



An innovative experiment for the health of Women Sugarcane Workers

The *Mahila Ustod Kamgar Sanghatana* (Women Cane Cutters Organization), an organisation of women sugarcane cutters facilitated by *Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM)*, is working in 80 villages in Beed and Hingoli districts of Maharashtra for the past 4 years. The organisation seeks to focus attention on issues such as recognition for women as sugarcane workers, basic amenities during seasonal migration, ration, livelihood options in the home villages, and health. Special efforts are being made to ensure health care facilities for women sugarcane workers, both at the villages they have migrated too as well as in their home villages. Experiencing both successes and failures, the Women Cane Cutters Organization, along with SOPPECOM, has been experimenting with different initiatives. The organization hopes that the initiative will eventually be adopted and universalised by the Government.

Representation of Women Sugarcane Workers in *Jan Arogya Samiti*

The Women Cane Cutters Organisation is working on the health issues of women cane cutters at the village level. The most appropriate forum for women sugarcane cutters to raise their health related issues is the *Jan Arogya Samitis* (Public Health Committees) of the Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs). Local activists of the organisation made attempts at various levels to bring about the representation of women sugarcane cutters in these committees. During village-level meetings of the organisation, there was consensus on this demand. Women's *Gram Sabhas*¹ were organised in the villages. Although several challenges arose in passing resolutions, the activists succeeded in getting them approved in the

Gram Sabhas. Signature campaigns were conducted, and memorandums were submitted to the District Collector and the Chief Minister. Additionally, the *sanghatana* explained why the representation of women sugarcane workers in the 'Jan Arogya Samiti' is essential at the district, block and village level. Due to persistent follow-up, the local administration accepted this demand.

Jan Arogya Samiti

In Beed, more than 25 women sugarcane workers, and in Hingoli, more than 15, have become members of the 'Jan Arogya Samitis'. The women cane cutter members were given training to make their participation in the *Jan Arogya Samiti* meaningful. Awareness was raised about the health issues specifically faced by women sugarcane cutters, and what points should be raised during these meetings. They were guided about what their responsibilities entailed, and they were trained on the structure and functioning of the committee. .

These women cane cutter representatives have now begun to take an active part in meetings and raise health issues faced by women sugarcane cutters. They have begun to interact with the local health system to help solve these problems.

Health camp for women sugarcane workers

The representation of women sugarcane workers in the *Jan Arogya Samitis* of the Health and Wellness centres helped facilitate the organisation of health check-ups and health camps for the women cane cutters through the health department. These camps were organised just before and just after migration for sugarcane

1 A village-level meeting of women of a Gram Sabha, a platform for women to voice issues and promote participation and leadership

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१	सौ.शोभा बाबासाहेब बहिरवाळ सरपंच, पिंपळवाडी	अध्यक्ष	१३	श्रीम.जनाबाई पंढरीनाथ डोंगर अंगणवाडी सेविका, बहिरवाळ वस्ती	सदस्या
	श्री.डॉ.महेंद्र बांगर सर वैद्यकीय अधिकारी प्रा.आ.केंद्र चन्हाटा	सह अध्यक्ष	१४	श्रीम.कविता अवधुत जाधव अंगणवाडी सेविका, सुर्याचीवाडी	सदस्या
	डॉ.शारदा बाबुराव सारंग स.आ.अधिकारी उपकेंद्र-पिंपळवाडी	सचिव	१५	श्रीम.वैजयंता शेखेराव कवठेकर अंगणवाडी सेविका, कान्हेराव	सदस्या
	श्री.सुंदरराव नवनाथ ढवळे सरपंच, भाळवणी	सदस्य	१६	श्रीम.छानबाई भारकरराव पवार अंगणवाडी सेविका, तुणेवस्ती	सदस्या
	सौ.पुजा गणेश बहिरवाळ उपसरपंच पिंपळवाडी	सदस्या	१७	श्रीम.लताबाई आसाराम कातांगळे अंगणवाडी सेविका, देव्याचीवाडी	सदस्या
	श्री.गोरख महादेव भांडवलकर उपसरपंच भाळवणी	सदस्य	१८	श्रीम.लतिफा तैयनुर सय्यद अंगणवाडी सेविका, वाजुकेवस्ती	सदस्या
	सौ.आशाबाई विधास बहिरवाळ प्रा.पं.सदस्य पिंपळवाडी	सदस्या	१९	श्रीम.अपूर्वा घोडिबा इनकर अंगणवाडी सेविका पिंपळवाडी	सदस्या
	श्रीम.बहिरवाळ सी.आर. आरोग्य सेविका उपकेंद्र पिंपळवाडी	सदस्या	२०	श्रीम.संगिता बाबासाहेब भरत महिला बचत गट अध्यक्ष	सदस्या
१	श्री.मोराळे के.बी. आरोग्य सेवक उपकेंद्र, पिंपळवाडी	सदस्य	२१	श्रीम.पुष्पा यादवराव स्वाई अंगणवाडी सेविका, भाळवणी	सदस्या
१०	श्री.पाखरे दादादाव आसराजी मुख्याध्यापक पिंपळवाडी हामकुल	सदस्य	२२	श्रीम.काशीबाई केशव मुळीक आशा कार्यकर्ता सुर्याचीवाडी, देव्याचीवाडी	सदस्या
११	श्रीम.महागंदा बळीराम सोनवणे आशा कार्यकर्ता पिंपळवाडी	सदस्या	२३	श्रीम.मिता दादादाव बहिरवाळ आशा कार्यकर्ता, भाळवणी	सदस्या
१२	श्रीम.प्रमिला उत्तमराव निकाल्जे आशा कार्यकर्ता पिंपळवाडी	सदस्या	२४	श्रीम.कल्पना अंगद थोरात ऊत्तमोड कामगार महिला मनुष्य	सदस्या

cutting. Women were checked for cervical cancer and vaginal infections. Pregnant women were checked up, and haemoglobin, BP and blood sugar tests were administered. Women who were found to need medical care were given relevant treatment.

In the past two years, health camps have been held in 30 villages in Beed and Hingoli districts, with the participation of over 1000 women.

Attempts are also being made to raise awareness among women in the village on health issues, through the representatives of the Jan Arogya Samitis. Through follow up with the ASHA worker, the Anganwadi worker and the primary health centre, pregnant women and children are provided with immunisation. Pregnant women and nursing mothers are helped to get their entitlements under specific schemes and services. The representatives make lists of pregnant women, nursing mothers, adolescent girls and children in the age group 0-6 years, and supply these to the health authorities, to ensure that they get the health check-up and services they are entitled to.

2 Elected head of Gram Panchayat



Experiences of Jan Arogya Samiti members

"We attended the meetings regularly, and raised the issue of the filth and garbage near the Health and Wellness centre. The gram panchayat provided a container for garbage as a result of this".

- Kalpana Thorat,
Jan Arogya Samiti member, Pimpalwadi,
Block and District Beed

"The sub-centre in 'Vangi', which was linked to our village, was non-functional. As a result, the sugarcane workers were not getting any health services. We contacted the sarpanch², community health officer and the taluka health officers and demanded that the centre opens within two days. Now the health sub-centre functions regularly, the committee meets regularly, and health camps are being held for the women".

- Dwarkatai and Savita Tai,
Jan Arogya Samiti member,
Village Kathoda, Block and District Beed.

"I am the village leader of the Women Cane Cutters Organisation. I work on the health issues of women cane cutters. As a member of the Jan Arogya Samiti, I have worked on cleanliness issues, demanded medicines for the cane cutters (to be used during sugarcane crushing season) and organised health camps for the women sugarcane workers. As a result, women have become more aware about health issues".

- Rani More,
Jan Arogya Samiti member,
Block Wadwani, District Beed



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