A Field Assistant gave Freedom to Sankuvanigunta

**Introduction:**

Field assistants mean in the sense they don’t have so many powers to do. In most of the Gram Panchayats (GP) the Field assistants work under someone’s guidance and they don’t do anything beyond that limits. But here the context is completely different. One of the Field Assistants, Phanidhra broke his limits and worked towards achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and had given freedom to his village. All things happened by a normal graduation person working as a field assistant. Most of the villagers started saying what is this job? What’s the use etc? Nobody recognised his work. But still he did not lose his hopes and he strongly believed that one day he would do something for this village. But it was a tough situation as it is a very back ward GP and all are from back ward castes and depend on daily labours work. In this context also he started working with good efforts and the community also supported for achieving the ODF status.

Sankuvanigunta Gram Panchayat (GP) is a part of Kotha Patnam Mandal of Prakasam District. Sankuvanigunta, gram panchayat has 105 households and it consists of 645 populations. There is only one section of population from SC caste, and it also consists of mala group of people. In general view everybody think that the SC communities and villages are in very backward condition. But here the story is completely different. All are well educated; job holders and a few of them are also settled as political leaders.
The remaining people also have good hard working skills and they go for daily wages. To reach the village we should cross the “Vagu” (Canal). So in rainy seasons the canal fills with full of water and it affects their regular transportation. Even the Bay of Bengal is within 6km distance. During the particular cyclone periods, the effect will be more on this village. That’s why the government has already arranged a cyclone relief centre within the GP. Those days there were no transportation facilities and the government supplies food .etc. The overall GP situation indicates that it’s quite different from that of developed GPs.

**What Worked?**

Under Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) the Mandal Level officials targeted this GP for achieving the ODF Status. In the initial stage the Mandal Level officials and the village Field assistant Phanidhra worked in tandem and started motivating the people through triggering and CLTS. This kind of mobilization supported people to think of the importance of toilets and its usage in the present society. It was then followed by door to door visits. Initial baseline survey took 3 days and the findings indicated that a total 46 toilets are needed to be constructed out of 106 Households. So these details were conveyed to Mandal level for proper approval. The people were not coming forward to build their toilets till approvals. The two main reasons found were, one is funding problem for a few of the participants to start their initial construction. For those 13 households funding issues were solved through Self Help Groups (SHGs). The SHGs supported Rs. 7000 per each participant. The second reason identified was that a few of the participants said that they didn’t want to build the toilets then, because once they constructed their new house then only they would be ready to build their toilets. For those who were unwilling to build their toilets were motivated by Phanidhra in such a way that they don’t get such an opportunity in future days and now it’s the right time to use the government scheme. Then they also realised and started construction. During the construction process, Phanidhra took a lead role on material procurement and allocated sand at low cost and at the same time he ensured that all the toilets maintained a good quality of construction. In construction stage he solved the documentation problems and ensured the payments’ release within the time period.

The overall process took 6 months and this duration itself Phanidhra and Mandal level teams have generated knowledge and importance of toilet usage through regular mobilization. So in this 6 month duration self people started using the toilets. In the month of January 2016 the District level team and Mandal level team declared it as the first Open Defecation Free (ODF) GP in the Mandal.

**Further Plans:**

Phanidhra said that once after achieving the ODF status he would not stop with that achievement. “This success gave good energy and strength for me to do something for my village. I started thinking for further GP developmental activities,” he says. Phanidhra tried to ensure the sustainability of ODF achievement and started regular monitoring to ensure that there is no one going for open defecation and he prepared warning boards to display in few places of the village regarding Rs. 500/ fine if any one goes for open defecation. To achieve other sanitation issues, he mobilized the youth and once in a month they all targeted one common place and they started cleaning the garbage in that place.

Determination and consistent efforts of a motivated field assistant towards achieving 100% sanitation. This case show cases the importance of constant follow-up on the efforts taken to motivate and mobilize people.