

Collecting Community Contribution

Alang village of Bhavnagar district is a coastal village and also known as Asia's largest ship breaking yard. Although Alang was covered under the Ghogha project, it was difficult to begin construction for as long as two years, since the men were reluctant to raise the community contribution. The issue was discussed at the Gram Sabha and the women silently witnessed the meeting. The next day, ten women met at the village temple. They reasoned that if men could raise Rs. 7 lakhs to construct a temple, then it was certainly within their means to raise Rs. 30,000 for solving their water problems. Despite their logic, solutions were not that simple. The women, primarily belonging to the Darbar community, had never set foot outside their homes without the consent of their husband. Yet, determined, they went ahead to raise money from their village. One of the women, who had come to Alang as a bride and had lived there for 12 years, collecting the contribution gave her the opportunity to step out of the house and she saw the entire village for the first time. Within few days, the women collected the stipulated amount and entrusted it to the men to pay the contribution to the project.

Differential rates for contribution

There are about 50 houses in Chamla village in Dehgam taluka of Gandhinagar district. Women used to fetch water from far away places. Gayatriben, the Sarpanch of the village, resolved to find a solution to this problem. She got information about Sector Reform scheme being implemented by Government and held discussions with people and the community agreed to join in the scheme. Since the population of the village was mostly labourers, the collection of public contribution was a hurdle. However, in this Herculean task, Pani Samiti members, Babubhai, Samuben, Kantaben etc., took responsibility. Appreciating the economic conditions of the labour class, Gayatriben convinced the community about the need for differential rates for contribution and this has now been accepted as a norm. Those villagers whose crops have been harvested paid Rs.300/- per household as contribution and thus Rs.12,000/- has been collected, while for those who could not afford to pay the contribution, the Pani Samiti has been given the authority to collect the charges as per their convenience.

Undeterred Sarpanch leads the way

Jhanjhesar village is situated in the Visavadar taluka of Junagadh district. From the midst of the village a big river, Jhanjhesari, passes through and geographically divides the village into two parts. A dam has been built for irrigation in the downstream area of the village. Because of the

Jhanjhesari dam the village faced no problem of water scarcity, but the water was available only from the stand post. In the absence of a water storage and distribution system, fetching water meant a long walk for the women of the village. As the solution of the problem the village Sarpanch Parsottambhai decided to execute the Swajaldhara scheme in the village. Some people of the village tried to drive a spanner into the programme and create problems, but without any fear Parshottambhai worked doggedly for the betterment of village. Today with the backing and help of all the Pani Samiti members, works are in progress under the Swajaldhara scheme in the village.

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Sharifaben, Mota Asambia village - Kutch

One meeting with Sharifaben of Mota Asambia village is enough to get a glimpse of the traditional temperament of the people of Kutch known for their resilience. The earthquake of 2001 had caused considerable damage to the water supply infrastructure in the village and the women faced great difficulty in fetching water for their drinking and daily household requirements. When the community-managed programme was introduced in the village, Sharifaben resolved to make it a success and ease the woes of the women in the village. As a member of the Pani Samiti, Sharifaben took the lead in making house-to-house visits, explaining the benefits of the project to the villagers and cajoling them into making the community contribution. She maintained the records, operated the bank account and when the repair and reconstruction work was on, monitored it very diligently in order to ensure quality works. The village now has functional in-village water supply distribution and women do not have to trudge long distances.

Diluben, Tarasara village - Bhavnagar

The Pani Samiti was formed in Tarasara village of Bhavnagar keeping in mind the active participation of people from all the communities. But when the matter of community contribution came to fore, people were reluctant to join in. Diluben, a vegetable vendor decided to make the programme a success and went from house to house to collect contribution with some of the other women from the village. In this way they collected Rs.20,000 and Diluben contributed from her own pocket for some of the economically underprivileged families. The result is that community contribution for the in-village water supply system based on Mahi was hundred per cent. The villagers believe that they are getting year-round safe drinking water at the price of one gallon of water and have started paying the O&M for the water supply system.

Khengarpar village - Kutch

This village is inhabited by Maldharis, a community where the men stay away from home all day as they take the cattle for grazing. At times they even migrate in search of grazing grounds for their cattle. In one of the Gram Sabhas, Shrujan – an ISA of WASMO – with a long standing presence in the village, introduced the programme. The women felt that by joining the

programme, their drudgery of fetching water from a distance of four kms. would end. They showed willingness, but when told that they have to contribute ten per cent of the cost of the scheme, their hopes vanished and there was a complete silence. One of the women boldly asked the others if they would pay towards the community contribution for the much wanted pipeline, and all of them said "yes" in unison. They contributed from their personal savings. They learnt to keep accounts and write receipts. The secretary of Pani Samiti Deviben Mahera says, "We have learnt to work for ourselves, we had never imagined that we would be able to accomplish what we desired. It has changed our lives."

Galpadar village – Kutch

The male members of Pani Samiti of Galpadar did not want to contribute to the community-managed water and sanitation programme, as in the past (after the earthquake) they had been cheated. Their reaction was of despondency and the Pani Samiti refused any contribution. In one of the meetings of members from WASMO and VIKSAT with Pani Samiti, there were signs of hope. Kubarben Ahir, a member of Pani Samiti declared, "The women of this village have decided to join the programme and contribution will start from me. I will pay from my savings." She says, "When I mobilised the other women in the village, I had not only faced opposition, but even got disgraced sometimes, but I continued persuasion and pressurized people till everybody paid. I told myself that I have a responsibility to fulfill. Now everybody gets regular, adequate water in their houses and I have become a leader. I am not the chairman of the Pani Samiti, but I do whatever is required to be done." She is proud that she had an occasion to talk to the Chief Minister of Gujarat, about their accomplishments at an exhibition.

Naranpar-Gauripar village – Kutch

Women and youth of the village collected contribution from people for the water supply system. The respective Pani Samitis of Naranpar and Gauripar collected Rs. 2,50,000 and Rs. 4,00,000. Thereby, construction works of ESR and pond deepening began. Villagers, especially women were happy to have water at their doorstep after all the years of laborious digging of virdas and fetching water from distant places. Women also take the lead in maintaining sanitation in the village and conduct regular meetings.