Towards a Life of Dignity

Introduction

Ranamatia Gram Panchayat consists of three villages i.e. Ranamatia, Chikalmatia and Tumdikasa, part of Churiya block of Rajnandgaon district. It was earlier attached to Karmari Gram Panchayat latter on it became a separate Gram Panchayat. The Gram Panchayat is situated around 35 km from block and 45 km away from the district Headquarters. Total population of the Gram Panchayat is 1281 covering 259 households and Ranamatia village has 59 households and a population of 168. This village is surrounded by dense forest from all sides. The major source of livelihood is agriculture and its related activities. A community member says that as there is enough open space, villagers were going for open defecation. Lack of proper sanitation facilities and defecation in the open was a major concern and was a reason for serious health risk for the villagers. One villager says “We don’t have any idea that open defecation can have detrimental effect not only to our health but also to the overall growth and development of the human being. However, it is abject poverty that cripples them and prevents them in their overall development. The houses were mostly kachha without any toilet facilities. People answered the call of nature in the water bed, in the rice field, on road side or even in the backyard. In the process, they polluted the atmosphere, contaminated water sources which resulted in spread of water-borne diseases.
A non-governmental organisation was entrusted with the responsibility to go for ODF Gram Panchayat /Village in the selected area, started its venture from Ranamati as it is one of the most backward villages of the block, it took around 15 days to complete all processes. Let us understand the process undertaken to complete the entire plan and to make Ranamati the First ODF (Open defecation free) village of the state of Chhattisgarh.

- After discussing with the village leaders, PRI members and others arranged a meeting in a common place with everyone's consent (continuously for three days 7th - 9th September 2013).
- Gradually developed rapport and confidence with the community members.
- Understand the different aspects through Situation Analysis (SA) of the village i.e. source of livelihood, income sources, and health issues; develop Map (Social Map), cultural settings, social status, Usage of toilets and its history, people's dependency etc.
- Used different triggering tools like defecation mapping, Glass demonstration, 5 F diagrams etc., to sensitize community about the impact of poor sanitation on health.
- Door to door visit was done to make everyone understand about the ill consequences of open defecation.
- Then formed 6 team, each team comprising of 5 members, given different responsibilities for ex. Masons for toilet construction, committees for monitoring and vigilance and others.
- All section of the community actively participated especially role of youth and FLWs is immense.
- Through this process natural leader emerge, who are now become CLTS Champions.
- All the HHs helped each other for speedy construction. Collectively purchase cement, stones, iron etc.
- Even if they stopped their own regular work likes agriculture for achieving the ODF status.
- Fine was imposed on the people who didn’t obey the direction of Gram Panchayat.
- Role of women members was highly encouraging, for restricting others to go outside for defecation and strictly regularising fine system.

- Role of Gram Sabha is the cornerstone in regulating all activities along with the community involvement.
- Role of Government department was lacking but gradually they accept the whole process wholeheartedly.
- Community construct all toilets by mobilizing their own funds. But latter on Panchayat allotted funds to 23 BPL families but through the Gram Sabha they decided to distribute it among all the HHs concerned.
- The process completed in between 07th September to 23rd September 2013. The community celebrated Open defecation free status for 2 days during 22nd and 23rd September where representative from both Government and Non-government sector attended and realized that it can be possible through concerted effort and attitudinal and behavioural changes at community level.

“Punei Bai, 83 years oldest women of the village says I had never thought of using a toilet in my life, it is my neighbour and the village community who supported me and helped me out”

**Conclusion**

Although government has initiated several steps for the villagers but there is still a long way to go for them to be model village, they need to develop their skill on SLWM (Solid liquid waste Management), should initiate and strengthen School sanitation focussing on Menstrual Hygiene management and separate toilets for both the boys and girls, hand washing practice should be regularised among school going children, safe drinking water facilities should be provided, schemes like MGNREGS, PDS, NOAPS should be streamlined.