

FREEDOM FROM OPEN DEFECATION: THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY

- **Background**

Open defecation is a major health hazard and causes enormous hardship, especially to rural women. Government funds for constructing toilets have to be supplemented with awareness campaigns to motivate ordinary people to do their part. Sarola, a village in Maharashtra, was able to become “open defecation free” with effective community participation, taking advantage of the Sant Gadgebaba Gram Swachhata Abhiyan. Toilets were built in every house, along with systematic management of solid waste. The village testifies to the larger social benefits that can come from the efforts of a group of determined youth.

Sarola is a small village with 1,032 inhabitants of whom 75% are dalits (scheduled castes), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and the vimuktajati nomadic tribes (VJNT), and 25% from other castes. It is 9 km from Tuljapur block. Apart from agriculture (the main source of livelihood), another important source of livelihood is construction work in surrounding villages and at the block. Almost 40% of the population belongs to the Wadar community (VJNT), whose main source of livelihood is stone-cutting and construction. Only five residents of Sarola are government employees. Education facilities are poor. There is only one primary school, and students go to Malumbra village (8 km away) or Tuljapur (9 km away) after their schooling there.

- **Location, Date**

Sarola Village, Maharashtra; 2008-09

- **Areas**

Rural

- **Stage/Scale**

Pilot

- **Objective of the assignment**

It was a community effort started by the youths of the village to make their village “open defecation free”.

- **What was done**

- Awareness was created by organising rallies on sanitation with banners and people picking up Jadhru (broom) to clean up the streets. Later, it was identified that there were infrastructural and logistical problems like the site for garbage collection was near the Anganwadis. Hence, using community mobilisation techniques like door-to-door campaigns, discussions with local politicians and school teachers, awareness was generated amongst the people.
- In the beginning the response was slow in the village but with the help of teachers, children and youths a sense of pride was created in sanitation and shame was created for the current state of the village. Moreover, the Nirmal Gram Puraskar was set as an

ultimate goal for the village to ensure continuous motivation for the people of the village.

- When all else failed and the people still did not stop open defecation. The youths took their instruments to sites where people went for open defecation and practiced a few songs for them.
- These soft techniques inspired change in the community which led them to winning the Nirmal Gram Puraskar in 2008-09.

• **Impact**

In 2008-09, the village was awarded the central government's Nirmal Gram Puraskar by the president of India. In 2008, the village received a district-level prize for implementing the SGGSA successfully. In the same year, the Dalit community participated separately in the SFADWSA and received the block level first prize of Rs 5 lakh, which was spent on the development of the Dalit quarter. The village also got a regional award (in three financial years) for effective solid-waste and water management, and for being "eco-friendly". These awards are incidental to the other outcomes of the sanitation programme – increased awareness, a culture of collective action (including strengthening of Panchayati Raj institutions), women's empowerment through SHGs, greater account ability and transparency, and so on.

• **Challenges and Issues**

This case study shows that the goal of being ODF is not as simple as building toilets. Many factors are at work –Sarola's journey began with an advertisement in a Marathi regional newspaper. It required education as well as access to information (provided by a village reading room). It shows the importance of education not just in the narrow sense of literacy, but also other government interventions. Cash incentives such as awards are also not enough. Achieving ODF status required public action in an otherwise divided local community (in terms of caste, among other things). In Sarola, this was facilitated by local government institutions such as the Gram Sabha, which met regularly.

• **Innovation**

Through effective community participation the youths of the village used soft skills like picking up a Jhadu (broom) and cleaning up the streets, spreading awareness by calling on the Dalit community and then slowly reaching up to the other castes of the village and creating a "good morning campaign" where they had music session between 5 am to 8 am in placed commonly used for open defecation.

• **Financials**

Not Available

• **Economic sustainability/Revenue Model**

Not Available

- **Implementer Contact Persons**

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- **Sources and References**

- Dhaktode, N. (2014). Freedom from Open Defecation: Role of the Community. Economic and Political Weekly , 28-30