

Smt. Anne Ferrer
Recipient of the Award for Development and Welfare
of Women and Children - 2015

Born: April 10, 1947

Mrs. Anne Ferrer was born in England. She came to India and studied journalism in Mumbai. After marrying Mr. Vincent Ferrer, the couple moved to Ananthapuram, a chronic drought prone district in Andhra Pradesh, with a sole intent to serve the poorest of the poor in India. This led to the setting up the Rural Development Trust (popularly called RDT) in 1969.

Mrs. Anne Ferrer has been working in Ananthapuram district for over four decades. She speaks the local language and works tirelessly for the development of the women and children of the region and in building up strong leadership to fulfill the mission and vision of the organization in accordance with its guiding principles that constitute its DHARMA viz., 'concern for poor and needy', 'work beyond duty', 'pursuit of excellence in work' and 'reaching as many poor as possible'.

Since the very beginning RDT has been focusing on strengthening community-based organisations (CBOs) through a series of participatory capacity building trainings, both for the people and its team. Its impact is seen in the collective strength of Dalits, tribes, backward castes and rural poor, who jointly assert their rights and mobilize various resources and services for their welfare and development.

RDT works for the integrated development of marginalized sections viz. scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward castes and persons with disabilities in 3291 villages in 6 districts of Andhra Pradesh viz. Ananthapuram, Kurnool, Guntur and Prakasam of Andhra Pradesh and Mahaboobnagar and Nalgonda of Telangana State. There are over 10,281 Chenchu families with a population of 39,084 spread across 258 villages in Nallamala forest which are covered under RDT's integrated programs of development since 2010. With a modest beginning, the work has scaled up over the years; and extended continuous support to millions of rural poor families caught in the vicious cycle of poverty; and facilitated them to improve their quality of life and live with identity and human dignity.

Program interventions of the organization cover all the facets of development which include children's education and protection of their rights, women's empowerment, community and institution based rehabilitation (CBR/IBR) of persons with disabilities, community health including HIV/AIDS, community habitat, rural hospitals and ecological regeneration and environment development. Community Development Committees in the villages are sensitized and empowered through awareness workshops and capacity building trainings. The Committees are provided an access to socio-economic inputs and services, which enhances the involvement of poor rural communities as the main actors in their own development process. Some of the area of services rendered by RDT includes the following:

Access to Quality Health Care: RDT has set up three general hospitals and one hospital for infectious diseases. There are 17 rural health clinics. There are 105 hospital doctors and 15 field doctors. RDT has trained local women to be Community Health Workers (CHWs) in almost every village. The safe delivery project aims at providing an access to quality antenatal and post natal care with a special focus on anemia, nutrition, health education, identification of risk pregnancies, promoting institutional deliveries, and coverage of all eligible children and mothers under immunization. These grass-root health care services are provided by different categories of workers

from basic Community Health Workers (CHWs) to Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), staff nurses and doctors. More than 13,330 babies are delivered every year in the RDT hospitals.

Mrs. Ferrer has also initiated the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PTMTCT) of HIV project. This has facilitated reduction in vertical transmission of HIV from mothers to infants. RDT gives preference to women and girl children in health care referral services; and extends counseling, nutritional support and needed health care and legal guidance to women who are being subjected to violence or psychological harassment in the family and community. Counseling centers are set up to provide guidance, health check-ups and support to poor migrant women who are pushed into the sex trade.

There are over 1,553 nutrition care centers which provide supplementary nutrition to over 30,000 children in the age group of 0-4 years. Over 7,38,000 outpatients and 56,000 inpatients have availed the services of the RDT hospitals during 2014-15.

Community Managed Education System: RDT has been providing required facilitation and support to the members of Community Development Committees (CDCs) to independently manage and monitor over 3,028 supplementary schools in 2,801 villages providing additional coaching to children belonging to Dalits, Tribes and Backward Communities. RDT lays special emphasis on girls' education beyond primary education and it has so far provided bicycles to over 16,000 school girls for their continuity of education in secondary schools. Providing school materials, uniform, savings grant and coaching material by RDT, is also intended towards achieving 100% of enrolment and over 75% of retention of students at primary and secondary level.

Access to quality higher, professional & technical education: 2,566 meritorious students including 1,145 girls were enrolled under the education special scholarship scheme to pursue intermediate studies in colleges; and to further undertake professional/technical courses such as medicine, engineering, etc. during the years 2004-15. Financial assistance is also given to students who are not covered under special education scholarship scheme to pursue their higher, professional and technical courses. During 2014-15 a total of 47,361 students were provided higher educational grants.

Mrs. Ferrer ensures that sports/games and cultural events are also included in the development process of the rural children. There are over 60 rural students training in the hockey academy. With the support of Rafa Nadal Foundation over 104 boys and 68 girls are trained in tennis, computers and English language.

Youth development: RDT's Professional School for Foreign Languages trains boys and girls in English, French, German and Spanish language for addressing the demand of the competitive job market. This program not only provides job opportunities; but also helps build confidence, personality and develop communication skills in the individual. RDT volunteers from abroad come to teach the language to the students. RDT has also set up computer laboratories for the benefit of the children. More than 98% of those who successfully completed their training find jobs fetching decent salary in cities and thereby, help their families to come out of poverty.

Caring the special children: The special education and rehabilitation program supports children with disabilities. It also provides care, shelter, nutrition, education and medical facilities to those suffering from cerebral palsy; along with orthopedic support, physiotherapy, surgery support; and rehabilitation to poor children with disabilities. RDT runs special centers for the orphans; and

children who are sexually abused and HIV+ve infected. Over 1,200 children with disability are pursuing their special education and rehabilitation training at 17 residential centers, both in primary and secondary level run by RDT in 9 locations.

Emancipation and Empowerment of Rural Women: In the initial days, the participation of women hardly existed in all the programs that were introduced. It was a journey of a couple of decades for Mrs. Ferrer to get the women to speak up, come out of their houses, and sensitize them about the right to education and basic knowledge of healthcare for their children.

She enlightened them on safe child birth and institutionalized deliveries, health, hygiene, savings, income generation, etc. This resulted in starting of a special women sector in 1982 by Mrs. Anne Ferrer, which was intended for empowering the rural women. Organizing women into self-help groups (women sanghams) promoted solidarity; and increased their self-confidence and self-respect. They are trained in need-based vocational skills, in farm and non-farm sector and are also encouraged to manage their mini-banks.

8,122 Self Help Groups comprising 1,08,612 women are functioning up to the end of March 2015 and of them 7,444 SHGs in 1501 villages are managing their mini-banks independently. Mrs. Anne Ferrer's initiative facilitated rural women to meet their basic as well as emergency needs (E.g. health, children's education, etc.) without depending on others.

RDT has provided an access to Revolving Fund popularly called Women Development Fund (WDF) constituted by RDT covering women representing 7,769 SHGs in 1,550 villages. During 2014-15, as many as 17,291 women accessed WDF for various income generating schemes which include milch cattle, rams and petty businesses.

RDT has also been facilitating SHGs to carry out their livelihood with the help of skills acquired in vocational training centres. These include agarbathi, book binding, herbal phenol, sanitary napkins, kalamkari, embroidery and tailoring. Over 8,300 rural women own more than 10,000 milch cattle. These women have developed strong bonds and support each other on social and developmental issues, including battling for alcohol prohibition.

RDT has worked to ensure that women have a voice in governance and any issues that arise at the family, community, social and political level, and to strengthen them to participate equally with men. RDT has an exclusive core team of women which addresses and initiates programs for women and works towards enhancing their skills and confidence and thereby, ensuring participation and involvement in all activities.

Inclusive and Integrated Development of the People with Disability (PWDs): Around 26,116 PWDs, men and women are constituted into 2,122 Self Help Groups. They have an access to revolving fund to take feasible income generating activities either independently or with the support of their family members. Around 250 women with disabilities were trained in handicrafts and they produce jute, jewellery and other handicraft items made of eco-friendly materials, which are exported abroad and sold in India through exhibitions and shops. The beneficiaries are trained in technical and design skills for this activity. The groups also work on mobilizing government resources, and in advocacy of their rights and fighting against discrimination based on disability, gender and caste.

Service by the Community: Mrs. Ferrer's philosophy has helped develop a sense of social responsibility to carry out good action for others. For instance, the rural poor women and children are taking a lead role in Seva Hundi Movement. The concept of Hundi with a catchy slogan 'Spandinchu Sayam Andinchi' (Let your hearts respond and hands help) was introduced in a few

project villages in 2012 on an experimental basis, but it spread to over 1,00,000 families in over 2,000 villages. The spirit of this program positively influenced all sections of people, especially the rural poor, who with their little saving in their Hundis expressed their concern for those who are the poorest of poor and the neediest of needy. The amount contributed by people is being used for the education of orphaned children, nutritional support to Chenchu tribes and any other welfare and developmental needs.

Social Action Teams: In order to develop the social dynamics, Mrs. Ferrer's guidance has helped formation of such teams at village level. Around 405 social action teams with over 1,216 members are constituted in 405 villages. These teams support RDT in identification of persons, especially women in distress requiring counseling, rehabilitation, legal guidance and other support services in the villages where they work.

Community Habitat: Community habitat for the marginalized section is yet another area of service. Over 62,000 houses are constructed by RDT in the name of women; by involving housing beneficiaries and community development committees, to play a lead role at every stage of construction.

Team: RDT's team mainly comprises locals. It has over 2,204 employees and about 3000 volunteers. Mrs. Anne Ferrer strongly believes in team work. To develop this ability and level, the team is encouraged to attend various professional / management training courses, workshops and carry out extensive field work. The implementation of integrated programs for development is the responsibility of an area team leader who is in charge of 75-100 villages.

Mrs. Ferrer's vision and passion is to work for the disadvantaged and marginalized sections. This is reflected in all RDT's policies and programs. Ms. Anne Ferrer is an icon of nobility, humility and veracity. She is an epitome of love and care; and is a perennial source of inspiration to one and all. Today Mrs. Ferrer and RDT has touched and made a big difference to nearly every aspect of the lives of the people in Ananthapuram.

Awards and Publications: Mrs. Anne Ferrer is the recipient of the Isabel Ferrer Award for equality between men and women (Generalitat Valenciana) in 2005. The Spanish embassy in India felicitated her for her contribution to humanity. She is conferred the Graama Pragathi Puraskaram by the Dr. Pinnamaneni & Mrs. Seethadevi Foundation, Vijayawada and Ugadi Puraskar by the Government of Andhra Pradesh for her contribution to rural development. Mrs. Anne Ferrer has portrayed Mr. Ferrer's and her journey of life and work, in her book 'Expect a miracle and lots of hard work'.

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