

Gramalaya – Tiruchirapalli

WORLD WATER DAY - 2009

Date: 22.03.09

Venue: NIWAS, Kolakudipatti

Water is life is the expression of people, with an emotional outburst, this was felt by the visitors from WaterPartners International and PepsiCo foundation of India, as they talked to many beneficiaries who had come to participate in the world water day program, which was held on the 22nd march 2009, at Kolakkudipatti village, near Thottiyam Block of Tiruchirapalli District.



More than 21,000 people from 500 villages and 211 slums came to participate in this program. People take this event to be a personal one (as their own), and they take care, so that they are involved in every possible way. They make their own arrangements for their logistics and they also brought their lunch along with them. The new inclusion, this year was the participation of men in a big way in this gathering.

As a precursor to the meeting on World Water day, the Chief guests released hundred's of colorful balloons in the air. Then the meeting began at 11.00 Am by singing the Tamil Thaaai Vazhthu. Followed by a ceremonial lighting of the Kuthu Vizhakku by the country director of WPI, Mr.S.Damodaran, Mr.T.Soundiah, Collector of Trichy District, Mr.Keith Stamm, Chief Operating Officer- Water Partners International – USA, Mrs.Claire Brown Lyons-Manager Global Grant Portfolios-Pepsico Foundations, USA. and by Mrs.Heather Arney, Programs Manager-Water partners International, USA. A brief note on the credentials of the guests on the stage was highlighted in her speech.

Mrs.J.Geetha Executive Director welcomed the visitors and bouquets were presented to the visitors. The first speaker of the day was, Mr.S.Damodaran, the Country Director of Water Partners International, he spoke about the need for celebrating world water day. He spoke about



non formation of ice in the Himalayas, at heights above 30,000 feet, and he also related the reason for this dreary thing, and its forth coming impacts. He educated the whole crowd about the need for preservation of water and its sources. He also highlighted the uniqueness of this program as how it is managed by the people, (AWASH), also thanked WaterPartners International for their support for this World Water Day celebrations.



Then there was this experience sharing by the people of various villages, the first one was by Ms.Kousalya of Vairaperumalpatti – she spoke about the condition of her village, before the intervention of gramalaya, there were no adequate basic facilities like toilets and drinking water pipes. She also narrated a true incidence of a woman who went to get water from the other

side of the road, and how, she had fallen down and broke her leg, and because of this she has become disabled and could not earn a regular income. She concluded with an emotion of relief as to how Gramalaya’s AWASH has brought about an understanding and change in the community of her village.

Second person was Mr.Ramasamy, a member of Kolakkudipatti AWASH. He spoke about the pre intervention conditions of their village. He also mentioned about the few hand pumps the village had, which did not supply sufficient water and how much problems that had created between the people of the village, when it comes to getting drinking water. Mr.Ramasamy also expressed his thanks to gramalaya and for AWASH, as this effort has put their village not only on the Indian map, but through this world water day, their village had been put on the world map too.



During the experience sharing by Mr.Porkilan, Panchayat president of Mangalam village he highlighted the impact of AWASH committee that has brought a change in the community. He also added how AWASH has created the additional demand for water connections in his village.

The next key speaker of the day was **Ms.Claire Brown**, She expressed her disbelief as “true but unbelievable” about the number of people who had gathered in the village for world water day. She said that she has been hearing about this during the last year, and here she was! to see it in all, and how her dream of visiting this village has come true. She greeted and thanked all the women for bringing this change in their life, families. Lastly she thanked all the women and encouraged them to continue doing the good work they had begun.

Then the president of the function **Mr.T.Soundiah, District Collector** spoke, he was felicitated by many representatives of the government from the panchayat. The

first statement of the collector was to thank the women who had gathered there, he also appreciated the efforts of gramalaya and what he was seeing was the fruit of their labour. He began with the meaning of the word, Gramalaya = Grama+alayam, and went on to explain about the meaning of grama (which in



the local language means “village” and the word “alayam” means “temple” in the local language). So the implied meaning is making every village to become a temple and clean and peaceful place. He also said how realistic is the name of this NGO, as Gandhi had said, India’s heart lies in the villages, and if India is still alive, it is because of the villages, and that is what Gramalaya was involved with. He went like narrating a story to the villagers as to how the stink of open defecation would welcome a person coming to a village. He also said as to how it is today, and thanked Gramalaya for the change they had brought about in their project areas. He also explained about the inability of the government, because of various reasons, and also gave a typical example of how, if a family needed more money than what they earn, they went on to borrow and related this to the loan scheme of Guardian, MFI and their schemes to build toilets and get water connections. He certified the true efforts of Gramalaya and the gathering was a fruit of their hard work in these areas.

The next thing he spoke was about the need for why water day? Ten years back water was freely available, today even a daily wage labour has to carry his drinking water in a bottle. This is because, availability of water and its quality and the fear of recurrence of medical expenses because of bad water. He spoke about the situation of deep bore wells and their conditions. If this was to continue, India may become a desert by the year 2015. He encouraged the people to take care of water sources, rain water harvesting for drinking and for

recharging. Lastly he confidently asked women to save water as they are always wise in saving.



The next person was Mr. David Foster from Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad. He exclaimed that in his 30 years of visit to India, he has never seen such a big gathering of women. He also said that it would have been nice if all the beaurocrats who have been learning under him were there to see the importance of this world

water day. He also said about an important question, he had asked during one of his teaching sessions, as to what was the best finding in the medical field. Someone said it as X-ray, another said as, Antibiotics. But the truth was not all that, but sanitation, because sanitation (hygiene practices) could reduce the medical bills to bare minimum. Then he asked the gathering few questions as to

who consumes more water,? Is it agriculture? Industry or wastage of water? He related this to the wastage of water that is comparatively more in India than in other in countries like Singapore, where the wastage of water was only 5% and in places like UK and Europe it was only 15%. The center for science and technology in India has



found that more than 50% water is being wasted in India, and also went on to give an award for any town which can truly boast of less than 20% of water wastage. He concluded with a note of encouragement to the women who had made this big difference in their lives and community.

Mr.Keith Stamm, Chief Operating Officer, WaterPartners International his his speech mentioned about his interview with people and was glad to hear about the people saying **“Water is Life and Sanitation is dignity”** he also added that the documentary which is shot during the World Water Day celebrations will be

shown to the world. He also encouraged women to save water as they are always good in saving.

Next in the line was Ms.Kamala Bandari, vice president of Trichy Seva sangam . She spoke about her life as an example, after her husband's death and how she had to swim upstream in her life to bring up about 8 of her children in spite they come from a conservative family background/community, and today they stand as walking testimonies of hard work and perseverance. She went on to encourage every woman, to continue persevering towards this social challenge and achieve the best for their village and in terms to their country through their love.

While Mr.Thugili C.Subramaniyan, spoke, he highlighted on people's participation during 1958, in the form of part cash payment and also physical labour as another half for getting drinking water pipe connection. He encouraged agriculturists to adopt drip irrigation technology which will help, not only to preserve water but also saves wastage of water. He also spoke on hygiene conditions in the village and how stopping open defecation will preserve the water from being contaminated by fecal matter.Lastly he concluded by encouraging women to take a lead role in saving water as they are always good at saving.

The Executive Director Mr.D.Paul Sathianathan spoke about GUARDIAN , MFI and its role in WATSAN . Gramalaya NGO has promoted Gramalaya Urban And Rural Development Initiatives And Network (GUARDIAN), a Sec. 25 company – a not for profit organization to reach the urban slum dwellers and rural poor through financial support and services under water credit concept for the creation of individual water connections and household toilets. Legal entity for Guardian and other modalities were finalised during Nov. 07 and Guardian is engaged in the process of mobilizing funds from HDFC, Union Bank of India and Indian Overseas Bank for the commencement of lending operations.

Next person was Mr.Varadharajan, (Rain Water Engineer). He spoke about the importance of rain water and why need to do that? And what are the benefits of rain water etc? He elucidated the truth about the claims on minerals, and explained how rain water had ozone content along with other important ingredients. He also explained how cheap are the rain water and how one can preserve even for a year if properly kept. He also brought to light a fact about why women in Tamilnadu have commonly breast cancer and uterus cancer, was because of bad



water quality that goes into the anatomical system.

This was followed by lot of cultural programs by the children from various villages, was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who had come for this celebration.

Lastly Mr.S.Kumarasamy concluded the program with a vote of thanks, thanking all the participants from far and near.

These are some of the feed backs of the people who had been coming every year to this mega event World Water Day.

- Participation of members has been increasing every year that requires elaborate arrangements.
- Sale of products by different SHGs and other vendors have increased and more number of shops also increased.
- Security arrangements and fire service personnel's attention was very cooperative.



- No. of Vehicles used for transporting the members have increased and it reveals the people's involvement in attending the function eagerly.
- Floating of colored balloons, participation of PLF leaders, cultural troupe arrangements etc., are the special features of the event.
- PLF leaders wearing uniform saris and controlled the crowds was very laudable.
- Panchayat presidents, Bankers, public and non-SHG members' participation shows the interest connected with public movement.
- Like cultural festival, members took part in World Water Day Celebration with own arrangements for food and transportation.
- Congregation of about 21000 members in one place and discussing the issues connected with water and sanitation could not be seen anywhere.

Date: 26.03.09

Place: Tiruchirapalli-18

J.Geetha

Executive Director