

Shaping Young Minds as the Change Agents for Tomorrow

My School My Responsibility

You must meet **Kartiki Yogesh Satav**, our minister of health in the child cabinet; says Mr. Deepak Sarode Headmaster of Zila Parishad School at Shelke Vasti with pride when Gourav pays visit to the school. She is so popular that she has been re-elected as health minister for two times in a row.

The Minister is duly summoned, along with the Prime Minister and other Ministers for Swachhta, Cultural Activities and Sports. All are neatly uniformed with hair combed and greets with an infectious smile. They are all below the age of 10. This is the Child Cabinet of Primary School in Ranjangaon Shelke Vasti, a village in Pune district, Maharashtra.

This used to be like most other Govt. schools with average facilities, trying to bring education to the doorsteps of bright young children from the small village of Shelke Vasti. Everything was very much as usual till the WASH program reached to the school. The WASH program (Water, Sanitation & Hygiene) is being implemented by the team FINISH Society supported by ITC Mission Sunehra Kal (MSK) in Shirur Block impacting 23 schools since last two years.

WASH is one of the several other initiatives of ITC Mission Sunehra Kal aimed at changing the status of sanitation and hygiene leading to improved '**education for all**'. Hundreds of village schools in rural India are drab, badly- constructed and under-equipped. Toilets, if they have them, are typically crude and without a separate block for girls. Attendance is poor, classes large, Classroom are small, much learning is by rote, and teachers and students often lack motivation.

The Journey towards Transformation

Child friendly infrastructure plays a huge role in the transformation of the school environment that is beyond our imagination. The simple and basic improvements like separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys, attractive decor inside and outside the classroom, clean and well maintained toilets, hand washing stations, availability of water, closer links with parents and community members, high morale amongst children etc affect the students learning greatly.

MSK WASH Program focuses on bringing change in the attitude and behaviour of students along with the infrastructure support so that the outcomes are long lasting. The Child Cabinets of the schools are a great platform to make that happen and as far as hygiene is concerned, the key person is the Minister of Health.

During the initial schools visits and a few sessions, Gourav and the team observed great interest and enthusiasm amongst the child cabinet members. To strengthen them further, round of meetings with the child cabinet, peer groups etc were conducted. The children were motivated to take responsibility of different areas and lead the younger students in right direction. This served two purposes; one there was a system at school level looking over the sanitation and hygiene aspects and second was developing leadership skills that can shape the children into role models for other

students. In order to support the behaviour change process, the program also provided infrastructural support for a group hand washing unit, all weather pathways to toilets, soap bank. To ensure that schools share the accountability, the team encouraged them to participate financially also. As a result of intensive mobilization and programs, the school shared 30% of the cost (Rs. 31,500) of total construction work (Rs. 1,05,000).

Every day, the health minister **Kartiki** arrives at her school a little early and checks the condition of the compound. She has a roster of helpers; she puts them to their daily chores of cleaning and sweeping. 'Everyone in the school has to play their part', she says with confidence. She ensures that, throughout the day, they are kept clean and well maintained. The school has a dust bin which is used by everyone to collect waste. The sanitation part is being very well handled by the Swachha Minister- Hrishikesh Husale.

'If there is a problem with younger students for proper toilet usage and managing waste, I ask other members of child cabinet and my classmates to help them. Similarly, children who come to school unwashed, without shoes, with dirty finger-nails or hair in a mess, are gently asked to follow good personal hygiene practices. Parents are also being reached out to monitor the children's hygiene behaviour at home. In the beginning a challenge was being faced to source hygiene materials and to get dedicated funds for this purpose. With suggestion from MSK team, the students started contributing towards a fund that can exclusively be used for replenishments of soap, brushes and cleaning materials. Every student contributes to the funds Rs. 300 annually, collected by the Minister of Finance Samyak Ingle followed by the Headmaster.

'Construction is easy, but behavioural change is not', shares the principle. He is thankful to the support from the FINISH-ITC MSK team to guiding the school through the concept of 'My School My Responsibility' where everyone has a stake and opportunity in a brighter future.



Kartiki & Other Bal Cabinet Ministers



Minister of Health Kartiki demonstrating the handwashing steps



Hand Wash Station and Pavement Block Pathway to Toilet