

VILLAGE UPDATE

Singanapuram & Neithalapuram

1. Housing:

Each of the thirteen families in the village of Singanapuram and the nineteen families in Neithalapuram that have been supported by Streetsville United church is now living in a house constructed under the BFT program.

A typical house is a sturdy 240 sq ft structure with a cement foundation, thick stone walls, and a tile roof. All the houses have separate kitchens and latrines and backyards. Some houses have bathrooms in addition to the latrines.

The houses have benefitted the families in the following ways:

- The families that subsist by farming are getting a better price for their harvests of groundnuts and other harvests. Instead of selling their crops straight from the ground because they lacked a dry, secure storage place, they can now wait for better market prices.
- The house gives the families a sense of security; as they are now safer from thieves as well as severe weather conditions most families have begun to obtain proper kitchen utensils, mirrors for their homes, and some families even have radios!
- The house plays a vital role in improving the families' health. Their old huts were leaky and draughty and contributed to colds, bronchitis and pneumonia. The new houses keep the families warm, and dry.
- The backyards of the houses are used for a kitchen gardens in which wholesome vegetables and fruits are grown for families' consumption; the families sell the surplus at the local market to supplement their income.

2. Water:

- A well has been dug in each of the villages, providing families with a clean water source. Three BFT families in Singanapuram and all BFT families in Neithalapuram now have water facilities right in their own homes!
- Bore-wells have also been dug in both villages to help irrigate agricultural land owned by families.

3. Electricity:

- Currently, almost of 50% of the families in Neithalapuram and Singanapuram have electricity in their homes. The self-help groups in both villages have agreed to prioritize the completion of the "electricity project" in the upcoming year.

4. Income Generating Programs:

- All families in Singanapuram and in Neithalapuram have been helped through income-generating activities. These activities include the purchasing of dairy animals such as cross-bred cows and buffaloes; sheep-rearing; setting up small business enterprises. A milk co-operative was set up in agreement with other villages in the area. The co-op helps the families sell their products at fair market prices and creates a forum to discuss the issues that, individually, they may find difficult to deal with. Self-help groups, (such as credit and savings clubs) that members voluntarily join and regularly contribute part of their income as savings help families overcome credit shyness by helping members increase their access to bank loans and access government funds. Such linkages to between the rural poor and large indigenous institutions such as banks and Block Development offices promote the sustainability of the work begun under the BFT program. There are three self-help groups in Neithalapuram and two in Singanapuram.
- Families who were depending solely on agricultural labour have started taking up other activities such as masonry, tailoring and carpentry after they accessed skills training through BFT program.

5. Education:

- 20 young children in Singanapuram attend the village primary school. 18 children attend the primary school in Niethalapuram village.
- BFT staff conduct children's camps during the no-school seasons and report that the children who attend these camps generally do much better in school. The camps give the children extracurricular training as well as some tutoring.
- As the village of Singanapuram does not have its own high school, twenty-eight children from the village attend a nearby high school in Panakalli village. The village of Neithalapuram has a school up to 10th standard. Eight children from BFT families and several children from nearby villages attend the school in Neithalapuram. The school has a drinking water system and a drypit latrine. Awareness training on health and sanitation is given to the students a regular basis.
- The BFT program has had a significant impact on the education of women in Singanapuram and Neithalapuram: girl children who were often denied schooling are now increasingly being encouraged to obtain education. As families become more and more economically independent, the need for young children, (both boys and girls) to share the heavy load of providing for the family is lessening.
- Basic informal education is also given to women. Most women in both villages can now read and right their names.

6. Health and Sanitation:

- Drainage systems have been built in both villages: 700 ft long in Singanapuram, and an 852 ft in Neithalapuram. These drainage systems keep the villages clean, maintain mosquito breeding at minimum, and lower the incidences of water-borne diseases. The families from both villages prioritized the building of these systems by putting aside their differences and by working together through the village self-help groups, as all of the households were equally affected by the free-flowing waste which became particularly deplorable during the rains.
- Several sessions awareness campaigns on preventive health and hygiene issues were conducted in the villages by BFT field staff and

government public health officials. These training sessions will continue in co-operation between the local self-help groups and government health institutions.

7. Environmental Impact:

- The self-help groups were provided with training on ecology and environmental issues. Information was shared on the importance of forestry, water management, soil conservation etc.
- Thousands of trees were planted in community wood lots. These trees help protect the soil from erosion, provide fodder for animals, timber for building and fruit for families' consumption and for revenue.

8. Other:

- All families have received a smokeless hearth. This has reduced the amount of firewood used from the already depleted forests, and lowered the amount of pollution released into the environment.
- The families within both villages worked with together and built roads connecting them to main roads. This activity has increased their access to markets and public transportation.



The story of one family in Singanapuram is one of the many stories of hope that came about because of your love and generosity...

The family's name is Raju: a young couple with two young boys, Manikanda and Kumar. When Raju and his wife Rajamma joined the BFT program, they were one of the poorest families in the village. Raju had an old loan of 7,000/- rupees, and had to frequently leave home in search of jobs in other towns and villages in order to put food on their table and to repay his loan. Although he is a barber by profession, work was not always available in barber shops and he often worked as an agricultural labourer. Rajamma also worked as an agricultural labourer whenever work was available and her parents could tend the children. The family slept in a draughty two room hut made of mud bricks and coconut leaf thatched

roof. Disease, hunger and fear for the future were not unusual to the family.

Now the family lives in a sturdy stone house with tiled roof, a bathroom and a kitchen. They are very proud of their new house and its backyard garden. Rajamma planted tomatoes this year and got a high yield that she even sold some in the market. Raju says that he never even dreamt that he would ever be able to educate the children. The most they could dream about was being able to afford to buy few goats or sheep that the boys could tend when they became old enough.

Today, both of Raju's sons go to the local elementary school. Kumar and Manikanda are in 3rd and 4th standard, respectively. Their parents say that they would do everything they can to see that their sons continue their education and have a profession. Manikanda says he would like to be a teacher when he is grown. Both children are vaccinated against polio, tetanus and diphtheria. If there is an ailment in the family, they can now afford to go to the doctor and get treatment.

Raju has opened his own barber shop in the of Bacheri, an adjacent village, as there are already two barber shops in his own village. He is working very hard and Rajamma, who can now read and write her name, confided in BFT staff that they are saving up their extra income (through the self-help group), to open a petty shop in Singanapuram that she will run.

Raju has paid back his loan of Rs. 7000. He says that he thought it would take him a lifetime to repay it. He says that he feels more free than he has in a long time. Now, the couple say, we can focus on giving our children a better future.

The family has expressed their deepest gratitude to Streetsville United Church family for giving them a chance to break out of the cycle of poverty. Raju told BFT field staff: I see many possibilities now that I was never able to see before. I was the object of someone else's kindness; but now I can help someone else.



