

## *From Seattle to Tekulapally ... Opening the flood gates of inquiry ....*

*“I came here to learn... mainly three things... about sanitation, how you think about sanitation and ways of promoting sanitation that is suitable to your situation... Ms Sylvia Mathews Burwell, President, Global Development Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation during her visit to Tekulapally village, Ranga Reddy District, Andhra Pradesh on 12 Feb 2011. She and her team members visited this pilot village of WASHCost (India) Project along with WASHCost (India) team.*

Ms Sylvia Mathews Burwell, President, Global Development Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was inquiring about water, sanitation and hygiene related issues. Accompanied by her team members, Ms Elspeth Williams and Mr Hari Menon, Ms Burwell visited Tekulapally village in Ranga Reddy District, Andhra Pradesh with the WASHCost (India) Project team. Tekulapally is one of the ‘test bed’ villages, where WASHCost (India) Project initiated its field work for research and is currently piloting the embedding process of the research findings. The team reached the village by 9.30 AM and walked along the streets and lanes of the village. During this visit, Ms Burwell met village residents and learned about their lives, issues related to sanitation and their progress along the sanitation ladder. She also interacted with the representatives of the Village Water & Sanitation Committee and members of women’s self help groups. She had many questions for the village residents and was curious to understand rural realities in the Indian context, especially as relates to water, sanitation and hygiene. She visited a few homes and interacted with residents to learn their perspectives.



Mrs Nagamma and her family (Tekulapally Village, Ranga Reddy District, Andhra Pradesh, India) interacting with Ms Sylvia Mathews Burwell, President Global Development Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation on 12 Feb 2011

Her first stop was at the home of Mrs Nagamma, an old lady who lives with her daughter and grandsons. Nagamma had given away her agriculture land to her sons for cultivation and currently earns her livelihood as an agricultural laborer. She did not have a toilet at home and gave several reasons - a) the lack of adequate space at home and b) the cost of building a toilet. She has a tap connection at her home and stored water in several pots. Nagamma is part of a self help group, which she primarily uses for savings and loans. Membership of the group also enables her to access other schemes of government.

The next meeting was with Mrs Nirmala, an agriculturist. Nirmala's mother-in-law is old and unwell, which restricted her movements. For her convenience, Nirmala constructed a toilet at home with her own money in 2007. She did not get any subsidy or support from the government. Though she could not perceive any clear relationship between toilet and health related benefits, she felt it was convenient to have a toilet at home. She mentioned that the toilet was kept locked when she was not at home to prevent the neighbours using it and soiling it. Nirmala noted that she had not faced any maintenance related problems as she had constructed a high capacity pit. Nirmala drew most of her income from agriculture and did not have much savings.

Ms. Burwell next visited Mrs Bhagyamma who had recently constructed a toilet at home. Bhagyamma had benefited from exposure to the WASHCost project. As part of embedding process the WASHCost India team raised



Mrs Nirmala showing her toilet to her guests in Tekulapally village.



Mrs Bhagyamma recently constructed a toilet inspired by the WASHCost (India) Project's initiatives on embedding processes in the village.

awareness of WASH issues in the village. Interventions include establishing a Village Water & Sanitation Committee, improving WASH governance and improving access to individual sanitary toilets. As part of this process, the government's Rural Water Supply & Sanitation Department agreed to provide subsidies to families who constructed new toilets during this phase. Consequently, Bhagyamma put pressure on her husband to construct a toilet at their residence. Her adolescent daughter joined hands with her mother in supporting this cause. They spent Rs 25,000/- (about US\$600) to construct a toilet and bath room. They expected to receive some support (subsidy) from the government.

Ms. Burwell next met with about 30 women who were members of local self help groups (SHGs). Ms Burwell enquired about various issues related to the functioning of SHGs and their perspectives on sanitation. Most women mentioned that they would like to have a toilet at home, but they felt they did not have adequate financial resources to construct one. Priority items like gold jewelry (which is a symbol of prestige) and family cell phones (which are considered to be a necessity) appeared to take precedence in terms of expenditure. So the women still felt they needed financial support from government for constructing toilets. The conversation with the women was informal and sprinkled with jokes, questions, interesting comments by women in the village. For example, Women revealed the secrets on how they hide their savings, (within layers of sarees, in boxes in kitchen, cup boards, etc.) so that they are not tempted to spend it.



Ms Sylvia Mathews Burwell, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Dr Sneha Latha, WASHCost (India) Project with members of women Self Help Groups



The Visiting Team interacting with members of newly formed Village Water & Sanitation Committee in Tekulapally Village on 12 Feb 2011

Ms Burwell also interacted with members of newly formed Village Water & Sanitation Committee. The members explained the improvements in WASH delivery in the village as a result of the embedding process under WASHCost (India) Project. They also informed her of improved awareness about drinking water and sanitation. However, the committee members felt that improving sanitation facilities remained a big challenge.

Two senior officers from the Department of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation, GoAP also participated in the field visit, Mr Ram Gopal Reddy, Superintending Engineer and Mr. Srinivas Reddy, Executive Engineer. Dr Sneha Latha, Country Coordinator of the WASHCost (India) Project

facilitated the interaction between visitors and villagers, supported by Dr Venkat Swamy and Ms Sirisha from CESS. Dr Charles Bachelor, Mr Rutger Verkerk from IRC, Netherlands and MV Rama Chandrudu from WASSAN participated in the visit. The visiting team thanked the villagers and WASHCost (India) Team for all the support and time.

### All Ears and Full of Curiosity....

Ms Sylvia Mathews Burwell was full of curiosity about rural life, life styles, economic activities, culture and WASH issues. She was all ears in absorbing rural realities – a woman who really listens. Some of her questions were ...

How many children does each woman have? Where do you go for health care (primary and maternity care/ delivery of babies/ vaccination of children)? Is this government service or private service?

How do you save money? Where (location/ place within home) do you keep your money? Do you belong to any self-help group? What are the benefits of a membership? How frequently do you meet? What do you do when you meet?

Are you a farmer? What crops do you grow? How do you manage livestock during droughts? What kind of extension support do you get for agriculture?

Does everyone have a tap at home? If you do not have tap connection at home, how do you fetch water? Do you have toilets? When did you construct your toilet? Why could not you construct a toilet? How much did you spend for constructing the toilet? What are the benefits of toilet? What are the issues related to maintenance of toilet?

Do you send your children to school? Which school do you prefer (government or private school)? How much do you pay for fees and transportation? Do you have a cell phone?

The women of Tekulapally were equally curious about their guest. They bombarded her with questions too. "Why did you come here? What kind of climate you have where you live? What do you eat? What do you grow?" Ms Burwell explained about her life in Seattle. Villagers were surprised that Seattle does not have agriculture and wondered whether drought could be the reason..... These conversations were full of fun and curiosity on both sides. Both sides listening... and learning.