

THE STORY OF TERAHALPATNA

Terahalpatna is a sleepy village in Balanga gram panchayat under Nimapara block of Puri district. The small village comprises 61 households; most of the families live below the poverty line. As per 2001 census, the population of the village is 410. Although the village is situated only five kilometer away from Satasankha on the Bhubaneswar-Puri national highway, it has not witnessed rapid change. Only a couple of years ago, most of the villagers were still ignorant of the basic ideas of health and sanitation. It was a familiar sight to find men, women and children sitting behind the bushes, on riverbanks and on roadside in mornings and evenings, answering the call of nature. In the process, they polluted the water of river Bhargavi. The village ponds and other water bodies were dirty. There was hardly any one, who bothered to clean the sources of drinking water. Needless to say, water-borne diseases were common among the villagers.

The people of the village led a community life. They have a *kotha ghara* and a temple in the village. Two self-help groups (SHGs) formed earlier concentrated on mobilizing savings. However, it never occurred to people that the water they drink was not free from contamination. Never did anyone urge them to give up open defecation and use toilets.

In September 2003, the Society for Social Unity and Development (SSUD) with support from Water Aid, Orissa implemented a project called Integrated Water and Sanitation Promotion (IWSHP) to bring about a change in the attitude of people towards personal hygiene and sanitation. A conscious attempt was made to empower them, especially women, who usually shoulder the responsibility of fetching water for the entire family, look after the aged and the sick, and take care of the cleanliness of the house. The services of the SHGs were utilized to explain to people how sanitation could become a way of life. It was hoped that they, in turn, would motivate their family members to adhere to good sanitary practices.



Villagers discussing sanitation problem

An attempt was made to involve the community in the campaign. Meetings of the Village Water and Sanitation Committee were held regularly. Other groups such as students, teachers, parents, youth groups also met and discussed how they could improve their surrounding. The SSUD staff were sent to a model sanitation village at Trichi, Tamil Nadu to see for themselves how community empowerment has led to the creation of a healthy environment.

Once the villagers were motivated, things became easy. People constructed their household toilets and started using them. Water Aid India had given a sum of Rs 10, 000/-, to the village committee, which was used as a revolving fund. The poor and the needy could borrow money, interest free, from this fund for the purpose of constructing household toilets. At the end of the project in August 2004, the achievements were quite spectacular.

- At least one low-cost latrine was set up in every household and seven households have constructed super-structures.
- Open defecation has stopped altogether and everyone in the village uses a sanitary latrine.
- Mothers safely dispose of their children's faeces.
- People have acquired the habit of disposing of solid and liquid waste.

