

## MEDIPALLY IS MODELPALLY

Nirmal Grama Purashkar (NGP) awards are given to those villages, which attain “zero open defecation status”. This prestigious award motivates the village leaders, mainly Sarpanches (President of Local Councils at village level) to take initiative and ensure that their village gets this award. Once the award is received, after the euphoria is over, the villagers and the leaders also take a relaxed approach to issue of sanitation. Old habits die hard. One could see several villages that received NGP awards slipping back to the old practices. This is a major concern for governments, which are investing huge resources towards promotion of sanitation.

Given this background, Medipally village, Mudigonda Mandal, Khammam district Andhra Pradesh stands apart. This village received two awards in 2008 - Nirmal Grama Purashkar Award from Government of India and Shubhram Award from Government of Andhra Pradesh. The trend continued and another award best Panchayati in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene reached this village from Google in 2010. Behind this trend, not just one leader that we typically see in many NGP villages, there are several women Self Help Groups, youth groups and individual families in the village, that are behind this success. This is an open secret behind the continuity of success in this village.

The process began with a felicitation meeting organized by District Water Sanitation Mission, Khammam for the recipients of NGP in 2006-07. Inspired by the achievements of these villages, S Hari Prasad, the Village President of Medipally took a decision to lead the village towards “total sanitation”. REEDS, a local voluntary organization provided guidance and support to this initiative. Officers of District/ Mandal Water & Sanitation Mission contributed effectively to this process by responding to the local initiatives at the village level.

S Hari Prasad organized village meetings and explained to the villagers on the need for improving sanitation in the village. People also responded positively to his initiative. The first step was to construct soak pits at every house. There was no proper waste water management in the village. Pools of stagnant water created menace in the village. The Gram Panchayat supplied sand, stone and other material required for constructing a soak pit. The cost of such material was about 150 Rs/ pit. By 2008, 98% of families built soak pits in their houses. The size of the soak pits varied depending on the family size and amount of waste water they generate. Each family contributed their own labour for digging these pits. Maintenance of soak pits is also the responsibility of the families. Some families clean soak pits once in a week, while others clean once in 15 days. To ensure this, Gram Panchayat appointed Mr Veerababu, whose responsibility is to inspect the soak pits and ensure that they are in proper order. He also cleans soak pits in the houses of old aged who are unable to clean their soak pits. Though the soak pits are cheap and easy to maintain, they may not be total solution to the problem of waste water disposal. Open drainage lines in the village were not properly designed and maintained earlier. During this initiative, additional drainage lines were constructed and old drainage lines were repaired. Priority was given to those localities, which need drainage lines. Gram Panchayat spent about Rs 1.5 Lakh for this purpose.

Maintenance of cleanliness is not just the responsibility of Gram Panchayat anymore in this village. Kalanjali Self Help Group was the first to adopt a street in the village and ensure that this street is clean. Member of this group cleaned up the street, drainage lines twice in a week. Soon other SHGs followed this and now all localities/ streets are adopted by women SHGs. This is a turning point in the village, where the responsibilities of maintaining sanitation are shared by local self governance institution and local community based organizations.

A garbage collection bin is arranged for every 20 families. Gram Panchayat ensured that the garbage/ solid waste is collected regularly from these bins and transported to a vermin compost unit to convert the same into compost/ manure. Dung based manure production processes at household level were also systematized in the village so that there is general hygiene in the village.

Simultaneously, the President initiated the process of promoting sanitary latrines in the village. He constructed a model toilet within the available funds in the form of government subsidy (2750 Rs/Unit). For doing this, he motivated the local masons to reduce their wages and fixed it at 500 Rs/Unit. Since the toilets are good for the village, the masons also agreed to subsidise part of their cost. Though there was enthusiasm to construct toilets, not everyone came forward. To push this agenda further, films shows were organized to showcase the experiences of Gangadevulapally, a model village in the state, which promoted total sanitation in the village. The film particularly focused on the role of women SHGs in promotion of sanitation in the village. This triggered a process of construction of individual sanitary latrines in the village. However, many people were not still habituated to using these toilets. Gram Panchayat and SHG members took several initiatives to promote use of sanitary latrines - conducted home visits, explained the benefits of sanitary latrines, painted the walls with motivating slogans and so on. Soon the Gram Panchayat realized that motivation & incentives are not adequate. There has to be a "disincentive" for continuing open defecation. It was decided to levy fine if any one continues the practice of open defecation. Three persons were appointed to be on vigil, by paying a monthly salary of 1500 Rs/month. They keep an eye on the localities that are commonly used for open defecation from 4 to 7 AM and from 5 to 8 PM every day. This had an impact on the process of behavioural change in the village. The villagers gave up the practice of open defecation completely, in due course of time. Though many households had individual toilets, there were few families which could not afford to construct toilets due to several reasons. Considering their need, Gram Panchayat constructed two community toilets in the village, in two locations. These were completed in 2008. Gram Panchayat takes the responsibility of maintenance of these community toilets and provided water facility to these toilets. Establishing and maintaining toilets in schools, aganwadi centers is also an important intervention in the process.



A Board on the Wall by a SHG indicating the jurisdiction of the group in promoting Sanitation



A low cost soak pit at every household and with every water point in Medipally

Apart from promoting sanitary practices and environmental sanitation in the village, the Gram Panchayat also established a water purifying plant in the village. Since the groundwater in the village has excessive fluoride content, the villagers were suffering from fluoride related problems. Gram Panchayat and SHGs took the lead in establishing a water purifying plant in the village. The capital costs are reduced to only Rs 1.5 Lakh by getting an assembled unit, rather than buying a braded equipment/ unit. The operational cost of the water plant is 4000 Rs/month, which include salary of staff (2000 Rs/month); replace of filters (1200 Rs/month) and miscellaneous (800 Rs/month). Electricity connection of this plant is linked to local village water supply system of the rural water supply department. This bill is picked up the department. Gram Panchayat evolved a coupon system in the village. Each coupon could be exchanged for 20 lt of pure water. The cost of each coupon is 1 Rs. Each family buys coupons for a month in advance. Villagers have to collect water from the plant itself. There is no door delivery. The surplus amount from this plant is used for any development activity in the village. Water quality is tested every day to ensure that there is no fluoride content in the treated water. The functioning of this water purifying plant motivated several neighbouring villages and they also established similar plants in their villages. However, the price of water in Medipally continues to be cheaper.

Apart from promoting basic WASH services, the village leaders (both Gram Panchayat and SHGs) promoted greenery in the village by planting a variety of trees. Families in each street are responsible for nurturing these plants. During summer, Gram Panchayat supplies water to these trees, through a tanker.

This village demonstrates the processes of sharing responsibility of promoting sanitation between local governance institution and community based organizations. This shared responsibility helped to sustain the WASH service levels and also improve the quality of the same, over a period of time. Several costs are absorbed by members of local institutions, such as maintenance of cleanliness (of streets, trees/ plantations, drainage lines) and watch & ward functions. Similarly, department of rural water supply also provided financial support for capital costs (promoting sanitary latrines, drainage lines, etc) and operational costs (Eg: electricity expenses of water purifying plants). But the non-cost interventions such as partnerships between Gram Panchayat and community based organizations provided strong basis for improved and sustained WASH services.

**Documentation by Kishan. Subramanyam Raidu and MV Rama Chandrudu WASSAN 21 May 2011**



Garbage Collection System in Medipally



Water Quality Testing Equipment in water purifying plant in Medipally