
SIR ALBERT HOWARD MEMORIAL TRUST, MADHYA PRADESH

Madhya Pradesh's (MP) health indicators are appalling — the second highest infant mortality rate in the country, higher than average maternal deaths and more than 50 percent of children under the age of three are malnourished. These indicators are even higher in the Kesla Block of MP, where the Gonds, Korkus and other Scheduled Caste communities have borne the brunt of displacement due to the construction of the Tawa Dam and the establishment of an ammunition testing ground. There is heavy dependence on quacks, private practitioners and traditional healers like bhagats because of poverty and ignorance.

Armed with extensive experience in community empowerment, the Sir Albert Howard Memorial Trust (SAHMET), has initiated a health intervention in 50 villages around Kesla. In the first phase of the Community Health Program, efforts are concentrated on the capacity building of community health workers (CHW) through training and exposure. SAHMET creates awareness among the villagers regarding the various public health schemes available so that children need not die of snake or dog bites because of time wasted on 'treatment' from bhagats. Patients suffering from tuberculosis, malaria and jaundice can seek timely medical interventions.

SAHMET has been mobilizing community groups — youth, adolescents and women — to take up various issues. Young people have the space to discuss issues of gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS. Men are sensitized to women's needs. Women learn to deal with rampant anaemia and malnutrition.

The collective result of all these efforts is that the communities are forcing government hospitals to function better so that people can access their health entitlements. One successful outcome was when women got an irregular ANM (Auxillary Nurse Mid-wife) transferred by putting a lock on the community health centre. CHWs have taken serious patients to the hospital and demanded the attention of doctors by calling them from their residence. As a result of SAHMET's efforts, the health department is aware that people are better informed and cannot be ignored.

A grant of Rs 4.32 million was sanctioned in 2006-2007, for three years.

Training of community health workers





▲ *Building awareness on health through street theatre*



◀ *Health education in the village school*

▼ *At a community health meeting*

