It will not be an exaggeration to say that six decades of efforts to achieve are still not leading to desired results and in most of the places, lack of awareness still stands as the reason for absence of sanitation for all.

Sarali Gram Panchayat (GP) in Pathapatnam Mandal of Srikakulam District serves as a perfect example of this scenario. With a total of 232 households, GP has been working towards completing toilets for 15 households only and remaining have no access to toilets.

Like many other villages Sarali is also facing common issues such as lack of initial fund and spatial constraints in constructing the toilets to complete 100% construction. Lack of awareness and leadership in the village stand out as important issues stopping the GP from becoming an Open Defecation Free (ODF) village.

It has been noticed that due to lack of any kind of leadership, there has not been any brainstorming on how one can solve the problems that village is facing. Distrust of the system as well as the residents, has resulted in no donors coming forward to help the financially weak households in any way. “Even if we give money from our pocket there is no guarantee that the Govt. money will come on time and even when it does, nobody can guarantee that the residents will give back the money,” says a resident in response to initiatives taken in other GPs with respect to leading money for construction.
Seven out of the 15 families have a space crunch in the house premises restricting them from going ahead with the construction process. However, there have been no attempts to collectively discuss and come up with suitable solutions. RALU members discussed their experiences and shared their findings on similar issues in other GPs of the state.

Residents of the village are now geared up to deliberate upon the issues that are facing with district level officials and among themselves to find appropriate solutions.

Another issue that gripping the GP is water scarcity. “There is no water to drink, let alone water for other purposes” says a resident of the GP. Concrete planning is required if the efforts are to be sustained “we ask our men to defecate in the open because we women cannot defecate outside and there is not enough water for everyone” said a group of women reflecting on the intensity of water scarcity.

A noticeable fact here is that Sarali is located 75 kms away from the district head-quarters, which might be the reason why Sarali is out of the reach of influencing IEC activities at the required rate.

Lack of awareness and distrust among the residents about receiving the promised money from govt. under SBM. Sarali clearly shows that citizens still perceive the incentive offered under SBM as a subsidy. Saralis distance from the Mandal head quarters also can be a reason for lack of awareness activities.

If sanitation has to be achieved, it is these distant villages that need more handholding than the GPs located near towns and cities.