The construction of toilets by a third party group has been met with success in terms of cost, time, and energy in Ammapalem Gram panchayat (GP) in Pedavegi Mandal of West Godavari District. Excitingly, this had led to the Ammapalem GP to be in the process of being declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) through both the construction of toilets but also through the sustained usage of the toilets. This success can act as a model that can be followed by other GPs in order to move towards reaching ODF status. Under Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), the beneficiaries of this GP expressed their gratitude to both Sr. Sambasiva Rao, who actively facilitated construction of the toilets as well as the Cooperative Society of Pedavegi who took on the essential role of third party construction.

How Did This Happen?

The issue of open defecation was first brought to the attention of MLA Sri. Chintamaneni Prabhakar when farmers discussed the issue during one of his visits to the GP. The farmers were concerned because households who did not have toilets were using agriculture fields for open defecation—even though they were using the fields for agricultural activity which resulted in many problems for the farmers and the wider community. The MLA told the farmers that under SBM soon toilets would be constructed for all those who needed and took positive steps to ensure this happened efficiently and effectively. Immediately, the MLA announced at the very same meeting that he would lend Rs. 5.00 Lakhs which could be repaid to him once incentives were received under SBM. From his own resources, the MLA entrusted the money to Kotaru Sambasiva Rao, Son of Sarpanch of Ammapalem. The MLA suggested to Sri. Sambasiva Rao for exploring the possibility of third party bulk construction of toilets in order to keep costs minimal.
At the same time, the village was adopted by Sr. Amareswa Rao, who is superintended of Engineering and a member of the Secretary, District Water & Sanitation Committee under SBM. Sri Amareswara Rao conducted motivational meetings in the village in order to spread awareness and action on issues of sanitation in the village. Through these meetings, community members were inspired and about 267 households without toilets were mobilized for construction of toilets. The community then compiled a list of beneficiaries ready for immediate construction of a toilet—which was about 50 households during this first phase.

In order to begin this construction process, Sri. Sambasiva Rao approached a third party group, the Cooperative Society of Pedavegi. The Cooperative society is as an institution that gives crop loans to local farmers. Sri. Sambasiva Rao proposed that the society acts as a third party agency for the bulk construction of the 267 toilets with his active support. The society agreed to the proposal and took on the role of third party construction of the toilets.

“The society and Sri. Sambasiva Rao constructed our toilets. We contributed earthwork and assisted masons in construction in order to reduce the cost of labour. My toilet was constructed within the incentive of Rs.15000 without a burden.”

– Parasa Savitri, a please beneficiary.

A women with her toilet in Ammapalem

Photo Credit: R. Srinivasa Rao, Program Officer, PRIA

The Construction Process

The Cooperative society took care of all aspects of constructing the toilets—right from planning and procuring materials to finding masons. The incentives were then directly given to the society as per the beneficiary details. The society also repaid the loan of Rs. 5.00 to the Honourable MLA after receiving incentives under SBM. Since the toilets were built in bulk, they were all completed with white wash within the incentive limits. In addition, a siddanti planned the construction of all toilets keeping in mind the Vasthu needs of each the residents. It was a true community effort since beneficiaries dug their own pits and assisted in the construction.

Active problem-solving took place in the village by siddanti and elders. They successfully able to deal with a variety of challenges such as joint family disputes, division of property, and lack of space. To address the challenges of Vaastu in some cases, a single pit approach was followed.

Ammapalem GP is an excellent example of how unique approaches such as the use of a third party for bulk construction can lead to Open Defecation Free status for a village and reduce costs, time, and energy on building toilets. This initiative is worth replicating in other villages in order to keep both construction costs within the incentive amount and increase the amount of toilets to be constructed.