

A Sight loss Prevention Activity

Vitamin A supplementation qualifies as a sight loss prevention activity (vitamin A deficiency can result in child blindness and children who are malnourished as 45% of the Indian children are likely to be vitamin A deficient and need to be supplemented with vitamin A).

Our member would like to read about the recent high profile launch of VAS biannual round in Jharkhand.

Jharkhand launches Mother Child Health and Nutrition Month

Jharkhand was carved out of Bihar as an independent State on November 15, 2000 fulfilling the aspirations of the tribal people, who presently constitute 28% of the total population, though they have been living here for thousands of years. The State is blessed with natural resources, like forests and woodlands (covering 29% of the total area), coal (32% of all India reserves), copper (25% of all to be found in India). The State is organized into 24 districts to administer a largely rural population (78% of the total population of 27 million) living in 32620 villages, of which only 8484 villages are connected by road. The population density at 338 persons per sq. km. is relatively low compared to most states of India.

Jharkhand inherited a poor health infrastructure from its parent State and the delivery of primary health services was far from satisfactory. The State placed emphasis on primary health right from the beginning and organized 'Catch up Rounds' to deliver preventive health services like immunization, vitamin A supplementation, iron and folic acid supplementation, de-worming, etc. The Catch up Rounds' served the purpose of making Jharkhand catch up in health indicators with the rest of the country. The World Bank in March 2007 reported *"Equally impressive progress has been made in some key health indicators, especially in the area of child vaccination and prevention of major diseases. The newly instituted "catch up rounds" (since 2002/03) has led to a dramatic improvement in the coverage of child immunization, and vitamin A and iron supplementation."*

The A2Z project started working in Jharkhand in 2005 aiming to strengthen the delivery of micronutrient supplementation programs of the government. Working closely with partner agencies such as UNICEF and The Micronutrient Initiative, the A2Z project contributed to improved monitoring of vitamin A supplementation during 'Catch up Rounds'. By the end of 2007, Jharkhand realized that the continuance of 'Catch up Rounds' was impeding the strengthening of the routine system for delivery of preventive health services. The A2Z Project, together with partner agencies, assisted the Government of

Jharkhand in conceptualising and organizing a biannual vitamin A supplementation round ensconced in a framework for better nutrition of mothers and young children. Called the Jharkhand Matri Shishu Swasthya evam Poshan Mah (JMSSPM) or Jharkhand Mother Child Health and Nutrition Month, the biannual round was launched on February 2008 by the Chief Minister of Jharkhand, Mr. Madhu Koda and the Health Minister, Mr. Bhanu Pratap Shahi. With such high level commitment, high levels of vitamin A supplementation coverage can be expected benefiting children of the State and **preventing avoidable blindness among young children.**

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