

## PROJECT FOR ENDING FARMER SUICIDE

A LONG-TERM ALL-INDIA AID PROGRAMME



In recent years, suicide has been spreading like an epidemic amongst farmers in India suffering from debt and crop failure. For example, in 2006 in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, there were 1,044 reported suicides—one every eight hours. Amma is concerned to help the families in the worst hit states of India, especially the women and children.

Amma with the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Vilasrao Deshmukh

It was in March 2007, after discussions on the issue with Maharashtra Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh, that Amma first announced that M.A. Math would soon be launching a massive project in order to fight the problem. “The problem cannot be solved through economic packages alone,” Amma told the Maharashtra CM. “What is needed is social and spiritual interventions so that the farmers realize that suicide is not the way out. In fact, it only further aggravates the problem for the families.”

On 27 September 2007, M.A. Math inaugurated two programmes aimed at fighting the problem: Vidyamritam and Amrita SREE. The projects are focused at places with high farmer–suicide rates—Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The idea behind these two initial projects is to help lessen the financial strain placed upon agricultural families, which is one of the main factors in the suicides. “Yet another generation should not become slaves of emotional weakness like suicide,” Amma said. “Rather than that, they should understand that they need to develop self confidence. The future generation should have the mental strength to face life’s challenges.”

Below from left to right: A girl from Kerala receives a scholarship that assures her free education; Anil from Maharashtra receives a bicycle, which will enable him to get to his school and continue his education; Narsing, an orphan from Maharashtra, receives his scholarship



## CURBING THE SUICIDES OF FARMERS



Above (left to right): A girl from Karnataka and a boy from Andhra Pradesh receive scholarships from Amma

**THE FIRST  
APPLICANTS  
RECEIVE AID  
FROM AMMA**

## VIDYAMRITAM

In September 2007, on the occasion of Amma's 54<sup>th</sup> birthday, the first recipients received aid from Amma. Through Vidyamritam, M.A. Math will provide scholarships to 100,000 children of farmers living below the poverty line throughout India. The first phase has seen the enrolment of 30,000 students from the states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. Many of the beneficiaries are children who have lost one or both parents to suicide. The children (ages 10 to 15) receive a monthly stipend until they finish their education, subject to their performance in their studies. Since the announcement of the project in July 2007, thousands upon thousands of applications have been received and continue to pour in daily.

Vidyamritam will be a permanent humanitarian programme of the M.A. Math with new students taking over the scholarships of previous ones who have graduated.

As an extension of this project, the M.A. Math is conducting awareness campaigns, including programmes to inculcate values. A newsletter containing articles, stories and discussion forums to further facilitate the intellectual and mental growth is being received by all the children. Furthermore, special advanced-education camps and symposiums on environmental preservation are being conducted.

## AMRITA SREE (SELF-RELIANCE EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT)

Through Amrita SREE, M.A. Math is providing free vocational training to 5,000 Self-Help Groups of women from impoverished agricultural families. After completion of their training, the women are assisted in setting up small-scale cottage businesses and in obtaining the necessary bank loans.

Below (left to right): Women from Kerala and Maharashtra receive certificates of enrolment and financial support as part of M.A. Math's Self Help Group programme

