

COMBATING VACCINE HESITANCY WITH SUPPORT OF WOMEN VOLUNTEERS

In a nutshell: Setu didi as community champion in mobilizing 1000+ people for COVID-19 vaccination.

Nodal agency: Lohardaga district and Ranchi district, Jharkhand

With the sudden surge in COVID-19 during its second wave in 2021, the Government of Jharkhand like other states undertook a series of measures to protect people from the pandemic. Soon after COVID-19 vaccination was rolled out, hesitancy came up as one of the critical challenges in tackling its spread. People from different sections, especially of the rural society in the state, developed wrong perceptions regarding the vaccination drive.

Under such challenging circumstances, a collaborative initiative involving the state government and development organizations engaged motivated local women volunteers with an objective to bust the vaccine myths. Their efforts in facilitating vaccination have been encouraging. These women volunteers are referred to as 'Setu Didi' because they acted as a bridge between communities and public health services and convinced them to get vaccinated.

In this regard, services of the Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society, which has a network of self-help groups (SHGs) and mentoring sessions for members, were utilized. Community-based incentivized volunteers selected through the existing women collectives were introduced as part of Jharkhand Integrated Development for Health & Nutrition (JIDHAN), a COVID-19 response initiative by PRADAN, PHIA Foundation, Transform Rural India Foundation (TRIF), and Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiative., Transform Rural India Foundation (TRIF), and Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiative.

The Setu Didis get symptomatic people screened and get them isolated at home if necessary or give timely referral through accredited social health activists (ASHAs). They encourage returnee migrants and others to get tested for coronavirus, promote COVID-appropriate behavior with the help of SHGs and CLFs and encourage villagers to get vaccinated.

Impact

- Setu didis' team approach proved to be very effective. Supporting their approach, state government issued guidelines to promote testing and vaccination by involving auxiliary nurse midwives, ASHAs, anganwadi workers, teachers, PRI members, religious/traditional leaders, etc.

- Effective psycho-social counselling and inter-personal communication to address the concerns of rural communities busted the myths related to vaccination and testing.
- Each Setu Didi covered 12 to 14 villages, working with local women's institutions, Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members and frontline workers.
- During lockdown they found it difficult to reach all villages within their respective working area, but they took charge of 3 to 5 villages neighboring their own village.