“My uncle passed away and we performed his last rites today. We were carrying the deceased to our Christian cemetery and felt disgusted to note that even the pathway to our cemetery is used for open defecation” explained an agonised youth of Gurijepalli Gram Panchayat (GP), Guduru Mandal and Krishna district.

“Entire village population belongs to Schedule Caste and that too only one particular caste called ‘Mala’; about 15-20 youth in our village are well educated and work in private jobs in Vijayawada city. We don’t see any hope of getting these together and making things better in our village” – this is the essence of the lamentation of a youth group across an informal discussion with the RALU team members.

Gurijepalli village of Guduru Mandal is a small village with 130-135 households consisting of 515 population; and with 13 SHGs in the GP, it is an active community. There is an old temple near to the GP office and there are three churches across the village and most of the villagers follow Christianity.
The Problem...

Even if the Gram Panchayat comes forward to facilitate any process about the construction and usage of latrines, our people will not come forward to believe and participate – says the Sarpanch in despair during the interactions with the team. “We have some experiences like delayed releases, little coordination between Field Assistant of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme-MGNREGS (who does the measurement of the construction and certifies the stage of construction) and the RWSS functionaries like Assistant Engineer that has to sign on the Measurement Book (MB)” etc and that caused a disbelief and disinterest about the whole issue.”

‘Who will spend their hard earned money for starting the construction of latrines and wait for longer period like 3 months for release of payment?’ – questioned an annoyed woman SHG member. She also shared that during the TSC phase (Total Sanitation Campaign- which is the earlier title of Swachh Bharat Mission), 110 latrines were sanctioned in the village and only 8 were built. The payment of those built is still pending – conveyed a community member.

In an effort to build trust, the individual’s case was taken up by the visiting team and the details were tracked from the district level Management Information System (MIS) by the HRD Consultant of District Water & Sanitation Committee, Krishna district. When tracked, the bank account given by the community member was found to be inactive (not in operation).

Water supply is another big issue in the village. An open well, out of which the water is fetched by village people, is also not a potable source. The village has no proper drinking water source -the Village tank (Cheruvu) is not useful as it is contaminated with cattle, human open defecation and shrubs.

Way Forward...

Thus, there is a need to re-build the trust and attempt confidence building measures in the village. Though the delays in payments are due to the individual’s details being not provided properly, there is an overarching disbelief in the Government system.

Hence a problem-solving approach has to be adopted by functionaries in a participatory manner, making the community understand the processes that happens in the system of approvals, payments etc. Only when the community is explained the gaps in the process (that may be from SBM or people themselves), it would be possible to get the work on track – opined the members in open-ended discussions.

The village is not listed for the target GPs that are aimed to make Open defecation free in the current year. We approach GPs and communities that are vibrant and do activities like community mobilisation, processing approvals, etc., that follow a regular visit by the DWSC consultants and AE for smooth implementation of SBM – shared the RWSS functionaries.

It is also very usual that there are group dynamics among the community and where one group doesn’t cooperate when the other group takes the lead. “Even if we attempt to borrow initial investment from the Women SHGs, they are not coming forward due to trust-deficit”– said the Panchayat Secretary and Village Organisation Leader.

Therefore, villages like Gurijepalli require a multi-pronged approach for re-building confidence among the people, addressing existing concerns and building on the community response.

The incentive given in SBM is still viewed my many as a subsidy and the case with Gurijepalli is the same. Citizens are not willing to spend money on construction due to lack of trust on governmental fund flow. Further group dynamics of various communities is one other barrier to realising the dream of complete sanitation.