

Villagers in the millennium city rise to the sanitation challenge

By Ashok Dash

Dhana village, Faruknagar tehsil of Gurugram district, Haryana, is one of five villages Sehgal Foundation and Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. are collaborating with on a project called “*Swacchta hai to swaasthya hai*” (cleanliness brings health). Dhana is primarily inhabited by the *Jat* community who strongly adhere to their customs and traditions. Bringing together and mobilizing this community for a cleanliness drive in their village was challenging, but progress is being made. Community engagement in sanitation issues is transforming challenges into opportunities.

Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. had helped build sanitation infrastructures but the community was not willing to maintain them. So Sehgal Foundation carried out sanitation campaigns to sensitize and mobilize the community and engage them in village development so that the cleanliness efforts in the village could be sustained.

At first, villagers said, “Cleaning the village is not required, it will not render any result, and we do not have time for this activity!”

The team organized a door-to-door campaign to enrol villagers in sanitation activities. They tried to convince people to participate in meetings to discuss cleanliness and sanitation. When community members did not show up for the meetings, the team felt disheartened, but they did not give up. They continued working with renewed enthusiasm to partner with the community.



The team organized meetings for the convenience of community members, created ward-level committees, and held interactive sessions with these committees. They conducted sessions on sanitation with schoolchildren and vendors in the village, organized International Women’s Day with a

sanitation theme, and conducted informative sessions on health-related hazards due to poor sanitation. Their persistence paid off as the villagers gradually started understanding the need for sanitation. They eventually joined together on their own and organized a sanitation drive in their village.

Initially, women had not stepped out to participate in these events as they were reluctant to enter the public sphere, so Sehgal Foundation’s women team

members held separate sessions with women. As a result, women came forward, geared-up with brooms, gloves, and masks, to clean their village. Gathering momentum, they joined together to clean a huge garbage dump in the village.



Inspired and encouraged by working in this village, the foundation team planned similar campaigns in Baliana village in Rohtak and three villages of Gurugram: Baas Hariya, Bas Kushala, and Kasan. The community paved their own way in making their villages clean and created a slogan "*Hum sab ne thana hai, gaon swacch banana hai!*" (Together we have vowed to make our village clean!).

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