

Rural health improvement initiatives

Tags: Fishermen livelihood

Tribal development

Vasai



The marginalized tribal communities and fishermen residing in the Vasai taluka face significant challenges in accessing basic services, including water, sanitation, and healthcare facilities, primarily due to their geographic location. Moreover, Because of its geographical position, the Vasai taluka's marginalized tribal tribes and fishermen suffer major challenges in obtaining essential amenities including as water, sanitation, and healthcare facilities. Furthermore, these communities slip through the cracks of various government initiatives, where they face barriers that prevent active participation, which are frequently attributed to their adherence to traditional cultural practices and their marginalized status. The residents of these villages face substantial health and hygiene risks due to the absence of proper sanitation infrastructure and the limited availability of water resources.

AKAH's intervention

Since April 2017, the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat has been actively involved in improving access to adequate sanitation facilities and water supply in these areas through its Rural Health Improvement Program. The program's goal is to mobilize families from marginalized tribal groups to enhance their quality of life by developing a community-led integrated system for water management, sanitation, and health and hygiene promotion.

Specific case of the intervention in a neighbourhood

In the Poman block of Vasai taluka, Palghar district, specific villages namely *Divekarpada*, *Fanaspada*, and *Burudpada* have witnessed significant improvements in sanitation infrastructure. Individual household sanitation units have been constructed, benefitting the residents, while two school sanitation units with accompanying handwash stations have been established. Additionally, the implementation of rooftop rainwater harvesting structures has predominantly taken place on public buildings, effectively harnessing rainwater resources.

Awareness sessions, drives, and training focused on health, hygiene, community leadership, and environmental aspects have been conducted to ensure active participation of the community members. Furthermore, capacity-building efforts have been made through mason training, benefitting local masons in the construction of sanitation units. These comprehensive interventions have significantly contributed to the improvement of sanitation conditions, water security and hygiene behaviour.

Outcomes

To address the critical challenges of water scarcity and inadequate sanitation facilities, the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat in collaboration with Quantum, has taken proactive measures by implementing an innovative rainwater harvesting system. This system includes the installation of a filtration system attached to storage units along with improved water quality collected from rooftops.

The implementation of rainwater harvesting system has brought about significant and positive changes within the local village community. The availability of quality water has substantially improved, enabling the community to sustain its water supply until the end of May, fulfilling needs such as handwashing, drinking, and toilet-use purposes.

AKAH has executed a project targeting three hamlets in the Vasai Virar region, focusing on providing individual sanitation units to households and community schools. These units have been designed to be user-friendly, easy to maintain, and repair. Moreover, careful consideration has been given to ensure cultural appropriateness, incorporating local customs and beliefs to foster community acceptance and long-term sustainability. The agency has actively engaged the community in the construction process, promoting a sense of ownership and community involvement. Villagers have actively participated by assisting masons, helping with material shifting, and contributing to the construction of soak pits.

With the provision of improved sanitation facilities within households and schools' health and hygiene practices have witnessed notable improvements, leading to a reduction in waterborne diseases. Moreover, the availability of safe and hygienic sanitation environments has created conducive learning conditions within schools, further ensuring the overall well-being and development of the community.

AKAH has undertaken significant infrastructure development in the region, including the construction of six rainwater harvesting systems, 320 individual household sanitation units with 50 solar lanterns distributed among the community members, and two school sanitation units equipped with handwashing facilities. These interventions have successfully enhanced access to safe water and sanitation for more than 6,600 individuals residing in marginalized communities.

These implemented systems not only address immediate needs but also contribute to long-term water security and sustainability. By promoting natural groundwater recharge, these rainwater harvesting systems play a vital role in replenishing water resources over time.

The various interventions have been designed to ensure minimal maintenance requirements, allowing for sustained functionality and benefits to the communities. The successful implementation of these projects signifies a significant step towards improving the living conditions and well-being of marginalized populations.

SANITATION UNITS:

Beneficiary name: Bayju Vijay Govari

In the midst of our life in a hilly region near a reserve forest, we constantly encountered challenges stemming from the conflicts between humans and animals. Unfortunately, the recent incident where a leopard snatched our dear street dog served as a stark reminder of the risks we face daily.

Living with arthritis at the age of 57, even the most basic tasks, such as going to the toilet, became a formidable struggle for me. We didn't even have the means of seeing anything during the dark as there was no access to light. Carrying heavy buckets of water for our needs was not only physically exhausting but also mentally draining. Our only recourse was to venture into the forest behind the hills, a daunting prospect that filled us with fear and trepidation. The possibility of encountering wild animals or losing our way in the dense wilderness weighed heavily on our minds. But thanks to an intervention, we now have a dedicated sanitation unit right within the confines of our home. Solar lanterns were also provided for safety and security reasons. It has improved hygiene, saved time, and

brought peace of mind. Our family is healthier, and we are grateful for this positive change in our lives.

RAINWATER HARVESTING:

Beneficiary name: Ramakant Chavan

Our community faced numerous challenges in accessing water, especially during the months of March and April. We had to travel a considerable distance of 2 kilometers to a water stream near the Pada just to fetch water. This process was not only time-consuming but also physically exhausting. Sometimes, the water would accidentally spill from the bucket, leading to wastage.

The scarcity of water affected various aspects of our lives, including sanitation, drinking, farming, and our everyday activities. It was a constant struggle. However, everything changed when a rainwater harvesting system was installed in our community. This system revolutionized the way we accessed and utilized water.

The rainwater harvesting system ensured the efficient and responsible use of water, addressing our community's needs effectively. With the support of the gram panchayat and the active involvement of our community members, we developed a sense of ownership and pride in maintaining the system.

The success of the rainwater harvesting system serves as a testament to the significance of water security in communities like ours. It has brought about positive change, ensuring that we have a reliable and sustainable water source, even during challenging times. We are grateful for the improved quality of life and the newfound sense of resilience and unity that this system has brought to our community.

