

# **Disaster Management and Training: Two Decades of Service to the Nation**

## *Sri Sathya Sai National Disaster Management Mission*

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### **Introduction**

Every year, natural and man-made disasters leave a trail of destruction, disease and suffering around the world. Often, there is no advance notice of the impending disaster, and even when there is some notice – as in the case of cyclones and floods – there is little that can be done to prevent the disaster. Large numbers of people and animals in the area or path of destruction become helpless victims. Government and non-government agencies are required to be in a disaster-preparedness mode to immediately mitigate the suffering caused by such disasters.

For nearly two decades, *Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, India (SSSSO)* has been one of the major pan-India organisations engaged in building capacity to respond to disasters, as well as being one of the first responders to various humanitarian crises arising out of disasters in the country. Since 2002, SSSSO has conducted field operations across India to alleviate human suffering during disasters. Some of the major ones include the Tsunami off the Indian Ocean coast in 2004, earthquakes in Gujarat and Sikkim (2011), floods in West Bengal (2017) and Kerala (2018), and frequent cyclones in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh (2013, 2015, 2019).

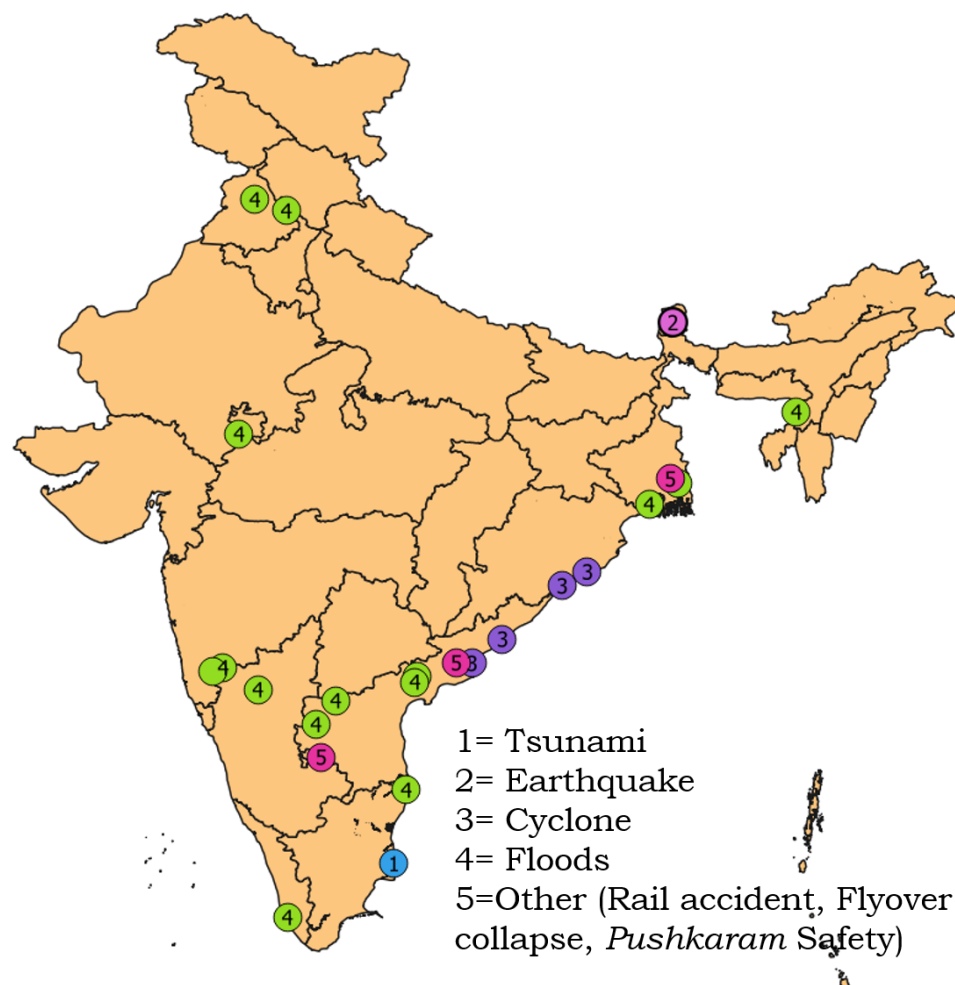
The precursor to these rapid responses was the massive cyclone that battered Andhra Pradesh in 1977. Sri Sathya Sai Baba had then instructed the Seva Dal volunteers of SSSSO, Andhra Pradesh, to cut short his birthday celebrations in November and ‘rush to work’ to help those affected. Such relief and rescue operations in villages and districts laid the foundation of competencies required for the Disaster Management initiative launched subsequently by SSSSO.

In order to be prepared with a trained volunteer team to quickly respond to such emergencies, SSSSO has worked continuously to train citizens – both women and men – across the length and breadth of the country. The training sessions span both Disaster Management (DM) and Disaster Awareness (DA). DM sessions typically train members of Sri Sathya Sai *Samitis*, whereas DA sessions have been held in a variety of institutions like colleges, government offices, and police units.

The Disaster Management Initiative of SSSSO formally came into existence in 2001 on the instructions and inspiration of Sri Sathya Sai Baba who pointed

out in the context of the Gujarat Earthquake, ‘*We are able to do relief activities, but it would be better if we do rescue activities also.*’ The Disaster Management Training Modules were developed with Baba’s guidance. He also pointed out after the Tsunami in Tamil Nadu (2004) that it would be better if only trained volunteers are deployed. Thus began a concerted mission that led to the training of more than 1,00,000 volunteers across India in the last 20 years.

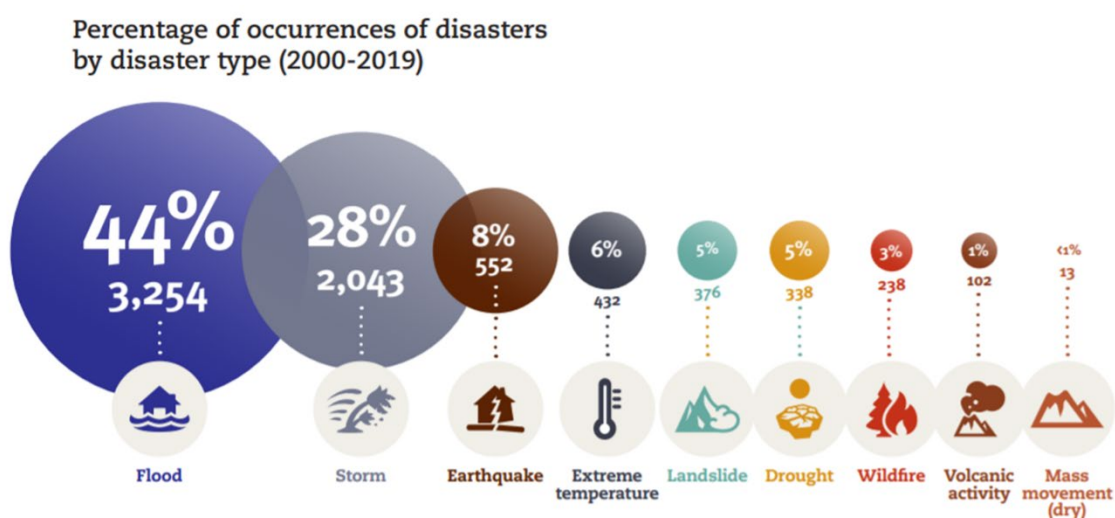
This note is an attempt to document the two decades of work across India that SSSSO has accomplished, serving hundreds of thousands of distressed citizens in the process; and, importantly, creating a group of trained volunteers (*Seva Dals*) to serve in the event of future disasters. The featured stories highlight the planning, training, coordination, and selfless service of the trained *Seva Dals* deployed to serve in several major disasters across India. The training initiative highlights SSSSO’s collaborations and partnerships with various agencies including government, non-government, and educational institutions – to ensure that citizens are adequately trained to assist in disaster management.



**Figure 1: Major Disasters in which SSSSO served actively to manage the aftermath (2002-2019)**

## Disaster Management – Context and Importance

Natural disasters cause immense damage to life and property around the world. A recent report jointly released by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the Centre for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) outlines the enormity of such losses in the last 20 years. The report is based on CRED's Emergency Database called EM-DAT and lists 7,348 major disasters worldwide between 2000 and 2019. These disasters have affected the lives of 400 crore people and caused more than ten lakh deaths. Most of the events were floods and storms (including typhoons, hurricanes/cyclones).



**Figure 2: Classification and Occurrences of Disasters**  
(Source - UNDRR-CRED Report 2019)

According to the report, there has been a 134% increase in the number of floods occurring between 2000 and 2019 compared to the period between 1980 and 1999, and a 40% increase in the number of storms for the same period. Such increases are attributed to an increase in global average temperatures by 1.1 Celsius over the last few decades. (It usually takes a millennium for an increase in global average temperature of about 1 degree Celsius.) It is estimated that global temperatures may rise up to 3 degrees Celsius in the coming decades leading to extreme weather events, and a majority of the disasters categorized above. These numbers are a reminder that disaster events like floods and cyclones are not only here to stay, but they will also occur more often than we have seen in the past. Scientists predict that, as water vapour in the atmosphere increases due to global warming, it may precipitate storms and hurricanes of higher intensity, including wetter monsoons in Asia.

India, with 321 disaster events between 2000 and 2019, was third in the world with only China and the United States experiencing higher numbers of

disasters (577 and 467 respectively). A majority of the 321 disasters in India were hydrological (floods) and meteorological events (storms). China and India together accounted for 70% of the globally disaster-affected people in this period (280 crores). The UN has estimated that India lost about \$80 billion due to natural disasters during the twenty-year period from 1998 to 2017.

With the inevitability of such disasters striking at regular intervals, the focus worldwide has been on mitigation of the effects of such disasters. At the third UN world conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, the 'Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030' adopted seven targets:

Reduction in:

- a. Disaster mortality
- b. Number of affected people
- c. Direct economic losses
- d. Reducing damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services

Substantial increase in:

- a. National and local disaster risk reduction strategies
- b. Enhanced cooperation to developing countries
- c. Multi-hazard early warning systems, disaster risk information and assessments.

The Sendai Framework emphasized 'enhanced disaster preparedness for effective response and to 'build back better' in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction' following a major disaster.

In India, the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) is primarily responsible for policies, plans and guidelines for Disaster Management. This apex body is mandated with involving all stakeholders including local governments, citizens, and NGOs, in its efforts to mitigate the effects of disasters and, capacity building for serving citizens before, during and after disasters. Implementation of disaster management programmes however rests with the individual states. The National Disaster Management Plan (2019) emphasizes the need for local capacity building. It states:

*'Enhancing the capacity of communities, as they are the first responders to disasters, is a significant part of the capacity development process. The Sendai Framework notes the need to build the knowledge of civil society, communities, and volunteers on disaster risk reduction. Capacity building must include awareness, sensitisation, orientation, and developing skills of communities and community leaders. Assistance from NDRF, civil defence, civil society organisations, local community-based organisations, and Self-Help Groups will be encouraged.'*

It is clear that the task of raising community awareness and capacity to respond to disasters of varying proportions lies not just with the governments at all levels (although they are statutorily responsible for policy, planning and implementation of disaster preparedness and management), but also with other non-government agencies, communities and community-based organisations. It is in this context that the contribution of SSSSO in the area of capacity building as well as responding to disasters in the country has been documented in this note.

## **Disaster Preparedness and Management Programmes under SSSSO**

While the Government of India enacted the National Disaster Management Act in 2005 and set up the National Disaster Management Agency, and the State Disaster Management Agencies (SDMAs), SSSSO was already well ahead with its response to disasters and capacity building of volunteers. By 2005, Disaster Management teams from SSSSO had already responded to disasters like the Tsunami and moved ahead with training of volunteers across India.

Service has been the central focus of SSSSO since its inception. As far back as 1969, while speaking at Dharmakshetra, headquarters of SSSSO in Mumbai, Baba exhorted members of the Organisation not only to focus on service, but to be trained well to serve effectively. He said:

*“Do not restrict your service within certain limits. Be alert to the call everywhere, at all times; be ready with a smile, a kind word, a useful suggestion, some knowledgeable care, a pleasant reply. Look for chances to relieve, rescue or resuscitate. Train yourselves so that you may render help quickly and well.”*

Based on the guidance received from Baba, SSSSO commenced Disaster Management Training Programmes on a national scale in 2002. Sri Shyamal Sur pioneered these and conducted zonal level training programmes in all corners of India. He handheld the Disaster Management Programme in SSSSO for more than a decade.

The training programmes created a large pool of trained Seva Dals, both as faculty members for training and as first responders during disasters. These efforts were further strengthened when the Disaster Management Programme was announced as one of the flagship national initiatives of SSSSO to mark the 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

The two-fold Focus of the Disaster Management Programme is:

- To create teams of well-trained first responders during disasters, who can use a common sense approach in conducting rescue and relief operations with whatever equipment is available at that time and place

- To create Disaster Awareness (DA) among the public at large, especially the youth

For the Disaster Awareness Programmes, the wide spectrum of public covered in the one-day awareness trainings include:

- i. High School and College Students (including IITs, universities, NSS, and NCC Volunteers)
- ii. Police and Fire Service Personnel from Police Academies in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Jammu & Kashmir
- iii. Corporates like Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consultancy Services, Steel Authority of India, Thomson Press, and GE India.

***More than 2,00,000 participants have attended the Awareness Programmes conducted by SSSSO.***

Disaster Management Trainings are two- or three-day events (as opposed to Disaster Awareness Programmes that are of one-day duration). Trainees are well equipped to be deployed to disaster-struck areas once their training is complete. As depicted in Figure 1, trained teams have responded to scores of disasters, big and small, over the years starting with the Tsunami of 2004 which was a mega disaster estimated to have killed nearly 2,30,000 people in more than a dozen countries. Numerous earthquakes, floods, and cyclones have occurred since then, giving the teams an opportunity to serve as first responders in multiple states such as West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Sikkim and Kerala. An example of a ‘small’ yet significant rescue operation is that of four youth from Tamil Nadu trained in the DM programme, who saved 200 huts from a fire in 2004 using the techniques taught during the training.

In the following sections, the activities of the Disaster Management Teams have been described:

- A brief on the training component of the DM Programme
- A series of features highlighting the response of teams to major disasters and crises.

(These features offer a qualitative view of the accomplishments of the DM teams, since their work is often not quantifiable and, numbers are not necessarily available or reflective of the service rendered by the DM teams.)

## **Disaster Management (DM) and Disaster Awareness (DA) Training Programmes**

The objectives of the National Disaster Management Programme are:

1. To train and build up a core group of active workers of the Organisation in each district who can render effective service in disaster-struck areas, and also be able to respond rapidly to the most affected areas



2. To conduct DM Awareness in schools, colleges, villages and institutions to build resilient communities

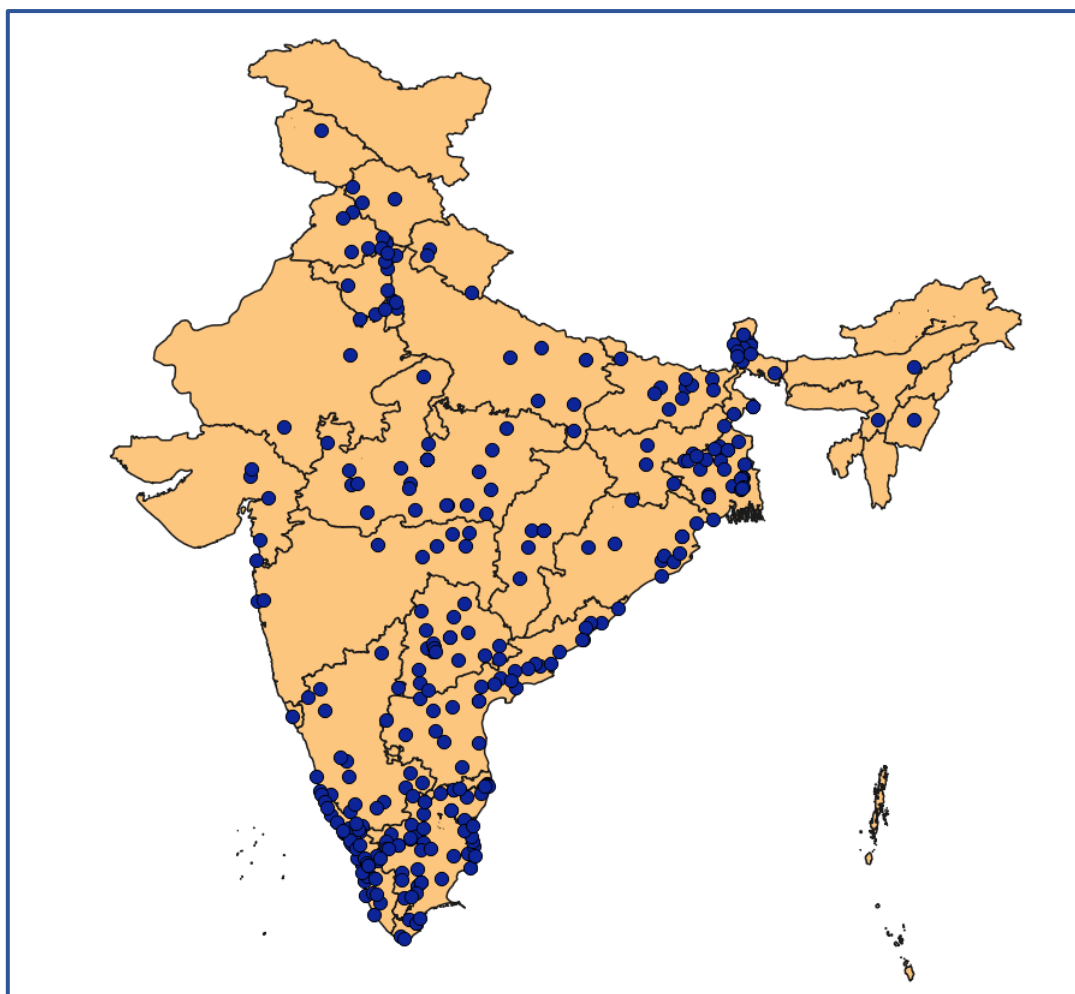
The training offered is completely based on the practical knowledge and experience gained by the National DM Team through the work rendered during various natural disasters. ***Like all service programmes of SSSSO, the training is offered free of cost.***

The DM training covers a comprehensive list of topics, with experiential learning that includes:

- Need for Training in Disaster Management
- Causes of Natural Calamities
- Preparations and actions to be taken
- Problem Identification
- Learning Rope knots and various rescue techniques for high rises, fire, water
- Training in Basic First Aid
- Preparing DM Teams
- Resource Management
- Motivation to be a part of a DM Team



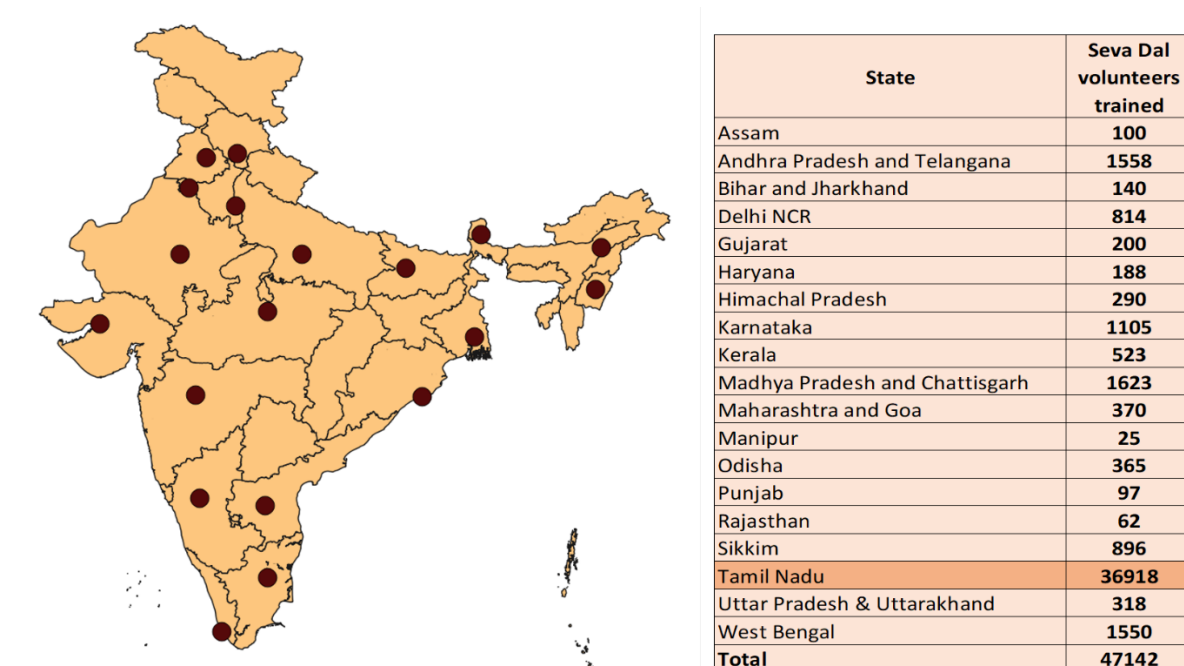
**Figure 3: Glimpses of Training Modules delivered by SSSSO at various locations pan-India**



**Figure 4: 300+ SSSSO Training locations across India**

Between 2002 and 2019, the DM Team conducted 679 training programmes in 20 states, graduating a total of 47,142 Seva Dal members. A third of the trainees were women members of the *Samitis*. However, only 12 of the 20 states had women trainees. Tamil Nadu led the way by conducting 63% of the trainings and graduating 78% of the total trainees. Women trainees in Tamil Nadu constituted 36% of total trainees. Sikkim tops the table with 38% women trainees.





**Figure 5: Disaster Management Training of Seva Dal Members (2002-2019)**

### **DM Team Training for Jammu & Kashmir Police Force**

In 2015, the Jammu & Kashmir Armed Police Force invited SSSSO's Disaster Management Task Force Team to conduct a two-day emergency response and Disaster Management Training Workshop at its headquarters in Zewan, Srinagar. Held on April 4 and 5, 2015, this unique partnership saw SSSSO's DM personnel train 51 members of the Armed Police in rescue and recovery operations during natural catastrophes like landslides, earthquakes, floods, and storms.

Despite unseasonal rains and flooding in the River Jhelum, the DM Team members from Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab travelled to Zewan and conducted the training that included classroom sessions as well as practical exercises focusing on fire, high-rise, water-related and other emergency rescue operations.

Police personnel participated wholeheartedly in the training programme and were fully engaged in all aspects of the training, both in-class and in the field practice sessions that included a river-rescue training session over the River Jhelum that had experienced floods.



**Figure 6: Disaster Management Training of Jammu & Kashmir Armed Police Force**



**Figure 7: Police practicing knots during the training**

## **Featured State: Tamil Nadu – Leader in Capacity Building and Disaster Response**

### **Tsunami (2004)**

The devastating Tsunami that struck the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004 has been categorized as a ‘mega disaster’ due to the number of casualties and extent of damage across multiple nations. The damage it caused was unheard of in recent memory of our country and indeed the world.

Services rendered by SSSSO, Tamil Nadu, in the aftermath can be the subject of a book. The Disaster Management training that had been initiated in 2002 allowed the State Disaster Management Unit to respond immediately and perform the urgent and arduous tasks like removing dead bodies, preparing them for identification and burial, supplying basic needs like food and water to survivors and, cleaning up areas to prevent further disease. Seva Dal members were the first to report to Nagapattinam and Velankanni – coastal towns devastated by the Tsunami. Estimates indicate that the SSSSO Teams cleared more than a thousand bodies, which was an essential first activity in the rescue and recovery process. The disciplined and dedicated services rendered by the Seva Dals in the face of such a catastrophic event was much appreciated by the government officials, police, and all agencies involved in rescue and relief operations. Seva Dal volunteers were the only group allowed by the police into some sensitive areas for relief and recovery measures – especially where bodies (with jewellery on them) had to be laid out in a hall for families to claim; or unclaimed bodies had to be buried. That was the extent of trust and respect that the Seva Dals had earned during relief operations in the aftermath of the tragedy.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba had instructed the state unit that in addition to rescue efforts, the team must work to restore the dignity of the survivors by providing materials to help them rebuild their lives. As a result, the state unit quickly organized kits that included stoves, kerosene, utensils, and dry rations. While hundreds of Seva Dals worked on the ground, hundreds more worked in the background to get relief materials ready for transport to various affected areas. The Tsunami relief operations undertaken were mammoth and unprecedented in SSSSO.

Members of the Tamil Nadu Disaster Management team rightly point out that service rendered by the trained Seva Dals following the Tsunami cannot be quantified or assessed in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. There is no measurement tool that can assess the value of removing thousands of dead bodies and preparing them for burial or cremation; nor can there be an economic value placed on the high degree of trust and respect earned by the team throughout the state for the level of services provided. Seva Dals operated out of love and devotion, and indeed, their lives were changed irrevocably following this mega disaster.





**Figure 8: Seva Dals carrying the bodies to the burial ground - Tsunami 2004**

Following the experience with Tsunami rescue, recovery and rehabilitation, the Tamil Nadu Disaster Management team was charged up sufficiently to plan for skill training and constant updating of skills in order to meet any eventual catastrophes. Tamil Nadu's geographic location, especially, leaves it susceptible to cyclones, storms, and floods. So, it was imperative that the team builds a group of trained Seva Dals who can be deployed to serve in any type of crises.

Such preparation has resulted in the team responding to several other disasters over the years including the Chennai Floods in 2015, the Kerala Floods in 2018 and various cyclones including 'Thane' and 'Gaja'. During the Chennai Floods, the team completed four levels of service provision:

1. **A**ctual Rescue during the floods with the support of temporary boats and human chains.
2. **B**asic Relief Services involved provision of required relief materials like food, biscuits, water, medicines, and tonics.
3. **C**leaning focused on the vital service of sanitation works at relief camps and flood-affected areas including Government Hospitals
4. **D**oor to Door distribution of 'Sai Prasadam' packed in carton boxes. Each box had 21 essential items like dry rations, sarees, dhotis, mats, and toothpaste. The team distributed these cartons to more than 18,000 families in the stricken areas of Chennai, Kanchipuram, Tiruvallur and Cuddalore.



**Figure 9: Members of the Tamil Nadu Disaster Management Team during the Chennai Floods**

In addition to training the members of its own team, the Disaster Management Team continues to train college students, paramedical staff, fishermen, forest department, police, fire and rescue service personnel, CRPF, RPF, Coast Guards, corporate employees, and teachers. The team has even joined with the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to offer training programmes at NDRF's headquarters in Arakonam.

In 2017, the Disaster Management Team from SSSSO participated in a two-day workshop on National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR) held at New Delhi. The team showcased unique and improvised rescue methods at the workshop and was appreciated by the participants and government alike. Following this, the SSSSO Tamil Nadu DM team was invited by the Government of Tamil Nadu to conduct a two-day Disaster Management training to all its first responders in all the districts of the state.

***Between 2002 and 2019, the Tamil Nadu Disaster Management team has conducted Disaster Management Awareness training for over 1,00,000 volunteers from different institutions and professions.***



**Figure 10: The SSSSO Disaster Management Team took part in a National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (2017) – SSSSO Members seen with Piyush Goyal and Kiren Rijiju, Cabinet Ministers, Government of India**

In 2019, the team had an opportunity to participate in the Annual Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Exercise (HADR) in all coastal districts of Tamil Nadu on the theme of cyclones and urban flooding. The team was able to actively participate and contribute to the proceedings, as well as share their vast experience in disaster relief with the other participants that included the Armed Forces.

On September 28, 2019, the Commissioner, Revenue Administration, Chennai, inducted 69 Sai Disaster Management team members into the State Disaster Response Guard.



**Figure 11: Disaster Management Team Members of SSSSO Tamil Nadu being nominated as ‘State Disaster Response Guards’**



## **Featured State: Sikkim's All-rounder Disaster Management Team**

18<sup>th</sup> September 2011 will perhaps remain etched in the memory of every Sikkimese. It was the day an earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale struck the state. The Sai Disaster Management Team worked round the clock for a week in restoring normalcy for the victims. The majority of efforts were in Lingzya, North Sikkim, which had suffered the most damage. The SSSSO DM Team's major works included drinking water supply at several populated places, a temporary water supply line in the camp area, visits to affected areas, supplying of essential commodities, counseling, and conducting mass prayer sessions.



**Figure 12: Disaster Management Team from Sikkim responding after the Earthquake in 2011**

The state's experience with the 2011 earthquake spurred the DM Team under SSSSO, Sikkim, to train large numbers of Seva Dals in Disaster Management so that they are ready and available for a rapid response in the event of disasters not only in Sikkim but also in the neighboring states. The DM team conducts about six or seven training programmes annually. As a result, there is a strong group of 600 trained youth volunteers that can be mobilized to serve whenever there is a need. Volunteers are spread across six districts.

The DM Team has participated in mock drills conducted by the State Government in partnership with NDRF on multiple occasions and at various locations. The NDRF has also provided a weeklong training to SSSSO Members at Namchi, South Sikkim.

The trained Seva Dals in the DM Team have had opportunities to serve the citizens in the aftermath of disasters over the years in their own state, as well as neighboring states. The comprehensive DM training has contributed to the team's effective response to different types of disasters, whether earthquake (in Nepal), floods (West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam) or fire (Sikkim).

On 25th April 2015, when Nepal experienced a major earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale, the Sai DM team quickly got into action and initiated relief measures focusing on shelter, food, water, medicine, and clothing. A 42-member DM Team of SSSSO Sikkim, with four trucks fully loaded with relief materials worth ₹ 8,00,000 and seven other light vehicles carrying team members proceeded to Ramechap on May 1, 2015 with due permission of the Nepal Government.



**Figure 13: Disaster Management Team from Sikkim responding to the Nepal Earthquake**

### **Featured Seva: Uttarakhand Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation Project**

Summer is typically a busy season in Uttarakhand due to the influx of travellers from all over India. Pilgrims make their long-anticipated journey to the famed temples in this part of the country. On June 16 -17, 2013, right in the middle of this busy pilgrimage schedule, there were heavy rains accompanied by landslides and severe floods in the pilgrim centers of Kedarnath, Rudraprayag, Joshimath and Rishikesh. Enormous damage to life and property followed. Several thousand fatalities were reported. Most of the roads were damaged due to the flooding, and access to the affected areas was severely curtailed. Communication systems too were hit.

SSSSO, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, responded promptly by setting up relief camps near Dehra Dun Airport, Rishikesh Bus station and Haridwar



Railway station. Over 1,500 food packets were air lifted on June 19, 2013 from Jolly Grant Airport to the Kedar Valley. The stranded pilgrims were provided biscuits, bread, cooked food, drinking water, medicines, blankets, and cell phones to enable them to call and reassure their concerned relatives.



**Figure 14: Relief Work at the Jolly Grant Airport, Uttarakhand**

Once the evacuation process was streamlined, SSSSO volunteers focused their attention and efforts to aiding villagers still residing in the affected areas near Chandrapuri (Bhatwari Sunar) which was totally washed off.

Sealed bags containing rice, wheat, sugar, dal, tea, refined oil, biscuits, rusks, candles and match boxes were provided to the villagers. These bags were often transported, individually, by the Seva Dal volunteers on foot as there was no direct access to the villages. In addition, the affected villagers were provided tents, medicines, blankets, clothes, cooking utensils, steel plates and solar lanterns. A hundred families were served in this round of Seva.

In the second round of Seva in the villages surrounding Bhatwari Sunar, 450 food packets, and dry ration kits consisting of wheat flour, rice, dal, cooking oil, sugar, tea, salt were distributed to the households. Twenty-five large tarpaulins were given to aid shelter for those who had lost their dwellings.



**Figure 158: Providing food and shelter in a scenic yet difficult terrain**

The third and fourth rounds of relief activities covered several villages in the Guptkashi area. Residents were given 450 solar lights and food packets. Small food packages were prepared, as Seva Dals had to walk 25-30 kms to reach the distribution point.



**Figure 16: Relief trucks had to be stopped 2 kms away from distribution point due to narrow passes**



The extent of damage due to the floods, and the upheavals to residents' lives were such that continuous rehabilitation measures were needed in addition to the immediate relief efforts. Severely damaged schools and houses had to be rebuilt; villagers needed winter clothing and regular supply of food items. The state unit helped several families with marriages of their daughters which had been planned prior to the deluge and flood. Families of the brides were given gift cheques of ₹10,000 each, along with clothing, household items, furniture and blankets.

The relief operations demonstrated that Seva Dal volunteers are required to serve at both ends – those in the field rescuing and delivering relief materials to the affected and, those in the background who coordinate, procure, put together and transport the materials to the distribution points. The entire team has to work in a coordinated and dedicated fashion to achieve the goal of serving the distressed to the best extent possible and in a timely manner.

The Uttarakhand flood relief operation also bears testimony to the fact that the Disaster Management Team's work does not end with providing rescue and relief immediately after the crisis event. Rehabilitation measures to restore the lives and livelihoods of the affected continues to be an ongoing activity well beyond the event.

### **Featured Seva: Cyclone Fani in Odisha**

On 3rd May 2019, the coastal part of Odisha experienced nature's fury in the form of a devastating cyclonic storm 'Fani', which made its land fall at more than 200 kms/hour near the coastal town of Puri. The four-hour long storm stranded the people of Puri, Bhubaneswar and Cuttack to ground zero and left them with tearful eyes and little hope to rehabilitate themselves. More than 10-lakh people were impacted due to lack of electricity, food, and communication network. Fani came like any other cyclone that makes its annual visit to the coastal areas of India, but the enormity of its catastrophic effect was something which can be explained only by the ones who have experienced it.

SSSSO, Odisha, with its Seva Dals and the Disaster Management Team was well prepared for the pre-informed cyclone and tackled the situation with sincerity and efficiency. They set out in batches to different parts of the affected areas to survey the ground situation. Bhubaneswar acted as the headquarters of the State SSSSO and functioned as the nodal center for all preparations. Seva Dal volunteers worked without rest and sleep to pack the relief materials. From 5<sup>th</sup> May, the volunteers reached more than 5,000 households through different routes, and supplied dry foods and some basic utilities like flashlights, candles, matchboxes, mosquito repellents and, safe

drinking water to sustain a family for a week. Due to the impact of the cyclone, the people of Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha, lacked electricity and water. The Seva Dals reached out to the people of the city with generators to pump water to the overhead tanks. Even animals and household pets were taken care of, with volunteers distributing food for them in the affected areas.

More than 10,000 affected villagers and slum dwellers in Puri District were served cooked food, wherever cooking facilities were not available. The food was prepared and served at their shelters by the Seva Dals with utmost love and care. Further, 10,000 more were served by supplying them with adequate rations. Around 2,600 safe drinking water jars were provided to the households.

The calamity had also left the villages and their surrounding water sources polluted and unhealthy. The Seva Dal volunteers went in batches taking with them adequate quantity of bleaching powder, other sanitary items, and cleaning equipment including automated wood cutters to clear the logs from the blocked roads.

The unhygienic conditions in the aftermath of the cyclone had brought about a fear of an epidemic outbreak in the affected areas. Keeping this in view, a team consisting of more than 20 doctors, para-medicals and Seva Dals with adequate medicines organised medical camps in the villages and provided medical amenities to the inhabitants. About 2,000 patients benefited from the medical camps.



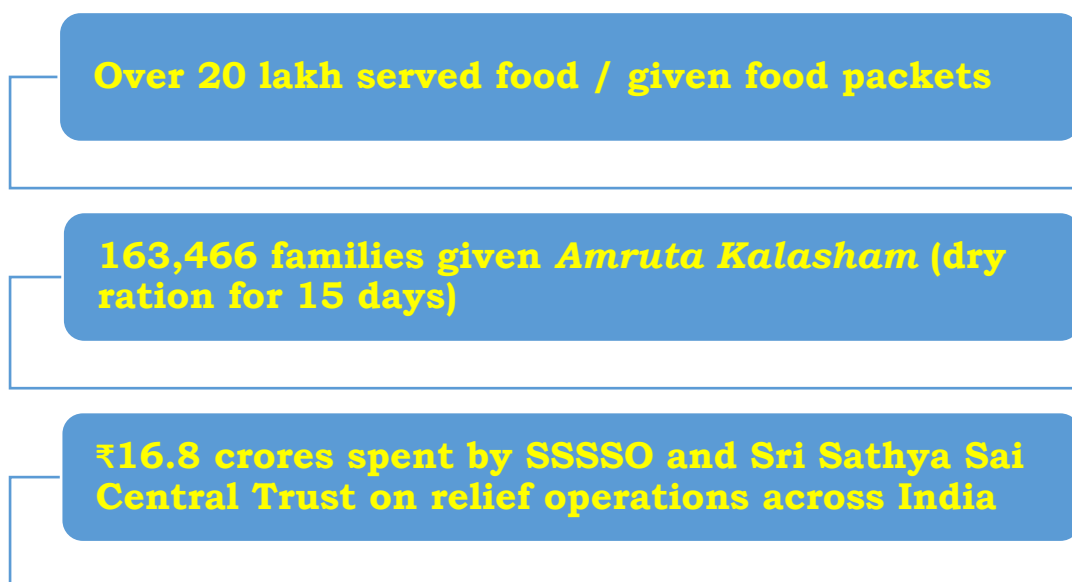
**Figure 17: Service by Seva Dals after the Fani Cyclone in Odisha**



## Featured Seva: Feeding the masses during COVID-19 Lockdown

Although hydrological and meteorological events are more frequent, occasionally other unforeseen events require a rapid response to impending disaster and suffering. COVID-19 and the ensuing lockdown in March 2020 resulted in a massive humanitarian crisis in the country. Hundreds of thousands of migrant workers left the cities where they toiled, often walking several hundred kilometres to reach their homes. Many more who stayed were left without livelihoods, incomes, and even basic necessities to survive in the cities. The crises were sudden, as they often are, and care providers like SSSSO had to swing into action almost immediately to alleviate the suffering of the masses.

In every state across India that required assistance, the state units of SSSSO provided basic necessities like food, water, dry ration/groceries, quick eats like biscuits and fruits, footwear, masks, sanitizers and medicines. Massive community kitchens were set up in several states to serve fresh cooked food to the poor, wage workers, stranded citizens, and migrant workers passing through on their way home. Pandemic-specific items like face masks, PPE kits, face shields, soaps and sanitizers were provided in many of states. The mobilization of volunteers, materials and resources was on an enormous scale, as required to meet the needs of large swathes of population in distress due to the pandemic and the crisis in their living situations.



**Figure 18: Overview of COVID-19 Seva Operations**

Key features of the Covid Seva were distribution of food packets and/or cooked meals to individuals, as well as provisions to households through distribution of *Amrutha Kalasham* (dry ration kits comprising of materials required for preparation of full meals at home).

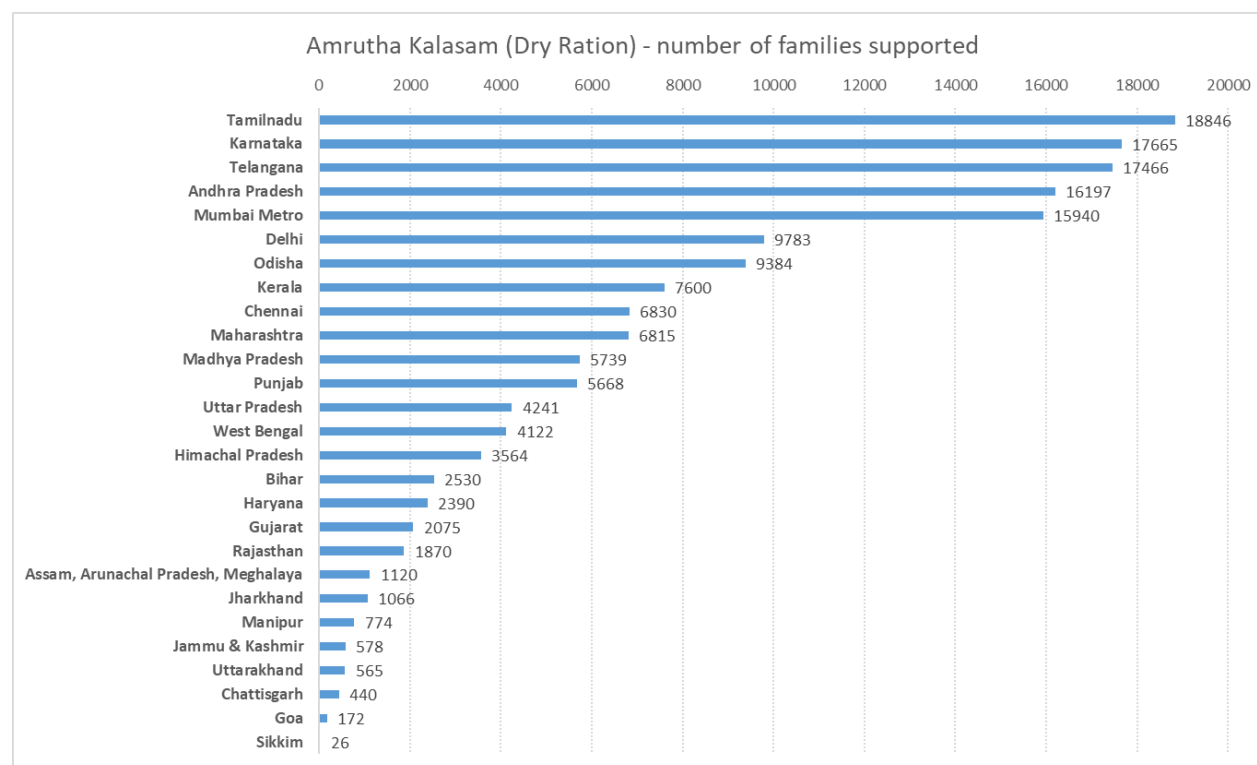
If we assume five members in each household:

Number of persons served is: 1,63,466 households x 5 members = 8,17,330

Number of meals served (through distribution of the dry ration kits) is:

8,17,330 x 2 meals per day x 15 days = 2,45,19,900

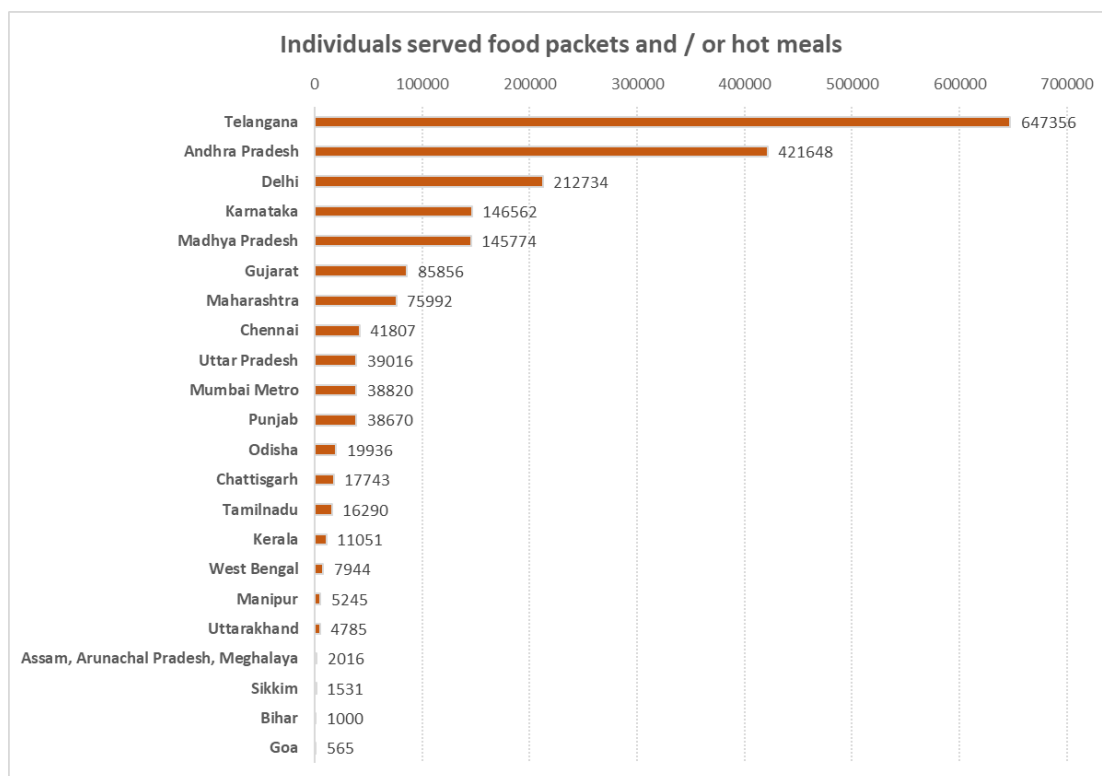
***In summary, the Amrutha Kalashams served nearly 2.5 crore meals over 15 days to household members.***



**Figure 19: Dry Ration Kits supplied: Number of Households by State/City**

(Appendix 1 provides a complete list of items served to the needy as reported by SSSSO State Units.)

A critically important service was the provision of food packets and hot meals through massive community kitchens to migrant workers, and others in cities and towns that were in deep distress due to the lockdown induced loss of livelihoods, wages, food, and shelter. The immediacy of the need demanded that Sai Samitis swing into action and provide food to the needy in railway and bus stations, city and town centres, roads and highways where migrants were walking home. ***Nearly 20-lakh citizens were served food over the weeks following the lockdown in March 2020.*** Hygiene products and footwear were other essential items provided in many states.



**Figure 20: Individuals served food packets and/or hot meals, by State/City**

### **Seva Dals in Action - Hallmark of Selfless and Silent Service**

The need for quick mobilization and action to serve the distressed in the wake of COVID-19 demonstrated the pan-India level grassroots bench strength of volunteers built over decades by SSSSO. While the actual number of volunteers deployed is unknown, it is safe to say that lakhs of volunteers worked across India with the hallmark 'Love All, Serve All' motto of the Organisation and the characteristic silent *Seva* that SSSSO promotes. The number of persons served, and costs associated may give a glimpse into the magnitude of operations; but the real value of the service is in the countless hours of selfless service rendered by the silent *Seva Dal* volunteers across the country. They served at railway stations and bus stops, highways, hospitals, and quarantine centres in the urban areas and remote rural villages to ensure that no one went hungry during the lockdown. All this happened in the middle of a pandemic, with considerable concerns of personal safety. Their yeoman service during these testing times was acknowledged by many, including the media and officials in various state governments.



**Figure 21: Testimonial from a Member of Parliament, Gujarat (left), the Vice President of India (top right) and the Media**

A testimony to the efforts of both SSSSO and Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust in alleviating the suffering of fellow citizens during the pandemic was the invitation by Sri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, to both organisations to join him for a discussion on disaster rescue and relief measures, along with several leading spiritual organisations. SSSSO was represented by Sri Nimish Pandya, All India President. The Central Trust was represented by Sri R.J. Ratnakar, Managing Trustee.



**Figure 22: SSSSO (middle right) and SSSCT (left) leaders in conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi**

## Way Forward

After two decades of capacity building, rescue, and relief operations in the aftermath of major and minor disasters in India, the Disaster Management Initiative under SSSSO is poised to scale up its Disaster Preparedness activities in the next few years.

***As of 2019, the DM Team has trained 47,142 Seva Dals, nearly a fifth of the total strength eligible for training.*** Some of these were re-trainings/upskilling of existing volunteers. The plan is to train all Seva Dals on the state rosters by 2022. In addition, re-training of district level teams is planned, to ensure that volunteers are ever ready for deployment in the event of an emergency. Reviewing and upgrading DM equipment at the state and district levels is also on the cards.

Disaster preparedness training will also be imparted at Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Jyothi schools across India. This will include training on first aid for teachers and senior students, visual displays on techniques of saving lives in an emergency, health and hygiene practices, sanitation (including clean school premises and toilets), and availability of a first aid box at each school.

Since response to disasters is occasional, trained Seva Dals will also be required to work regularly towards enhanced resilience in villages and communities. Weekly *Grama Seva* in the allotted villages will comprise of:

- Nutrition – to develop capability to prepare food for thousands at a short notice.
- Health, hygiene, and sanitation – trains the Seva Dals to work with the villages and communities on improving health and hygiene and, work towards improved sanitation.

***The focus in the years leading up to the centennial birthday celebrations of Sri Sathya Sai Baba will be on training youth members at every Samiti.*** The National Initiative on Disaster Management aims to make every member of SSSSO capable of and committed to the task of being a first responder in his/her home, locality, workplace, society, and community, thus becoming an asset to the nation.

### Appendix I: An Overview of Relief Materials provided during the COVID-19 Lockdown

STATE	COMMUNITY KITCHENS	FOOD PACKETS	AMRUTHA KALASAM	Fruits/ vegetable kits	Biscuits / chocolates	Buttermilk/ Milk	Energy drink/ immunity booster medicines	WATER PACKETS/ Bottles	Medicines	Soaps + Sanitizers	Masks	Other (PPE Kits, umbrella, sanitary napkins, tooth paste and brush,bedsheets, ventilator etc)	Migrants Served
Andhra Pradesh	40		16197					193491			1,80,000		72262
Assam, Meghalaya & Arunachal Pradesh		2016	1120					1072		1398	1750		
Bihar		1000	2530					350			2100		
Chhattisgarh	1	16218						2284					
Delhi-NCR	18	233557	9463					17177			14700	700	17177
Goa		565	172					770	849	250	1000		
Gujarat		84697	1965	3705	17415	9747	305	1195		727	1826	2122	
Haryana & Chandigarh			2390		1500		15000			6500	7800	42	
Himachal Pradesh		108	3564							3000	5360		
Jammu and Kashmir		100	185										
Jharkhand			1000										
Karnataka	7	146562	17665									1200	
Kerala		262	914	320							100000	111	
Madhya Pradesh	2	78590	5095	150	1800	150	140	4200	300		37279	155	275
Maharashtra	10	122698	29289										
Manipur		5245	758		650					50	150	20	525
Odisha													
Punjab		30670	10361		16000	520		8000			8000	65	8000
Rajasthan			1858										
Sikkim	6		26							800	800		2399
Tamil Nadu	3	41827	6830				500					35	
Telangana	37	619639	17147							17147			
Uttar Pradesh		39016	4241	800		5329		5210	35	7488	4686	805	
Uttarakhand	1	4730	472										
West Bengal		7944	2500		11580	120	7728	8222		2770	1800	20	7944

(Source: The Loving Hand – A Compendium of Service, March 27 to June 10, 2020, SSSSO).



### Appendix 1A: Number of Persons Served

		<b>A</b>		<b>B</b>		<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
Sl.No	States	Amrutha Kalasam (Dry Ration) - number of FAMILIES supported		PERSONS (supported with Food Packets /Food Hampers / Community Kitchens)		A x 4 (number of persons in household)	B+C= total persons served
		<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>
1	Andhra Pradesh	16197	9.9%	421648	21%	80,985	5,02,633
2	Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya	1120	0.7%	2016	0%	5,600	7,616
3	Bihar	2530	1.5%	1000	0%	12,650	13,650
4	Chattisgarh	440	0.3%	17743	1%	2,200	19,943
5	Chennai	6830	4.2%	41807	2%	34,150	75,957
6	Delhi	9783	6.0%	212734	11%	48,915	2,61,649
7	Goa	172	0.1%	565	0%	860	1,425
8	Gujarat	2075	1.3%	85856	4%	10,375	96,231
9	Haryana	2390	1.5%		0%	11,950	11,950
10	Himachal Pradesh	3564	2.2%		0%	17,820	17,820
11	Jammu & Kashmir	578	0.4%		0%	2,890	2,890
12	Jharkhand	1066	0.7%		0%	5,330	5,330
13	Karnataka	17665	10.8%	146562	7%	88,325	2,34,887
14	Kerala	7600	4.6%	11051	1%	38,000	49,051
15	Madhya Pradesh	5739	3.5%	145774	7%	28,695	1,74,469
16	Manipur	774	0.5%	5245	0%	3,870	9,115
17	Maharashtra	6815	4.2%	75992	4%	34,075	1,10,067
18	Mumbai Metro	15940	9.8%	38820	2%	79,700	1,18,520
19	Odisha	9384	5.7%	19936	1%	46,920	66,856
20	Punjab	5668	3.5%	38670	2%	28,340	67,010
21	Rajasthan	1870	1.1%		0%	9,350	9,350
22	Sikkim	26	0.0%	1531	0%	130	1,661
23	Tamilnadu	18846	11.5%	16290	1%	94,230	1,10,520
24	Telangana	17466	10.7%	647356	33%	87,330	7,34,686
25	Uttar Pradesh	4241	2.6%	39016	2%	21,205	60,221
26	Uttarakhand	565	0.3%	4785	0%	2,825	7,610
27	West Bengal	4122	2.5%	7944	0%	20,610	28,554
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,63,466</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1982341</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8,17,330</b>	<b>27,99,671</b>

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