

ASSEFA

PROFILE

Association for Sarva Seva Farms (ASSEFA)

- Established in Gandhi Birth Centenary Year, 1969, in collaboration with Tamil Nadu Sarvodaya Mandal

- Legal Entity : Registered under Society's Act
- Year of Registration : 1978
- Registration Number : 139

- Registered under FCRA: 4th January, 1985
- FCRA No : 075900016

- General Body : 27 Members
- Executive Committee : 5 Members
Chairman
Vice Chairman
Treasurer
Executive Director & Secretary
Member

ASSOCIATION FOR SARVA SEVA FARMS - A PROFILE

Association for Sarva Seva Farms (ASSEFA) is a non-government voluntary organisation with a distinct character of upholding the Gandhian ideals and principles in the life of the human beings by applying Sarvodaya principle in the economic and social behaviour of the people. It is an institution committed to promoting the concept of self-reliant rural community imbued with love, truth and justice.

MISSION STATEMENT:

To build a socially balanced society without losing individual identity and respect, at the same time spurt it to action for the upliftment of social, cultural and economic life to all. It also strives to resurrect the community values by bringing a model of change that incorporates the best from the tradition and the modern and discards the worst.

ORIGIN AND AMELIORATION:

The accidental birth of Bhoodan movement in 1950s was through a philosopher and strong pursuer of Gandhiji's principle, Sarvodaya (*welfare to all*), Vinoba Bhave. He brought some cheers in the faces of rural poor by bringing them lands for cultivation from rich landlords through a movement called Bhoodan. The followers of Sarvodaya, particularly among the youth were impressed with this movement and soon involved themselves actively with Vinoba Bhave movement.

However, the Bhoodan lands allotted were mostly barren requiring enormous man power and technical inputs for cultivation. Hence, the life of poor hardly changed and they continued to live under impoverished conditions in spite of holding Bhoodan lands. Soon people realised the failure of Bhoodan concept - *Equal sharing of lands to eliminate poverty* and believed that collecting and distributing lands alone will bring no changes to the poor.

Some Sarvodaya followers envisaged the idea of developing Bhoodan lands through an organisation by assisting the poor with manpower, money resources and technical inputs for the development of lands. It was in this context that ASSEFA was born as Sarva Seva Farms in 1969 as second phase of Bhoodan movement. The success of its experiment in Sevalur in turning barren land into green expanses through the collective effort of a diverse crew of poor and landless farmers aided with strong youth forces, gave an enormous incentive to ASSEFA to cover 27 new farms in Tamil Nadu in the next 14 years, developing 1796 acres of Bhoodan land, and benefiting 801 families besides developing 30 farms in other states, developing 2782 acres and benefiting 951 families.

Sarva Seva Farm was, during its early stages, confined to Tamil Nadu. However a replicable model had been formulated, which followed roughly the following guidelines.

- ⌘ Identifying a contiguous area of under-developed Bhoodan land, usually atleast 20 acres in extent.
- ⌘ Identifying potential beneficiaries - either of Bhoodan patta holders or if poor, distributing new Bhoodan lands to them. Majority of the beneficiaries are Harijan communities with Bhoodan landholders.

- ⌘ Organising the beneficiaries and local youth to develop the land for irrigated farming by sinking open well, levelling land, laying pipeline etc., as necessary.
- ⌘ Farming the land under direct ASSEFA management. Bhoodanees were paid a daily wage for their work and shared the harvest surpluses after a proportion for capital repayment was deducted.
- ⌘ After a period of time, lands were handed over to the Bhoodanees to manage themselves, either as co-operative group farms or individual farms based on their needs.

Thus, success was seen in the transformations of both land and men. Although these establishments were achieved with the help of outside capital - mainly abroad, these resources were recovered back from Bhoodanees to carry on the development of other Bhoodan lands. This recovery was not a mere commercial transaction but visualised as a rational act of sharing between equal brothers, the donor (the repayment farmer) and the receiver (the new project farmer), who understood equally their mutual needs and responsibilities.

ASSEFA soon showed the Bhoodan farms as a humanisation process, which brought together the landed and the landless, the village farmers and the external social worker. They had created new and experimental communities, which were models of what could be achieved with love and common sense.

The expansion of ASSEFA's work to other states namely Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Bihar proved critical to ASSEFA's subsequent progress. Firstly, it necessitated the restructuring of the organisation to enable it to cope with a much larger number of development projects spread over a vast geographical area. Secondly, it exposed the Bhoodan model to different environments; and when the model was inadequate, it forced ASSEFA to rethink.

Thus during the years from 1978 to 1985 ASSEFA gradually went through a period of policy review and experimentation which resulted in a transformation of its identity and outlook. There were perhaps three major aspects of transformation.

The first aspect of change was a gradual switchover from farm-based to village-based development. This happened sometimes through the process of the work on the existing farms reaching out to the villages within whose boundaries they were located, as well as to adjacent villages mainly through the establishment of secondary programs such as schools, small industries and other economic activities.

Secondly, there was an expansion in the scope and nature of its work. The first Sarva Seva School had opened in 1978 and by 1983 there were 15 full time primary schools operating in Tamil Nadu, each employing two teachers and catering to groups of 30 to 80 children. These were administered by a separate school's section called *Sarva Seva Education Trust*.

In the meantime, experimentation with village-based industries including groundnut sweet making, oil pressing, cardboard manufacturing, leather works, etc., was also carried on. Health development also became an aspect of its work and two village-based educational health programs were initiated. Animal husbandry programs were also taken up to offer supplementary income to the farmers. Besides, the development of degraded land through forestry and indigenous techniques to prevent soil erosion were practised. Housing programs were also initiated in certain projects where its necessity was felt.

In addition to overseas aid, reasonable resources were started to mobilise from the local and government development initiatives were also harnessed to a larger degree. Banks were approached to take up economic programs, often with government subsidy being provided under the IRDP. In the mean time, ASSEFA started to co-operate with AFPRO and PRADAN in the watershed management and management staff recruitment respectively.

The third broad area of change occurred in ASSEFA's structure. Majority of the staff associated with ASSEFA's programs had been recruited from within the Sarvodaya movement. However, the expansion of ASSEFA's program made it necessary to recruit from outside the movement both because of the volume of work demanded it and because, as ASSEFA diversified, it needed expertise beyond the capacity of the existing staff. Thus ASSEFA absorbed an increasing number of field specialists. These are people who, under the community development program, have a greater training than implementation role. Health workers, generally qualified in either community health or health education have to build up a local team or midwives and health animators, from among the village people to educate and serve their own village. The principle is applied to in other fields: ASSEFA has teachers, women's development workers, agriculturalists, veterinary workers, industry specialist, engineers, community accountants, adult educators, bio-gas technicians and even beekeepers and plumbers on the project staff. They have their own specific role, but are not isolated from other project work.

ASSEFA's approach to the integrated village development was very cautious. It did not necessitate doing everything at once; rather, it allowed the community to set the agenda for change, identifying specific problems on which to act. This kind of approach not only did this make development more relevant to the village situation, but it also allowed the resources available to be allocated rationally and economically.

VISION OF SUSTAINABILITY

With the experiences gained from the past, ASSEFA realised that development was a long-term process and could not be hurried to make the project sustainable. The injection of external capital and demonstration of a technique of common decision making, could not hope, in a short space of time, to bring about a caring and self-sufficient society, which was economically and socially strong. Hence, to achieve village self-reliance, a new working strategy was evolved which effected five distinct stages of growth for each project. The strategy saw a typical project as a partnership between ASSEFA and the people, which was to last between 7 and 13 years. It would start, tentatively, with a process of *communication*, and then by *experiment and action*, would evolve gradually into a *substantial development program*, whose achievements would be *consolidated by repeated practice*, eventually leading to its spread by *demonstration to the surrounding area*.

The concept of long-term development process was put into practise in 1984 through Planning cum Micro realisation (PcMR) program under which 10 new projects were identified for exploration for development potential by small teams of workers. During the process, ASSEFA realised the advantages of working with an area approach rather than focusing on a single project village. In addition to a phased approach in terms of time, therefore ASSEFA started to phase its projects in terms of area development. The success of first village in an area became a model for others to follow. As project expanded, adjacent villages under the program were formed into clusters allowing one or two community workers to concentrate on that

area. As more clusters were taken up the project progressed to block development status.

WORKING STRATEGY

Community centred approach is the working strategy of ASSEFA towards achieving its goal. The formation of Gram Sabhas (village assembly) in the adopted villages was the key structure in deciding the agenda for changes in the respective villages. The agenda, which mainly focuses on the strengthening of the existing social, economical and cultural condition forms the base for development.

Based on the individual agenda, the people in the village are formed into different functional forums. At present, there exist functional forums like agriculture to concentrate on agricultural promotion, Dairy to promote dairy development, Artisans group to look after artisans needs, women self-help groups to serve their special interests, Health to attend to health aspects, Education to monitor education programs and so on in the ASSEFA projects. It is not necessary that all functional forums subsist in a village. Based on their need, agenda will be placed before the Gram Sabha and the necessary forums will be formed subsequently.

Nidhi Foundation, a people's financial structure, completely managed by people themselves, is created in each village for resource management. The members of different forums in that village will also become the members of Nidhi Foundation. The project funds distributed through gram Sabhas are being collected back in the Nidhi Foundation and used as recycling resources. In addition, the savings among the members of different forums are pooled in the Nidhi Foundation to meet their immediate and economic needs. Besides Nidhi Foundations ASSEFA has floated a non-commercial people bank, Sarva Jana Seva Kosh, the objective of this being to safeguard and mobilise the resources of Nidhi Foundations.

To ensure maximum capitalisation of the economic activities, the beneficiaries of the various economic programs have started marketing outlets. The products produced from village cottage industries like agarbathi, camphor, carpentry & blacksmith manufactures of steel furniture, chappal, cashewnuts, processed honey, match box, etc were better marketed through Sarva Seva Gramodhyog Samithi (SSGS), a non-profit trust, registered under K.V.I.C, Govt of India. Besides, ASSEFA Dairy Development Federation has been recently started by the women dairy forum members, procure milk from the members, process it and sell the hygienic milk for better prices. Similarly, the members of the housing forum have started a company, Sarva Seva Habitat Promotion Ltd., to ensure hygienic habitat to their members at low cost. In addition, it renders services in repairing the existing houses.

Thus, ASSEFA has been alive to these principles and has been directing its development activities towards building up the community activating it and strengthening it. It has promoted community organisations at the village level like Gramsabha, which directs the development action in the village. Functional forums have also come up to attend to the sectoral interest of the people. Village capital fund has been instituted by savings and contribution and this fund is channelled through a single organisation called village Nidhi Foundation wherein all people's organisations are represented. Specific self-help groups are also functioning to cater to their specific interest. Intermediate committees/forums have also been formed to monitor program, which apply to more than one village. The village Nidhi Foundations are integrated with Sarva Jana Seva Kosh to look into over all credit programs of the area.

GENDER EQUATION

ASSEFA has been, in its rural development strategy, giving more attention to gender equality, since its beginning, to unfold the bias and to make them as a reckoning figure in the society. It has been organising women groups and creating awareness among them the benefits of collective action. It is also implementing certain programs exclusively for women. The steps like } organisation of women self-help groups } Awareness building and skill development training } promotion of literacy } restriction of the family size and lessening the family burden } security measures against health hazards } maternal care } special emphasis on girls education by offering special facilities } running of separate women development projects in partnership with international and state associations } eluding the women from their natural psychological inhibitions through participation in the various meetings, forums, seminars and workshops } exposure visits } easy access to resource and } mobilisation of resources for credit exclusively for their economic improvement through linkages with RMK and so on are some of the highlights of ASSEFA's effort to empower women.

Besides, ASSEFA is proposed to provide a novel program to benefit women member through social security scheme in the form of social pension. If a member of dairy forum gets involved herself in supplying milk with ASSEFA Dairy Development Federation for certain period, she will get a pension for life long. In addition, she could nominate a women/girl in her family to get pension after her. Hence all these programs are framed to improve the economic status of the women and through which it aims to empower women.

STEPS AHEAD

ASSEFA has been making tremendous efforts to ensure three basic concerns of human being - survival, security and dignity specially for the rural sectors. Based on these, activities to improve economic, social and cultural conditions are being implemented. To bring stability and sustainability to these programs, strong people's structural organisations like *Sarva Jana Seva Kosh* to provide management services to the credit programs, *Sarva Seva Gramodhyog Samithi* to look after the income generation activities and providing linkages to the production units, *Sarva Seva Education Trust* to monitor education programs, *ASSEFA Dairy Development Federation* to provide sophisticated marketing arrangements for dairy production and *Sarva Seva Habitat Promotion Ltd* to attend to housing activities are established. ASSEFA's aim is to accelerate the process of self-management at the village level, which would demonstrate the self-rule by the villages. The other institutional infrastructures at the top level indicated above will only render external services required by the community to stabilise their activities.

Community Based Organisations

<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Nos.</i>	<i>Members</i>
Nidhi Foundations		
Women Self Help Groups	25923	4,16,148
Dairy Groups	814	

Housing Groups		
Education	___ Schools	42480Children



ASSEFA COVERAGE

States covered under development Projects	...	8
Blocks covered under Projects	...	102
Villages covered	...	7112
Family coverage	...	5,57,278

PROGRAM APPROACH AND THRUST - I

PROGRAM	TARGET POPULATION	APPROACH	MAJOR INITIATIVES
ECONOMIC PROGRAMS			
Agriculture	Small and marginal farmers	Watershed management	Soil and water conservation, land reclamation, crop inputs, well deepening, irrigation facilities, dry land farming, pasture development, disseminating the art of organic farming and horticulture, agro services centres, seed banks, credit for crop inputs, bullocks, etc.
Animal Husbandry	Specially earmarked for women.	Enhancing supplementary/ income, nutrition, etc.	Upgradation of milch animals, goatery, poultry, fishery, piggery, fodder growing, centralised marketing infrastructures for milk and decentralised marketing for other animals products like egg, poultry, goatery, etc.,
Rural Industry	Landless, Women and rural youth	Centralised marketing, decentralised production	Fibre and yarn based handicrafts, spinning, weaving, pottery, leather industries, oil extraction, black smithy, match box, gem cutting, camphor, milk products & agarbathi making, turkey towel making, grocery, etc. Established Sarva Seva Gramodyog Samithi for managing credits and promoting the above activities through proper marketing.
Social Credit	To adopted communities	Decentralised community oriented micro financial system to benefit the communities	Village revolving fund (capital base), savings among women groups and children, school corpus fund for future school operation, linkages with Govt bodies like RMK, Banks for credit facilities. Established Nidhi foundation and Sarva Jana Seva Kosh for resource mobilisation and its safety.

PROGRAM APPROACH AND THRUST - II

PROGRAM	TARGET POPULATION	APPROACH	MAJOR INITIATIVES
SOCIAL PROGRAMS			
Rural Education	Girls, boys in remote villages, Adult illiterates and child labourers	Holistic Development	Sarva Seva school program, Balwadies, Remedial Education to dropouts, Health Education, vocational training (ITI) and supplementary education to children of the Govt schools.
Health	Women and Children	Curative, preventive and promotive care, upgrading local skills	School Health check-ups, Training of Dais, immunisation, growth monitoring, supplementary nutrition, and promotion of sanitation and availability of portable water.
Housing	Earmarked for rural women	Construction of houses with child and women centred approach	Repairing the existing houses and constructing new houses owned by women. Established "Sarva Seva Habitat promotion Ltd" for promoting rural low cost houses for women.
Forestry and Energy	Village as a whole	Supply fuel-wood, fodder and timber	Farm forest, community forestry, social forestry, biogas, smokeless Chullhas, etc.
Social security and insurance	Women and rural communities	Social pension and compensation through insurance scheme	Social pension to women through dairy programs, insurance to cattle, crop and human through cattle promotion, crop protection and human health promotion schemes.
Skill Development	Various functional groups	Training in both theory and practice	Training to develop various entrepreneurial capabilities, teachers training, community health training, HRD training at various levels- village, cluster, and project level workers, etc.,