

People centric approach in sanitation – a successful initiative in Tiruchirappalli

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Gramalaya is a civil society organizations working for water and sanitation initiatives in India, especially in Tiruchirappalli region of Tamil Nadu both in the urban and rural *contexts* of the District. Gramalaya believes its triad strategy emphasises health improvement that leads to economic development and economic development help the communities to achieve social development whereby the communities are entrusted, entitled and empowered.

In the three blocks of Tiruchirappalli District the operational areas Gramalaya projects are aimed at stopping open defecation in the intervention areas which include rural and urban slums in Cities. Gramalaya played an active role in enabling the the panchayat to declare India's first village Thandavampatti as open defecation free (ODF) village in Tiruchirappalli District where the panchayat passed a resolution in the grama sabha meeting. Based on the community led total sanitation approach, Gramalaya so far helped the local communities to declare 56 panchayats as ODF with the assistance from the district officials under Total Sanitation Campaign scheme.

The community initiatives for total sanitation in the three blocks of Thottiyam, Thathaiengarpet and Thuraiyur Block in Tiruchirappalli District of Tamil Nadu is being presented in this paper as case study for wider learning. The major contributing factors, the role played by various local institutions are narrated in the paper. The paper in brief talks about the community, credit, capacity and change objectives.

1. Introduction

“Sanitation is more important than political independence - Mahatma Gandhi “. Governments at every level have realized that making every village ‘nirmal’ (clean and healthy) is central to all development efforts. Clean, green and healthy villages are an enduring sign of India's progress. The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) aims to halve the proportion of people without access to water and sanitation by the end of 2015. It is an endeavor that is driven by worldwide statistics that put more than 2.4 billion people without access to adequate sanitation facilities and more than 1.1 billion people lacking protected water facilities. In India more than 70 crore people lack basic sanitation facilities and defecate in the open every day. Gramalaya, a civil society organization supports people led initiatives for improved and sustained access to water and sanitation in India, particularly in the rural areas of Tiruchirappalli District, in Tiruchirappalli City Corporation, Municipalities, tribal villages of Green Hills and the tsunami affected areas of Nagapattinam coastal villages.

2. Gramalaya and its pioneering work in Sanitation

Gramalaya initiated the demand responsive approach for sanitation promotion much before the reforms in the water; sanitation sector was introduced in India. The endeavors of Gramalaya have been greatly encouraged by the early successes during the initial years of work. In 2001, Gramalaya along with local Government facilitated the community of Thandavampatti village in Tiruchirappalli district in achieving the first open defecation free Gram Panchayat in Tamil Nadu, where all people of the village resolved in the gram Sabha to refrain from open defecation and to fine anybody found defecating in the open. In the urban context, the residents of the Kalmandhai slum in Tiruchirappalli City Corporation declared their slum open defecation free which was endorsed by official declared by the then City Corporation Commissioner of Tiruchirappalli as India's first open defecation free slum. The above two examples are cited here as examples of community led total sanitation and the facilitative role played by the Government agencies in the absence of major programmes. Gramalaya has been innovative in its response to the special needs of the children, and has promoted first of its kind very simple easily replicable child-friendly model for sanitation in the urban slums of Tiruchirappalli. Children under 12 who contribute more than 25 % of the slum population, received the child friendly latrines well, and used them regularly which has been the critical component in achieving open defecation free habitations.

Gramalaya has also facilitated in promoting low-cost, durable, water saving polypropylene toilet pans for adults and for children. The pan supports bulk transportation, and the problem of breakage which is faced in the case of ceramic pans is considerably reduced – the plastic pan served as cost saving mechanism by reducing the two key cost factors. Promoting community managed toilets by women self-help groups and piloting same has opened up the institutional options in the complex urban environment. The Toilet technology centre established at the Gramalaya Training Centre served as a learning centre for all key stakeholders, - local government leaders to Government officials to community and civil society representatives, the centre demonstrated working and exhibit models of more than 24 designs appropriate for various context and levels of affordability. Through the above experiments and demonstrations Gramalaya has offered a learning ground for many players, who are currently making significant contributions to the sector. The pioneering initiatives of Gramalaya have paved the way thus far for 287 rural villages (3 Blocks) and 168 slums to be declared as Open Defecation Free (ODF) zones.

3. Status at Start and the challenges

3.1 Access to drinking water

In the three blocks the drinking water supply had been upgraded to piped water supply systems in most of the villages, but due to frequent power failures, break down and inadequate supply in the source, the piped water schemes were not functional and people used hand pumps. Majority of the sources tested positive for bacteriological contamination. Source sustainability was a serious problem causing disuse of many schemes.

3.2 Poor coverage of sanitation facilities

Sanitation, as elsewhere in the country was neglected among rural communities. In the three blocks, except in the few habitations where Gramalaya was already working, the sanitation coverage was as low as less than 22 %. In the urban slums the existing community latrines were in appalling state, filth and feces overflowing. Poor design and facilities added with lack maintenance and ownership rendered the community latrines in a state of dysfunction which served as deterrent in community considering community latrines as an option.

3.3 Local Institutions



Water is politically popular and hence gets sufficient attention from local Government and sanitation was in the back seat, unwanted by people and unattended by local Government.

The local institutions mandated for various development like village water, sanitation committee, village education committee and others either were nonexistent and not actively performing their roles. Until the prestigious “Nirmal Gram Puraskar” came into play the local government representatives were unaware of the total sanitation campaigns and their roles.

4. Community Visioning

The community especially women, were organised into SHGs and these SHGs were federated at Villages, Panchayat and Block level. Other community based organisations which were promoted included men’s groups and children’s groups, though these were basically targeted for behaviour change communications. The women federations and the schools were the platform on which the sanitation promotion programme was launched. The federation leaders were trained on mobilising women, linkage with bank and other financial institutions and also in interfacing with local Governments. The communities were facilitated to organise themselves, identify the issues and possible ways of addressing them. The federation leaders led the need assessment process, and they resolved to



achieve for all people in the operational areas have equal right to access to safe water, sanitation, health and improved income status without discrimination of caste, class, gender and region.

Based on the need assessment carried out through the community, Gramalaya had developed its

interventions for the community that would promote health and hygiene with focus on sanitation. The project plan adopted a development approach aiming to empower the communities helping them to improve their health, living standards and environment. The underlying belief of the initiatives is that health empowerment would in turn lead to economic and social upliftment that would give people the power to alleviate poverty caused by water and sanitation related morbidity and issues. Participatory behaviour change communication, Community and local government capacity building and financing

option through microcredit were the three major strategies adopted to achieve the objectives set.

5. Interventions and changes

The community led initiative aimed at stopping open defecation in the intervention areas which include rural and urban slums in Cities.

5.1 Community Organisation

At the start there was lukewarm response from the communities for sanitation. Reaching out to all habitations and households was also a challenge. Thrift and credit was an attractive for women organise themselves as groups. Gramalaya promoted many women self help groups, and federated them at village, Panchayat, cluster and block levels. The organised structures at different levels offered a good platform for sensitizing community and systematically educating them. The federation leaders received formal trainings on leadership, fund mobilisation, accounting, cost recovery, communications trainings. The trainings combined with



the opportunity to learn and interact with local institutions, motivated the women leaders to play an active lead role in promoting sanitation. In the 90 Panchayats from 3 blocks more than 180 women leaders were trained, who in turn reached out to more than 3000 SHG leaders at village level and who reached out to more than 60,000 women members of the SHGs. Main responsibility of the leaders' at Block level was, overall finance management including mobilising finance through credit from bank and other, dialogue and follow up with the Block level government and officials for release of subsidy and oversee the progress. At the Panchayat level the leaders' role is to planning, review, addressing gaps, distribution of loan, mobilising masons and materials. At the village level the leaders were responsible for demystify misconceptions about household latrines, unlocking demand for latrines, hygiene promotion, monitoring usage and recovering cost. The women's federation is named as WAVE (Women's Action for Village Empowerment)

Men have supported mainly in construction by undertaking both unskilled labour and skilled masonry work. Because of their tight engagement in livelihood activities, organizing them and reaching out is still a challenge.

5.2 Behaviour Change Communication

Children are also trained as ambassadors of change, by strengthening the school committees and structured sessions on hygiene promotions using interactive learning tools and methods. Gramalaya reaches out to 259 schools in the 3 blocks. The children are trained and motivated to influence behaviour change among peers and family members. Children's demand for latrines at home has been significant factor in demand generation. The teachers are trained in using participatory techniques for behaviour change communication, in motivating children adopt key hygiene behaviours, encouraging parents to build and use latrines at home, and also in monitoring change through school attendance, children's key behaviours. Children out of schools and adolescents are



captured for change by organizing them into groups at village level. These groups regularly meet for hygiene sessions and also lead on environment cleaning process.

Regular sessions hygiene education is structured into all SHG meetings, the women turn carry the messages and influence

changes at the household. Every year around majors events like women's day, world water day, world toilet day Gramalaya facilitates the WAVE federation leaders to organise campaigns and events on handwashing, sanitation and other themes on rain water harvesting and with support from local entrepreneurs, local government, institutions. In Sep, 2007 during the mass campaign led by WAVE federation and local government leaders more than 90,000 families were reached with messages on Sanitation and handwashing. As many people washed hands with soap as a gesture of their commitment to adopt this practice. Major part of the cost for the campaigns has been locally mobilized, with PRI actively contributing and leading.

5.3 Financing – Micro Credit as an option

Loans from the commercial banks and Primary Agricultural Co-operative societies to the women Self-Help Groups enabled the communities to construct household toilets. During the year 2007-08, 19,859 household latrines were constructed with a total loan amount of Rs.6.13 crores.

Fund mobilization for household toilet construction through various sources

Sl. No	Fund Mobilization for toilet construction	Thottiam		T.Pet		Thuraiyur		Total No.of Toilet constructed	Total Amount mobilized for toilet construction
		No.of Toilet	Amount	No.of Toilet	Amount	No.of Toilet	Amount		
1	Banks	3905	19525000	496	1486000	1597	5910600	5998	26921600
2	SHG Internal Savings	1215	4252500	1819	4146200	1661	7114390	4695	15513090
3	Govt.Subsidy*	1750	2100000	3192	3830400	1386	1663200	6328	7593600
4	Own Contribution	526	2630000	422	1675000	457	1828000	1405	6133000
5	MFI Linkage	32	96000	524	2505287	383	1948500	939	4549787
6	PRIs	0	0	0	0	494	594900	494	594900
Total :		7428	28603500	6453	13642887	5978	19059590	19859	61305977

* This list included 6328 toilets which were provided with subsidy from TSC project.

5.4 Technology



The communities were enabled to access technical support through the toilet technology centre which housed different toilet models. Community volunteers were trained as skilled masons of low cost latrines. Pamphlets on different toilet models suitable for all households as affordable and acceptable by different socio-economic status of the households were

introduced. The women self-help groups and their federation leaders were given more orientation for providing on the spot consultancy for designing and locating the toilet places within the premises and house sites. People were encouraged to use the locally available cheap materials for pit lining and construction of foundation for the toilets. The local cement fabricators and entrepreneurs were sensitized on producing materials appropriate for latrine construction. With the knowledge of options available through the technology centre, skilled masons and supplies available from local manufacturers, plastic pans the supply chains were strengthened, which helped translation of demand to actual household latrines. Technology transfer aimed at

- Menu of options suiting varying budgets making household latrines affordable to all.
- Optimum use of space to overcome space constraints
- Minimizing the use of water
- Environmentally sustainable
- Cater to the special needs of children, pregnant women, elderly and persons with disability
- Make use of locally available materials and suppliers to ease supply chain blockages
- Make available alternative options like plastic pans which help in cost reduction.
- Skill transfer to community volunteers to contribute to sanitation promotion and earn from the opportunity like masonry training

Technology to address other aspects of environmental sanitation, like solid waste and waste water management were also introduced. Training on promoting Kitchen garden from waste water and waste composting for manure were provided which served as income generation opportunities for the community.

5.5 TSC and support from Government

At every stage the projects fully utilized the support from TSC. TSC lacked skills in intense community based behaviour change communication and demand generation, Gramalaya's efforts complemented the TSC mission. In the initial days TSC focused only allocation of areas to NGOs for operation, monitoring work completion and subsidy release. Only after Gramalaya's continued efforts at sensitizing the PRI leaders, combined with pride in receiving the Nirmal Gram Puraskar, did TSC and Local Government realised the importance of



demand generation and behaviour change communication. Once the conviction set in, and inspired by the work done by Gramalaya, TSC extended support. While supporting the community initiative in the three target blocks, TSC invested time and energy in upscaling similar community led sanitation in other blocks of the district. Government at various levels also helped with adequate water supply to communities and schools to respond to increased water demand due to uptake in latrine usage.

PRI leaders of the three blocks have acknowledged the role played by Gramalaya in sensitizing, and supporting them in demonstrating approaches in mobilising and engaging the community as active players in the sanitation programme. Panchayat and Block level Government and officials found behaviour change communications a major challenge. The local Government found “WAVE” federation an effective platform for hygiene promotion and managing subsidy distribution. It was easier for them to facilitate the community led movement. The trigger was provided by Gramalaya’s people centric approaches. WAVE federation also supported participatory monitoring of usage.

The District Administration through the Total Sanitation Campaign supported Gramalaya in releasing subsidy for the constructed toilets. The toilets constructed were monitored by the by the officials at the block and district level, they also participated and endorsed the village Open defecation free declaration organised by people in association with elected representatives. Encouragement and support has been extended by the Member of Legislative Assembly and the state ministers. The Panchayat chairman and the Presidents monitored coverage and usage before declaring the village as open defecation free, they proudly erected sign boards in important locations, and also promulgated an order of fine for anybody found defecating in the open. Child brigade was made responsible for monitoring. The District Collector participated in the Panchayat-level Federation meeting of women self-help groups and appreciated the combined efforts of TSC, women self-help groups, bankers and the NGO Gramalaya.

TSC used Gramalaya’s operational villages as a model of best practice and organized for several exposure visits for stakeholders from other blocks in the district. The visitors arranged by TSC included state government officials and District Magistrates from others states like Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Orissa.

5.6 Capacity Building of Local Institutions

Various training programmes were organised for capacity building of CBOs including WAVE federation, PRI members, and Local officials to promote knowledge on the importance of hygiene and sanitation and in the strategies for achieving it. Besides the structured training programmes on various aspects – like finance management,

technologies, behaviour change communication tools, planning and implementing aimed at strengthening the community action towards sanitation for all. Gramalaya provided orientation training in other successful intervention areas including water, sanitation and community development. The federation leaders were provided training and exposure on community managed water and sanitation programmes and leadership qualities for sustainability of the federation. The local cement fabricators who already involved in supplying of construction materials using low-cost technology were given training and exposure visits to the Gramalaya Toilet Technology Centre. Themes of capacity building related to the the roles are as below.

1. WAVE Federation leaders – Finance Management, Accounting, Audits, Cost recovery
2. SHG Leaders – Behaviour change communitarian, demand generation, Monitoring usage, mobilising local resources – Masons, Materials and Money
3. PRI leaders and Government Officials – Sensitizing on strategies for sustainable sanitation, Managing demand and supply, monitoring, Goal oriented action for sanitation
4. Cement manufacturers – sensitisation on responding to the rural sanitation market demand – low cost blocks, doors etc
5. School teachers and students committees – school water, sanitation and hygiene management and peer education
6. Nationalised banks and financial institutions
7. All stakeholders – Exposure visits to best practices

To facilitate participatory planning and monitoring, Gramalaya promoted a representative project Advisory committee at every Panchayat which consisted of panchayat officials, school teachers, assistant educational officers, bank managers, Agricultural co-operative bank managers, ward councilors, Federation leaders, Sub-Inspector of police, TSC officials, Cement fabricators, Businessmen, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan supervisors, Panchayat presidents, press reporters and Gramalaya staff. The committees regularly meet to review progress and play a facilitative role in addressing any specific challenges. The committee represented the community at large and brought community perspective in addressing challenges and finding appropriate solutions.

The mandated Village Development Committee (VDC) at gram Panchayat level were strengthened by sensitizing the members for regular meetings and active participation. The importance of the activities and roles of the VDC were reemphasized to the members during the meeting organized at the village level. VDC was shared all information about the ongoing works and their support was sought. Revising and strengthening the VDC is one of the significant reason for achievements so far.

5.7 Sanitation as Business

The projected while promoting sanitation encouraged the business opportunities related to the same. The increased income generation opportunities enhanced communities and local institutions in sanitation promotion, and such active participants advocated for sanitation. The local cement manufacturers were exposed to the rural market and special demands of rural sanitation. Some examples of promoting entrepreneurship opportunities are, the women federation were trained and helped to set up business models of brick making, dealership for plastic pans, recycling plastic for manufacturing appliances, manure production from waste composting. Such sanitation linked business opportunities contributed to household and local economy. This reversed the vicious cycle of lack of sanitation and poverty, and made them positively contributing. Community volunteers were trained as low cost sanitation masons, who contributed and gained from sanitation promotion.

5.8 Convergence



The project implemented in the three blocks of Thottiyam, Thathaiengarpet and Thuraiyur Block in Tiruchirappalli District of Tamil Nadu resulted in convergence different stakeholders like the community based organizations who are the Panchayat-level federation of women's self-help groups, school children, PRIs, Total Sanitation Campaign, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the bankers in the operational area. As an outcome of the project, the entire block of Thathiengarpet declared as ODF villages. This enabled the district administration to apply for the Nirmal Gram Puraskar Award of the central government for the block-level approach.

Gramalaya and the people acknowledge the support from donor agencies like WaterAid, UK, Water Partners International, USA and Arghyam, Bangalore for the financial support and guidance. Their understanding and commitment for community initiatives helped us invest in community processes and play a catalytic and capacity building role. Support towards staff and infrastructure enabled Gramalaya to leverage support from local government officials and like minded organizations in achieving sustainable sanitation in the operational area. Locally available human and other resources were fully harnessed

and utilized in the processes. Subsidy for hardware from TSC and PRIs, credit from and Micro-finance were vital inputs into the whole programme. Community contribution and assistance from local institutions mobilized for construction of toilets were higher than external assistance in all forms.

6. Challenges and Way Forward

The community led total sanitation approach in the three blocks of Tiruchirappalli District resulted in successful implementation of the sanitation project. Of the total 90 Gram Panchayats, last two years 7 have already received the Nirmal Gram Puraskar and this 41 have been awarded. The other Panchayats are subsequent the selection have achieved total coverage which is likely to be endorsed through next year awards. The main challenge is sustaining the change achieved and mainstreaming all sections of community especially men in the community processes. WAVE federation has played a significant lead role in processes, and its changing role to the scenario of monitoring health impacts and sustained behaviour change has to evolve. Equity and inclusion is another challenge which has to be addressed more effectively. Reviewing the works so far it is realised migrant population which do not fall any revenue records do not get counted in sanitation planning. Some section of the poorest and much deserving households for various reasons, like old records claim them as beneficiaries. These gaps will have to be addressed if upscaling similar approach is considered by Government or other players. Thus, after almost two decades and considerable innovation at ground, Gramalaya has facilitated communities in three blocks to achieve total sanitation and also has offered a model of best practice, a learning ground for many other sector players. Gramalaya is now considering expansion its area of operation through its capacity building and technical support.



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