



**SRINIVASAN SERVICES TRUST**

**THE ROUTE TO PEACE  
THROUGH PROSPERITY**

## INTRODUCTION

**Srinivasan Services Trust (SST)**, is an India-based social arm of the multi-billion dollar TVS Group. It has spent the last 26 years working in underserved villages in and around southern India, to promote peace and harmony in one of the most complex communities in the world.

SST works directly in 2,500 villages at any given point in time. It has a wider footprint in another 2,500 villages—that it has earmarked and where it plans to be more actively engaged to help bring transformation to 5,000 villages in the next few years.

SST is funded substantially by the century-old TVS Group, headquartered in Chennai, India.

SST typically begins by helping the villagers focus on their own personal growth. It does this by reducing and eventually eradicating hunger, poverty and lack of opportunity. That, in turn, brings about a transformation in attitudes that help achieve peace, harmony and prosperity in these villages.

**Cover image:** Government Higher Primary School, Gejjagalli village, Kadakola Panchayat, Mysore cluster

*A business can succeed only if it is inclusive and sustainable. The Trust works on this principle, by truly believing that no country can march forward by leaving its poorest behind and that in India in particular, peace and harmony are vital to this progress.*

The work SST does is thoughtfully planned and tailored to meet the needs of each community in these villages. This is key, because of the social diversity and indeed the complexity of challenges the underserved face in their communities.

A business can succeed only if it is inclusive and sustainable. The Trust works on this principle, by truly believing that no country can march forward by leaving its poorest behind and that in India in particular, peace and harmony are vital to this progress. This idea is also enshrined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) where sustainable peace and sustainable development go hand in hand.

While the route to achieving this objective is through self-sufficiency and sustainable development, the goal we seek is peace, prosperity and harmony. Without this balance, no community or society can thrive.

# MISSION. VISION. GOAL.

## MISSION:

*To take our model of empowerment and transformational change to over 20,000 villages in India, so they become sustainable and self-reliant. We will reach this goal by partnering with the government and other organizations working together to create a prosperous rural community.*

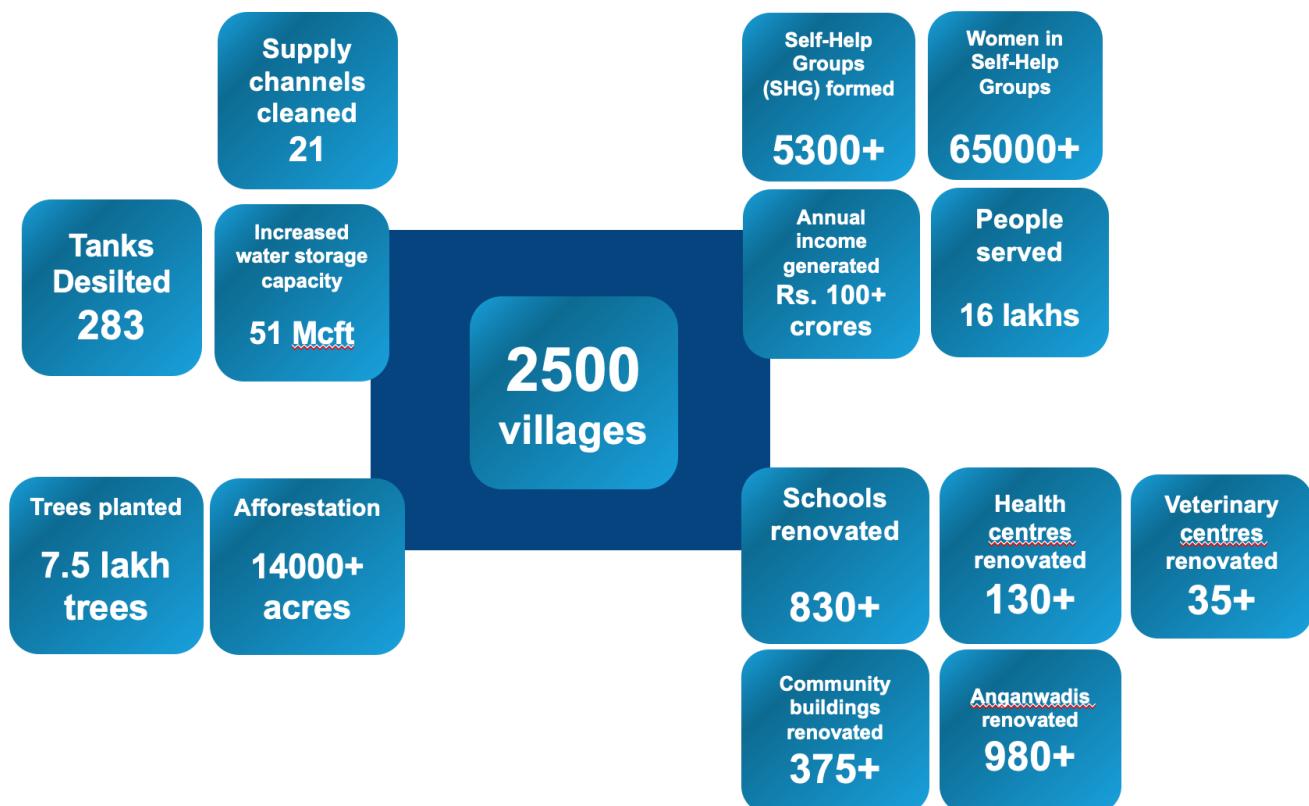
## VISION:

*To partner in the transformation of rural India by enabling people and communities to achieve sustainable development.*

## GOAL:

*Our goal is to bring about sustainable change in India's most underserved villages so that they can become part of nation building. If India's villages prosper, it reduces income inequality and the many other inequalities that stem from it. When individual states prosper and poverty-induced migration is arrested, prosperity returns. By taking the villages forward, we take the states forward and the country forward.*

## SST IN NUMBERS



# INDIA IS DIFFERENT AND TRANSFORMATION IS DIFFICULT



*The change we work for is a transformation in attitudes in the community, as this is the only way to create lasting change to bring about peace and harmony.*

India is as complex as she is ancient. There are six major religious groups, 22 official languages, thousands of dialects and hundreds of castes. The diversity is so vast that dialects, customs and practices can change every few miles within a single town.

This diversity presents everyday challenges. These challenges include social tensions and divisions based on religion, linguistics, caste, food habits, festivals and practices leading to conflicts, inequality and regionalism—all of which upend progress.

In the villages in which we work, communities are divided on the lines of caste, religion, wealth, customs and even dialect. This means those belonging to the higher caste do not easily co-mingle with those from the lower one. Worse, the distribution of general facilities, land and even access to education is determined by whether one is in the majority community or the minority.

These differences have existed for generations. They have, in turn, left a scarred history of violence, abuse of power, discrimination, unequal distribution of wealth, opportunism, hunger and extreme deprivation.

Our work in these villages, therefore, has been driven by the motive that all change will be slow. Much of this task requires patience and a deep understanding of issues that leave little room for mistakes. More than anything else, it has meant taking everyone along and ensuring that we have been sensitive to the multiplicity of divergent views as also goals within each community. The change we work for is a transformation in attitudes in the community, as this is the only way to create lasting change to bring about peace and harmony.

# OUR IDEA OF PEACE AND HARMONY



Balawadi at Mamallama, Venkatagiri

We recognise that the main reason differences are exacerbated in communities is because of poverty and deprivation, that leads to exploitation. And that having a decent livelihood, with basic needs being met, can be a great lever for overall well-being and peace in communities.

So we start with the hope of enabling equal opportunities for everyone in the community—be that in education, sanitation and livelihoods to infrastructure, the environment and healthcare.

In our work, we have discovered that when people are well-fed and prosperous, they are willing to give back to the community. This act of giving back creates social leadership and ownership, which results in the necessity to act responsibly in the interests of the community as whole. No one wants to be judged a poor leader. Recognition remains a great motivator for those in small communities.

Better healthcare and education can also help

*We choose social workers from within the community to work with the locals so they do not see it as an intrusion in their village life.*

transform social outcomes in impoverished parts of India. This could also become the model for achieving better social cohesion within the community, as it's easier to create awareness among those who are educated.

We choose social workers from within the community to work with the locals so they do not see it as an intrusion in their village life.

## **LAST MILE BREAKDOWN**

India runs some of the biggest public service schemes in the world, be that in early child care, nutrition, health services, agriculture or wage guarantees.

The problem, though, is that in a country of 1.3 billion people with disparate levels of education and awareness, most schemes do not reach the population they are meant to serve. Several programs go unavailed because of the lack of awareness among potential beneficiaries, while others get dissipated because of rent-seeking or the systematic diversion of funds by vested interests. The result is that primary healthcare centres are left derelict, farmers continue to employ poor practices, classrooms have failing infrastructure and many communities are cut off from all services because they are in inaccessible places or simply unaware.

Our work has been to create awareness for these programs, act as facilitator to ensure the underserved get their due and to help improve access to both the goods and services that the exchequer provides them.

This could be something as simple as ensuring that pregnant mothers know that they can get nutritious meals from a government program to improve health outcomes in them and children. Our task is to sensitise them about the needs of nutrition for the growing baby and to connect them to the distribution network. Even spreading this level of awareness and trust can take months in the most socially deprived pockets.

Other initiatives could be in helping the community apply for a public toilet under the government program to build these, or to register for work under the national wage guarantee so they can keep hunger and malnutrition away.

Once the basic needs are met, and the communities teach themselves to become self-reliant and access the services meant for them, we focus on community building and social cohesion to ensure lasting peace and prosperity.

# BRINGING IT TOGETHER



SST Model

We strive to help communities lead more enriched lives in all the areas that are important for prosperity and well being.

It is only when all the elements come together that villages are able to start acting as one unit. This can take up to five years in each village.

This ability to act as a unit in which they put collective well being before individual needs is what helps bring peace and prosperity to villages.

*In India's villages, there is no one-size-fits-all method, and no progress is possible without the full and keen participation of the community members.*

Our model of serving the community was developed over two decades and did not happen overnight. We did not have a formula that we could apply because of the incredible diversity not just in the communities but also because of the wide range of needs each community had—which was unique to that village or social group.

In India's villages, there is no one-size-fits-all method, and no progress is possible without the full and keen participation of the community members. Mostly, the solutions they seek lie in them and our role is to guide them to get there—systematically and peacefully.

One of our biggest learnings has been that no community can thrive peacefully if only a limited portion of their needs are taken care of. Just as economic well-being is important, so is education. Families and communities must stay healthy and have access to basic infrastructure—be it drinking water, utilities, better roads and home toilets.

Education is a greater leveller in a country where access to quality education is the preserve of the few. Women, we have discovered, are early adopters to change and can significantly reduce poverty by earning supplementary incomes.

The environment also has a key role to play. By minimising damage to the environment and taking care of it through sustainable practices, it's easier to limit the unpredictable outcomes of climate change even at a micro level.

And ultimately there has to be the focus on health and well being. Even a few days of sickness is the difference between cycles of poverty and self-sufficiency.

## **KEEPING IT TOGETHER**

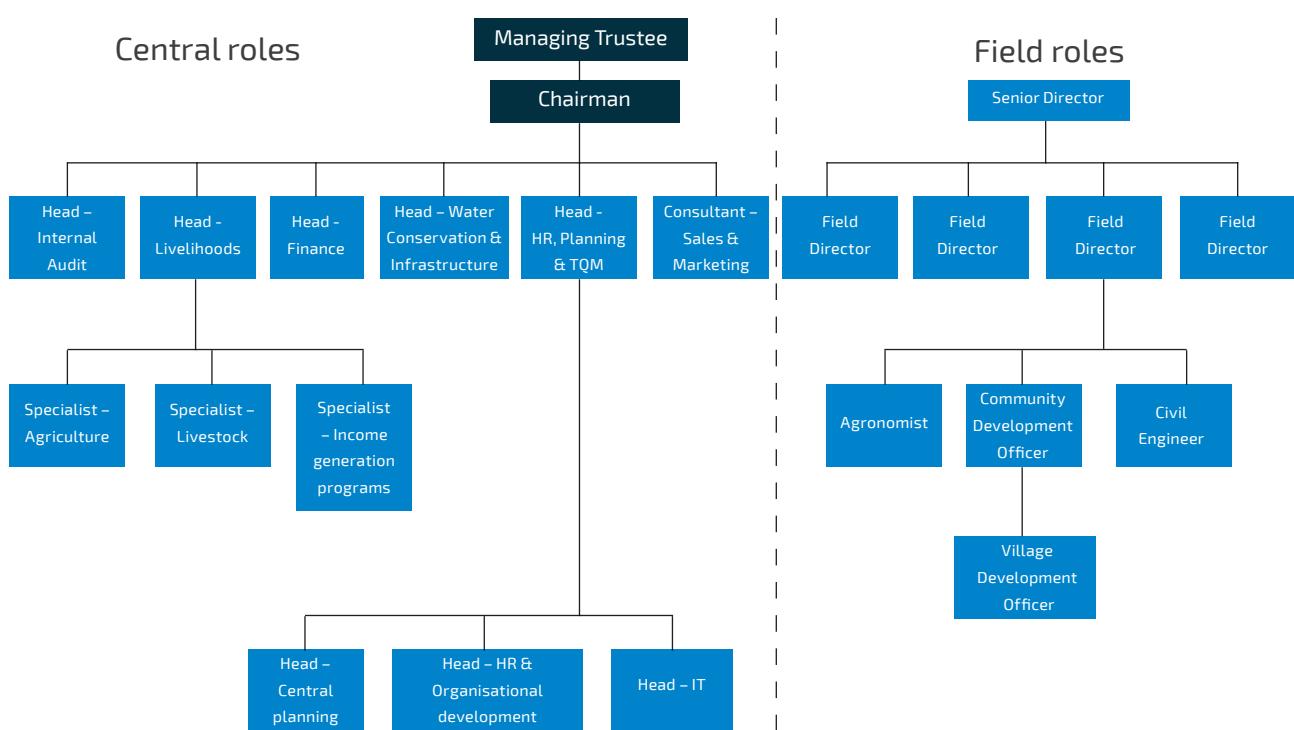
As communities progress on all these parameters, they move on to the accumulation of assets. This, in turn, provides them with a safety net against uncertainties and sudden expenses. Once they build resilience, the change is more rapid for their next generation which has greater access to the basics. At SST, we see our role as facilitating this right to life with dignity. This then forms the backbone of peace and harmony in communities, because there is no resource scarcity to introduce exclusion and conflict.

Economic progress, therefore, is a peace multiplier. Even though the change in the first two years of our work in these communities is slow, it is predictable and incremental. This combination of changing attitudes and building resilience leads to lasting change and harmony.

# SST STRUCTURE

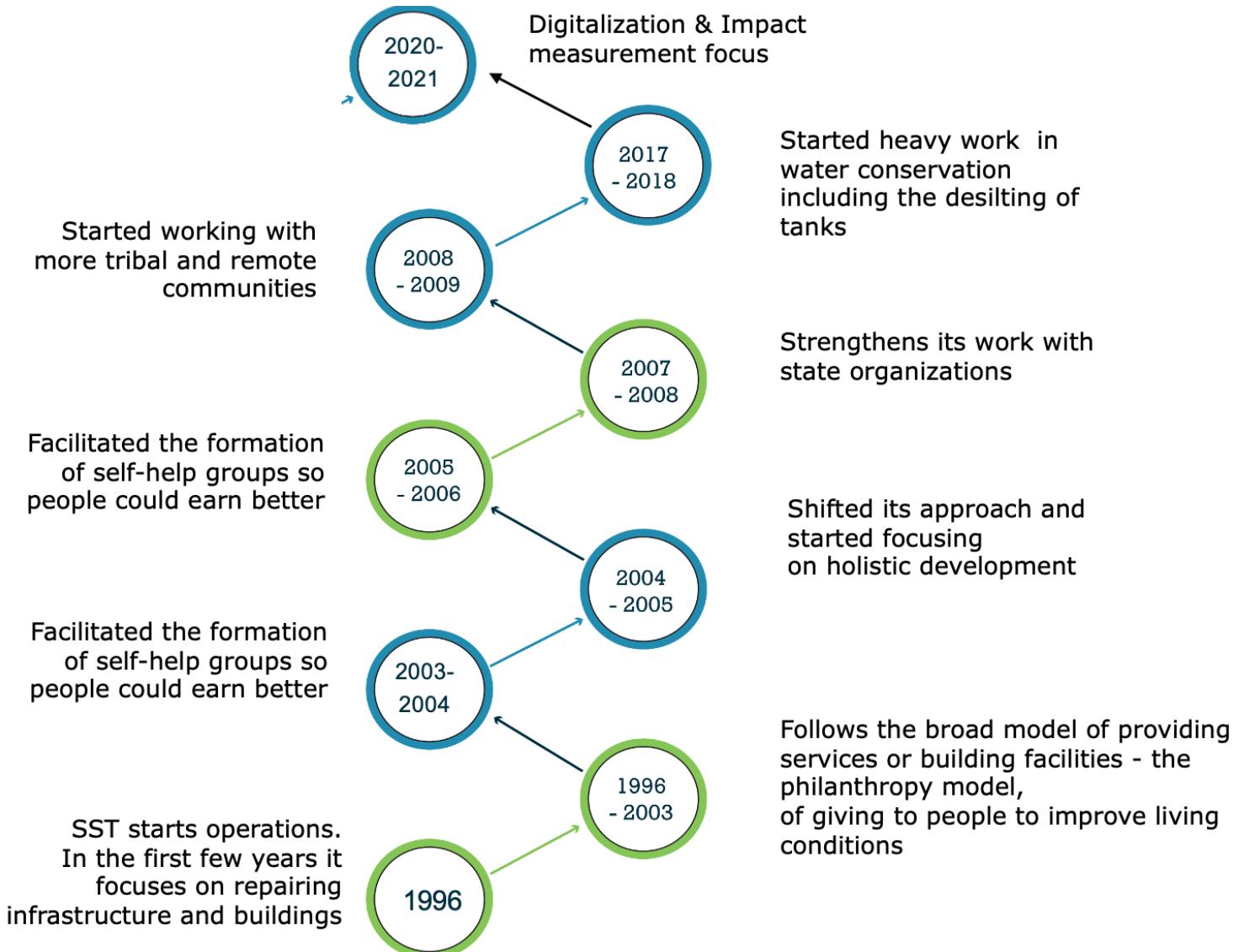
**TVS**

**SST**



Our work is from the village up. We start by identifying the problems the community faces and then looking for local solutions. We train our community development team to work as per the guidelines laid down from the two decades of learnings we have had. At the more senior level, we find ways to build partnerships with the public sector and other agencies that share our vision of a better and more peaceful community.

# SST TIMELINE





Kitchen garden by Mrs. Santhi, Vellithankottai village, Veerappanur panchayat,  
Javadhu cluster

# AREAS WE WORK IN

# AGRICULTURE AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

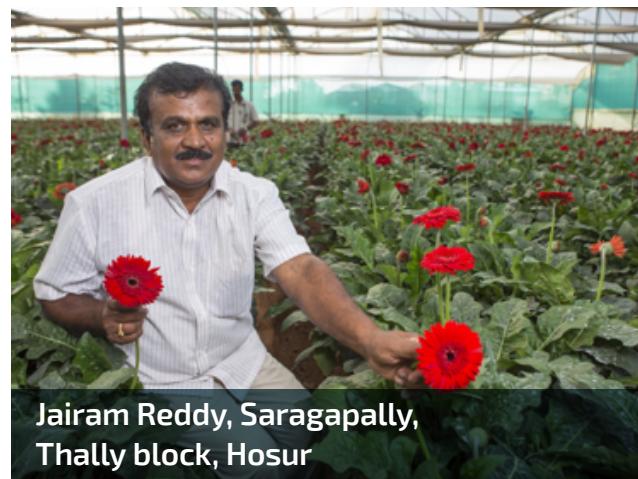
While India is still an agrarian economy, farming practices have not kept pace with the times. Farmers with small and medium holdings in particular are deeply impoverished. Most of them persist with crops that require water, even as they are stuck on arid land.

Others struggle with crop failures from climate change and the debt induced from such a setback. That apart, the high cost of labour-intensive farming makes this activity untenable. Farmers struggle because they haven't been taught ways in which to manage these issues, reduce failures and improve yields with better practices.

At SST, our engagement with farmers includes micro steps such as encouraging them to test the soil and also helping them get it tested. We also assist them in growing suitable crops in small patches as an experiment using drip irrigation, mulching and organic soil supplements and plant foods. Once the experiment succeeds, they have the courage to try out the better practices across their land holdings and eventually shun failure to embrace prosperity.

The result is that farmers have turned to everything from horticulture to varieties of crops that are more lucrative and more suitable for their land and micro climate.

We have found that typically when one farmer gets results, he acts as a champion of change. Soon, others follow.



**Jairam Reddy, Saragapally,  
Thally block, Hosur**

It is also important for farmers to diversify. We are, therefore, always encouraging them to keep livestock, teaching them how to improve the yields of milch cattle and directing them to veterinary assistance when needed—routinely and in emergencies. We also help villagers get into poultry farming that can be lucrative. Ultimately, no one wants to remain poor. What keeps them in poverty is the lack of skills, and the lack of opportunities to a better income.

So we encourage people to learn more to earn more. This means more co-operatives among farmers, teaching the power of collective bargaining, training people, and introducing better farming methods. Once farmers learn to work together as a team, there is more cohesion among them. This automatically reduces conflict and brings harmony. Once our communities become self-sufficient and learn to reinforce that with state support, they strike out on their own. At this stage, we typically minimise our outreach in such villages and seek other communities that need help.

## CASE STUDY



### Hatching a plan for his peers

#### NAME

E. Murthy

#### MY TRANSFORMATION

From being disabled and despondent to a successful entrepreneur.

## OUR STORY

As a young boy growing up in Settianthal village, in Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu, I had ambitions to join the army and follow in the footsteps of my father and elder brothers.

In my last year in school, my right leg was amputated after a road accident. This dashed my dreams of joining the army. I became despondent and depressed. I refused to study further after completing school.

To lift my spirits, my family encouraged me to go out of the house, hang out with others, and occasionally attend the social service meetings in the village. I would try and get out just so that I wouldn't sit and mope. This proved to be the turning point.

I started attending village development meetings and volunteered to help others. This brought me to the notice of SST. They began befriending me and were very patient with me. They would try and tell me that despite my injury, I could lead a better, more productive life and do something of my own.

I didn't believe them at first. At one of the village development meetings, they suggested I take up poultry farming and become self-employed. I eventually agreed after my parents offered to lend me some money to get the business going. I built a poultry shed in the compound of their house and bought 50 chicks for Rs. 2,500.

Within three months, I was able to use my profit of Rs. 8,000 to buy 150 chicks. In four months, I managed to earn Rs. 53,000. My success has boosted my confidence. I now try to encourage others who are disabled to start their own business.

## THE SST WAY

### SST social worker Paramasivan who mentored Murthy.

Murthy had a disability and was lacking in confidence. He had no self-belief. We used to observe him at village meetings and felt we should do something. When SST approached him, he didn't show much interest. He used to say, "I can't do anything. Nobody will help. Talk to somebody else because I am of no use," and so on.

I started frequenting the place where he would turn up to watch other boys in the village play volleyball and sit next to him and talk. I would point out to each of the boys playing and spell out what their plans were, and what they were aiming to become in life. SST workers felt that Murthy could work from home. SST would steer talk toward livestock and discuss what Murthy could achieve. Murthy's parents were also worried about their son. So, SST would give separate counselling to his parents. The aim was to convince them that their son can work and that they all could make this happen with some help.

Murthy's mother was part of a self-help group of 15 people, and she knew about SST, and trusted us. SST asked Murthy to buy 10 chicks for Rs. 50 each. Within four months and during the Deepavali festive season, he managed to sell 500 of these. He earned a steady income without much effort. Today, things are different. Murthy has also got married. He now has a large 120-foot shed to house 5,000 broiler chickens that he purchased. Murthy still attends village meetings and plays a supervisory role when time permits. He has become a role model for others and is an inspiration. For me, Murthy's example is truly impactful. His transformation is what they call in Tamil, *adhbudha velai*, or an extraordinary achievement.

## INFRASTRUCTURE



Drinking water arrangement in Melkootathur village, Melsilambi panchayat, Javadhu cluster

*Once the villagers have basic infrastructure,  
they are able to become more productive.*

The distribution of infrastructure in India is greatly varied even in its biggest towns and cities, not to mention the less accessible areas or villages.

India's villages can be places where the community struggles with everything—from lack of drainage to drinking water to toilets, or even motorable roads. This lack of infrastructure means deprivation for communities that have to struggle every day for their basic needs. Women have to walk miles to fetch drinking water for their homes; children stay at home because the school buildings are uninhabitable and few teachers are willing to go there.

Open defecation spreads disease, especially in the rainy season. The lack of motorable roads and functional public healthcare centres means illness that goes untreated becomes chronic, and sometimes results in the death of the only earning member of the family.

Year-upon-year poor communities get trapped in poverty, and even those on the margins get pushed into poverty. Sometimes, just a small incident can be a trigger. In these communities, so much time and effort is spent in trying to plug the gaps and make do, that most productivity is lost in doing so.

At SST, our work in infrastructure could mean seeking government assistance to fix public infrastructure and teaching villagers how to maintain them once they have it. In slightly more resilient communities, we encourage villagers to contribute to building shared

resources as this ensures a better standard of maintenance. In regions where water is scarce, we teach villagers rainwater harvesting and other ways to maximise the water they have. Water conservation is a key activity for us. We teach them how to build farm ponds, desilt rivers, and build check dams so they have water even in the dry months.

We also help the community with restoring public-use buildings. Sometimes all it takes is plaster and paint work to make a school building habitable again. Adding blackboards, and carving a usable road to improve access can actually keep students and teachers motivated to attend school. The small details make a big difference.

SST works in villages by identifying the infrastructure gaps and finding solutions within the local community with the help of the public works department. In India these departments are typically understaffed and overworked, leaving officers too overwhelmed to micro-map the needs of the community and help bring about change.

STT helps by plugging this last mile gap. This ensures that while villages prosper, the government also meets its development goals. Once the villagers have basic infrastructure, they are able to become more productive. This, in turn, builds greater resilience. This, then, translates into fewer squabbles over simple resources and ensures their better distribution as also greater harmony.

## CASE STUDY



Gravel road in Irulamparai, Javadhu cluster

## The road to riches

### PROJECT

The Road to Riches

### OUR TRANSFORMATION

From a struggle for access, to a path paved with opportunities.

## OUR STORY

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Life was tough without a usable road in our village of almost 240 people. Little children accompanied by elders had to use a path that cut through fields and watch out for snakes on their way to school. Farmers paid for their sugarcane, paddy, bananas and other produce to be carried as loads on heads, as there was no motorable road. Even the sick had to be carried by people up to a point if they wanted to access a road to reach the nearest hospital.

SST came to our village in 2004. As the needs of the village grew over the years, the SST team, like us, realised how much of a hindrance this lack of a 2-kilometer stretch of road was. Past efforts by villagers, including approaching the Block Development Officer and government agencies, failed to yield results.

The SST team took the initiative and had a meeting of all villagers, including community leaders. The villagers decided that they themselves would build the road to help save costs and ensure quality. Of the total Rs. 200,000, most villagers including the key beneficiaries contributed Rs. 30,000 while SST gave the balance. It took a month to complete the gravel road, and it was ready in December 2014.

Today, minivans, tractors, and autos carrying schoolchildren ply on this road. SST helped change the situation around, otherwise people would migrate to Kerala to work on coffee plantations. They also assisted with an anganwadi, animal husbandry, arranged loans for ladies who are part of the self-help group, and helped the elementary school in the village become a middle school.

## THE SST WAY

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**Community Development Officer C. Loganathan who worked with villagers to make this gravel road a reality .**

This village suffered for a sheer lack of a gravel road. While we at SST helped in the areas of health, agriculture, animal husbandry, education and environment, the villagers saw the access road as the key to long-term prosperity.

The SST staff knew that children going to school even refused to go because of safety reasons, while farmers found it difficult and expensive to get their produce out to markets for lack of a proper road. Even tractors and other equipment couldn't make their way into most fields and, therefore, could not be used. So ploughing was done using buffaloes.

We decided to help these villagers in their efforts to build a 2-kilometer stretch of gravel road. Trust built up over a period of time proved to be key. The villagers came to see SST members as part of their families. It wasn't surprising that they came up with 30 percent of the money for the project and even decided to do it themselves.

The road is now a reality and has transformed the outlook for this village. Earlier, villagers would trek 5 kilometers to Malligapuram village for most things. For instance, farmers who wanted to get their paddy threshed had to go there. For a banana bunch that sold for Rs. 75, the farmer had to part with Rs. 15 to get it across as a head load and place it in a van. Today, this costs just Rs. 2 to transport on a minivan using the new gravel road. When these 240 families see us as a family and we see the happiness on their faces, it's most satisfying.

# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



Gravel road in Irulamparai, Javadhu cluster

*We have found that it is women who seek to put an end to domestic abuse in the community, to stop alcoholism and to even take on social leadership roles that promote peace and prosperity.*

Women are among the most vulnerable category in India along with children and the elderly. Traditionally, India has a poor score when it comes to gender equality. At the community level it translates into higher child mortality among girls, greater school dropouts, early marriages and pregnancies, poor nutrition, domestic violence and dependence on the male members of the family for survival.

The lack of education, skills and training is a real roadblock when it comes to their financial independence. Some can't even read or write let alone seek skilled work.

Women also constitute a large portion of the unpaid farm labour. Most work in their family fields in addition to managing household chores. As such, they are not seen as valuable members in the family as they are classed as non-income generating despite their significant contributions to the household.

To help women improve their status, we start by organising awareness campaigns that encourage them to be functionally literate and give them confidence. That way, with training and the skills they acquire, they can become micro-entrepreneurs and income earners.

Once they step forward, oftentimes amid great resistance from male family members, we

teach them to read and write. To begin with, our team identifies their abilities and aptitudes. Based on this we try to help them get skilled, and become part of larger groups — such as self-help groups where women support each other to build micro-enterprises. These micro-enterprises can be tailoring, mushroom farming, producing edibles, crafts and weaves or even rearing poultry or milch cattle.

Once they are able to function as a group that generates a steady income, access bank loans to grow and have a market for their goods, they become more valued in their households and communities. Swiftly, they become change agents.

We have found that it is women who seek to put an end to domestic abuse in the community, to stop alcoholism and to even take on social leadership roles that promote peace and prosperity.

Typically, they will ensure that other girl children in the village get a better shot at opportunities they missed, send them to school and for higher education and group together to end malnutrition. The overall effect of a steady livelihood for them is stability in their homes and communities which helps foster cooperation and harmony.

## CASE STUDY



### An oyster of change

#### NAME

Sujatha Murthy  
(1954-2016)

#### OUR TRANSFORMATION

From a housewife to a mushroom farmer who boosted her income to Rs. 6,000 per month.

# OUR STORY

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**(As narrated by Sujatha's husband R.B. Murthy.)**

Sujatha lived in the tiny village of Bethalapally in Tamil Nadu. The area is close to Hosur where most of the menfolk work in factories. The women mostly stay at home, and Sujatha was just another housewife. She couldn't imagine being anything else. Her story started more out of curiosity than anything else.

We were close to the TVS factory at Hosur, so SST decided to send community workers to our villages. Social workers would encourage us to keep the villages clean and form self-help groups so we could motivate each other, collect garbage and recycle waste to bring in funds. Our surroundings were clean, we had fewer diseases, but then we wanted more.

Sujatha had little, except a small kitchen garden. A social worker from SST asked her if she would like to produce mushrooms—a lucrative crop.

Sujatha knew nothing of mushroom cultivation. She, however, was adventurous and volunteered to attend a two-day training camp organised by SST at a government research centre nearby. It proved to be the turning point. The experience taught her how to grow, harvest, and sell mushrooms.

Next, Sujatha took a loan from the bank. SST workers helped her with the loan application. She bought a few seeds and planted them on our terrace. In three weeks, she made Rs. 4,500.

As Sujatha grew more confident, she approached an SST self-help group for a loan of Rs. 20,000 to boost cultivation.

Soon, she was selling mushrooms worth Rs. 6,000 a month. Sujatha added a floor to our house, sent her granddaughter to a private school and bought enough gold for her daughter's wedding. I'm proud of her.

SST also enrolled her for a course in farming, and Sujatha, in turn, taught eight other women how to be independent. That's real empowerment.

# THE SST WAY

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**SST social worker A. Jayapaul who mentored the late Sujatha Murthy.**

Sujatha was part of a self-help group in her village. SST workers came across her in meetings. People usually ask us for loans and try to put their money in some income-generation programs that SST supports. SST tries to use local resources and motivate people. Sujatha was also looking at ways to make money.

We did research at the local level and found that there was demand for protein-based food. As there's a substantial population that's vegetarian, mushrooms are a protein-source for them. SST workers observed the local market and felt there was a good demand for oyster mushrooms. SST was confident that mushroom cultivation would fit in well. Experts, too, at the local agriculture college agreed. It was hard work at first. Most villagers feared financial ruin and SST had to create a climate of trust. SST highlighted the fact that mushroom cultivation does not involve much labour. SST also helped with marketing by tying up with local stores for distribution. SST introduced the villagers in Paiyur to experts from the local agriculture college.

Sujatha was always enthusiastic. While others thought mushroom cultivation was fraught with risk, she embraced the idea from the start. She was among those who also attended a two-day training program at the agriculture university at Ootacamund.

Sujatha was the first to get into mushroom farming. Her husband supported her and was very understanding. His encouragement was a great advantage.

Sujatha, in turn, motivated others by telling them how her life had changed for the better. What's remarkable is that she trained 26 others in the village in mushroom cultivation. It is her lasting legacy.

She may not be in our midst today, but her work lives on in the better lives she has created for others.

# EDUCATION



Anganwadi at Madathukuppam, Nagapattinam cluster

*Girls for example often skip school if there are no toilets they can use. Students skip school if the surroundings are dirty or the building is not accessible.*

In villages in India, government-run schools are often dilapidated and struggle to find teachers and students alike. Even when they are managed well, parents often pull the child out of school when they need an extra set of hands to work in the fields. Often, they will put them to work to overcome financial difficulties.

Our work in education revolves around two things—creating awareness about the link between education and opportunities and finding ways to keep students and teachers motivated.

So we routinely counsel parents to keep their children in school, and try and teach parents ways to augment their own incomes so they do not have to pull the child out of school.

We use recognition as a tool to keep teachers motivated and encourage them to showcase their good work. We also persuade them to apply for public awards and recognition. Where possible, we involve the community in the upkeep and maintenance of school buildings.

In some cases, we find the resources needed to improve the school—be it having clean toilets or drinking water.

Girls for example often skip school if there are no toilets they can use. Students skip school if the surroundings are dirty or the building is not accessible.

So we work with the community to change this and make the school a welcoming place.

At the preschool level we work with the community to renovate and maintain anganwadis or play schools where nutritious food is given to those under five.

We encourage community ownership so mothers feel motivated to bring their children to the playschool. Often, we help them gain access to learning tools so that their social skills develop at an early stage.

Once children find learning enjoyable, they tend to be more willing to go to school.

When the community feels the younger generation has a better chance of prosperity because of learning, they tend to work hard to keep villages cohesive and peaceful. Often children go home and teach illiterate parents too, bringing a sense of pride to the community.

## CASE STUDY



### Breathing life into a school

#### NAME

R. Thamarai Selvi

#### MY TRANSFORMATION

From a teacher to headmistress of a model school.

## OUR STORY

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In 1991, I began teaching in government schools in Tamil Nadu. However, 2008 marked a turning point. That year, I was promoted as headmistress and transferred to the Government school at Ramasanikuppan, in Tiruvannamalai district. When I came here, the infrastructure wasn't great. The school had just 48 students, disheartened teachers and poor attendance. Worse, the school was a hub for anti-social elements who would drink and gamble on the premises.

I had to change this. My husband K. Prabakaran, who retired from the Indian army in 2003 at the age of 37, turned out to my strongest ally. He contributed most of his pension for the school and started working on improving the building and other structures on the campus. Today, eight years since he first began working, he has been instrumental in the construction of toilets and a hand-washing building that's the envy of other schools in the state. I am tempted to admit, "behind every successful woman, there is a man."

In 2015, SST stepped in to provide invaluable support. SST offered Rs. 11 lakhs for construction of a stage and additional class rooms. They motivated the community to make the school one of the best government schools in the district. We have also created a greener campus with 25 fruit trees that include guavas and pomegranates. The hand-washing area, which my husband helped construct and contributed Rs. 200,000 of his own personal money, is such a hit that children are motivated to maintain personal hygiene and spend more time in school activities.

SST is helping the school set up a new building for 'Smart Classes' with computers. We have introduced the ABACUS training method and have students who have won competitions. More importantly, SST has helped the community take ownership. The school was chosen as the best in the district by the District Collector. Today, there are 50 boys and 40 girls in the school with three teachers. Our ambition is to make this school the envy of private schools.

## THE SST WAY

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**Community Development Officer Paramasivam who worked with Thamarai Selvi and K. Prabakaran.**

SST adopted the school in 2015. Compared to elsewhere, we found the school in good shape and with all the attributes necessary to scale greater heights. We stepped in to help with some buildings that were in a poor state from lack of use. The *Balwadi* apart, we decided to help with the construction of a stage. TVS and SST are particular about the state of school classrooms and toilets, and these were found to be good in this school.

The toilets are always kept clean. The school spends Rs. 1,000 a month to keep the toilets clean.

We, at SST, decided to help the school to create green spaces on the campus. SST helped plant trees and gave a total of 100 saplings. The school pays Rs 2,000 to a helper who waters these on a regular basis.

For us at SST, Thamarai Selvi and Prabakaran were a great source of inspiration. She is self-motivated whilst he is selfless. Those in the service of education need to have this feeling of selfless motivation. From morning to evening, they are at the school. While the school timings are from 9:10 a.m. to 4:10 p.m., the fifth-standard students are given extra coaching for an hour.

The school spends Rs. 100-a-day on tea, biscuits and fruits. Such attention means these students are strong in their fundamentals and are sought after by middle-schools that offer education from sixth standard. It's little surprise these students go on to be toppers in the state.

While Thamarai Selvi is the recipient of the best teacher award and has even won the prestigious Kamarajar award for teaching, 50 school headmasters have visited the Ramasanikuppan school to study and replicate its success. There cannot be a better testament to this couple's efforts. We, at SST, are proud of them and this model school.

## HEALTH & HYGIENE



ANC care in Renukondapuram HSC, Padavedu cluster

*Undernourishment can lead to poor cognitive ability, lower immunity and morbidity among children under the age of six.*

*Acute malnutrition in children can result in death.*

Child and maternal health is one of the most neglected areas in underserved areas. Nutritious food is often reserved for the earning members of the house—typically the men. As a result, women fall low in the priority list.

Mothers who aren't getting nourishing food during pregnancy, including an iron-rich diet, can suffer during childbirth. It can result in premature births, underweight babies and even infant and maternal mortality.

Those who do deliver live babies and survive childbirth themselves, face other challenges in raising these children. Infants born to women who are suffering from nutritional deficiencies have lower immunity and are more susceptible to disease. Poverty and lack of medical access then hampers their progress.

Undernourishment can lead to poor cognitive ability, lower immunity and morbidity among children under the age of six. Acute malnutrition in children can result in death.

To pull pregnant women and young children out of this trap, all existing government programs focus sharply on the first 1,000 days of a child's lifecycle. Nutrition spending typically targets these children and their mothers.

At SST we work with public agencies to deliver this program to women. In villages, we create awareness about anemia and teach women to identify and grow iron-rich vegetables.

We often help facilitate public health camps where they get routine check ups to keep them healthy and well. This, in turn, makes them productive and ensures they are able to supplement incomes and build resilience.

This resilience is key to stability and peace in communities.

Our simple solutions include encouraging the community to build and use toilets to avoid open defecation, providing clean drinking water and ensuring better nutrition through government programs.

We emphasise on hygiene and sanitation to avoid communicable diseases. This has vastly improved the well-being of communities.

We have also helped train and skill the community in areas such as recycling and garbage collection.

As a result, self-help groups are able to earn money from the recycling of biodegradable waste into compost, or from waste segregation and door-to-door collection.

## CASE STUDY



### A green path to wealth

#### NAME

Punitavalli

#### MY TRANSFORMATION

From an anaemic, low-income earner to a healthy dairy farmer.

## OUR STORY

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It's hard for me to forget my hardships. After I was widowed, I had to earn money and raise a family. So, I worked on a farm for Rs. 2,000 a month, until I began to fall ill frequently. I would feel dizzy even before noon and hardly a day would go by when I wouldn't tire after just a short while.

After a year, I gave up work as it became clear to my employer that I really couldn't keep pace. I spent the money I had on medicines. Nothing worked and I started feeling low.

Then, one day, I attended a health camp in my village after SST told me about it. The camp looked at basic health, such as anaemia, malnutrition, preventive health and so on. The tests showed I had very little iron in my blood, and the health worker told me that's why I was constantly tiring.

Many Indian women in villages suffer from anaemia, but most of us don't even know it exists. We keep imagining all kinds of ailments. The doctor at the health camp gave me iron supplements to boost my hemoglobin levels, and it worked. I started feeling better soon enough.

SST workers then came home and offered simple solutions such as planting vegetables rich in iron, so I wouldn't have to take supplements. I began to use them in my everyday cooking. Gradually, I found my old energy, and eventually returned to farm work. Recently, I took a loan of Rs. 28,000 from the self-help group that I'm a part of. With this, I purchased a cow so that I can earn extra money from milk.

I enjoy dairy farming and I know this will help me and my family earn enough to lead a life of dignity.

## THE SST WAY

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### **SST social worker Saravanan who mentored Punitavalli.**

Punitavalli used to regularly attend the monthly Panchayat Level Federation meeting in the village as the area representative. Suddenly, she stopped coming and we were left wondering. We decided to find out and were told she felt too tired to attend.

The first thing we did was to take her for a check-up. Tests at a health camp conducted by SST showed she was anaemic. We helped her with treatment so that first her stamina improved. Once she was better, she wanted to make up for lost income.

She had land around her house and only one cow. Her maximum income was Rs. 2,000 per month. With the help of a bank loan, she purchased a cow and it later produced a calf.

In Nagapattinam, which is a Tsunami-affected area, TVS and SST help indirectly by offering training as also skills development that assists in rehabilitating them. We have told them not to expect handouts.

When we started out in 2011, for two years it was a struggle to change their mindsets. Gradually, with results, people felt encouraged. The district of Nagapattinam has a record of 100 percent repayment of loans.

Today, Punitavalli earns more than Rs. 7,000 per month selling milk and by working on other people's farms. She also works on her land. Over time, we have earned people's trust. Today, when TVS or SST are mentioned, they show that they have confidence in us and in how we can help.

We helped them take the first step, and they are on their way to run the show.

## ENVIRONMENT



Check dam in Naikuthi village, Harur cluster

*Our primary goal has been to sensitise villagers of the need to restore nature and be in harmony with it.*

One of the biggest challenges facing India is the rapid deforestation of its green cover because of indiscriminate felling of trees to make way for human habitation.

This has led to climate change at the micro level, exacerbating everything from unpredictable weather patterns to the denudation of soil cover.

Our primary goal has been to sensitise villagers of the need to restore nature and be in harmony with it.

To do this we have encouraged them to plant more trees, conserve water and encourage the flourishing of flora and fauna to make habitats more natural.

So typically, we will introduce them to introduce foliage that is local to the area and nourish it.

We will help them create water catchments to avoid the unnecessary depletion of groundwater. We will also encourage the use of organic composts and fertilizers for their agricultural produce.

Keeping the surroundings clean and vibrant as also helping in increasing tree cover, has over the years demonstrated to them that an alternative way of living is possible.

In remote tribal belts we teach them how to live off the natural products of the forest, be that honey or tamarind.

They are taught to sort, pack and market these products in the expanding organic produce market.

Today, this source of income has greatly influenced how they interact with their environment and choose to preserve it.

A combination of these factors has built resilience in communities which has led to greater harmony and cooperation.

Villagers have united in a common goal to improve and take care of their environment and nature.

## CASE STUDY



### Pimpri village wonder

#### PROJECT

Pimpri Village Wonder

#### OUR TRANSFORMATION

From no drinking water to an exporter of foods.

## **OUR STORY**

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Our village of almost 210 families relied on rain for agriculture. That meant uncertainty and we spent all our time on trying to find ways to secure water sources.

This left us with no time to even think of village development says Shri Gore, a 45 year-old farmer.

Today, that mindset has changed and everyone is enthusiastic about village development work in Pimpri Dumala in Pune. SST came to our village and decided to help change around things.

They helped us set up self-help groups to better our incomes. Then we started on water conservation, covering almost 72 hectares. It paid off. The water level rose to 4.2 feet and the amount of water available during the peak summer period rose to 45 days.

The availability of water boosted farm yields and boosted the incomes of some farmers to almost Rs 45,000 per month.

This further bolstered expectations of the villagers. With help from SST, we began to tackle issues of solid and liquid waste management, cleanliness, quality of seeds among other things.

With guidance from SST members, we planted saplings of neem, tamarind and other crops. In July of 2016, almost 2,500 saplings were planted. These initiatives have made the villagers proud of their unity and what they have achieved so far.

## **THE SST WAY**

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**Community Development Officer Rajendra Jadhav who worked to achieve the transformation in Pimpri Dumala.**

Villagers here had to travel 8 kilometers to fetch water. Six to seven farmers even spent their own money to access water for their fields. We thought, what about other poor farmers who didn't have anyone to take up their cause?

That's when farmers and we decided to together find ways to access water for drinking and irrigation. SST contributed, but made it mandatory that 20 percent of the money should come from farmers, for things such as rent for tractors for removing mud.

We decided to build tanks and clean a storm drain that had collected dirt. After cleaning, more than 3 to 4 feet of water collected in these tanks.

Now, villagers have water to grow pomegranates, custard apples etc. Onions, too, are being exported to the United Arab Emirates. On average, villagers earn Rs. 25,000 per acre.

There is greater awareness of hygiene. The villagers have achieved their target of completing the construction of toilets. Previously the toilet in the school was not being used by students due to lack of water. Today, they have water.

Also, villagers and SST put in money to start an E-learning Centre and repair the village school building.



**Jaipal Reddy, Vanamangalam, Hosur cluster**

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