

## **Investing on improving WASH services is a winning formula...**

Mrs Subhashini, Sarpanch (President of the village), Marteru Village, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh, India

*Mrs Subhashini was elected as Sarpanch during the 2006 elections. And she believes that she was elected as Sarpanch of Marteru village as villagers recognized her efforts and commitment for promoting better WASH services in the village. Marteru is a village with about 8000 persons. For a long period of time, she invested her own money in promoting and maintaining sanitation in the village. However, villagers realized that this is not a sustainable practice and agreed to share the cost of improved services. Her husband's support in this entire initiative is an interesting dimension too. More in her own words....*

Mrs Gowri Subhashini, Sarpanch of Marteru village proudly showing an album that captures her achievements in promoting sanitation... Her husband K Venubabu, who is a strong support to her is also seen in the picture.



## **Can you we gain the confidence of people, if you fight elections on the promise of better sanitation?**

Yes, definitely we can gain the confidence of the people; I am the example for that; I concentrated on improving the sanitation in the village even before elections were declared and showed results. People believed my commitment and trusted in my abilities to improve sanitation and they elected me. Before election, the village did not look clean; dust/garbage was floating all over the place... people used to suffer a lot.

Before elections we bought 5 rickshaws and 2500 dust bins. I distributed the dust bins to each and every family in the village. At the same time, we also employed five staff members and instructed them to collect garbage in the morning from each and every household. Now also this process is continuing. Our main concept is to improve the situation of village sanitation. Even the people are also want change. I got a good support from the people.

## **15 days before the elections, you started this program. Do you think it led you to win in the elections? If yes, explain how?**

Yes, in elections the educated voters voted us because of this program. The uneducated voters are also inspired by seeing all the process.

## **15 days before the elections, you started this program and invested a lot in buying dustbins, in employing staff & so on. While starting the program what did you think**

**about the investment, from where you pool the money to take this program ahead?  
What was your confidence?**

I didn't take money from any one. I sensed that people wanted improvement in the sanitary conditions of the village. I took this agenda as an opportunity to show my commitment. I started investing my own money. This surely yielded good dividends... in the form of votes....

It is already two years eight months since we started the program. Now also this program is going on well. Villagers are also using all the facilities. After providing the dust bins, people are not throwing the garbage on to the roads, but they are using the *rickshaw* that collects the garbage. If anything goes wrong, villagers can give a complaint to Grama Panchayati by using the helpline number. For example: if any day the *rickshaw* puller does not go, then the citizens can give the complaint to the Panchayati by using the helpline. Panchayati will respond to the complaint immediately and send the *rickshaw* to collect the garbage.

People are also feeling very happy by seeing all the programs and the improved sanitary condition in the village. And they are also cooperating with the Panchayati to keep the village clean and tidy. Because of all these efforts, our village got *Nirmal Gram Puraskar Award*, *Best Sarpanch Award* and *Subram Award* at state and national level.

**After continuing this initiative for a long period and receiving all the awards, have you faced any problems while implementing the program? If yes, explain**

Yes, I faced problems. Our Panchayati does not have enough funds to continue this program. The funds at Grama Panchayati are not sufficient even to pay the salaries of sweepers. I invested our own money to purchase 2500 dust bins, garbage *rickshaw* and also paid salaries to the staff employed for the program from our pocket. It continued for two years. After that I explained the financial condition of the Grama Panchayati to the villagers. I requested the villagers to pay Rs.10/- per month per household as a maintenance charges. The villagers also understood our problem and co-operated with us. Now Grama Panchayati collects up to Rs.15000/- per month, which is used for meeting the costs of maintaining cleanliness in the village. Now the financial burden on the Grama Panchayati has come down with the co-operation of the people. In future we are planning to increase the maintenance charges from Rs.15/- to Rs.20/-.