Abstract:
Since 2011, EcoPro has built 54 ‘dry toilets’ in Boodheri village (a ward of Tindivanam Municipality). EcoPro’s involvement was in response to a request from a young woman hailing from Boodheri, and had the aims of introducing toilet sanitation (ideally in all 250 households), implementing total sanitation without significant water needs, and engaging farmers to make use of Ecosan ‘products’ (i.e. human urine and fully-sanitized compost derived from human feces) in gardens, orchards and fields. EcoPro’s monthly audits show sub-optimal usage levels of these toilets, with villagers opting to defecate in the open. This project aims to increase sanitation awareness and trigger a change in the villagers’ mindset through Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), a methodology that aims at achieving long-term behavior change. EcoPro’s long-term goal is to improve environmental sustainability and ecological balance in the village through eradication of open defecation, increase of toilet usage and reuse of humanure.

Q2 report (July – September 2017):
Our baseline survey conducted in early July 2017 revealed that out of the 54 ecosan toilets we had constructed, 38 are being used regularly. Of the remaining 16 toilets, owners of 2 toilets have relocated with their families and no longer reside in the village, while 14 families that have ecosan toilets in their backyard continue to defecate in the open.
Our dialogues with these 14 families have not been encouraging, and a few families do not make us feel welcome. So we devised a new strategy: we planned to engage young kids using small games played with a Frisbee. We started by conducting Frisbee games in what is called “pee thottam” (literally meaning “shit garden”), a place where the women and children go to defecate, on the northern side of the village.
We started the ‘triggering process’ with the children and the women in the village. We started with a few warm-up questions and then asked them how many of them defecated in the open. We explained via a simple calculation of the quantum of feces produced by the inhabitants on a daily basis, and charted fecal-oral transmission routes and transmission via animals grazing in that play-ground. Once the villagers got the point there seemed to be disgust on many of their faces.
Our subsequent mapping exercise (in the northern part of the village) appeared to have a catalyzing effect. We worked with the villagers to draw a map of the village on the ground marking the fields, schools, houses, temples, ecosan toilets, flush toilets, etc. using different color powders. The community members were asked to fill the map with a yellow powder illustrating where they went to defecate. Within a few minutes, even to our horror, this filled open spaces in and around the village. It was powerful to see a map of the village with the open defecation areas marked. This showed the villagers what kind of risks they were putting themselves and the village at.

Reflections:
• Rapport building through Frisbee games served as a good entry point to get children’s full involvement in the triggering process.
• Children seem to be able to persuade their families to get things done. We hope they also can coerce their parents to understand the importance of keeping their village free of open
defecation.
• We felt that triggering children alone is not sufficient. Success largely depends on the understanding and knowledge of parents. It is good to influence both children and parents simultaneously and thus bring attitudinal and behavior change in all age groups.
• Many families who had demanded that they get a dry toilet built in their backyard, and had contributed money and/or manual labour towards its construction, today complain of having to use a dry toilet. The concept of not using water in the squatting hole and covering the feces with ashes seems to be regarded as of lesser status that operating a flush toilet. To get them into the habit of using and maintaining the ecosan toilets requires continuous education and monitoring.
• Our play sessions always had one of us (the kids and/or us) stepping on human feces in varying stages on decomposition. Some of the kids seemed embarrassed, especially when it happened to an EcoPro employee. But with many kids, this barely elicited a reaction – even when it was them stepping in fresh feces. Years of conditioning to open defecation seemed to have made them indifferent.

**Q3 report (October – December 2017):**

• On 14th October, we organized a street clean-up on the southern side of Boodheri village with 20 residents (18 women and 2 boys). The eager participants brought out brooms and spades and set about aggregating the solid waste that was strewn all around. Discussions are on about forming an informal group that meets once a week to clean up the street.
• On 20th October, we met the local municipal councilor and had a discussion with him regarding the sanitation facilities in the village.
• A local tailor has expressed an interest to farm using ecosan inputs in his field. He proposes to grow 2 acres of paddy using organic methods and ecosan inputs.
• On 21st October, a participatory village mapping exercise was organized on the southern side of the village in which 12 women participated. One amongst the several revelations that came out of this mapping exercise was that one or more women confessed to defecating just outside their homes or in a neighbour’s property when the weather prevented them from taking a long walk to reach their habitual defecation spot.
• On 26th October, we met with the village women where we discussed the possibility of forming a self-help group to help them earn some money in their spare time. The women were enthusiastic in this meeting and expressed their need to earn some additional income. Several of the women pointed out that earning additional income would directly mean being more respected by their spouses.
• On 15th November, we met the women again. Many of the women seemed to have learnt tailoring at some point, and seemed inclined towards making use of that skill. Conversations are currently on to understand if setting up a small tailoring business is appropriate.
• On 17th November, we met with Eco-Femme to understand how we can impart menstrual hygiene knowledge to the village women, and to explore the possibility of having the women get involved in the manufacturing of cloth pads. (Eco-Femme is a social enterprise in Auroville that makes washable cloth pads and promotes menstrual practices that are safe, clean and eco-friendly.)
• On 13th December, Eco-Femme conducted a menstrual hygiene management workshop at Boodheri. This workshop was attended by 23 women, who seemed tentative and reluctant at first but actively participated once they felt relaxed. The workshop ignited several discussions on the taboos surrounding menstrual hygiene, such as not being allowed to go to the temple and not being allowed to touch things at home. One of the elderly women shared her
experiences of having grown up on a diet of millets and how that helped her combat menstrual pain and cramps.

Reflections:

Though our primary goal at Boodheri (and the goal of this project) is sanitation education that results in higher toilet usage and lower open defecation, our conversations with the villagers have rather naturally extended to other aspects of everyday life such as solid waste management, menstrual hygiene, etc. We strongly feel that our relationship with the villagers is the key to our long-term success, and this has led us to embracing these conversations. These conversations are what led to establishment of a women’s group, organizing a street clean-up, and inviting Eco-Femme for a menstrual hygiene workshop.

In the past, there have been several attempts made by different people and organizations (from within and outside) to improve the facilities in Boodheri and generally advance the standard of living. Almost all of these have failed to bring about any sort of change. This has often been attributed to a lack of cooperation amongst the residents. There is a clear lack of leadership and representation, exacerbated by the postponement of local body elections. There seems to exist a constant tension even amongst neighbors (of equal social status). It is not uncommon for us to hear statements such as “I don’t talk to people in that house,” etc. This is where we feel the women’s group is pertinent – it brings women together on a common platform, empowers them to speak about common challenges, and nurtures women leaders.

Q4 report (January – March 2018):

• **Women’s group** – We held meetings with the women’s group and with the local tailor in which we discussed entrepreneurial options. We organized a farming inputs workshop for them as most of the women were farming.

• **Ramco group visit to Boodheri** – Ramco, India’s fifth largest cement manufacturer, currently considering building ecosan toilets in their CSR projects in Tamil Nadu, brought teams of officials and beneficiaries to Boodheri to have a look at the toilets, discuss pros and cons with the owners and learn from EcoPro’s firsthand experience.

• **Street play** – We organized a sanitation themed street play in the village through Yatra Arts. The play was well received by the audience, especially the kids.

• **Exposure visits** – We organized exposure visits that focused on organic farming, candle making, self-improvement through group discussions/reflection and dance. The villagers (esp. women) told us that they rarely get the opportunity to step out of their village to go to a new place and learn new things. We intend to organize more exposure visits as the villagers responded positively.

• **Emptying of chambers** – We emptied the fecal compost chambers of seven households. All of the households made use of the compost in their little gardens at home or in their fields. In three of the seven households, family members removed the fecal compost themselves; this is an important step towards taking charge of the whole sanitation cycle.

• **Frisbee sessions** – We restarted the Frisbee sessions based on demand from the kids and their parents, who recognized that their kids were having a lot of fun.

• **Toilet survey** – We visited and surveyed every single household that had our toilet. A copy of the survey is attached. The latest results reflect a definite progress in behavior change.

• **Short films** – To document our work in Boodheri, we decided to make two short films: one that talks about ecosan and its pros and cons, and a second that covers our work in Boodheri.
Outcomes:

Earlier, when we took a didactic approach, telling villagers when they were ‘wrong’ (for example when they showed a preference to defecate in the open, in spite of owning a toilet), a considerable number of them would not be happy to meet us. We have had experiences where people have pretended not to see us, refused to acknowledge us, and would sometimes hide themselves on seeing us.

The overall outcome of this project has been that many villagers are now more open to general interaction and thus also to conversations about their toilet. We feel more welcome in the village and in the villagers’ homes. There have been several occasions where we have been invited to meals, snacks into people’s homes and to their religious / family gatherings.

This significant improvement in quality and depth of interactions coupled with our realization that the villagers needed more exposure encouraged us to scale up the interaction. Every time we have given them a little exposure, they seem to respond well.

When we held the village meeting in May, one of the women, from our women’s group, spoke in public about the menstrual hygiene workshop that we had organized and she had attended. The very fact that she did so reflects the increased readiness to address hygiene and sanitation issues.

Purely in terms of toilet usage, out of the 55 toilets built, 6 toilets have been abandoned as families have migrated to Chennai. Of the 49 toilets expected to be used, 10 are used every day by all members of the household; 30 toilets are used primarily by kids and young women in the household but not by the men; 8 toilets are used only as a shower / store room; and 1 toilet has been remodeled into a kitchen. Currently, 82% of the UDDTs are in use, which reflects an upward trend and is highly encouraging.

Reflections:

As we’ve known since the beginning of our work in Boodheri (2010), sanitation needs long-term educational interaction to bring about behavior change. Simply investing and constructing toilets is far from a complete solution. It takes continuous work to bring about sustainable change in behaviour.

The Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach is also meant to be a long term project. As of now, we are seeing improvements in our interactions with the villagers and them being more open to learning new things. Over the course of this project the percentage of toilet users has gone up by a fair margin validating our approach.

Another important point to keep in mind is the emptying of fecal chambers, collection of compost and usage of urine. Only a few families are comfortable handling their own waste. We have worked with these families to encourage usage of the humanure in their gardens and fields. Most consider emptying a chamber and handling waste, to be a menial job and would prefer that someone else does it for them, even if it means shelling out extra money.

When we started to build toilets, the first few women were eager to have them built and they are amongst our most regular users. Our subsequent batches of toilets seem to have been requested because of envy – because a neighbor has one or a relative got one. These toilet owners have remodeled their toilets; or requested to have the toilets converted to a flush system; or refused to empty their fecal chambers whilst asking us to empty them; claim not to use the toilet regularly because doing so would fill the chamber too quickly, etc.

Conclusion:

Using the CLTS approach in Boodheri was rewarding for us as it changed the dynamics of our relationship and made the interactions far more enjoyable for everyone involved. We are constantly looking to find the right level and kind of exposure and provocation to see how they react. We refine our approach and cater to the individual, applying slightly different styles for different people and different occasions, and sometimes we actively try to provoke change and sometimes we wait for it. Sometimes, we feel our way around by judging how they react.
Boodheri women at candle making workshop at Bamboo Center, Auroville

Boodheri farmers during the exposure visit to an organic farming cooperative in PS Palayam, Pondicherry
Ecosan toilet user survey at Boodheri

Boodheri women at Life Education Center, Auroville for a day of reflection, sharing, yoga and dance
EcoPro staff Rajalakshmi addressing the village meeting.

Kids playing a game of Ultimate Frisbee in Boodheri.