The village of Mandurivaripalem becomes an exception in terms of a convergence between various divergent factors - the initiative of the Sarpanch, addressing Vaastu issues and involving the Self Help Groups in the construction and monitoring of the toilets to achieve the final goal of making the village Open Defecation Free (ODF).

Uday Bhaskar, Sarpanch of Mandurivaripalem in Ongole Mandal of Prakasam District has contributed majorly towards achieving the status of the ODF village under Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM). His role here is more than that of an able leader. He actually paid for the construction material worth Rs.5000 from his own pocket to ensure a smooth and hassle free process in making the village ODF.

When he first took the responsibility and started out as a Sarpanch, about 70% of the households owned a toilet. The goals then remained clear with about 30% of the households needing a toilet and ensuring overall sanitation in the village. The silver lining here was the fact that these 30% households were covered under the SBM. The necessity further boiled down to about 17 toilets required in making the village ODF.

**Previous schemes:**

There has been a lag between the releases of money towards the toilets constructed under the MGNREGS; the scheme provides for a subsidy of Rs.12000 (Rs.9000 as amount and Rs.3000 as labour cost - “Sramadanam” - as the contribution by the beneficiaries).
The Sarpanch intervened in ensuring that there is no delay in the construction by contributing his personal money. He also took the technical liberty of making the size of the toilets a little bigger, according to the SBM norms as opposed to the MGNREGS norms. Today, the toilets stand completed, though the beneficiaries are yet to receive the payment of Rs 9000.

**Advent of SBM:**

The launch of SBM started with awareness meetings conducted with the initiative of the Mandal Parishad Development Officer (MPDO). The village-level functionaries, including the Sarpanch, vice-Sarpanch, field assistants, members of the Self-help groups, Anganwadi workers and ANMs. There were separate meetings conducted for the benefit of village functionaries at the Mandal level stressing on the importance of sanitation and the role of construction and usage of a toilet as healthy practices. These meetings also stressed on the importance of sanitation facilities for women.

The fact that the toilets have not been constructed cannot compensate for the looming issue of financial crunch. Despite the available subsidy, these 11 households could not construct the toilet owing to severe poverty. The Sarpanch intervened and offered his help to complete the construction by barring any extra cost above the subsidy amount of Rs 15000. On an average, the amount for the construction of each toilet came up to Rs 22000 of which the extra Rs 7000 were borne by the Sarpanch. To further lessen the costs, the Sarpanch procured the material personally and engaged masons from a neighbouring village for the construction purpose.

One interesting factor that contributed to a corpus fund available with the GP was that, since 1984, the village has always seen the unanimous election of the Sarpanch which saved a lot of money and election costs. This has helped to generate funds for the developmental activities of the village.

**Positive Factors:**

Construction is a time-consuming process which requires constant monitoring. The Self-help groups played a worthy role here, by taking this responsibility and ensuring that there is no delay in the process. The Sarpanch, Panchayat secretary and the SHGs together monitored this process and any deviation or delay was reported for immediate redressal.

**Constraints:**

Some cultural beliefs and practices like “Vaastu” and “no construction during pregnancy in the family: did exist. The panchayat did not directly oppose any of these factors. Instead, they took the support of the pandits and an influential mason (balemdarstry) in assuring the community and incorporating their suggestions in ensuring that the cultural beliefs are not contradicted. In case of the belief regarding pregnancy, the GP respected the individual sentiments and took up the construction work after the delivery of the child. This served to avoid a confrontation and ensured a positive approach and attitude towards the construction of toilets and this added a genuine interest towards the cause.

**Some Hard Measures:**

There was a situation where facilities like pensions, employment opportunities under MGNREGS, ration and so on were held up as a last resort penalty to ensure the construction of toilets specifically for those households which did not initiate the process even after long sessions of motivation and pressure for the construction of an toilet.

**Continuing Efforts:**

The Sarpanch and the GP do not want to restrict it here, with just the construction of toilets. Migrants who visit the village for brief periods do not have any sanitation facilities. The next stage of intervention would be to construct community sanitary complexes for these people to ensure total sanitation in the village.