

## Annual Report of Friend in Need Trust (India) / Association Un-Ami (France)

Sep 2009-Sep 2010

The fifth year of FIN has been dedicated to corrective measures – to correct the mistakes of others for the most part, though we absolutely accept our responsibility in the matter, being one among the financial sponsors and sometimes the main sponsor of the projects concerned! In the first four years of the existence of FIN, we were mainly a fund raiser to diffuse and install safe toilets and complementary hygiene promoting or income generating infrastructure in the village of Kameshwaram. We formulated projects in cooperation with the residents of Kameshwaram and other NGOs which actually carried out the tasks of construction and installation. We financed, monitored, facilitated and gave feedback. In economics jargon, this created a typical problem of ‘principal and agents’ – we were the principal with the money and our agents were the other NGOs to whom we outsourced the tasks. The interactions were basically based on trust, because it is impossible in such situations to have perfect and complete information on the motivations or efforts of implementing agents. From the third year onwards, it became increasingly clear that given: (i) the pressures of the market; (ii) insufficient pre-planning before installation; and (iii) inadequate demand, education and motivation from the beneficiaries themselves, the installations introduced were not being used completely or efficiently.



Members of the Family

This led to two major evolutions in our fifth year. First, within Kameshwaram our efforts were uniquely devoted to corrective measures. Second, we began to valorise my competencies, expertise and networks within the academic community, and that of FIN colleagues Mr. Ganapathy (Rtd Special Editor of The Hindu), Mr. Paranjyoti (Field officer, FIN) and Mr. Sriram (Documentationalist) to create and diffuse knowledge on sanitation. FIN was also used as a vehicle to train students in field research. We were greatly supported in this venture this year by the active participation of four French students, two American students, one Indian student and our regular helpers Mrs. Raji (finance & administration, India), Mrs. Christine Honore (finance and administration, France) and Mr. Nico Rasters (Website). [Please see the separately attached newsletter presenting the activities of our students for details].

**What of the future? We have decided not to outsource anymore. Moreover, we do not intend to install any new infrastructure till we correct the defects of all existing installations to the maximum extent possible. For projects within Kameshwaram, even if it takes a long time we will develop local capacity and work to mobilize and organize local talent towards the attainment of targets. For this we will invest more in making our presence felt in the village to create awareness and a sense of trust in the form of reciprocity. We will organize the rural workers more and perhaps create informal**

cooperatives, i.e. create the institutions that are currently missing at the village level to ensure the sustained and efficient use of the infrastructure installed.

Your donations will be like seed capital to start such informal cooperatives but ultimately we will need to arrive at business models by which they can be self-sustaining at the village level. Such business models may or may not exist, but we have to try and search for them first. This may even become a mini-social movement, albeit peaceful and constructive. In this manner, we hope to ensure more engagement and commitment to outcomes, and in turn, better outcomes. We will also continue to train students, undertake research on sanitation and waste management and diffuse the knowledge generated to all.

In this annual report, we now turn to the three major challenges faced and the ‘corrective’ actions taken. We will explain how these actions were initially hailed as successes, how the cracks started appearing and what corrective steps were taken thereafter. We will not discuss our research findings, which will be summarized in a later newsletter.

**Challenge 1 – Repairing the Ecosan toilets that we helped build in Kameshwaram in 2006-2008.**

FIN had gained notoriety for having facilitated the installation of 350 ecosan toilets in Kameshwaram over 2006-2008 and we were very proud of this feat. As a result Kameshwaram had been awarded the ‘Nirmal Gram Puraskar’ for significant sanitation coverage. But we knew that usage of toilets could be improved.



Ecosan toilet - a Junk room

In rural India, sanitation drives suffer from three shortcomings. First, individual household toilets are underused as men continue to prefer the outdoors. The use of toilets conflicts with commonly held notions of masculine virility, unless it happens to be raining! So, millions of rupees have been (and are continuing to be) spent on toilets, which are only used by women for the most part. Second, most sanitation coverage programs accompany users only in the very run short time period following the construction. Thereafter, the toilets may fall apart or be diverted to other uses but nobody bothers (see

photos by Mr.Ganapathy of toilets in Nagapattinam). Third, there are no efforts to generate improvements or incremental innovations through feedback from end-users on the design of the toilets. So we initiated the ‘Toilet beauty contest’ in Kameshwaram to tackle these three shortcomings.



The roof leaky, too low and no doors for toilet

Using a simple carrot and stick approach, in 2007 FIN initiated ‘toilet beauty contests’ as an incentive mechanism to promote usage of toilets and improvements in design. This simple action had attracted wide attention. The toilet beauty contest was open only to families in which all members – both men and women - use the toilets. To maximize the scope of use of the Ecosan toilets by end-users, the contest involved three interrelated ‘sub-contests’: the layout of the garden irrigated by urine from the toilet; the external appearance and cleanliness of the toilet and its immediate surroundings; and any innovation introduced on the functionality or structure of the toilet by the family. Such contests elevated the status of a toilet while bringing publicity to the family, drawing attention to fact that the men of the family also deign to use the toilet. Finally, they made ownership of a toilet a sign of social mobility supporting the creation of new demand.



In 2009 we decided to hold the second ‘Toilet Beauty Contest’ in Kameshwaram. Thus, on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of July 2009, a multi-disciplinary team of ‘judges’: Sangeeta Venkatesh (founder Svanishta, consultant and writer on environmental issues), Malavika Ramanujam (architect), Oswald Quintal (Director Kudumbam – expert on organic farming); Gita Balakrishnan (Ethos) and Felix Raj (architect) examined 66 toilets that had been built by Gramalaya with the financial sponsorshi. The criteria for

the judgment and the corresponding points were formulated by Gita Balakrishnan (Ethos). From left to right (Sangeeta, Malavika, Oswald, Gita, Felix)

To our great surprise and shock the evaluation of the judges revealed alarming facts.

**General Observations:** The households eligible to participate in the contest corresponded to the third sanitation drive, under which 100 toilets had been built by the NGO Gramalaya with the main financial sponsor being WATER AID (and FIN being a minor participant paying Rs 1000 per toilet on behalf of the beneficiaries). These toilets were found to be of much inferior quality by the judges. The reason proposed by way of explanation by the builders was that during the period of construction there had been a severe inflation which had led to cost-cutting. There seems to have been also a lack of interest and supervision in the construction of the ecosan and very little care taken in educating the beneficiaries on how to use or maintain the toilets. Out of 100 toilets that had been constructed about only 50 seemed to be used properly. The two main reasons for the sub-optimal usage seemed faulty construction and lack of education on the use of the ecosan toilets.

**However, the judges were amazed that traditional fishermen families with little prior knowledge of farming were showing great ingenuity in growing a variety of fruit bearing trees and shrubs using the urine and compost from the ecosan toilets. Mr.Oswald, an expert on organic farming, noted that certain varieties of bananas and other fruits were much bigger than that obtained without compost or even with vermicompost.**

The above facts came to light only because of holding the toilet beauty contest, which had permitted a broad evaluation of the state of the toilets and their usage. Thus, spurred we conducted a deeper study whose results are summarized below.

**The context in Kameshwaram and the outcome**

	Year	Number of toilets completed	Need of repair in 2009	Abandoned by 2009
Drive 1	2006	150	50% approx.	none
Drive 2	2007	75	50% approx.	none
Drive 3	2008	100	65	About 40

**Common defect – Cracked ceiling**



2

**Other common defects**

**– Doors falling out**



**Walling peeling off -**



But strangely enough some of the defective toilets were being used while others weren't. A deeper investigation revealed that the toilets which were being used belonged to sanitation drives in which 'education and motivation' of beneficiaries had played a major role.

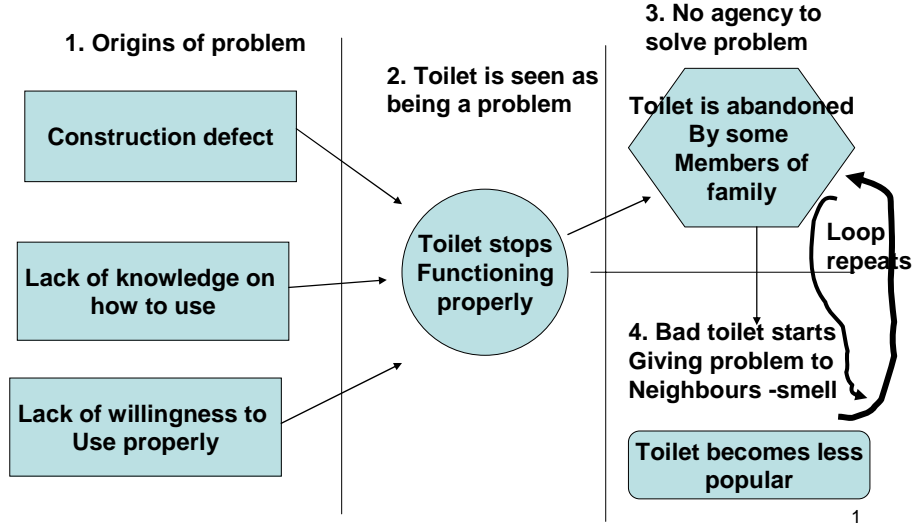
**Role of education and Motivation clear!  
People do not abandon toilets then!**

	Education And Awareness creation	Number of toilets completed	Need of repair in 2009	Abandoned by 2009
Drive 1	Excellent	150	50% approx.	<b>NONE</b>
Drive 2	Excellent	75	50% approx.	<b>NONE</b>
Drive 3	none	100	65	About 40

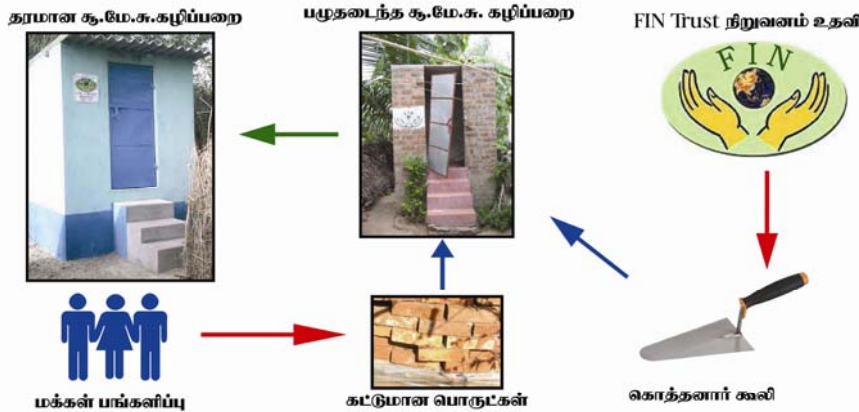
4

The FIN field staff, Mr. Paranjyoti explained that he had seen all this happening around him slowly, but had not informed to spare me emotional distress and pain, as he knew that I did not have the funds to repair the toilets. I asked him – “why should we be the ones to pay for the repairs? He replied – “Madam, all these toilets were diffused in the post-Tsunami period, when everything was given away free and people have got used to the notion of getting toilets for free”. Furthermore, WATER AID and UNICEF had been the main financiers of our big sanitation drives. FIN had contributed between Rs 1000 to Rs 2000 per toilet (with 350 toilets in all ) in return for monitoring, interacting with the constructing NGO and giving feedback. Normally, there is a check up after 12 months, then annual reports of the big agencies are written and they move on. **What is interesting is that most of the toilets were OK for 12 months during which all feedback had to be given.** The defects became apparent only thereafter. But, Mr.Paranjyothi knowing the resource allocation of FIN for the year had not wanted to burden me with additional worries. Since then, we have had long talks with him and he is now very much aware that all the problems should be discussed first and finding solutions would take away any of my emotional distress endured during the interim period! So our further discussions with Mr. Paranjyoti and villagers revealed the following dynamic process.

## Reasons for abandoning of toilets – not all at once – a dynamic process



### பழுதடைந்த சூ.மே.சு.கழிப்பறைகளை FIN Trust உதவியுடன் பழுது நீக்க, கலந்தாய்வு கூட்டம்.



**இடம்:** காமேஸ்வரம்

**நாள்:**

Then we started taking corrective steps. Paranjyoti, Mathilde and Jordan our French student interns prepared this ingenious poster and discussed it during meetings with Kameshwaram residents. They explained that the households could transform their damaged toilet into a good one and FIN could help by paying for the labour, if they

could pay for the materials. **We had got a subvention from HP of 1000 Euros and we decided to allocate it to these repairs.** Since the residents had got the toilets earlier at minimal costs, they were not too keen to participate. But, we are slowly getting takers – now the challenge is to construct a seamless process from ascertaining demand for undertaking repairs to providing the masons and getting the job done.

Here, we faced another problem. In India there is a severe lack of skilled labour in low-tech sectors like sanitation, despite the teeming population. There are simply no institutes that generate qualified masons, plumbers, electricians and the like. There are no schools that are building these skills in both literate and illiterate students.

Furthermore, any form of rural works is considered to be ‘low brow’ – today everyone wants a desk job or a management job and engages in rural works only if necessary. The universities in the provinces are for the main part producing ‘unemployable graduates’ who lack the minimum soft skills of communication and understanding. Thus, it is not uncommon to find a chief electrician in a village with a Masters degree in economics, knowing neither economics nor the basic principles behind solving electricity related problems. Not finding a job in the market but armed with a diploma and an effective social network, he may have been accorded the post of chief electrician in a village to learn on the job from less literate colleagues.



There are few rural works cooperatives – these organizations which flourished in previous centuries have all but disappeared. For these reasons it is extremely difficult to find qualified and motivated masons. **Thus, there is a clear case of ‘missing institutions’ at the village level that can effectively provide repair services for the toilets diffused. FIN hopes to contribute to filling this lacuna by creating a ‘Sanitation service unit’ with locals.** It will help the masons who have built the 350 masons in kameshwaram, coming from the adjacent village of Thirupundi to form a unit for ensuring

a reliable service for Kameshwaram. The challenge is to get the masons to accept to work on a consistent basis – these masons do a variety of rural works and also work on family plots. The idea of coordinating to provide a consistent service to a client is extremely new to their mind-set, even if payments are assured. This is something we are working upon.

**What of the future for ecosan? What of 2011? This is what we plan to do...**

- Carry out a detailed survey of all toilets in Kameshwaram.
- Carry out a detailed survey of all households without toilets – to ascertain demand for same.
- Inform all households (orally and through brochures) of the availability of repair services.
- Regularly hold meetings with families in the new ‘FIN office’ in Kameshwaram (see last section) and invite families which have undertaken toilet repairs to speak to others.
- **Create the FIN sanitation service unit and coordinate with at least 4 masons to ensure consistent repair services in Kameshwaram.**
- Raise funds for repairs and carry them out.
- No new toilets will be diffused till all existing defective toilets are repaired.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Challenge 2 – Facilitate a village school to have clean toilets, figure out a way for the school to maintain the toilets, develop a methodology to monitor maintenance and create an incentive system to sustain maintenance routines.**

In July 2007, one of the private schools in Kameshwaram called St Sebastian attained celebrity status by becoming the first school in India to be equipped with urine diversion toilets, also called ecosan or ecological toilets. These toilets were financed by the student association of the Grenoble School of Business, SOS (France) thanks to the dedicated efforts of research interns Antonin Benyacar and Annabelle Didier. These ecosan toilets were constructed by our NGO partner, SCOPE. There was an article in ‘The Hindu’. A member of the Government came and opened the complex. In short, there was a lot of fanfare.

What was the innovation?

- The urine was to be collected in drums and given to the adjacent farmers for free.
- In return, the farmers were to supply vegetables whenever possible for the midday meal offered to students.

There were regular visits to the Ecosan toilets and I received a lot of compliments. So I thought the toilets were just great.



**However, when we paid a visit to St. Sebastien school in July 2008 without informing them that we would be coming, we found the toilets to be dirty and not fully used. There was shit in the anal washing hole, revealing that it had not been used properly. The toilets were stinking of urine, indicating that they had not been cleaned by the administration. The farmer on the adjacent plot was not using the urine. Indeed, he complained to us that the collected urine was causing problems.**



An enquiry revealed that the director of the school, who is totally devoted to the school and made sure that the toilets were clean, had been in a hospital with a stomach tumor since the past month. In his absence, the teachers were reluctant to maintain the toilets. Second, some miscreants from the village had also amused themselves, dirtying the toilets.

While I was unearthing the reasons for this sorry state --- I heard similar stories from other funding agencies/NGOs working on school toilets. I also visited some schools and had extensive discussions with school principals and teachers.

## Actions taken from September 2009

### 1. Visit to San Sebastien School with FIN team from France in November 2009



We visited the school and interacted with the Head Master and the students. As soon as we entered the schoolyard, we were repelled by the nauseating smell coming from the toilets. The headmaster assured us that after achieving the academic challenge by reaching a 100% success rate at the final exam, the next challenge is to have a clean and non-smelling school. As he talked, I was struck by pictures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses in the Head Master's office next to those of Mother Mary and Jesus Christ. The Head Master, Mr. Arokia Dass, explained that the school had been built in 1954 by his grandfather, and located in the

premises of the San Sebastian Church in Kameshwaram. In 1977, there had been a big storm and the school hamlet had been completely destroyed. The church had offered to rebuild the school if the school could be run by the priests, with the teachers being priests also selected by the church. His grandfather had refused and was denied all help from the church thereafter. However, local Hindus, Christians and Muslims in the village and neighbouring areas got together, raised funds and rebuilt the school to its present state. Therefore, the present headmaster, himself raised in a Hindu household by a friend of his father in the city to gain access to 'English language classes', considers himself to be a global secular citizen even while adhering to the religious practises of his faith. The pictures of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses had also led the Christian church groups to refuse all help in the post-Tsunami period unless the offending pictures of all non-Christian religious entities were removed. Mr. Dass had politely refused. As a consequence, he is missing out on interesting financial opportunities, because secular non-religious organizations like FIN, simply cannot match the deep pockets of the Church groups in India. This story is not to touch upon the pressure exercised by religious organizations in developing countries, the last frontier for augmentation of converts, which is common knowledge anyway, but to illustrate the 'secular' stance of the Head Master who directs the school. He is also very enthusiastic to formulate and implement a joint strategy to maintain the school toilets. **This factor is most crucial because school Principals are judged on the basis of student results in exams and not on the state of the school toilets. So unless the Head Master is personally motivated to improve sanitation and hygiene in the school, all efforts will be useless.**

## 2. Two students from Agro-Paris Tech, a Grandes Ecole (Premiere Elite school) are assigned to the project

AgroParisTech is the Paris institute of technology for life, food and environmental sciences. Sophie Sfez and Gabriela Simonet are in the Masters Program of agricultural engineering. Before their last year at AgroParisTech, they decided to spend one year abroad, with two six-month internships. They spent the first six months in Canada and having heard about FIN from Antonin's (FIN intern 2005-2006) sister and finding the project interesting, they decided to work with us. One of the principal actions undertaken was to collaborate with the students and the teachers of St Sebastian's School, in Kameswaram, to develop awareness and management of toilets and waste.



They started by doing a survey of the views and behavioural patterns of the students. They asked questions such as: Do you use the school toilets? How are they (nice, smelly, yucky)? Would you be willing to clean them along with your teacher? Do you know the difference between an ecosan and non-ecosan toilet? Do you think clean toilets in schools are a good thing? Do you think schools need clean toilets or is it ok not to have them? **An analysis of the student responses revealed that boys and girls hold very different views.**

The girls mainly use urinals but they try hard to retain themselves and wait to get home because the toilets are dirty and smelly. Some students do not use the toilet properly and shit outside the bowl and this is disgusting for the next user. Ecosan toilets are supposed to have buckets with ash but in the school toilets these are missing. Girls find it a real pain to keep shifting from hole to hole to use an ecosan toilet. Finally, for girls, there seems to be a notion of 'shame' attached to even wanting to go to a toilet. They hate the fact that everybody can see them when they are going to the toilet and they are ashamed

The girls do not want to wash the toilets because they consider it to be a job that is usually done by really poor people or members of the scavenger community. Now, they are doing it because they have no other choice but it is difficult for them to carry the water in buckets, and it is not very efficient for cleaning. They said that it would be easier for them if we could find some modern techniques to do it: say with a hosepipe to bring water (to avoid carrying heavy buckets) and install sprayers at the end to obtain a higher pressure of the water. Then cleaning would be fun.

The answers of the boys were similar in terms of complaints (toilets had no water, no ash and were very smelly) and usage of mainly urinals. However, there were two major differences. First, there was no notion of shame. They don't mind peeing outside and they don't care who sees them. Second, boys are totally against the idea of cleaning the toilets. The headmaster explained that according to local social norms, in homes only women are in

charge of maintaining hygiene, and so boys are very averse to cleaning anything at school. Having understood the context, Sophie and Gabriela got into action.

### Step 1 : Creating awareness through games and interaction with students

Sophie and Gabriela made posters depicting biodegradable and non-biodegradable materials and introduced games in classrooms by which the children had to decide which was which. Then they spoke of toilets, hygiene, waste management etc. Here's an excerpt from their bi-month report: "Working with the school, we discover that it is easier to motivate young people than adults. The first meetings we organized were with the teachers and we discovered their passivity. Even if they had ideas, they never take any initiative. Moreover, we realize that sanitation and waste management are delicate subjects: it is unimaginable to ask boys to clean their toilets and very hard to change the habits of adults. The school staff has agreed to follow our initiatives, but they never undertake anything by themselves. On the contrary, the last meetings we organized were with students who seemed eager to participate".



### Step 2: Using EM to get rid of the smell



Another excerpt from the reports of Gabriella and Sophie: "In order to reduce the bad smell of the toilets we decided to experiment a new technology called EM, or Effective Micro-organisms. We first met M. Lucas (Director, EcoPro) in Auroville to receive explanations about EM fabrication and application. In April, we gave the school activated EM and three sprayers, and the headmaster organized several teams of students. Every week, one team had to spray EM after school. This first test with the girls of the High School was a success! The girls found it great fun to use sprayers! Unfortunately, we don't think it is possible to keep using

sprayers because students are likely to break them and it may harm the small hands of the girls to use them for a long time. In June, we started a new protocol, using only buckets and applying EM by hand. It did not seem to disturb the girls to apply EM by hand because we explained it is a natural and harmless product and provided soap so they could wash their hands after application.

We taught the teachers how to activate EM by showing them a movie and undertaking the activation of EM with them. **They were not very receptive**, that is why we fear that nobody will take the initiative to buy and activate EM after we leave, unless if other student interns like us keep working on this project.

We calculate the annual budget for EM application in the two ecosan toilets (boys and girls) to be around 3000 Rs. Due to the time of conservation of activated EM (6 weeks), we can only buy 200mL bottle of pure EM at a time or we will waste a lot of the product. We need 3 bottles for 6 weeks. The headmaster considers the school can afford it but we have to make sure he will keep buying EM after our departure.”

### Step 3: Creating a sanitation and waste management committee

Gathering volunteers from the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> classes, Gabriela and Sophie formed two committees – to ensure maintenance of toilets and manage waste in the school. The Head Master assigned two of the temporary teachers to head the same. **However, when I visited the school in August, neither of the two teachers in charge was able to tell me anything coherently about their activities as committee heads in the previous month confirming their apathy.** Mr. Ganapathy also wrote to me that: “Students of the 9th std. are found to be not very keen on sanitation and solid waste management activities. They are not wearing the badges given to them. The headmaster said that they feel a little shy to clean the toilet and he will definitely ensure that they do the job by separate session with them.”



ST.SEBASTIAN HIGH SCHOOL,KAMESHWARAM  
WASTE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE(JUNE 2010-APRIL 2011)

[Sitting] 1.Vinothini(8-A) 2.Narmatha(8-A) 3.Gayathiri(8-A) 4.Ilavarasan(8-B) 5.Vignesh(8-A) 6.Subramani(8-A)  
[Standing – First row from bottom] 1.Kannia(9-B) 2.Pathmavathi(9-A) 3.Priya(9-A) 4.Sowndarya(9-C) 5.Vembu(9-C)  
6.Nandhini(9-C) 7.Arunmathi-Teacher 8.Mr.A.Das-Headmaster 9.Veerasekaran(8-B) 10.Sakthibalan(9-A)  
11.Sargunam(9-C) 12.Mohamed Towfiq(9-A) 13.Paranjoti FIN Trust

Courtesy: FIN Trust  
Photograph by Gabrielle Kiarello, August 2010



ST.SEBASTIAN HIGH SCHOOL,KAMESHWARAM  
SANITATION COMMITTEE(JUNE 2010-APRIL 2011)

Kavitha(9-C) 2.Vijayalakshmi(9-C) 3.Maria Vinolia(8-B) 4.S.Sowmia(8-A) 5.Shalini(8-A) 6.Ajithkumar(8-A)  
(8-A)  
– First row from bottom] 1.Latha(9-C) 2.Tharani(8-A) 3.Mariyamrin(8-A) 4.Gowsalya(8-A) 5.Gajendran(8-A)  
8-A) 7.Arunkumar(8-A)  
– Second row from bottom] 1.Saranya-Teacher 2.Mr.A.Das-Headmaster 3.Sambathkumar(9-B) 4.Paranjoti FIN Trust  
5.Kannan(9-B) 6.Kannan(9-B) 7.Senthilkumar(9-C) 8.Jayasuthahar(9-A)

Courtesy: FIN Trust  
Photograph by Gabrielle Kiarello, August 2010

Here ended the internship of Sophie and Gabriela and Mr. Paranjyoti, our field staff entered the scene and we worked on the existing infrastructure for sanitation and hygiene.

### Step 4: Repairing the toilets and repainting them



During the summer vacation (April-May), the taps for handwashing were repaired, more water sprayers were installed in the toilets for cleaning, water storage containers were hauled up on the roof, all taps in toilets were repaired. The entire cost of repairs and materials was borne by FIN Trust (gory details of costs coming your way in financial statements in next newsletter!)

### Step 5: Steps taken for waste management



We have placed blue bins for non-degradable waste in different parts of the school. The waste from these are gathered and put into a plastic tank shown on left. What you see is what the school kids produce in two months. There is a black bucket for biodegradable waste from lunch boxes next to the hand-washing area. There is only one and it is always dirty. The stray

dogs overturn it and the area is a mess. I have repeatedly requested for more black bins to be bought – but nobody is buying them because nobody wants to touch a yucky black bucket with food waste. I am meeting in a couple of weeks with specialists of composting in Bangalore <http://www.dailydump.org/>. I have had skype meetings with them already and I am excited about the beautiful earthen pots (cheap on top of that) that we are going to procure. One of the objectives of my next visit to the village in November is to devise a system by which it's not yucky to clean the buckets with biodegradable waste, buy many buckets and pots and put the buckets in the beautiful pots so that they look pretty and are not overturned by the stray dogs and clean up the buckets myself – to remove all taboos about cleaning !! Mr. Nagappan shown on right of above picture along with Mr. Paranjyoti, is an expert in composting in the village and has single-handedly built a bio-gas plant. I have requested his help in the future for overseeing the compost management at school for a small honorarium and he has agreed to the same.



### Step 6: Transporting the non-biodegradable garbage to Velankanni



Mr. Paranjyoti has established contact with a 'non-biodegradable waste' buying unit in the nearby town of Velankanni. He made a first triumphant tour in a hired van with the school waste! If this can be done with the school, why not with the villagers? This is what we are aiming for. In Indian cities, segregation of waste is not required to be carried out by the households. There are however pockets of "NGO supported" or "very-aware-residential-colonies" in every major city, where the residents have organized themselves to manage the

waste generated. We want to do the same in Kameshwaram, document the process, and

present a cost-benefit analysis to the Indian government so that the process can be replicated. We have again a very long way to go, but we have got started!

### **What of the future? What of 2011? This is what we intend to do in the school....**

The fundamental problem in schools is not even the lack of toilets **but the lack of ‘routines’ for toilet maintenance and a total lack of motivation on the part of the teachers involved. There is no point in building toilets in schools without first ensuring the initiation of routines that would be endogenously maintained. Both financial incentives and a methodology of work will have to be developed to ensure the participation of the teachers in the committees effectively.**

**Another problem that has not been mentioned earlier, but which is a stark reality in rural India is the following.** Since many centuries only members of the scavenger community have been responsible for maintenance of public areas. Though all backward caste members are most eager to get government certification to avail of freebies, they expect only members of the scavenger community to participate in cleaning of public areas (and all residents of Kameshwaram are backward caste but not all are below the poverty line and so all are subsidized to some extent but not to the same extent). The members of the scavenger community, despite all the government aid have a very tough life and are socially ostracized, but still it’s a challenge to find committed workers from this community even if you offer them a good deal. This is what I am not able to understand.

**For instance, from my own experience and other anecdotes I hear, many members of the scavenger community, without studying game theory, play what is known as the ‘ultimatum game’ making rational use of the repugnance of any other members to clean public areas. They hold multiple cleaning jobs and do not respect their commitments completely in any! If reprimanded they threaten to go on a hunger strike invoking caste oppression or simply remind their employer that any way nobody else is going to do the job !!**

What is strange is that this game-playing has become such a social-norm that it is very difficult to find any one even under a good deal to clean public areas. To date I have found no-one. I am also trying to find non-scavenger community members to hire for cleaning. I have offered up to Rs 10,000 per month from my personal pocket for someone to clean the school toilets and collect garbage from the fishermen families – but nobody is willing to come because of the social stigma attached to cleaning of public areas or others! **Now the next time I go to the village, I am going to clean up toilets, pick up garbage and have my actions photographed and displayed! My French student Marion is also going to join me. Moreover, after six months of such talking and talking and talking, Mr. Paranjyoti our field staff is mentally prepared to attempt to do this once a month ! I have asked for this event to be photographed and displayed every month – and you cannot imagine the nature of the sacrifice this means for his family. So I am extremely grateful for his participation. I feel the best way to break this social stigma is to have non-scavenger community members clean the toilets and pick up the trash! Want to join?**

In the above context, there are basically two options for schools:

- (i) **The teachers and students can maintain the toilets themselves.** This is a very unpopular option and usually is a passing fad to accompany the visit of a VIP.
- (ii) The school authorities can pay so that a cleaner can be employed. But this will require persuasion and a clear examination of the school's account. The school authorities want the parents to bear the costs of the cleaner, but parents claim shortage of funds and the school prefers to reinvest in classrooms and materials to augment to student population without investing in sanitation infrastructure. **But the problem is really not the payment – but to find someone. As mentioned earlier we are not able to find anyone and we have been trying for over 6 months.**

For the rest of 2010 and 2011, our objective is to work with the school and develop a methodology to maintain the toilets, make EM or effective micro-organisms within the school to spray on the toilets to keep out the school and we have plans for several 'incentive mechanisms' to promote a wider participation from both the student body and the staff – you'll read about them in the future!

\*\*\*\*\*

**Challenge 3: Turning OUR WHITE ELEPHANTS black again!**



A white elephant is a valuable possession which its owner cannot dispose of and whose cost (particularly cost of upkeep) exceeds its usefulness.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White\\_elephant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_elephant)

Any investment that nobody wants because it is unprofitable.  
[www.investopedia.com/terms/w/whiteelephant.asp](http://www.investopedia.com/terms/w/whiteelephant.asp)

**3.1 THE RUSTED SOLAR DRIER INSTALLED IN 2007!**



When the Mayor of the village of Rumeilly in France granted me 3.5 lakhs or 7000 Euros in 2006, my NGO partners felt it must be invested in a livelihood project for the fishermen. Though well intentioned the solar drier was hardly ever been used and became a public hazard. We wrongly assumed that the solar drier would be adopted eagerly as it could increase the earnings of the fishermen. Training had been given to the women. However, to maintain and generate income from it, a group which could undertake it as a business was required. Since such a group

did not emerge, the community leaders decided to keep it locked. There were also problems about ownership. It wasn't clear to whom it belonged During the elections, there were fights over it and four men apparently passed some hours in jail.

During 2007-2008, the solar drier lay rotting. The parts that seemed important were stolen – like the fans and the motor. The Nargis cyclone of 2008 further rusted the solar drier. I wanted the solar drier to be carted away and sold to someone who could repair it and make better use of it. The village Panchayat said that the fishermen would never give up anything given to them. But I found it quite easy to have it carted away in exchange for three solar lamps. They want lamps that can be seen at night from a distance of 3 kms from the beach and they also considered the rusted solar drier a public hazard.



### What of the future? What of 2011?



The rusted solar drier has now been carted away and is in a safe place. We are at the moment negotiating sharing of costs with prospective buyers who will be use it for a charitable non-profit cause and who have a skilled and motivated work force to make efficient use of the solar drier once it is reinstalled. Apparently in the Nagappatinam area about 43 solar driers were sold in the aftermath of the Tsunami and to date, we haven't come across one yet that is being used properly. We are extremely sorry to have listened to the advice of NGOs whose investments

swing to the tune of the popular fashions of the moment, without enough study of the supply and demand sides of the market.

### 3.2 THE UNUSED DESIGNER TOILETS CONSTRUCTED IN 2007



This was entirely my bloomer. I wanted to build an ecosan toilet complex for a contest hosted by the Indian design mag 'Inside-Outside' on pro-poor constructions. I wanted it to be different, even revolutionary! Chatting excitedly with Mr. M. Subburaman, Director of SCOPE, with his extensive experience of Ecosan toilets, we hit upon the idea of building an Ecological Toilet cum Bathroom Complex) or ETBC on the premises of the Panchayat office of Kameshwaram. We reckoned that even if we didn't make a dent in the contest, it

could serve as a showcase for all visitors and encourage adoption of ecosan toilets in Kameshwaram. It was designed in collaboration with NIT students with inputs from Mrs. Geetha Balakrishnan of Ethos – marking a first collaboration with Indian students. Mr. Subburaman and his team did a superb job of building the complex and the students and the local masons had great interaction. In short, it was a most happy experience!

It was an Eco-friendly Toilet Bathroom Complex (ETBC) with Rain-Water-Harvesting (RWH) and Solar energy facility. The bathroom had RWH facility. Water was to be collected in all three tiled roofs and drained into two tanks inside the bathroom. Bathroom was provided with towel and soap stand. The men's toilet had bamboo walls and support for roof and contains ceramic ecosan toilet pans. The women's toilet had brick walls and superstructure and contains Fibre-Reinforced plastic or (FRP) pans. A kitchen Garden was to be raised behind the ETBC to use the compost created in the ecosan toilets. **The Innovative Features of the ETBC in terms of social norms and technology were that it was the first Ecosan toilet with solar light facility and RWH facility in the country. The first TBC for a rural panchayat office. The first ETBC to study the comparative performance of ceramic pan vs. FRP pans. This had cost us 75,000 Rs.**

What happened afterwards? **The entire complex was locked and unused and the Panchayat staff continued to use a conventional toilet with an attached septic tank (rather smelly) nearby!** No garden was grown.

Why did this happen? It happened because the hypothesis on which the construction was made –that a toilet complex in a Panchayat office would be a showcase – a model for all visitors to see – was completely wrong. The Panchayat members were least interested – but had been too polite to say 'no' to an offer. The Panchayat Head's own family uses only a toilet with septic tank. The Panchayat head out of loyalty and friendship to us, is the only member of his family to use the ecosan toilet that has been provided to him. Finally, the Panchayat has absolutely no need for it (while I was told there were hordes of visitors regularly in need of bathrooms) and no interest in its maintenance. So it was viewed as a good will gesture to the Panchayat but every time I came here I argued about it, so that became a sore point in our discussions and even the Panchayat also became embarrassed to possess this white elephant. In the meantime, the bamboo door fell out and the other door latch got stuck.



### What of the future? What of 2011?



Perhaps out of generosity or perhaps out of sheer embarrassment, the Panchayat requested a donation of Rs 25,000 to buy land from a farmer to install a 'fair-price' shop as per government regulations and they informed us that in return we could maintain/use the toilet complex that we had constructed on the Panchayat premises as well as an unused room next to the toilet that has served as a junk room since 10 years. We took the offer and so **the new FIN office at Kameshwaram consists of a set of toilets and a room next to them in the premises of the Panchayat!!**

**the new FIN office at Kameshwaram consists of a set of toilets and a room next to them in the premises of the Panchayat!!**

Wow! we finally have a place in Kameshwaram which can be a showcase for our ideas, where we can invite families and decision makers for tea, show them films, documents, hold discussions with them – make plans! And have fun too!

And incidentally – and here I’m really being honest here – I ended up by chance in Kameshwaram on my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday (after conducting interviews with a Canadian colleague with Indian biotech firms elsewhere!) and I had a great birthday bash there – Mr. Paranjyothi had arranged an inauguration ceremony for the new FIN office, next to the toilets. Mother Earth was appeased with promises of respect and prayers. I got a golden elephant from Mr.Ganapathy – surely to keep in mind that even if we move slowly, we should move wisely! And a blue shawl from Mr.Paranjyoti to remind me of the ocean at Kameshwaram ! I even got a lovely cake with a candle for every decade – Thanks Paranjyoti ! So there we were – the FIN team, including my sister and I, chomping down this lovely cake with superb lemon tea made by Mrs. Selvamani in her hamlet, in a wonderful ambience of camaraderie and affection! Wish you had been with us!

Cheers and many many sincere thanks for your support,  
Shyama V. Ramani

PS – Guess how the cake was decorated?

PPS – please check out the new website designed by Nico Rastors, a Dutch colleague and friend.



Here’s a poster of the main members of FIN made by the French students Jordan Trombetta and Mathilde Lefevre – its also there in the new website. [www.friend-in-need.org](http://www.friend-in-need.org)