Enhancing Government’s Capacity in Digital Dissemination of Reproductive and Child Health: Lessons from Project Samvad in Uttarakhand, India

Located in the foothills of the Himalayan mountain range, Uttarakhand is one of the less populated and smaller states of India. Despite a better economic index as compared to the national average, the health status indicators reveal a mixed picture. While the state’s IMR is lesser than that of India, the MMR continues to be quite high (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Uttarakhand</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population (in million)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty rate (in %)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour force participation rate</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy rate (in % adults)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 100,000 live births)</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 live births)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
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Project Samvad in Uttarakhand: At a glance

**Goal:** Improved maternal and child health (MCH) through the promotion of appropriate family planning (FP) methods and nutrition messages using digital platforms

**Primary Objectives:**
- Improve knowledge and behaviours on (a) nutrition in the 1000 day MCH period and (b) modern contraception
- Capacity building of partners and scale up through institutionalisation of video-based Social and Behaviour Change Communication approach

**Project period:** June 2018 – September 2021

**Location:** Haridwar and Udham Singh Nagar

**Key partners:** National Health Mission, Uttarakhand
PROJECT SAMVAD IN UTTARAKHAND

In June 2018, project Samvad was launched after a non-financial Memorandum of Association (MoA) was signed with the National Health Mission (NHM), Government of Uttarakhand. As suggested by the Mission Director and the Chief Medical Officers of the two districts, 100 villages across two blocks Bahadrabad (Haridwar) and Sitarganj (Udham Singh Nagar) were selected for piloting the project’s interventions.

In each of these districts, a three-day training of the front line workers (FLWs) of the health department was conducted on using the Pico projector as well as on social and behavior change communication strategies. More than 120 participants including Asha, Asha Facilitators (AF), and Block Coordinators were trained. Besides, increasing the knowledge and skills of the FLWs on Pico-based dissemination, the training helped the DG team to build a rapport with these cadres, which facilitated the implementation of project activities.

Initially, 100 Pico projectors were purchased by DG and handed over to the ASHAs. They used the projectors to screen video messages during their community meetings. This had a positive effect on the level of awareness about maternal and child health practices, among the target beneficiaries. Once the success of the project was evident, the district officials wished to scale up the intervention to other blocks. So, the pico-projectors were withdrawn from the ASHAs and distributed to all the ASHA facilitators in these two districts.

By end of 2019, the pico-based dissemination began in all blocks of Haridwar. In Udham Singh Nagar the expansion took place at the beginning of 2020. By the end of the project cycle, a total of 150 Pico projectors were purchased and distributed to the AF in these two districts.
Since April 2020, the pico-based dissemination was stalled due to the COVID-19 outbreak. During this period the 16 video messages, which were being used for pico-based dissemination, were repurposed and circulated through the WhatsApp platform. The DG team shared the COVID-layered videos with the block-level supervisory cadres of the ASHA who then circulated it to the ASHAs. The ASHAs further shared the videos with the beneficiaries in their catchment areas.
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- The supervisory cadres of ASHA became capable of ensuring the quality of pico-based dissemination sessions.
- In the two pilot blocks, the Pico-based dissemination was integrate with the roles of the ASHA and its supervisory cadres.
- WhatsApp videos created by DG was in demand from health department officials from all districts across Uttarakhand.
- Video messages specific to the context of Uttarakhand were produced and disseminated.
- Government adopted the pico-based dissemination approach for community meetings conducted by the Asha Facilitators.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES:

- Erratic supply of IFA tablets and other consumables in the state adversely affected utilization, despite increased demand for services.
- Lack of ownership of the Samvad projects by the government officials.
- The ASHA and Asha Facilitators were not very motivated to conduct Pico-based because it was not linked to any incentive.
- The emphasis of the government officials was more on increasing the utilization of services, so monitoring of pico-based dissemination was not very regular.
- The COVID-19 pandemic also delayed many project-related activities.