

## Keelakarthisgaipatti, India

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### Population 900

Keelakarthisgaipatti is a neighborhood which is part of the block, or village, of Thottiyam. Although there are a few concrete houses, which were constructed by the Government of India under a group housing scheme for caste communities, an overwhelming majority of houses in Keelakarthisgaipatti are thatched-roof and tiled. There is one primary school, which before the project lacked a water source and sanitation facilities for teachers and students. Most of the people living in the village are landless, agricultural laborers whose livelihood depends on daily wages. The waste water and sanitation system was very poor. The system had not been constructed with proper masonry structures or drainage. Thus gray water was stagnating in the streets. Open defecation was routinely practiced by the women along the village boundaries, and the men use the nearby forest area and the hillocks. The children defecated nearby the houses and on the streets.

### New Water Source

As a result of this project, community members in Keelakarthisgaipatti now get their water from three tubewells capped by handpumps. The members of the Village Water and Sanitation Committee know how to appropriately maintain the water system to reduce breakage. However should a pump need repairs, the committee has the capacity to make those repairs. Additionally, to further prevent diarrheal diseases throughout the community, each household constructed its own low-cost latrine. Families were able to choose the type of latrine they preferred and obtained loan funds from the WSHG. The school also has its own sanitary block for children and for faculty.

### Project Activities

The Sustainable Health through Water and Sanitation Program in Keelakarthisgaipatti was completed during the Spring of 2004. The project has demonstrated great success.

Since the start of the project, there has been a remarkable change in the village. As a result of the project, all houses have a toilet, and people no longer defecate in public. In fact, the village instituted a policy that would fine anyone caught defecating in the open in the village. Feces are no longer seen throughout the village, thereby reducing the incidence of water and food contamination. The people in the village now collect their water from working handpumps, and the run-off from the pump runs into a community garden, rather than stagnating as a home for mosquitoes. The garden is tended to by the children in the village, and the crops produced are sold to maintain the pumps and the garden. Many families have also started kitchen gardens which they water with their wastewater.

Throughout the project, women in the community have developed a stronger voice and have become more confident and more empowered to make decisions within the community. In charge of the loan fund used to build new toilets members of the Women's Self Help Group were given a new role as leaders in the community. They played an

## Project Completed in 2004



Children celebrating their new water system. Keelakarthisgaipatti.



River near several project sites including Keelakarthisgaipatti. When water is scarce in villages, people must walk here for water.



A. Maherwari, 10 years, drinking safe water from her new handpump. Keelakarthisgaipatti.



Girl operating a new handpump in Keelakarthisgaipatti.

active role in construction, funding, and successfully completing the project. Women learned to save money and are now active members of their households.

### **Reasons for project success**

There are many reasons for the success of this project. First, the project was not started until each community member was in agreement with the goals of the project. Our partner organization took the community on village walks to explore the dangerous and contaminated areas of the village. During that time, field staff educated community members on the causes of common illnesses in the community and helped them understand that handpumps and sanitation systems, along with the commitment of the community would reduce those diseases. As the community understood the advantages of investing in water and sanitation, they became much more supportive of the project. Community members made it their job to ensure that every community member would participate. In the event that a community member was reluctant to participate, other community members worked to convince him or her that the benefits would be worth the expense.

This dedication to the project carried over to the actual construction of the project. Beneficiaries worked diligently to develop their water system and to build a latrine for every home. Community members helped their neighbors, especially the elders of the community, to ensure that everyone completed their toilets in a timely manner and a high quality way. Now, community members are encouraging one another to pay back their loans to the loan fund.

Another reason this project was particularly successful was that children's groups were used very effectively. Children were given many responsibilities in taking care of their community during this project. Not only are they in charge of maintaining the toilets and water supply in their school, they also were given responsibility to teach their peers and their elders about appropriate hygiene methods. Including the children as "health ambassadors" offered repetition of field staff messages, but also encouraged children to invest in their community. That investment will last into the future and will ensure the sustainability of the project.

### **Upcoming Activity**

The village water and sanitation committee will continue to maintain the handpumps and the sanitation network. Community members continue to pay back loans. Women's and Children's Self Help Groups have encouraged active participation of women and children in the community, and these groups will continue to be a driving force in enhancing the quality of life in the community.



Focus Group Discussion conducted by the Health workers from Gramalaya in Keelakarthisaipatti.



Children taking active participation in the group discussion in Keelakarthisaipatti village.



Ramya at her new latrine. Ramya and friend Vasuki were going to Balwadi wearing footwear (cheppals). Ramya said they wear shoes to protect against worms in feces along road and sunlight. Ramya insisted that others wear shoes too.



Pump caretakers, Dhava Mani and Lakshmi Kesavan demonstrate pump greasing on a new handpump in Keelakarthisaipatti.