

Baandhani goes from strength to strength at Ambedkar Nagar, Dhayari

No more struggling up and down the steep and slippery bank of the nala to collect dirty water for drinking, washing clothes, cleaning vessels, bathing...

The women at Ambedkar Nagar in Dhayari fringe village have just inaugurated their new water stand post. This is another success in a series of vital improvements, achieved, bit by bit, through the women's efforts.

For a long time, this settlement had no basic amenities whatsoever. And the women bore the brunt of it, dealing with



LEFT: a view of part of Ambedkar Nagar

The local Baandhani collective is now three years old, and stronger than ever. It was the new **toilet block** that really set the ball rolling. As part of the PMC-NGO toilet drive in 2000, SA-Baandhani negotiated with the PMC for a block in



RIGHT Baydabai explains their problems to the Municipal Commissioner

Ambedkar Nagar. The local Baandhani group, with support from Pune Baandhani, played a major role in the construction.

The women took charge of the site, kept tabs on materials deliveries, checked on the mixes, ensured the concrete was cured, and kept a constant eye on the work

ABOVE LEFT: inaugurating the new stand post



LEFT: organising savings books in the Baandhani office (caretaker's room)

BELOW: discussions at a Baandhani meeting



the stress of no toilets and no water supply. But they didn't just sit back, they knew exactly what was needed to improve their lives, so they set about it. They got together, and started saving, holding meetings, discussing what they could do, and negotiating with the PMC.

Once the block was ready for use, the community got together and worked out a maintenance system. They decided not to employ a caretaker, just a cleaner twice a week, and otherwise they're looking after the toilets themselves. It's a system that's working well. The caretaker's room has become the **Baandhani office**. It's a useful base and a pleasant place to sit, talk, hold meetings. It's a space the women can really use. The toilet block meant that the PMC had recognised Ambedkar Nagar as a settlement needing facilities. And of course a toilet block based on pour-flush latrines and a soak pit needs water... so the toilet block meant that a water pipe had to be extended to the toilet block, which meant that, with some prodding, the PMC could also connect up a **water stand post**.

A remaining big, grim issue is waterlogging. Ambedkar Nagar is on low-lying land and any surface run-off just



ABOVE: the new toilet block with the Baandhani office on top

settles there. The problem is made a whole lot worse by sullage which flows right in from upslope apartment blocks. For most of the year, stagnant pools pollute the settlement. During the monsoon the community has to cope with outright flooding.

It's nasty, it stinks, and it has a very bad effect on everybody's health. It also reduces the effective functioning of the toilet soak pit. So Baandhani and SA are negotiating hard for permissions to build drainage channels in the settlement. This is an urgent project, and hopefully the go-ahead will come soon.

A central part of Baandhani-SA's way of working is to participate in any municipal project that focuses on the

RIGHT: stinking filthy water collects in the settlement

RIGHT: the community has achieved some basic improvements to their settlement



urban poor. This way Baandhani can make sure that their needs and priorities are on the city planning agenda. This is what is happening at Dhayari. The toilet block at Ambedkar Nagar has meant much more than toilets: it has led to other developments, the Corporation has 'recognised' the settlement, and the women's total involvement in obtaining and managing their facilities has really strengthened the Baandhani collective.



RIGHT: cleaning up the toilets

