We may not be able to help everyone in this world. But if we are able to express our compassion to a few people around us, they will pass it on and very soon it will spread as if through links of a chain.

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Struggling to overcome a formidable challenge, a full year has gone by. Now, a new year has begun. Indeed, 2020 has been a time wherein humankind has been tested. These days many people live as if lost in a deep, dark forest, waiting with yearning to be delivered by the first rays of sunshine. They are waiting to leave behind all the darkness of 2020 and for life to return to normal.

It is essential that we develop the qualities of patience, mental strength and optimistic faith to help us face adverse situations. If we develop these qualities, we will automatically be able to bring changes in our external circumstances. We may feel the outside world remains shrouded in darkness. However, such times present the best opportunity to light the lamp within us and dispel that external darkness with our inner light.

The world is like a flower. Each country is a petal of the flower. If even one petal is attacked by a pest, it will soon affect the entire flower. We are seeing such a situation now. It will take sincere effort and the positive attitude of people from every part of the world to ensure that this global flower regains its health and beauty.

This is a time when humanity should come together, as children of one mother, forgetting all differences. It is time for the world to reinvestigate global environmental protection and sustainability policies and move forward after correcting previous mistakes. Whatever happens, don’t lose courage. Only if we maintain our mental courage can we think and act properly.

If we put in proper effort and maintain a grateful attitude, it definitely will make a difference. Like all other decisions, being happy is also a decision. We should make the firm decision that we will remain happy and courageous, regardless of the circumstances.
Whether we laugh or cry, the days will pass by. Decide whether you want to live laughing or crying.

When you make the decision to face life positively, no matter what it brings, it will definitely create an atmosphere of happiness around you. A happy person is a strong person. When such a person encounters someone who is sad, he will have the resolve and strength to reduce that person’s sorrow. This itself can be a major step in helping to remove that person’s sadness. One person can certainly make a difference for others.

This is the time of an awakening. Human beings have the strength, courage, goodness and love within themselves to overcome and survive any disaster. All that is needed is to wake up. This is not the time to succumb to fear and disappointment. On the other hand, this is the time to awaken our powers of discrimination and awareness.

As the year 2021 begins, let us move forward with optimism, never forgetting the strong warning given to us by Mother Nature. May there be peace, happiness and good health all over the world. May the world be delivered from the cruel grip of the coronavirus. May we be able to open our hearts and love and serve each other, and fulfill our duty towards Nature. May these testing times be over soon.

Amma, Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi
Founder, Embracing the World

Volunteers in the Americas shared info on how to put together kits of food, disinfectant supplies and clothes. They delivered them to the elderly, disabled and poor.
In 2020, with most of Embracing the World’s institutions and volunteers under lockdown along with the entire world, our focus turned to the people and communities hit hardest by the pandemic.

From emergency medical response to cutting-edge technology for healthcare workers to providing food and other basic needs for impoverished communities, we navigated the challenges COVID-19 imposed to make as great an impact as possible. As always, we focused on integrated solutions designed to both meet immediate needs as well as to address more systemic, underlying issues.

Embracing the World has chapters in more than 40 countries. As a global network of regional humanitarian organizations inspired by the India-based humanitarian initiatives of the Mata Amritanandamayi Math, Embracing the World exists to help alleviate the burden of the world’s poor through helping to meet each of their five basic needs—food, shelter, healthcare, education and livelihood—wherever and whenever possible. We are especially focused on helping to meet these needs in the aftermath of major disasters.

Augmenting these efforts, we work in the fields of environmental conservation and sustainability to help protect the future of our fragile planet. And through our university, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, our researchers are innovating new means of delivery of goods, knowledge, information, energy and healthcare so that we can get help to those in need here and now, wherever they are.

Our vision aligns closely with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Today’s complex challenges—from stemming the spread of disease to preventing conflict—cannot be tackled neatly in isolation. This means focusing on systems, root causes and connections between challenges to build solutions that respond to people’s daily realities.
From India to Germany to Brazil, we have chapters in more than 40 countries. Our work includes immediate aid, but then continues to long-term relief. In this way, we’re helping vulnerable communities get back onto solid ground. Not only does this come in the form of food and medical aid, but also via scholarships, vocational training, and permanent shelter.
Volunteers in Brazil brought basic supplies to slum areas.
One of the main focuses of Embracing the World is to work to ensure all people have access to adequate nutrition, safe drinking water and secure places to dwell. Navigating the impacts of COVID-19 made this more challenging than ever before.

In response to the economic crisis sparked by the pandemic, volunteers around the world began collection drives and distributed food and essential supplies as soon as lockdown restrictions eased up in their countries.

In rural India, Amrita SeRVe, our self-reliant villages project, works with communities who are in need of support starting from basic needs. Rural areas account for 69% of India’s population, and according to government statistics, 25% of them live in poverty.

With a baseline system in place since 2013, Amrita SeRVe used the networks of support between village clusters to assist in meeting basic needs during the pandemic.

For delivery to people in the Chicago area.
Volunteers in Faridabad, Delhi NCR delivered food and basic supplies to nearby villages, housing colonies and slums. Most families in those communities lost means to earn a living during lockdowns. Thousands of volunteers around the world take part in our service efforts. Amma teaches that everyone—rich or poor—has the power to make a difference in the life of another and that no selfless gesture is insignificant.
Teams in Spain and the US launched collection drives and then head out to distribute supplies to all who needed the support.

**KEY ACTIONS**

**Basic supplies**
of food, medicines, groceries and other provisions were given to migrant workers, villagers and other at-risk populations by our centers across India.

**Food, clothing & toys**
were delivered by volunteers after donation drives in city centers and suburbs around the world—from North America to South America to Europe to Australia.

**Donations of funds**
to local food banks, soup kitchens and shelters were given when direct deliveries were not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions.
Amrita Hospital and the Kerala Network for Organ Sharing coordinated a successful heart transplant for Shabeer, 39.
HEALTHCARE

Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Center (Amrita Hospital) opened its doors in 1998. Since then, Amrita Hospital and the allied medical institutions of the Mata Amritanandamayi Math have provided completely free treatment to 5.1 million patients and subsidized care to another 300,000 patients—a total of ₹764 crore ($104 million US) in charitable medical care. Behind these numbers are human beings, and we believe that everyone has a right to high-quality healthcare.

Embracing the World supported the Indian and Kerala governments financially to help combat and contain the coronavirus, as well as provide relief to those physically, mentally and economically affected. Amrita Hospital became a hub for COVID-19 treatment and also found ways to reduce exposure to the virus for patients with other medical conditions.

Another crucial issue from the outset of the pandemic in India was to develop efficient and affordable items to protect people and support healthcare workers, especially in areas where there was a fast-moving spread of the virus. As the medical needs of the pandemic increased exponentially, Amrita Hospital and Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham worked together to create a long list of innovations, from low-cost nanomasks to a mental health call center for the public at large.

Even within the demanding context of COVID-19, Amrita Hospital continued its pioneering efforts in healthcare by opening a specialized women’s clinic for breast-related ailments. Surgeons also successfully conducted complex procedures, including the first successful C-section performed on a mother with Pompe disease, a rare and often fatal genetic disorder.
KEY ACTIONS

₹13 crores ($1.7 million US) in donations to Indian and Kerala governments for COVID-19 relief.

COVID-19 treatment at Amrita Hospital from the beginning of the pandemic that also provided free care for people who could not afford it otherwise.

Online video conferencing between doctors and patients so people could access information in all areas of medicine without the risk of leaving their homes.

A nanofiber-based mask developed by Amrita Center for Nanosciences and Molecular Medicine that is low-cost and can be washed and reused on a daily basis for up to 30 days.

Powered Air Purifying Respirator that is used to supply air to medical professionals in infection-prone areas was developed for affordable pricing by Amrita Hospitals and AMMACHI Labs.

Free mental health hotline set up by Amrita’s Social Work Department for people feeling stressed, anxious or depressed.

A novel therapy for COVID-19 under study by the Amrita School of Biotechnology uses Nitric Oxide (NO), which kills the SARS-CoV-2 virus in addition to preventing infection of host cells, and showed that patients who received it at Amrita Hospital were able to recover more quickly.
During India’s national lockdown, Amrita’s faculty threw themselves into innovating new ways to help in the fight against COVID-19. More than 60 researchers from various fields—including medicine, nanoscience, AI, big data, sensor-manufacturing and material sciences—participated in this cross-disciplinary effort to design solutions that could ultimately be used around the world.

Prabha
a tele-operated, ultra-violet robot used to disinfect rooms that in September 2020 was deployed at Amrita Hospital in Kochi, Kerala

Maruti
a remote-control patient transportation robot that allows the operator or caretaker to move a wheelchair from a safe distance of 1-4 meters

Annapoorna
a robot used to remotely serve food and water and deliver medicines to patients in quarantine

Remote Bedside Monitor
an application that uses smartphones to decrease the number of visits required by medical support staff to isolation wards

Bodhi
a robot designed for security personnel that can patrol thoroughfares and broadcast messages
AmritaCREATE’s education initiatives in rural India emphasize the girl child.
AmritaCREATE is our Center for Research in Analytics, Technologies & Education. Its key area of work is in poverty-stricken areas of rural India, where literacy is lower and school dropout rates are higher than in urban centers.

The center’s main focus is the support and development of accessible education to address the needs of children, which includes tutoring and social support outside of school hours, as well as providing literacy training for adults. As it was around the world, COVID-19 upended India’s 2019 to 2020 school year. When the nationwide lockdown came into effect on March 22nd, all schools and other educational sectors were closed.

From the beginning of the pandemic, AmritaCREATE identified a number of factors that would bring challenges to the fields of basic education in rural India. These included a downward slide in educational access; child mental health during the lockdown; the stress of failing year-end tests, especially for grades 10 and 12 in the Indian education system; and a rise in the number of school dropouts.

AmritaCREATE decided to take a two-pronged approach that started with immediate intervention during the initial period of uncertainty created by COVID-19, and then included documentation of research in order to have concrete information upon which to build future solutions during such emergencies.
KEY ACTIONS

Immediate assessment
began with regards to the ground situation in villages when
India’s initial lockdown began to ease on June 8, 2020.

Online teacher training
also began with support from central offices at Amrita Vishwa
Vidyapeetham’s campus in Amritapuri.

Education support
was initiated as the lockdown eased further and permission
was sought from local governments to open education
support centers, even though schools were not open.

Teachers went door-to-door
to connect with students where online classes were not
possible due to lack of resources or interest among villagers.

Connecting with students
began in villages in Punjab in July with just two online
classes, and by November, there were 18 educational
support centers reopened across several states, eight of
which had regular classes.

COVID-19 protocol
was strictly maintained as teachers and children wore masks,
maintained social distancing and washed hands frequently.

At education support
centers, children were
 taught to wear masks,
 wash hands frequently
 and maintain social
distance.
AmritaCREATE pioneers the use of technology to bring education to children in rural India.
With gender equality work, there is a specific focus on rural India.
The ultimate goal of women's empowerment is to achieve a state of balance between the genders within society. Like the two wings of a bird, women and men are of equal value. Without the two in perfect balance, humanity cannot progress.

UNESCO and Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham inaugurated India’s first-ever Chair on Women’s Empowerment & Gender Equality in 2016. The university has also established the Center for Women’s Empowerment & Gender Equality (CWEGE).

The mission is designing tools and methods for effective interventional strategies towards the empowerment of women and strengthening gender equality with the active and inclusive participation of communities, with a specific focus on rural India.

The work is based on six holistic dimensions of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals defined as: safety and security; economic vitality; education; political, social and cultural environment; environmental quality; and health.

Within CWEGE, there is a focus on understanding and mapping the vulnerabilities in communities to support India’s progress towards achieving the UN’s 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development. COVID-19 brought greater need in this area, while simultaneously presenting an entirely new set of challenges.

As the world begins its transition into a post-pandemic era, the upheaval caused is more visible in India’s at-risk sections, with gender equality a key issue. Despite the fact COVID-19 has pushed back a lot of gains, CWEGE renewed its pledges and promises for a better world.
Training in cloth mask production and Saukhyam Pads was given to village women with AmritaSREE SHGs.

**KEY ACTIONS**

**UNESCO and Amrita**
renewed the Chair on Women’s Empowerment & Gender Equality and lead initiatives in response to COVID-19.

**COVID-19 safety information**
for village women in India was the first crucial action to prevent the spread of the virus, as they are by tradition the most essential caregivers in their villages.

**Cloth mask production**
training was given to village women with our self-help groups (SHGs) and some also participated in their distribution, especially to essential service locations like gas stations and banks, as well as to electrical workers and police.

**Saukhyam Reusable Pads**
production continued when possible by women in our SHGs in rural India so they could maintain an additional means of income for their families.

**A survey of women in rural Kerala**
was conducted to investigate how the pandemic was affecting their lives, both in terms of community and household challenges.

**International collaboration**
between CWEGE, UN Women, women entrepreneurs, and other experts on the matter took place to find solutions for the pandemic’s economic fallout.
Women with AmritaSREE SHGs are among the more than 200,000 taking part across India to find ways to earn for their families.
In Odisha, tribal people comprise 23% of the state’s population.
The threat of the coronavirus demanded a new set of rules and enforcements to prevent contagion and loss of life. In addition, it brought out the need for prevention of stigmatization, prevention of violence against healthcare providers, and prevention of neglect of the afflicted.

**SUPPORT FOR TRIBAL PEOPLE**

In addressing the pandemic, India saw an immediate and crucial need for underprivileged people in isolated tribal areas to be informed and given awareness regarding the disease. These communities usually lag behind in awareness of current events due to their remote locales and traditional ways of life. As such, they were full of panic and confusion regarding COVID-19.

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, which has been declared a Tribal Center of Excellence (Tribal CoE) by the Central Ministry of Tribal Affairs, quickly set to work on how to take action.

The Tribal CoE is mainly active in the states of Odisha, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh—places where the risk of community spread was high. Migrant workers returning home from the cities was another serious concern, as they could inadvertently act as COVID-19 carriers from one region to another.

The threat of the coronavirus demanded a new set of rules and enforcements to prevent contagion and loss of life. In addition, it brought out the need for prevention of stigmatization, prevention of violence against healthcare providers, and prevention of neglect of the afflicted. The Tribal CoE determined it could make the most impact with public health awareness campaigns.

The main challenges were restricted movement due to the lockdown, low Internet connectivity and poor electricity. However, the Tribal CoE was able to disperse awareness with the help of local village workers. A key tool was the use of mobile technology, especially tablets.
KEY ACTIONS

A campaign for early awareness of COVID-19 began in February 2020 by sending videos, demonstrations and outlines of discussions for village workers to share with their communities.

Awareness sessions for children were given by teachers before lockdown and all instructors wore masks, practiced social distancing and carried soap with them to wash hands before and after contact.

Public information posters were put up in villages to provide instructions about handwashing and social distancing.

Door-to-door visits were conducted by village workers because many tribal people only speak their local dialects and needed immediate translation about COVID-19 prevention and steps to take if symptoms appeared.

Online communication was urgently needed when India’s national lockdown took effect on March 24, 2020, so Tribal CoE used WhatsApp groups to send awareness videos and images to all village workers.

Migrant workers were forced to return to their villages once lockdown began, but the villagers also had a fear of catching COVID-19 from them, so Tribal CoE quickly sought solutions for one of the most dire circumstances of India’s lockdown.

Information for family members of migrant workers was given regarding the right course of action to bring their relatives back home, while at the same time connecting them to the respective authorities like local police stations, ward members and local government officials.

Awareness info about migrants was distributed to the general public on how to treat them with compassion and respect, as the government authorities set up quarantine facilities in local schools (which were empty due to the lockdown) and other public facilities.

Info about healthcare workers was needed because the villagers were afraid medical staff not from their community carried COVID-19 and forcefully threatened them to leave, so village workers shared the information that healthcare workers were there to protect people from the pandemic and help save lives.

Overall, the Tribal CoE was able to reach 18 villages with a total of 2,199 households and 10,958 people.
The Tribal CoE focused on reaching isolated villages by creating an information network about COVID-19 and its care.
A new UNESCO Chair strengthens sustainable development.
Simple and basic necessities are not being met for a majority of the world’s population. It is time to think about how the contributions of high-end research translate to those belonging to the vulnerable sections of society.

HIGHER EDUCATION WITH VALUES

As it was across the world, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham was quickly closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. But as the pandemic continued, the university’s professors, staff and students found ways to reconnect via remote solutions to continue its compassion-driven research. As a pioneer in online learning, it was able to use previously developed platforms for e-learning and virtual labs and freely shared them with other institutions so they too could work with their students.

Amrita offers top-notch education with an emphasis on humanitarian-oriented research and a commitment to instilling universal values. Key to its initiatives is addressing the challenges modern development is bringing to the world.

Despite the advancements made in science and technology, simple and basic necessities are not being met for a majority of the population, alongside the health of the environment. It is time to think how the contributions of high-end research translate to those belonging to the vulnerable sections of society.

The Times Higher Education World University ranking system rates universities based on how they address the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In 2020, it placed Amrita among its top 100 universities in emerging economies. In addition, Stanford University ranked five scientists with Amrita faculty among the global top 2% in their respective fields, and the Government of India rated it as the country’s fourth best university.
Amrita led research from sustainable development initiatives to early-landslide detection.

**KEY ACTIONS**

**A UNESCO Chair** for Experiential Learning for Sustainable Innovation & Development was established, supporting the university’s mandate to strengthen sustainable development in villages across India.

**Pandemic outreach** in the form of technical innovation and humanitarian response was conducted to practically serve the world at this crucial time.

**Coronavirus-related curriculum** and service opportunities were created so Amrita could engage its students in real-life learning.

**Online learning tools** developed at Amrita were used during the COVID-19 lockdown to aid remote learning and to innovate new learning and teaching assessments so students could continue their course work.

**Amrita freely shared** its tools, expertise, knowledge and online technologies with other institutions of higher learning so they could also remotely conduct classes.

**The Human Brain Project** made Amrita the first Indian university to partner with the initiative in the European Union, which has 143 universities working to develop solutions to better understand brain function and cure brain diseases.

**Amrita’s landslide detection system** in Munnar, Kerala was able to pick up early warnings for landslides and soil slips in the district and send alerts to the state government, as well as broadcast warnings on Amrita TV.
The university focused on pandemic outreach, especially to create service opportunities in which to engage students and faculty.
AYUDH found ways to help with the pandemic via online channels.
AYUDH is based on Amma’s teaching that we are not isolated islands, but are linked to each other like the rings of a chain; that our lives are not meant to be lived only for ourselves.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Founded in India in 1985, AYUDH empowers young people to integrate universal values into their daily lives. Starting with themselves, the goal is to establish a future of hope, peace and social engagement. Today, our international youth movement is active in more than 40 countries across Asia, Europe, North America, South America, Australia and Africa.

AYUDH is based on Amma’s teaching that we are not isolated islands, but are linked to each other like the rings of a chain; that our lives are not meant to be lived only for ourselves. Amma says we need to set aside some time to make a difference in the lives of those less fortunate. With that understanding, our young generation can become the light of the world.

Members quickly gathered at the beginning of the pandemic to find ways to support their communities, especially vulnerable populations like the elderly, people in poverty and people with disabilities.

As COVID-19 wore on, they became resourceful in finding ways to continue communications with each other and carry on their purpose of youth empowerment for the building of a better world. Their initiatives not only mirrored those of the rest of Embracing the World’s volunteers, but inspired the older generations on how to implement positive solutions in more creative ways.
KEY ACTIONS

Support for isolated people
started at the beginning of the pandemic when AYUDH chapters worldwide held sessions on how to order groceries and other essentials online and how to use virtual work apps.

Grocery delivery
to the homes of the poor, the disabled and the elderly was done by AYUDH members worldwide.

Voluntary blood donations
for people in need were carried out by AYUDH India, especially at a time when plasma was used to treat COVID-19.

A call helpline
was set up by AYUDH Americas so people could receive counselling to manage their stress and to access info on how to reach health professionals.

A massive donation drive
was held by AYUDH Brazil, in which they collected more than 2,000 pounds of nonperishable food, hand sanitizers and reusable masks to distribute to impoverished communities.

Cloth mask sewing
was conducted by AYUDH volunteers around the world to distribute to community health workers, homeless people and women and children living in shelters.

Basic human rights
were addressed by AYUDH Europe in a nine-month campaign that included hate crimes, sexual abuse, environmental action, sustainable development goals and both mental and physical health.

Support for the visually impaired
was continued by AYUDH Kenya when it expanded its White C(r)ane project to provide canes to more than 20,000 people in low-income communities, especially tribal areas.

Protect the girl child
was the subject of an awareness campaign by AYUDH India to convey the message not to discriminate between a girl child and a boy child, especially in terms of education.
In India and Brazil, dozens of AYUDH volunteers—as it was around the world—came together to collect and deliver food to poor communities, especially people with disabilities and the elderly.
Volunteers around the world plant trees in public spaces.
Our environmental initiatives are carried out by GreenFriends, an international network of community-based organizations committed to putting into practice Amma’s simple suggestions for both protecting and healing Mother Nature.

This includes the way we use the planet’s remaining resources and the way we interact with the natural world. It is about what each of us can do—right now in our own backyards—to help restore the lost balance between humanity and nature. There is no denying it is an urgent need. Amma has emphasized that the responsibility for the COVID-19 pandemic rests squarely on the shoulders of humankind’s selfishness and its boundless exploitation of nature.

Yet, Amma says the need of the hour is not fault-finding nor feeling guilty, but casting away idleness and engaging in noble action with alertness and courage. Through seeking positive solutions, we can find a way to break the vicious cycle of environmental degradation and start a new age of living in harmony with all creatures, plants and natural resources.
KEY ACTIONS

Plant & wildlife restoration was sponsored by Amma Australia for a First Nations’ project to help care for areas most severely hit after catastrophic wildfires from 2019 to 2020.

Public clean-up drives were held by volunteers around the world whenever possible given lockdowns and social-distancing restrictions.

Beekeeping to protect and support local bee populations from disappearing, as well as preserve biodiversity, was conducted by MA Centers globally.

Harvested apples grown in the Amma Canada orchards were distributed to local food banks.

Community tree planting was carried out around the world by volunteers in coordination with their local governments and support organizations.

Growing at home online sessions were held for training on how to grow organic vegetables, including places as small as balconies and window sills.

UN youth-led virtual assembly held by the United Nations Environmental Program was attended by AYUDH India, a chapter of our youth wing.

A sustainability conference was held online by AYUDH Europe and included talks, panel discussions and working groups with experts and young activists from various backgrounds.

Volunteers in Italy honored Amma’s 67th birthday by cleaning up public trash.
Many people talk a lot about environmental preservation, but true greatness lies in putting these principles into practice and actually doing something about it.
This is the time of an awakening. Human beings have the strength, courage, goodness and love within themselves to overcome and survive any disaster.

- Amma