



Men as partners in improving the health status of Rural Communities

It is a known fact that Haryana is characterized by a male dominated society where most of the decisions are taken by men. The potential benefits of involving men on health and especially reproductive and sexual health issues are immense. It includes, expanded rights for women, improved family health, better communication between partners encouraging joint and informed decision making within households. Most importantly it helps to create channels of communications between both the sexes on issues that have a huge impact on women's health and well-being.

The project focused on developing male partnership and participation in improving the overall health status of rural communities was started in Mewat district of Haryana in June, 2008.

Mewat district is one of the most backward and underdeveloped districts in the state. One of the reasons for selecting Mewat was the strategic consideration of trial testing interventions in a project setting that was perhaps the most socially challenging and therefore critical to validate the feasibility of replicating similar project interventions in less challenging socio-cultural setting. Mewat district in this sense provided a unique setting with its distinct ethnic and socio-cultural tract and a social backwardness rooted in its history. Historically the region has been extremely turbulent and has been subjected to repeated invasions. The destruction and devastation over the centuries have resulted in backwardness and gross underdevelopment of the area and its people.

The objectives of the project were to work towards improvement of mother and child health and reduce maternal and child mortality among the project population, promote good health practices, health seeking behavior through health education, increase access to quality health services by strengthening the coordination with government health department.

The project covered a population of 29,000 in thirteen villages of Tauru Block of Mewat District. The project interventions covered men, women, and children in the project area with a special focus on pregnant women, lactating mothers and school children.

The project involved conducting a baseline survey to assess the health status and needs of the 10 gram-panchayats of Tauro Block. Based on the findings specific Behavior Change Communication (BCC) activities were planned to promote healthy practices and positive health seeking behavior. The BCC activities focused on health education on preventive health care issues including nutrition, hygiene and sanitation, safe drinking water, anemia, prenatal and ante natal care, immunization, reproductive health, communicable and other diseases with a specific focus on jaundice, malaria, tuberculosis and typhoid.

Another important aspect of the project was to make easy and affordable health products and services accessible to the community through camps, mobile clinics, diagnostic facilities, and provision of medicines. The medical camps conducted in the project villages provided a composite of services that included health check up by a doctor, free distribution of medicines, follow-up, and health counselling. During the diagnostic camp free consultancy and checkup was provided by general physicians and Gynecologists from Artemis Hospital, Max hospital, Uma Sanjeevani and Umkal hospital in Gurugram. The well-trained dispensers from Global Health line i.e. 98.4 chain of pharma clinics made free distribution of medicines in the project villages.

The project also helped in developing linkages with existing health facilities and creating a referral system wherein serious cases requiring institutional care could be referred to private and government hospitals.