CATALYSING CHANGE FOR A MALNUTRITION FREE INDIA

27 States

308 Preraks

6 Union Territories

Joint initiative of Ministry of Women & Child Development and Tata Trusts
Table of contents

Guiding Principle of Tata Trusts 1
Message from Chairman 2
Nutrition portfolio 3
Messages from R. Pavithra Kumar & Dr. Rajan Sankar 4
Swasth Bharat Prerak program: The one year journey 6
Burden of malnutrition in India 7
Towards a ‘kuposhan-mukt’ India 9
Swasth Bharat Prerak program 11
Contributing to nation-building 12
Program design 13
#PrerakSpeak 15
A day in the life of a Prerak 18
Championing change: Postcards from the field 20

• Catalysing convergence - Strength is in coming together 20
  - Unlocking new opportunities through convergence 21
  - Improving service delivery through Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Days 22
  - Poshan Chaupal - Village as a hub for convergence 23
  - Convergence efforts to fight malnutrition 23

• Leveraging technology 25
  - Smartphone app comes to the rescue of anganwadi workers 26
  - Using ICDS-CAS to improve growth monitoring 27
  - Reaping successes through correct ICDS-CAS usage 28
  - Fostering accountability through technology 29
• Influencing behaviour for improved nutrition  
  - Kishori ka Pitara - Overcoming socio-cultural taboos  
  - Snakes and ladders - Bringing young girls together  
  - Power Panch Girls - Fighting anaemia  

• Systems strengthening  
  - Reimagining anganwadis  

• Community mobilisation  
  - Making women empowerment a Jan Andolan  
  - Suposhit Kumbh - Jan Andolan at the Kumbh mela  
  - Swasthya Saheli - Mobilising adolescent girls for health and nutrition  
  - Using community radio to spread nutrition messages  

• Capacity-building  
  - Training for quality service delivery  
  - Project Srishti - Menstrual health management campaign  
  - Correcting data discrepancy by training frontline workers  

The Path Ahead  

The India Nutrition Initiative: Addressing malnutrition comprehensively  

The Swasth Bharat Prerak team  

Notes:
• Program coverage including Prerak strength is as of April 2019
• All titles and designations associated to persons mentioned in this report are noted as they were on February 2019 and may have changed since
Guiding Principle of Tata Trusts

“...there is one kind of charity common enough among us, it is that patchwork philanthropy which clothes the ragged, feeds the poor, and heals the sick. I am far from decrying the noble spirit which seeks to help a poor or suffering fellow being. However, what advances a nation or a community is not so much to prop up its weakest and most helpless members, but to lift up the best and the most gifted, so as to make them of the greatest service to the country.”

- Jamsetji N. Tata
At Tata Trusts, we are committed to making a substantial difference to the communities we serve. To deepen this impact, we believe in pursuing important causes that are good for the nation as a whole. Nutrition is one of them. It is a priority area, especially children and pregnant women. This in turn impacts the health of the population at large for years to come as it improves the quality of people’s lives. It is for this reason, we set up ‘The India Nutrition Initiative’ with the mandate to address the issue comprehensively. I am pleased that through the Swasth Bharat Prerak program, we are able to contribute to the POSHAN Abhiyaan, which the Hon’ble Prime Minister launched on 8 March last year. It is indeed gratifying to see so many accomplished young people enthusiastically devote themselves to the cause of nation-building.

Ratan N. Tata
Chairman, Tata Trusts

Tata Trusts’ mission:
To positively and sustainably impact 100 million lives by 2021
Nutrition portfolio

Nutrition is a key area of focus for the Tata Trusts. The Trusts’ strategy for combating malnutrition is an integrated approach with three fundamental aspects:

- Ensuring adequate nutrition among communities to promote optimal growth and mitigate health risks related to malnutrition;
- Strengthening existing nutrition programs and schemes of the government through appropriate modifications and support; and
- Providing recommendations and undertaking data-backed advocacy to policymakers, by developing research products and extending technological support and data analytics to help tackle the challenges in improving nutrition outcomes in the country.
The Tata Trusts are proud to have supported POSHAN Abhiyaan through the Swasth Bharat Prerak program. This fruitful partnership has resulted in the deployment of an excellent resource, i.e. a Prerak for providing crucial support to the district administration towards implementation of POSHAN Abhiyaan. The Preraks have gone beyond the call of duty and have supported their districts in making visible and tangible differences to nutrition outcomes. Their indefatigable energy and the ability to innovate is truly commendable. We wish them the best in their efforts to transform the nutritional health of their respective districts.

R. Pavithra Kumar
Chief Program Director, Tata Trusts

The Swasth Bharat Prerak program has welcomed talent, and has engaged young women and men to actively support POSHAN Abhiyaan. The Preraks have lived up to the expectations of them. They truly reflect and embody the term Preraks; they are indeed an inspiration and a motivation! They have touched hundreds of thousands and have made a demonstrable difference on the ground through their commitment and dedication.

Dr. Rajan Sankar
Director, The India Nutrition Initiative
Swasth Bharat Prerak program:

The one year journey

Across the country, over 300 young professionals are channeling their youthful energy and commitment to make a difference to the lives of countless millions of people. Innovation is their mantra and the ‘can do and will do’ spirit the calling card. Working closely with local administration and communities at the grassroots level, they are laying the foundation of a healthy India.

They are making change happen.

They are the Swasth Bharat Preraks - Inspiring, catalysing and deepening the impact of POSHAN Abhiyaan.
Burden of malnutrition in India

Over one-third of India’s children suffer from chronic malnutrition. This not only implies that they are too short (or stunted) for their age, it also indicates poor cognitive development, thus affecting their opportunities to realise their full potential.

While India has been performing well across several development indicators, we are yet to break the vicious cycle of malnutrition. Home to the highest number of malnourished children in the world; over 50% of India’s children, and women of reproductive age are anaemic.

Although India has been making progress in improving its nutrition indicators, a greater pace of improvement is warranted to create meaningful impact. The complex determinants of malnutrition further complicates this development trajectory.
**Stunting (<5 yrs of age)**
- 48% in 2005-06
- 38.6% in 2015-16

**Wasting (<5 yrs of age)**
- 19.8% in 2005-06
- 21% in 2015-16

**Underweight (<5 yrs of age)**
- 42.5% in 2005-06
- 35.8% in 2015-16

**Anaemia among children (<5 yrs of age)**
- 69.4% in 2005-06
- 58.6% in 2015-16

**Anaemia among women of reproductive age**
- 55.3% in 2005-06
- 53.1% in 2015-16

*Source: National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4 [2015-16])"
Towards a ‘kuposhan-mukt’ India

Citing malnutrition as one of the biggest challenges the nation faces and the government’s firm resolve to overcome it, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched the path-breaking POSHAN (Prime Minister’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment) Abhiyaan or the National Nutrition Mission. Launched on 8 March 2018, it has brought the issue centre-stage and has energised the movement against malnutrition with a greater sense of purpose and urgency.

Innovative and convergent in its approach, POSHAN Abhiyaan aims to strengthen services around nutrition and create a greater sense of awareness and ownership among communities.

Focus areas under POSHAN Abhiyaan

- Skilling of frontline functionaries
- Convergent action across key line departments
- Implementing innovative solutions to tackle malnutrition
- Technology driven service delivery and monitoring
- Generating greater community ownership for the cause
- Incentivising the use of technology for efficient service delivery
Swasth Bharat Prerak program

In January 2018, the Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India and the Tata Trusts, signed a Memorandum of Understanding to implement the innovative Swasth Bharat Prerak program to support the effective implementation of POSHAN Abhiyaan.

Under the program, Preraks are deputed as a district-level managerial and administrative resource to the state machinery.

A unique fellowship program, the program provides young professionals an opportunity to contribute tangibly to nation-building by catalysing change. The program draws inspiration from a similar initiative of the Tata Trusts, the Zila Swachh Bharat Prerak program.
Contributing to nation-building

The Swasth Bharat Preraks are bright, young minds with backgrounds in engineering, medicine, management, language and social sciences. Many of them have given up plush careers to be a part of this fellowship and make a difference.

The Preraks undergo a rigorous training program that prepares them for the roles and responsibilities in the district. The training covers programmatic and technical know-how, and key skill sets such as critical thinking and leadership, which are essential for the effective roll-out of POSHAN Abhiyaan.

As a district-level resource, over the past year, Preraks have contributed substantially to moving the nutrition agenda forward. Apart from their technical competence and management skills, they have brought to the Abhiyaan a freshness of perspective, youthful enthusiasm and innovative thinking.

308 Preraks
27 States
6 Union Territories

~8168 applications received
~Attrition rate of less than 16%
~1485 first round interviews conducted
~Only 20% of the total number of candidates interviewed were selected
Program design

The Swasth Bharat Prerak program is aligned with the mandate of the POSHAN Abhiyaan, which aims to reduce undernutrition among women, children, and adolescents. It adopts a life-cycle approach and provides greater emphasis on the first 1000 days of a child’s life (from conception to two years of age). Over the last year, the Preraks catalysed action for efficient and effective implementation of the four pillars of the Abhiyaan.

Four pillars of POSHAN Abhiyaan that Preraks help implement
The Preraks have been instrumental in conducting, planning and executing quality assurances of learning modules - incremental learning approach - under the capacity-building component. As part of the resource group at the district and state levels, the Preraks ensure that through the ‘learning by doing’ approach, frontline workers become skilled.

As POSHAN Abhiyaan relies on multi-sectoral and multi-ministerial convergence, Preraks have assisted in drafting action plans for convergence committee meetings. As master trainers in some districts, the Preraks ensure that frontline workers are adept in using the Integrated Child Development Services-Common Application Software (ICDS-CAS) on their smartphones. The software provides for transparent, reliable and readily available data, a pre-requisite for any program’s effective monitoring.

When the Abhiyaan was designed, it was envisioned that ‘nutrition’ would become a people’s movement - a Jan Andolan. To make this a reality, the Preraks utilise social media, community radio and public spaces to promote and advocate messages linked to good nutrition.

The key for any successful outcome, as always, is effective implementation. Having seen the Swasth Bharat Prerak program at close quarters, I can with complete confidence say that it has played a crucial role in making this possible. I am enthused with the commitment and dedication of the band of young Preraks - their zeal, enthusiasm, innovative thinking, and the burning desire to make a difference is most commendable. They have emerged as the X-factor and have been able to catalyse changes on the ground towards the goal of a kuposhan-mukt India.

Dr. Vinod K. Paul
Member, Health and Nutrition, NITI Aayog
The Swasth Bharat Prerak program has been instrumental in the implementation of POSHAN Abhiyaan. What is extremely gratifying is how young professionals have catalysed the movement. They are committed and dedicated and have brought onboard youthful energy, optimism, and a new way of doing things. The zeal of making a difference has resulted in making many innovations that will further strengthen the Abhiyaan.

Dr. Rajesh Kumar, IAS
Mission Director, POSHAN Abhiyaan; Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women & Child Development
“As a Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana Scholarship awardee and an aerospace engineer from IIT Chennai, a plush career beckoned but that wasn’t for me, and I decided to do what I always wanted: doing something for the society and making a positive impact in the lives of people.

Vutukuri Sri Rama Koundinya
Hyderabad, Telangana

With a degree in management from IIT Bombay, I could have gone for a cushy corporate career. However, I chose this unconventional path to contribute to nation-building.

Ankita Rathore
Nashik, Maharashtra

“The joy and fulfilment of giving back to the society and the opportunity to strengthen a system which will continue to work independent of our presence drew me to the Swasth Bharat Prerak program.”

Dipanshi Sood
Jharkhand (State Lead)

“I am a doctor by training but was always keen on making the anganwadis better as they are the focal service delivery point for addressing malnutrition and improving the health and nutrition of children, and lactating and pregnant mothers. The Swasth Bharat Prerak program provides me this opportunity.”

Milu Joseph
Thrissur, Kerala

I have often been a beneficiary of schemes and have always wanted to contribute. Today as an implementer, I have deep insights into the complex process of development and I better understand the expectations of beneficiaries.

Khushbu Maheshwari
Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh
A day in the life of a Prerak

A day for a Prerak is always exciting with lots to do. It could include the activities listed below, and then some more:

- Assisting the highest level of decision-makers in the district towards improving nutrition-related services
- Engaging with district and block officials, panchayat functionaries and the community members to develop campaigns to promote behaviour change
- Utilising mass and mid-media channels to create awareness about the importance of good nutrition, health, and hygiene
- Leveraging resources to transform anganwadi centres
- Facilitating panchayat and community-level programs - Poshan month, deworming day, breastfeeding week
- Training frontline functionaries on the use of ICDS-CAS enabled smartphones
The success of any intervention depends upon strong systems and more importantly, human resources. That’s where this initiative is so special and different - it has a catalysing resource at the forefront, the Swasth Bharat Prerak. Coming from diverse backgrounds, what the Preraks have in common is a fire and a burning intensity to contribute to the country’s well-being. Their passion is contagious and has rubbed off on the functionaries across all levels, and there is a perceptible difference on the ground. This portends well for the fight against malnutrition and I am delighted with the outcome.

Dr. Chandrakant Pandav
Member, National Nutrition Council

The Swasth Bharat Prerak program has provided valuable human resource support to the state. The Preraks have actively engaged with the state machinery for the implementation of POSHAN Abhiyaan. They bring diverse perspectives and have successfully worked with various stakeholders on the field. Their contribution to the Abhiyaan is appreciated.

Smt. Vinita Vaid Singal, IAS
Secretary, Department of Women & Child Development, Maharashtra
Championing change: Postcards from the field

The Swasth Bharat Prerak program has been steadfast in its support to POSHAN Abhiyan, especially in strengthening health and nutrition-related services to children, and pregnant and lactating women in the 1000 days window. Over the course of the past year, the Preraks have driven change to improve service delivery.

The following pages provide a snapshot of their contribution towards realising the objectives of POSHAN Abhiyan.

Catalysing convergence - Strength is in coming together

The POSHAN Abhiyan provides an ideal platform for convergence of various ministries and line departments as well as other schemes that feed into its broader mandate. The targets for reducing malnutrition and anaemia necessitate a comprehensive approach that cuts across programs and schemes to ensure efficient service delivery and monitoring of interventions. Preraks are well-positioned, given that they are not confined to any specific department, and work across departments to support convergence at the ground level.
Unlocking new opportunities through convergence

Armed with an educational training and professional experience in medicine and public health, Anshuman, from Sheikhpura district in Bihar, believes that convergence is the mantra for the success of POSHAN Abhiyaan. The targets, he says, can never be achieved by a single person or department. Hence, the need for convergence.

Anshuman initiated two innovative platforms for effective convergence with the Education Department: (i) Poshan Kaksha where awareness on nutrition and hygiene is spread among school and college students, and (ii) Poshan Charcha where lady supervisors and ICDS officials like Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs) create awareness about the Abhiyaan to the Education Department officials such as principals, teachers, cooks, etc.

Initially, Anshuman himself helped the officials understand the importance of nutrition and hygiene in the community and also demonstrated ways of communicating effectively with children in the anganwadi centres, schools, and colleges in the district. These initiatives have now been rolled out in all 54 Gram Panchayats and it is envisaged that over the course of the next few years, with sustained efforts, the benefits from the Poshan Kaksha and Poshan Charcha platforms will reach the district’s entire population.
Improving service delivery through Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Days

Vishal Raghuvarsahi, from Gopalganj district of Bihar, was determined to improve beneficiary participation at the Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Day (VHSND). He achieved this by applying out-of-the box thinking and set up a ‘Poshan War Room’ to mobilise beneficiaries.

The War Room is a dedicated space for a team of eight data entry operators who make reminder calls, a day prior to the VHSND, to all frontline functionaries and ground-level officials. On an average, 1150 bi-weekly calls are made during any given month. In addition, Vishal has helped devise a reporting format for accurately capturing status reports. Regular follow-up has helped instil a sense of pride and responsibility in officials associated with the event. Consequently, there has been improved performance in VHSND services such as provision of antenatal care and routine immunisation.

Elsewhere, in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand, nesting high in the Himalayan ranges, Ankit Yadav is working towards establishing a model VHSND. “After being part of many village level activities at various anganwadi centres, I felt that VHSND is the best possible platform to fight malnutrition,” says Ankit. On this day, frontline functionaries, such as accredited social health activists (ASHAs), anganwadi workers and anganwadi helpers along with sanitation and Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) workers come together.

Through his field visits, Ankit observed that a high number of beneficiaries were indifferent to the activities and VHSND was plagued by low levels of participation from health and PRI functionaries. After detailed consultations with the district officials, a proposal of ‘model VHSND’ in 25 Gram Sabhas on a pilot basis was finalised. In addition to routine activities, the focus was on inviting subject-matter experts to engage with the beneficiaries on issues of critical importance like institutional deliveries, exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding, and immunisation. Information, education, and communication (IEC) material are distributed on this day.

Nukkad natak are also performed to spread awareness and sensitise the community about the various schemes and facilities provided by the relevant departments. A big hit with the beneficiaries is the ‘poshan hamper’, with the message of right nutrition. The results are encouraging and there is a noticeable increase in participation on VHSNDs.
Poshan Chaupal – Village as a hub for convergence

The initiative of Poshan Chaupal in Siddharth Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh is aimed at introducing village focussed convergence activities and encouraging the belief that malnutrition is everybody’s responsibility. Vinay Kumar supported the district in organising Poshan Chaupals on VHSNDs, which witnessed convergence in the action of stakeholders at the village – pradhans, kotedars, rojgar sevaks, school principals, self-help groups and frontline functionaries, such as the anganwadi workers, ASHAs and auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs).

This coming together provides the perfect platform for delivering health and nutrition focussed messages. The activities also include nukkad natakai, distribution of iron/folic acid and vitamin A tablets to school children. Integral to the success of Poshan Chaupal is the formulation of the village convergence action plan.

In several villages, this has resulted in the development of a Gram Panchayat Development Plan as well. Vinay’s efforts have received widespread media coverage and are a good example of grassroots’ democracy fostering nutrition awareness. The initiative also found mention at the fourth meeting of the Executive Committee of POSHAN Abhiyaan.

Convergence efforts to fight malnutrition

‘Nawa Besta Naar’ or the Joint Health, Nutrition and Sanitation Program (JHNSP) is an initiative in Kondagaon district of Chhattisgarh to bring together the efforts of multiple line departments in the fight against malnutrition. JHNSP involves the creation of committees at the village, block and district levels, and the institution of block level master trainers to train block and village level committees. The discussion points include counselling themes for pregnant and lactating women, uptake on status of malnourished children in the village, activities and other events at anganwadi centres among many others.

Under the guidance of the District Collector, Mohammad Asif Khan provided crucial implementation support to the JHNSP. He assisted in the orientation and training of master trainers, and sector and block level functionaries. He also provided inputs on building an effective feedback system from the district to the block and village levels.

Asif regularly tracks progress at the block level and shares the findings with the District Collector and Nodal Officers. “Monitoring and supervision of the program by all line departments will help strengthen efforts in the collective battle against malnutrition and I am deeply grateful to the District Collector for involving me in this initiative,” he says.
The Swasth Bharat Prerak program has played a crucial role in the effective implementation of POSHAN Abhiyaan. The Preraks are an integral part of the district administration and have made significant contributions towards achieving targets under POSHAN Abhiyaan. The youthfulness of ideas and freshness of perspective which Preraks bring are deeply appreciated by us and give us a clear picture of the situation on the ground. We are grateful for the presence of this extremely talented cadre of young professionals and wish them the very best for future endeavours.

Shri H. Arun Kumar, IAS
Special Commissioner, Department of Women & Child Development, Andhra Pradesh
Leveraging technology

The cornerstone of POSHAN Abhiyaan is ICDS-CAS - the technological component. The use of ICDS-CAS is aimed at enabling real-time monitoring of nutritional indicators that may inform the government to modify current policies in order to further strengthen last-mile service delivery.

At present, a large number of frontline functionaries are users of this software. To ensure that ICDS-CAS is present in the hands of each field-level staff, extensive planning is undertaken. This includes bidding and procurement of handsets, configuration of handsets, mapping of anganwadis with unique identification codes, and most importantly, training of anganwadi workers in the usage of ICDS-CAS.

The Preraks have played a crucial role in the roll-out of ICDS-CAS by identifying and implementing workable technological solutions for overcoming bottlenecks.

"I would like to mention the role of the Swasth Bharat Preraks, who under the guidance of my team and their State Lead, have played an eminent role in supporting the state and districts in implementation of the Abhiyaan. They have been instrumental in key areas including inter-departmental coordination, defining SMART objectives at the system level, streamlining of operational processes and providing analytical support.

Dr. M. Geetha, IAS
Secretary, Department of Women & Child Development,
Chhattisgarh"
Smartphone app comes to the rescue of anganwadi workers

For too long have anganwadi workers been burdened with paperwork. Before the introduction of ICDS-CAS, each anganwadi worker maintained 11 handwritten registers. ICDS-CAS has come to their rescue by easing the daily drudgery. The application has now reduced the number of physical registers to just one. In reducing the workload, it has increased the accuracy of data and now allows for real-time monitoring. When in full effect, the dashboard makes identification of gaps easier and greatly assists in analysing the efficacy of schemes.

Therefore, it is important that each ICDS-CAS enabled handset is marked with a unique 11-digit identification code. When Arjun Sharma, from Chandauli district in Uttar Pradesh, noticed that errors in the codes allocated to the anganwadi workers were causing data discrepancy, he immediately flagged it to the district administration. This swift reporting helped ease the preliminary bottleneck and enabled smooth implementation of ICDS-CAS in Chandauli.

Arjun vouches for the transformative impact ICDS-CAS usage can have. “Scientifically driven approach to combat malnutrition necessitates the use of technology and mapping progress in real-time. The provision of smartphones is a significant step towards empowering the anganwadi workers and bringing them up to speed with modern technology,” he says.
Using ICDS-CAS to improve growth monitoring

Despite the many advantages of ICDS-CAS usage, Sumit Bharti noticed low reporting rates of height and weight measurement of young children in Baran district of Rajasthan. After careful inquiry, he attributed the cause to reluctance in adopting new technology and poor information about the benefits of ICDS-CAS usage in growth monitoring.

In consultation with the district administration, Sumit adopted a multi-pronged strategy on a pilot basis to improve reporting through ICDS-CAS. He identified a lady supervisor who was comfortable with ICDS-CAS and assigned her with daily monitoring of the dashboard. She was then asked to provide feedback, follow up, and mentor other anganwadi workers who were negligent in uploading data. This is an excellent example of supportive supervision that encourages greater accountability. Sumit’s strategy yielded positive results and in a short span of two months, 100% data uploading was witnessed in the sector.

This success led the strategy to be scaled-up to the entire district. A week was identified every month, during which anganwadi workers were required to complete growth monitoring of all registered children. From this, reports of errant anganwadi were shared with the concerned lady supervisor and block coordinators who would then ensure corrective action.

This was accompanied by comprehensive training for the anganwadi workers until they attained proficiency in ICDS-CAS usage. “These concerted efforts have led to a major improvement in reporting through ICDS-CAS and as of April 2019 there is 97.43% weighing efficiency and 95.61% height efficiency in Baran district,” informs Sumit proudly.

To further strengthen the qualitative aspects of this drive and ensure data authenticity, growth monitors have been identified from among the lady supervisors, CDPOs, block coordinators and development partners to conduct physical verification of data of at least 25 beneficiaries per month as recorded by the anganwadi workers.
Reaping success through correct ICDS-CAS usage

The alarming prevalence of stunted and underweight children in Jehanabad district in Bihar compelled Suraj to take corrective action. He observed that even though ICDS-CAS had been implemented in the district, most anganwadi workers were extremely reluctant to use it. Their hesitation ranged from perceiving ICDS-CAS as an additional burden to a tool, which could be used for greater scrutiny by the superiors.

Determined to clear their misgivings, Suraj played a pivotal role in advocating for phased training of frontline functionaries in ICDS-CAS usage. In the first instance, training of master trainers, which comprised CDPOs, lady supervisors and block coordinators was undertaken. Next, sector-level workshops were organised for small groups of 30 anganwadi workers each and personalised grievance redressal was also initiated. Finally, the master trainers helped address several technical flaws through intensive training.

“Identifying and strengthening existing gaps in the system is often a more desirable approach. In this case, I decided to act like a catalyst of change, much like the role of a Swasth Bharat Prerak,” says Suraj.

These interventions generated positive gains for the district and led to more accurate recording of data. The district monthly progress reports (MPR) over a six-month period saw a reduction of stunting by over 9%, of children with low birthweight by over 15%, and underweight and wasting prevalence by around 5%.
Fostering accountability through technology

Manish Kalwaniya from Sheopur district in Madhya Pradesh has leveraged technology to ensure a robust monitoring mechanism for strengthening implementation of POSHAN Abhiyaan.

Manish helped create a ‘WCD Monitoring System’ WhatsApp group, which utilises a simple tool - the live location feature. It monitors the live location of all sector supervisors and growth monitors during working hours. The functionaries share details of their field visits and live location for a period of eight hours. A mere click confirms whether the worker is present at the stated location or not.

With support from his District Project Officer, Manish is overseeing the monitoring functions. “The initiative has brought about greater accountability and responsibility in the frontline functionaries,” informs a pleased Manish.

A three-strike rule has also been instituted to address the failure to mark attendance. On the third instance of default, strong disciplinary action is undertaken.

The district administration is keen to sustain the momentum as they believe that efficiency amongst ground staff is strongly related to improved beneficiary outcomes. Ten districts in Madhya Pradesh have replicated this initiative and there is interest for further scale-up.
Influencing behaviour for improved nutrition

Concerted efforts towards IEC are crucial to bringing about positive change in the beneficiaries and communities to adopt healthy behaviour for improved nutrition and sanitation. Preraks have been conceptualising and supporting innovative strategies to increase participation of community members for sustainable behaviour change.

Kishori ka Pitara - Overcoming socio-cultural taboos

Pitara - a treasure-chest - evokes fond memories of childhood, innocence and carefree days, of mystery and curiosity and the joy of finding a hidden treasure. In this case, the pitara - ‘Kishori ka Pitara’ - springs open a world of information and knowledge, helps overcome stigma and taboos, and brings a smile of self-assurance.

In August 2017, the supervisor and anganwadi workers of Kakarmatta ward in Kashi Vidyapeeth block of Varanasi came up with a simple yet extremely effective tool, which has since then transformed the lives of many adolescent girls.

Typically, on a ‘Ladli Diwas’, anganwadi workers and ASHAs mobilise the girls to participate in activities related to adolescent health. On the day, they are encouraged to drop queries, without mentioning their names, on subjects they otherwise feel uncomfortable discussing, into a white box - ‘Kishori ka Pitara’. This creates a trusting environment and helps maintain anonymity. The frontline workers address the queries with care and sensitivity.

“Having a Prerak is always very helpful for efficient functioning, POSHAN Abhiyaan is very promising in the transformation of the lives of women and children. The nutritional support through POSHAN Abhiyaan will help minimise malnutrition in the district and contribute significantly to improving the health of children and future generations.

Shri Ronald Rose, IAS
District Collector, Mahabubnagar, Telangana

“
The Pitara has helped the young girls overcome cultural taboos about bodily changes and menstruation; it has also equipped them with information on health, well-being, and nutrition.

“Kishori ka Pitara provides adolescent girls the safe space to voice their concerns and ask questions,” says Arushi Bedi, Swasth Bharat Prerak, Varanasi who saw the potential of the initiative. The results are visible - the participation of girls went up four-fold - from 10 to 40 in Kakarmatta ward of the district.

In the span of one year, Kishori Ka Pitara has become a tool for empowerment at 1500 anganwadi centres. Seeing the enthusiastic response, Arushi, with the support of the district administration plans to scale this initiative across the district. It is also being implemented in different forms, for example as ‘Sawalon ka Pitara’ in other districts in the country such as Dewas, Dhar and Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh.
Snakes and ladders - Bringing young girls together

Nida Fatima, from Lakhimpur Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh, has effectively adapted the game of snakes and ladders as a tool to foster awareness in young girls on health issues.

A traditional ‘snakes and ladders’ mat is mapped with questions on health, nutrition, and personal hygiene. The questions are framed to initiate a two-way conversation between the anganwadi workers/teachers and the participants. This innovation to a game, which every child knows, was introduced in two blocks – Bijua and Lakhimpur Gramin during Kishori Diwas. It has seen enthusiastic participation. “It has proved to be an effective medium for anganwadi workers to engage young girls on topics such as nutritional health and female hygiene,” says Nida.
Power Panch Girls - Fighting anaemia

Morena district, once infamous for its association with dacoits is now known for the power of five – the Power Panch Girls who are taking on the mantle of fighting anaemia.

Prateek Vashishtha found that over 50% girls and women in Morena were anaemic. To overcome this challenge, Prateek brought on board five adolescent girls. These girls were sensitised on the importance of iron and iron supplements, correct eating habits, and symptoms, causes and preventive treatment of anaemia.

Each of these five girls named as ‘Power Panch’ were asked to educate an additional five girls. A month later, Prateek witnessed improvements in haemoglobin levels of the first group of five girls. Not too long after, such groups of Power Panch Girls have multiplied and today 840 girls have benefitted. In view of its successful outreach, the Power Panch Girls concept has been replicated in five other districts in Madhya Pradesh. Future plans include convergence with Health and Education departments to ensure greater coverage.
Systems strengthening

A key aspect of POSHAN Abhiyaan is systems strengthening, with a focus on a life-cycle approach (covering adolescent girls, nursing mothers, and children) to bring about a tangible difference in the quality of services and to make it a more robust and responsive program. The Preraks are actively supporting this component.

“Preraks or catalysts of change have made a valuable contribution towards effective implementation of POSHAN Abhiyaan in their respective districts. They have helped provide an unbiased perspective of developments at grassroots, which has helped inform decision making at various levels.

Shri J. N. Kansotiya, IAS
Principal Secretary, Department of Women & Child Development,
Madhya Pradesh”
Reimagining anganwadis

One of the objectives of POSHAN Abhiyaan is to strengthen and improve the anganwadi infrastructure. To make this possible, Swasth Bharat Preraks are working hard to transform anganwadis into effective and vibrant centres for delivery of nutrition, health and early childhood related development services.

Diewakarr Anupam Mittal, from Haridwar district of Uttarakhand, was appalled by the state of one of the anganwadis in Annekki village. The anganwadi had been vacant and unused since 2007 and was being used as dumping ground for household garbage. Committed to changing this neglect, Diewakarr sought support from the District Collector to transform the dilapidated anganwadi centre into a model anganwadi. Through persistent efforts, the team won over the villagers who were resistant to this change.

The once defunct anganwadi is now a welcoming abode for mothers and children. It is a learning hub that boasts of a small library and playground. In addition, there is a kitchen garden and compost pit, and the walls have been painted afresh with engaging educational messages. Most importantly, it has been designed in such a manner that any future repairs can be undertaken using local resources by the villagers themselves.

In Mansa district of Punjab, Aditya Madan successfully secured funds from Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited’s CSR portfolio as also under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act for converting 100 anganwadis into model centres with improved infrastructure - proper buildings, toilets. “With this momentum, ICDS has again become a priority for the district administration,” says Aditya.
Similarly, Ankit Choudhary in Palamu district of Jharkhand, tapped into CSR funds of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited to secure two LPG cylinders and a stove burner each for 50 anganwadis so as to create a smoke-free environment. Conventionally, such anganwadis served food prepared on firewood, which posed major health risks. The provision of LPG cylinders will positively impact the health and safety of anganwadi workers as well as the beneficiaries. On the anvil is scaling the initiative to 200 anganwadis.

Deep in sprawling Chittoor, the second largest district in Andhra Pradesh, a ‘quality’ revolution is taking place. Twenty five anganwadi centres from 13 blocks have received International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) certification. The assessment criteria for receiving ISO 9001 certification includes presence of physical infrastructure facilities, regular pre-school activities, presence of trained anganwadi workers, minimal percentage of low birthweight children and reduced rates of anaemia amongst pregnant mothers and children.

Karthikey Reddy who assisted these efforts believes that ISO certification has encouraged the community to take greater ownership of anganwadi centres and has also instilled a sense of pride. “It is a recognition of the improved facilities at the anganwadi centres and has brought about professionalism in day-to-day operations,” Karthikey adds.

Preraks across districts have been instrumental in not just generating funds from different platforms but also qualitatively improving service delivery at the anganwadis.

In Dhalai district of Tripura, in an attempt to improve community ownership of anganwadis, Kushankur Dutta set up a vegetable donation box across 10 anganwadis where community members donated fresh vegetables, especially green leafy vegetables from their household stock, which in turn were used to prepare supplementary meals at anganwadis.
In Katni district of Madhya Pradesh, Ratneshwar Tripathi worked alongside the district administration to introduce ‘Project Muskaan’- an initiative spanning 1700 anganwadis in the district. The project encourages community members to donate toys to anganwadis.

In Narayanpur district of Chhattisgarh, Him Kumar Ghimire supported district officials with installation of water filters in 560 anganwadis with financial support from the District Mineral Fund. Preraks across states are pursuing similar efforts to ensure that anganwadi centres in their districts have potable water.
Community mobilisation

An important component of POSHAN Abhiyaan is mobilising the fight against malnutrition into a people’s movement – Jan Andolan. It aims to motivate communities to build knowledge and modify attitudes to strengthen behaviour for improved health, nutrition, and sanitation. Preraks have been actively supporting the planning and implementation of community mobilisation activities.

"POSAN Abhiyaan is one of the most important schemes of the government which requires continuous efforts and dedication as it is beneficiary specific, time-bound and needs to be dealt with a target-based approach. I am sure this journey was an unforgettable experience for [the Preraks] and I am glad to have been assisted by such talented and young professionals under the Swasth Bharat Prerak program.

Shri Amit Kumar, IAS
District Magistrate, Sonbhadra
Uttar Pradesh"
Making women empowerment a Jan Andolan

A carefully crafted campaign, the Nari Sashaktikaran Sankalp Abhiyan (Women Empowerment Movement) created mass awareness about women-centric government services across Uttar Pradesh in December 2018. “Women’s nutrition and health status needs a sensitive and holistic focus, and hence this campaign,” says Ravi Shankar Giri, State Lead, Uttar Pradesh.

Designed as a Jan Andolan, this campaign also had elements that made it a robust convergence model – it brought relevant line departments together to create awareness. The enthusiastic involvement of anganwadi workers, ANMs, ASHAs, school teachers, self-help groups, and female police personnel, known as the Mahila Sashaktikaran Doots, made it a true women’s empowerment movement.

The Nari Sashaktikaran Sankalp Abhiyan was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of the state; it saw active participation of around 10,000 women at district, block and village levels. The themes centred around awareness of women-centric empowerment schemes on health and nutrition, education, self-employment, security, cleanliness, etc. It followed a trickle-down training model to successfully reach the final beneficiaries - the women at the village-level, through extensive door-to-door campaigning by the Mahila Sashaktikaran Doots.

This form of Jan Andolan led to demand generation among women for women-centric government services. “The outreach program of Nari Sashaktikaran Sankalp Abhiyan has not only empowered anganwadi workers, ANMs and ASHAs, but more importantly the vulnerable population of women in Uttar Pradesh’s villages,” says Ravi.

“

The Swasth Bharat Preraks are integral in supporting the state in the effective roll-out of POSHAN Abhiyaan components. We are confident that the young men and women will whole-heartedly work towards this nation-building initiative and will contribute towards strengthening nutrition linked services in Uttar Pradesh.

Shri Anil Mishra, IAS
Director, State Nutrition Mission, Uttar Pradesh

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Suposhit Kumbh - Jan Andolan at the Kumbh Mela

Community mobilisation is key to the success of POSHAN Abhiyaan and what better platform to make this happen than the world’s largest human gathering – the Kumbh Mela.

Naman Pant, the Prerak from Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh, realised that the Kumbh Mela provides the perfect locale and platform to spread awareness about good nutrition and could also be utilised to promote behaviour change through the messages being disseminated.

The medium selected to create awareness was nukkad natak. Scripted in the local idiom and speaking the language of the audience, the innovative effort sensitised a vast multitude of people to nutrition and health. A record-breaking 100 nukkad nataks of 10 minutes each were performed in a 24-hour period by the Preraks on 18 February 2019.

The mass awareness drive mobilised an estimated 30,000 people who actively participated in the movement. In parallel, approximately 13,000 people participated in a signature campaign committing themselves to adopt healthy nutrition focussed behaviour.
Swasthya Saheli – Mobilising adolescent girls for health and nutrition

Swast Bharat Prerak in Jaipur, Neha Sharma, believed that mobilising adolescent girls around nutrition and anaemia would bring lasting change not just in their lives but also for the community. With support from the ICDS officials, Neha mobilised 75 girls on Balika Diwas (held on the 24th of each month) to generate awareness around the importance of good nutrition for a growing woman’s health.

Under Swasthya Saheli campaign, the girls were divided into various groups and from amongst them a Swasthya Saheli – a leader - was identified and trained to lead monthly meetings on topics of anaemia prevention and good nutrition. In addition, anaemia camps, iron tablet distribution exercises and dissemination of free sanitary napkins was undertaken in partnership with the community and other stakeholders.

“I felt that open discussions among adolescent girls would help them take a decision about issues related to health, hygiene, and nutrition. It will also instil confidence and leadership abilities in them,” says Neha.
Using community radio to spread nutrition messages

Arun Subramanyam from Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu chose radio, community radio, and television to inform people about nutrition, especially maternal health and the first 1000 days. The initiative had a reach of over 18,000 households. He conducted six live sessions through the All India Radio and used the community radio service with the help of Keystone Organisation to inform members of the tribal community in Kothagiri. Arun facilitated telecasting information on POSHAN Abhiyaan, and nutrition awareness videos on Doordarshan’s Tamil channel and local TV channels, namely Ragam TV.

Not too far away, in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu, Vishnu G.P. helped mobilise frontline functionaries to disseminate nutrition focussed messages through the community radio channel Kadalousai. Anganwadi workers performed jingles on addressing the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition and demonstrated nutritious recipes for the take-home ration.

Prameet Chopra in Khandwa district of Madhya Pradesh demonstrated the power and reach of the national radio. As a guest speaker on All India Radio’s Gram Lakshmi program, which is aimed at addressing malnutrition; Prameet spoke on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and consumption of nutritionally endowed foods, supplementary nutrition, and indicators of malnutrition such as stunting, wasting and underweight prevalence. He especially stressed on the need for mothers to bring their young ones to anganwadi centres for holistic nutrition and development.

The Gram Lakshmi program was aired across all 1682 anganwadis in Khandwa on 1 April 2019. Recognising Prameet’s efforts, the District Project Officer issued an official communication requiring anganwadi workers and beneficiaries to listen to the program’s messages and hold discussions thereafter.
Capacity-building is crucial for ensuring effective delivery of nutrition services and bringing about greater awareness for better nutrition, health, and sanitation. POSHAN Abhiyaan recognises this need and the Swasth Bharat Preraks have been instrumental in ensuring implementation of training as per the mandate of the Abhiyaan. This includes identifying training needs, especially for frontline functionaries and implementation of training programs.
The Swasth Bharat Prerak program is unique wherein the Prerak is directly working with district administration towards a specifically focussed agenda of helping the district achieve the targets of POSHAN Abhiyaan. As a CEO of Zila Parishad, it is sometimes not possible to get to the root of every issue. In such scenarios, the Prerak is our eyes and ears and keeps us updated about the status of activities happening in the district on a day-to-day basis.

Dr. Naresh Gite, IAS
CEO Zila Parishad, Nashik, Maharashtra

Training for quality service delivery

Effective implementation of POSHAN Abhiyaan depends on the capacity of frontline workers to provide communities with improved childcare services through counselling sessions, regular home visits and effective inter-sectoral service delivery.

Working in the difficult terrain of Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir, Puneet Bhatt observed that the anganwadi workers and lady supervisors had not received training for some years. This was adversely affecting the quality of services. Puneet, with experience in public health, set about taking corrective action in right earnest. He organised regular training workshops on different themes such as growth monitoring, infant and young child feeding practices, kangaroo mother care for low birthweight babies, and identification of severe acute malnutrition in children.

Pre and post-tests were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. The results were impressive; the scores of frontline workers were above average. To encourage ongoing learning and improving the quality of service delivery, the best performer is conferred the best anganwadi worker of the month award.
Project Srishti – Menstrual health management campaign

Juhi Kumari, of Latehar district of Jharkhand, wanted to dispel social taboos around menstruation. Working closely with the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Juhi helped initiate ‘Srishti: Aao Chale Batein Karen’ campaign.

The campaign has made exceptional efforts to improve menstrual health of the target audience. Juhi and her dynamic team made a compelling case for the introduction of the campaign by conducting a comprehensive survey of over 350 adolescent girls to assess the prevailing knowledge of menstrual hygiene.

A key component of the campaign was training 50 master trainers, who in turn will serve as agents of change and promote messages on menstrual health at schools, anganwadi centres, haat bazaars, and community gatherings. “It is gratifying to see these menstrual warriors strive valiantly to break taboos and myths surrounding menstruation, which is an essential bodily function,” shares a beaming Juhi.
Correcting data discrepancy by training frontline workers

Inaccurate data on malnutrition can lead to beneficiaries being excluded from schemes that benefit them. Rutu Tekwani, from Narmada district of Gujarat, noticed a discrepancy between the data on underweight children recorded in the MPR of the district and NFHS-4.

The Women and Child Development Commissioner in Gujarat entrusted her with conducting a verification exercise of Baal Tula reports (or growth monitoring registers) of select anganwadi centres. The results revealed that in the sample 10 anganwadis, the proportion of underweight children was approximately 50%. It was substantially higher than the figure of 15.24%, as reflected in the MPR.

To address this data discrepancy, along with support from the Program Officer, Mr Ramesh Bhabhor, Rutu provided intensive growth monitoring training to the anganwadi workers. The team also demonstrated how to correctly record weight and the use of digital weighing machines.

As a result, after only four months, the percentage of underweight children reported increased from 15.24% to 40% thereby substantially bridging the gap between MPR and NFHS-4 data. This ensured that all malnourished children continue to receive the due services.

This endeavour has been appreciated at various levels. Rutu remains grateful for the faith the district officers reposed in her. “It has enabled me to make this vital contribution towards accurately mapping data,” she says.
The Path Ahead

The Tata Trusts are playing an important and vital role in India’s transformation story across sectors. In the nutrition sector, the Swasth Bharat Prerak Program, unique in design and implementation, is sowing the seeds of a healthy and productive India. It recognises that nutrition as a public health intervention cuts across sectors and a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including Ministry of Women & Child Development, NITI Aayog, National Nutrition Resource Centre and other entities. Working together is not a luxury, it is a must to overcome this huge challenge.

Indeed, the Swasth Bharat Prerak program has brought together district authorities, PRIs, NGOs, private sector, communities and the citizens towards the goal of a koshan-mukt India.

It is in this coming together that India will have a healthy and productive future. This will further deepen impact and lay the foundations of a healthy tomorrow for India’s children and mothers. It will also continue to provide India’s young the opportunity to contribute to nation-building activities and be an active player in the country’s progress.
The India Nutrition Initiative:
Addressing malnutrition comprehensively

To support the government in its endeavour to address the challenge of malnutrition, the Tata Trusts established The India Nutrition Initiative (TINI) in May 2015. It consolidates and carries forward the work of the Trusts to tackle the issue of malnutrition comprehensively. Since then, TINI has implemented a diverse portfolio of projects, including staple food fortification, nutritious foods for children and pregnant and lactating women, and has undertaken enabling activities such as advocacy, monitoring, learning, and research.

TINI’s programs have strong linkages with the government’s ongoing health and nutrition programs, both at the central and state levels. The programs are designed to complement and add value to the government’s programs. The Swasth Bharat Prerak program is TINI’s flagship initiative.
The Swasth Bharat Prerak team

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