

## NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends,

**We are completely re-building a small hamlet for around 50 families.** The work is going very quickly and we hope to have the first phase of the work, that is, the houses, finished in another month.

No matter how often I am immersed in the poverty in our work which affects all categories of the village people, I am sometimes brought up brutally by the shocking destitution I still meet. I keep telling myself that I still know very little about the effects of real poverty.

Let me tell you of my first encounter with Kakanji Nagar. We tend to forget how poor people can get once we have provided decent housing, water, medical care, etc., it is hard to remember the horrible original living conditions that were there before. So I would like to share with you what it was like in Kakanji when we first discovered it.

**Our RTU motto is SEE-DECIDE-ACT.** The first two are fairly easy, it is the ACT part that tends to be left aside. This motto for us means that we look at whatever needs there may be in the area where any of us is working: housing, water, medical, children, schools, micro-credit, etc.. When we build a house we should also see if there are other needs for that family, or indeed, any of the other families around. This is the integrated system that has always been in all RTU's outreach.



**So, Kakanji Nagar before we did anything.** I invite you to look around your own home while reading this, just for the contrasts.

The most striking features are the appalling drains. This hamlet is on the edge of a large village and all the waste water with all the rubbish flows from there and through Kakanji Nagar. Since toilets are non-existent for most houses, the drains are used. The very sight of half a dozen such long drains is nauseating, but there is nothing these people can do about it – they are from the lowest of the low castes.



The huts in which all the families try to survive are really beyond description. All of them are made entirely from coconut fronds stuck straight onto the earth ground. I said to myself that I could not stay for 24 hours in these conditions. The huts were mostly about 6'x6' – no more, sometimes less. How a family of five or six crammed into them I have no idea. I went into one hut to visit a man who had badly broken his thigh. His wife and four little girls were there. She was cooking on an open firewood and I could not stay inside for

more than 5 minutes, the bitter smoke was too much. There was no water source for these 50 huts. There were no toilets – the children used the open drains – the adults? There were no bathrooms – so where the adults bathed I cannot say. No kitchens. No electricity. No water nearby. Absolutely no facilities. But lots of lively and very friendly children, all in need of clothes and medical care and everything else that children should have.



**So, what are we doing now for these people?** The first big need was for water, not only for their endless needs for water, but also because we cannot build without it. I divined four suitable places, a drilling rig bored down to plenty of water and handpumps have been installed in strategic places.



Immediately we started building really delightful little houses: two rooms, a kitchen, a sitting-out verandah, toilet cum bathroom. They look attractive family homes. As one lady said: “I had resigned myself to living all my life in a miserable hut and could never dream of having such a strong, safe house.” For those who are interested, a house currently costs Rs.55,000 (around £730\*, \$1160, or €830).

**We are already training one suitable lady as the health worker.** We are planning to build a centre for evening classes for the children with a play area and for a meeting hall for the elders.

And so it goes on and on. It will be such an enormous contrast to what is there now: from a horrible slum to a delightful hamlet with all the necessary facilities, and eventually hard-top lanes with good drains, if the local government can be convinced of the need!

For those who are interested: a house costs Rs.55,000, £763, \$:1140, Euros 887. I can only say that you may like to be involved, though the actual doing of the whole work is more important.

**About the man with the broken thigh.** How they all squeezed into their wretched hut at night is beyond me. In one corner on the mud floor was an open firewood cooking place. Extremely dangerous in a hut made entirely of dry coconut fronds. There was the wife and four tiny girls, one in the arms of the mother. After much persuasion the husband confined to his plank bed, agreed to go to a good hospital. This treatment will take some months and the wife, with the baby, must stay with him. So we have admitted three of the children temporarily to one of our Children’s Villages. Since there is now a total loss of any income, we have also included



them on our home sponsorship programme. Eventually the husband will be cured and able hopefully to start earning, then the family will be united in the new house we will build for them.

This is how See – Decide – Act operates.

## Housing Programme:

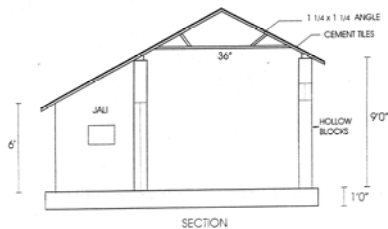
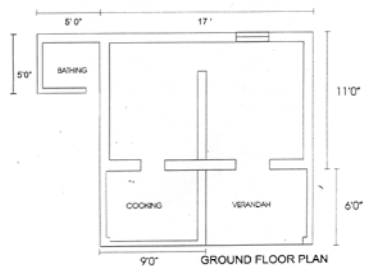


**I am Saravanan, Manager of Rural Housing department.** I am working at RTU since 1991. After completing my school studies, I did Technical course. In RTU I was working in various departments. For the past 5 years I am fully involved in the rural housing programme.

Identification of beneficiaries: We do rural appraisal in most of the villages and identify the poorer of the poorest. Then we screen them through our survey team. Most of the beneficiaries are poor with a piece of a tiny plot in some cases provided by the government for the housing purposes. RTU also has bought the land for the individuals and even for few villages in order to build them a house. In an emergency, we immediately build the houses without any delay and give enough dresses, necessary household materials and other assistance for all of them.

Sometimes we could see lot of huts in a remote area like Kakanji Nagar. Those families suffer a lot, even for their daily survival. In those places, first we survey them and will provide immediately all the necessary items for their survival, then we look into their needs; housing, water, medical support, educational support to children, etc.. We build the whole village up. This is called group housing. At present we are busy with this group housing project at Kakanji Nagar in Devathanapatti.

We also build small houses for old people who are not cared for by their biological children and relatives.



Construction details: Our regular masons measure the size and mark for foundation. Normally the house owner digs the foundation and fills it with the support of our mason. If a household do not have adequate skilled person we also provide labour.

We complete a house within 15-20 days from the day of measurement, including whitewash and painting.

After completion of a house, we encourage the people to save minimum Rs.50/- to Rs.100/- per month in secured schemes of postal or bank for their yearly house renovation expenses. Most of the beneficiaries take electricity facility or expand the house within few years,

and we encourage them to do so.

Sometimes teachers at Government Schools/Kallar Schools (for remote and 'backward' tribal peoples) in rural area will approach RTU to construct classrooms, toilets and water facility for rural poor children. We do the survey and construct classrooms, toilets and hand-pump facility as per the need of the place.

Achievements to date:

No. of houses built for the poor	..	7491
No. of bore-wells and hand-pumps	..	2073
No. of open wells	..	14

I wish to thank all our supporters for this good programme going on well with all your generosity.

### First year at RTU



A young woman was on the fast track to the managerial elite ranks of her firm. Being wise she sought out the advice of the CEO, a businesswoman she greatly admired.

"Boss, what do I need most of all to become a good manager?"

"You need to learn how to make good decisions."

"And how do I learn that?" asks the young woman.

"Experience" her boss replies.

"And how do I get that sort of experience?" the young woman asks.

"Bad decisions".

*-Anonymous*

It is already one year since I came to RTU which was a pleasant surprise. Learning is never ending. My experience in RTU is marvelous and enriching. I enjoy each day in RTU, especially when I see a sweet smile on the faces of the hopeless children who come to us hopefully, contentment in the life of the aged, gratitude when the people receive a shelter etc. In short when I could reach out to any one in need and that would be success of the day. My religious order (Order of Friars Minor Capuchins) has assured the continuity of RTU. We Capuchins are very grateful to Br. James for the great confidence he has in us. This was also the great concern of all the well wishers of RTU.

As the director of RTU, first I was concentrating on the various programmes. As the number of staff is very big, it took some time to know the staff. Even now I cannot say that I know all the staff. In my earlier careers I mostly confined myself within the campus beautifying, bring more order, systems etc. My new learning in RTU is to look out of campus and to reach out to the needy. Br. James is the *Guruji* to teach this lesson. This is also our thrust for 2009. I consider RTU's systems and the suffering of the needy are two wheels of RTU and I am confident that I ride on it well. I cannot say that everything is rosy. I have learned also through bad decisions.

I am confident that with the inspiration of Br. James and with your support, RTU will reach out to many more.