



## Whats been happening

In May this year we returned to Lintha Village near Ngapali Beach on the west coast of Myanmar to continue the Digging Deep for Myanmar toilet construction project that we commenced in 2013. This years project aimed to provide two new toilets for disadvantaged families while further refining the design based on findings of the prototype build from the previous year. The project was again supported in Myanmar by Sue (Mama Sue) and Sahin Ozturk, founders and operators of the Vera Thomsom English language school which is supported by the Andrew Clark Trust.



Sue and Sahin

We are grateful for the support of our good friends and sponsors, Ruth & Greg Allen and Jane Owen & Jamie Maslen who offered to raise enough money to build one toilet each. So successful were their fundraising efforts that we were able to build a third toilet, which was greatly appreciated by the Lintha community. Each couple travelled to Lintha and spent a week helping build the new toilets alongside villagers and local tradesmen. The value of their efforts and contributions and the benefits to the community should not be underestimated.



Ruth & Greg



Jane & Jamie

## Why are we doing this

Only about 40% of the people in the village have access to a “functioning” toilet. One toilet provides safe and clean sanitary facilities for around six families or 30 people. Serious gut infections and diseases are common in the village. Poor sanitation and hygiene are major contributors to the problem so these new facilities along with planned hygiene education programs should greatly reduce the incidence of these illnesses.



Lintha village scene



A "toilet" in the village

Poor sanitation practises and open defecation contribute to groundwater contamination. The main water source is from groundwater wells, a number of which are spread throughout the village. Water quality tests carried out last year showed that those wells used for drinking water and considered by the locals as safe, were actually heavily contaminated. No doubt this contaminated water is also contributing to the incidence of disease so improved sanitation practises will also improve water quality thereby reducing illnesses.

Lack of toilets causes particular problems for women and girls. Where there is nowhere safe and private to go to the toilet there is a lack of dignity. Women and girls often have to wait until dark to go to the bush or a discreet part of the village to relieve themselves, where they are at risk of abuse.

So by providing some basic clean sanitation for these people, we were hoping to not only reduce disease and illness, but to provide basic safety and restore dignity to the community.

## Last year's prototype

We inspected the prototype toilet constructed in 2013 and it appears to be functioning well except for a minor leak in the tank connection which was easy to fix. It had only been in use for a few months as extra work was needed during the dry season to seal the base of the tank so it was difficult to tell how well the treatment process was working. We will monitor each of the installations over coming years and address any problems should they arise.

## This year's build

Many lessons were learnt from the prototype build of 2013. The septic tank and disposal trench remain unchanged but the toilet building was a complete redesign. The main reason for the change



is the high cost and availability of quality timber in Myanmar. It seems that foreign companies are pillaging most of the good stuff for export and timber prices are comparable to those in Australia. Our initial assumption that timber was abundant and would be cheap and readily available proved false, another good example of why you don't assume anything when working in a foreign country.

The alternative brick design returned an overall project saving of around 20% and was far quicker and easier as the same tradespeople that were used for the septic tank were also able to build the toilet building.

Also, the change from July, when we were there last year, to May proved a good move as we avoided the start of the wet season and didn't have the high groundwater to deal with. No pumps, no sloshing around in ankle deep water, no dodging heavy downpours this time, just heat and humidity.



**Greg inspecting his new creation.**



**Workers digging the hole for the septic tank. Yes, that's a girl helping!**

We have nothing but admiration for the local workers. A team of around four with only basic tools and equipment were able to build a toilet, septic tank and disposal trench in 5 days. All this in high humidity, 35 degree heat, no machinery to dig the holes, mix the concrete etc. Their work ethic is simply astounding. For their efforts, these people receive around \$5 US per day, a relatively good wage by Myanmar standards. We have decided that is far better to employ local people to do the bulk of the work as it helps to stimulate the local economy and puts much needed food on the table.

The only physical work that needed to be done by the volunteer "tourists" was to fit the roof and door. The new design is more robust, doesn't have the same termite attack issues as timber and will require far less maintenance.



**Pouring the septic tank base slab.**



**Building the septic tank.**





**Building the toilet.**



**Pouring the septic tank lid.**



**Jamie measuring up for the door.**



**Fixing the roof frame. Greg directing while Thein Lin watches on.**



**Geoff making the door.**



**Jamie hanging the door.**





**Jamie fitting the roof sheets.**



**Installing the absorption trench.**

## Other activities

Between the six in the travelling party, we were able to deliver approximately 80kgs of clothing, educational aids, toys and sports equipment that had been donated by friends here in Aus. The educational aids were distributed at the school. Ruth, Jane and Sophie had a great time handing out the clothes and toys to appreciative villagers. It was rewarding to see the people parading their newly acquired goodies. Soccer balls and frisbies also proved a hit with the kids and we had some great fun playing with them on the beach and in the village. We also took some basic battery power tools, a drill and power saw, to make the building a bit easier.



**Ruth distributing donated clothing in the village.**



**Jane measuring up for a donated school uniform.**



**Sophie with more donated school uniforms.**





**This little bloke was very happy with his new soccer ball.**



**Playing soccer with kids on the beach.**



**Playing frisbie with the village kids.**



**Some of the village kids.**

## **Where to next**

We are planning to return in April next year to continue with the program, this time to build six to eight more toilets. We have trained Their Lin, one of the local resort workers to be our man on the ground to help organise materials and tradespeople as well as be our interpreter while we are there. He learnt very quickly and we are confident he will be able to organise and supervise future builds when we are not able to be there.



**A training session with Their Lin.**

A big thanks again to our sponsors who travelled to Lintha with us at their own expense and of course to their supporters for digging deep and donating so generously. Be assured that every cent of your donation was spent on the ground improving the life of these very disadvantaged people. We look forward to your continued support.



**Our sponsors Ruth & Greg and Jane & Jamie handing over the toilets to the local people.**