

Together we are stronger

Rangpur is a Village in Ladpura Tehsil in Kota District of Rajasthan. There is a Government Upper Primary School in Rangpur which has a super active School Level Coordination Committee (SLCC). But until last year there was nobody to take ownership of the poor infrastructural and behavioral condition of the school in terms of Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). It was only after the DCM Shriram Swachhagrah program was launched during May 2018, that the fate of the school and the people living in the village changed.

Through findings from the gap assessment, the DCM team came up with a strategic plan to work in selected schools of Kota. They mobilized the villagers, identified local leaders, sensitized local bodies, anganwadi workers, Panchayati Raj members, School Development Management Committee, teachers and parents. They conducted pre-triggering sessions in the presence of all of the stakeholders and formed a School Level Coordination Committee (SLCC) with five volunteers, namely, Rakesh Kumar, Durgashankar Kevar, Gilok Gurjar, Raghunath Yogi and Mahendra Kumar.

This team of five indefatigable soldiers took up the challenge to set up an innovative Sanitation Fund (Swachhta Kosh) for keeping the cleaning drive alive in their village and at the school. They decided to work as a team and started sensitizing people about the importance of having a sanitation fund. They told them that all the work done by DCM Shriram Swachhagrah program, like separate toilet blocks for boys and girls, handwashing station and drinking water facilities will go in vain if they do not participate and donate 20 rupees per month. This fund will help in continuing WASH activities for children, as it can be used for refurbishment and catering to small needs of schools to maintain WASH infrastructure.

Slowly, the villagers understood the ramification of the noble cause and started donating 20 rupees. This SLCC team has collected 2710 rupees in less than a month's time. This is so far the highest monthly collection of all the SLCC teams working across the project. Kudos to the five brave men and their relentless efforts to mark the beginning of a self-sustainable model for operations and maintenance of the school WASH. They are being recognized by the DCM team and are being asked to visit other schools and villages to train people.

Little champs lead the charge

There is a common saying that children are vulnerable and bound to lose track if not guided properly. But in village Motipura of Bhimpura Gram Panchayat there is a Government Upper Primary School (GUPS) which has 14 little champions who are strong-willed in changing the destiny of their school and their village.

A year ago, this school had a strength of only 27 students with just two teachers. Unlike other villages, this village was not fond of sending their children to schools, since they made them work along with them. But after the initiative of DCM Shriram Swachhagrah School WASH program, the situation changed and currently the school has enrolled 24 more children taking the total strength to 51.

A lot of preparation and action went into making this happen over the past couple of months. As part of School Led Total Sanitation, (SLTS) a child cabinet is set up in each and every school. The DCM team, with the help of teachers of GUPS identified 14 students, and trained them on the functions of child cabinet committee. The training was in the form of classroom sessions, games, sports, drawing competitions, skits and songs so that children can participate and enjoy the activities.

This child cabinet has 7 boys and 7 girls: each one of them have their own department, post, position and roles to play. There is a Prime Minister, one Deputy Prime Minister, one Health and Sanitation Minister, one Water Minister, one Sports Minister, one Education Minister and one Cultural Minister, and each of the Ministers has a subordinate to assist them in their work. The Ministers have their roles and responsibilities chart drawn out on a display board in the school. There is also a rotational system of sharing Ministries weekly so that every minister and subordinate get to work in other departments. There is a provision for accepting support from volunteers (students) who are not members of child cabinet committee or teachers or School Management Development Committee members.

The trickiest part is to sustain and keep the cabinet alive and active; encouragement to motivate child cabinet is a very good tool to instigate ownership towards work. But the story here is different. This cabinet has gone out of its way and done things that were not expected from them. The cabinet of GUPS Motipura has successfully convinced parents to send their children to school through door to door sensitization. This has led to a surge in enrolment which has gone up by 50 per cent.

As this school has no sweeper, the cabinet ministers take the responsibility of cleaning their school every day where they are assisted by fellow classmates and teachers. The cabinet has also started in situ treatment of food waste or wet waste by digging two pits near the campus in which they are making compost. They have also taken the lead in making a dustbin with rods and iron sheets which is kept at corner of the road so that the villagers don't throw garbage on the roads.

The cabinet ministers have also laid down plantation beds for flowering plants, medicinal plants, herbs and shrubs. They have made a soap bank which is being used by the students for handwashing. During the daily morning assembly, the students are checked on basic parameters of cleanliness, health and hygiene like short nails, clean shoes, clean school dress and combed hair. The child who fails to match the parameters are asked to bring soap for the soap bank as a punishment. They are also collecting monthly sanitation fund of 20 rupees from households. Currently, around 640 rupees have been collected this month and they got a tap repaired from this fund.

The unprecedented steps taken by these little champions will help them become great leaders of tomorrow. There is reason enough to feel happy and one is proud to call them little torchbearers who are not only guiding their schoolmates but are also showing the path to other people in the village.

My first period



Mahar Jain is a student of Government Girl's Senior Secondary School Arankheda, a village and Gram Panchayat in Kota, Rajasthan. She is a student of Standard 7 and is a very diligent student, always scoring good marks in the class. She had her first menstruation only a couple of months ago, and like many other girls, she was clueless about the changes happening to her body.

She was flummoxed by the sudden behavior change of her mother and her grandmother towards her. She was asked not to touch her father and brother, not to worship, not to sleep on her bed, stay in a corner of the house and not to roam around during the 'bloody' days. The only reason that came to her mind was that she has now become dirty and impure because of this curse that has fallen on her.

She felt ashamed of herself and her confidence dipped. The most disturbing fact was that she could not share it with anybody. But as they say, every dark cloud has a silver lining, and Ms. Rama from DCM Shriram Swachhagrah program came to her rescue. Rama is a community mobiliser specialized in Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and she started conducting MHM trainings and sessions with adolescent girls in all government schools where DCM was operational. When she arrived in Mahar's School, she was surprised to see the forthright manner in which Rama was talking on this topic. Rama told them about the myths and taboos associated with menstruation and showed them animated videos. She also discussed with them her own story and her first experience. Mahar and her class mates started calling her Rama Didi and they became very comfortable talking about menstruation to her.

DCM Shriram Swachhagrah team decided to conduct an essay writing competition on the topic "My first period" for adolescent girls of Arankheda school. The result showed that almost all the girls wrote about their first experience without hesitation. Mahar wrote one of the best stories in her class and she was asked to read it out in front of the DCM team. She read out her story with pride and without showing a hint of shyness. In the process, she stole the hearts of everybody in her class.

Mahar says that she has gained back her lost pride and confidence. She realizes that she was ignorant of the fact that periods are normal. She has made a promise to herself that she will fight against this taboo and will inform people around her on the myths of menstruation.

No job is small

This is the story of Arun who is 20 years old and hails from a small village Kedha Rasulpura in Kota District of Rajasthan. Though his family's main occupation is sanitation work, but his sisters and Arun always had other plans. Arun's eldest sister is a doctor and middle one practices nursing while the youngest one is studying in second year of college. His father works as a daily wage laborer in the nearby vegetable market. His mother is a housewife but also cleans one of the schools in her village and earns not more than 200 rupees per month.

Being the only son in his family, he is well aware of his responsibility. He is a good student and always had dreams of going to a college, completing his studies and get a job to take care of his family. He understands his family's condition and knows that his parents are saving every penny possible for the marriage of his three sisters. So, he decided not to put extra burden on his parents and to take up a job for completing his studies. After completing his school, he started looking out for a job to support his higher studies.

Soon he heard about DCM Shriram Swachhagrah program that was being implemented in two schools of his village. He looked at it as an opportunity and he came in contact with the officials and school management committee. Looking at his enthusiasm and his urge to work, the school and DCM officials offered him the job of cleaning both the schools of his village.

Arun is pursuing first year of Bachelor of Arts in Government Arts College, and has been working for the past couple of months. He is very happy with his job as he considers it to be his ticket to higher studies and sees it as an opportunity to fulfil his dream. He says that his sisters are his role models and provide motivation for the entire family. Though he sometimes envies them as they get more love and affection from parents but he admits that they deserve it more than himself.

Today Arun is one of the best green workers in his village because he is sincere, never takes leave and is very good at his job. I was overwhelmed to listen to his story of self-esteem and independence that seldom comes at this age.