

Projecting Health

Two case studies on empowering local community health workers to improve health outcomes

Projecting Health, sometimes referred to as Digital Public Health, is a PATH-led, innovative social and behavior change communication approach that gives communities the skills and low-cost tools to produce scientifically accurate, engaging, and effective health education videos. Working with local community-based nonprofit partners, PATH has recently integrated the model successfully into existing community support programs in India.

The community-developed videos are shared during mothers' group meetings facilitated by community health workers, or accredited social health activists (ASHAs). Traditionally, ASHAs relied on verbal communication, games, and printed job aids such as posters or flash cards to convey key health messages. The videos offer a medium through which ASHAs can promote healthy behaviors with increased accuracy, ease, and effectiveness. By equipping community members with new tools for effectively promoting health behaviors and mobilizing communities to improve maternal and child health outcomes, the approach is shifting the driving force for change from health experts to the community.

USHA DEVI'S STORY

Usha Devi is an ASHA working in one of the villages implementing the Projecting Health project. Before the start of the project, she was often reluctant to perform her duties because she lacked confidence in her ability to do her work. Usha struggled, despite attempts by her supervisors to motivate and encourage her, to take an active role in promoting maternal and newborn health in her village.

Usha was immediately interested in the new approach for changing behaviors, especially the innovative use of technologies such as pico (or pocket) projectors and mobile devices. She sought training to learn how to facilitate discussions and screen videos, and she began convening her mothers' group meetings with support from her supervisor. The training and capacity-building efforts of Projecting Health, along with the use of video to aid dissemination of key maternal and newborn health messages to women, empowered Usha to perform her duties with greater confidence.



“Organizing meetings has now become easy; screening the video in the meetings is an easy way of facilitation.”

– Usha Devi

Usha explained how the introduction of videos to mothers' group meetings enabled her to improve her skills in facilitating discussions. She observed that women are participating more actively in discussions and understand the messages more readily from the videos compared to the previous methods, which relied on flipbooks and charts. Usha expressed her appreciation for the training and tools that have helped her grow professionally and personally. Since using the pico projector to show the videos, conducting meetings has become easier, less stressful, and more impactful. She can speak less and facilitate more. The Projecting Health project has enhanced Usha's ability and capacity to deliver key messages and, more importantly, has clearly demonstrated the potential impact of this model for revolutionizing behavior change communication approaches.

SHYAMDULARI DEVI'S STORY

Shyamdulari Devi is another ASHA in a Projecting Health village. She takes great pride in her work, often going above and beyond what is required of her to ensure that every woman in her village has access to the potentially life-saving information presented in the videos. Shyamdulari made it a point to show each pregnant woman in her village the video on birth preparedness. When she learned that Kiran, a pregnant woman, was not allowed to leave the house and could not attend mothers' group meetings, Shyamdulari arranged a private-screening in Kiran's home. The entire family participated, including Kiran's husband and father-in-law, and Shyamdulari made sure they understood the steps needed to ensure a healthy delivery.



When the time came for Kiran to give birth, the family followed the steps outlined in the video and explained by Shyamdulari. In doing so, they made certain that Kiran delivered safely at the health center. Thanks to Shyamdulari's creativity, flexibility, and dedication to improving the health of women and children in her village, regardless of the challenges and barriers, Kiran and her family acquired the knowledge and tools they needed to access appropriate care for the birth of their first child.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

With the introduction of Projecting Health, the ASHAs have become effective leaders and advocates, and the impact of their work is visible in their community. Usha Devi, Shyamdulari Devi, and others like them have come a long way from when they first became ASHAs. Although they entered the frontline health workforce with only basic knowledge and skills, they are now respected, confident, and knowledgeable members of their community. They are no longer simply delivering key health messages prepared by others but are being increasingly acknowledged for their contribution to the actual development of that content. The training and skills they have received through the Projecting Health project make it easier for them to achieve their ultimate goal: saving the lives of women and children.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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PATH is an international organization that drives transformative innovation to save lives and improve health, especially among women and children. We accelerate innovation across five platforms—vaccines, drugs, diagnostics, devices, and system and service innovations—that harness our entrepreneurial insight, scientific and public health expertise, and passion for health equity. By mobilizing partners around the world, we take innovation to scale, working alongside countries primarily in Africa and Asia to tackle their greatest health needs. Together, we deliver measurable results that disrupt the cycle of poor health.

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¹ Digital Green, a nonprofit organization based in India, originally pioneered the use of community-led videos to change behavior to improve the uptake of important agricultural practices.