Striking a Chord: Sehat Sandesh Wahini

A unique venture of the GoUP, Sehat Sandesh Wahini is a mobile video van project being implemented by SIFPSA in the villages of Uttar Pradesh for awareness generation and promotion of NHM schemes focusing on RMNCH+A health issues.

Sehat Sandeshwahini project is yet another pioneering effort by the Government of Uttar Pradesh focusing on awareness generation and publicity of various health schemes under National Health Mission covering reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health issues through video van shows in villages with the objective to bring about a makeover in health seeking behaviour among the rural communities and draw people to come forward and avail health services and facilities meant for them.
The project, being implemented by SIFPSA on behalf of NHM UP, aims to cover over 33000 villages across 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh, of which more than 20000 have already been covered at least once since Feb. 2014, when the program kick-started. The program is being implemented by three agencies in 2016-17, selected through a transparent tender process engaging 67 vans. To cover all blocks of the state, total 880 cycles of the video van show have been planned, with emphasis on scheduled tribe areas, where additional 60 cycles would be conducted.

A video film of about two hours addressing all RMNCH+A health issues covered under various NHM schemes, to name some - Janani Suraksha Yojana, Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK), Rashtriya Kishori Swasthya Karyakram (RKS), Family Planning Routine Immunization, Nutrition EMTS-108 and 102 Ambulance Services etc. has been prepared. The show also includes a short documentary on women empowerment and area specific short films on vector borne diseases. Video vans have been designed in such a way that glimpses of all NHM schemes can be seen on the walls of the van. In addition to villages already covered in previous cycles, 20 new villages from each block have been selected by the CMOs of the respective districts for the show. Each video van team consists of a counselor and an operator. Show timings are kept in the evening only. Pre-publicity is done by the team with the help of Gram Pradhan, ASHA, AWW, ANM and other grass root level workers and through distribution of handbills. A quiz session is held by the counselor at the end of the show followed by prize distribution to winners. The entire program is extensively monitored by officers of NHM and SIFPSA. More than 20000 villages of Uttar Pradesh have been covered by the Sehat Sandesh Wahini so far.

Reflections from the field:

Nyotha, a small village of block Patiyali approx.65 km from district Kasganj, plunges into darkness after sunset, with no provision of electric power supply in the village for years. Even as it got dark, evening of April 18 2016 saw huge crowds draw towards the ground opposite the house of ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) Mithilesh, popularly known as ASHA bahu in the village of approx.450 inhabitants to watch the Sehat Sandesh Wahini show, a luminous, entertaining and edifying audio visual display, a rare phenomenon for the village folks of Nyotha. Educating as it entertained, the show that included short films on various health issues and NHM schemes addressing those issues, got them all glued to it. Most women who reluctantly left the show midway to cook dinner for the family came back to watch it. The question answer session carried out by the counselor at the end of the program saw a very active participation by all, specially the adolescents.
"The SSW team had reached the village around 3 in the afternoon and after meeting the pradhan (village head) made program announcements and went door to door distributing handbills with the help of ASHA" informed the block program manager. Despite the fact that the show happened during harvesting season when the villagers continued cutting crops for as long as they could- through late evenings, it was attended in large numbers.

Commented Amendra, one of the many enthusiastic participants, "Program zyada zaroori hai. Woh to aaj hi hai, gehun to roz katega" ('Program is more important. It is only happening today while harvesting happens every day and can wait')

Village Shivala Kala of block Khair, district Aligarh exhibited an air of exuberance following the Sehat Sandesh Wahini show on April 06, 2016. Venue of the show was a ground opposite the house of a popular village figure, Dr. Gokul. The show was attended by at least an audience of 150 including men, women, adolescent girls and boys and children. remarked Shanti, the accredited social activist of the village (ASHA) 'Had this not been a peak harvesting season when most villagers remained in fields for long hours, there would have been a larger number attending the program!'. On request of the villagers, the show had begun an hour in advance of the scheduled time. The SSW team had reached the village around 2.30 pm and after meeting the Pradhan, ANM and ASHA, went around making program announcements, with ASHA making door to door visits and also distributing handbills. 'There was drum beating as well', said ASHA, the team leaving no stone unturned in publicity of the sandesh wahini show. Though many women left towards the end of the show wanting to finish with their cooking and other household chores before it got too dark, most others stayed back, looking forward to the question and answer session which promised attractive prizes for the winners! The session saw a very active participation by all.

Village Pihura of Block Sahpau, district Hathras on April 7, 2016 had ASHA Guddi Devi's entire family, be it her two daughters or her husband, join in to make arrangements for the Sehat Sandesh Wahini show that was to be held at a ground close to their house, suitable for all. People started arriving much before the scheduled time, with men occupying the cots and women, adolescent girls and children the dari, while most adolescent boys stood in groups to watch the show.

SSW team had reached the village around 2.30 pm and with the help of ASHA had gone around the village making announcements and distributing handbills which resulted in hundreds
emerging to watch the show. The excellent quality of the AV show containing short films with content everybody could connect with, kept the audience enthralled. A short film on three delays leading to maternal mortality was watched intently and in utter silence by the women. Mention of ASHA bahu and her appearance in the film made Sonu, a young adult from the crowd, comment 'dekho bhabhi ki baat ho rahi hai!'. However, after almost an hour of watching the show, many women started leaving saying they had cooking and other household works to finish. While ASHA's husband offered glasses of water to the audience, ASHA and ANM encouraged women to sit through the program. Reminder by the counselor that there would be a question answer session after the program that would fetch attractive prizes to the winners helped to quite an extent. An active quiz session was held by the counselor at the end of the show followed by prize distribution to winners.

Similar sentiments and enthusiasm are being reported from thousands of villages across the state. Sehat Sandesh Wahini shows are mostly being held in remote, underserved and media dark villages. The programs are being regularly monitored by block and district level NHM officials, as well as division and state level SIFPSA officials.

Sehat Sandesh Wahini show has clearly struck a chord, especially with women, touching each with reflections of elements from their own life stories.