



Asha
for Education

Bringing hope through education

Fellowship Siddamma

Annual Review for June 2025 - May 2026
Budget Proposal for 2025-26

Asha Austin

September 2, 2025

Background

- ❑ Asha supported various projects with Siddamma since 2004 and Asha Fellow since 2005.
- ❑ Social worker and activist: worked extensively to empower the Irula Tribe and Unorganized Labor.
- ❑ Instrumental in the release of bonded laborers from rice mills in the Red Hills Area.
- ❑ Community Resource Center created by Siddamma promotes the use of the natural/organic cultivation systems and traditional seeds. She has trained 1000s of local farmers and students on tradition organic farming practices.
- ❑ Creates coops, social program and advocacy programs
- ❑ Provides education to children, women and farmers through Bharathi Trust (since 1990)
- ❑ Awarded Trafficking in Persons Hero – 2006



Mission and Vision

❑ Mission of the Fellow :

- ❑ Uplift and empower the Irula Tribe. Create a society where life and livelihood is possible for all
- ❑ Make them aware of their rights (understanding that laws exist for the people to earn minimum wage)
- ❑ Community based resource center to educate economically disadvantaged, provides skills to sustain. Revive traditional/organic farming methods.

❑ Vision :

- ❑ Bring basic amenities electricity, gas, housing and water.
- ❑ To train local leaders to represent the community and ensure equitable development for the community and ensure that funds from the Tribal Welfare Board is used effectively.

❑ **Goal for 2026:** Evaluate grazing lands currently under illegal occupation by landlords and submit applications to have these lands reallocated to the Irula community for housing. The Sarpam will conduct a full survey of the land and provide the necessary information to support the application process

Strengths and Weakness

Strengths :

- In the field – heavily connected and involved with the community she serves. Knows of all the daily issues they face and is present with them to resolve issues/conflicts
- Empowering women leaders in several villages and enabling them to resolve their own issues

Weakness :

- Siddamma is a one-woman army – she does not have a team going out to seek funding for her or providing any administrative help to her.
- Dependence on only Asha for funds.

Kari Siddamma

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Geographical Spread

Tamil Nadu
Andhra Pradesh
Karnataka

Active Period

ASHA since 04
Over 30 years

People Serving

Irula Tribe

Women &
Children

Farmers

Laborers

Bigger Causes

Labor Rights

Women
Empowerment

Organic
Awareness

Irula Rights &
Integration

Irula
Empowerment

Need Based Efforts

Tsunami

Cyclones

COVID

Dispute
Resolution

Lifelong pursuit, Selfless, Committed, Overcomes (Personal & Societal) Hardships



Recent Updates and Progress

Sarpam Sangam's Independent Success

- ❑ Operating efficiently across multiple regions
- ❑ Taking ownership of activities independently
- ❑ Demonstrating strong autonomy and reliability
- ❑ Sarpam organized tribal meeting with the Tribal Director. The Tribal Director expressed deep pride in the Irulas' progress. He Recognized the transformative impact of Sarpam Sangam's efforts

Irula Children Education Awareness

- ❑ Several Irula dropouts in the later teen years
- ❑ The Tribal Department recognized this and set up an Education Awareness Camp to motivate the children to get back to school. The whole community and parents were invited.
- ❑ A three-month training camp was set up in Trichy to equip Irula youth with computer and vocational skills. While the program created valuable learning opportunities, many participants found it difficult to stay away from their families and chose to return early, reflecting their deep attachment to home and community.
- ❑ The Tribal Department recognized that region-based training would better suit the Irula community. However, limited funding has delayed its implementation.

Women's Collective at Loyola College

Over 1,000 women spanning weaving groups, community workers, sanitary cleaners, Irulas, and Dalits gathered at Loyola College. The Minister, who was present, asked how the Government could best support these women. A key idea discussed was setting up region-based small schools. This important conversation is set to continue on **16 September**.



Tailoring Training for Women

□ The Tribal Director organized tailoring training in two areas, with buses provided for pickup and drop-off to encourage participation. A total of **32 women** took part, and tailoring machines were offered at subsidized prices. With the success of this program, requests for similar training are emerging from several other areas..



Tailoring Training for Women

□ The Tribal Department is establishing a production center that will serve as a Tailoring Training Center for Irula women. The government has allocated over INR 1 crore for the construction of this center and the provision of tailoring machines. The Sarpam Sangam is also close to finalizing a contract with schools, enabling Irula women to produce school uniforms for multiple institutions.

Government Support on Land Rights - Patta and Housing

- ❑ The government has begun providing pattas and land in regions where Sarpam is active, marking a significant step forward in supporting the community's stability and growth
- ❑ While the government has committed to providing pattas and land in areas where Sarpam is present, several remote regions remain underserved, where this support is not yet

Defending Land and Forest Rights

- ❑ In forest areas, the Irula community has faced harassment from forest authorities. Yet, they have shown remarkable resilience in standing up for their rights. The Tahsildar confirmed that they will not be displaced and will be granted patta and land.
- ❑ A total of 63 Irula families without land were able to obtain patta in the forest areas in Gummudipoondi, thanks to the leadership of Irula women. Each patta was issued in the name of the woman in the family. In addition, the government provided INR 4,37,000 per household, and the houses were built by the Irula women themselves.

Defending Land and Forest Rights



These homes were built by Irula women, with the patta registered in the name of the woman in each family. The Sarpam Sangam takes immense pride in this remarkable achievement

Organic Farming

- ❑ Siddamma is recognized as a **voluntary resource person** for promoting organic and sustainable farming practices. While the government has encouraged organic farming, recent funding gaps have limited her ability to continue this important work.

Demand for Safe Workplace for Irula Women

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Site Visit Compliance

- ❑ Last in person site visit was conducted in person by Sowmya Suryanarayanan on Dec 28, 2022
 - ❑ Attendees : Sowmya Suryanarayanan and Siddamma
 - ❑ Site Visit Report –[Site Visit Report Dec 2022](#)

- ❑ Virtual site visit conducted on 15 September 2025
 - ❑ Attendees : Sowmya Suryanarayanan, Rangakrishnan Srinivasan, Kaavya Venkat, V K Gupta, and Ankita
 - ❑ Site Visit Report [Site Visit Report 2025](#)

FCRA Compliance

- ❑ FCRA for Asha Trust is valid till October 2028

Budget Proposal (2025-2026)

- ☐ Do you approve disbursement of INR 5,00,000 for the time period of April 2025 through Mar 2026 towards supporting Siddamma's honorarium
- ☐ Time to vote (15 Sep 2025)
 - ☐ Yes: 6
 - ☐ No: 0



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Thank You
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