a small patch of vegetables for themselves. Instead, they buy vegetables from markets or go without.

The vegetables sold in the markets are laden with harmful pesticides and fertilisers. Encouraging villagers to grow kitchen gardens can help curb the problem of malnutrition, as fresh vegetables can provide essential nutrition.

The key goal of income generation is to economically empower men, women, and youth by providing them with training in types of work that can earn them money in addition to their farming. Villagers can find opportunities to generate income by producing value-added products from agricultural produce and by promoting local handicrafts.

One of the most important things is to support the village-based industries that already exist—sometimes for centuries. The essential ingredient is to provide the training needed to improve product quality, thus ensuring better prices and marketability.

For example, 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. Our team is working to help these potters get better prices for their products.

Another aspect is empowering women's groups to learn a skill through which income generation is possible even from home. Tailoring is something that can be done in this way. Machines have been distributed and tailoring teachers have been appointed in several *Amrita SeRVE* villages. We have also had women from the villages come to Amritapuri for training in how to make newly stitched products out of upcycled materials.

Another important aspect is the establishment of Self Help Groups (SHG's). The first step is to create self-reliance groups (SRG's) through gatherings that establish awareness and unity. Once that strength is there, micro-finance begins and everyone must contribute by participating in regular meetings.

We are also empowering villagers by setting up businesses through milk co-operatives and farmers' clubs.



5. INCOME GENERATION

The idea behind eco-friendly infrastructure is to ensure that building technologies will be in alignment with local resources, thereby leaving a small footprint on the environment. When it comes to life in India's villages, this means emphasising or, in some cases, returning to traditional construction systems.

Indian villages have perfected many time-tested and proven building technologies that use natural materials. The need of the hour is to promote these technologies, as using such local materials to build also helps to reduce energy costs. For example, one of the key elements is the use of compressed mud blocks.

On the other side of the coin is replenishing nature with resources that we have used. We are

encouraging massive afforestation drives and have spearheaded the planting of thousands and thousands of trees. This will also help to combat climate change.

In fact, Amma herself says that if we plant trees, this planet will become a paradise. A tree is like a house that we construct for Mother Earth. Trees also help regulate the micro-climate of the village.

Finally, the *Amrita Kuteeram Project* was begun in 1998 and has built more than 45,000 houses for the poorest people across the country. Families in six of our villages have received homes and the initiative continues in the rest of our villages.

For villages not connected to the power grid, we are providing micro-grid solutions using solar panels.



6. ECO-FRIENDLY INFRASTRUCTURE



7. SELF-EMPOWERMENT

God's power is not something outside. It is within us. We need to awaken that power.

- Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi

Real strength should come from within. If we are going to rely only on the external, there is no stability. Through yoga, meditation, and spiritual practice we can achieve this goal.

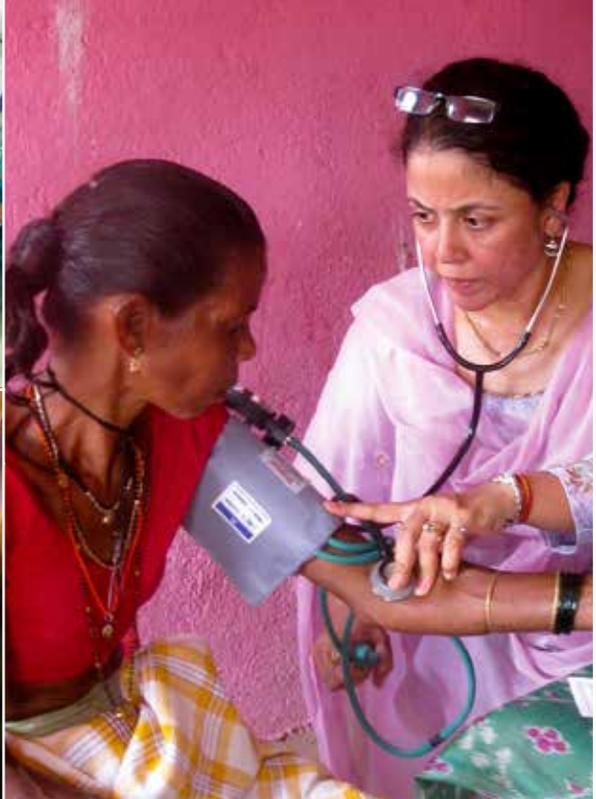
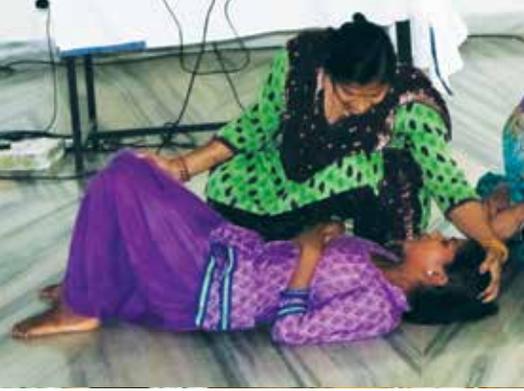
In the olden days, the people of India's villages knew their inner strength. They were also completely tuned in with Nature. This led to a complete harmony of being.

Our goal is to help India's villagers to understand their inner strength and from that foundation, achieve true self-reliance. For many millennia, a completely self-reliant village

was at the centre of Indian life. A vibrant culture that had evolved over thousands of years guided how to live. We want to revive this culture once again.

To begin with, we are teaching a system of simple yoga asanas and meditation for women, youth, and children that can be practised on a daily basis. Youth from the villages are also being trained in Amritapuri to become yoga teachers.

In addition, we are also conducting cultural awareness classes, teaching how to live in harmony with nature, and organising village-level sports events and camps for children and youth. Central to all of these is the idea of how to bring the village together for experiences that ultimately teach us how to celebrate the gift of life.



LEARNING HOLISTIC HEALTH

“This should be my village,” Meenal from Gujarat told Amma as she showed a poster she had made in one of the classes for 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.”

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

The women attended sessions on how to recognise diseases and practise first aid. They also studied the keys to prevention through hygienic practices such as handling drinking water safely and washing hands. Ayurveda was also introduced.

Through role playing, the women learned new ways to address difficulties in family affairs, such as drinking problems. They made a visit to a primary health centre and met an Anganwadi so they could make connections about with whom it is important to work.

The women also took part in *Amala Bharatam*, Amma’s cleanliness campaign aimed at cleaning India’s public places. They were taught how to spread awareness about sanitation in their villages, especially among young people. One of the key aspects of this is to prevent waterborne diseases.

As part of the course, the women practised yoga every morning before breakfast. Many of them took asana practice to heart and felt strongly that they would continue when reaching home. They also wished to encourage others to take up yoga. Urmila Devi from Bihar said, “Yoga keeps us strong internally.”

BUILDING TOILETS & SKILLS

The Government of India has recognised that safe water and sanitation are vital to the nation's survival, mandating that open defecation should be eradicated in India by 2019.

Because unsafe water and lack of sanitation is a major cause of disease and health hazards in rural villages, researchers at *AMMACHI Labs* are finding solutions through their field work in the *Amrita SeRVE* villages.

It is a well-documented fact that the most effective tool for development is the empowerment of women. To address the lack of toilets in the country, *AMMACHI Labs* brings vocational courses to women across India. *The Rural Toilet Builder* course teaches women basic plumbing skills, allowing them to construct, install and maintain toilets.

The women are able to put these skills to practical use; they then receive hands-on training in masonry, digging, block-making, plastering, and construction. They also learn about the importance of practising proper hygiene for their personal health, thus empowering them to spread awareness and become ambassadors for change.

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

Such vocations are traditionally considered male occupations. *AMMACHI Labs* aims to counter this historic stigma by empowering women, who are then able to complete the sanitation process from start to finish.



USING TABLETS TO TEACH

Education is one of Amrita SeRVe's main focus areas, as children are our future. Amrita CREATE (Amrita Centre for Research in Advanced Technologies) runs Amrita Education Centres in all of our villages through the Amrita RITE (Amrita Rural India Tablet Education) project.

Children are given afterschool classes in order to supplement and build upon their existing knowledge. They are also taught human values, yoga, and meditation.

One of the key elements of the education programmes is its mobile component. The e-learning project is a unique tablet-based technology that targets the learning needs of multi-grade rural students. The tablet helps establish skills in basic literacy, language learning, science, and mathematics.

Thanks to the natural curiosity of children in using new hands-on technology, tablets provide the support that rural children need to stay in school. The learning programme is also designed to work where there is little or no internet connectivity.

The holistic curriculum, based upon Amma's vision, provides both 'Education for a Living' and 'Education for Life'. Amrita RITE's integrated methodology provides technology-enabled mother-tongue instruction in class subjects, computer literacy, and health awareness on topics such as nutrition, sanitation, substance abuse, and adolescent health.

The programme addresses social awareness for adolescent girls on gender equality, child labour, and trafficking. The tablet initiative also has the goal of addressing adult literacy and education.





LIVE-IN-LABS

Established in 2013, *Amrita University's Live-in-Labs™* is a multidisciplinary experiential learning programme that exposes youth to problems faced by rural communities in India.

The goal is to spend two weeks to six months in Indian villages to understand current challenges and develop sustainable solutions. The programme brings together *Amrita University* students and faculty—in conjunction with students and faculty from international universities—to put theory into practice. The result generates innovative solutions and develops collaborative problem-solving skills.

“This programme is overwhelmingly positive and I give it my personal recommendation,” says Brandon Arkinson from *Ryerson University*, Canada. “Not only was I able to experience the amazing and tantalising culture of India, but I was able to

observe and immerse myself in the remote tribal villages of South India. I was able to grow as a person while fostering friendships and bridging my cultural understanding of how societies organise and operate.”

Since the emphasis of the programme is on mutual sharing and learning, *Live-in-Labs™* strongly believes in taking an inclusive approach to addressing challenges and, therefore, encourages participants to work with rural populations to come up with sustainable solutions.

As a result, the programme is designed as a two-way model of sharing and learning and encourages participants to be open to “other ways of thinking”. Participants of the *Live-in-Labs™* programme can work on projects in the areas of Health & Livelihood, Education & Technology, Energy, Infrastructure & Basic Facilities, and Environment & Farming.



UPCYCLING TO EMPOWER

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

Archana is with a group of women who took part in our two-week upcycling course. The students from *Amrita SeRve* villages are taught how to take old and discarded materials and make them into new things—things that can often be sold for a higher price.

Technically, the definition of upcycling is the process of transforming by-products, waste materials, or unwanted products into new materials or products of better quality or better environmental value. Clearly, the possibilities of such an idea are endless, and this is something that can be of great help to India at this time.

Most of our waste comes from cities. People there have money, but they do not have land to grow things. Nor do they

have much time to make things. They buy mostly packaged things and simply throw the waste into the trash.

On the other side of the story is life in the villages. People there have land and time, but no money. Agriculture itself depends entirely on climate, so sometimes crops fail and that means no income for that season.

How to bring together these two different states of existence? First thing is we are teaching villagers how to take plastic and used cloth and make products to sell in cities. With old saris, discarded bed sheets, torn pants, and used plastic bags, they make handbags, braided rugs, water bottle holders, and small purses.

The items truly do turn out beautifully, thus giving a viable stream of income in addition to agriculture. When seen from the broader perspective, it's an interesting collaboration. Instead of a nuisance to the earth, city life can become a way to help village people lead better lives.

FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

Amma would like to offer a suggestion that she feels would be helpful for our society. At least one child from every family must first serve in rural areas for one year after graduation. - Amma

The Amrita SeRVe Fellowship Programme was begun in May 2015 to give an opportunity to our youth to live among the poor, understand the problems they face, and find solutions to help them.

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.

Fellows come from different walks of life. They may be graduating students, former corporate professionals, doctors, teachers, yoga teachers, or nurses. Although their qualifications or

former work experience are a great asset in village-development work, what really distinguishes most Fellows is a deep desire and the heart to serve.

At the beginning of each Fellowship term, Fellows come together for training in Amritapuri. The training emphasises organic agriculture, agro-forestry, watershed management, kitchen gardens, and waste management. Through learning about these, Fellows gain the opportunity to engage with the most pressing needs of the world and India today.

Along with development work, Fellows are encouraged to focus on spiritual practices. Training is provided in Amrita Yoga and meditation. Fellows are encouraged to equip themselves to lead satsang and bhajan sessions in the villages. More info at: amritaserve.org/fellowship.





OUR

The team of the **Corporate and Industry Relations Department (CIR)** at *Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetam* organised student internships for 108 students, faculty, and staff members during summer 2015. The teams traveled to the *Amrita SeRve* villages across India, helping contribute to the developmental work ongoing there.

Amrita CREATE at *Amrita University* works to develop online learning programmes, including labs for school children. Now in all of our villages, the same learning programmes are available to students attending the free afterschool tuition centres.

Besides getting help to complete school homework and learn English, Science, and Mathematics in a fun way, students are also participating in yoga sessions and conducting regular clean-up drives.

AMMACHI Labs at *Amrita University* works in the area of women's empowerment. In most *Amrita SeRve* villages, staff from *AMMACHI Labs* trained women to build their own toilets. India still has the world's largest number of open defecators; in our villages change is now beginning.

AMMACHI Labs also trains women from our villages in different trades such as soap making, artificial jewelry, and other products from locally available resources.

The Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS) provided training to village women to work in their own villages as *Swasthye Mitrs* or health workers. These health workers impart basic awareness to the community in prevention, as well as help with early diagnosis of common illnesses. They are also building smokeless chulhas and have started kitchen gardens.

Amrita University's Center for Wireless Networks and Applications and the **School of Engineering** collaborated to bring piped water to impoverished rural communities in our villages in Odisha and Rajasthan.

Many experts agree that access to piped water brings dramatic improvements in health. Infant mortality declines and children in the community enjoy better physical and cognitive development. The centre also helped implementation of a hydropower source for the piped water supply in our village in Kerala.



TEAM

Amrita Karshaka developed by the **Amrita Center for Cybersecurity** uses modern technology to help farmers irrigate their farms. This was piloted among farmers in our villages in Tamil Nadu. One of the quickest ways to end rural poverty is to help farmers grow additional crops through proper irrigation.

Amrita Center for Nanosciences has developed a technology that allows for solar panels to be deployed without the need for expensive batteries, since the panel itself features integrated storage. Household lighting systems were piloted by the centre for our village in Kerala.

In the future, youth from our villages will be trained by the centre in order to deploy and maintain these systems in *Amrita SeRVe* villages across the nation.

The **Amrita Center for International Programs** runs the **Live-in-Labs** project. This multidisciplinary, experiential learning programme facilitates the research, development, and deployment of sustainable solutions for the current challenges faced by our rural communities.

AYUDH (Amrita Yuva Dharma Dhara) is the international youth movement of *Mata Amritanandamayi Math* and is active in Europe, North America, Asia, Australia, Africa and India. It was founded in 1985. *AYUDH* seeks to empower young people to integrate universal values into their daily lives.

Starting with themselves, *AYUDH* wants to help establish a future of hope, peace and social engagement while maintaining an awareness of spiritual principles.

Embracing the World is a global network of regional humanitarian organisations inspired by the humanitarian initiatives of the *Mata Amritanandamayi Math*. *ETW* exists to help alleviate the burden of the world's poor through helping to meet each of their five basic needs—food, shelter, healthcare, education, and livelihood—wherever and whenever possible. *ETW* is especially focused on helping to meet these needs in the aftermath of major disasters.

www.embracingtheworld.org



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



Mata Amritanandamayi Math

Amritapuri P.O., Kollam - 690546 Kerala, India

info@amritaserve.org

www.amritaserve.org

AMRITA
SeRve™
SELF RELIANT VILLAGE

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