

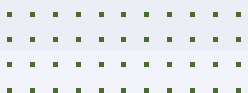


# #SafaiMitralnspires

*A collection of stories from sanitation workers gathered during the State-Wide Intensive Training for Sanitation Workers on their Occupational Dignity and Safety under*

## **Maharashtra Urban WASH & ES Coalition**

*a joint initiative of the  
Regional Centre for Urban and Environmental Studies (RCUES) of  
All India Institute of Local Self Government (AIIILSG), Mumbai,  
UNICEF Maharashtra*



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## Message for the Readers

The Maharashtra Urban WASH-ES Coalition and UNICEF Maharashtra are proud to present **#SafaiMitralnspires**, a collection of inspiring stories of sanitation workers from across Maharashtra.

This series was born out of our desire to recognize and celebrate the often-overlooked contributions of sanitation workers, who play a critical role in keeping our cities clean and healthy. During our state-wide program on sanitation worker occupational dignity and safety, we were continually impressed by the resilience, determination, and dedication of these unsung heroes.

The stories featured in **#SafaiMitralnspires** are just a few examples of the many sanitation workers who are making a positive impact on their communities. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the master trainers whose dedicated efforts in finding and sharing these inspirational stories have been instrumental in illuminating the remarkable contributions and efforts of sanitation workers. We hope that by sharing these stories, we can raise awareness of their important work and inspire others to take action to support sanitation workers in their own communities.

We encourage you to read the stories in **#SafaiMitralnspires** and to share them with others. Together, we can help to make the world a more just and equitable place for all, including the sanitation workers who make our lives possible.

www.mahawashcoalition.com

**Disclaimer:** All stories featured in this publication are based on the information provided by the respective sanitation workers, with formal consent from them. The author assumes no responsibility for any errors in the content of these stories.

## About the Maharashtra Urban WASH-ES Coalition



The Maharashtra Urban WASH & Environmental Sanitation Coalition (Maha-UWES Coalition) is a state-level platform that enables and supports safe and sustainable actions in urban WASH and ES across cities in Maharashtra. The Coalition is a joint initiative of the Regional Centre for Urban and Environmental Studies (RCUES) of All India Institute of Local Self Government (AIILSG), Mumbai and UNICEF Maharashtra.

## Secretariat of Maharashtra Urban WASH-ES Coalition



The secretariat acknowledges the dedication of the Master Trainers who stepped forward to provide training for sanitation workers as part of the State-wide Intensive Training Program for Sanitation workers on their occupational safety and dignity. In addition to the training sessions facilitated by RCUES of AIILSG, Mumbai, several others were conducted in partnership with private organizations, NGOs, and various collaborators across diverse cities.

## Partners (Master Trainers)





Image: Poornima Sarsar/Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

# Poornima Sarsar

## ***From Sanitation Worker to Master Trainer: Poornima's Journey of Education and Empowerment***

Financial constraints often force individuals to choose between work and education. Poornima Sarsar, a dedicated sanitation worker with the Akola Municipal Corporation, faced this dilemma. Despite a strong desire for knowledge, higher education initially seemed out of reach. However, Poornima wasn't one to give up easily. She meticulously planned her schedule, carving out study time before or after her sanitation work shifts. This unwavering dedication paid off when Ms. Poornima successfully completed her Bachelor of Arts degree – a remarkable achievement that showcased her commitment to self-improvement.

News of her accomplishment reached the Akola Municipal Corporation. Recognizing both her academic feat and her potential as a role model, the corporation offered her a unique opportunity: to become a Master Trainer for the Sanitation Workers' Program. This program aimed to equip sanitation workers with additional skills and knowledge to enhance their job performance and safety. While initial shyness arose due to the male-dominated training environment, her eagerness to learn quickly overshadowed her apprehension. She actively participated, soaking up the new knowledge and best practices.

Upon completing her Master Trainer training, Poornima was chosen to lead the training batch for sanitation workers. Standing confidently before her peers, she shared her personal journey of juggling work and studies. Openly discussing the challenges and the importance of self-discipline, her story resonated deeply with the participants. They saw not just her academic success, but the dedication and perseverance required to achieve it. This newfound inspiration fostered a sense of self-belief and a newfound appreciation for their profession. The training environment transformed, becoming more engaged and motivated.

The training sessions imparted by Poornima proved successful. Beyond imparting new skills, her story serves as a powerful tool for breaking down stereotypes. Poornima stands as a powerful testament to the transformative power of education and the potential for growth and empowerment available to all those with a strong work ethic and unwavering ambition.



Image: Reshma Shaikh/Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

# Reshma Shaikh

## ***From Competition Winner to Community Champion: Reshma Shaikh's E-Waste Journey***

Reshma Shaikh, a resident of Lonavala, emerged as a champion for environmental protection through her leadership in the Meera Self Help Group. In 2024, the Lonavala Municipal Council partnered with the Kushagra Innovation Foundation to organize an e-waste collection competition for self-help groups. Recognizing the urgency of addressing improper e-waste disposal in their community, Reshma actively participated with her group members in the training program. This initiative equipped them with critical knowledge about the harmful effects of e-waste and proper collection and disposal methods.

Armed with this newfound expertise, Reshma and the Meera Self Help Group embarked on a mission to collect e-waste directly from Lonavala residents. Their initial door-to-door campaign encountered resistance as many residents lacked awareness about the environmental and health hazards associated with improper e-waste disposal. Undeterred, Reshma adopted a patient approach, educating residents about the harmful effects of e-waste on both the environment and human health. She emphasized the importance of e-waste recycling, highlighting its contribution to resource conservation and environmental sustainability.

Reshma's dedication and the collective efforts of the Meera Self Help Group yielded impressive results. Residents became increasingly receptive to the importance of proper e-waste disposal, leading to a significant increase in e-waste collection. Their commitment culminated in a significant achievement – the Meera Self Help Group was recognized as the top collector in the Lonavala Municipal Council's e-waste collection competition. This victory served as a springboard for a new opportunity. Impressed by their dedication and the positive impact on the community, the Lonavala Municipal Council entrusted the group with the responsibility of managing the town's e-waste collection center. This ongoing role empowers Reshma and the group to make a lasting impact on their community by facilitating responsible e-waste disposal and promoting a culture of environmental sustainability in Lonavala.



Image: Savita Manohar /Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

# Savita Manohar

## ***Resilience in Action: Savita's Journey from Widowhood to Entrepreneurship***

Savita's story exemplifies resilience in the face of hardship. A resident of Dindori, she found herself widowed at the young age of 32, faced with the daunting responsibility of raising a son alone. Despite these challenges, her unwavering determination propelled her forward.

Determined to build a secure future for herself and her son, Savita secured employment as a sanitation worker with the Dindori Municipal Council. This role not only provided her with financial stability but also allowed her to contribute to the cleanliness of her community. She donned her PPE kit with a sense of purpose, understanding its importance in safeguarding her health while performing her duties.

However, she did not limit herself to just completing her assigned tasks. The training she received instilled in her the importance of proper hygiene practices. She actively shared this knowledge with her fellow sanitation workers, promoting a culture of safety and well-being within the workforce.

Savita's dedication extends beyond her work as a sanitation worker. Demonstrating remarkable entrepreneurial spirit, she established a small residential shop. She skillfully manages both her job and the shop, fueled by a desire to provide her son with the best possible education and opportunities.

Her ultimate goal is to see her son clad in the prestigious uniform of the Indian Army. This dream fuels her tireless work ethic. She meticulously saves every penny to invest in her son's education, ensuring he has the resources and foundation to succeed. By prioritizing his education, Savita empowers him to pursue his aspirations and achieve his full potential.

Her story transcends the realm of sanitation work. It serves as a powerful reminder to the human spirit's ability to overcome adversity. Through her unwavering determination, entrepreneurial spirit, and unwavering love for her son, Savita has carved a path towards a brighter future, inspiring others with her strength and resilience.





Image: Amit Chavan /Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

# Amit Chavan

## ***From Football Star to Sanitation Champion: Amit Chavan's Journey in Public Sanitation***

Amit Chavan's career path exemplifies resilience and dedication to public service. His journey began on the football fields of Maharashtra, where he enjoyed a successful professional career from 2000 to 2010. However, an unfortunate injury forced him to retire from his athletic pursuits.

Undeterred by this setback, Amit sought a new chapter in his professional life. Following in the footsteps of his aunt, he joined the Satara Municipal Council as a sanitation worker. While fulfilling his duties with dedication, Amit's natural leadership qualities and excellent English language skills became evident. Recognizing his potential, a supervisor at the council presented Amit with a unique opportunity.

Amit was selected to participate in Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) events. This role leveraged his communication skills to raise awareness about sanitation and hygiene practices within the Satara community. He actively participated in monitoring various government campaigns, including those focused on achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) city status and Swachh Survekshan (Cleanliness Survey) improvements for Satara.

Amit's commitment to public service extends beyond his designated role. He embarked on a personal mission to further contribute to Satara's progress. This included actively learning about additional government initiatives, such as the Majhi Vasundhara Abhiyan promoting city-wide environmental sustainability. His thirst for knowledge and unwavering dedication to a cleaner Satara serve as an inspiration to others. Currently, he is pursuing a Sanitary Inspector course at All India Institute of Local Self Government, Kolhapur, further solidifying his commitment to the sanitation sector.

Today, Amit Chavan stands as a role model, demonstrating that even in the face of adversity, one can find new purpose and make a positive impact. He has transformed from a skilled athlete to a sanitation worker, leader, and community educator. His dedication to his community and his unwavering pursuit of knowledge are an inspiration for all.



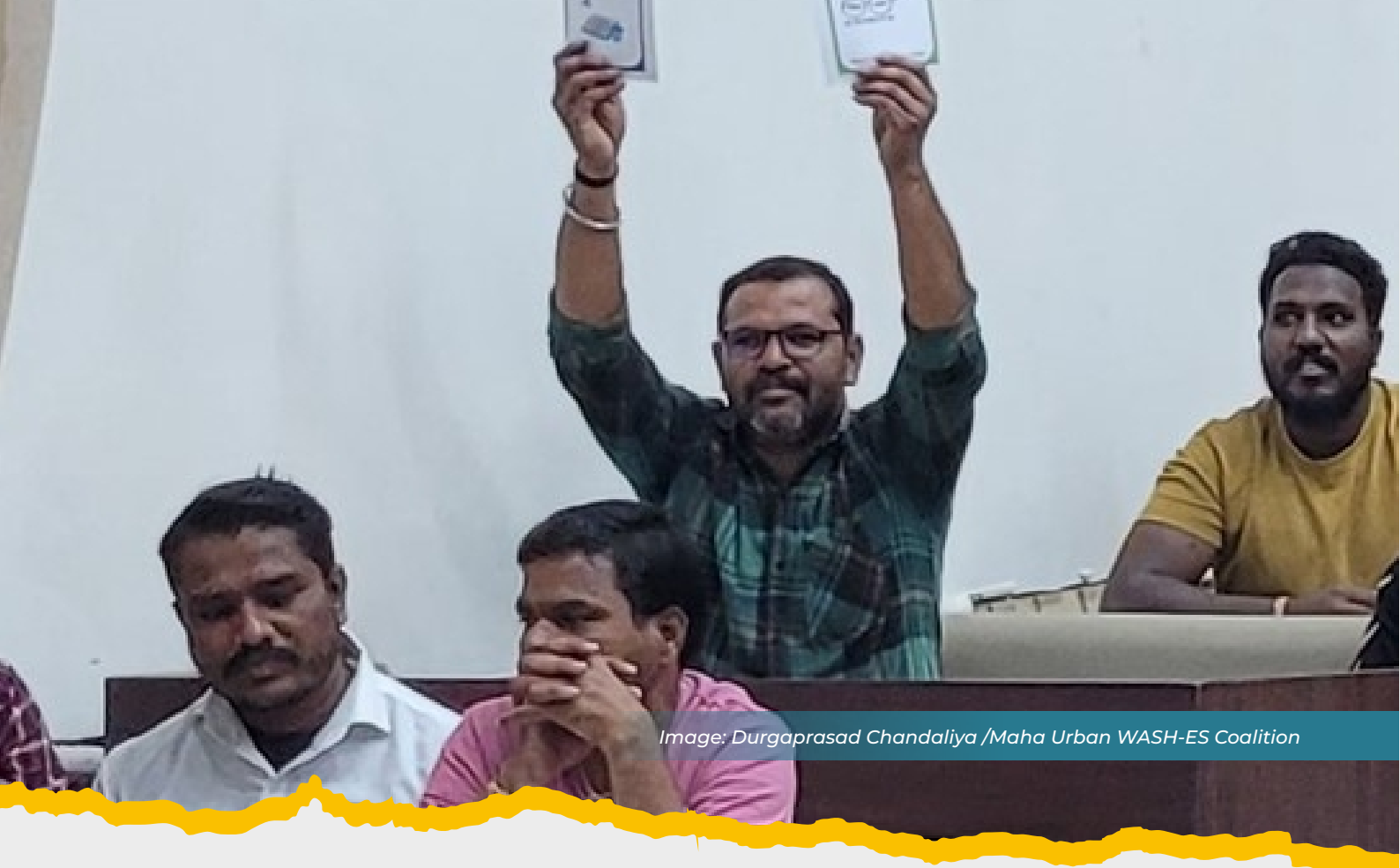


Image: Durgaprasad Chandaliya /Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

# Durgaprasad Chandaliya

## **Breaking Barriers: Durgaprasad Chandaliya's Pharmacy Inspires a Community**

Durgaprasad Chandaliya's story exemplifies the power of ambition and perseverance. Born into a family of sanitation workers in Ahmednagar, his initial exposure to the world was shaped by the rigorous routines and physical demands of this essential profession. However, unlike following the familiar path, he harbored a dream of a different kind – a career in healthcare.

Fueled by his desire for a white coat instead of a khaki uniform, Durgaprasad defied expectations and pursued a Bachelor of Pharmacy degree. This achievement marked a significant turning point, opening doors to new possibilities beyond the sanitation work he knew.

Graduation presented Durgaprasad with a critical decision. While he could have returned to familiar sanitation work, a yearning for a different kind of service lingered. The Swachhta Udyadhi Yojana, a government initiative empowering sanitation workers, emerged as a potential bridge to a new life.

Seizing this opportunity, he approached the authorities with a well-defined business plan. His vision – a medical shop offering affordable medicines and reliable health advice – resonated with their objective of uplifting sanitation workers. Backed by the Yojana's seed funding, Durgaprasad's vision soon materialized into a reality on a familiar street corner in his community.

His shop transcended the purpose of a mere retail space. It became a beacon of hope and a symbol of resilience within the community. The son of a sanitation worker, now a trusted pharmacist dispensing healthcare essentials, embodied the power of determination and the ability to break free from preconceived notions of social mobility.

Durgaprasad's story underscores the importance of recognizing the potential that exists within every individual, regardless of background. His journey reminds us that even the most challenging beginnings can lead to unexpected success stories, and that unwavering dreams can have a profound impact on the lives of others.



Image: Sachin Salavi /Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

# Sachin Salavi

## ***A Soft Voice with a Powerful Message: Sachin Salavi's Fight Against COVID-19***

Sachin Salavi and his sanitation team at the Mahad Nagar Parishad epitomize the concept of unseen heroes. While their khaki uniforms typically symbolize street cleaning, during the COVID-19 pandemic, they became a badge of courage and resilience.

As the pandemic gripped India, Sachin's team's duties transformed dramatically. Beyond their regular sanitation tasks, they shouldered the critical responsibility of handling COVID-19's grim realities. This included transporting patients to hospitals, ensuring proper disposal of infected materials, and assisting with final rites – a stark contrast to their pre-pandemic routines. Unlike their counterparts in larger cities, his team received no additional compensation for these high-risk tasks.

Despite the challenges and emotional toll, Sachin's commitment remained unwavering. He approached each task with a quiet determination, leading his team by example. His dedication stemmed from a strong sense of duty and a desire to protect his community from the pandemic's worst effects.

Sachin's voice, usually soft-spoken, now carries a newfound weight. It conveys a message of hope and a plea for recognition of the vital services sanitation workers provided during the pandemic. He speaks not just for himself, but for every unseen hero who bravely stepped forward, their compassion their sole motivator.

As Mahad Nagar recovers, Sachin's plea resonates – a call to acknowledge these unseen heroes who walk among us, risking their lives for the well-being of others. Their quiet strength exemplifies not just resilience, but the very essence of humanity, a light that shines even in the darkest of times.



Image: Aarti Ranpise /Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

# Aarti Ranpise

## ***Never Too Late to Learn: Aarti's Story of Perseverance and Personal Growth***

Aarti, a dedicated sanitation worker for 17 years, exemplifies the power of perseverance in the face of adversity. Born into a family where financial constraints limited access to formal education, Aarti began working as a sanitation worker in 1998. Despite a starting salary of only Rs. 40 per month, she remained committed to her role while harboring a desire for further education.

However, at the age of 40, her life took an inspiring turn. Fueled by the unwavering support of her husband and mother-in-law, she made a courageous decision to reclaim the education she was denied earlier. With unwavering determination and a thirst for knowledge, Aarti enrolled in the Secondary School Certificate (Std. 10th) program.

Her commitment and tenacity paid off! She passed the Std. 10th exam with flying colors, achieving an impressive score of 57%. This remarkable feat resonated throughout the community. Her colleagues celebrated her achievement, and the council itself acknowledged her accomplishment by felicitating her at her workplace. This recognition served not only as a testament to her dedication but also as a powerful symbol of the dignity inherent in all professions.

Aarti's story doesn't end here. Currently, she is actively preparing for her Higher Secondary Certificate (Std. 12th) exam. Balancing the responsibilities of her work and family life, she serves as a shining example for others. Her dedication to education in the face of daily challenges inspires those around her and demonstrates the transformative power of perseverance in achieving personal goals.



Image: Ajit Khare /Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

# Ajit Khare

## ***Driving Change: The Inspirational Journey of Ajit Khare in Community Sanitation***

In the landscape of sanitation work, Ajit Khare emerges as a dedicated figure making tangible differences within Satara's communities. Beginning his tenure in 1999 as a vehicle operator with the Satara Municipal Council, he immersed himself in understanding the critical science behind fecal sludge disposal, recognizing its significance for public health.

Over a decade, his commitment remained steadfast. However, he harbored ambitions to extend his services to the neighboring Gram Panchayats, where sanitation efforts often fell short. Despite financial hurdles, he persisted, eventually acquiring a desludging vehicle in 2019. With this vehicle, Ajit took to the nearby villages. His focus was not on profit but on safeguarding the well-being and dignity of his fellow villagers.

Ajit's impact transcended the sanitized streets; it seeped into the fabric of his family. Witnessing their father's unwavering commitment, his children were inspired to pursue higher education. His eldest son, in particular, now follows in his footsteps, preparing to become a sanitary inspector and carry forward his father's legacy.

His story epitomizes the transformative power of dedication, highlighting the profound impact of seemingly ordinary jobs. He isn't merely cleaning streets; he is laying the groundwork for a healthier, more equitable future, one desludging vehicle, one village at a time. Ajit serves as an inspiration, resonating with the ethos of sustainability and community empowerment.



Image: Ganesh Boraji /Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

# Ganesh Boraji

## ***Rising Above: Ganesh Boraji's Journey of Resilience and Opportunity***

Ganesh Boraji has been a sanitation worker for the Murud Janjira Municipal Council for over 8 years. His dedication to his sanitation duties has ensured the cleanliness of the town's streets for countless residents.

Recognizing the need to supplement his income for his family's well-being, he embarked on the additional challenge of operating a fish stall at the local market after his sanitation shift. This seemingly simple step demonstrated his willingness to take initiative and seek opportunities beyond his primary role.

Through sheer perseverance and hard work, Ganesh's fish-selling endeavor blossomed into a thriving business. What began as a small-scale operation soon flourished into a well-established shop within the heart of the market. Supported by his wife, he was able to translate his vision into a reality, significantly improving his family's financial stability.

Ganesh's journey transcends personal success. His hard work not only secured his family's financial stability but also opened doors for his children's education. Thanks to his dedication, they now attend quality schools, a testament to the power of hard work in breaking the cycle of limitations.

His story resonates with resilience and determination, an inspiration for others facing adversity. It highlights the transformative power of seizing opportunities and persevering through challenges. Ganesh exemplifies the potential for individuals to overcome obstacles and create brighter futures for themselves and their families.



Image: Suraj Honmane /Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

# Suraj Honmane

## ***Sanitation Worker by Day, Mridangam Maestro by Night: The Story of Suraj Honmane***

Suraj Honmane, a resident of Thane, Maharashtra, has carved a successful path in the sanitation sector. Raised in a modest household, he learned the value of hard work from his father, a sanitation worker. Despite financial limitations, he nurtured his passion for the mridangam, a traditional Indian instrument.

Balancing his studies with assisting his father instilled a strong work ethic in Suraj. In 2018, he followed in his father's footsteps by joining the Thane Municipal Corporation as a Safai Karmachari. His dedication shone through, leading to a promotion to team leader within a year.

His commitment continued to pay off. Two years later, his performance earned him a promotion to Supervisor, significantly improving his family's financial situation.

Even with increased responsibilities, Suraj hasn't abandoned his love for music. He finds enjoyment playing the mridangam during his free time, striking a healthy balance between work and personal passion.

Suraj's dedication to learning extends beyond his musical interests. His participation in the sanitation workers training program reignited his desire for professional development. This experience motivated him to pursue further education, and he is currently looking forward to enrolling in courses at institutions like AIILSG to achieve his dream of becoming a Sanitary Inspector.

Suraj Honmane's story serves as an example for achieving excellence through his dedication to his work, continuous learning, and unwavering passion for personal pursuits.

Furthermore, his story highlights the positive impact that training programs can have on sanitation workers. By providing opportunities for professional development, these programs can empower sanitation workers like Suraj to achieve their career goals and improve the overall efficiency of the sanitation sector.



Image: Jayashree Ranve /Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

# Jayashree Ranve

## ***Leading by Example: Jayashree Ranve's Journey in Sanitation and Empowerment***

Jayashree Ranve's journey in the sanitation sector is a testament to resilience and unwavering dedication in the face of challenging circumstances. Ten years ago, she held a position in a beauty parlour, showcasing her interest in personal care and aesthetics. She also actively participated in Self-Help Groups (SHGs), highlighting her commitment to community development and women's empowerment. However, life took an unexpected turn when she became a young widow with a child to raise. Faced with the immediate need for financial security, Jayashree sought support from her father-in-law.

With his encouragement, she secured a sanitation worker position at the Lonavala Municipal Council. While this transition from beauty care to sanitation work was significant, Jayashree embraced her new role with a positive attitude and strong work ethic. Today, she speaks with pride about her contribution to the community's well-being, recognizing the vital role sanitation workers play in maintaining hygiene and public health.

Jayashree's dedication extends beyond her official sanitation duties. Her passion for empowering women continues to be a driving force. She actively volunteers her time with SHGs, a cause she championed even before entering the sanitation sector. Her leadership qualities and unwavering commitment were recently recognized by her peers who unanimously elected her as the SHG leader. In this new role, Jayashree has a wider platform to advocate for and support the social and economic empowerment of women in her community.

Jayashree's story exemplifies the importance of skills development and adaptation in the face of life changes. Her experience highlights the transferable skills present in various professions, such as attention to detail and a commitment to public health. Her leadership within the SHGs demonstrates the potential for sanitation workers to be active participants in community development initiatives. This not only benefits the community but also fosters a sense of agency and empowerment among sanitation workers themselves.

## Maharashtra Urban WASH & Environmental Sanitation Coalition

Initiative of RCUES of AILSG, Mumbai, and UNICEF, Mumbai Field Office, is a platform to facilitate collaborative action in urban water supply and environmental sanitation.

## State-wide Intensive Training Program

## for Sanitation Workers in Maharashtra

for their Occupational Safety and Dignity



Image: (L-R) Meena Bhise, Sarika Choudhari, Sonali Lad, Amruta Parihar /Maha Urban WASH-ES Coalition

## From Sanitation Workers to Changemakers: State-wide Intensive Training Program Empowers Sanitation Workers in Maharashtra

Meena Bhise, Sarika Choudhari, Sonali Lad, and Amruta Parihar are sanitation workers in the bustling city of Satara, Maharashtra. Their dedication to keeping the city clean is often unseen and undervalued. However, the state-wide intensive training program for sanitation workers on their occupational dignity and safety has transformed their roles and empowered them both professionally and personally.

Prior to the training, their understanding of sanitation work was limited to sweeping. The program broadened their perspective, revealing the critical role they play in public health. Sonali Lad, emphasized this newfound understanding: "Keeping our city clean isn't just about sweeping. It's about protecting everyone's health."

The training provided them with practical knowledge and essential tools, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits. Sarika shared the impact on their daily work: "Before, we worried about getting sick. Now, we can work with confidence, knowing we're protected."

The program focused beyond mere safety measures. It ignited an entrepreneurial spirit within the group. Inspired by the training sessions and the potential for self-improvement, Meena, Sarika, Sonali, and Amruta are exploring the formation of a Women's Self Help Group (SHG). This initiative would allow them to generate new income opportunities for themselves and potentially support other sanitation workers facing similar challenges.

Sonali's voice resonated with newfound pride as she declared, "We're not just sanitation workers. We're changemakers. We have the skills and resources to build a brighter future."

The story of Meena, Sarika, Sonali, and Amruta exemplifies the transformative power of knowledge and opportunity. This training program not only enhanced their occupational safety and dignity but also ignited their entrepreneurial spirit, paving the way for a more empowered and secure future.



# #SafaiMitralnspires

