

Towards a Hygienic Lifestyle

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Working to gain the full-hearted support and active participation of the villagers in the building of individual toilets within the premises of their homes is a step in the path of social transformation

The most prominent landmark in Belkhara is the water tank, which stands tall at the entrance of the village next to the temple. It is a symbol of pride, prestige and prosperity for the people of Belkhara. About 400 ft away from the tank, where the vast open ground spreading out on the western periphery of the village ends, is the intake well and the pump house. And down below, next to the well, runs the river, Gauri, which serves as a natural boundary between Belkhara and the next village Harno. The rivulet has been the lifeline for both the villages for years. The villagers used it for bathing and washing and it was also the favourite place for their buffaloes during summer. The water flows round the year in this rivulet, even as hand pumps go waterless during the dry months.

But now the mini piped water supply (PWS) system provides water to all the 125 families of the village in their homes—seven days a week, round the year. It is a dream come true for the villagers of Belkhara—a dream, which became a reality three years ago because of the efforts of the villagers, especially the women's self-help groups (SHGs), which have been at the forefront of all developmental activities in the village for the last 12 years.

There are overall signs of prosperity in Belkhara. The *kaccha* houses are giving way to more airy and well-lit brick structures. Electricity connections have reached most of the families. All children of the school-going age, including girls, are now in school. The smaller children look healthy and no longer have distended tummies or discoloured hair. All this is, of course, not attributable only to the availability of safe water in homes but also to the overall development in the village due to the sustained involvement of PRADAN, which has touched all major spheres of their lives—economic as well as social—and has improved the quality of life in the village.

PRADAN has been working in five blocks of Koderma district of Jharkhand since 1992–93, covering 164 villages. There are 10,912 members working towards regular savings and credit mobilization in SHGs. In addition to organizing savings and credit, PRADAN has promoted livelihood activities such as agriculture, poultry, and *tasar* reeling and spinning. SHGs have been a powerful vehicle for socio-economic change in the area. Underprivileged women clubbed their SHGs under the banner of Damodar Mahila Mandal Sangh (a federated body of SHGs promoted by PRADAN). They have drawn strength through social networking, meeting at regular intervals and joining hands to protest when there are instances of violence against women. Substantial work has been done to empower women in SHGs. SHG meetings are not only a hub for economic activities but also a source of solace for the women, who interact on social issues so that they can contribute to the progress of the society. PRADAN professionals arrange for as well as conduct various training programmes, and offer regular facilitation to SHG members, leaders and community resource persons (CRPs). These have also triggered an urge among members, to constantly improve their lives. Gradually, members have started discussing and sharing their opinions on healthy food habits, balanced diet, reproductive health, immunization, family planning, self-hygiene and sanitation, environment cleanliness and the importance of clean drinking water in their SHG meetings, cluster meetings and other forums. The most drastic and overwhelming change has been seen in the field of water and sanitation issues.

To develop a better understanding of water and sanitation, PRADAN organized an exposure

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visit to the Gram Vikas in Ganjam district in Odisha, where a community based intervention on water and sanitation had been implemented. The PRADAN team accompanied nine people from the villages of Belkhara and Dharaidih for the exposure. The objective of the visit was to show the villagers the people-owned-and-managed, sanitation-cum-drinking water project, the processes involved in planning, implementing and monitoring the scheme, and its day-to-day management. The visit was followed by training programmes and awareness generation on how unclean drinking water and open defecation cause diseases. The benefits of having a safe source of water, the clean handling of water and the availability of toilets were highlighted after establishing the link between unsafe water, diseases and loss of income. The villagers easily arrived at a consensus about the need to have a PWS system in the village; however, the high cost of building a latrine with a septic tank acted as a deterrent.

To begin, a mini PWS system was developed in Belkhara and Dharaidih, through community contribution and with support from the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) under its Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) programme. Considerable time and energy were spent by the community in deliberating on the implementation and management structure, which is critical in ensuring effective and efficient delivery, maintaining proper records for transparency and ensuring that the rules and regulations are complied with, by one and all. A Village Development Committee (VDC) was formed and its main task was to implement, monitor and manage all the programmes promoted in the village. The villagers of Belkhara and Dharaidih held

a number of meetings before the VDC was formed and it was ensured that each caste or *tola* was represented in the committee. Training programmes and regular monthly meetings were organized to narrow down the social gap among the different communities in the two villages so that they could come together and participate in project implementation and management. Monthly meetings are held in the villages; the income and expenditure of the committee are read out to the villagers and all major decisions are taken in the meeting itself.

The experience of the women with the PWS system has been very positive and they now talk about the consequences of consuming contaminated water. They also speak of how water gets contaminated and emphasize the need to keep drinking water in covered, clean containers. They realize the importance of the water not being touched by hand when handling it. Most of the women now take a bath everyday in the privacy of their homes. Earlier, due to scarcity of water, most of the women and children did not take a bath; during summer, often, they bathed in the river where they also used to clean their cattle. As

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a result, most of them suffered from skin diseases as well as gynecological complications due to poor menstrual hygiene.

Women from the village shared, "Earlier these facilities were only for the town people but now we can also get these facilities at our village, without any dependency

from outsiders. Now our life is much more meaningful and we have more time for other work because we are now spared the drudgery of fetching water."

At present, the team is implementing four other drinking water projects funded by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation of the Government of Jharkhand. Money has been transferred for this by the department to the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC). PRADAN engages with the VWSC, the villagers and SHG members for techno-managerial purposes.

In Dharaidih, due to the continuing increase in the price of diesel, monthly operation costs became an issue. A solar-based lifting device was installed to lift the water from the well, to tackle the problem. The discharge of the solar

The PWS system in *Belkhara* comprises an overhead tank with a capacity to hold 30,000 litres of water and a 400-foot long main pipeline made of 90 mm diameter PVC pipes. This pipeline connects the tank with the intake well which is 20 feet in diameter and 32 feet deep. A five horsepower pump, run on diesel, draws water from this well and pumps the water up to the water tank. The well is covered and the water is treated with bleaching powder and alum before being pumped up.

The total cost of construction of the PWS system is Rs 15,04,800, of which the families contributed Rs 20,000. Apart from that, the villagers contributed around Rs 60,000 to install an electricity-operated pump because there was no provision for an electric pump in the original proposal to the donors. Currently, each family is paying a user fee of Rs 75, which goes towards the maintenance and service charge. Each family gets about 150 lpcd of water per day, and water is supplied twice a day.

pump varies from 0.9 to 1.8 litres per second, depending on the intensity of the sunlight. A device called the 'ferule' is being installed to supply uniform water to each and every household. The aim is to cover the entire village, reduce the consumption of fossil fuel, and provide potable water to each household.

SANITATION

The SHG women raised issues related to unsanitary practices and the consequent health hazards and were keen to have sanitary units at home. However, they believed that constructing a toilet would be very expensive and were apprehensive that it would overflow or smell. This provided a new activity for the PRADAN team. It contacted UNICEF and the District Water and Sanitation Department to seek solutions. Training programmes were organized at the SHG and the cluster levels, to clear doubts. UNICEF, Jharkhand, provided for the construction of two sanitation units for demonstration purposes at Belkhara where PWS was functional. UNICEF also supported by providing technical training and on-field support to construct sanitary units. SHG members from the village and from other clusters visited the village and were motivated to have their own units because of the easy-to-build technology and the cost-effectiveness. The members discussed the issue of having a sanitary unit with their families and in cluster meetings. Meanwhile, the PRADAN team raised some funds from UNICEF, to construct 10 sanitation units in five SHG clusters, that is, two in each cluster. The need to construct the sanitary unit was so high that in two villages, SHG members initiated and constructed sanitation units at their own cost and began using them too. In every forum of SHG members, sanitation became a point of discussion.

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The PRADAN team also explored a tie-up with the government-sponsored Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA), whereby the Department of Water and Sanitation would provide Rs 4,600 per sanitary unit as an incentive and the rest of the funds would be the beneficiary's contribution. A detailed cost-estimate of the Individual Household Latrines (IHHLs) was prepared, and a plywood model was constructed for display, to

help SHG members understand the working of the toilets better. This latrine is basically a 4 x 3 ft permanent brick structure with a twin soak pit at the rear end of the unit. The size of the soak pit is 1 metre in depth and 1.2 metres in width. One soak pit would be in use at a time; once it got filled, the empty soak pit would be connected through the junction box situated at the back of the IHHL, for further use. One soak pit would take a family of five to six members approximately four to five years to fill. Once the soak pit was filled, it would take the night soil five to six months to convert it into manure which could be used for agriculture purposes. The entire cost of this IHHL would be around Rs 9,500–10,000. Members contribute Rs 5,000–5,500 approximately, most often in the form of labour.

Under the NBA, each village has to form a VWSC, with the *Mukhiya* of the *panchayat* becoming President of the Committee. This Committee takes care of the issues of drinking water, and safe disposal of liquid and solid waste of the village. As per government guidelines, the incentive amount for each family in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category will go to the account of VWSC; BPL families will then receive a cheque for the incentive amount after the construction of the

unit. To cover the entire village and help it avail of the incentive for the sanitation unit, the Above the Poverty Line (APL) families will be divided into five categories—families belonging to the scheduled tribes (ST)/ schedule castes (SC), women-headed families, marginal farmers, landless farmers and families with a member who is handicapped.

The constant liaisoning by PRADAN with the concerned departments and the Deputy Commissioner (DC) helped pave the way for some monetary help for BPL families to construct latrines and a drainage system in the villages. In Koderma district, in the project villages of PRADAN, about 4,000 SHG members wanted to construct IHHL units. They applied to the concerned department and funds for 93 units have been disbursed for construction. The release of the funds by the government has been slow; the community members have, in some cases, begun constructing the units at their own cost. In almost all the villages of Koderma district, SHG members are willing to construct IHHLs.

Meanwhile, the government issued an order converging the Mahatma Gandhi National

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Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with this sanitation programme. There is, therefore, a provision of Rs 4,000 per IHHL as labour payment to job card holders. However, it is still a struggle to have the funds released under MGNREGA and the department. As per government rules, MGNREGA funds go into the account of the *panchayat samiti* whereas the incentive amount goes into the account of VWSC. Therefore, it is a great struggle to align the programme with

MGNREGA funds.

It has not been an easy task for the people to put in their own money for making latrines, thereby contributing to a healthy society and lifestyle; constant effort has helped move this forward. Hopefully, in the years to come, more and more people will realize the importance of health and hygiene in their lives and develop healthy ways of living. After the construction of IHHLs, PRADAN's focus is on how individual members of the household use the toilet as well as other hygiene issues. It will take time to change the mindset of the villagers; the team has begun to handle this Herculean task and is confident of achieving its goal.