

Punsari Gram Panchayat (GP): Child-friendly and all-round development, winner of national awards

Punsari Gram Panchayat (total population 5,100, female 2,447 male 2,653), Taluka Talod is located in Sabarkantha district in the state of Gujarat, India. Children's population below 6 years includes 578 (female 247, male 302). The population includes 410 persons (females 196, males 214) from the SC community. The village is located at about 80 KM from the state capital, Gandhinagar. Known as a smart village, Punsari is equipped with effective and efficient programs ranging from early childhood development to women's empowerment and to modern infrastructure such as CCTV camera and public announcement system. It has received about 80,000 visitors so far from national and international entities, and is a model of good governance.

Governance: Punsari has undergone transformation under the leadership of two Sarpanches: Mr. Himanshu Patel (2006-2016) and Sunandaben Patel (2016-to date) (photos on the right, top first and second respectively). Gram Panchayat Coordination Committee (GPCC) was formed and is active. There were 228 Below Poverty Line (BPL) families in the village in 2011, now reduced to 60.



In 2006, the GP had Rs. 2 lakh in the bank, and in 2012, it reached a fixed deposit of Rs. 1.5 crore. This was achieved through well managed funds. Punsari has received several awards, including Nirmal Gram Award by the Central Government and Best Gram Panchayat of Gujarat (2010-11).



Child Nutrition and Education: Child malnourishment rate is zero percent, achieved by eight well constructed and well run AWCs. All AWCs have functional toilets with soaps and napkins for the children. Total 100% enrolment of all eligible children in schools is ensured every year, and 0% drop out rate is ensured through girls and boys from poor background households adopted by well-to-do families for education support. Atal Express minibus (20 seats) provide free commuting for students to five primary schools (up to Standard 5) and four secondary schools (up to Standard 8). The schools are equipped with the classrooms with CCTV Cameras, well equipped computer labs, books library, playgrounds, mineral water plants, separate toilets for girls and boys (cleaned regularly), effective midday meal (plus one special meal per month).

Women empowerment: There are 108 women's Self-help Groups (SHGs) with a total of 1,200 membership; 90 SHGs linked with banks for loans and have revolving funds. Training programs were organised in sewing, henna (Mahendi), beauty parlour, pottery etc. Women have eight shops at a government built shopping centre for selling their produce.

Public Health, drinking water, sanitation, agriculture and other sectors: Maternal and infant mortality rate is zero per cent. Primary health centre operates 24x7 with maternity ward, medicine shop and library. Piped clean water is supplied to every house through five bore wells. Also there are four hand pumps and a Reverse Osmosis (RO) plant for water purification. All 73 village wells are regularly recharged with rainwater. All houses are covered with sanitation units. The whole village is covered with an underground drainage system for waste and stormwater management. Pay-and-use public toilets are accessible near the bus station. Plantation of fruit and medicinal plants has been done in barren lands. Punsari has a well managed crematorium for last rites. The mortal remains (*asthi*) are kept in pots/urns in Gram Panchayat for collective dispersal at Haridwar or other religious sites once in a year.

Leadership: The Sarpanch (Mr. Himanshu Patel) had started with formation of Gram Panchayat Coordination Committee (GPCC) by involving all the Gram Panchayat members, frontline workers and officers of the government line departments, and operators of Fair Price Shop and Midday Meal. The frontline workers and others had few challenges in the beginning as they were not used to such coordination, but strong will of the Sarpanch resulted in regularising the GPCC forum.

Children's participation was ensured through activities such as village newsletter.