In Devarampadu, consistent efforts towards awareness generation have helped to sustain Open Defecation Free (ODF). Change begins at home. In this village, change began at every single household and the results ensured a clean ODF village. “Nothing is difficult if everyone resolves,” this is unanimously agreed and practiced in the village.

In a community dominated by OCs and OBCs and largely dependent on tobacco cultivation for a living, development of the village was a priority. People in this village were observed to be quite responsible towards the village and its welfare. Sanitation was not an alien concept to some residents who were already owning a toilet and using it.

Devarampadu was one of the chosen Gram Panchayat (GP) by the Mandal-level officials during the launch of SBM for the initial target to make villages ODF. The first meeting in this direction was conducted in the presence of the District Collector on the theme of “Improving Sanitation” and was attended by the Sarpanch and field assistants. The need for construction and utilization of toilets was explained to the members in addition to presenting them with IEC material, short films and movies on the importance of sanitation to further motivate the village-level functionaries. The content was extremely influential in motivating the GP members. “It was very thought provoking and influential. They showed how a cat digs a hole and covers up after it does its business. It is only humans who do not
care about their surroundings and environment. The effects of lack of sanitation on health and how women are the major sufferers owing to the lack of toilets were vividly explained,” a GP team member who was highly motivated recalled. This meeting was highly effective in bringing everyone on board to strive for an ODF village with the team and the Mandal Development Officer took a step forward in the process.

A village-level meeting followed the Mandal level meeting and the team could manage to convince the villagers who immediately agreed for the construction of toilets.

The process started with an individual household visit emphasizing on the importance of sanitation and the need for toilets. When the community expressed their concerns on the construction of toilets under Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), the GP team assured them and explained clearly about the scheme and the provisions. The GP team could successfully provoke a thought amongst the community members on the issues of sanitation.

The GP team undertook a survey to help identify the households without toilets and the number came up to 24 households which did not own a toilet. The GP members conducted door to door campaign for 24 households on toilet construction. The construction started, and a community member happy on incentive came up at the right time and helped them in constructing the toilets.

“Of Course, We Faced Issues”…

Devarampadu is no exception when it comes to facing some problems in the process of achieving ODF. “Vaastu” was one concern the GP team encountered while convincing people for constructing a toilet. The priests intervened with their timely advice and helped resolve these matters, thereby contributing their bit towards achieving sanitation. Another major factor that contributed was the regular visits undertaken by the GP team and the MDO twice a week to focus on the work and for any issues that might need immediate redressal.

“Sanitation work does not end at constructing toilets, actual sanitation is achieved when people start using them,” believes a field assistant of Devarampadu. The GP team with the help and support from the MDO, worked on this promise of ensuring that everyone uses toilets and worked on motivational activities to ensure the same. The community was also told about how the village will not only receive the title of ODF but will also stand a chance to receive more funds from the government towards any developmental activities in the village. This played a major role in absolute unity and motivation for the entire village for working towards ODF.

The senior citizens of the village did not adjust with new practice as they did not know how to use a toilet. “Earlier, we could take a walk, smoke and do our business, now we do not have such options. That does not mean I will oppose the change. Change is inevitable and I am ready to adapt to the newer processes for the development of the village. In fact, every one of us will do it and ensure a developed Devarampadu,” a 70-year-old man shared with us.

The mission doesn’t stop here; toilets are being constructed in Anganwadi centres and primary schools to ensure total sanitation in the village. There was a fund crunch. It was at that time when some funds were received as a part of the CSR scheme of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited with which the school toilet was completed.

Devarampadu is a good example to showcase that awareness is key. GP Sarpanch and the team focused completely on motivation. Not only was open defecation was eliminated through appropriate solutions to all the local challenges but utilisation could also be ensured.