

Indian toilet scheme wins Geneva global innovation award

October 10 2012

An innovative scheme to provide rural Indian communities with toilets and running water in every house has scooped the first Global+5 award in Geneva.

"It's more than water and sanitation, it's human dignity," said Joe Madiath, head of the Mantra project (Movement and Action network for Transformation of Rural Lives) run by Indian non-governmental group Gram Vikas.

Speaking at the awards ceremony in Geneva late Tuesday, Madiath expressed surprise that a project involving toilets "could lead to such a big prize."

The Global+5 award, created by the Geneva-based Global Journal, is aimed at honouring the "solutions to the most pressing global questions of the next five years."

Based in Orissa in eastern India, Gram Vikas helps to provide "blanket coverage" of toilets and piped running water to communities where 85 percent of the population has no access to a toilet and 99 percent no running water.

So far, the Indian group says it has reached 988 villages, including those in hilly areas lacking electricity, claiming its project has led to a more than 80-percent drop in waterborne disease.

Without such help, "rural communities remain more prone to waterborne diseases and as a result demoralised and unable to defeat the cycle of poverty," it said in a statement.

Lack of basic sanitation is a widespread problem in Indian homes, with census data showing more households in the country of 1.2 billion people have a telephone than a toilet.

Some 47 percent of India's 330 million households have [toilet facilities](#) while 63 percent of homes have phone connections—mostly mobiles.

The award jury, which included [World Trade Organization](#) director Pascal Lamy and former Greek prime minister George Papandreou, also praised six other projects nominated for the award.

In particular, they cited the "Discovering Hands" initiative which employs visually impaired women in Germany to detect [breast cancer](#).

The 20 women trained to spot the cancer have a 50 percent better detection rate than traditional methods, the NGO said.

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Citation: Indian toilet scheme wins Geneva global innovation award (2012, October 10) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-10-indian-toilet-scheme-geneva-global.html>

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