

Health and Nutrition Activities

Women and pre-school children suffer from malnutrition in Trincomalee District. This is the result of a survey that was conducted in 20 villages in the District (Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim villages). Main reasons for malnutrition are lack of safe drinking water, poor hygiene, difficult access to health facilities, food shortage as well as little variety in the daily food. Diet consists mainly of rice, sambol and leafy vegetables. Some villages have good access

their health and nutrition. Meanwhile, other PHI and midwives have joined them and now the "IFSP Health Team" is meeting every month to plan and discuss activities to improve health and nutrition.

Annual Planning

The Department of Health is lacking staff, equipment and facilities to provide health services to the villages. To overcome these limitations, IFSP has

entered into an agreement with the DOH on 20th of March to improve services. This motivates DOH staff to cooperate with IFSP.

On the 20th of May the IFSP Health Team together with DPDHS, MOH and IFSP conducted a workshop to set up an annual plan for health and nutrition activities. The activities include training for village health volunteers, also deworming campaigns for school children, training of pre-school teachers, vitamin A distribution and the support for toilet construction. All these activities will be accompanied by awareness programmes which should



The IFSP Health Team

to fish, a very good source of protein, which is needed to build a strong and healthy body.

Nevertheless, most families do not consume healthy food items such as eggs, fish, vegetables and fruits often enough and in sufficient amounts.

Training

Seven staff from the Department of Health (PHI, midwives), Department of Agriculture (AI) and from NGO's were sent by IFSP for a training supported by UNICEF in Colombo. They learned how to train health volunteers in the villages and how to explain to people what they can do themselves to improve

enable the families in the villages to understand what is necessary to improve their health and nutrition and what they can do themselves. Besides, the Health Team and the village based health volunteers (as far as available) will support village communities. During the awareness programmes everybody is invited to ask questions on any topics related to health and nutrition.

Some of the activities (e.g. deworming) will be carried out in all villages of the five Divisions where IFSP is working. Other activities (e.g. toilet programme) will focus on the villages where IFSP has done PNA (Participatory Needs Assessment).

Toilets

During the PNAs (so far done in 20 villages) the lack of sanitation facilities, such as toilets was identified as one of the major problems. People defecate in the open field. This can have serious health impacts, such as Cholera which occurred in 1998 in several locations, e.g. Gopalapuram and Cassim Nagar, in the Kuchchaveli Division. Therefore IFSP gave priority to these villages for toilet construction and soon construction in other villages will follow (e.g. Periyakulam, Valaiyootu, Ethabandiwewa). In close co-operation with the PHs, Samurthi Animators and GS, IFSP has selected poor families as beneficiaries. In several villages this selection was already done during the PNA. Selected families have to contribute labour and material to the toilet construction and should be willing to share the toilet with neighbouring houses. Since awareness programmes on the importance and proper use of toilets have been conducted in several villages, the construction is under way.

Health Volunteers

Village based health volunteers can play an important role. They fill the gap between the lack of government staff in certain remote areas of Trincomalee District and the needs of the villagers. EHED is an NGO with many years of experience in training and supervision village based health volunteers all over Trincomalee District. These volunteers support the Department of Health as well as ICRC and SLRC in conducting regular health activities. They also visit families in the villages on a regular basis to support them in health and nutrition related problems. Therefore, IFSP and EHED have been entering into a co-operation to train additional volunteers to cover all PNA villages. The selection of the volunteers will be done in June and the initial training is scheduled for July.

In the near future one important task of the volunteers will include a monthly growth monitoring

of children below five years to identify the underweight children. The volunteers will advise the parents how to improve the nutritional status of their children.

Mid-day Meal

Malnutrition is a major problem amongst school children, especially in remote areas. Many school principles report that children faint during lessons, they cannot concentrate or do not even come to school since they have to help their parents in earning money or cultivation. Since good education is very important for the future of children IFSP has initiated a mid-day meal programme (Illai Kanchi/Kolla Kantha) for school children to improve their performance and to attract all children to attend school regularly.

A pilot programme to test this approach was launched with St. Mary's College in Trincomalee town in 1999, addressing selected children (orphans or children from poor/displaced families). Since this programme is progressing very well, IFSP is ready to expand it to poor villages in Trincomalee District. An agreement has already been signed with the school principle in Nalloor and Muthur Division. Other schools could follow soon.

The parents of the school children provide healthy food items that are available in the village itself (e.g. green leaves, coconut, cashew and shrimp). IFSP is supporting this programme with red rice, green and white gram as well as some basic equipment for the cooking. Two mothers of the school children volunteer cooking the meal and one person is in charge of buying the necessary ingredients. In turn, two students will help in preparation and cooking that at the same time they learn how to prepare a healthy meal. These students will collect the firewood.

IFSP news is available in Tamil and Sinhala

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