

Perambalur Community Hygiene Project

Executive Summary: The project will build a public toilet facility in Sendurai Taluk, Perambalur District in Tamil Nadu, India. The facility will have eight Indian style commodes, two areas for bathing and water delivered via a bore well with a hand pump. Women self-help groups in the Sendurai area will purchase land for the project, manage it, and collect funds from local families for regular cleaning and maintenance through a “fee for use” system.

Background

In India, over 700 million people defecate outdoors, most along roadsides, in or next to communal water supplies and in common areas. Since a single gram of feces can contain 10 million viruses, one million bacteria, a thousand parasite cysts, and a hundred worm eggs, it’s not surprising that nearly 600,000 Indian children die each year of ailments related to poor sanitation¹.

A study on women's health in Tamil Nadu, found that there are virtually no toilets in the rural areas. Of the 1,017 women interviewed, only five had facilities in their home; the rest used fields and open spaces for defecation. The absence of sanitation facilities is especially difficult for women and girls since they typically have to rise before dawn and make their way in the darkness to fields, roadsides, and woods to defecate in the open--knowing full well that they risk rape or other violence in the process. Many complain of being in constant pain from having to hold their water through the daylight hours, and a large percentage suffers from urinary tract infections and constipation caused by infrequent urination and defecation.

Surprisingly, the solution to sanitation-related illness is relatively simple. According to the World Bank, providing safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and improved hygiene would reduce 88% of the disease burden in developing nations, and 15% of all deaths under age 5ⁱⁱ. Building inexpensive public toilets with bathing facilities could save thousands of lives each year and improve living conditions for countless women and girls.

Perambalur Community Hygiene Project

This project is designed as a model partnership to demonstrate that “private ownership” of public hygiene facilities can improve public health in rural areas. The program will be carefully documented and used to encourage state and national redevelopment authorities to adopt “public/private” partnerships in construction of public facilities, and work closely with women self-help groups in local civic projects.

Andimadam and Sendurai Blocks are located in Perambalur District in southern Tamil Nadu. The two blocks have a combined population of more than 250,000 living in approximately 7,500 households. Most homes are of the thatched variety and only 10 –15% have indoor plumbing or toilet facilities. Eighty-five percent of residents engage in open defecation in areas outside of homes, in public lakes and near water supplies. Currently, this poses the biggest single public health threat to residents.

Several years ago the government of India responded to the lack of sanitation facilities by embarking on a program to build toilets. Without consulting affected communities, the government constructed approximately 6,000 public toilets on government lands contiguous with local

panchayats (a collection of villages with a minimum of 500 residents) in the Andimadam and Sendurai Blocks. Most were built in areas unsuitable to construction because underlying soils contained a high percentage of sand so most collapsed during the following rainy season. The few remaining facilities fell into disuse because no provisions were made for maintenance and repair. In less than two years, virtually all of the government's investment in sanitation was lost.



Example of Outdoor Toilet Built By Tamil Nadu Government

In 2004, staff from Sahaya met with more than 75 leaders from Women Self Help Groups in the Andimadam and Sendurai Taluks to discuss their priorities and find out what they felt were the most pressing needs for their communities. In every meeting, public sanitation and child health were the top concerns. In response, Sahaya and READ decided to raise funds to conduct a pilot public toilet program.

More than two dozen leaders in the Sendurai area committed to purchasing land for the project, and forming an action committee to oversee construction and maintenance for facility. They agreed that each family would contribute 10 rupees a month (25 cents) toward cleaning and periodic maintenance if Sahaya would raise the funds necessary to build the public bathroom.



Women Self-help Group Leaders from Sendurai

Basic Design for Public Toilets

The public toilet facility that will be constructed in Sendurai is based on a design developed by the World Bank. It will have eight stalls with Indian style commodes and two areas for bathing. Once construction is complete, water will be delivered to the bathing areas via a bore well with a hand pump.

Sahaya's local partner READ will oversee all construction and assist self help groups in organizing and operating the action committee that will oversee the facility. We hope this public/private partnership will serve as a model for similar facilities in other parts of India.



Typical Design for Eight Stall Public Bathroom

Budget

Construction Costs:

(8+2) public toilet facility:	152,000 rupees (approx. \$3,535 US)
Cost for digging bore well	75,250 rupees (approx. \$1,750 US)
Plumbing and finishing work	5,000 rupees (approx \$ 116 US)
Total Project Budget:	<u>232,250 rupees (approx \$5,401 US)</u>

Why Your Help Is So Necessary

Sahaya and READ have been unable to find any foundations that were willing to underwrite the cost of the project. All funds are being raised through private contributions from individuals. Your financial support is desperately needed to make this project a reality.

For donations, please make checks payable to (Specify that you would like to support the Perambalur Community Hygiene Project):

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For more information see Sahaya International at: <http://www.sahaya.org/> or phone (evenings): 530-756-9074 or email kkvanrompay@ucdavis.edu

ⁱ India's new loos save lives. Scott Baldauf | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor. February 10, 2004

ⁱⁱ World Bank. *Water, Sanitation and Health*. 2001