

## Villagers script their own progress in Madhya Pradesh

Fourteen-year-old Mamta had to abandon her studies after Class 5 because her village in Madhya Pradesh did not have the facilities. Three years later, however, the story has changed - Mamta can continue her studies with a middle school opening up near her home thanks to a new initiative where the residents themselves identify their needs.

As part of the village planning programme started by Unicef, the district administration and some NGOs, Mamta's village Kolhari in Shivpuri district now has a middle school where she has been admitted in Class 6 this year.

The project involves the community using norms of participatory rural appraisal techniques; villagers themselves chalk out the needs of their hamlets and apprise the government about the requirements.

The programme, started initially in Guna and Shivpuri districts, has wrought a profound change in the lives of many villagers.

'After the introduction of village planning in Kolhari, we have got an all-weather road and a series of hand pumps. Since our village has no toilets and most diseases in the village are spread as a result of open defecation, we have now applied for toilets, which we hope to get soon,' an enthusiastic Mamta said.

The women in the village have also applied for anganwadi centres so that they can provide better care to their children.

Under the programme, social maps are prepared to assess the distribution of available resources in the village. Household surveys are then conducted to collect basic information about the village, the community and the needs of children, primarily in areas of health, education, nutrition, drinking water and sanitation.

Information is also sought on the socio-economic condition of people.

The data collected is used to prepare developmental plans for presentation and approval in a special 'gram sabha' (village) meeting. Then, the plans are passed on to the district administration for implementation.

The areas chosen for rural planning include birth registration, maternal and infant mortality, maternity benefits (including regular health check-ups, immunisation), breast feeding, malnutrition, health and sanitation, controlling diarrhoea, decreasing child marriages, consumption of iodised salt, supply of drinking water and personal hygiene. Special stress is given on female child education.

'The programme requires villagers to meet twice a month at the village community hall where each hamlet formulates its own plan for development and analyses the progress. Then they submit an application with the district administration, which sanctions funds and directs the concerned department to implement the works', said Umesh Vashisht, convener of the Centre For Integrated Development, an NGO working on the project.

'One woman volunteer has been appointed in each village panchayat and one cluster animator given the task of guiding a group of five such volunteers. Also, master trainers are appointed to teach volunteers the basics including rapport building with villagers, door-to-door surveys, social and resource mappings.

'They are also trained in how to address the gram sabha and talk about the problems of the hamlet and seek solution,' Vashisht said, adding that the results have been amazing and pointing to Kolhari as a case in point.

*Sanjay Sharma* ( © IANS / India eNews)