

18. Empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions on Health Issues through Electronic Media: A Pilot Project in Karnataka

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The Institute for Social and Economic Change launched an innovative action project on the Empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions on Issues of Population, Health, and Social Development through Electronic Mass Media in Karnataka. This project was sponsored by the Population Foundation of India, New Delhi, and Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Mumbai, and implemented in consultation with the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of Karnataka.

The objectives of the project are:

- to educate and sensitize members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions on issues such as population, health, and social development through the electronic media in Karnataka; and
- to utilize the electronic media to reach the larger audience of opinion-makers of rural communities such as Panchayati Raj members, health workers, anganawadi workers, ANMs and non-governmental organizations in Karnataka.

The Government of Karnataka, under the India Population Project –IX, produced television programmes on various issues related to Reproductive and Child Health. ISEC sponsored the telecast of 12 episodes of the production through Bangalore Doordarshan Kendra (DD-1) on Thursdays, from 6.00 to 6.30 p.m. during June to September 2002.

The TV episodes were on the following topics:

- ❖ Health problems of the adolescent girls
- ❖ Menstruation and related developments
- ❖ Age at marriage
- ❖ Health problems of married women
- ❖ Ante-natal care
- ❖ Post-natal care
- ❖ High-risk pregnancy
- ❖ Breast-feeding practices
- ❖ Importance of breast-feeding
- ❖ Immunization (BCG and Polio)
- ❖ Immunization (DPT and others)
- ❖ Temporary and permanent family planning methods

The project was implemented in six districts of Karnataka covering 115 Gram Panchayats. The following six NGOs, with many years of experience in providing health care services and imparting health education, collaborated with ISEC in implementing the project activities.

- Family Planning Association of India, Dharwad, Dharwad District
- Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, H.D. Kote (Mysore District)

- Jayanthi Grama Women and Children Welfare Association, Bijapur District
- Grameena Abhyudaya Seva Samsthe, Doddaballapur (Bangalore Rural District)
- Family Planning Association of India, Bidar Branch (Bidar District)
- Action for Rural Reconstruction Movement, Shorapur (Gulbarga District)

A two-day workshop was organised in May 2002 at ISEC to design the strategies for project implementation. Selected NGO personnel, health education and media experts, and government officials participated in the workshop at which the modalities for implementation of the project were finalised. A one-day orientation programme to sensitize the volunteers of the six NGOs on the following issues was also organised at the headquarters of the NGO concerned in order to

- discuss the modalities to bring the Panchayat members to the TV viewing sessions in each village;
- familiarize the volunteers with the contents of each episode;
- organize a meeting of all gram panchayat presidents and secretaries to finalize the venue for group viewing and making necessary arrangements before the telecast of the first programme. The idea was to seek their cooperation and active involvement as well as sufficient publicity for the programme;
- brief the volunteers to make necessary arrangements for group viewing, arranging discussions and clarifying the doubts raised by the panchayat members after watching the TV programmes;
- to enable them to organize pre- and post-telecast evaluation by administering a well-designed questionnaire supplied by ISEC; and
- supervise the implementation of all aspects of the programme in the project areas.

The volunteers from selected NGOs were trained on various aspects of health care and health education, and each one was entrusted with the responsibility of bringing PRI members to the TV viewing sessions for group viewing and facilitating discussions in each village. This training methodology was appreciated by both panchayat members and volunteers. Through this project, we were also creating a pool of trained and committed health volunteers in villages for availability in future programmes.

The active involvement of NGOs in the project areas helped ensure the participation of Gram Panchayat members. This training experiment also illustrated that television could be used as a powerful and effective medium for training panchayat members in our country. The state government might take up this methodology, after making necessary adaptations while planning their future training programmes.

As a part of the project, the State Department of Health and Family Welfare had requested the ISEC project team to prepare a comprehensive Handbook on Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) for the use of field staff in Karnataka. ISEC has brought out the handbook in consultation with the leading health education and medical experts of Karnataka. Dr. M Ramakrishna Reddy and Mr. N M Narayanamoorthy served as consultants for the preparation of the Handbook. The Govt. of Karnataka printed and distributed 47,000 copies of the Handbook to all health and anganwadi workers (ICDS) in

the state.

An analysis of the pre- and post- telecast questionnaires reveals that the TV programmes were helpful in increasing the awareness among the panchayat members on various aspects of Reproductive and Child Health and governmental programmes. A final evaluation, carried out in December 2002, demonstrated that the methodology evolved was found to be more effective and acceptable to Gram Panchayat members, though there were few operational difficulties during the implementation of the project. In India, where we have to train a large number of elected representatives of PRIs and create awareness about various developmental issues, the government and training institutions alone cannot handle this task. It is, therefore, imperative to look for more effective and acceptable training methodologies, including the use of powerful electronic media. This action project in Karnataka is an innovative effort in that direction.