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Swachh Gaon Kalwari: Community Engagement for a Clean Village

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“Improving sanitation facilities and making them sustainable means changing behaviour. Helping people to understand the importance of toilets can inspire them to invest their time and resources in upgrading these facilities and taking care of them. The benefits of a toilet are not only health-related—the pride, dignity and convenience that they bring are usually more important in convincing people to use them.”

According to the 2011 Census report, less than half of the Indian homes have toilets. The 2012 National Sample Survey Office records reinforce this abysmal state of sanitation in India, reporting that only 32 per cent of rural households in India have toilets. There are glaring exceptions as well; for example, in Kalwari village of the Tauru block in Nuh (erstwhile Mewat) district of Haryana, the villagers have worked hard to create sustainable sanitation practices. Almost 90 per cent of the Kalwari households have constructed toilets, and the village has almost no open defecation. The village has proper drainage and garbage disposal systems for waste management. The residents of Kalwari have taken great strides toward their goal of leading healthy and dignified lives by achieving these sanitation successes. This village, just like thousands of other villages in India, once struggled with the sanitation issue but now serves as an example of how to create *swachh gaons* (clean villages).

KALWARI GAON

The village of Kalwari, as per the 2011 Census, has 519 resident families with a population of 2,751 (1,462 men and 1,289 women). The village is located on the border of Nuh and Gurugram (erstwhile Gurgaon) districts, 24 km north of the district headquarters in Nuh block and 8 km from the Tauru block headquarters. Kalwari has four *anganwadi* centres and two government schools. The overall literacy rate of the village is 78.38 per cent, 89.31 per cent (men) and 65.99 per cent (women). Agriculture is the primary occupation in the village. The majority of young people are keen to work with the government.

A study of Kalwari was undertaken in January 2016 by the Sehgal Foundation. The non-profit organization's work in Nuh district since 1999 has focussed on water management, agricultural development and promoting good rural governance. Through its 'Good Rural Governance'

programme, the Sehgal Foundation has used a community-led, interactive approach to create conditions for a more active civic engagement among poor rural citizens and to strengthen the capacities of the local government to be more accountable and effective. With this approach in mind, the methodology followed in this study of change in Kalwari, where the Sehgal Foundation has been working for approximately five years, included (i) discussions with several social groups and village-level institutions (ii) interviews with key community leaders, the *sarpanch*, and other *panchayat* members, and teachers, and (iii) a 'transect walk' of the village with the community leaders.

THE STATUS OF SANITATION IN KALWARI

Sustainability through community engagement has become a mantra for *Swachh Gaon* in recent years, after the earlier top-led and construction-oriented attempts to improve sanitation failed to motivate the people. Factors critical for sustained sanitation-behaviour changes include the involvement of communities and public institutions and increased public awareness about the benefits of changing sanitation-behaviour. This study focusses on the construction of sanitation facilities, and on their maintenance and usage by the community. Checks on sanitation

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facilities examined personal hygiene, use of functional toilets, availability of water and proper waste management. The research team conducted the checks at the following locations in Kalwari: (1) individual households, (2) *anganwadi* centres and (3) schools.

INDIVIDUAL HOUSEHOLD SANITATION

Good personal and food hygiene, the consumption of safe drinking water, and the proper disposal of human excreta are the major factors that can improve the quality of individual household-level sanitation.

The drive for the construction of individual household latrines in Kalwari began with the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) that was launched in 1999. Although many toilets were constructed under TSC, their use remained limited due to lack of public awareness about the ill-effects of open defecation. Community meetings and training programmes by village-level institutions such as the *gram panchayat* (village council) and the Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee, and awareness-generation programmes on radio and television inspired the villagers to bring about change. As a result, toilet construction in the village increased significantly. Ninety per cent of households built new toilets under the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign) in 2012–13, and the villagers gradually incorporated hygienic practices into their daily lives. They now regularly wash their hands before cooking, eating and after using the toilet. Cooked food is usually kept covered, and kitchen sheds are regularly cleaned after meal preparation. Most of the single-pit toilets, as was evident in the transect walk, are cleaned regularly and the water

supply is supplemented with the use of submersible water pumps. Scavenging work, such as the removal of human waste from pit latrines, is systematically carried out with the help of a machine.

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poster display on 'good hygiene practices'. Children in another centre said that, in addition to general pre-school education, the *anganwadi* worker, sometimes, gives them lessons on hygienic practices.

SCHOOL SANITATION

The two government schools of Kalwari have separate toilets for boys, girls, people with disabilities and the staff. The toilets are regularly used by the students as well as the teachers. The sweeper appointed by the school authorities maintains the toilets and the overall school campus. The cooks maintain the kitchen where they prepare the mid-day meals. The schools have clean water tanks, hand pumps and submersible water pumps. During the school visit, students were seen washing their hands and plates before collecting their mid-day meals. Wall paintings and posters on hygienic practices were not found in the schools, but the students said that the Physical Training teacher checks their nails, dress and general cleanliness every day before school. The teachers interact periodically with the students and discuss the importance of hygiene and the connection between hygienic practices and physical fitness.

ANGANWADI SANITATION

Two of the four *anganwadi* centres in Kalwari are located on school campuses. An *anganwadi* 'worker' is in charge of the centre's activities and an *anganwadi* 'helper' is responsible for the overall cleanliness of the centre. The helper cleans the rooms, the kitchen area and the toilets. Two centres share the school toilets and water supply. The centres outside the school campus have access to water from hand-pumps that the *gram panchayat* has installed nearby. One of the *anganwadi* centres had a

AVAILABILITY OF WATER

Regular availability of water for drinking and other daily use is a key indicator of sustainable sanitation. In the village of Kalwari, the *gram panchayat* had 25 hand-pumps installed for the supply of safe drinking water. In addition, seven government water supply connections were installed by the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) to maintain an adequate supply of water in the village. During the transect walk, researchers noted that approximately 40 per cent of the households had submersible water pumps to ensure a reliable water supply.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

A suitable waste management system is essential for good health and dignified living. In Kalwari, solid waste, including animal waste, at the household and community levels, is disposed of in individual pits located outside the village. This waste is converted into compost and used later in their agricultural fields. Households that do not use the waste compost can sell it. Liquid waste from households and the rest of the village flows through concrete drains to a common water body. The village submitted a proposal to build a water treatment plant to process the liquid waste, which PHED is considering. In 2014, the *gram panchayat* selected a space about 500 m away from the village as a waste disposal complex for solid waste. The villagers expect it to be functional in 2016. Due to the solid and liquid waste management systems

in place, the village roads, seen during the walk, were dry and free of debris. Two sweepers recruited by the *gram panchayat* maintain the overall cleanliness of the village roads and drains.

MAKING OF THE SWACHH GAON KALWARI

The Bellagio Principles for Sustainable Sanitation, endorsed by the members of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council during its 5th Global Forum in November 2000, have identified the main cornerstones of sustainable sanitation as human dignity, quality of life, and environmental security at the household level; participation of all stakeholders, especially the consumers and providers of services in decision-making; and consideration of waste as a resource and its holistic management. Using this framework for the review of Kalwari proved to be exemplary. Over an approximate five-year period, the villagers came to a profound understanding of the ill-effects of poor sanitation practices and how to bring about change. Kalwari became a *Swachh Gaon* due to peer influence on behaviour change as well as the pro-active role adopted by government functionaries at the village, block, and district levels.

The following sections examine each of these factors and their roles in influencing the sanitation of Kalwari.

VILLAGE-LEVEL INSTITUTIONS LED FROM THE FRONT

Kalwari's village-level institutions played a pivotal role in improving the status of hygiene and sanitation. The *gram panchayat*, the School Management Committee, and the

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Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNC) members worked together to achieve a clean village.

The *gram panchayat* mobilized government funds. The *sarpanch* and other Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) members, during their 2010–2015 tenure, utilized all the available

funds allocated under the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan, and by PHED and other government departments to improve sanitation in Kalwari. The *gram panchayat* not only encouraged the construction of toilets at the household level but also took an active part in the disbursement of Rs 18 lakhs to the beneficiaries (Rs 4,600 for each individual household). The *panchayat* formed a monitoring committee comprising PRI members, community leaders and ex-army men, who supervised the construction of toilets before disbursing the funds. The *gram panchayat* arranged for the installation of water storage tanks in schools, two new government water supply connections, and approximately 20 hand-pumps in the village.

The *sarpanch* and other *panchayat* members played an active role in keeping the village clean. The *gram panchayat* recruited two sweepers and provided them with the basic equipment to maintain the general cleanliness of the village on a daily basis. The *gram panchayat* also took the initiative to construct roads and drains, ensuring that they were cleaned at regular intervals, and to install solar lights in the streets of the village to improve travel safety after dark. The *gram panchayat* spread awareness about the benefits of improved sanitation and hygiene practices through wall paintings and community meetings.

The *gram sabha* also made meaningful contributions by providing an open platform to the *gram panchayat* members and communities to discuss issues of sanitation and necessary follow-up. Based on the outcome of those discussions, the *gram panchayat* appealed for funds from the relevant government departments and undertook action, utilizing the available funds.

The School Management Committee members perform the important role of monitoring the cleanliness of school campuses. They regularly oversee the cleanliness of the toilets and kitchens in particular, and they check the quality of the mid-day meals from time to time. In case students fail to come to school in clean uniforms, the committee members play a vital role in discussing these issues with the respective teachers and the parents. Sunita Devi, a member in Kalwari, shared that the meetings with the teachers serve as a useful platform to discuss issues of sanitation and creating a healthy environment.

Members of the VHSNC have also played a critical role in improving sanitation practices in the village. They conduct awareness-generation meetings with small groups of villagers, including marginalized people such as women, young girls and children. Committee members discuss hygiene practices, both at the personal and the household levels, children's health and vaccinations, pregnant women's health, and cleanliness of toilets and kitchens. In collaboration with the *gram panchayat*, the committee used Rs 10,000 as an annual grant to each VHSNC by the Health Department for constructing drains, and spraying the area, from time to time, to keep the village free of flies and mosquitoes.

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POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT FOLLOWING GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND MONITORING

Regular monitoring by government functionaries works both as a check on the performance of Village-level Institutions and a motivation

to execute responsibilities effectively. Representatives from the office of the Additional Deputy Commissioner periodically visit Kalwari to supervise the sanitation status. During group discussions, villagers shared that on one recent occasion, the Additional Deputy Commissioner paid a surprise visit at 5:00 a.m. to Kalwari to check whether anyone was found defecating in the open. Representatives of PHED check the quality of water once or twice a year. Representatives from the Health Department conduct health check-ups of school children once a quarter, approximately. The *gram prerak* (village motivator), in charge of the Swachh Bharat Mission at the block level, often visits the village to check the overall cleanliness, waste management, and the conditions of roads, school and *anganwadi* sanitation, as well as household latrines. Such regular monitoring by officers from different government departments ensures compliance by villagers and also deters unscrupulous elements from littering and draining household water into the streets.

COMMUNITIES SHOW WILLINGNESS TO ADOPT CHANGES

Changes in the collective behaviour of the community in Kalwari have created a better and healthier environment. Villagers have acted on the awareness they gained about the benefits of proper hygiene and sanitation.

Construction of toilets is sometimes easier than changing habits and getting villagers

to use the toilets for what it is meant. Toilets are often used as store rooms or cow sheds. However, the villagers of Kalwari have willingly conformed to the desired behaviour in toilet use and improved personal hygiene, maintenance and cleanliness of households, schools, *anganwadi* centres and the village, thereby making their village a *Swachh Gaon*.

This behavioural change in Kalwari can be attributed to increased levels of awareness and education among the villagers. Knowledge and information about the ill-effects of living in a filthy environment and how it leads to diseases and untimely deaths had a strong psychological impact on the villagers. Peer influence also worked as a binding force in this respect. Sehgal Foundation's '*Good Governance Now!*' initiative in Village Leadership School sessions provided selected community leaders (named as *Sushasan* Champions) with information about the ill-effects of poor sanitation practices and made them aware of the benefits of good hygiene habits. These champions understood the provisions under the Swachh Bharat Mission. Thus, greater citizen participation and public awareness have led to effective implementation of the sanitation programmes of the government.

CRITICAL ROLE OF WOMEN'S INFLUENCE

Women and girls are traditionally responsible for domestic water supply, sanitation and maintaining a hygienic environment in village homes. As managers at the household level, women also have a higher stake in the improvement of the community water and sanitation services and in sustaining facilities.

The collective action in Kalwari toward sustainable sanitation can be replicated in other villages. The partnerships between communities, village-level institutions, government departments and non-profit organizations led to the creation of a Swachh Gaon in Kalwari, over a period of five years.

Rajbala's (VHSNC member in Kalwari) observation in this regard is apt. She said that the increase in awareness levels with greater dissemination of knowledge about good hygiene practices among women in Kalwari has changed the face of sanitation and created a healthy environment across households. Meetings of the VHSNC as well as the Village Leadership School sessions of the 'Good Governance

Now!' initiative have mobilized women by stressing on the importance of good hygiene habits, which has gradually influenced their thinking. Slowly, the villagers have stopped the age-old poor sanitation habits and have started accepting the changes. They have ceased open defecation, have begun regular cleaning of toilets and kitchens, wash their hands, use soaps, and dispose off garbage properly. Although stereotypical gender roles continue in the village, some of the *Sushasan* Champions mentioned in the group discussion that even male members of their families now take an active part in maintaining cleanliness.

CONCLUSION

The collective action in Kalwari toward sustainable sanitation can be replicated in other villages. Partnerships among communities, village-level institutions, government departments and non-profit organizations led to the creation of a *Swachh Gaon* in Kalwari, over a period of five years. The election of an informed, public-spirited *sarpanch* and good Ward Members created an environment in which the elected representatives were aware of their roles and responsibilities and were better able to plan for the development and to use the development funds in their village.

Awareness-generation by the *gram panchayat* and the Sehgal Foundation, and a campaign by school children spread the message of sanitation to every family in the village. Moreover, the School Management Committee members, teachers, *anganwadi* workers and women members of the VHSNC carried out intensive awareness-generation drives among women and children, which led to behavioural changes in sanitation practices. The district administration played a significant role by monitoring sanitation projects and releasing funds on time.

Voluntary efforts to bring change in villages in India go waste unless they are accompanied by strict monitoring and fear of imposition of penalties by village institutions. In Kalwari,

the coordinated, pro-active role of the *gram panchayat*, community monitoring mechanisms and government officers' regular visits ensured village compliance with sanitation norms. Kalwari's proximity to Gurugram, the financial and industrial hub of Haryana, the residents' high literacy rate (79 per cent) and the community leadership groups created as part of the Sehgal Foundation training programmes promoted social capital, leading to fast acceptance and sustainability of sanitary practices. However, even without the favourable conditions of Kalwari, other villages may strive for replication of *Swachh Gaon* across India, if the communities and the village institutions act on a joint pledge to improve sanitation practices.

The references in the article are available at newsreach@pradan.net