

The Transformation of Jolhakarma

AVIJIT MALLIK

Having been able to assure food security among the villagers and realizing that economic self-sufficiency alone was not going to alleviate the basic problems faced by women, the focus in Jolhakarma is on ensuring pipe water supply and sanitation units within homes to assure them a life of dignity, free from the ordeal of open defecation and the drudgery of getting water for daily use from remote sources

Jolhakarma is a revenue village in the Chandwara block of Koderma district and is located about 12 km from the district headquarters. The village has approximately 56 households, of which about half belong to the Muslim community and the remaining are from the Other Backward Communities (OBCs). Whereas agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for the villagers, the absence of irrigation facilities, coupled with small landholdings, makes farming a fragile practice in the area. Food insecurity and the absence of gainful income opportunities locally have pushed the men of the region to migrate to towns, at least for half the year.

Total households	56
Total population	296
Men	155
Women	141
SC population	22
Total literate	192
Literate men	108
Literate women	84

PRADAN started its work in Jolhakarma in 2006–07. The initial focus was on organizing the women into Self Help Groups (SHGs). There was resistance from the men of the Muslim households to the idea of women joining SHGs. Through PRADAN's consistent efforts, women from the OBCs were persuaded to form two SHGs that was involved initially in savings and credit.

As the SHGs stabilized over a period of a year, the women members were steered towards coming up with livelihood plans. Farming emerged as the common thrust area for all the member families. They approached the banks with their livelihood plans, and were offered credit support. PRADAN

extended technical support to help the groups adopt improved agricultural practices. SHG members showed great interest in vegetable cultivation on small parcels of their lands. Over the next two to three years, all the members registered significant gains in income from farming. In some cases, the men stopped migrating altogether. Their success inspired other families, including women from Muslim families, to join SHGs. By 2009, the village had four SHGs, which included women from all the households!

In 2011, during a livelihood-planning exercise in the village, women members brought up the matter of water. The problem, they said, was not only the scarcity of water for farming but also of drinking water. There were around seven dug-wells and two hand-pumps in their homesteads. However, during the summer months, the entire village depended on just one hand-pump, which yielded turbid water. The women spent a long time in queues, waiting to collect a couple of buckets of water for domestic use. SHG members also shared that there were frequent outbreaks of water-borne diseases and skin ailments, especially among women and children because they suffered the most due to the scarcity and the poor quality of water.

On further probing, the women also shared the pathetic condition of hygiene in the area. The village had no individual sanitation units

In 2011, during a livelihood-planning exercise in the village, the women members brought up the matter of water. The problem, they said, was not only the scarcity of water for farming but also of drinking water

and, therefore, open defecation was the only option for them. Women and teenage girls suffered the most because of the lack of sanitation units. Most of them had to defecate before dawn or then wait until dusk. Water-borne diseases were quite common (at least one child from each household suffered from a

water-borne disease last year, during the rainy season). That economic development alone was not going to be the solution for the basic problems faced by women became evident. Specific focus on water and sanitation was necessary, to improve the living conditions in the villages.

In 2012–13, the villagers of Jolhakarma formed a Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC), as per the mandate of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). The main function of VWSC is to address the issues of drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in the village. Each revenue village would have a VWSC constituting 12 members, with 50 per cent representation of women. The *mukhiya* of the *panchayat* is the Chairperson of the VWSC. A person designated as the *jal sahayak* acts as the Secretary of the Committee, to link the body with the PRI and the agencies of Drinking Water and Sanitation Department (DWSD). This is a statutory body formed to improve the WATSAN (Water and Sanitation) scenario of the village.

Except for the *mukhiya* (Jolhakarma comes under the Kanko *panchayat* in Koderma block), all the members of VWSC belong to the village. The SHGs in the village nominated some of their most active and articulate members to join VWSC. All the women representatives in VWSC are members of SHGs.

VWSC members and other villagers (mainly women SHG members) were taken for an exposure visit to a nearby village called Belkhara, where PRADAN had earlier installed a pipe water supply system, with financial support from the CSR division of Damodar Valley Corporation. The women of Belkhara explained to the visitors the project and the roles of the user groups in the operation and maintenance, including the system for tariff collection, regular repair and the monitoring of the water quality. They were eloquent in their sharing of the impact of the water supply system, in terms of minimizing the drudgery of women, the drastic reduction in gastro-intestinal disorders and the enhancement of a sense of well-being among the villagers.

Upon their return, the SHGs of Jolhakarma quickly convened a meeting of all the villagers to share their experiences of the exposure visit and resolved to set up a pipe water supply system in their village. The *mukhiya* presided over the meeting. In the same meeting, PRADAN informed the villagers about the provisions of the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP), a flagship programme of the Government of India, to make safe drinking water accessible in rural areas. The DWSD of the Government of Jharkhand and UNICEF were consulted to prepare a detailed project report (DPR) for the installation of a pipe water supply system.

VWSC and PRADAN spent three days exploring various options to create a sustainable water supply system for Jolhakarma. The exercise started with an assessment of the total water requirement of the village, taking into consideration the current population and the prospective population of the next two decades, and estimating the water needs of the animals. These were important design

VWSC and PRADAN spent three days exploring various options to create a sustainable water supply system for Jolhakarma

considerations for the water supply system when ensuring sustainable water security for the village. The development of conjunctive water sources were planned to reinforce this effort.

In each and every step, the women participated fully and were involved in the major decisions.

The plan was finalized after two rounds of iteration of the DPR with the *gram sabha*. The scheme included digging a sanitary well (30 ft deep and 25 ft in diameter) in the lowland to tap the sub-surface water flow, setting up a solar powered pumping device, constructing a pump house, an overhead tank (for 27,000 litres of water) and PVC conduit systems for distributing water to every household.

The DPR was finally vetted by the *gram sabha*. The *mukhiya*, as Chairperson of the VWSC, then submitted the DPR to the District Water and Sanitation Mission (DWSM), with copies to the Principal Secretary, DWSD, and to UNICEF.

The Executive Engineer went to the village to formally launch the scheme. Meanwhile, the SHG women took the initiative to identify lands belonging to their members, to set up installations such as the sanitary well, the pump house and the overhead tank. The lands were formally donated by the members to VWSC. This otherwise complicated exercise literally took no time due to the involvement of SHGs in building consensus in the village. The SHGs also convinced all the families to contribute Rs 1,000 per household as subscription, to build a corpus fund to meet any exigencies in the maintenance of the water supply system.

The DPR received technical sanction from the office of the Superintendent Engineer

and administrative approval of the DWSD, the Government of Jharkhand. UNICEF played a key role in strengthening coordination among all stakeholders. A total of Rs 23 lakhs was budgeted for the scheme. The entire fund was transferred to the bank account of VWSC in three instalments. VWSC implemented the scheme with the help of the villagers. This system offered an effective alternative to the contractor-driven implementation process. The SHGs were responsible for regular monitoring of the implementation.

In the village, a fortnightly meeting was organized, wherein SHG members and VWSC members monitored and reviewed the progress of the drinking water unit. The villagers also extended their support in the implementation by working as daily wage labour.

The project received regular technical support and overseeing from UNICEF and PRADAN. The execution of the project was completed within the stipulated period.

VWSC undertook responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the works. Two village youths were trained to operate the solar pump, and to clean and maintain the water tank and the distribution system.

VWSC purchased a chlorine dosing system, to ensure the supply of bacteria-free water. VWSC meets once every fortnight, to collect the water tariff of Rs 60 per household, per month. It also keeps an eye on the overall management of the system, optimum water use, including checking wastage and monitoring water quality. The per capita supply of water has been decided at 75 litres per day. Thus, a family with a size of six members

The project received regular technical support and overseeing from UNICEF and PRADAN. The execution of the project was completed within the stipulated period

receives 450 litres of water per day. The water is supplied for two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening.

This apart, the overhead tank remains full, to ensure water availability any time of the day as per the need. At the peak of last summer, Jolhakarma did not face any water scarcity even for a single day.

After completing and operating the pipe water supply system, SHG members again took the initiative and discussed the problem of open defecation and how it affected their sense of dignity and overall cleanliness of their village. SHG members shared their discomfort about having to defecate in the open and discussed its harmful consequences such as the occurrence of water-borne diseases, skin diseases, etc., as well as the problems faced at a social level. With the provision of running water in homes, the next step was to have individual sanitation units at the household level.

VWSC resolved to support each of the households in constructing toilets. In the first phase, 30 households received financial support under Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA). They received Rs 4,600 per household to construct toilets. This amount was supplemented by most of the families, which contributed Rs 6,000 to Rs 12,000 each to complete the construction. The use of the sanitary unit, fitted with a twin soak pit, was demonstrated by officials from UNICEF in the villages of Koderma; it was found to be a suitable model for the area.

Many households created space for bathrooms by increasing their financial contribution. In most of the cases, the women invested some money of their own, to cover a portion by the side of the sanitation unit for a bathroom

because they knew that this would improve the quality of their life. The women were able to finance the additional costs for construction through interest-free loans from their SHGs. In many villages, SHG members demanded that the district authority include the cost of constructing bathrooms. When there was no response from the district authority, the Federation members in one of the meetings decided that the SHGs could take a decision about whether they would like to give interest-free loans to their members for meeting the extra cost.

The message, thus, to the SHG meetings (with which the members fully concurred) was that besides toilets, they also needed bathrooms so that they would never have to bathe in the open again.

Seeing the success of this intervention, the District Administration and DWSM released the financial allotment for the next lot of 26 toilets. By this time, the government had ensured the convergence of MGNREGS with NBA.

Estimate of a Sanitation Unit of 4' x 3'

No.	Material	Quantity	Unit	Rate	Cost
1	Brick	1,000	Pcs	2.70	2,700
2	Sand	30	Cft	10	200
3	Cement	4	Bag	400	1,600
4	Chips	2	Cft	30	60
5	Rod	2.5	Kg	50	125
6	Rural Pan-syphon	1	Pcs	250	250
7	Door	1	Pc	1,100	1,100
8	Mason	3	MD	300	900
9	Labour	5	MD	150	750
10	Roofing material (Asbestos)	1	PC	450	450
11	PVC Pipe and Y-Tee	5	Ft	LS	330
TOTAL COST (Rs)					8,465

There was a huge issue at the district level about the convergence of MGNREGA and NBA. After a discussion at the block level, a format was developed to record the availability of job cards and the sanitation position in the village. A resolution was passed that all the villagers, who have job cards, would first get the sanitation units and then the rest of the villagers would have to have their job cards prepared for the construction of sanitation units. The resolution, along with a list of villagers, was submitted to the block office by the concerned *mukhiya*; after approval by the block office, it went to the district level. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) sanctioned the amount and gave instructions to the Executive Engineer to release the support amount into the account of the concerned VWSC and asked the Deputy Development Commissioner (DDC) to allot the funds to the concerned *panchayat* for sanitation work.

STILL A LONG WAY TO GO

A visit to Jolhakarma these days reveals dirt-free pathways inside the village, neatly constructed

toilets beside every house, and the discernible presence of a water tower. These are some of the signs of change. However, the real transformation can be sensed when talking to the women of Jolhakarma. They are not worried about having to get up in the dark, before sunrise to go outdoors for their daily ablutions. Neither do they worry about standing in long queues to collect water from hand pumps.

Now, the women in Jolhakarma bathe in closed spaces. This is a dream come true for them. Every gesture and word expressed by the women conveys a deep sense of self-worth and confidence in having freed themselves from the daily indignity, ordeal and drudgery by creating common asset for everyone and making their village a place worth living.

The men of the households with toilets, however, still hesitate to use these and attempts are being made to discuss the issue with them. Therefore, the village is not yet 'open-defecation free'

The men of the households with toilets, however, still hesitate to use these and attempts are being made to discuss the issue with them. Therefore, the village is not yet 'open-defecation free'

So far, 37 households have built sanitation units at their homes. Meanwhile, due to a change at the policy level, the Government of India has discontinued dovetailing MGNREGA funds for the construction of sanitation units and has asked to release the entire amount of Rs 12,000 per household, to the account of the concerned VWSC. Unfortunately, due to the lack of clarity at the district level, the funds have not been released as yet.

Lately, in the village meetings, SHG members have been discussing solid and liquid waste management in the village. An SHG member plans to construct a soak pit to collect waste water; many others are also thinking along the same lines. They plan to keep dustbins in their homes so that their surroundings remain clean. They have asked the *mukhiya* to release the funds under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) for the rest of the households, to build the sanitary units.