

Actions Speak Loud: Mobilising the Paudi Bhuyan Community for Well-Nourished Babies

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As a warm breeze rustles the bamboo stalks outside her hut, Rekha sits inside and lovingly holds her new-born daughter close, to feed her. Recalling the instructions given by her village's ASHA just two days ago, she expertly adjusts her arm to help her daughter properly latch on and starts to breastfeed her baby.

Rekha's attendance at the awareness campaign on breastfeeding in the under the Jiban Sampark program during the Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Day at her village Anganwadi centre two days ago, has newly boosted her self-confidence and knowledge to best care for her baby.

Particularly vulnerable: Hurdles in Rekha's path

Rekha, 20 years old, has recently become a mother to a new-born girl in the village of Bhudabhuin in Odisha. She belongs to the Paudi Bhuyan tribe, a community which is categorised as a 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group' (PVTG) in India. Globally, breastfeeding is recognised as an essential practice for new-borns, as early and exclusive breastfeeding is the foundation for a human being's optimal growth, development, and lifelong immunity. However, among PVTGs in India, there exist knowledge barriers, superstitions, and indifference towards the practice of breastfeeding, which can be detrimental for the survival and optimal development of new-born children in these communities.

'Jiban Sampark': Connecting with life

Along with other new mothers in her village, Rekha recently attended the Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Day at her village Anganwadi centre in Budhabhuin, where they also celebrated the 'World Breastfeeding Week'. These celebrations and awareness campaigns were a part of the UNICEF-supported 'Jiban Sampark' program, implemented by SEWAK and other NGOs in Talabahali and other areas of the

Lahunipada block of Sundergarh district in Odisha.



Rekha, along with other women from the Budhabhuin village attend the VHSND Day under the Jiban Sampark programme at Budhabhuin, Odisha. Photo credit: SEWAK (Self Employed Workers Association Kendra), August 2022.

The observance of the World Breastfeeding Week in the Lahunipada block of Odisha, including Rekha's village, included the engagement and mobilisation of community influencers, frontline workers, and other stakeholders such as the Odisha PVTG Empowerment and Livelihood Improvement Programme (OPELIP) and community resource persons (CRPs) in the VHSND sessions.

Here, she was sensitised on relevant topics for her, like the necessity and importance of breastfeeding, maternal nutrition, health check-ups, micronutrients supplementation and water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices.

Sushil Pradhan, a key functionary of SEWAK, an NGO implementing the Jiban Sampark programme, remarked:

"The celebration of the World Breastfeeding Week, from 1st to 7th August, is a part of the Jiban Sampark program. Such occasions provide a strategic opportunity for community members to gather and help effectively share messages about good practices like breastfeeding."



Observation of the World Breastfeeding Week under the Jiban Sampark programme at Budhabhuin village in Odisha. Photo credit: SEWAK, August 2022.

Well informed parents make the right decisions on Infant and Young Child Nutrition (IYCN)

Rekha and her other peers were educated about IYCN and care in their local language by community mobilisers whom she knew and trusted, in a safe space where they could ask each other questions and clarify myths and misconceptions. They gained information around the nutritional components of breast milk, its role in protecting babies against infections and illnesses, how breastfeeding decreases the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), among others.

UNICEF supports good IYCN practices

UNICEF's support for the activities under the Jiban Sampark program has yielded appreciable results in positive adoption of good practices in IYCF, health and sanitation behaviours for good health and nutrition outcomes among Rekha's and other women of the Paudi Bhuyan tribe. The 'Jiban Sampark' programme stands as a stellar example of one that involves community mobilisation for the improvement of better health and nutrition practices for young children and new mothers, particularly among vulnerable groups of India and globally.

For more information, please contact

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