The spirit of the constitution will be fulfilled when every Panchayat has a Sarpanch like Chinthirala Ramadevi.

The Sarpanch, with her initiative and leadership; with determined efforts and support of other village leaders, the community and Govt. Departments achieved open defecation free (ODF) status under Swachh Bharat Mission during December, 2015.

Issapalem Gram Panchayat (GP) in Narasaraopet Mandal of Guntur district has 1042 households and 3975 population, of which SC and ST population are 670 and 260 respectively. As many as 778 households have access to Individual Household Latrines (IHHLs) by the time Ramadevi was elected as Sarpanch and construction of latrines for the remaining 264 households and 100 per cent usage in the village had been her immediate priorities.

The strategy was to mobilise community for construction and usage of IHHLs – i.e., construction and usage by those who don’t have and ensuring usage by those who have IHHLs. A survey conducted with the help of Panchayat Secretary, Ward members, Field assistants, ASHA and Anganwadi workers revealed that 264 households needs latrines. Further, village level meetings were conducted to mobilise these households to construct latrines. Immediately after the meetings, the same was appraised to the Mandal level officials seeking their inputs and support towards construction of toilets to the households.
Inclusive approach in community mobilisation

Awareness among the households regarding need for construction and usage of latrines was created through street plays, community meetings, audio-visuals, wall writing, posters etc., under Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin).

The Sarpanch said the IEC activities done in the village were really useful as it is the primary responsibility of a Panchayat Raj Institution and quoted the Constitution of India:

“Sanitation is one of the functions of Panchayat Raj Institutions as per 11th Schedule of 73rd constitutional amendment act-1992. According to the schedule, every Panchayat is to work towards providing people with proper sanitation facilities so as to ensure their well being.”

Initial financial support to some of the households who did not have money to start construction was extended by the Sarpanch herself and that helped as a big first step to achieve the task. Later, the money was repaid after households received financial assistance under the SBM (G).

Field assistants and Women’s Self Help Group members, under the guidance of the Sarpanch, conducted small-group meetings and passed resolutions in the meetings to achieve ODF status. Motivating community had become difficult as there was no trained personnel available to interact with the community as and when required. The Sarpanch, with the help of field assistants under MGNREGS and SHG members accomplished it.

Picture 1; Photo Caption:
They also helped in motivating the community about the need for construction and usage of latrines. It was decided in the meetings that a fine would be imposed on those who practice open defecation.

A village level monitoring committee was formed of which the Sarpanch herself was a member. The responsibility of the committee was to facilitate, monitor the construction of latrines and ensuring usage after construction. As part of this, the committee kept vigilance in early mornings and late nights to control open defecation if any.

This monitoring continued for two months since its beginning and the result is that there is no instance of open defecation in the village.

Political pressures due to the proposed Chief Minister’s visit to the village lead to gearing up the construction of latrines. Though there were a lot of hardships in mobilising masons and community members, 264 IHHLs were constructed and now, each household has an IHHL with 100 per cent usage. Out of the 264 IHHLs, 52 were constructed under Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) and 212 have been constructed through the assistance from SBM (G).

The Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh visited this village on 11th December 2015 and declared Issapalem Gram Panchayat as an ODF Village.

Salient features in Issapalem ODF status:

- The entire village sanitation was good and the toilet construction and usage status and public response while interaction also was good.

- The Sarpanch has played a vital role in making the village ODF.

- The enabling role of district and Mandal administration with support of line departments such as rural development, education, public health and others have contributed tremendously to the success of the total sanitation drive in Issapalem.

- The people have also passed a resolution that the any guest or visitor to the village during fairs or ceremonies, such as marriages or family functions, should not defecate in the open. Now there are plans of construction of toilets even in temples complexes in the village.

- It was observed that all the school toilets/Anganwadi toilets have adequate water supply and are well maintained.

Field Assistant who was an integral part of the IEC activities.