Rentapalla Gram Panchayat (GP) in Sattenapalle Mandal in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh has attained ODF status with the collective action of all the people in the village and officials who assisted the functions of a village, besides major contributions from a trusted elderly person in the village.

The GP has 1376 households with 5308 population. Under the Swatch Bharat Mission (SBM), 243 toilets have been constructed and their coverage in the village reached 100%. Now, the thrust is more towards ensuring the usage of toilets and other aspects of SBM (Gramin) like Solid, Liquid Waste Management (SLWWM) by arranging tri-cycles for waste collection, putting up big dustbins in street corners and involving all stakeholders in achieving the same.

The Gram Panchayat shouldered the responsibility of making the village open defecation free with active support from Field Assistants, ASHA workers, ANMs, SHG members and a trusted member of the community.

One day, the Sarpanch convened a meeting on Swachh Bharat for the villagers where in certain aspects related to village sanitation status and the scheme were explained. Post meeting, the Sarpanch, ANMs and Anganwadi teachers together visited each household without toilet.

During these individual/household interactions, the major challenges such as crunch, the issue of availability of space for the construction of a toilet and various other cultural inhibitions faced by the community were brought to the notice of the Gram Panchayat.

“You should visit our village after six months to notice the developments in sanitation. We are continuously working on achieving complete sanitation and will keep doing so till we achieve it”

RamachandraRao
Another major activity undertaken by the Panchayat was a motivational drive with the help of “dandora” (trumpeting across the village) or motivation call in the mic throughout the village with the help of a drum to grab the attention of the people. During this motivational walk, the Panchayat members also advocated the cause.

The Panchayat then took the help of Ramachandra Rao, a person from within the community who had popularity amongst the people. He is well known and recognised for his community oriented goals and expertise of participating in various developmental programs for the village at the district level. He personally discussed with those members who were apprehensive about constructing toilet despite the motivational meetings, announcements and door-to-door campaigns.

He also personally visited all the households along with the Panchayat members to speak to and motivate the families who have not constructed a toilet. After the construction; he undertook a “mic campaign” to advocate the importance of the usage of toilet. He also started working in the direction of achieving total sanitation by putting up community and individual dustbins to ensure proper waste disposal. He is clear on his goal for the coming years; improving drainages, disposal of waste, individual hygiene are just some of the issues to be addressed.

Specific constraints in the efforts for construction of toilets in Rentapalla Gram Panchayat, like lack of space within the household for the construction of toilets in new households; identification of space for the existing houses that want to construct new; inability to invest the initial money handled in a comprehensive approach by the team of GP members supporting the initial expenditure for construction in some cases; field workers and masons that can help in giving appropriate solutions and Rao overseeing the overall task.

- Particularly in the situation where the people had to reconstruct their houses to construct a toilet, was solved with the help of an expert mason, who ensured that constructing a toilet would not prove to be a hindrance to the reconstruction of houses.

- The Panchayat devised a system of pooling in money from the personal sources of the GP members and given money to those households which could not afford the initial investment. The construction material was bought in bulk.

- Community toilets were also constructed for the migrant workers who come to the village.

**Inclusive monitoring**

The community thought that it was okay for men to defecate in the open as there is no issue of privacy as faced by women.

Though the Gram Panchayat has 100% toilets, the usage is only around 80%. The Panchayat and the community were aware that open defecation is practiced and they got together to address the issue.

The Panchayat employed 5 members from the community to watch over the outskirts of the village and other places where open defecation usually occurs.

The Gram Panchayat members also mildly pressurised the households by threatening to cut off the benefits from Govt. (such as pensions, food rations, etc.) unless the latrines are constructed and used. This has resulted in the reinforcement and the households have come forward to construct and use toilets.

**Path ahead in ensuring complete sanitation**

The Panchayat is now planning to motivate the migrants into using community toilet and not to defecate in the open. In addition to the existing two community toilets, the GP is also planning to construct a few more to accommodate the migrants. Toilets for boys in the Govt High School; construction of a toilet in the private school is yet to be taken up.

Rentapalla GP laid importance to all the phases of achieving sanitation starting form motivation to mobilization to addressing the challenges for construction and finally monitoring the usage of toilets. The GP team has used the services of a trusted elderly member to mobilise the community. Further, challenges be in terms of spatial or fund constraint or toilets for migrants, all of them were taken care of.

With such a comprehensive approach there is no scope for failure in achieving 100% sanitation for any GP.