

## COMING TOGETHER



*Dr. Mona Sharma*

It all started more than ten years ago. I was the Sub-Collector of Chatrapur then. While working in close association with the community, members of the panchayati raj institutions and

volunteers of non-governmental organizations for the spread of literacy among the illiterates under the Total Literacy Campaign, I had noticed the eagerness of people to improve the sanitary condition in rural areas. An awareness was gradually building up, I distinctly remember.

Years later, while working in Sundargarh district, I marked the same enthusiasm among the people of Bonei subdivision. In an orientation workshop the participants showed interest in low-cost sanitary latrines, which formed a part of the houses build under Indira Awas Yojana. The programme had generated so much interest in them that they did not mind braving the summer heat to participate in the workshop.

The awareness, which was gradually building up in rural Orissa, in the process of implementation of Total Literacy Campaign and in the construction of houses under Indira Awas Yojana, has taken the shape of mass movement. Orissa State Water and Sanitation Mission, now spearheads this campaign. ICDS functionaries, members of panchayati raj institutions, self help groups and non-governmental organizations have come together in one platform to work towards reducing the incidence of water-borne diseases, undernutrition and infant mortality.

Ten active SHGs are being selected in each district to be associated in the Total Sanitation Campaign. The members of these groups will be encouraged to set up Sanitary Marts. The exercise has been completed in 13 districts and is nearing completion in the remaining 17 districts. In collaboration with UNDP, training in masonry work has been given to 279 women in Khurda, Malkangiri, Boudh, Nuapada, Bhadrak and Puri districts. The programme will be extended to 10 districts in the next phase.

The message of Hon'ble Chief Minister to the SHG members urging them to actively associate themselves with the Total Sanitation Campaign in their villages was read out to them by the Anganwadi workers in October' 2005. The members have been advised to install sanitary latrines in their households to set a model for other village women. In the 'Rural Artisan Meet' organised on the occasion of International Day for the Disabled, on December 1, 2005, different low-cost models of sanitary latrines were displayed.

However, bringing about a behavioural change by changing the mindset of people is no easy task. People's reluctance to change their mode of living poses a serious challenge to the task of 'building a cleaner Orissa'. It is really difficult to motivate people, particularly those living in our countryside, to give up their age-old practice and make sanitation a matter of habit. The officials and volunteers working under different programmes are coming together and lending support to the Mission. A beginning has been made. The day is not far off when the dream of building a cleaner Orissa will be a reality.

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