

CASE STUDY

2016/No. 1



Abburu Gram Panchayat
Sattenapalle Mandal
Guntur District

Sarpanch of Abburu gram panchayat - A role model



This Gram Panchayat is a classic example of what able leadership can achieve. It is a case in point to demonstrate how the commitment of an individual can change the approach of an entire village towards sanitation. What is remarkable is not just what this village could achieve in terms of sanitation and hygiene but also in protection of gender rights.



Abburu is a Gram panchayat (GP) in Sattenapalle Mandal of Guntur district, located about 42 km from the district headquarters. Abburu is a role model GP for toilets construction in Andhra Pradesh. The Sarpanch of this village, Mr. Katta Ramesh, had started toilet construction even before the launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM). With 610 toilets constructed through SBM and NBA scheme, the Gram Panchayat ensures 100 percent usage of the constructed toilets. So much so that, Government officials cite the case of Abburu for any reference on construction of toilets and technology pertaining to it. Abburu stands as a role model for entire Andhra Pradesh.

Katta Ramesh, the Sarpanch, is a man of action. "As soon as I was elected, I started thinking what I should do for the village during the five years of my term," says Ramesh. As a first step he banned alcohol in the GP, by no means a small achievement. "And then I thought I should inculcate respect for women in the village. And develop an environment of safety. I started taking steps in this direction." In the process, Ramesh noticed that villagers, especially women, were forced to defecate in the open as there were no toilets, and that this caused many problems. "I then decided that construction of toilets for everyone was my next goal."

He started visiting households and got a count of households that did not have the toilet facility. He then sat down to work out a plan with assessment of financial resources and other factors and worked systematically to rectify all the ground level issues and launched construction work.

Though he focused on the construction of just toilets in the initial stage, Ramesh realised that people had no facility for bathing either. Most households did not have individual bathrooms. This forced people to wait for the cover of darkness to take a bath and women were subjected to risky conditions. So the Sarpanch decided to build both toilet and bathroom together. But this raised concerns about the budget so Ramesh had to rework the entire budget. He ordered material in bulk, set up manufacturing of toilet rings within the village so that transportation costs were reduced. He asked the villagers to get involved in digging of pits and a few other works so that labour costs were also reduced. "I felt that getting involved in the works will bring about a sense of responsibility and ownership. It was team work to achieve a goal," explains Ramesh.

At the time of the construction, the District Collector had visited the village and was inspired by the technology. The Collector and some other officials made more visits and checked the quality of materials and work and the design. The District Collector was so inspired by the efforts of Abburu village that he personally apprised the Chief Minister about the work and how the Sarpanch managed to stick to the budget while completing the work with perfection. The Chief Minister responded in a positive manner and suggested that the same technology and design of construction should be used all over Andhra Pradesh.

On one occasion, there was some pressure on the Sarpanch to expedite the work as the CM was scheduled to visit the village. But Ramesh refused to compromise on quality and do a hasty job. "I am not doing this project for the sake of awards or for the CM's visit. It is for my people," he categorically stated. Ramesh saw it as a permanent solution for the sanitation issues in the village and hence refused to succumb to any pressure. He ensured not only good construction but also that all toilets had proper ventilation, electricity as well as paraphernalia such as a hanger, a bucket, a mug and even cleaning solution, all provided within the Panchayat funding.

When people looked at the way the construction took place and at the final outcome, they exclaimed that it must have cost a lot of money. But, not only did Ramesh not spend more money than the budget limit, he also took the responsibility of quality work at each and every stage. Abburu, therefore, stands as an inspiring example for all villages in Andhra Pradesh and the Sarpanch

is now an expert, guiding people and officials in meetings and sharing his experience.

Within Abburu village, it has been observed that while sanitation practices are good in all the school toilets/anganwadi toilets, lack of water source has affected the toilet maintenance. The GP has been planning digging of bore wells to rectify water issues. The GP plans to construct toilets on the outskirts on the village as well as the village temple complex.

CHALLENGES

- Motivating the villagers in the initial stages was an uphill task.
- Construction in rented houses was an issue until the Sarpanch explained the importance of having a toilet in the house.
- Some small children, when not accompanied by elders at playtime, are still resorting to open defecation.
- In order to sustain usage, there is need to create more awareness.

WHAT MADE ABBURU A SUCCESS STORY?

The key elements, processes and systems that contributed toward Abburu success are:

- First and foremost is the dynamism of the Sarpanch. His vision enabled the GP to plan ahead, rectify the ground issues and then launch the actual construction.
- He could plan the budget, time line and other required resources as per the ground data he collected from all households.
- He garnered the support of the community in the construction and in 100 per cent usage, motivating them by explaining the benefits of a toilet facility as well as warning them of the problems with open defecation.

The entire process was regularly monitored by not just the Sarpanch but also by the Collector, State, district and block officials. With two months of regular motivation and monitoring of each house, the village has achieved 100% toilet usage.



IEC material displayed on a school wall.