

Prejudice Turns into Pride

“Pani Thiye Panjo” (The water belongs to us)

Bharapar village in the remote Kutch region is a unique case in the water supply sector. Based on the experiences in early independence era, people perceived that creating drinking water facility in the village was only government's responsibility and the onus of infrastructure and maintenance in their areas was on the government. Hence the village did not pay any water tariff to the Water Supply Department for about 36 long years. They never paid any heed to the call for recovery as well.

Decades later, when community managed water supply programme was introduced post earthquake in 2001, the village refused to be conned into believing about the government's support. Consistent and tireless efforts then were made by the facilitators. This perseverance eventually helped overcoming the precarious situation. Gradually, trust was built among the community. The community then also participated in the exposure trip to villages that were on the way to self-reliance for meeting the drinking water needs. This brought a turning point and Bharapara villagers were grossly motivated.

At an event held at Naliya in October 2006, the Sarpanch of Bharapara village, Kanjibhai Gadhara, presented a cheque of Rs.80,000/- to the Secretary, Water Supply, as the payment of water supply bill of GWSSB accumulated in last 36 years. Kanjibhai Gadhara says, “Finally, we have realized that our fate lies in our hands. We just can not depend on government for our year round water needs”. The village is not only proud to be partner in management of water supply systems but has also urged other villages to take care of the tariffs of bulk water supply for ensuring regular supplies. Bharapar in one voice now asserts, “Pani Thiye Panjo”.

“Stop at a depth of three feet”

Dhandhalpur is a village of 272 households in Sayla taluka. AKRSP(I) has been working in this village since 1990's and along with the village organisations, implemented a range of natural resource management interventions. Water being a critical source in the region, a percolation tank was a major intervention for the village, priority for which emerged after discussions with the women's and the farmer's groups. The completed tank recharged nearby wells and made water available for domestic needs also.

However, conflicts soon arose as nearby farmers used engines and siphon arrangements to take water for the cotton crop. There was hardly any water left for domestic needs. The women's group protested and different groups (siphon users vs. engine users, cattle vs. agriculture etc.) fought daily. Even the panchayat could not take a decision with the result that the police had to intervene to resolve conflicts.

Finally the women's group and some enlightened farmers realised that this conflict was helping nobody. Every body was called to the temple near the tank, and a compromise was negotiated. Farmers could irrigate, but would have to stop at a 3 feet depth (mark indicated on the tank). The remaining water would be only for domestic use (drinking water for humans, cattle). This ensured that hand pump remain recharged even in summer. This norm, taken in a religious place, holds and the village is secure for drinking water as long as the tank is filled. During drought also, the 3 feet norm ensures priority to domestic needs.