

Women at the Helm

Saraswatiben, Pushpaben Bariya and Manjulaben Tandel - Valsad

Moti Doldungri, Nargol and Dandi villages in Valsad district have women as their Sarpanches. These villages faced water scarcity, with Dandi and Nargol experiencing salinity problems as well. Being women themselves, these Sarpanches were sensitive to the daily struggle the women underwent in accessing water. When the Swajaldhara programme was introduced in their villages, they made sure that lack of contributions from the communities would not stand in the way of achieving water security. In Moti Doldungri, Saraswatiben generated awareness among women of the village regarding the benefits of the scheme. The motivated women of the village raised Rs. 68,000 and implemented the scheme, which they desired in the village, ultimately benefiting one and all. The case was similar in Nargol village, where the Sarpanch, Pushpaben Bariya encouraged the people to contribute and the Pani Samiti collected over Rs. 40,200 from the community.

Proximity to sea accelerates salinity ingress in Dandi village of Valsad and in summer wells dry up and groundwater level goes down. Though the village is covered under a group water supply scheme, due to low pressure and low technical facilities water does not meet the requirement. To solve these problems villagers decided to join in the Swajaldhara programme. Although the programme was accepted, when it came to collecting community contribution, people were reluctant to come forward. In fact, at one point of time the programme had to be withdrawn due to the lack of community contribution. The village Sarpanch, Manjulaben Tandel brought the project back. After a series of meetings and talks with the community, the project was reintroduced. As a result of her perseverance, the Pani Samiti account received Rs. 1.03 lakhs from the people.

Ramaben, Mankanpur village - Jamnagar

Ramaben, the Sarpanch of Mankanpur village of Dwarka taluka firmly believes in exercising her powers to fulfill the responsibilities of a Sarpanch. Her leadership convinced people in this no-source village to have faith in the programme of WASMO. She not only established an efficient water supply system, but also persuaded each house to have soak pits. Water harvesting has helped them to have assured water supply. She is confident and has a long agenda of village development waiting to be fulfilled.

Vilasba, Morchand village – Bhavnagar

Earlier Morchand village had three hand pumps and two public wells, but in summer the sources would dry up. Under the WASMO programme Vilasba, the Sarpanch of the village, collected people's contribution for the scheme with the help of the ISA. The construction work was awarded to an agency but when they failed to complete it, the Pani Samiti took over all the construction. Today, there is one ESR, one sump, three check dams, distribution pipe line, 20 stand posts, three washing facility, three school sanitation units, underground tanks and two cattle troughs. Under the leadership of Vilasba and her perseverance in mobilising people the Pani Samiti completed all the construction work without compromising on quality. Vilasba is always supported by her husband Babuba Gohil in the work she undertakes.

Chanchalben Rathodia, Vayadpura village – Vadodara

People of Vayadpura are enjoying the success of the initiatives they have taken for the in-village water supply and sanitation programmes. With the construction of an ESR and distribution line the villages are getting stable water supply. The credit goes to Sarpanch Chanchalben for making the development work possible in the village. She says, "Women had to toil in the farm whole day and then queue up at the village tank for fetching water at midnight." This prompted her to take a step towards the implementation of the programme and she decided to collect the community contribution from every household.

Vasantben Makwana, Rangpar village - Bhavnagar

Rangpar is an ordinary village of Bhavnagar district. The issue of low literacy rate had always been a hindrance in Rangpar for development initiatives. In such a situation when Vasantben became the first woman Sarpanch, villagers were skeptical as well as they had expectations from her. With the complete support of community and Gram Panchayat, Vasantben brought progressive changes in the village. One of the changes was a solution to scarcity of drinking water through Swajaldhara programme. Bhimjibhai, Chairperson of VWSC provided full support to Vasantben and with the consent of other Pani Samiti members it was decided to regularise water supply through stand posts and cattle troughs. They were sure that it would instill confidence among the community to take house connections. It proved true and villagers came forward for house connection and paid required tariff.

Kalpnaben Mehta, Jawanpura village - Sabarkantha

Jawanpura village is a part of the Group Panchayat, which is headed by a woman Sarpanch, who is also the Pani Samiti Chairperson. Kalpnaben took the lead in implementing Swajaldhara programme in Jawanpura, which also benefited Sapavada and Sadatpura village. When Kalpnaben was elected as the Sarpanch of the village, availability of drinking water within the village was a distant dream. She realised this dream through Swajaldhara programme and now people in all the three villages are getting adequate and regular supply of drinking water. Kalpnaben also motivated people to achieve complete sanitation and encouraged people to construct toilets, as a result of which, all the households in Jawanpura village have toilets.

Sumitraben, Bavka village - Dahod

Sumitraben is the young and dedicated Pani Samiti Chairperson of Bavka village of Dahod district. She cherished the dream of becoming the Sarpanch since childhood and her determination won her the position of Sarpanch as well as the Pani Samiti head. Sumitraben took initiative to construct a common hall, rooms for village school, and kindergarten, bore wells and houses for economically marginalised families. But apart from all these achievements, her real aim was to bring a solution to the water problem, especially to benefit the women. Sumitraben continuously laboured for this and finally her dream came true through WASMO. She came forward and formed a Pani Samiti with fifteen women as its members. Bavka Pani Samiti has clearly shown how women can get together to resolve their main time consuming activity – that is of fetching water.

Shobhnaben, Verasara village – Kutch

Being a village dominated by the Darbar community, the role of fetching water was being traditionally handled by the men folk of the village. They used to fetch water from the outskirts of the village in a 'kavad' (a horizontal bamboo to which pots are tied on either side), which was very time consuming. Effectively the men were not able to go for work in time. Under the leadership of Shobhnaben, the Sarpanch and a member of the Pani Samiti, a habitation-wise needs assessment was done and three underground tanks were constructed in the village whereby all households had equal and easy access to safe, regular and adequate drinking water. Shobhnaben says, "As the Sarpanch, it was my duty to do everything possible to solve the problems of my fellow villagers. In turn, they too have given me all support required." The men from the village are all praise for Shobhnaben's initiative and they say, "Until now it was the women who would come to us with their problems. But, one lady (Shobhnaben) has set an example by solving the problem suffered by men."