


# ASARA changing the face of AP's tribal belt

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Hyderabad:** The 'ASARA Tribal health programme' in a largely inaccessible tribal belt of the Araku Valley in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh has successfully brought down maternal mortality in the most inaccessible tribal belt to zero. Interestingly, it is the tribal men and women who are running the entire show and travel up to 40 kilometres on jeeps, bike and then on foot on the extremely difficult terrain to record each new pregnancy and track the progress of registered pregnant women.

Various state governments are now looking at partnering with the foundation for knowledge sharing on the model and the project which is now in 181 habitations will soon be expanded to cover 1179 habitations across the Vishakhapatnam district and later across states with a high tribal population.

The challenges in providing primary health care in the tribal areas, however, are many. "Traditionally women have delivered with the help of 'daai' here which is usually elderly women from the community 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

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**Gauri Naidu** | ASARA MEMBER

pilot member whose role is to approach the male members of the family and convince them first, as women have very little say in matters regarding their own health.

The tribal health project is run by PIRAMAL Swasthya, a wing of PIRAMAL Foundation (an NGO). Speaking about the initiative, Vishal Phanse, chief executive officer, PIRAMAL Swasthya said that the organization is now planning to work with disruptive data and data analytics to expand the Araku model in other tribal belts across the country. "The enormous amount of data that we have collected during our fieldwork can be used to chart health patterns and issue advisories. We are currently working in the direction by integrating healthcare electronically," he said.