

ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2019 / MARCH 2020

AUROVILLE VILLAGE ACTION GROUP





MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTORS

Dear Readers,

We take great pleasure in sharing with you the annual report for 2019-2020. This year, apart from sustaining the activities in the four thematic areas - capacity building, community development, economic development, and psycho-social support, we focused on strengthening the capacities of the leaders at the grassroots level with the aim to empower the community-based institutions. Federation and Self Help Group (SHG) leaders were given specific training in financial literacy and leadership skills to perform better. Training events organized on 'civil rights and the roles and responsibilities of the public under the Panchayat Raj Act' were very useful to the participants to know their rights and duties.

AVVAI , a sustainable financial model for education and empowerment of girls, continues to support the daughters of the SHG members to pursue education. WDI .Inc also helps in financing the students from the most vulnerable families for higher education. During this year, we had a positive collaboration with the Indian Bank to benefit more families financially through the Self Help Groups.

AVAL , a social enterprise supported by our team, has added a new collection designed by an intern from NID (National Institute of Design). This year the unit also made its presence visible in more online and offline stores.

We continue to collaborate with various units of Auroville and community-based organizations in our area by mutually sharing the skills and experience for the benefit of the communities.

The Covid 19 pandemic has just started to show its presence in India and we do not know what is in store for India and our working area. We all keep our fingers crossed.

Our sincere gratitude for all you - donors, friends, and volunteers since it is the trust and support that you repose in us, that keeps us moving forward.

Anbu & Moris
Co-Directors



WHO WE ARE

Since our founding in 1983 we have a multifaceted holistic community development program through a network of various community-based organizations through a network of leaders, Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Federations, Paalam youth members, and the sports association. Members include more than 5,200 women in over 300 women's groups, 1,500 people in sports associations and men's groups, Paalam youth members, children, parents, government schools teachers as well as traditional/elected community leaders, panchayat, block, district, and state-level officials.



WHERE WE WORK

We are functioning in Vanur block of the Villupuram district, which is one of the most backwards districts in Tamil Nadu as per the State Human Development Report 2017. This is one of the bottom five districts of Tamil Nadu.

We operate in 34 panchayats and 75 settlements, in a radius of approximately 25 km around Auroville, integrating all sections of society; irrespective of caste, class, race & gender, with a shared dream of a sustainable future for all.

To date, we have impacted around 50% of the communities of the Vanur block and have developed into a reliable organization for positive change, fostering socio-economic development through democracy-building and social advocacy.



★ Villupuram district

WHAT WE DO

We offer strategic services in the areas of **Capacity Building, Economic Development, Community Development and Psychosocial Services** to promote integrated development and empowerment of individuals and communities, with a focus on women and other marginalized groups.

Our emphasis is not on charity or service, but co-development with villagers to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to build a better future for all.



Community Development

This program is built on the values of Unity, Equality, and Harmony. We strive to foster an atmosphere of solidarity, and ownership among the people through various interventions. We are providing novel programs and opportunities to over 6,500 women and men, members of Self Help Groups (SHG) and Community based Organisations to grow and expand their skills. Self Help Groups (SHG's), federation leaders, sports persons, students, elected and traditional leaders, and teachers in the working area are encouraged to become collectively responsible to organize themselves, co-create, and to implement positive solutions in their villages.

Empowerment

Health Camps

Summer Camps

Awareness Camps

**Community
Celebrations**

Inter-caste Exchanges



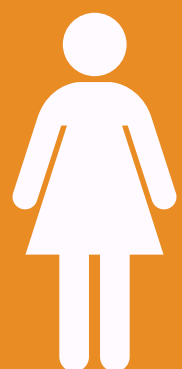
2090 women participated in **8** women seminars

41 medical camps benefited **2219** people



457 women participated in **17** Udhayam Women's Federation meeting

64 women participated in the training to women's federation and leaders
Panchayat governance & Grama Sabha



977 women participated in **30** inter-caste exchanges



302 women participated in the Women's Day celebration at AVAG

255 women participated in the Pongal celebration



6 eye camps benefited **474** people



35 women participated in **4** focus group discussion for single women

48 children participated in the summer camp

EXCHANGE PROGRAM



Our unique exchange programs provide a setting for discussion between groups that traditionally would have no or little opportunity to interact with each other. These interactions are aimed at overcoming the prejudices that are endemic to India, such as viewing the Dalit Community (called before “untouchable”) or assigned castes” as polluting.

The importance of these exchanges is seen in a set of common results:

- New friendship and inter-community relationships formed
- knowledge and understanding replace mistrust and myths
- women for women and not women of different castes.

"I have always wanted to be able to take care of people and work together, be able to express the energy towards my work. The exchange program gives me a chance to do so. We share problems with each other, and are able to feel the power of unity. After participating in this program, I don't feel that other women are strangers. I feel like they are my sisters." **Lakshmi, Kottakarai**



MEDICAL CAMPS



Health camps are organized in the villages with the support of the local people. This year the Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) collaborated with us to offer weekly and monthly camps in the villages. These camps have benefited thousands of people, particularly the women, aged, and the marginalized in different villages, since tests are taken and medicines are given free of cost. If there is a need for further investigation and treatment, it is given at PIMS hospital at zero cost.

EYE CAMPS

AVAG in collaboration with PIMS has conducted 6 eye camps to benefit 474 people, mainly to screen people for cataracts and other eye-related diseases. Spectacles were given at subsidized price and further surgery free of cost.



SUMMER CAMPS

Our annual five-week summer program was organized for children , age 12-17 years, from the Auroville bio-region. The participants were exposed to a wide range of activities to enhance their leadership and academic skills and social competencies. The topics covered include improving skills in language and mathematics, imparting basic computer skills, and providing awareness on, social evils like casteism, gender discrimination, and sexual abuse of children.

Children were made aware of environmental issues, menstrual hygiene management, children's rights and safety. Sessions were organized on career guidance, hygiene, nutrition workshops, public speaking, sports and physical movement, ATB (Awareness true the body), and yoga. The program also aimed to expose the children to new avenues that are beyond academic purposes, done by way of field visits to different Auroville units.

This initiative is a good opportunity for planting seeds for more environmentally sustainable and socially just practices among children, and in turn, their families. All-in-all, over 48 children benefited from this program.



48 Children participated in the
annual Summer Camp



WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION



Each year, AVAG organizes various events to celebrate International Women's Day as a women's empowerment activity. The program is planned by the women's federation network. The day is filled with lots of food, games and activities like Kabaddi, tug-of-war, race, dance, and much more. This year we planned the event in four parts; unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic we had to stop activities after the first event.

1 DAY SPORTS & DEBATING EVENT

As a continuation of women's day celebration, AVAG organized a 1 day sports and debating event. More than 300 women participated in various games and sports programs. Each year we choose a topic with the help of the women's federation members, which is a highlight for all of us involved.

This event enables the participants to improve their skills to think logically, communicate effectively, and respond to the situation spontaneously.



HAPPY PONGAL

Pongal is a traditional harvest and thanksgiving festival in south India and a very special festival for AVAG, and therefore it is celebrated with great fervor each year. The celebration begins at the AVAG office where women from over 300 Self Help Groups (SHG) come together, along with volunteers and representatives from Auroville, and participate in different games and cultural activities. As a symbol of solidarity, self help group come with a handful of rice and jiggery and come together to prepare pongal. In these celebrations widows and single women -who are otherwise a denied the opportunity to lead – are given the responsibility to organize.

"This is a day when we get to take a break from our daily chores and come together to play sports and participate in different cultural activities. I start my day by decorating my home and as a tradition, paint the horns of my cows."

Jayanti, Vasantapuram village.



Capacity Building

This program aims to expand social awareness and to nurture each individual's capacity for self-empowerment and skill development to build a better future. Members in our network participate in a series of seminars, workshops, training and meetings that are geared to equip the communities with the right tools and confidence to bring about the change they wish to see within themselves, their villages and society as a whole. Topics covered are water and waste management, disaster management, menstrual health, gender issues, healthy food habits or medicinal plants.

Problem solving

1994 Women participated in
177 Seminars

63 women participated in
different Trainings

Strengthening

Workshops Meetings

TRAINING ON PANCHAYAT GOVERNANCE & GRAMA SABHA

With the funding support of the Sustainable Livelihood Institute, AVAG offered 3 two-day workshops with 140 participants to the leaders of different CBOs that aimed to foster political and social empowerment by creating awareness about the Panchayat Raj Act. The training focused on the various provisions given in the act, like the sources of funding, powers, roles, and responsibilities of the elected leaders and the voters. This workshop explained in detail the importance of conducting gram Sabha meetings and participating in them. AVAG empowers the people to be informed and actively participate in such meetings to hold Panchayat leaders accountable for their decisions.

The workshop incorporated participatory learning tools such as games, stories, drama to simulate real-life situations and make the education meaningful.



AWARENESS PROGRAMS CIVIL RIGHTS & LIBERTIES



250
women participated

In Dec 2019, AVAG invited district-level key facilitators from the State Institute of Rural Development to hold a seminar on different Government schemes, such as housing schemes, welfare & life insurance schemes for women

SURVEY & SOCIAL RESEARCH ON WATER & DRAINAGE SITUATION

AVAG participated with Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical and Research (JIPMER) in conducting a survey on water and drainage situation in one of our working villages. Students of the institute were given orientation on the village reality and the staff of AVAG assisted the students in carrying out the survey.



MEETINGS

Strengthening meetings are held to support newly formed SHG's and those groups in need of additional or specific help in their activities. Members spend the day discussing the importance of unity, solidarity and co-operation within the group using interactive games and discussions facilitated by AVAG staff.

1994 women have participated in
61 strengthening meetings



FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION FOR SINGLE WOMEN

This year, with the support and guidance of Ms.Nalini, professor of the Social Work Department of Pondicherry University and an intern from the Department of Social Work, Pondicherry University, we undertook research on the conditions of single women in our bio-region. Four sessions were held covering around 35 single women.

Each session included 8-10 widows, women were were deserted, or spinsters.

Though we have not yet completed analyzing the data, the discussions were quite intense for us who led the sessions and helped us to better understand them and efficiently plan ways to support them.

It was heartening to see their help for each other. When quite a few women broke down in tears, others spontaneously came to comfort them. They were very open thanks to the trust they have in us as an organization.

UDHAYAM WOMEN'S FEDERATION



This is a body that represents the voices of the women in all the SHGs. They support the organization in making decisions related to the programs in the villages, more so for women. The federation also supports the organization in the effective execution and monitoring of the activities for women.

AVAG organizes regular yearly meetings for the leaders of the women's federation and training on topics like the Panchayat Raj Act, domestic violence against women and child sexual abuse.

NEW GROUPS FORMED

350 women's Self Help Groups formed with over

5500 women

250 men's Self Help Groups formed with over

850 participants

4580

Udhayam's Women Federation Members

350 general body members

40 executive committee members, and

9 office bearers.

Psychosocial Services

The aim of this program is to provide emotional and mental support, as well as to enhance the spiritual and physical health and wellbeing of each individual and the community. Furthermore, AVAG is providing training to the community members in counseling, de-addiction, and other specific therapies and facilitates between practitioners and clients. Healing sessions are offered to the traumatized and the families of alcoholics and are linked to de-addiction centres for treatment and rehabilitation

Art Therapy

De-addiction Services

Counselling

Yoga

Self-analysis

Workshops

HEALING THROUGH ARTS FOR AVAL WOMEN

“Whenever we make something with our hands, some deeper parts of ourselves are also included in that creation. Art can unite us all beyond words.” Krupa Jhaveri



As a part of our self- empowerment activity, we organized a training workshop in art therapy aimed at team- building, self-expression and knowing another culture through art. The training is conducted by the art therapist and Aurovilian, Krupa Jhaveri who is the director and founder of Sankalpa, a subunit of Thamarai , under the AVAG Trust. The day witnessed a variety of emotions and this workshop meant a lot for the participants, particularly to the social enterprise team. It was an occasion to be away from the daily routine, to gain a better understanding of others, share deep feelings in a safe environment, and to empathize with each other.

De-Addiction Services



AVAG offers specific services to combat Alcoholism: one of the biggest threats the local rural communities are facing.

12 rehabilitated and alcohol addicts attend weekly sessions for rehabilitation and support

100 participants

2 alcoholic de-addiction awareness programs

ALCOHOLIC ANONYMOUS ANNUAL DAY

We have discussed the prominent issue of alcoholism extensively with SHG members and are working to alleviate the problem in our member communities. To ameliorate the situation some SHG members are trained to spread awareness about treatment options, identify cases and send them for rehabilitation services to combat alcoholism, one of the biggest threats the local rural communities are facing.

We offer healing sessions to the traumatized and get the families of alcoholics linked to de-addiction centers for treatment and rehabilitation.

Economic Development

This program aims at financial inclusion and fair practices to increase economic opportunities and to strengthen the livelihood base of the communities through a sustainable approach of revolving funds and savings programs, as well as by providing access to flexible, ethical and people friendly financial institutions. A loan and repayment scheme provides thousands of people with an opportunity to access financial means.

Financial Inclusion

Revolving Funds

**Livelihood Skills
Training**

AVVAI Fund for Education

Social Enterprise



WSHG's **internal savings** came to **Rs. 78,04,1000**



3752 women helped to receive **loans** worth **Rs. 112,27,8800**



Rs. 63,47,7800 issued to **2102** women through
internal lending



683 women borrowed **Rs. 22,88,0000**
from **AVAG Revolving Fund**



Loan for Children's Education **Rs. 31,02,2000** to **1205** women



Rs. 20,59,4000 issued to **594** women to improve
housing



FINANCIAL INCLUSION - FUND FOR EDUCATION

AVVAI Access to education is a sustainable model revolving fund that aims to support underprivileged students from rural communities in our working area to pursue education, which would otherwise be out of their financial reach or too burdensome for the marginalized families.



This is being done through a revolving fund that ensures sustainability and provides a regular capacity to support students with the same need.

AVVAI Project started in 2015 with a two crore CSR grant from MSSL Motherson Sumi Systems Limited as a sustainable model of financial inclusion and continues allocating funds to low-income families to cover the expanding demand for affordable, easy access loans for girls' education. The loan and repayment scheme ensures a continuous opportunity to support future generations of girls in need, while the interest received from the repayments funds supplementary education programs.

This revolving fund program is managed in collaboration with the Udhyaam Women's Federation

This programme has initiated a shift in the social normative of preferential treatment towards girls.

FOCUS GROUP MEETING FOR SHGS ON FINANCIAL INCLUSION

The meetings are used to educate group members about the importance of savings, maintaining records, and verifying financial statements. Group members are made aware of different sources to formal credit that is available to them. Sessions on loan application procedures are conducted. Ethical and democratic processes within groups for sanctioning loans are also discussed and encouraged.

253
participants in 3 meetings



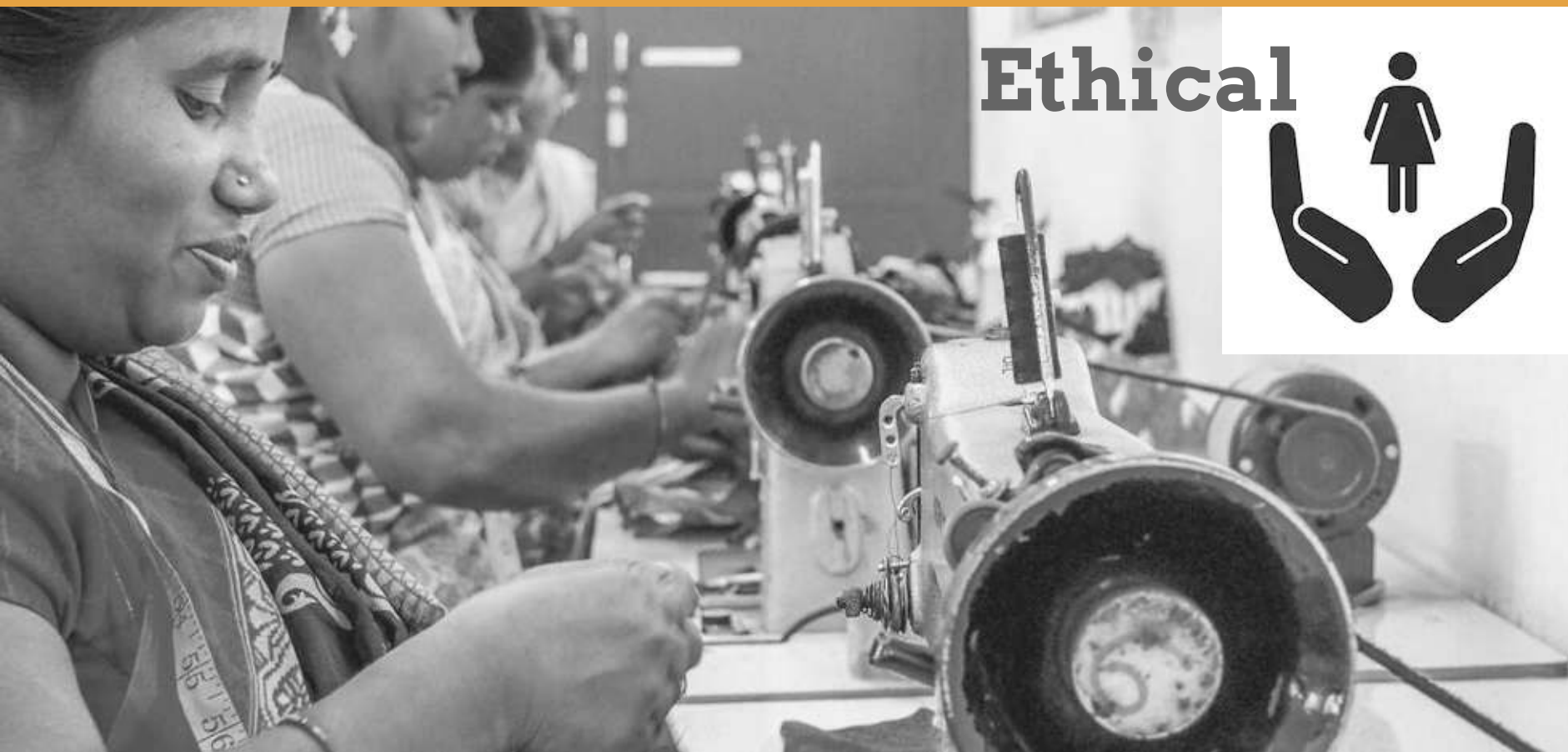
BANK GRADING



We organised and facilitated a meeting for 100 women from 5 different Self-Help-Groups to connected them with national banks to get loans for agriculture, housing, businesses and the purchase of land. Initial meetings were organized in the villages to listen to those women and review the loan request and to help with the applications. An amount of INR. 19,40,000 got approved for personal loans.

35 women benefit from this initiative

**Women
Empowerment
through livelihood
training**



Ethical



NEWS FROM AVAL

A social enterprise by women for the benefit of women



Sustainable

AVAL's vision has always been to empower female artisans from different rural villages, castes and religions to come together, support each others growth and to approach fashion in an integral and transparent way that considers both, people and the planet. AVAL is dedicated to ethical & sustainable practices and to create conscious, high quality fashion designs that are built to last.

GET INVOLVED

Become a Volunteer

Volunteers can help in countless ways from funding support to design & film making. Please email us directly if you would like to join our team as a volunteer. We encourage minimum volunteer periods of 3 months.



Become a friend

A friend can give support in many ways; You can wish us well and follow our progress through reading our newsletters and sharing your reflections. Financial contributions are always welcome, please visit our [Donate](#) page to know more about modes of contribution.



Become a Partner

As a Partner you'll be the one presenting AVAG or AVAL in your community, city or country, whether in the form of projects or products. We aim to spread our vision and to co-create to create a better world for all of us.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To beloved trustee Alain Bernard, the executives and the staff and volunteers who with their dedication and effort, make AVAG's work possible.

To the organisations that have contributed to our projects and have supported us this year, and our individual donors from around the world, your support means the world to us!

THANK YOU

AVAG ONLINE

Contact us at: avag@auroville.org.in

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