



Shyama V. Ramani

### **Brief of Work Done for the Community [993 words]**

Shyama is an academic social entrepreneur, serving the academic community, a coastal village, the practitioners' world, and citizens at large, especially students – to build WASH capabilities in India. For her, WASH stands for adequate and safe, Water & Waste management, Sanitation and Hygiene behaviour. An original feature of her achievements is that she has managed to attain them working slowly throughout the last decade, dividing her life between Europe and India, in addition to family and academic duties, as an extra life mission.

In the aftermath of the Tsunami of December 2014, moved by compassion to do something more concrete in India, she went beyond her academic duties to found a Trust called Friend In Need India, (or FIN from now on) to help rehabilitate a devastated isolated fishing village called Kameshwaram, in Tamil Nadu. Initially, she approached the problem as an academic, raising funds for other NGOs to implement sanitation drives and studying how they did it, in order to spread the knowledge for replication in other villages.



The ecological toilet model suitable for high water table coastal areas was chosen and Kameshwaram became the village with the maximum number of 'ecosan' in India. For this feat, the Kameshwaram Panchayat was awarded the 'Nirmal Gram Puraskar' from the Indian government in 2007. This also attracted other local social enterprises active in the sanitation sector to seek funds from international agencies to build more toilets in this village. At this point, she discovered some very alarming realities, true not only for Kameshwaram but throughout India.

First, ill-conceived latrines are even being built in India every day (and many of these in Kameshwaram were also of poor quality and falling apart after 24 months), and these are going to become millions more points of contamination in the future — unless the issue of proper construction is addressed. Therefore, more work is required on standardization of sanitation systems to ensure safety.

Second, building toilets is not sufficient to eliminate open defecation. Moral persuasion and education are needed to convince men to use toilets and for families to maintain toilets. School children must be also included in this education mission.

Third, even building and using toilets are not enough to improve health status. These must be combined with access to safe water, waste management and hygiene behavior as they are extremely complimentary. Further, given climate change, water harvesting and ecological recycling routines have to be included in any developmental project in the water and sanitation sector.

Thus, at this point, she stopped raising funds for other NGOs to implement sanitation drives in India and transformed FIN into a research-action unit to undertake research in order to generate useful knowledge and tools to improve WASH infrastructure and capabilities throughout India. Her vision remained the same namely to make Kameshwaram as clean as any in the world – but her strategy changed radically.

She has come to two conclusions. First, every village should have a local social enterprise to maintain hygiene and promote hygiene behaviour. It cannot be added as an additional government responsibility. Second, there is a real need to educate our population starting from the bottom – comprising children and citizens, and going right up to the top – even policy makers. For this, first research, documentation and standardization procedures that can be easily understood and applied are necessary.

Thus, she now teaches and trains at three levels academic level, practitioners', villagers and citizens. Interestingly, an increasing number of professionals and youth from all over the world are volunteering for they see this strategy as a good approach to develop throughout the world.

In the scientific community, she is the first to have published in high quality international journals and books on the Indian WASH challenge. She has inspired other Indian economists to work on the unglamorous but essential topic of sanitation.

Among the practitioners' community she has organized several national conferences, including one on responsible social investment in sanitation in the aftermath of the MFI crisis. Her innovative solutions, such as the 'Toilet beauty contest' to persuade men to use toilets have been noted by international agencies and implemented elsewhere. She has recently received a grant from the Indian Government to develop tools for sustainable sanitation, for which a number of professionals are also volunteering.

For citizens, to spread awareness, hope and inspiration by example, she and her team maintain a Facebook page which chronicles the work and insight derived by FIN and other social workers and enterprises <https://www.facebook.com/finindia>.



Finally, unlike other Professors who teach only the very educated, Shyama's early mornings and weekends are devoted to conducting meetings and classes, often through skype, to the village team in Kameshwaram. As summarized by S.Venkatesh (Clean India, August 2014) her teaching and training in Kameshwaram are to:

- Develop skilled and capable personnel from the village population who will provide sanitation and waste management services in Kameshwaram and nearby

villages

- Develop standard environmentally sustainable toilet designs
- Create new designs that make ecological toilets attractive or even more attractive than toilets with septic tanks
- Create awareness on the need for toilets and waste maintenance and their sustenance
- Create a waste management system with the maximum recycling within the village
- Evolve documentation methods for quality audits of sanitation drives.
- Develop skilled and capable personnel from the village population who can implement the documentation and quality control protocols
- Develop skilled and capable personnel from the village population who can teach all of the above to residents of other villagers and NGOs

Today, there are some clean villages in India about which we regularly read in the newspapers. But, we are not fully informed about how they happened, how much it cost, what kind of mistakes were made, what kind of challenges were faced etc.. In short, to replicate such good outcomes, we do not know where to start and what possible paths to choose from and these are the challenges that FIN is trying to address.

### **Additional required information**

Website links:

On Friend In Need [www.friend-in-need.org](http://www.friend-in-need.org)

On Shyama V. Ramani [www.shyama-v-ramani.net](http://www.shyama-v-ramani.net)

Videos: See <http://www.shyama-v-ramani.net/videos.html> There are nine videos

Awards/Distinctions won:

- Awarded the “Terre de Femmes” Trophy by the Yves-Rocher Foundation and the Institut de France in March, 2008 for the work of Friend in Need.
- Invited delegate to ‘The Women’s Forum’, to speak on “Women Entrepreneurs in India”, October 2008, Deauville, France.
- Invited to deliver the ‘Annual Charles Cooper Memorial Lecture’ in March 2008 on “Playing in invisible markets: Innovations in toilets to harness the economic power of the poor” at UNU-Merit, Maastricht.

Academic Publications:

1. “On the Diffusion of Toilets as Bottom of Pyramid Innovation: Lessons from Sanitation Entrepreneurs” with S. SadreGhazi and G. Duysters, *Technological forecasting and social change*. 79, 676–687, (2012).
2. Where is the toilet please? The sanitation sectoral innovation system in Rural India By Shyama V. Ramani and Shuan SadreGhazi in the volume edited by Shyama V. Ramani on “Innovation in India: Combining Economic Growth with Inclusive Development” New Delhi, Cambridge University Press (July 14, 2014).

3. "Commercializing an Innovation in an Invisible Market: Case of Ecosan toilets" with A. Benycar and A. Didier eSS Occasional Papers, Vol.1, No.1, May-July 2008, 77-90. <http://www.esocialsciences.com/essJournals/essJournalIssuesMain.asp?jid=2&issue=Curent>
4. "Determinants of the prevalence of diarrhoea in adolescents attending school: A case study of an Indian village school with T. Frühauf, A. Dutta & H. Meijers, United Nations University, Working paper #2012-059, 2012. <http://www.merit.unu.edu/publications/wppdf/2012/wp2012-059.pdf>

## **PRESS CLIPPINGS**

**THESE CAN BE FOUND AT [WWW.FRIEND-IN-NEED.ORG](http://WWW.FRIEND-IN-NEED.ORG) UNDER GALLERY  
(FROM LATEST TO OLDEST)  
PDF FILE BEING SENT SEPARATELY.**

1. Economic and Political Weekly, October 3, 2015, Innovation and India's Growth How Inclusive Are Its Achievements? ++
2. Der Standard (German) September 17, 2015, Interview with Shyama Ramani
3. Clean India Journal, August 18, 2014, Kameshwaram's unique toilet technology
4. The Hindu, July 29, 2014 Innovating for economic growth++
5. THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS 02 November 2009 NGOs plan one million toilets in India
6. The Hindu November 02, 2009 Low-cost technology needed
7. Kumkum (Tamil) 13 August 2009 The beautiful toilets
8. The Hindu July 20, 2009 Role for NGOs in creation of sanitation awareness
9. Times of India, July 19, 2009 Toilet with painted wall wins contest
10. Times of India, July 18, 2009 Contest to crown the cleanest toilets
11. Capacity.Org UNDP April, 2009 A beauty contest for toilets\*\*
12. The Hindu March 01, 2009 Ecosan toilet contest to be held at Kameshwaram
13. The Hindu February 23, 2009 Ecosan model offers an alternative
14. Deccan Herald, December 5, 2008 Toilets with attached gardens
15. Le Monde, (French) October 10, 2008 Pour les femmes du village indien de Kameshwaram, "un instrument de pouvoir" qu'il a fallu domestiquer
16. The Hindu, August 18, 2008, Beauty contest for toilets
17. The Hindu, July 15, 2007, Ecosan Toilet Beauty Contest Conducted
18. The Hindu, July 13, 2007, University to act as village knowledge centre
19. The Hindu, June 10, 2007, Ecological sanitation festival under way
20. UNDP Report, May 2007, The perfect toilet (featuring Kameshwaram)\*\*
21. The Hindu, May 30, 2007, Village school gets 'ecosan' toilet
22. The Hindu, January 07, 2007, Maximum 'Ecosan' toilets for fishing village
23. The Hindu, September 20, 2006, Tsunami-hit village get 50 Ecosan toilets
24. The Hindu, July 06, 2006, She trudged through tsunami-hit villages to help rebuild them

**\*\*Press targeting practitioners**

**++Press targeting academics**