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## SUCCESS STORY

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### A Panchayat that Puts the City to Shame

BHAVDEEP KANG

The residents of Baghuwar have reason to smile. This little village in central Madhya Pradesh is proud of its hygiene and sanitation. Every family has access to a *pucca* indoor, water-economical toilet. '100 per cent open-air toilet-free village' proclaims a sign at the panchayat ghar. "No woman has to suffer the indignity of an open-air toilet," says R.S. Naroliya, a resident.

The 100 per cent toilet coverage was achieved under the government's Total Sanitation Campaign - offering a heavy subsidy on individual household latrine units and implemented through the zilla panchayat. The toilets are "green" or water economical - just two litres per flush. In fact, the panchayat is now considering experimenting with the new one-litre toilets.

With every building connected to the underground sewerage system, the village is a hostile environment for mosquitoes and flies. No open drains, standing water or garbage heaps are to be found. The wide, cemented, tree-lined roads are clutter-free. Even the 'dhobi ghaat' (where the clothes are washed) has been constructed in a manner that avoids water collecting in fetid pools.

Organic waste finds its way to NADEP compost pits, while plastics and other non-biodegradable matter is collected on a house-to-house basis, with the garbage finally being loaded on a tractor and taken away to be incinerated.

What is truly impressive is that all of this has been accomplished by the village itself. No NGO or UN body or government agency can take credit for what district officials have dubbed the 'Baghuwar Model of Development'. Reiterates Surendra Singh, a member of the panchayat, "There has been no outside intervention at all."

Thanks to the extremely clean, green environment, the village is virtually disease free. Not one case of chikungunya or malaria has been recorded here in three years, although the village falls in an area known for the widespread incidence of mosquito-borne diseases.

Geeta Bastiani, ANM (auxiliary nurse midwife), says she has been posted in and around Baghuwar for the last 19 years. "There have been many changes in that time. General cleanliness has ensured that there is a very low incidence of disease. Vaccination coverage is 100 per cent and malnutrition is nil. The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) have been zero for several years now. There has been only one case of a woman giving birth at home but that too because she had given birth to her child so quickly that we could not get her to the hospital in time!"

The statistics back Bastiani's account. There has been zero incidence of infant and maternal mortality in the last three years, 100 per cent vaccination coverage and no Grade 3 and 4 malnutrition (in a state with the highest incidence of child malnutrition). Moreover, Baghuwar has a crime rate of zero and there is no sale of alcohol and tobacco here. According to Bastiani, it helps that there is no liquor vend and no sale of tobacco in the village. For women, the panchayat's refusal to condone either is a great relief.

And that's not all. In the long, long list of Baghuwar's

achievements. There is 100 per cent enrolment in schools here. With squeaky-clean classrooms and a flourishing garden, the school has a welcoming environment that facilitates learning. Attendance is compulsory for every child. If a child - girl or boy - plays truant for more than five days, the parents can expect a visit from the headmaster.

The village is justly proud of its walls. Free of graffiti, advertisements and tobacco stains, every square inch is devoted to useful information and Gandhian adages.

"Our government machinery functions differently in Baghuwar. We feel like we are part of the process here, part of a family. It is a credit to be posted here. You don't need to issue any show-cause notices or pull up anyone here. Everyone feels compelled to do his or her job because the community will not settle for less," says Sushil Kumar Goyal, who heads the block.

The feat of which Naroliya is most proud is its village watershed management programme. Through a check dam and reservoir across the dry bed of a *barsati* (rain-fed) river, the village has succeeded in raising the water table from 90 feet to 45 feet in just 10 years. All the farmers have benefitted, with the cost of irrigation having come down substantially. But despite increased access to water, the farmers of Baghuwar are turning to non-water intensive organic agriculture.

Development projects are not necessarily government-funded. What is sanctioned is faithfully utilised. If there's money left over, it may be diverted to other projects; if it falls short, as it did in the case of a new school building, everybody chips in.

"How much can the government do? We have to be self-reliant," says Naroliya. He points at the wall of the village *chaupal* (a place where discussions on the issues and problems of the day are held), which lists not just the rights but the constitutional duties of citizens. The *chaupal* is distinguished by a wall that has useful information (like the railway timetable as well as the water-harvesting system) for the benefit of all.

Baghuwar is a village of arches. Every community *basti* (cluster) is marked by an arch painted in the village's trademark sky blue-and-white. "When there is a wedding, visitors find their way easily," explains Bhai Sahib, the village elder. There are 17 castes in the village, but no recorded instance of conflict. The Dalit *basti*, with its cemented roads and underground sewerage, looks no different from the rest of the village. "The entire village pitched in to help build the temple here," says Naroliya. Now everybody together ensures that the temple is maintained in a pristine state.

Apart from absence of crime - the police *chawki* (post) was withdrawn two years ago owing to a lack of work - there have been very few civil suits as well. "The effort is to settle disputes at the panchayat level and we have been successful so far," observes Singh. A great deal of time, energy and expenses has been saved in the process.

The panchayat is never elected but appointed by consensus. No local body election has ever taken place in Baghuwar. "We have achieved only 40 per cent of what we want to do. There is much more on our agenda," says Naroliya. The economic and social empowerment of all women, a 100 per cent pass percentage in the Class X board examination (currently it is at 70 per cent) and more widespread organic farming are some of the targets that have been set.

(Women's Feature Service)