

Salima Pathan has been working with SSP as an Arogya Sakhi since 2019, where she focuses her efforts on improving women's health and nutrition in her village. Situated in the drought prone Marathwada region, the Nila village where Salima tai works, used to face severe water shortages. It depended on private water tankers to meet their household needs during the summer months. A large part of the community consists of poor daily wage labourers who are engaged in local brick kilns and sugarcane cutting activities.

Mobilizing the community for WASH initiatives

With the support and guidance of SSP, Salima tai began her journey as an Arogya Sakhi by conducting household surveys and holding dialogues with women in the community. Through this, they were able to identify common issues that women in the community faced and come up with sustainable solutions.



Water scarcity had been a major issue that women were particularly sensitive to, since they were in charge of most household water-related activities. Through dialogues and discussions, women also identified stagnating water in potholes and clogged drainage channels in the village as a serious problem, leading to dirty water overflowing onto the roads and causing water-borne illnesses.

In addition to activities promoting kitchen gardening, organic farming, livelihoods diversification and convergence with government schemes, Salima tai worked with the Gram Panchayat to mobilize community members and carried out programs to raise awareness on issues related to water, sanitation and hygiene. For example, though community toilets were constructed, their use had remained limited.



The Impact and Change

As mentioned above, Salima tai conducted awareness raising activities to promote the use of toilets in the village, and reduce open defecation. Through her efforts, in partnership with other village leaders, today most of the women use the community toilets and the instances of open defecation have reduced drastically. The community is now working towards the goal of becoming an open defecation free village in the near future.

Given the situation of water scarcity, under Salima tai's guidance, the women organized themselves to find a solution. Women in the community worked with the Gram Panchayat and developed a plan for water storage and easy accessibility by constructing taps near every household. Through a yearly contribution of Rs. 2500, the community members are managing this process on their own. They have covered over 50% of the village, drastically reducing the dependence on tankers for water supply. Salima tai says that earlier, every household had to spend Rs.4000 annually to get water from private tankers, which has significantly reduced to a voluntary Rs.2500 per household now.

Through dialogues and discussions, women advocated with the Gram Panchayat for better hygiene and sanitation in the village. Together, women carried out cleaning of the drainage channels in the village to reduce flooding. They even constructed soak pits for ground water harvesting in a program supported by SSP. Working with the Gram Panchayat, Salima tai and the community developed a plan to conduct weekly cleanliness drives in the village. This voluntary initiative continues even today, and is attended on a rotating basis by women from the organized SHGs, largely thanks to the mobilization by Salima tai.

Salima tai says that it took a while to change the mindset of people and convince them of the benefits of working together to improve the village through voluntary activities. Today, the situation in the village is completely different to what it was a few years back., This is largely due to the transformation of women and community members through their capacity building and knowledge that they have gained from dedicated front-line workers. We can be proud of the transformation that Salima tai has brought to the village.

