Who is responsible for Community Sanitary Latrines?

The community of K. Savaram, a GP in Undrajavaram Mandal of West Godavari district, demonstrates how constructing Community Sanitary Latrines (CSLs) alone does not bring about the solution for achieving sanitation—rather there needs to also be a way for the CSLs to be regularly maintained and cleaned in order for people to be motivated to use them. This can be linked to questions of who is responsible for this maintenance and cleaning. With questioning who is responsible, it can be seen that ownership is important to keep in mind when it comes to CSLs.

“We are unable to bear the dirty smell. Nobody using the toilet is flushing water because of which the plates are full of fecal matter. Being an aged woman, I have no choice but to use the CSL. I flush water after I use it every time but not everyone does. It is not a problem of water scarcity because there is sufficient water available through a hand pump made for this purpose in front of the CSL. But with the behaviour of people I am suffering a lot” says a user of the community toilet who is forced to use it as she is a woman and doesn’t prefer defecating in open.
In the GP of 946 households, 10 households don’t have access to toilets as they dwell on encroached land called Kunta that belongs to the GP. Therefore, to solve this problem a CSL was constructed for these households in 2007. In the beginning, Panchayat workers used to keep it clean and maintain it regularly which motivated not only these ten households but nearby households as well to use the CSL. Unfortunately, the Panchayat began to neglect the regular cleaning of the CSL and those using it did not clean it either after usage. Rather, people turned to open defecation rather than the CSL. Therefore, the CSL became dirty and the people living near it began to be negatively affected as well.

“The CSL was constructed for people who don’t have toilets. In the beginning the CSL was kept clean every day by Panchayat workers. Now nobody is bothered about keeping the CSL clean. Neither the Panchayat nor people who use it are concerned about keeping the CSL clean. Neither the Panchayat nor people who use it are concerned about cleaning the CSL. The families surrounding the CSL are literally suffering from flies and bad odour” says a woman living next to the CSL.

Important Observations:

- Lack of ownership by both the Panchayat and people of the village
- De-motivators to use the CSL include no doors on the individual toilets
- No privacy for women
- Unsanitary condition of the CSL

The situation in K. Savaram demonstrates how to end open defecation and achieve total sanitation, much more must be done beyond just the construction of Toilets and CSLs. Rather, there also needs to be behavioural change in a community. This could be done through activities and workshops that could increase awareness and education surrounding issues of sanitation and health. This would help people realize that sanitation and maintaining clean toilets is their responsibility in order to have a healthy community. In addition, the Panchayat should also take on some of the responsibility of maintaining and monitoring the CSL to ensure a healthy environment.