

# Saksham

## Accelerating multi-sectoral commitment to improve maternal infant young child nutrition in tribal areas

The Saksham project is a scaled model of successful *HUNGaMA Next* strategies, being implemented across 1,678 tribal villages in three districts of Maharashtra. The project covers more than 55,000 young tribal children and their mothers, besides strengthening capabilities of 3,000 frontline workers. It is implemented collaboratively with the Maharashtra State Nutrition Mission and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

In addition to the *HUNGaMA Next* strategies, the project aims to improve convergence among government departments that implement nutrition-specific and sensitive services at grassroots. In order to accelerate multi-sectoral commitment for nutrition, two high-intensity support models – one with block level stakeholders and the other with Gram Panchayats are being piloted, along with a universal support model across the project area. These pilots are expected to provide early evidence for improved Maternal Infant Young Child Nutrition (MIYCN) outcomes in tribal areas as a result of multi-sectoral commitment.

More importantly, strategies adopted by the project since its inception in 2016 fully resonate with new implementation approaches articulated by *Poshan Abhiyan* in 2018. The high level of synergy with national guidelines not only provides a strong endorsement of the Foundation's vision and approach, but also makes this project a pioneering effort testing the new national nutrition strategies.

The project integrates Foundation's unique Nutrition Fellowship program under which a team of 70 young public health professionals live and work in remote tribal villages to ensure sustained, high quality technical support to grassroots nutrition actions. Fellows receive intensive technical and field training from the Foundation prior to being assigned to project areas. Their passion and commitment make a huge difference in the quality of project outcomes.



### GEOGRAPHIC AREA & POPULATION COVERAGE



▲ Amravati	216 Anganwadis	9,100 Children	1,500 Pregnant Women
▲ Gadchiroli	1,049 Anganwadis	30,300 Children	5,100 Pregnant Women
▲ Nashik	413 Anganwadis	16,200 Children	2,700 Pregnant Women

Two years after project implementation, early outcomes are encouraging although more implementation time and additional research are needed to validate them. An analysis of results from the baseline conducted in early 2017 and a rapid appraisal study in mid-2018 show interesting insights into the current capacities of frontline workers and the nutritional practices of tribal mothers in project area.

The high level of MIYCN awareness observed among mothers of young children is getting translated into adoption of positive behaviours. Knowledge of frontline workers on basic MIYCN indicators has improved, and more emphasis is now provided to complex issues like dietary diversity, meal frequency and minimum acceptable diet. Significantly higher proportion of pregnant women received counseling on balanced diet, resulting in positive changes in their food habits, including the quantity and diversity of their diet.

A hugely significant increase in coverage of counseling on exclusive breastfeeding was reported, resulting in an increase in proportion of mothers who exclusively breastfed their children for the first six months. Improvement was also seen in a range of hygiene practices of mothers. A higher coverage of immunization of 9-12 months' children was observed, and improved coverage of mothers and children at VHSND reported.