

NGO delivers zero mortality rate in remote tribal belt of Araku Valley

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Araku Valley: In this largely inaccessible tribal belt, an NGO-run tribal health programme — 'ASARA' — is not only providing the proverbial ray of hope but has also been quietly blazing a trail by achieving the impossible — zero maternal mortality.

Interestingly, it is tribal men and women that run the entire show, travelling up to 40 km on jeep, bike and then on foot in the extremely difficult terrain to record each new pregnancy and track the progress of each registered pregnant woman.

The health programme, run Priramal Foundation's Piramal Swasthya, is operational in 181 habitations and will soon be expanded to cover 1,179 habitations across Vishakhapatnam district. It may be replicated across states with high tribal populations as several state governments are keen on partnering the foundation.

TRIBAL MEN AND WOMEN RUN THE SHOW

► Plans are afoot to use data analytics to expand the Araku model to other tribal belts across the country



“The enormous amount of data that we have collected can be used to chart health patterns and issue advisories. We are currently working in the direction by integrating healthcare electronically

— Vishal Phanse | CEO, PIRAMAL SWASTHYA

The programme has been successful despite the challenges in providing primary healthcare in such areas. “Traditionally women have delivered with the help of ‘dai’ here, which is usually elderly women who have themselves undergone a number of pregnancies. It usually takes four to five visits over one and a half to two months to convince the family members to seek

medical help,” explained Gauri Naidu, a pilot member whose role is to approach the male members and convince them first, as women have very little say in matters regarding their own health.

A visit to some of the remote habitations taken up under the project revealed the tough job the Auxillary Nurse Midwives (ANM)s have — from being dropped to the nearest mo-

torable road to traveling on bikes and then hiking to the villages with a set of basic equipment for checking blood pressure, height, weight etc.

“Apart from the basic checks and registering pregnant women, we also identify high risk cases and arrange appointments for specialist consultation at a telemedicine centre,” explained K Pramila, a tribal ANM who works at Boduguda village.

The ANMs also keep track of possible pregnancies by visiting houses of newly-weds. “High prevalence of anaemia, poor nutrition and malaria are among the biggest problems. Also, the short height is a prevalent issue that can result in complications during childbirth, making it important to counsel women about the need for hospitalized care,” said Swarnalatha Tirlupathi, general manager, tribal health programme.

The writer went to Araku Valley on an invitation from Piramal Swasthya.