

1,000 sanitation ambassadors crusade for clean villages

By Debika Goswami

Lack of access to sanitation is prevalent in both urban and rural India. The Census 2011 report disclosed that more than half of the country's population defecates in the open. The 2017 data of Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation shows that almost 60 percent of the population have access to toilets, up from 45 percent in 2015 (NSS).

To address rural sanitation in India, Sehgal Foundation has been creating a pool of 1,000 *swachhta senanis* (sanitation ambassadors) in district Nuh, Haryana, to become action-oriented leaders in the movement toward *swach gaons* (clean villages). These sanitation ambassadors are chosen from among more than 10,000 people trained under Sehgal Foundation's good rural governance initiative since 2008. *Gram panchayats* (village councils) and the government can utilize these ambassadors to mobilize the community toward cleanliness and waste management.

Keeping the idea of creating clean and healthy villages at its core, the primary rationale behind this initiative is to mobilize villagers into realizing one of India's most ambitious and important missions—Clean India by 2019, which is critical to the well-being of India's population. About 50 field staff members from Sehgal Foundation have assumed a leadership role in this initiative and taken up the challenge to develop a clean Nuh district in Haryana.

Primary activities under this initiative include campaigns, community meetings, toilet construction, and awareness sessions. So far, 59 campaigns and rallies, 123 community meetings and 27 school campaigns have been conducted; and 5069 toilets have been constructed.

Glimpses from the grassroots in Nuh



"When I learnt about the Swachh Bharat Mission of Government of India in the training session of village leadership school conducted by Sehgal Foundation, only 30-40 percent households of my village had constructed toilets. In order to motivate fellow villagers, I joined hands with the panchayat and other sanitation ambassadors to organize rallies and door-to-door campaigns. As a result of our efforts, now almost 90 percent of households have constructed toilets and are also keen to use them."~ Jakir, sanitation ambassador of Ghida village, Punhana block.



Sanjay Kumar, Fakruddin, Kashmiri, and 12 other villagers volunteered to be sanitation ambassadors in Dhadoli village of Nagina block. Their consistent efforts, rallies, and campaigns influenced the thought process of fellow villagers, following which 80-90 percent of the village households began constructing toilets. Kashmiri Devi says, "It gives me immense pleasure and satisfaction that I have been a part of this cleanliness drive in my village. I believe that open defecation needs to be stopped with immediate effect and no further delay."



In Notki village of Nagina block, sanitation ambassadors mobilized the community for a sanitation drive that went on for four days with 72 villagers participating. Forty trolleys of waste and garbage were removed from village streets. Temporary drainage systems were created at different points in the village to reduce wastewater logging, and approximately Rs. 80,000 was raised in kind. Notki's filthy streets were made clean within two months.



As a result of the sanitation ambassadors' efforts, 35 toilets were constructed in Ranika village of Nuh block. The ambassadors motivated people to construct toilets, and promoted behavior changes in individuals and families so that they would develop the habit of using toilets and keeping them functional. Rallies, regular meetings with the community members, door-to-door household campaigns, school campaigns, etc., were conducted at regular intervals in the village to usher in behavior changes in adult villagers and schoolchildren.