ZILA SWACHH
BHARAT PRERAK

India’s new sanitation warriors
ABOUT TATA WATER MISSION
Tata Water Mission (TWM) is a programme initiated by Tata Trusts to tackle the water crisis with a multi-pronged approach. The three core areas supported by the programme are: technology innovations; improved service delivery through sustainable and integrated development, and through water conservation and water supply; and behavioural change communication models. TWM aims to provide better access to pure water to 6 million people in 7,000 villages across 12 states, within the next three years.

ABOUT TATA TRUSTS
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FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

Aishwarya Alexander
Involved the community and won the battle for a open defecation free Nalanda district in Bihar

Har Gobinda Boro
Put data to work to address issues around toilet coverage in Goalpara district, Assam

Minal Ingale
Engaged with children to persuade elders to build toilets in Chhindwara district, Madhya Pradesh

Manish Vishnoi
Put in 18-hour workdays to try and make Banswara district in Rajasthan open defecation free

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* As on July 2018
ila Swachh Bharat Prerak – India’s New Sanitation Warriors yet again compiles success stories of preraks who bring about a ‘toilet revolution’ in remote villages of India. The stories in this issue bring to life the diverse challenges that preraks encounter on their journey to make their designated districts open defecation free, and their joy and sense of achievement in doing so.

The four sanitation heroes featured in this issue are Aishwarya Alexander, Har Gobinda Boro, Minal Ingale and Manish Vishnoi. They bring about social transformation in the villages of Nalanda district in Bihar, Goalpara district in Assam, Chhindwara district in Madhya Pradesh and Banswara district in Rajasthan, respectively.

The Zila Swachh Bharat Prerak (ZSBP) programme is a unique pan-India initiative of the Swachh Bharat Mission – Gramin (SBM-G), under the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Government of India. The programme provides passionate young professionals an opportunity to work directly with the Government of India to catalyse change and development in India’s villages. Tata Trusts partner with the Swachh Bharat Mission to hire, train and deploy ZSBPs. The young men and women work closely with district administrations to design, implement and monitor interventions under the SBM-G.

We hope these stories will motivate other young people with a passion for nation-building to become a part of the ZSBP family, to co-create and implement innovative interventions that will ensure a swachh India.
Growing up in Patna, Aishwarya Alexander, 25, developed an interest in environmental issues during her school days. After completing her civil engineering from the Allahabad Agricultural Institute, and a post graduate degree in ecology and environmental studies from Nalanda University in Raigir, she zeroed in on the water sector. “I realised that the engineering-centric approach of mitigating environmental issues — specifically those related to water and sanitation — was a big failure in developing countries,” she recalls.

Aishwarya therefore decided to focus on sustainable community interventions in this area. Enrolling for the ZSBP (Zila Swachh Bharat Prerak) programme in March 2017 was the opportunity she had been looking for — to closely understand how government-led WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) programmes were executed, and the role of community engagement in making these work.

**A WHOLE NEW CHALLENGE**

The conditions in Nalanda district weren’t exactly helpful to begin with. The district administration had focused entirely on toilet coverage targets, with very little done on the community mobilisation aspect. One of the reasons was limited manpower. Block co-ordinators, the only people on the ground,
received little support from local self-help groups, and there were no swachhagrahis either to help with field-level activity. No wonder, they had achieved less than a third of the targeted coverage of households with toilets.

Aishwarya realised that a development partner agency was sorely needed to ramp up the field force and train them for the job. She was eventually able to rope in Unicef and Uttarakhand-based GIWA (Global Interfaith WASH Alliance) to help hire, train and deploy 712 swachhagrahis on the CLTS (community led total sanitation) and PRA (participatory rural appraisal) models to drive behavioural change among Nalanda’s residents.

However, since people weren’t willing to fund toilet construction in the early stages, it was clear that the standard awareness route wasn’t going to be very effective. Aishwarya and her team decided to use fear as a motivator instead, sensitising Nalanda’s residents to the ill-effects of poor sanitation on their health and well-being. With the support of the District Magistrate, Aishwarya and the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) team organised a variety of outreach campaigns around this premise.

For example, the ‘Bhai Number 1’ campaign encouraged brothers to construct toilets for their sisters, and they received recognition from the district administration for doing so. The ‘Sharamsaar Yatra’ (Walk of Shame) sent a powerful message to people who went out to defecate. In this campaign, people were taken back to the spot where they had defecated, and they were told how they were practically consuming their own excreta which could be transmitted on to their food by flies.

The ‘Zidd Karo’ campaign in government schools had teachers drawing up on the blackboard a list of students who didn’t have toilets at home. These children were made to write a postcard addressed to their parents, appealing to them to construct toilets in their homes. This kind of societal pressure worked very well in driving up toilet construction and its use in Nalanda’s households.

**AWAKENING MINDS**

These activities had the desired impact over the past one year. From 30% toilet coverage at the end of March 2017, Nalanda now has nearly 80% households with toilets. More than the numbers, though, it is the heightened level of awareness among villagers about sanitation and health that’s striking. “We now feel ashamed to even think about defecating in the open as we know its dangers,” says Sanjeet Kumar, a farmer from Adampur village.

Aishwarya, whose tenure has been extended by another six months, says the ZSBP experience has been enriching. “I have understood how a developmental scheme is carried out; the deciding factors behind its success or failure; the influence of community ownership in the sustainability of toilets and their usage; the power of information, education and communication; and most importantly, the influence of the SBM in bringing about positive change in the lives of millions.”

**TOILET COVERAGE:**

- Till March 2017: **30%**
- Till March 2018: **79.5%**

TATA WATER MISSION - A Tata Trusts Initiative
see myself as a starter of leadership development in the future,” declares Har Gobinda Boro (Hara). For the 31-year-old from Assam, this confidence stems from his transformative journey as a Zila Swachh Bharat Prerak (ZSBP). After his masters degree in social work from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, Hara’s interest in community-driven grassroots development began to grow while working with Anant Vikas, a rural livelihoods and youth development NGO in upcountry Maharashtra.

He returned home to join Grameen Sahara, an NGO focused on agri-based sustainable livelihoods. The three-year stint gave him a more professional grounding in his chosen area, thanks to Tata Trusts which have been funding most of the projects there. When he started work in Goalpara district in mid-April 2017, the transition wasn’t too difficult as Hara was familiar with the Trusts’ systems and processes. But there were other challenges in store.

**NUMBERS TELL THE STORY**

Goalpara fared better than many others in the state. It had achieved 71.7% coverage, with toilets built under past government-funded schemes. Yet, many of these were lying defunct as the families had continued to use their older kuchcha toilets — bamboo structures covered with cloth. Meanwhile, over 31,000 new toilets had to be built as per the Base Line Survey 2012-13 for Goalpara to achieve complete open defecation free (ODF) status.
Hara spent the first few days analysing the MIS data available with the local Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin office to understand how Goalpara’s 81 gram panchayats (GPs) had progressed in terms of toilet coverage, and shared the results with the Deputy Commissioner (DC) in charge: “Looking at the red bars (denoting poor progress), he asked me to further explore the issues in those blocks and GPs and present a report.”

The DC put this information out on the local SBM-G WhatsApp group that had the executive engineer, junior engineers, section officers, project consultants and others. Thanks to this, Hara says he came to know of official meetings and field events where he would land up, often uninvited, to observe what was going on and chat up villagers about the issues on ground. But things were still moving slowly.

Three months later, when the State Mission Director in Guwahati met up with Assam’s ZSBPs and took stock, the message went across that ZSBPs were here to help, and the situation began to change. Hara was asked to regularly track toilet construction and geo-tagging numbers and present those to senior officials in the monthly District Water and Sanitation Committee review meetings. The DC also began marking his comments to the concerned officials, and accountability went up.

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Hara focused his efforts on the two blocks with the least coverage – Rangjuli (66.4%) and Kushdowa (58.6%) – making regular field visits on his motorbike. “I found a huge gap in linkage between the district administration and local village bodies,” he says.

The first measure was to get the Gram Pradhans to demand funds required to complete the toilet targets, while Hara made presentations to the Executive Engineer and the SBM Director to highlight gaps and the support required. The dismal strength of swachhagrahis was also of concern — 144 against a 788 required for the entire district.

For awareness building, Hara brought in students of sociology and social work from the University of Science, Technology & Management in Meghalaya as interns. Working in teams, they conducted awareness and hand-wash activities in schools, and involved Village Development Committees to ensure that cleanliness was maintained through nigrani samitis. People were also taken to Goalpara’s model village Rangsapara — declared the cleanest in Assam — for inspiration. Getting more swachhagrahis on board and organising construction through local NGOs further helped ramp up toilet coverage.

Rangjuli and Kushdowa became ODF by February 2018, followed by other districts. The number of swachhagrahis in Goalpara grew to 281, and the entire district was declared ODF by end of March 2018 with nearly 100% geo-tagging completed.

Now posted in adjoining South Salmara-Mankachar district, a more confident Hara is contemplating a future in policy advocacy: “In 10-15 years, I want to be part of an agency or run my own organisation, helping youth work towards change.” Hara has evidently come a long way from being an introvert while growing up. “I didn’t have the courage to stand and present before someone. Now I try to meet new people, telling myself, “Let’s see what happens,” says a smiling Hara.
When she was assigned to Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district as a Zila Swachh Bharat Prerak (ZSBP) in August 2017, Minal Ingale saw this as an opportunity to do what she really loved. Hailing from Chandrapur in adjoining Maharashtra state, and armed with a masters in social work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Minal had been actively involved in social sector projects since 2013. "I always wanted to work in bigger projects run by the Government which impacts people positively," she says. Chhindwara is a largely tribal district. Its economy boasts a few medium-sized industries while the rural population depends mainly on agriculture. Of the 11 blocks in the district, five are predominantly tribal and forestry products are their primary source of livelihood.

The main problem that Minal faced when she joined was that there was no clarity about who was eligible for the government incentive for building toilets under the Swachh Bharat Mission - Gramin (SBM-G), and who wasn't. Quite a few poor and eligible households had been left out in the baseline survey (BLS) conducted in 2011. What's more, many among those who were listed in the BLS had no idea about the incentive they were entitled to. Minal knew that the issue could only be resolved through a fresh survey where the eligible and non-eligible households were accurately classified. But a bigger challenge was that people

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Minal Ingale, prerak Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh
in Chhindwara’s villages did not understand the goals of the SBM-G and the importance of being open defecation free (ODF).

**MAKING PROGRESS**

Minal and her team conducted house visits to educate people about the health risks associated with open defecation and the benefits of using modern toilets. People responded positively, though there was some resistance in the tribal areas. The larger goal of making India completely ODF by 2019 struck a chord with everyone. Minal urged them to be a part of this vision to ensure that the future of their children was safe and healthy.

This helped push the toilet coverage numbers, but many villages were lagging behind even as the deadline of declaring Chhindwara ODF by end-2017 was nearing fast. Minal and her team realised they had to get more innovative now with the outreach activity. Along with the *swachhagrahis*, the district CEO and other local officials, motorbike rallies were held across the district. Each rally saw a group of around 200 riders travelling 2-3 hours across villages, spreading awareness about toilet construction and urging local communities to make their villages ODF soon.

Minal also realised that the best advocates for the cause of the SBM-G were children. The team began to engage with them in households and in schools to eventually persuade the elders to build toilets in their homes. With a highly patriarchal culture, fewer women in the villages would participate in the ZSBP activities. However, when they understood that their children stopped being sick once their villages became open defecation free, many women began to come forward and convince the men to build toilets.

With 100% coverage, Chhindwara district was finally declared ODF in March 2018. For Minal, it was an experience to cherish and learn extensively from. Working closely with the district administration for the SBM-G has also been a unique experience. Minal says handling office-level issues along with on-ground implementation gave her better insights into the ZSBP programme, and the larger impact it has been creating. “The experience has changed me as a person, and also shaped my perspective on how such work should happen. I am thankful to Tata Trusts for this great initiative,” she signs off.

**TOILET COVERAGE:**

Till August 2017: 83%
Till March 2018: 100%

Minal and her team realised that the best advocates for the cause of the Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin were children and began to engage with them to eventually persuade the elders to build toilets in their homes.
Passion and fervent belief in a cause are powerful forces for transformation and Manish Vishnoi, a prerak with the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) in Banswara district of Rajasthan, best exemplifies it. Sustained efforts by Manish have led to a significant increase in the number of individual household latrines (IHH) in the district.

It wasn’t easy to begin with. The Wagad region, of which Banswara happens to be a part, is home to a tribal community that lives in spatially separated homesteads. Answering nature’s call in the open has been a practice followed by the rural populace for generations.

Along with spreading awareness about constructing toilets in houses and avoiding defecating in the open, Manish had to interact with the political parties at times to ensure that any ideological differences didn’t get in the way of his objectives. “I had to canvass support from all stakeholders for the smooth implementation of the programme,” says Manish.

COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION
Hailing from Peelva Khariya Bera village in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan, Manish had decided early in life to work in grassroots transformation projects. This led him to resign from a government job in 2013.
as a research assistant at the Sardar Patel Police University in Jodhpur, Manish got disenchanted with his role in just 10 days and quit. Looking for opportunities in the social development space, he applied for the Zila Swachh Bharat Prerak fellowship, having heard about it from a friend and the transformational opportunities it offered.

However, nothing he had learnt while studying for his masters in youth empowerment or with the Hyderabad-based National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (January - May 2017) prepared him for the challenges of working as a prerak in Banswara. “The challenges were big and numerous. It was unlike any other that I had encountered,” he says.

Adversity introduces a man to himself and the aphorism proved true for Manish too. Hitting the ground running from the day he was posted in May 2017, Manish worked consistently to grow awareness for basic sanitation and hygiene in 1,410 villages under 346 gram panchayats across the district. It proved to be a gruelling task, and 18-hour workdays were not uncommon.

The biggest challenge for Manish, though, was to get villagers to truly understand the importance of sanitation and the hazards of defecating in the open — topics that are typically considered as taboo for residents.

Motivating them to use the newly built toilets every day, and not revert to their old ways of defecating in the open, proved to be another major test for Manish. Some had even converted the new toilets into storerooms, constructing those only to avail the financial incentive of Rs.12,000. “The villagers were under the impression that they only had to build the toilets and continued with their old habits. Convincing them to change ways proved to be difficult,” says Manish.

Learning the local language, Wagadi, helped Manish communicate better with the locals. Connecting with them over informal activities was another route to win over their trust. This included organising an event, where the message of the SBM was shared with the 221 individuals who participated.

**PERSEVERANCE PAYS**

Numbers underscore the change that Banswara has seen. From 33\textsuperscript{rd} position on the Swachhata Index for May 2017, Banswara has finally met its ODF status target in 10 months (March 2018). Geo-tagging of the toilets constructed stood at an abysmal 0.07%, but with better teamwork and regular reporting this figure is now 74%.

Manish is particularly proud of the fact that he got a toilet built for his paternal grandmother in their village. The incident, which was covered by local media, made him a sanitation evangelist in Jodhpur district too. The *Swachh Namaskar*, an innovative greeting introduced by Manish to create awareness about sanitation and hygiene, is now popular among SBM stakeholders and has been made standard practice across the state.

But Manish says his job isn't yet done. With aspects such as ensuring sustainability of the efforts, completing the geo-tagging of all toilets and solid-liquid waste management remaining, Manish knows he must continue his good work to make Banswara an example for others to follow.