

Making PRI Champions for Jan Andolan, Rajasthan

Action Against Hunger-India (AAH) worked with the government on the POSHAN (Proactive and Optimum care of children, through Social-Household Approach for Nutrition) program in 8 Districts of Rajasthan to build an enabling environment for improved nutrition results in Rajasthan. For three years AAH, through the Government led 'Proactive and Optimum care of children through social-household approach for nutrition' (POSHAN) program, worked to strengthen the Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) program implemented by the National Health Mission in Rajasthan. AAH's intervention advocated the importance of CMAM among key stakeholders in various districts of Rajasthan. As a knowledge partner for the government of Rajasthan, AAH strengthened the POSHAN program by advocating to raise awareness amongst PRI members about their role in achieving the targets of POSHAN Rajasthan and POSHAN Abhiyaan. In collaboration with the NHM and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the new initiative was tailored specifically for PRI members and was rolled out in the eight districts through orientation and sensitisation workshops.

OBJECTIVES

Based on the experiences and learning in the initial program in Rajasthan, it was clear that the PRIs are a crucial stakeholder with decision-making powers at their disposal that should be leveraged to bring positive changes to the communities they serve. The intervention is currently being implemented in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The objectives are:

- To sensitize the local governance towards the issue of malnutrition.
- To discuss and generate awareness on the role of the local governance in POSHAN Abhiyaan Jan Andolan.
- To increase active participation of PRI members in generating a Jan Andolan towards Nutrition.

KEY ACTIVITIES

Action Against Hunger organised meetings in collaboration with the NHM and ICDS at the district and block level in eight districts. So far 97 meetings have been conducted with 645 participants involving the Sarpanches, panchayat members, National Health Mission (NHM) and ICDS officials, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), Aanganwadi Workers (AWWs) and civil society organizations. Under the initiative, the workshops sensitised PRI members on antenatal check-ups, optimal breastfeeding, complementary feeding, immunisation and vitamin A supplementation, growth monitoring, supplementary nutrition programs, anemia prevention in children, diet, deworming, food fortification, diarrhoea management, girls' education, age of marriage for girls, safe drinking water, hygiene, and sanitation.

CHALLENGES

Until 2018, there was no dedicated budget for nutrition or malnutrition-related expenditure in the central government's budget. Due to this, nutrition was never a high priority agenda for PRI members and they took very little interest in meetings and trainings centred solely around nutrition. It also made explaining the cross-cutting impact of nutrition on the overall development of the village a challenging task.

Often, due to the patriarchal beliefs of the region women Sarpanchs were not able to take any decisions related to the development of villages. Only sensitising them would not lead to desired actions at the village level. They also have to be empowered on aspects of gender equality and realising their agency as elected leaders. It was also found that many PRI members were unaware of Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNC), Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Day (VHSND) and other nutrition related programs and their functioning.

LEARNINGS & INSIGHTS

The meetings so far have been interactive with the active participation of the PRI members, health department officials, ICDS officials, and the local people and have generated deep insights into the gaps in the functioning of the system. During the meetings, the cause of malnutrition, its treatment and prevention were discussed in detail. The interactive discussions also help them to comprehend the role of Panchayats and the VHSNC in tackling the issue of malnutrition in villages and how the participation of Panchayats with their community could help in overcoming the issue. Nutrition is now a priority discussion in the monthly Gram Panchayat meetings in most of the areas of this intervention:

- It is essential to encourage male and female Sarpanches to become nutrition champions and involve the agenda of nutrition in their meetings include the Gram Panchayat.
- Regular publication of success stories of work done by Gram Panchayats, in regional language papers, motivates other PRI members to be more active around issues of nutrition.
- Motivating PRI members to launch a Kuposhan Mukta Panchayat will help in effective implementation of POSHAN Abhiyaan and achieve its targets.
- Initiating inter-village exposure visits influences the lesser active or passive panchayats to adopt positive behaviour changes and practices within their communities.
- If PRI members are motivated, trained and empowered to address the issues of nutrition related service delivery and ensure last mile coverage.
- Encouraging community participation in planning and implementation of nutrition specific and sensitive activities at the local level, facilitates active uptake of nutrition services.