



PRESS DOSSIER

Fundación Vicente Ferrer



VICENTE FERRER FOUNDATION-RURAL DEVELOPMENT TRUST

WHERE WE WORK

BENEFICIARIES: *DÁLITS*, TRIBAL GRUOPS AND BACKWARD CASTES

WHERE WE ACT

Housing
Health care
Education
People with disabilities
Women
Environment

HOW YOU CAN HELP

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

CONTACT THE VICENTE FERRER FOUNDATION

CONTACT THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT TRUST

THE VICENTE FERRER FOUNDATION IN SPAIN

The Vicente Ferrer Foundation (VFF) is an NGDO (non-governmental development organisation) committed to the process of transforming one of the poorest and neediest areas of the state of Andhra Pradesh in India, helping some of the most discriminated against people and those outside the Indian caste system: the *dalits*, tribal groups and backward castes.

The Foundation is a humanist organisation based on the philosophy of action. With his way of thinking and acting, Vicente Ferrer was able to transmit his commitment to eradicate inequalities and change minds while at the same time involving people in the Foundation's development. His way of perceiving development has given rise to an exemplary model within the framework of cooperation.

Vicente Ferrer's most outstanding legacy was to show us that to be supportive is to work for the common good. Solidarity is not only based on hands-on work with underprivileged communities, but is also tied to the sensitisation of society, and without this the change would not be significant.

THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT TRUST IN INDIA

Created in India in 1969, the Rural Development Trust's goal was to find solutions to the serious problems faced by the rural community of Anantapur. Since then it has functioned as a body which is well-established in the community, respectful of the environment and which promotes development taking place in the region.

A team of 2,500 people (99% of whom are Anantapur locals) is responsible for the development carried out by the organisation - the most innovative in India's history - covering 2,986 villages and benefiting more than two and half million people.



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THE VICENTE FERRER FOUNDATION IN SPAIN

In 1996 the Vicente Ferrer Foundation opened its first office in Spain to ensure a steady income and to give continuity to the projects in India.

Raising awareness and sensitising people in Spain to the need for continued development in Andhra Pradesh is its aim. Currently, the NGDO has its head office in Barcelona with seven regional offices across the rest of Spain.

Today, the development projects in Andhra Pradesh are funded by the contributions of more than 149,861 people; this means that the most underprivileged and the poorest in India can break away from the social marginalisation in which they live.

WHERE WE WORK

The Vicente Ferrer Foundation - Rural Development Trust works to carry out a comprehensive development programme in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, in the south-east of the country. After working for forty years in the district of Anantapur, the organisation has expanded its programme to new areas in the state of Andhra Pradesh such as the district of Kurnool. The goal is that day by day, more people living in abject poverty can benefit from these projects.

Andhra Pradesh has a warm, tropical climate with an average annual rainfall of about 940mm; this makes it the most arid state in the country, after the Rajasthan desert in the north. This lack of rain is even more manifest in Anantapur, one of the driest districts of the state with only 540mm of rainfall.

The harsh weather conditions which cause many droughts, limit the development of farming. Crops are at the mercy of water from the Pennar river, whose flow decreases every year, and the monsoon rains which fall, heavily, for two months preventing the subsoil from filtering it. The lack of water storage structures, erosion, high temperatures and few wooded areas are some of the aggravating circumstances for the low production and low fertility of the district's subsoil. Most people in the state of Andhra Pradesh depend, directly or indirectly, on farming. This unreliable situation therefore creates unstable incomes, price rises and in many cases, emigration to urban areas.



ANDHRA PRADESH

Area
276,574 km²

Approximate population
75,700,000 inhabitants

DISTRICT OF ANANTAPUR

Area
19,130 km²

Approximate population
4 million inhabitants

Population benefiting from the development programme
2.5 million

DISTRITO DE KURNOOL

Area
17,600 km²

Approximate population
3,5 million inhabitants

Population benefiting from the development programme
about 11,000 families

BENEFICIARIES: DALITS, TRIBAL GROUPS AND BACKWARD CASTES

Our communities

In India, society is organised around a rigid caste system linked to the Hindu religion. Each caste occupies a specific place within the social structure and this status is lifelong. Only through reincarnation, and according to one's moral path throughout one's life, can there be a change to a higher or lower caste. It is a hierarchical system and has been in place for centuries. In 1950 India's Constitution banned caste discrimination but the reality of change is slow and is not yet reflected in today's society. The Foundation works to improve the living conditions of the most underprivileged communities:

DALITS

This is the lowest rung on the caste system, so low in fact that they are considered to have no caste and throughout history they have carried out society's most servile and demeaning work. In rural India, *dalits* are a marginalised community, living apart from the rest of society, working as labourers. They are poorly and irregularly paid, which denies them access to decent living conditions.



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TRIBAL GROUPS and BACKWARD CASTES

Since 2005 and with the goal of giving additional impetus to the development programme, the Vicente Ferrer Foundation - Rural Development Trust has expanded its work to tribal groups and members of so-called backward castes; very humble people suffering blatant marginalisation and poverty.

CHENCHU TRIBES

The Foundation is in the first phase of work with Chenchu tribes. These people live in the central forests of Andhra Pradesh, where until now they survived and found sustenance. Due to the diminishing forest area and the depletion of natural resources, their already precarious situation has worsened. Currently this group has the highest poverty rate of the entire state of Andhra Pradesh. Initially, the Foundation has given them medical assistance to reduce the alarming mortality rate and education to lower the high illiteracy rate of these tribal groups.

WHERE WE ACT

Setting in motion a change which will give long-term solutions and which will contribute to the eradication of poverty requires work in the following areas:

Health care: Improving access to health and therefore quality of life for the most underprivileged communities in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Housing: Improving quality of life via access to a home, allocation and better infrastructure of basic services.

Education: Ensuring access to quality education and its continuation at all levels.

People with disabilities: Fostering of equal living conditions, rights and opportunities for the disabled within the community.

Women: Fostering of gender equality in all areas of development in which the VFF is present.

Environment: Stopping the devastating desertification from which some of the districts in Andhra Pradesh suffer and to convert these areas into cultivatable land in order for the people to support themselves.



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Health care: Improving access to health care and therefore better quality of life for the most underprivileged communities in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

In order to overcome the difficulty of access to health care faced by those living in rural India, the Foundation has created a programme offering health services to the inhabitants of the most remote areas. To do this, aside from an extensive network of general hospitals in Kalyandurg, Bathalapalli and Kanekal, the Foundation has a paediatric hospital and a centre for those affected by HIV. To cover the most faraway country areas, there are 20 Rural Clinics and a network of trained medical personnel to attend to basic medical needs in each village has been set up. The aim is to guarantee access to quality health care for as many people as possible. Currently, the Foundation's health care programme treats an average of 48,132 people a month via its rural network and its general and specialised hospitals.

Linking a rural health care network for maximum health coverage

Rural Prevention Groups are visits by doctors from various departments of the VFF to rural areas to attend to communities in the most remote villages. These Rural Prevention Groups are vital for the early detection of cases which can be cured if diagnosed in time. Thus, they also aim to take health care to the most faraway communities whose inhabitants do not have the possibility of travelling all the way to a hospital.

Community Health Workers, Rural Nurses and Rural Clinics make up a rural health care network to attend to underprivileged groups. Community Health Workers visit a total of 1,353 villages.

Construction of health care infrastructures

The foundation has three general hospitals in Kalyandurg, Bathalapalli and Kanekal which are complemented by other specialised centres such as the paediatric hospital or the Help and Care Centre for People with HIV/Aids, both in Bathalapalli. All these hospitals work in conjunction with the network of personnel on the ground and with the Government's general health plan. Despite the fact that these hospitals are in rural areas, the service offered is of the highest quality and equal to that usually found only in large cities.

Training of health care workers

In August 2004, given the lack of health care professionals in Anantapur, the Foundation set up a nursing school at this hospital centre. Since then, 40 nurses have completed their studies. The three and a half year long course entails studies in science, biology and nursing and these are complemented with other subjects such as economics, administration and english.



© Juan Alonso/VFF

Once the course has been completed, the students commit themselves to working at one of the Foundation's hospitals for a minimum of two years. This commitment helps the newly graduated nurses by giving them a job while at the same time ensuring that the Foundation can count on them for a certain period of time.

Given the success of this programme, the Foundation has recently expanded its facilities to take in more students.

Nutrition programme

In every village, four mornings a week, each community's Health Care Worker hands out eggs and ragi for children under four, pregnant women and those in HIV or tuberculosis programmes. The Foundation has been offering this nutritional support for more than ten years in order to prevent illnesses, especially in the case of children.

Vaccination campaigns

The Health Sector carries out numerous vaccination campaigns in collaboration with the Indian Government: tuberculosis, polio, triple vaccine, measles, hepatitis B and doses of vitamin A to prevent blindness in children in the 0 to 6 age range. These immunisation programmes help to prevent many serious physical and mental illnesses by simply administering the right vaccination.

Housing: Improving quality of life via access to a home, allocation and better infrastructure of basic services.



© Alex Oltra/VFF

India is a mainly rural country with 74% of the population (about 894 million people) living in rural areas in a total of 108 million houses. As a result of these high numbers, the shortfall in housing in these areas has increased to 14.9 million (2001 census).

To cover the needs of those requiring it most, the VFF has focused its energy to ensure decent housing with good hygienic and basic conditions for *dalits*, backward castes, tribal groups, people with disabilities and victims of natural disasters.

In the space of 40 years the VFF has built homes for 43,118 families. The Housing Sector is also in charge of basic infrastructure for community development such as the creation of multi-purpose halls, classrooms in public schools and water supply systems. In addition, it builds the VFF constructions such as hospitals, regional offices, residential schools, etc.

Education: Ensuring access to quality education and its continuation at all levels.

Education is a fundamental right upon which many other human rights hinge. According to UNICEF it contributes to better quality of life and helps eradicate the cycle of poverty and illness, paving the way for sustainable development.

The projects of the Education Sector, which began in 1978, encompass not only primary and secondary education but also higher and professional learning. It aims to increase literacy levels, reduce early dropping out of school, ensures quality education and safeguards gender equality in the classroom. Currently almost 99% of *dalit* children in the 2,433 villages in the Anantapur district are enrolled in primary school.



© Albert Uriach/VFF

The overall goal of this sector is ensuring access to quality education and its continuation at all levels. To achieve this it has nine specific objectives:

- Keep all levels of primary school attendance at 100%.
- Ensure continuity from primary to secondary school studies.
- Improve conditions for secondary school studies.
- Encourage studies at university, higher and professional levels.
- Increase university access for *dalit*, tribal and backward caste students.
- Equal gender literacy rates.
- Motivate school dropouts to return to school.
- Carry out extracurricular activities among students.
- Ensure the participation and ability of the CDC (Community Development Committee) to manage and control their children's' education independently of the VFF.

People with disabilities: Fostering of equal living conditions, rights and opportunities for the disabled within the community.

As a result of harsh living conditions for people in rural regions, the number of those with disabilities is particularly high in the areas of Andhra Pradesh where the Vicente Ferrer Foundation - Rural Development Trust operates. Poverty has become both the cause and the consequence of disability in India.

The number of people with disabilities in India is anywhere between 40 and 90 million people depending on either Government estimates or those of other non-governmental sources. Due to little access to economic self-sufficiency, these people have traditionally had very few possibilities to develop personally and socially given the discrimination against them by their communities and even their own families.

The general goal of this sector is to foster equal living conditions, rights and opportunities for the disabled within the community. To achieve this it has four specific objectives:

- Motivate the integration of people with disabilities into the community.
- Ensure access to education for all people with disabilities, regardless of what type.
- Improve access to health care and other basic services for people with disabilities.
- Increase economic and family independence for people with disabilities.



© Jesús Gutiérrez /VFF

Thus, the actions that drive the VFF have five central themes:

- Empowerment for people with disabilities via processes which allow the development of individual and collective awareness of the power and rights which they have.
- Sensitisation of society on the right of integration for people with disabilities, encouraging equal opportunities and eliminating barriers.
- Sectoral transversality within the Foundation via the fostering and inclusion of the Sector for People with Disabilities in other active sectors of the Foundation.
- Integration of people with disabilities within their own communities and as part of their families.
- Networking with other organisations and the Government to create synergies with other initiatives and services which are developed.

Women: Fostering of gender equality in all areas of development in which the VFF is present.

According to the 2001 census, women make up 48% of India's population. They are the mainstay of society, family economies and vital for the continuity of values and traditions. Women who belong to the lowest castes such as the *dalits* are "doubly" discriminated against for their gender and social position.

Despite the fact that legislation embraces gender equality and is against the discrimination of women, the truth is that socially and economically this is far from reality in India. In 1982 the Vicente Ferrer Foundation - Rural Development Trust began a women's development programme with the aim of increasing the role of women in society via education and women's' associations.

The main goal of this sector is to foster gender equality in all areas of development in which the VFF-RDT is present.

To achieve this it has five specific objectives:

- To increase the socio-economic level of women
- Encourage access to education for women and girls.
- Ensure access for women to professional and vocational training to create job opportunities.
- Combat abuse against women.
- Create visibility for the role of Indian women as agents of change and social transformation.

To do this, the actions that drive the VFF have three central themes:

- Empowerment of women via processes which allow the development of individual and collective awareness of the power and rights which they have.
- Transversality of gender with a holistic approach in all the actions we carry out to tackle the causes of inequality.
- A comprehensive approach which includes working with men; this is fundamental to achieve real change in the path to equality.



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Environment: Stopping the devastating desertification from which some of the districts in Andhra Pradesh suffer and convert these areas into cultivatable land in order for the people to support themselves.

The average annual rainfall in the district of Anantapur is practically half of that in the rest of the state of Andhra Pradesh. Anantapur's proximity to the equator and its high temperatures have made the area in which the Vicente Ferrer Foundation - Rural Development Trust works a semi-arid zone, the second driest in all of India.

In a district where 75% of the population depends on agriculture, droughts have a devastating impact among the poorest levels of society. Thus, in 1969, the Foundation implemented a long-term environmental development plan which includes fundamental approaches to ensure the future of the region's families.

The general goal of the Environmental Sector is to stop the devastating desertification from which some of the districts in Andhra Pradesh suffer and convert these areas into cultivatable land in order for the people to support themselves.

To do this there are three specific objectives:

- Foster an increase in the yield of the land to improve the living conditions and incomes of peasant families.
- Achieve an environmental equilibrium to ensure a natural balance of resources, flora and fauna.
- Establish a network of structures to allow the replenishment of aquifers for efficient water management and the creation of cultivable areas.

Thus, the actions that drive the VFF have two central themes:

- Encouragement of respect for Nature and for participation in environmental biorhythms.
- Active community participation in all self-sustainable projects.



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Colaboración Activa: Vicente Ferrer Foundation - Rural Development Trust Fair-trade

Colaboración Activa is the name for the Vicente Ferrer Foundation's - Rural Development Trust fair-trade programme whose aim is to combat the severe discrimination faced by *dalit* women with disabilities in Anantapur (Andhra Pradesh).

Via Colaboración Activa we offer another way to be supportive: a responsible trade cycle in which the final buyer shows a social, cultural and human commitment.

Fair-trade and the Vicente Ferrer Foundation - Rural Development Trust

In 2001 the Foundation set up its first residential workshops in Anantapur (Andhra Pradesh) for *dalit* women with disabilities to receive training in a craft activity.

At the workshops they also receive basic education, medical check-ups, integration and stable employment for the entire year.

131 women with disabilities currently make up the programme. They make jute, paper maché and hand embroidered items, do sewing, make jewellery and objects with araconut (pressed palm leaves).

Since they began working and receiving a salary, the lives of these women have changed; their self-esteem has increased as has their social standing.



© Mireia Salvador/VFF

A responsible trade cycle

With Colaboración Activa we offer an alternative way of being supportive: a trade cycle begins when a woman with a disability is given a job for which she receives fair payment and social recognition, ending with the purchase by the final customer.

The profits from the sale of Colaboración Activa items are reinvested directly back into the programme.

Our craft workshops

We bring together and organize disadvantaged groups of women to consolidate them as producers.

We pay a good salary in line with the socio-economic reality of the region.

The women who work in the workshops are given programmes on nutrition, rehabilitation, home economics, hygiene and health.

We respect the environment through the use of natural materials.

We cut out the middle man

We send profits from sales back to India to reinvest in the projects. The Vicente Ferrer Foundation - Rural Development Trust provides the workshops with the best means and infrastructure possible and the workers put in their time, effort and enthusiasm.

Shops

To encourage fair-trade Colaboración Activa cycles, the Vicente Ferrer Foundation - Rural Development Trust offers products to shoppers at their fair-trade and on-line shops.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Sponsor a child

Find out how your €18 a month contributes to improving their living conditions, their family and the entire community. Via photos, letters and drawings you will see these changes and of those around them. We also invite you to travel to Andhra Pradesh to meet your sponsored child personally.

Support a women's group

Help to change the situation for the women in India who suffer a dual discrimination: gender and caste. Your €9 a month will be part of a savings programme, managed by a group of women who will send you photos and share their progress with you.

Become a member or collaborator

Decide which type of membership is right for you to help the communities in Andhra Pradesh. Your donations will be allocated by the community for the project they consider best: the construction of schools, houses, hospitals or reservoirs, training women, upkeeping homes for children with disabilities, etc.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Annual Report Fundación Vicente Ferrer 2009

<http://www.fundacionvicenteferrer.org/es/sites/default/files/adjunto/publicaciones/VFF%20memoria%2009.pdf>

2011 Anantapur magazine

<http://www.fundacionvicenteferrer.org/es/sites/default/files/adjunto/publicaciones/revista-atp-2011.pdf>

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