



Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
Government of India



FRONTLINE

STORIES OF RESILIENCE

INDIA'S SANITATION CHAMPIONS



दुर्गा शंकर मिश्र
सचिव
Durga Shanker Mishra
Secretary



भारत सरकार
आवासन और शहरी कार्य मंत्रालय
निर्माण भवन, नई दिल्ली-110011
Government of India
Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
Nirman Bhawan, New Delhi-110011

Foreword

2nd October 2020 not only marks the 151st birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation but also the sixth anniversary of Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U). These six years have been nothing short of phenomenal with people across the spectrum joining the Jan Andolan and turning the vision of Hon^{ble} Prime Minister into reality.

While this people's movement is a result of the efforts of every single citizen, there is one group which has worked tirelessly on the ground to ensure Swachhata for India and its people. These are our frontline Swachhata soldiers, our sanitation workers whose hard work results in the clean and healthy cities that we take pride in today. While these sanitation workers have been silently shouldering the responsibility of Swachhata for decades, the present pandemic has brought their contribution to the front and centre. In fact, it would be no exaggeration to say that the situation could have been worse had it not been for these brave soldiers whose call of duty was stronger than the fear of the pandemic. SBM-U is focused on ensuring a life of dignified livelihood to our sanitation workers. Through our initiatives, we have been able to link over 5.5 lakh sanitation workers to social welfare schemes while over 84,000 informal waste pickers have been integrated into the mainstream.

It gives me great pleasure to launch the book, 'Frontline: Stories of Resilience of India's Sanitation Champions' put together by the National Faecal Sludge and Sewage Management (NFSM) Alliance who have been our partners in the sustainable sanitation journey. These 15 inspirational stories from across the country not only showcase the efforts of these individuals but are a testament to the innumerable Swachhata soldiers working on the frontlines of the urban sanitation value chain. It is equally pertinent that this document is being released on the birth anniversary of Mahatma who, throughout his life, espoused the values of equality and dignity for all. I am sure that these stories will serve to motivate each of us to work with greater determination as we steadfastly progress on the path of a 'Swachh', 'Sevasth' and 'Atmanirbhar' India.


(Durga Shanker Mishra)

New Delhi
September 30, 2020



**Sheetal
Kinnar**

Cuttack
ODISHA



**O
Laila**

Warangal
TELANGANA



**Mantu
Naik**

Dhenkanal
ODISHA



**P
Nagamani**

Warangal
TELANGANA



**Snehal
Bhosle**

Wai
MAHARASHTRA



**Tejaswini
Gaikwad**

Wai
MAHARASHTRA



**Reshma
Soni**

Jashpur
CHHATTISGARH



**Shobha
Yekhande**

Sinnar
MAHARASHTRA



**Banki
Rani
Swain**

Bhubaneswar
ODISHA



**M
Diviya**

Trichy
TAMIL NADU



Chithra

Trichy
TAMIL NADU



**S
Kamalam**

Trichy
TAMIL NADU



**Maya
Bai**

Ganj Basoda
MADHYA
PRADESH



**Suresh
Jena**

Dhenkanal
ODISHA



**Madhu
Singh**

Lucknow
UTTAR
PRADESH



As the global crisis owing to the COVID-19 pandemic looms, this book highlights the stories of resilient individuals who are making a difference on the front lines across the urban sanitation value chain. Each with a compelling tale and a unique identity, these individuals represent the human face of our country's efforts to ensure safe and sustainable sanitation for all. Against all the odds and exposure to risks, they continue to work hard for the safety of others. These are their stories.



LEADING THE WAY FOR EQUAL ACCESS TO SANITATION

**O
Laila**

**Warangal
TELANGANA**

“We are ostracised from society and always have difficulty in accessing even our basic needs. Beggary isn’t an option, not a dignified one. And we deserve dignity. There are many more barriers we will have to face, but it is nice to know that some people are helping us to overcome them. I wish to do the same for my community, as well.”

O Laila shoulders immense responsibility in her community in Warangal, Telangana. Despite her complicated past where her transgender identity has always been called into question, she chose to take centre-stage and champion the cause of the transgender community in the city. Laila had to leave her native village very early in life so that she could hold on to her sense of identity. An absolute model of resilience, she does not speak of the past. Instead, in the face of rejection, Laila chose to equip herself with education.

A post-graduate herself, she strongly believes in the power of education in shaping one’s future and has been influential in the education of transgender youth in the community. She believes that any job is, and should be a viable option for them which is the first step towards dignity. With her leadership skills and strong vision, she has been able to bring together a group of transgender people under the umbrella of an NGO called the Modern Awareness Society (MAS). Active since 2004, the organisation focuses on alleviating the problems faced by the transgender community and the urban poor. Today, with her efforts, there are about seven transgender Self-Help Groups in Warangal.

Her hard work has earned her recognition. The MAS has been awarded a contract for the operation and maintenance of a community toilet in Warangal by the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) in June 2020. This has been one of their most outstanding achievements on

their path for a sustainable livelihood and leading of dignified lives. She is also a member of the City Sanitation Task Force (CSTF) of Warangal. With this role, she has taken the opportunity to serve as a spokesperson for her community with the potential of addressing critical areas like the lack of access to dedicated toilets for the transgender community. She continues to leverage her membership and lend her voice to contribute to the sanitation decision-making by GWMC actively. She is also championing the cause for exclusive toilets for the community and exploring various livelihood options across the sanitation value chain for them.

➔ **Story source: Administrative Staff College of India**



AN ICONIC TRANSITION IN TRANSGENDER INCLUSIVITY

**Sheetal
Kinnar**

**Cuttack
ODISHA**

“The transgender community is from an informal sector, and most of the people earn their livelihood through begging at highway toll gates, trains and streets or through commercial sex. The pandemic and the lockdowns have made transgender people increasingly vulnerable as they are finding it difficult to make ends meet. We are incredibly fortunate that our engagement with the Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC) coincided with this challenging time, and we have a regular and assured source of income now.”

Sheetal was named Chandan at birth and was brought up as a male in a joint family in a village in Odisha’s Jagatsinghpur district. Having faced abuse, harassment, discrimination and isolation throughout her life, her sense of identity was always in question. At home, she lived like a man under house arrest, but in her community, she lived like a woman. This dual existence was becoming a burden.

She was introduced to the transgender community in 2005 by her guru when she returned from Punjab- where her family had sent her to work with her brothers, who tortured her there. With support from this group, she changed her name from Chandan to Sheetal Kinnar and got involved in community work. Her communication and leadership skills soon led her to contest the general elections in 2019 from Cuttack. The response from the people in Cuttack city overwhelmed her even though she did not win the election.

In the same year, her ambition for the transgender community led to the formation of the ‘Bahucharamata,’ a trans-Self Help Group. The SHG started with the production of home-based phenyl and soap and went on to volunteer with NGOs to raise awareness on health and sanitation. Their work earned them recognition by the Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC). The group was then selected by the CMC for the task to operate and maintain the Septage Treatment Plant (SeTP) at Cuttack, which provided the group with a stable income and dignified work. The ten members of

the Bahucharamata SHG underwent rigorous classroom and on-site training to understand the importance of the Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM) value chain, operational components of the plant, and their functioning, periodic and daily maintenance activities for operation and maintenance, etc. They also received training on sustainable business models, leadership, communication, and problem-solving, which they found very useful

The partnership with the Cuttack Municipal Corporation is a massive validation of their potential and identity. They have come a long way from begging at odd places to managing a treatment plant. As per the service contract, each SHG member will now be earning close to Rs. 10,000 per month. Bahucharamata members consider the SHG as a voice of solidarity through which they can empower themselves and hope that with a regular source of income, they would be able to improve their standards of living and help other transgender community members as well. “The responsibility is like a crown on our SHG and our biggest achievement,” says Sheetal.

➔ **Story source: Ernst & Young**



A FINE BALANCE

**Snehal
Bhosle**

**Wai
MAHARASHTRA**

“If I can do it, any girl can. Working sincerely is the key to earn respect and to get everyone to listen to you. Girls and women should be encouraged to pursue their careers. The practical experience gained will be beneficial in the long run. Receiving the award for best employee of the month was an achievement for me.”

Twenty-two-year-old, career-driven Snehal is the Site-In-charge for the Faecal Sludge Treatment Plant (FSTP) for Tide Technocrats in Wai, Maharashtra. She has successfully been managing the treatment plant since its inception and takes pride in venturing into the sanitation sector.

Presently pursuing a Bachelors degree in Engineering, Snehal lives in Rautwadi, 26 km away from Wai. Her predisposition to technology and engineering led her to apply and get selected for the position of Site-in-Charge for an FSTP which was the field experience she desired.

Initially, there were some challenges she faced like difficulty in understanding the nature of the work, handling the male staff and travelling to the FSTP since it was at a considerable distance from her residence. But with time and tremendous support from family, she was able to overcome all these challenges. With her hard work, she gained respect amidst the staff and has since been successfully managing the FSTP. Snehal has been raising

awareness about Faecal Sludge and Septage Management and its importance within her community. Her family is very proud of her achievements and has been incredibly supportive and helpful in managing her work with her studies.

The initial three months of COVID-19 were very challenging for Snehal; workers were apprehensive about coming to the site. But she, with the support from the TIDE team, assured the workers of safety. The FSTP has been successfully operational, even during the pandemic.

➔ **Story source: Center for Water and Sanitation, CRDF, CEPT University**



THE SCIENCE TO HER SUCCESS

**Tejaswini
Gaikwad**

**Wai
MAHARASHTRA**

“Every day comes with new learnings and challenges. One needs to keep the right attitude towards one’s work. Support definitely matters and improves practical knowledge in the field. Citizens, especially women, feel safe and cooperate when there is a female supervisor. My family has always been very supportive. I feel proud about my job, and am happy when people compliment me as a brave and confident girl working in the field of sanitation.”

Tejaswini Gaikwad works as the Scheduled Emptying Supervisor in Wai, Maharashtra. A resident of a small village named Menavli which is 4 km from Wai city, 24-year-old Tejaswini has completed her higher secondary schooling with majors in Science.

At a relatively early age, Tejaswini realised that she was interested in gaining experience and being independent by supporting herself financially for further education. She applied for a vacancy from Sumeet Facilities Pvt Ltd, for the position of a Supervisor for scheduled desludging operations in Wai and was appointed for the job which she accepted as a tremendous opportunity. Her job involved a lot of multitasking; she had to interact with citizens, field staff and Wai Municipal Council (WMC) officials regularly.

Tejaswini had to work on her communication skills for carrying out daily operations which were challenging initially. It was tricky to make decisions,

especially for technical problems related to vehicles. Along with site work, she also had to manage other office tasks like submitting monthly bills, daily updates, and regular correspondence with the sanitation department, etc.

With immense support from her family, Centre of Water and Sanitation (CWAS) team and WMC, she gradually had a better understanding of the work. She ensured smooth operations. To work more efficiently, she worked on her time management skills, improved her interpersonal skills as well as her decision-making capabilities. She turned a job from being just a means for financial independence to one that would push her to step out of her comfort zone and to be a better version of herself.

➔ **Story source: Center for Water and Sanitation, CRDF, CEPT University**



LEADING FROM THE FRONT

**Banki
Rani
Swain**
Bhubaneswar
ODISHA

“The people of Barabhuja have supported me during my difficult times and it is now my turn to help them. Low-cost foot-operated hand-wash stations is an innovation and I am proud to be part of it”

Banki Rani Swain is a woman of absolute resilience; her story sure proves that. A 44-year-old resident of Barabhuja Basti, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, Rani's life was filled with obstacles. Banki Rani is one of the many who migrated from Kamakhya Nagar in Dhenkanal district to Bhubaneswar in 2003, in search of better and newer opportunities. They had started settling, and life was beginning to look up. But suddenly misfortune struck, and her husband passed away in a fatal accident in 2009. Banki Rani became a single parent who had to raise two children and be the sole earning member of the family. She had to strengthen her will and soldier on with incredible determination and grit.

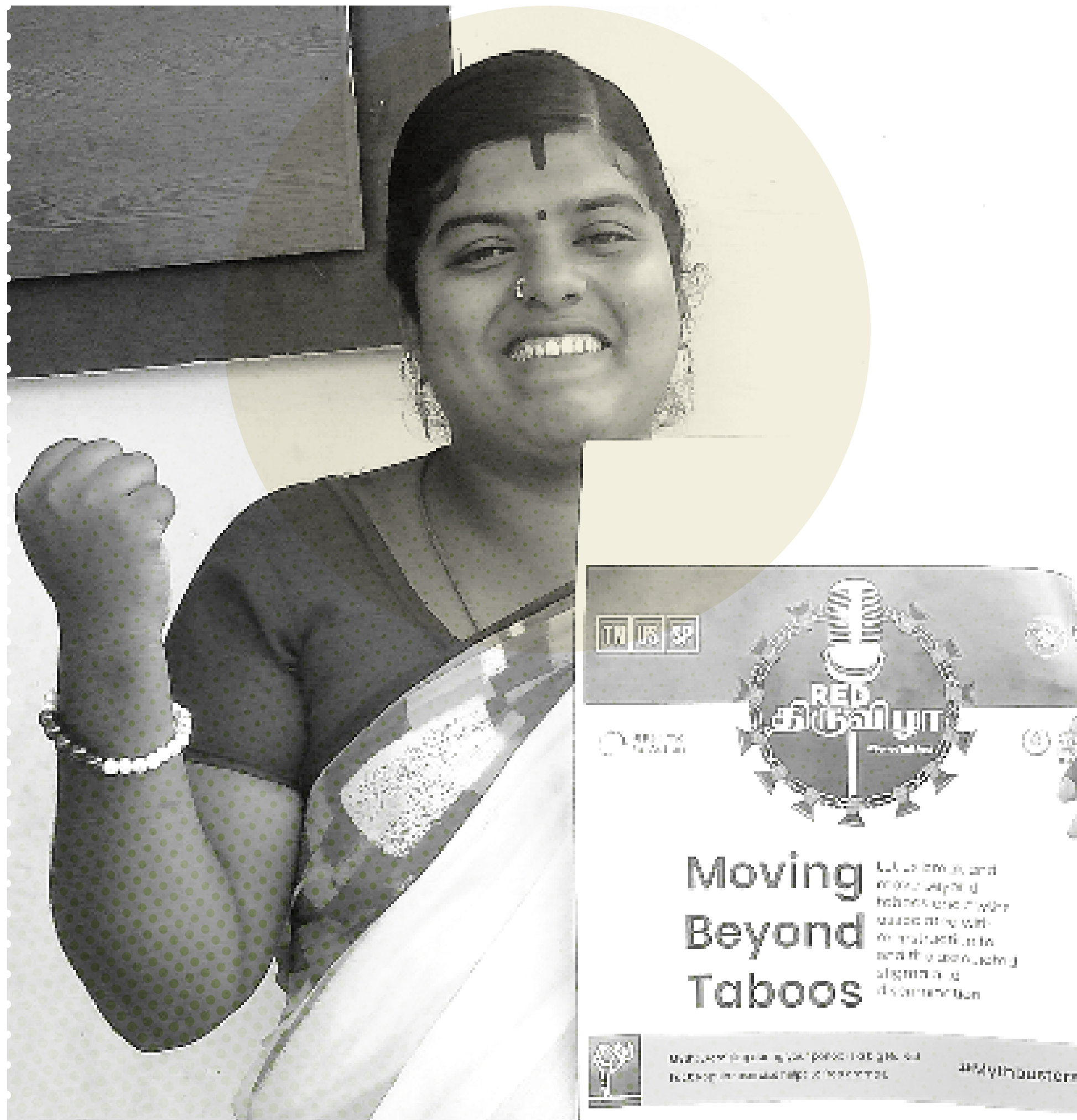
Armed with a graduation certificate and a plethora of skills as well as aptitude, it took her nine years to find a job she loved. In 2017 she took charge of the Anganwadi in Barabhuja. “This gave a new meaning to my life. With the loss of my husband, when I was feeling despondent, a job where I had to take care of so many children revived my strength and zest for life.”

From 2018, Banki Rani became a key voice of an inclusive WASH project being implemented by the Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR), in close coordination and consultation with Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC). Banki Rani, along with members of the Community Management Committee and Single Window Forum, worked concertedly to improve WASH services. Her fellow working women like Mamata Mohanty, Kanaklata Biswal, Bhabini Pradhan and Chandrama Behera, to name a few, were with her at every step. The

work included everything from assessing needs, listing households, facilitating the construction of toilets, checking the feasibility of connecting their toilets to the sewerage line, getting desludging done and getting a water ATM installed with the support of BMC. Banki Rani, like the perennial flow of a river, worked and succeeded in linking maternal and child care to WASH and in motivating people to adopt safe hygiene practices. Leading from the front to provide support in times of disasters like Fani to a global pandemic like COVID-19, she did everything possible. From taking people to cyclone shelters to distributing dry ration to securing financial support, she has aided every person she could.

On seeing the guidelines, the government had issued to protect densely populated settlements from COVID-19 - Banki Rani along with the volunteers made and installed a foot-operated hand-wash station at a convenient location to enable the elderly and vulnerable to use it. When asked what excited her most about it, she replied, “We can inculcate in children the practice of hand-washing and ensure maximum safety for all with zero contact and wastage.”

➔ **Story source: Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR)**



A WOMAN WHO DRIVES HER OWN SUCCESS

M Diviya

Trichy TAMIL NADU

“Many people look amused when they see me climbing into a desludging truck and even tease me saying I behave like a man. But many working women are supportive and appreciate my service. They are comfortable with my service and are kind enough to enquire about me while calling for desludging service.”

M Diviya is a woman of remarkable resilience, paving her way through a profession that is often male-dominated. Born to a family of meagre means in Thumbai Patti, Sivagangai district of Tamil Nadu, M Diviya was raised by her parents who earn their living by selling mats. Her poverty-stricken family could not afford to send her to school for long, as a result of which she had to drop out. She was married as soon as she turned 18.

But, marriage seldom solves the crisis of poverty. Manimaran, her husband, who worked as a desludging operator, could only earn a scant amount of Rs 100 to Rs 150 a day, out of which, he spent most on his vice – alcohol. Three years passed. Now, she has three children to feed, and the condition of the household was only deteriorating with every passing day. Diviya decided to take charge and turn things around.

Because her husband was a desludging operator, she decided to use this opportunity to her advantage and buy a desludging vehicle. But, the cost of a desludging vehicle was Rs 11 lakh, a costly investment for them with the meagre earnings of her husband. She, however, wanted to get hold of the truck and eventually convinced him to sell his ancestral property. With the money raised from the sale, she made an initial payment of Rs 5 lakh and availed a loan for the remaining. Business picked up over time. So did her husband's alcoholism. Her husband's alcoholism severely affected their finances, making it difficult for them to repay their loan at the end of every month. But,

Diviya was a woman of will and once again, she decided to take charge. This time around, she ventured into the desludging work alone, an otherwise male-dominated field.

With the support of her husband, she learnt the nuances of the desludging work and started and started working alongside him. This way, she also ensured that he was not spending any hard-earned money on alcohol. With scrutiny and discipline, she paid back her truck loan on time.

Diviya takes absolute pride in explaining the techniques involved in desludging and the significance of the entire sanitation value chain. She also raises awareness on menstrual hygiene management and provides critical inputs to design personal protection equipment for the safety of desludging operators. She still believes people are amused to see a woman in a desludging truck. When she is not managing the desludging truck and all the other work related to it, she loves to take time off for her passion-- cooking.

Diviya now heads a self-help group in Kalinga Nagar, near LIC Colony in Sathanur, which has helped her get a housing loan. With confidence and conviction, she stands tall defying the traditional roles that women were confined to.

➔ **Story source: Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS)**



A SOCIETY 'TRANS'FORMED

S
Kamalam

Trichy
TAMIL NADU

"I have never thought of income. It's never been my priority. I work very hard to maintain the cleanliness of my toilet. I'm happy that people have recognised it and are supportive. I'm not part of any transgender associations. I'm proud that I'm not dependent on anyone. I work, I earn, and I take care of my mother. I like the people in my area, and I'm glad to be doing my part to help them as well."

S Kamalam was not born a woman. Named Manikandan at birth, Kamalam's journey to becoming herself was arduous. Manikandan, born to a family in Sangiliyandapuram, lost his father early. Raised by a single mother, a daily wage worker, he had a very rough childhood. By the age of 13, Manikandan wanted to be identified as a girl, which was against societal norms.

At sixteen, Kamalam decided that she would not let poverty stop her from claiming her identity. She set up a shop beside her house to keep the household going. But this wasn't enough. She aspired to do more; she wanted recognition for her work. The opportunity presented itself when the Trichy City Corporation decided to construct a community toilet in her settlement.

She decided to volunteer as a caretaker for the newly built toilet. The District Collector ordered that the position of care-taker would only be available to all women Self Help Groups. But, that did not deter her, for Kamalam applied and successfully became a member of an all-women-SHG. She received a minimal, but steady wage of Rs 50 to Rs 100 per day for maintaining the community toilet.

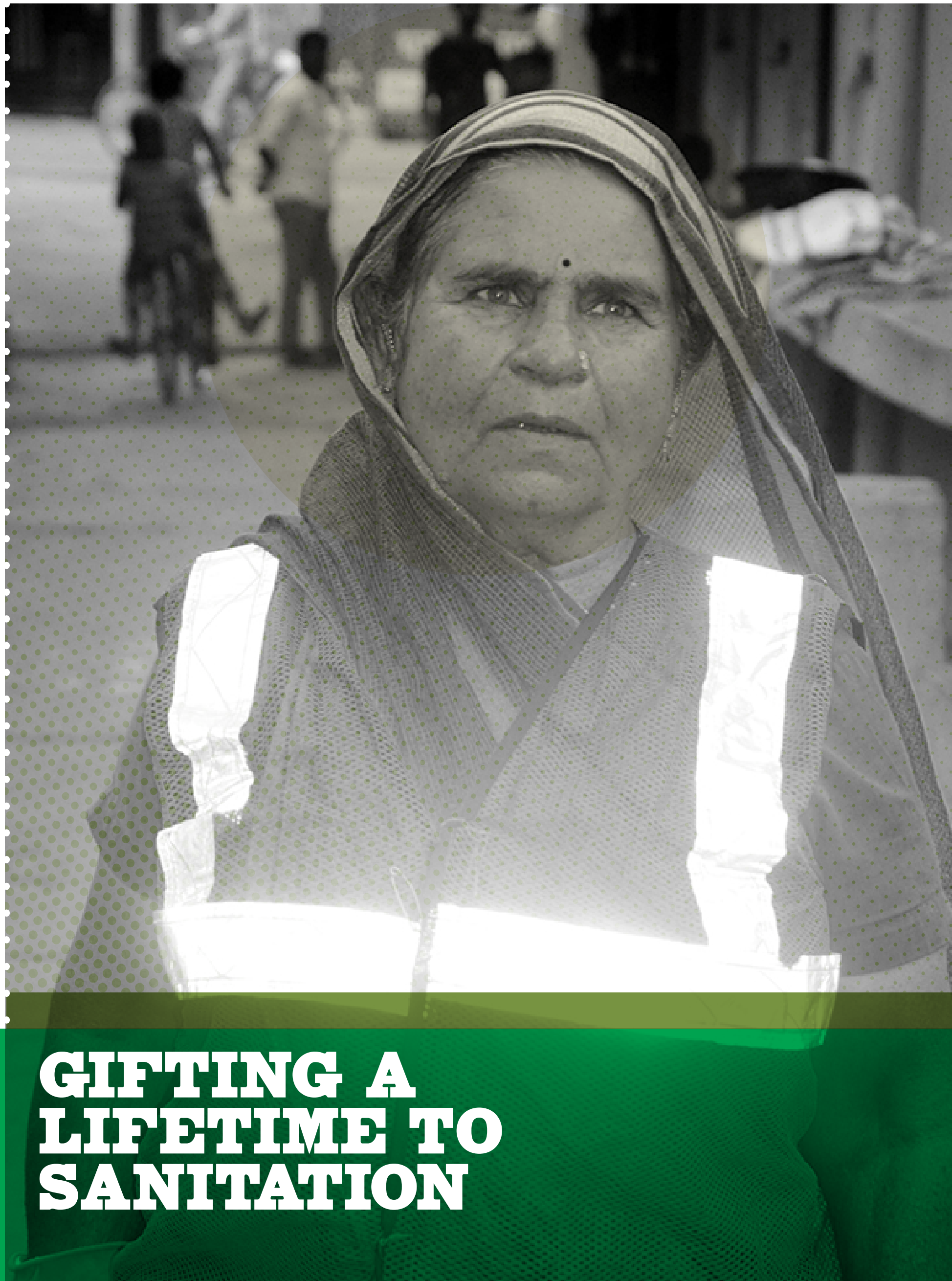
Kamalam is satisfied with her job and says it has brought her the recognition longed for. Working closely with the Citywide Inclusive Sanitation (CWIS) initiative, an intervention to make sanitation service delivery inclusive and equitable in cities, Kamalam has learnt the significance of behavioural change for safe sanitation.

Now, she is a community trainer working with CWIS under the Tamil Nadu Urban Sanitation Support Programme.

She currently conducts training programmes for people in her neighbourhood on various aspects of the sanitation value chain and menstrual hygiene management. She continues to learn, train and work in her locality to improve sanitation. In 2019, her work was recognised and appreciated by the Trichy City Commissioner.

This has only strengthened Kamalam's will to rise above all hurdles. The current COVID-19 situation proved difficult for all, especially the community toilet users who couldn't pay for the service. Kamalam realised the struggle of the people and decided not to burden them by demanding a user fee. To compensate for the loss she incurs, she opened a vegetable shop in April. Kamalam has come to be accepted for her selfless service by the same people who discriminated against her for her identity. She faced all the challenges a transwoman would experience in a society that is hostile and discriminatory towards this community and has risen as an icon.

➔ Story source: Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS)



GIFTING A LIFETIME TO SANITATION

**Maya
Bai**

**Ganj Basoda
MADHYA
PRADESH**

“I have been working continuously for thirty-five years as a sanitation worker in Nagar Palika Parishad Ganj Basoda, I have taken up cleaning work in my life as a public service. Even if I am retiring this year, I will continue to extend this service to the citizens for the rest of my life.”

Maya Bai is a resident and sanitation worker with the Ganj Basoda Nagar Palika Parishad in Madhya Pradesh. She has been employed by the Urban Local Body for 35 years now. Maya Bai and her group are responsible for the cleaning and upkeep of Ward 22, Chudi Mohalla of the city. An ordinary sanitation worker, Maya Bai faced an extraordinary situation when the COVID-19 pandemic entered the city, especially when the first case was detected in Ward 22 residential area, where her team was appointed. Overnight, for the period of fourteen days, the area was declared a containment zone. No one was allowed to enter the zone, but the daily cleaning of the community toilet in the ward was a basic necessity. When no other sanitation worker was ready to enter the ward and maintain the community toilet, Maya Bai showed immense courage and volunteered for the task. At this crucial point, she had accepted this challenge and cleaned the area single-handedly in order to ensure the safety of its residents.

She was thanked by the local authority and praised by the citizens for this act. She demonstrated that with the use of the correct PPE as well as proper care and physical distancing, regular sanitation work can be conducted smoothly. This motivated the other sanitation workers who resumed work in the area and other parts of the city.

Maya Bai has completed thirty-five years as a sanitation worker, and she retires this year. But she is just as motivated to continue serving her city and country as she was thirty-five years ago.

➔ **Story source: KPMG India**



**Madhu
Singh**

**Lucknow
UTTAR
PRADESH**

“I would like to encourage women to come out of their insecurities and take this business with pride. We need to change our mindset to bring change. Get your tanker registered to avail maximum benefit.”

MOVING BEYOND LIVELIHOOD TABOOS

Madhu Singh and her husband, Upendra Singh, an ex-army soldier did not have any entrepreneurial skills. Madhu, a housewife, stepped in to support her family when her husband took early retirement in 2011 and her children's education was at stake. She decided not to follow the conventional business path and instead started working as a desludging tank operator with her husband's consent .

Married at a young age of 18 years, Madhu was shy and lived in a joint family with her three children in Baldev Vihar, Telibagh, Lucknow. Her husband, who was the only earning member, was out of a job too. They saw profitable prospects in a desludging tanker. With the guidance of their neighbour, who too was already in the same business, they decided to invest all their retirement savings. In 2013, Upendra Singh took a credit of INR 7 lakh from a local bank in Madhu's name to start operation, but at the same time, he got an offer to work as a security guard at a national bank, which was 75 kilometres from his residence.

An investment was made and there was no looking back. Going against the societal norms, Madhu took on the challenge of working in an otherwise male-dominated profession. Her children and family members were taken aback and discouraged her sectoral choice, but her husband was supportive, making them understand the dignity of labour, regardless of gender stereotypes.

The startup days were tough when the driver and the employees would not take her seriously in implementing the desludging work and being utterly irregular. She attended to business enquiries and price negotiations over the phone. Apart from that, the nuisance of equipment maintenance, irregular tipping fees, improper desludging were hurdles she had overcome. With her determination and polite nature of customer handling, she learnt the nuances of the business and made sure the tanker loan was paid

in time. Earlier her family income was close to six thousand rupees and it was difficult to sustain a family of 8 members. With this venture, from earning twenty thousand a month in the beginning, now they are earning more than sixty thousand, continue their children's education and save every month.

Madhu is thankful to Population Services International (PSI) India, who, during the #ATF project implementation period formed the tanker operator association in Lucknow and worked with city authorities to create the legal environment in integrating the private operators into public systems. The project gave them a platform to discuss business insights and overcome problems related to tipping fees, designated disposal sites and registration. PSI supported the association in getting special permission during COVID-19 lockdown, through which desludging operations continued and registered Private Tanker Operators like Madhu, could continue their businesses and support her staff and others.

Madhu is now a part of the executive committee of the PTO association – Septic Tanker Operator Welfare association (STOWA) which itself is evidence of her success and acceptance in the male-dominated profession of faecal sludge management. She believes that one has to look beyond stereotypical livelihoods to change the outlook of society and encourage more women to join the brigade in bringing sanitation reform in the country.

➔ **Story source: Population Services International, India**



BREAKING FREE FROM GENERATIONS OF MANUAL SCAVENGING

Suresh Jena

Dhenkanal ODISHA

"I had never imagined that one day I would be explaining my work to national and international guests and also have the confidence to answer their questions. I can now easily explain the treatment process at the FSTP and how important it is to treat faecal waste to keep our environment clean and healthy."

Suresh Jena was recruited as the Manager of the Faecal Sludge and Septage Treatment Plant (FSTP) in Dhenkanal, Odisha. Suresh, an undergraduate, joined the Dhenkanal Municipality as a Sanitation Supervisor. He was trained on Operations and Maintenance (O&M) by Practical Action following which he started working at the plant.

"After our training, I realised the importance of Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM) for a clean environment and better public health," he says. Suresh has come a long way from the stigma and disparaging experiences that his father and other male members of his family who worked as manual scavengers endured. He was determined to change his fate

He now earns a salary of Rs.16,000 a month and is proud to be able to contribute to his family expenses. His gratitude shows through when he says, "In these times of difficulty when lives and livelihoods of people are threatened, I feel lucky to be working at the plant with a steady source of income."

Although the FSTP in Dhenkanal will now be managed by women Self Help Group (SHG) members, the ULB and the selected SHG have collectively decided to retain Suresh as the Plant Manager considering his keenness and admirable work. Even with this change in setup, Suresh is happy. "I was also involved in the training of the SHG members and am happy that they are going to manage the plant now. It is also heartening to

know that sanitation infrastructure and services can be managed by community members with their capacity building," he explains.

Suresh has also interacted with many state and national bureaucrats during their visits to the FSTP in Dhenkanal. This encourages him to learn more about FSSM. "I want to learn more about the sustainability of FSTP operations, repair and maintenance and other models of treatment facilities." While eager to learn more, he also aspires to sensitize and train other vulnerable and informal sanitary workers to be engaged in FSSM. "I will be happy to train others on the operation and management of the plant and also explain about the adverse impact of manual scavenging and the treatment process of the FSTP", he says passionately.

He is appreciative of the ULB's efforts in producing alternate sources of livelihood for former manual scavengers. "I want to thank Dhenkanal Municipality for giving me this opportunity, building my capacity and entrusting me with the responsibility to manage the plant." Suresh is also committed to empowering vulnerable manual scavengers with sustainable, dignified opportunities in faecal sludge management and operations.

➔ Story source: Ernst & Young



**Mantu
Naik**

**Dhenkanal
ODISHA**

“After I joined the OMM SAI Self-help Group, I have gotten a skills enhancement training and have also become more aware about my safety at work and know about my rights. Additionally, I was able to get access to other schemes for my family as well- I got bank account under PMJDY, insurance under PM Suraksha Bima Yojana. Being part of the SHG has given us the opportunity to start a sanitation-based livelihood of operating & maintaining community toilets in Dhenkanal. This has helped increase our monthly income. I feel proud to be called an entrepreneur now.”

OVERCOMING SOCIAL STIGMA TO BECOME AN ENTREPRENEUR

Mantu was born in a traditional community of sanitation workers and knew since childhood that he would do sanitation work. He had no one in their community to guide him about the importance of education in planning his future. So he studied till the 10th grade and then started working in small private offices as a cleaner. With his desire to get a dignified life, he applied for a police and army job, but due to his height not meeting the criteria, he could not get selected.

His parents worked as Municipal street sweepers and had low incomes because of which he had to support both his younger brother and sister's education. Mantu worked for eight years as a street sweeper in the municipality with a monthly salary of Rs. 7000. His family grew after marriage and it was difficult to meet the needs of his 2-year-old daughter.

One day, he came to know about a meeting arranged by Dhenkanal Municipality staff in their community about joining a male Self-Help Group under DAY-NULM and SBM convergence. After understanding the benefits of an SHG, he became a member and was nominated as the president of OMM SAI SHG. He became the driving force for this SHG; he held regular meetings and went to individuals' houses to make sure they attend these meetings.

As he learned more, he would discuss new ideas and encourage the SHG members to save regularly which would eventually help them with internal lending as well as availing bank loans. With his leadership, the group submitted an application expressing their interest to Dhenkanal Municipality for operation and maintenance (O&M) of community toilets. The other group members were apprehensive due to the social stigma associated with being sanitation workers. But he managed to convince them and was awarded the contract from Dhenkanal Municipality.

After getting a 6-month contract for O&M of 20 seats in February 2019, they faced many

challenges like financial constraints, management issues, time constraints due to their regular job as municipality sanitation workers. They received their first monthly payment from the Municipality for 2 months, after which the payments were irregular which led other SHG members to lose interest in the enterprise. Expenses rose and their earnings were hardly around Rs. 5000 per month. However, he managed to keep the group together, learned the operations and communication system of the Dhenkanal Municipality, and managed to run the enterprise with their internal savings amount.

This is how they became resilient by adapting to work as service providers to the Dhenkanal Municipality despite being from a vulnerable community. Due to his faith, hard work and continuous follow-up with the Municipality, the group received their pending amount of Rs. 75,000 in March 2020. From this amount, they saved about Rs. 40,000 to start an enterprise. The remaining Rs. 35,000 was distributed amongst five of the SHG members who were cleaning the community toilet. With his vision, the group is now planning to start their alternative livelihood enterprise and have also applied to Dhenkanal Municipality for more such contracts along with an extension of the community toilet contract.

The Dhenkanal Municipality is very happy with their performance and is looking to awarding more contracts to Mantu and his SHG as service providers because of the trust gained through hardwork.

➔ **Story source: Urban Management Centre (UMC)**



A TREASURE OF LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

P Nagamani

**Warangal
TELANGANA**

I'm feeling very happy and proud for establishing the sanitary napkin making facility "CHELI" at Warangal. This is the first of its kind in Warangal started by member(s) of a self-help group. This initiative provides livelihood to other SHG members. I am happy to be a role-model for all SHG members and will like to see more women becoming entrepreneurs and be self-sufficient. I feel empowered and satisfied that I am providing good quality, low cost sanitary napkins to women and girls from our community, which will help them maintain hygiene and good health.

P Nagamani was the eldest of three siblings. She was brought up with a lot of love and without any restrictions. She wished to continue studying after getting married but was not permitted. She became a mother of two children by the age of 21. Her parents were educated, and Nagamani did not face any gender discrimination, even after marriage. But her family has always faced financial problems.

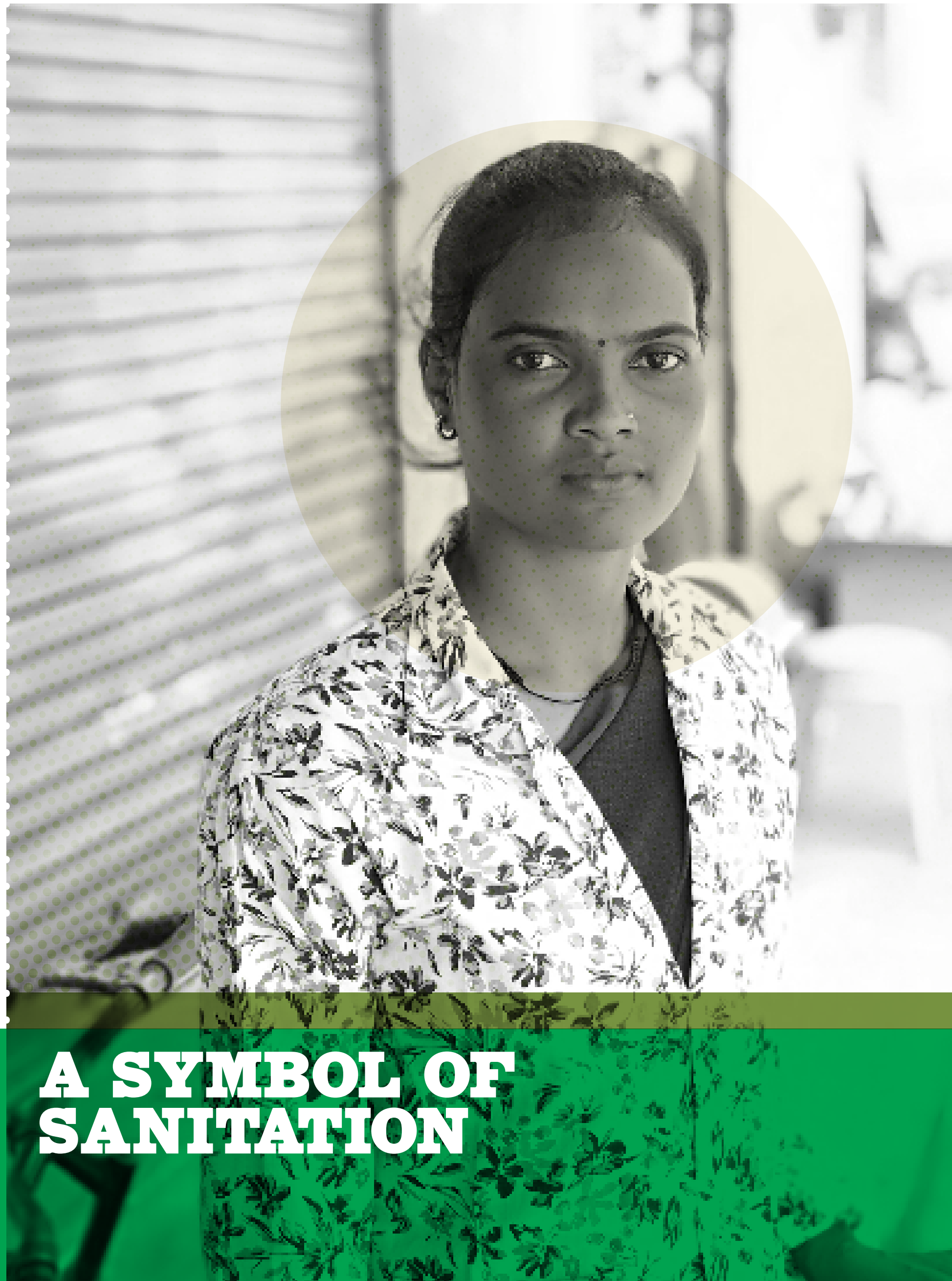
After marriage, she was one of those women who helped her husband. Her husband opened a school, and she supported him in managing the school. She even worked there as a teacher for 20 years. It was during this time that she learnt about SHGs from TV and radio. She has been a part of Sri Chamundeshwari SHG since 1999. An active SHG member as well as community resource person, Nagamani encouraged almost 700 other women to join SHGs to earn a livelihood.

When she wanted to start the sanitary napkin manufacturing facility, CHELI, she received incredible support from her family. As an entrepreneur, she has been able to provide a

livelihood to other SHG members as well. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she helped urban poor women in Mumbai slums with help from the Global Shapers Community by providing sanitary napkins to almost 200 women. CHELI sent 1000 sanitary napkins to them for which her unit bore the transportation cost. They even reached out to the Commissioner, Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) with support from Urban Management Centre (UMC) to talk about distributing their sanitary napkins to all women sanitation workers in Warangal during the COVID-19 lockdown. The Commissioner agreed, and they distributed 1100 packets of CHELI sanitary napkins to all women sanitation workers.

Nagamani, through her unit, wants to make good quality, low-cost sanitary napkins for all urban poor women. She envisions being able to provide the sanitary napkins to all urban poor women through the SHGs, area-level federations and city level federations network.

➔ Story source: Urban Management Centre (UMC)



**A SYMBOL OF
SANITATION**

**Reshma
Soni**

**Jashpur
Chhattisgarh**

“I saw nothing but darkness. Swachh Ambikapur Mission changed my life for the better. The immense support of the Municipality and my colleagues has given me the strength and direction to work towards a brighter future”

Reshma Soni who grew up amidst poverty in the Pathal village of Jashpur District in Chhattisgarh moved to Ambikapur with her husband and infant son about five years ago. When she had moved, she had dreams and an expectation of a better future for her family and herself.

But, before she could settle, Reshma was shattered by the untimely demise of her husband. With no source of income and a child to take care of, Reshma had nowhere to go. Hope came in the form of Mission Clean City Ambikapur which was launched as a part of Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban where she secured employment.

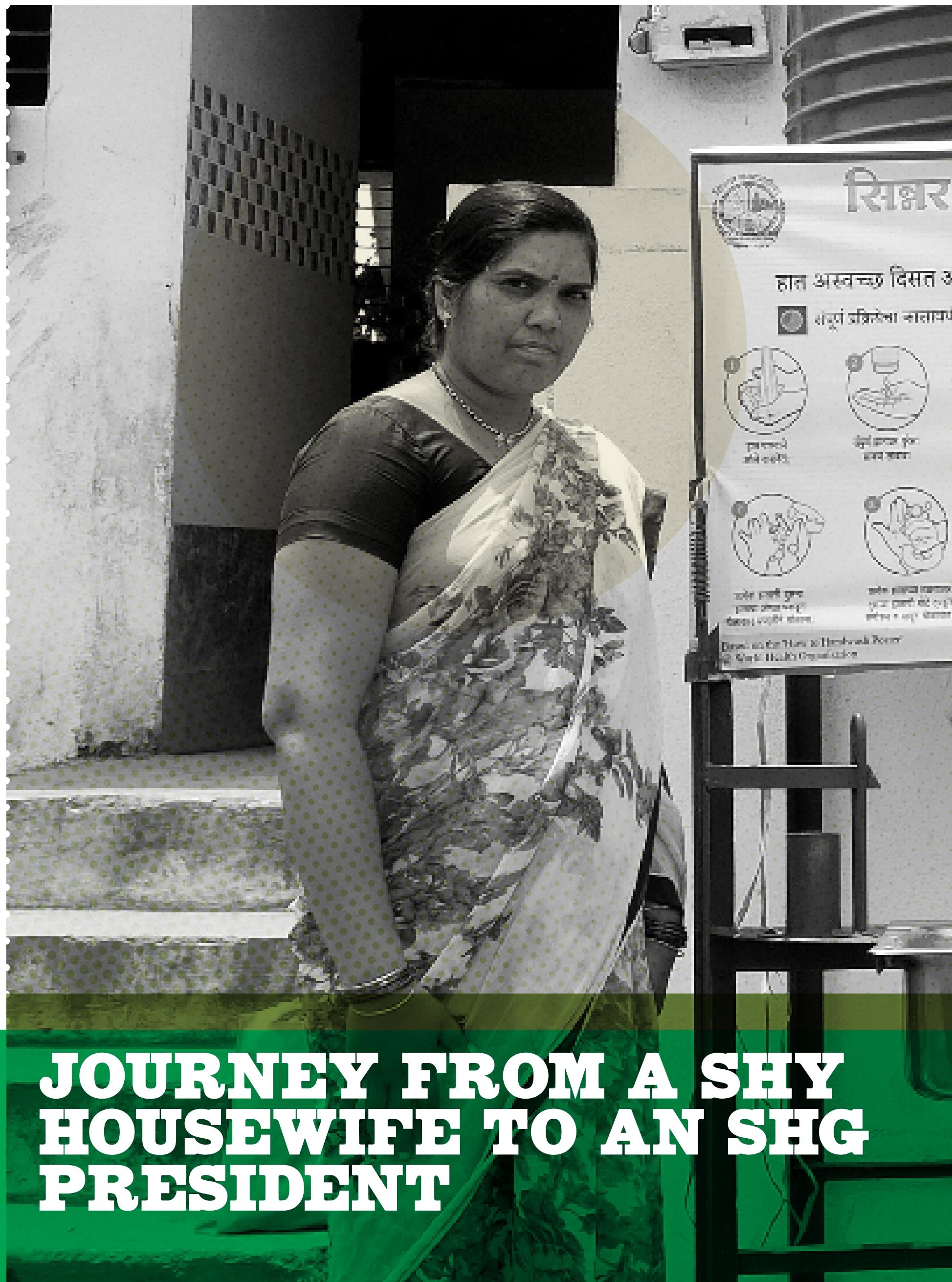
Today, 26-year-old Reshma is a ‘Swachhata Didi’ under a federation named “Swachh Ambikapur Mission Sahkari Samiti Maryadit” (SAMSSM), where she works as a supervisor responsible for handling a team of four door-to-door waste

collectors of Ambikapur. With her hard work, she earns Rs. 6,000 a month, which she spends wisely on the education of her son.

Reshma has always been shy, and therefore, one of the first things she focused on was to improve her communication skills. Besides, her leadership skills came handy when she had to ensure that her team members were cooperative with one another so that operations were carried on smoothly. She wants to continue as a sanitation worker and work diligently to ensure that her son gets all that he deserves.

Reshma gets ready every day in her signature blue and green sari that has now become a symbol of the Swachhata movement in Ambikapur.

➔ **Story source: KPMG India**



JOURNEY FROM A SHY HOUSEWIFE TO AN SHG PRESIDENT

**Shobha
Yekhande**

**Sinnar
MAHARASHTRA**

“My family always supported me to work for the benefit of the society. Even during the pandemic, I work on the field by taking all the necessary precautions.”

If we keep ourselves safe, the world would be safe’ says Shobha Yekhande, President of a Self-Help Group (SHG). Shobha has been regularly monitoring the hand-washing facility at Talwadi slum, in Sinnar, during the outbreak of COVID-19. Shobha, aged 38, is a resident of Talwadi slum and takes immense pride in carrying out her duties.

Until three years ago, Shobha was a shy homemaker. Her husband and in-laws then encouraged her to step out of the house and explore new avenues of work. Shobha then associated with the NULM Department at Sinnar Municipal Council and became the President of a Self Help Group.

She remembers the time when the Project Manager and Coordinator at the NULM Department helped her in developing social interaction skills and become a confident social worker. Since then, she has worked with the Municipal Council for various programs such as awareness sessions for segregation of solid waste, relief programs for flood-affected regions, tree plantation drives etc. She took a loan of Rs. 30,000 from internal savings of the group and Rs. 50,000 from Sinnar Municipal Corporation (SMC) to start a small grocery shop near her house. It was through the NULM department at SMC that Shobha was suggested to undertake the task of monitoring a Hand Wash (HW) station, for which she readily agreed. She has been monitoring the hand-washing station for 45 days now. She visits the stations twice a day; at 7 AM and 4 PM. During each visit, she checks for the availability of soap

and water and overall condition of the HW stations and informs the sanitation department at SMC accordingly. She also maintains a record of all the observations in the provided formats. The hand-washing station is right in front of Shobha’s shop, helping her keep a constant watch, while she works at the shop. Shobha not only monitors the station but has been actively involved in making people aware of the importance of hygiene and hand-washing, especially in times of the pandemic. She also persistently asks users not to vandalise the station.

Since Shobha is also known in her community, people come to her in case of any complaints regarding the HW station. When asked if the pandemic deterred her from carrying out her community work, Shobha says that she was never afraid of it. She takes all the necessary precautions, like wearing a mask and gloves and makes sure of maintaining physical distance while visiting the HW stations and interacting with the users. Throughout this journey, Shobha has received tremendous support and encouragement from her family, including her children, and she is utterly grateful for that.

➔ **Story source: Center for Water and Sanitation, CRDF, CEPT University**



SANITATION SECTOR COMES TO THE RESCUE

Chithra

**Trichy
TAMIL NADU**

“If the money had not come at the right time, my son and I would not have survived. We were able to get through the last month of the lockdown with this support.”

Chithra lives with her 20-year-old son Anand in the neighbourhood of Tharanallur in Trichy, Tamil Nadu. Six months ago, after her husband’s passing, the family’s survival became difficult. Although he worked as a scrap vendor, he spent all his earnings on alcohol, sparing not a single penny for his family. For Chithra, now 62 years old, living with an alcoholic husband meant being the sole provider in the family. Raising four children with a meagre daily income of from Rs 100 - 150 was a hardship she had learnt to cope with.

A couple of months ago, problems were aggravated when she was diagnosed with a mole in her uterus that required immediate surgery. The lockdown was announced six days after she was discharged from the hospital, and since then, livelihood has come to a standstill. As someone who always stood firm in the face of adversity, Chithra feels helpless as the crisis has taken control of her life.

Her son suffers from a hearing disability but still contributes by working as a daily wage labourer, earning Rs 100 per day. With the lockdown, the family had no means to sustain their household. Just when the financial situation began to decline, Chithra received Rs 1,500 as assistance from IDFC First Bank.

Chithra is a part of the Indian Institute of Human Settlements (IIHS) network that closely works with sanitation workers for urban development projects. Her three children are married and live separately, while Anand is hoping to get back on his feet as soon as the markets reopen. Meanwhile, Chithra is recovering from her surgery and is hopeful of coming out of the pandemic stronger.

➔ **Story source: Samhita Social Ventures**

