

# How we were then and how we are now

## A case study on school eco-sanitation



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"Once when I went for defecation, I felt that I had been bitten by an insect, so I told my friends and teachers. I was taken for treatment. There were plenty of insects and snakes in the area surrounding the school", said Prame Anandhraj, a student who is studying 3rd standard in St Joseph school. The area surrounding the school is thick with bushes and cashew nut trees, and the children were afraid to go to the toilet.

There were no sanitation facilities, so the children were open-defecating behind a tank. This was particularly a problem for the girls, as there was no segregated area for them to go away from the boys, who were also using the same area.



Valuthalampaatu is a small remote village in Cuddalore district, home to 150 families. The people mostly depend on agriculture and casual labour as a livelihood. The primary school was built in 1940 by Missionaries, to provide an education for the adjacent village's children. This was thriving, but gradually the school numbers diminished, especially girls, as it became a problem for them going to school because of the lack of water and sanitation facilities.

As a result of the lack of sanitation facilities, the numbers diminished to only 40 children, 25 boys and 15 girls. The school has only one building for 1st to 5th Standard, and at times it has become so difficult to work, that classes have been held outdoors, obviously a problem in the rainy season. The building was in poor repair, not being

maintained by either the school management or government. Only one teacher was government funded, but all the teachers were motivated to provide a good education for the children.

After much discussion within the community, the decision was taken by our partner NGO to provide ecosanitation facilities, with separate units for boys and girls, and the construction was completed with the cooperation of all the teachers and school management. "Rs 64500 was spent on construction, but the result is fully worthwhile - the children have hygienic facilities, and their smiles you couldn't buy anywhere!", School teacher Mr. Arun Pallavan said.

Our NGO partner provided a series of trainings, to help the children understand the correct use of the ecosan facilities, and the importance of handwashing and hygiene-it's incredible to see how enthusiastically the children have responded, and tell others! "There are two pits in a toilet, one is already closed and sealed, the other is open for defecation, covered with a lid. I go and squat over the hole, defecate, and afterwards I spread ash on it, and then I move a few steps back and wash my bottom. The stool goes into the chamber, and it will be dry compost after a few months. The washing water and the urine are collected in a separate pot. After everything is done, I wash my hands with soap. It is very safe and easy to use, and we don't have insect and snake problems anymore", said Antony Arunkumar.

The children have the wonderful idea that they will create a small garden, to grow vegetables and banana trees, which will be used for their meals! "We will collect the waste water, and use it for growing vegetables and banana trees", said Selvi, who is studying 3rd standard.

The Ecosan has enthused all the children, who are using and maintaining the toilet properly. They understand the health benefits, and it will help them stay well and prosper in the future!



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