

IMPROVEMENT OF MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH SERVICES FOR SALT PAN WORKERS (“AGARIYAS”) OF GUJARAT

Project Rationale:

Agariyas, the traditional salt workers, migrate along with their families for 8 months to desert region of Little Rann of Kutch for salt making (their only source of livelihood) where health services hardly reach. The only source of health service is a mobile van which lacks even the most essential medical supplies besides being unreachable during emergencies. The situation is even worse for women due to absence of female doctor in the mobile van resulting in women not discussing their health issues, left without any benefit of maternal health services. Studies by Public Health Centres and NGO partner show 50 % children suffer from night-blindness and malnutrition

Project Objective:

To advocate for sustainable maternal and child health and nutrition services for Agariyas, specifically:

1. To increase demand for quality maternal health services and a comprehensive mobile health unit
2. To increase access to and influence on prioritizing local/district/state level policy and programme process for improvement of access to maternal health services of women from marginalized communities
3. To organize and participate, along with marginalized community women in advocacy activities and demand improved access to quality health services.

Project Timeline:

2 years (2012-2014)

Project Cost: Year 1 = \$7000, Year 2 = \$13000

Major Accomplishments (2012):

1. Raising awareness:
 - (a) Organized annual convention (agariya sammelan) attended by 700 Agariyas where for first time the importance of maternal health was discussed openly by an expert Dr. Smita Bajpai
 - (b) Weekly radio programme started focusing on experts talking about maternal health issue
2. Health surveys: identified gaps for advocacy for e.g. village health funds(Rs. 10000) not utilized properly
3. Health camps: organized 4 health camps focusing on skin disease , eye checkups and women health marked by participation of 450 women and treatment of 150 identified with serious health issues
4. Successful modification of existing Insurance scheme to be extended to Agariyas medical treatment upto Rs. 30000 free
 - The existing insurance scheme called "Janashri Bima Yojana" provides for up to Rs. 30,000 of medical treatment per family; however, this was only

available to 10% of Agariyas because the government did not account for Agariyas that migrate to the desert. Janpath worked with the state “Empowered Committee” to successfully modify the insurance scheme to include 45,000+ Agariyas.

Activities in progress:

1. Inform women from the marginalized communities about the maternal health entitlements and motivate them to demand quality health services from the public health system
2. Build capacities and mentor the village health and sanitation committees to monitor and advocate for strengthening of health services
3. Capacity building programmes of women within the community through leadership training
4. Facilitate dialogues between the women/communities and the duty bearers to demand for quality maternal health services
5. Advocate with health departments, women and child development department, elected representatives of the state assembly/parliament and print media.
6. Highlight positive and negative issues /cases studies in Media

Project partner: Janpath (<http://www.janpathnetwork.org/index.htm>)

AID LA-OC Project Coordinator: Sridhar Vemuri



Agariyas making Salt in desert



Mobile Van : the sole source of “medical service”



Experts Meeting with women to discuss their problems



Empowerment through meetings

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After Amreli, Rann agariyas set to get CSIR's tips

ADAM HALLIDAY Posted online: Sun May 20 2012, 04:37 hrs

Ahmedabad : After a successful maiden project in Amreli, a patented salt-making process that has more than tripled the income of agariyas (traditional salt workers) there is likely to be extended to salt works in the Little Rann of Kutch (LRK) near Patan this year.

Developed by scientists from the Bhavnagar-based Central Salt and Marine Chemical Research Institute (CSMCRI), a Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) laboratory, the process not only improves salt quality but makes use of by-products that were earlier simply thrown away.

For instance, one of these by-products is Sulphate of Potash (SoP), a major component of fertilisers. India imports about 6 million-odd tonnes of SoP each year because no unit in the country produces it.

The agariyas of Rajula taluka in Amreli district, where the maiden project was located, produced 25 tonnes of SoP last year, according to Ajay Bhatt, one of the CSMCRI scientists who spearheaded the project. A tonne of SoP costs Rs 45 000 currently.

Bhatt and his senior colleague, Mohandas, met top officials of the Industries Commissionerate (IC) on Tuesday to discuss plans to extend the process in Santhalpur, a major salt works centre in Patan. Additional Industries Commissioner H B Shrimali, who is overseeing the project, could not be reached for comment.

The IC had funded 80 per cent of the Rs 1.2 crore Rajula project, with the Agariya Hit Rakshak Manch (AHRM) contributing Rs 30 lakh and the CSMCRI contributing the equivalent of Rs 30 lakh by not charging training and consultancy fees.

"The quality of salt using the new process has been so good that we could sell a tonne of salt for anywhere between Rs 700 to Rs 1,200. It was earlier just Rs 400 or so," said an agariya from Bherai village.

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Use of Media as a tool to spread awareness about agariyas