

An Update
on the
Ecosan and Water Project
At
Vankwad, Gujurat



Wherever the Need



In the autumn of 2007, Wherever the Need (WTN) started work in the village of Vankwad, Gujarat, some thirty-five kilometres north east of Rajkot. The village is typical of those found in this part of Gujarat, mainly given over to agriculture, especially dairy and subsistence farming. It is made up of 113 families with an approximate population of 1,400.

The original Vankwad village site had to be moved as it was in the flooded area created by the building of the Machchu Dam. Unfortunately even the new location of the 'rehabilitated' village is prone to flooding when the dam is over capacity. This means the major growing season is limited to December – July, when the land is not flooded. The houses were built by the villagers and are of a poor quality. Getting to and from the village is difficult, especially during the rainy season when the road is flooded.

The village school educates up to 11 years old, after which children have to attend the next level school at Jiyana one kilometre away. The high school is more than six kilometres away and no girls and very few boys attend from the village. The school should open at 09.00, but the teachers have to travel from Rajkot and arrive late, therefore teaching hours are reduced.



Water is piped in through the Government supply network, which means it is periodic with an indeterminate flow. When the WTN project started there were four standpipes scattered around the village, together with two buffalo troughs with an open pipe from which people also collected water. An external water pump had, briefly, complemented the Government water supply, but that silted up and was unusable when the project commenced. There were two water storage units, both damaged and unused. When water was not running, villagers would collect water from the farm wells and/or the dam, a walk of three kilometres.



A communal flush toilet with septic tank had also fallen into disuse (and disrepair) because of the lack of water and because people felt it was too far away to use frequently, even when there was enough water. There were no other toilets in the village and most people defecated in the open.

There were few organisational structures within the village, for men or women, and nobody was aware of what benefits may be available to them from either the State or National Governments.

We organised a number of village meetings to enable the creation of the necessary infrastructure for work to commence. We employed a local Gujarati speaking person and formed several volunteer groups. We arranged for senior villagers to visit WTN ecosan projects in Tamil Nadu.



The first part of the project was very straightforward as we agreed to repair the water pump to provide a more constant supply of water and this would include a supply to the school. The water pump was linked to one of the repaired storage units so that once filled there would be less need for pumped water on demand. The pump was locked when not in use, controlled by a local committee.

During the various meetings we quickly realised that people preferred family eco-sanitation (ecosan) units particularly after their experiences with the existing communal unit. Many women also requested some form of bathing room to be attached to provide privacy for them and their children, especially daughters.

However, despite the best efforts of WTN's local educators and even the enthusiasm of the people themselves, it took far longer than normal to engage the village in the use and benefits of ecosan. There is no logical reason for this, but with hindsight we feel it may have been due to some underlying resistance relating to the subject matter in general.

The construction was very simple. WTN used locally quarried stone and locally made porcelain and, although it took a little longer than anticipated, we constructed ninety-nine units within one year.



November 2009

A comprehensive visit one year later revealed outstanding results.

The positive response was overwhelming. Ninety-one of the ninety-nine units were fully in use, five chambers had been opened and another seventeen were awaiting opening. The compost itself was very fine and dry. On the day of the visit one chamber was opened and 178 kgs of compost removed.



Two photos showing the same ecosan unit eighteen months apart. Note tree growth on right and new tree on left of unit, both urine fed.

People constantly related positive stories of their experience after construction of the units, in comparison to before they were built. Everyone was positive. Mothers felt happier that the units provided their daughters with safety and privacy. One young boy explained how previously he used to help his grandfather walk to the fields so he could defecate, causing a great deal of awkwardness – now his grandfather used the family ecosan.

Many times the words safer, privacy and dignity were used.

One farmer was the first to use the compost on his farm and he had seen big differences. He had been growing cauliflowers and his observations were:

1. Cauliflowers needed less water where compost was used;
2. Minimal pest attacks and no pesticides used;
3. Where pest attacks did occur only the infected plant needed to be uprooted rather than the whole crop, as before;



Cauliflower field



4. No family illness from pesticide covered food, as suffered before;
5. Cauliflowers were larger and had more florets. This led to a three fold increase in income;
6. He is now negotiating with other families to buy compost;
7. Savings due to no pesticides purchased.

Other farmers are now following suit.

The eight units not fully in use are used by certain members of the family, but not by all. We believe that because of the success of the majority these will be fully in use by the spring of 2010.

The Self Help Groups (SHGs) that were formed during the early part of the project are all thriving and are now linked to other SHG Associations. There is a general increase in people's self confidence and as a community they have now applied for, received approval and sometimes even had delivered already:

1. New housing for an initial twenty eight families;
2. Pensions for seventeen women;
3. Water connection for each house;
4. Extra cattle trough;
5. New connecting road to main highway;



6. Flooring in front of temple for community meetings.

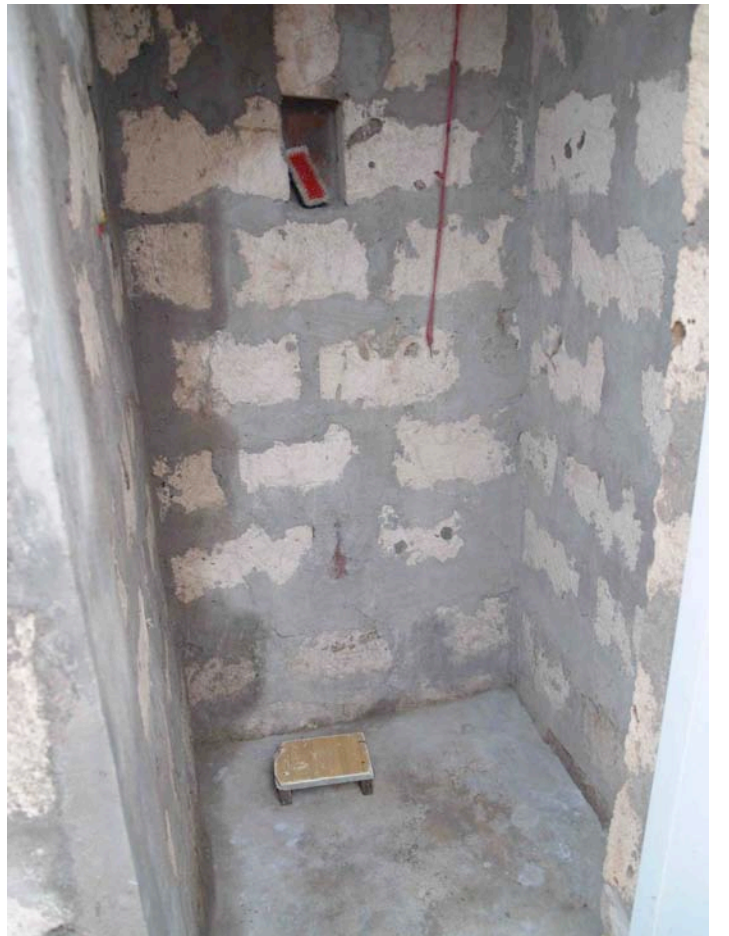
Whereas previously teachers would refuse to stay in the village, there is now one female teacher who lives there, because the facilities have been improved.

One item that was highlighted was that people are healthier and visits to the fortnightly mobile medical clinic have reduced drastically.

When the units were completed and the Assistant Collector visited the village, he informed the community they were entitled to a grant because they had their own toilets. As a community this equated to almost €3,000. This money was not kept by the individuals, but given to community funds for further village infrastructure investment.

Vankwad has turned into a major success story and shows that when approached correctly ecosan can mobilise and empower a community and help them to help themselves. Wherever the Need would like to thank the funding organisation God My Silent Partner for supporting this project and SSP for their involvement.





The two photos at the top show the inside of ecosan units, both with water and ash. The photo to the left is of the date a chamber is sealed written on the roof, and to the right is the inside of a washroom.

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