



Asha
for Education

Bringing hope through education

Fellowship Siddamma

Annual Review for April 2025 – April 2026

Budget Proposal for 2026-27

Asha Austin

June 29, 2026

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 :

- ❑ Setting up rice mill at the Farm and having the Irulas own the rice mill
- ❑ 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.

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

Government Change in Tamil Nadu – Positive Impact for Irula Community

- ❑ Following the recent government change, the newly appointed SC/ST Minister (Vanni Arasu) is someone Siddamma and Geetha have known for many years
- ❑ The Minister has reached out to Siddamma to better understand current tribal issues and community needs. They have had three meetings so far.
- ❑ The Minister has asked for a clear summary of tribal community needs, along with the estimated budget required to address them.
- ❑ As a result, Siddamma has been traveling extensively over the past three months to meet with communities and gather input.
- ❑ The Minister has called for a meeting with Sarpam and other key stakeholders, including the Tribal Director, to better understand the broader issues facing tribal communities and to raise government awareness of the need for support



Cuddalore Fisherman Rescue: Advocacy Leading to Government Action

- ❑ Three fishermen from Cuddalore went missing at sea after being caught in strong winds.
- ❑ Initially, the government response was limited, and the case did not receive urgent attention.
- ❑ Through persistent follow-up and advocacy by Sarpam, the government stepped in and intensified search efforts.
- ❑ The fishermen were eventually found floating near Rameswaram, having survived by drinking salt water while stranded at sea.
- ❑ The incident received significant media attention and became widely covered as a major news story.
- ❑ Fortunately, all three men were found alive, although they were in poor physical condition and needed immediate care.



Cuddalore Fisherman Rescue: Advocacy Leading to Government Action

- ❑ One of them has severe kidney issues
- ❑ Siddamma and Geetha were able to give their families basic groceries/food
- ❑ Currently they are working to get them government compensation

Unorganized Workers Union Meeting

- ❑ Sarpam organized a meeting of the Unorganized Workers Union, bringing together approximately 60 activists.
- ❑ The meeting provided a space for activists to discuss current challenges facing unorganized workers.
- ❑ The gathering was also a moment of reflection, as 2 prominent activists who were Siddamma's close friends and longtime colleagues have recently passed away.



Kuvempu: Permanent Community Learning Center

- ❑ Siddamma is spearheading the Kuvempu project in partnership with Asha Detroit in Chitradurga District, Karnataka.
- ❑ The project serves children, youth, women, and marginalized rural communities across nearby villages.
- ❑ Key activities include evening learning centers, education support, vocational training, tailoring/livelihood programs, and help accessing government benefits.
- ❑ Construction is currently in full swing for a permanent project building.
- ❑ The new center will provide space for classrooms, training, tailoring, meetings, and community programs.
- ❑ Siddamma is closely involved in oversight of construction and travels often to the site



Kuvempu: Permanent Community Learning Center

- ❑ A staff member on the administrative side was found to be involved in serious corruption related to student scholarships.
- ❑ She was reportedly issuing checks directly to students and then taking the money back from them.
- ❑ She also threatened students and families, warning them not to tell anyone about what was happening.
- ❑ Once word reached Siddamma, she acted immediately and removed the staff member from her position.
- ❑ Kuvempu also conducts summer camp classes across several village centers
- ❑ The camps help students strengthen basic English skills while also participating in music, dance, drawing, craft work, and cultural activities.
- ❑ Recent photos from the field show strong participation from students, staff, families, and local community members.



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Senchiamma School, Senjiagaram: Early Education for Irular Children

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- ❑ Siddamma works with Asha Seattle on Senchiamma School in Senjiagaram village near Chennai.
- ❑ The school serves Irular tribal children, providing early childhood education for children roughly ages 0–6.
- ❑ The program helps prepare young children for mainstream government schools through basic learning, motor skills, reading, writing, and arithmetic.
- ❑ Asha Seattle support helps provide daily mid-morning snacks, nutritious lunches, learning aids, and school staff support.

Other General Updates

- ❑ Siddamma will be traveling in Europe through August, where she plans to meet with local NGOs and community organizations.
- ❑ Her discussions will focus on issues central to Bharathi Trust's work, including untouchability, tribal rights, education, and community empowerment.
- ❑ She also plans to share Bharathi Trust's experience with organic and sustainable farming, especially approaches that can support small farmers and rural communities.
- ❑ These conversations will help build awareness, exchange ideas, and explore potential collaborations with organizations working on similar social justice and sustainability issues.
- ❑ Siddamma is also turning 70, and while she has not spoken about retirement, she acknowledges that the work is becoming more physically demanding.
- ❑ At the same time, she says that working with the Irula community "runs in her blood," and that stepping away from this work would be extremely difficult for her.
- ❑ This makes it even more important to strengthen the next generation of leadership and ensure that Bharathi Trust's work can continue sustainably.

Vision and Goals



- ❑ Siddamma's 2026 vision is focused on land rights, housing, local leadership, women's livelihood, education access, and sustainable farming.
- ❑ Through Sarpam Sangam, Siddamma is strengthening community-led advocacy so Irula leaders can represent their own needs and ensure government funds are used effectively.

Site Visit Compliance

- ❑ Last virtual site visit was conducted in person by Sowmya Suryanarayanan 15 September 2025
[579_Site_Visit_Report_Siddamma18September2025.pdf](#)
- ❑ Last in person site visit was on Dec 20, 2022 [Microsoft Word - Site Visit Report. Siddamma Dec 2022.docx](#)
- ❑ Siddamma mentioned that a recent site visit was conducted for the Kuvempu project, during which she also shared updates on the broader scope of her Irula community work.

FCRA Compliance

- ❑ FCRA for Asha Trust is valid till October 2028

Budget Proposal (2026-2027)

☐ Do you approve disbursal of INR 5,00,000 for the time period of April 2026 through March 2027 towards supporting Siddamma's honorarium

☐ Time to vote

☐ Yes:6

☐ No: 0



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Thank You
Asha Austin