'Samvad' aiding systemic change in Chhattisgarh

The state of Chhattisgarh has championed triggering systemic change for advancing the efforts in improving the health outcomes for mothers and children by embracing the Digital Green's (DG) Samvad tech based communication tools. With the primary objectives of improving maternal and child health behaviors with a focus on nutrition of women in the 1000 days, for themselves and their children, improving knowledge & increase use of modern contraceptive methods, Capacity building of frontline extension workers and scale up of Digital Green approach to empower communities to demand and access Government services & entitlements, DG rolled out Samvad, a digital communication project in six states of India in the year 2015. The project kick-started in Chhattisgarh in the year 2017 in partnership with the state National Health Mission (NHM) and State Health Resource Centre (SHRC).

Integrating key elements like locally produced content featuring local individuals, viewers can relate to, human mediated dissemination among community members on a regularized basis and feedback and usage capture to shape the production and distribution of the new content, the Samvad was rolled out with the help of trained Mitanins (ASHAs in Chhattisgarh) at the targeted beneficiaries level.

One of the precursors for achieving equitable health at par with the Global goals is systemic change. Digital Green's Samvad project helped in bolstering the systemic change in the state in many ways. It strengthened convergence of the NHM and SHRC and other concerned stakeholder departments. The state's proactive and swift action in accelerating integration of technological innovation as it promptly appointed the nodal officer for M&E for the Samvad project. The state of Chhattisgarh also utilized the robust and adaptable Samvad approach for other health missions like anti-tobacco campaigns and Malaria eradication program, showcasing yet another aspect of systemic change of strengthening integration of innovative methods and digital approaches. Furthermore, Chhattisgarh was the first
state amongst all the six project states to integrate the pico projectors into the PIP and allocated a dedicated budget for it. SHRC incorporated pico projectors for their training purposes. It mandated the use of pico projectors for block level training. Chhattisgarh has been proactive in producing new videos as well. The local video production team produced 14 videos in the span of two years (excluding the lockdown period) in local language set in the backdrop of local areas with local people. It includes six training videos and is using these videos regularly during training sessions. Furthermore, SHRC procured 60 beam projectors, a similar prototype of Pico.

More often than not, systemic challenges hurt a project's soul by slowing its pace or worse delaying its take off. However, if an innovation touches the very soul of the system, the tide just places you in the right space. Chhattisgarh ensured conducive space to let Samvad spread its wings far and wide. The key drivers in it included a resilient and adaptive technological innovation and robust dissemination process aligning with the state government as partner, more specifically SHRC. The pico projectors by virtue of its portability and ease of use struck a chord with both the SHRC and eventually NHM. Enhancing skills and capabilities of the SHRC team members and the Front Line Workers (FLWs) in producing videos and running and maintaining pico projectors added flavor to the process. The systematic and cascading rolling out approach along with the hyper local content has been one of the critical levers of the Samvad project triggering systemic change.

DG diversification of the digitization process and paving way for WhatsApp, IVRS and LI based content dissemination made it all the more formidable innovation in SBCC at it helped the SHRC in navigating the training and awareness generation during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The foresight and agility in harnessing technical skills for the alternate systems, Samvad furthered the mutual push for the systemic change.

“Samvad as a complete technological innovation package for SBCC stimulated systemic change there by enabling the state government to achieve mileage in attaining national and global goals in health and well-being. SHRC being an ancillary/subsidiary institution with relative functional independence was able to embrace it quickly and continues to support it.” - Anju Khewar, Project Coordinator, SHRC, Chhattisgarh

As the Gol pacing towards the SDGs 2030, the government of Chhattisgarh will be one of the proud states contributing towards achieving them if they continue strengthening the Samvad tool in their RMNCH program. The SHRC and NHM are the primary stakeholders of the project Samvad and SHRC's proactive role and participation in adopting digital innovations of Samvad for achieving the development goals has been one of key drivers for systemic change. The state of Chhattisgarh is poised for scale up and sustaining the project Samvad under the able leadership of SHRC and essential support from the state NHM.