



THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY WATER PLANTS: VOICES FROM THE PEOPLE

We inaugurated 4 water plants in the Chikaballapur district of Karnataka. In these villages, groundwater has a high content of dissolved solids, fluoride, microbes, and arsenic, and surface water is no longer available. Through personal interviews with community members, the watermen, and Gram Panchayat, we were able to gather voices from the people impacted by the water plants. Their stories and experiences validate the influence of the water plants on the health and welfare of the communities they reach.

Maraganakunte provides up to 34 liters of filtered water to 180 to 200 households each day, including households from up to 16 satellite villages within 9 kilometers. Village members pay a small fee of 2 Rupees for a can of 20 liters. The waterman of this community, Ashwath N., has been an active waterman since the establishment of the plant, and had 15 years of prior experience. He works all day and night to ensure the machinery works to its full potential, because he deeply feels all should have convenient access to the filtered water. Ashwath is very happy with his position at the water plant, and with the quality of the water, as well as his relationship with the community members who appreciate his diligence.

Rashika G.S. is a woman of a household of 6 who takes about three 20-liter jugs of water per day. She lives only 20 meters from the plant. Either herself or her sister collects the water. She is delighted by the convenience of the plant, only taking 5 to 10 minutes per day to collect water, and there is never a line because the plant is open for a few hours each morning and evening. Rashika is very grateful for the clean water. She is ecstatic that the headaches and joint pains of her household are almost extinct.

“The water from the plant is so good and sweet!”

Her mother, who is a Kannada teacher at the local school, radiates happiness. She says she feels so much healthier since using the filtered water. The household only uses the bore well water for cleaning and bathing. Even with the convenience of a tap in their home, they refuse to drink or cook with the raw water. They keep the filtered water covered and in the kitchen, separate from the raw water. The cost of the water for them is very affordable and, notwithstanding the free raw water, they will never go back.

Enthusiasm for the plant harmonizes with every member of the communities as stories continue to be shared. Subhashini S., a mother and wife of a household of 7, is delighted with the convenience of the plant.

“Only takes 5 to 10 minutes a day to collect water”

Subhashini's household, similar to Rashika's, only uses the raw bore well water for cleaning and bathing, despite it being right outside the home. Subhashini is very happy with the quality and health benefits from the water.

“No more fever, no more body pain, no more headaches”

Kishor Kumar, who worked in agriculture, is thrilled with the obvious benefits for himself and his household of 7 from the filtered water.

“My teeth feel better”

Kishor is willing to wait for the water, in times of power outages, because it is worth tasting good, clean water that improves the health of his family. He says that there has been no more body pain, headaches, fever, or diarrhea.

Local doctors of Maraganakunte were also spoken with. Dr Deepika is the medical officer in charge, and Sister Anitha, the public health nurse, say the cases of gastroenteritis and water borne illness have reduced drastically.



Photo 1 Ashwath proudly standing next to Maraganakunte water plant



“The water plant is definitely much needed, in fact, I wish there is more awareness so every single person in the villages can drink and cook with the water”

Positive trends continue in Kothekote. Kothekote has a total of 5,400 households, and 150 to 200 households use the community water plant each day. 100 cans of filtered water are also transported to satellite villages, about 6 or 7, by a water truck. The cost of water for village members of Kothekote is an affordable 2 Rupees, but increases because of transportation cost to the satellite villages. The plant is located in the center of the village, giving easy access to all village members.



Photo 2 Children of Kothekote drinking the sweet water from the plant

The president of the Gram Panchayat, Mamidikayalapalli, shows keenness of the uplifting change in lives for the community members since the plant opened. The Gram Panchayat is very pleased with the water plant, especially with the very low amounts of fluoride in the water. He also hears from community members that children have fewer dental problems.

“Water is useful to health, so it should be used by everyone”

Before the plant was started providing the “sweet” filtered water, there was a high prevalence of fever, joint pain, headaches, and malaria within the village. The Gram Panchayat bill collector, Vijay Kumar declares,

“Drink the filtered water and fluoride disease and joint pain will reduce, I know. The medical cost has reduced by 100% in this community.”

Both the Gram Panchayat and waterman, Rajappa, show confidence in their knowledge about the water plant and the benefits of the filtered water. They said they are the ones responsible for spreading awareness throughout the community and are happy to explain the advantages to anyone who asks.

Abdul Manaff lives with four others in his modest home, all of whom boasted continuously about their access to clean drinking water. He pointed out a bore well water storage structure that had toppled last month, making bore well water collection frustrating. He is thankful for the continuous supply of water from the water plant.



Photo 4 A girl from Kothekote filling up a jug for her family after school

“I really like this water because before the water plant we found little worms in our water”

Abdul also says he feels very healthy after drinking the water, and the water leads his and his family to making healthier choices for their health, and other areas of their life. Abdul’s daughter, a shy 13 year old, also whispered,

“Before we got water from the plant, the kids had flu and cough very often in school.”

Shiva Reddy, a neighbor of Abdul’s also shares his satisfaction with the plant. He is delighted that his children were learning about the benefits of water in their schools.

“I never want to drink raw water again, I will only use the bore well for washing, cattle, and bathing.”



Photo 3 Rajappa the waterman showing off the Kothekote water plant



Asha, a schoolteacher comes to the home of Vekatashimma Reddy to share her voice on the plant. She is very happy that the school receives free water daily, and she knows the water benefits the students, especially their teeth. Vekkatashimma Reddy, an agricultural laborer, also believes the water is better for health for him and his children.

"The plant provides better quality water. I am able to work more days"

Nallapareddypalli shows great acknowledgments of the water plant. Nallapareddypalli has a population of 1,050 individuals, and 100% use the water plant. About 4 satellite villages come to collect water from the plant, as well. The Nallapareddypalli plant is very open with its users. The waterman is passionate about spreading awareness throughout the community. The monthly water-testing vial (shown below) is on display for all to see. If the water stays yellow, then the water is clean, and this gives comfort to the community members. R.J. Ramer Reddy, a member of the Gram Panchayat and an avid user of the filtered water explains that once a month, community meetings are held to discuss the water plant, as well as any other events or concerns within the community. He says his personal health has greatly improved since using the water, and he has not suffered from any fevers.

"The water tastes so sweet, I drink 5 liters per day."

Before the plant was in use, R.J. Ramer avoided drinking the raw water due to the terrible taste.

Many women of the community spend a lot of time gathering around the bore well when the water is available to collect for household chores. They also collect filtered water from the plant for drinking, and some use it for cooking, as well. The women speak mostly about the taste of the water,

"The water is so sweet!"

"The water is tasty to drink!"



Photo 5 The monthly water-testing vial showing the safety of the filtered water to Nallapareddypalli



Photo 6 Seethamana speaking with the Swasti team while holding her 20 L water jug

An energetic 83-year-old woman named Seethamana lives alone, and collects 20 liters of water for herself every 4 days. She says that the filtered water does not help her health at this age, but she is aware of the benefits and thinks the younger community members should be drinking the filtered water. Seethamana only uses the water for drinking because she loves the taste. She is delighted that the waterman of the community is very helpful, and often helps her carry her water home.

Photo 7 Women of Nallapareddypalli filling their water jugs with filtered water from the plant



A 15-year-old girl named Sulekha is proud to show her home and speak about the water plant. Sulekha speaks English very well and hopes to be a doctor one day. Her father has been struggling with hip pain, but the pain has reduced since using the filtered water. She hears the elders speaking about the filtered water,

"The elders say they have no leg or joint pain, and they can see clearly."

Sulekha's household is also one of very few that used the filtered water for cooking, but she said her mother talks to her friends about how her husband's body pain had reduced and that the water is making her family very happy.

K. Subramanyam, a PhD, has 5 family members staying with him. He also had provided some his agricultural land that was used for the installation of the water plant. He is very pleased with the filtered water, especially with the taste, or lack there of, and his families health. He says he is very well educated and he knows this water is essential for good health.



“The plant is well maintained and the staff is good.”

Thimampalli was the first community water plant to open back in January of 2013. This plant serves 15 to 20 households each day with about 200 liters. The plant is easily accessible to community members. The waterman, Venkatesh S., is well known in the community and he has been described as supportive and helpful. The waterman also has the responsibility of supervising the other 3 plants. He is passionate about his job and giving the communities, which he considers his friends, safe water.

Lakshmi first received awareness of the benefits of using filtered water 3 years ago when she was in the hospital for a heart condition. Since then, she has set drinking and cooking with filtered water a priority. Before the plant was established in Thimampalli, she had to venture out to Bagepalli to get filtered water, and the cost was high and the distance was far. She is so happy with the convenience of the water plant and the affordable cost. Venkatesh, who is only a phone call away, helps Lakshmi with her water when she calls. She often has difficulty carrying the heavy cans due to her medical conditions. She does feel her health, and her household’s health has been improving since using clean water.

“The water makes us healthy, no fever, no hand pain. With other water we feel unhealthy.”

V. Shiva Reddy is the dairy supplier for Thimampalli. He uses the water plant regularly and is eager to share his practice. He has a large household of 8 members, and he only wants the best for them. He uses the water from the plant for cooking and drinking, and keeps it separate from the raw water, which he only uses for his cattle, bathing, and cleaning.

“The water has no fluoride and I know it is good for my health.”

Shiva is passionate about the water plant and what it does for the people who use it. He feels everyone in every village, no matter the distance, should have access to filtered water.



Photo 8 V. Shiva Reddy filling a cup of filtered water from his home storage container

The community water plants established in these 4 communities show an surge in health and wellbeing. Through the communities own voices, we hear that members are drinking more , joint pain has reduced, and the taste of the water is enjoyable. Families are making healthier lifestyle choices, and the communities are aware that filtered water will improve their health. These plants are making a difference, and with continued support, they can change the lives of many more.

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