There are instances where people other than the elected representatives show exemplary leadership qualities. The instance in the village of Allurivaripalem, a Gram Panchayat (GP) in Narasaraopeta Mandal of Guntur district proves this point. One Mr. Punrnachandra Rao of the village has helped achieve open defecation free (ODF) in the village with his perseverance and absolute dedication towards helping the village progress towards better sanitation facilities. His role was not only mobilizing the households, but also in extending technical aspects like the procurement of material for construction in bulk quantities. It is very important to note here that Mr. Rao also helped contribute financially to the households that need the initial help and support.

His efforts paid off and today the Panchayat stands as an ODF village with 228 new toilets constructed under the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM).

Of the total of 624 households, 396 households already had an access to toilets before the launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission by the government in October 2014. It was therefore clear that open defecation was a rampant practice in the village amongst the 228 households which did not own toilet. It was at this juncture that Mr. Rao stepped up and decided to take up mobilizing the households that did not own toilet to motivate them to construct a toilet under the SBM. The main reason for extending support to the Sarpanch was that she had limited capabilities.
**Some Challenges…**

When the Sarpanch and her team started visiting the households for the initial survey and motivation, they realised the issues faced by the households which included the lack of space, lack of funds for construction and the lack of motivation despite the extensive IEC material.

**Collective efforts**

It was then that Mr. Rao; a determined youngster came forward to invest money to start the construction of the toilets immediately in the GP. On one hand construction started in a few households and on the other, the GP team continued efforts in motivating the rest of them who were not willing to construct the toilets. Some households also invested their own money to construct bigger bathrooms than prescribed under the scheme’s guidelines.

The GP team felt the need for motivational activities even after the construction to ensure usage of the toilets and the need for motivational activities to ensure utilization of the constructed toilets. Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) was used by the Mandal level officials to mobilize the community and the importance of construction and utilization of toilets. In addition to community mobilization activities, the field assistants, Anganwadi workers and ASHA workers ensure an individual visit to every house in the village to educate the members on the ill-effects of open defecation and the need for usage of toilets.

One strategy opted by the GP team to monitor Open Defecation (OD) in the village was a fine of Rs. 500 for every OD identified from the families. There was a notice issued to all the households regarding this fine and also regarding the stoppage of government welfare facilities to these households which practiced OD. This kind of a negative motivation was felt necessary to implement the usage of the constructed toilets by the GP team. To keep up their monitoring, they regularly kept watch on the GP road and all the OD sites for any defaulters.

**Way Forward…**

The previous schemes on sanitation do not provide an incentive to all the community members, whereas the SBM provides this incentive for the construction of a toilet. In addition, SBM does not put restrictions and gives liberty to the community in the construction of their own toilets.

Today, all the households realized the importance of the construction and usage of a toilet. People are aware of the health benefits of using a toilet. The households have also ensured water supply to the toilet for regular usage and maintenance.

While a majority of the community is using toilets, some men are still practicing open defecation for various reasons which include the fear of the pit being filled, the comfort of OD and the possibility of smoking during OD. The GP team is identifying these issues and is constantly motivating the members of the community to use the toilets at all times. In addition to toilets and usage, the GP is keen on ensuring better sanitation facilities which include door to door waste collection, segregation of solid and liquid waste, a dump-yard and community dustbins.

The GP team strongly believes that better sanitation facilities are the most important assets for the next generation in place of material assets like gold and land.

“We hope to give our future generations a safe and better environment for a sustainable society.”

A motivated individual worked on building awareness in the community to construct toilets, and also assisted the households with finances. He was supported by the Gram Panchayat team who continued motivation even after construction as utilization is crucial.