Case Story – Community Health Awareness

Financial impoverishment manifested its invisible presence on every nook and corner of the labour quarters of Titagarh Jute Mill. The first unit of the mill closed down way back in the early eighties and the second unit has been in and out of operation intermittently. In the present phase work is suspended for the last five months – which mean no wages, no income. With loss of stable livelihood, families have been trying to scrape a living – or merely maintaining existence.

Aruna Singh, a housewife in her mid forties has seen it through the years. “Our health status rise and fall in sync with the closure and commencement of work in the jute mills”, she says jovially showing that the residents have learnt to take their economic predicament in their stride.

On a more somber note, the impact of the awareness programme can be felt on two different plains. Through these exercises, people like Aruna have come to realize that their own knowledge attitude practice and behaviour are vital in preserving their health. “Hospital facilities, doctors, medicines have to play a key role in ensuring that sick people get proper attention. However, in case of certain illness which are very common in our area, prevention of the occurrence of the diseases can be controlled to a large extent if we become aware” she explains.

Through this current phase of health awareness programme, residents have begun to realize the importance of preventive health care and its role in ensuring overall health of communities.

“In addition to this basic change of attitude, the awareness programme through street play and doctor’s discussion has provided us with vital information on adoption of health and hygiene” she says. “We were aware of the importance of hand washing but when the message was given through the entertaining medium (drama), I have noticed that more people have started to make a deliberate attempt to emulate those messages in their lives. In fact, it has happened with my own children who have become more careful in washing hands before eating” she adds.

“The messages on care and attention of pregnant women have touched me, personally” she opines. “I had faced these problems during my pregnancy and thus have made it a point to engage other residents who seem to neglect the health issues of pregnant women in their families. I continuously refer to the programme, especially the message delivered by the doctor during the event to convince the erring family members to proved proper ante natal care to their daughters”

While economic constrains has its effect on quantity and quality of nutrition available to the families, the disproportionate burden of illness further weakens their economic positions.

“With allocation of due importance to the preventive aspects of heath care, we can definitely reduce the medical costs of the families which can be used for positive development, like children’s education” she says. “However, this can only be achieved through continuous campaigns to generate this level of awareness among all residents. For this reason, health awareness campaigns should be considered as a regular feature in the area where the local health workers and service providers should have a major role to play” she says.