Operationalizing Urban Health and Wellness Centers in Gwalior
The core objective of the Fifteenth Finance Commission (XV-FC) initiative is to elevate the public health infrastructure, primarily concentrating on bridging the gaps in primary healthcare in urban areas. The aim of the initiative is to ensure effective and accessible healthcare provisions that cater to the diverse needs of the populace. To achieve this goal, a pivotal measure is the identification of appropriate sites for Urban Health and Wellness Centers (UHWCs). This key task is undertaken through close collaboration between Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), the health department, and other stakeholders to ensure compliance with the guidelines set by the XV-FC.

The XV-FC emphasizes the significant value of the upgradation and renovation of existing healthcare facilities. These establishments play a vital role as they provide foundational support for the healthcare system, addressing the healthcare needs of local communities. Through concentrated efforts in the site identification for UHWCs and enhancing existing infrastructures, the XV-FC aims to achieve noteworthy and exemplary progress in public health facilities which will lead to tangible advantages for the inhabitants of urban areas.

**Findings of Gap Assessment for renovation/upgradation work and Subsequent Actions**

Among the 22 existing UHWCs within Gwalior, 14 facilities had sufficient space. The Samagra team identified gaps and communicated to the ULBs, enabling them to commence renovation and upgradation endeavors for these specific establishments. Four facilities, namely Harijan Basti Aausdhalaya Awadpura, Harijan Basti Aausdhalaya Laxmiganj, New High Court, and Motimahal, were situated in the premises of other department buildings or were co-located with civil hospital. In response, two new sites were identified for Harijan Basti Aausdhalaya Awadpura and Laxmiganj. Subsequently, letters were issued to the ULBs, to embark on new construction activities of Harijan Basti Aausdhalaya Awadpura on 12th April 2023 and Laxmiganj on 26th May 2023. The UHWC at Naka Chandravadni Naka faced spatial limitations, with only two rooms available. To address this issue, an alternative site was identified, and letter was issued to the ULB on 21st July 2023 for new construction work. In the case of DD Nagar and Government Press facilities, inadequate building space was a challenge. Initiatives were taken to address this limitation. Recognizing the significance of appropriate sites, the PATH PHC and health department jointly recommended land identification through collaborative site visits. The objective was to identify sites aligning with stipulated guidelines and capable of accommodating the infrastructure prerequisites of the UHWCs. Furthermore, a few UHWCs were either co-located with other facilities or lacked the essential infrastructure. Recognizing the importance of adhering to XV-FC guidelines, the PATH PHC collaborated with the health department requesting site identification for these UHWC.
Despite a defined target for renovating 22 healthcare facilities in Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh, many were neglected and were not given enough attention for crucial infrastructure upgrade initiatives. Rather, the focus was on decorative improvements like painting walls. Additionally, there was a lack of effective communication among key stakeholders. This disconnect that existed between the health department and ULBs resulted in a state of confusion and impacted effective coordination. The absence of a designated liaison person further exacerbated the issue, making it even more difficult to collaborate effectively.

Under Samagra, a USAID funded, PSI led project, implemented by PATH, to tackle the challenges hampering UHWC’s establishment in Gwalior; proactive measures were taken by the public health coordinator (PHC) from PATH’s Samagra team. Firstly, the team conducted a comprehensive gap assessment for the 22 existing facilities in Gwalior; delving deeper into their current conditions from February 2023 to April 2023. This evaluation highlighted that crucial upgrade activities mandated by XV-FC were being overlooked, revealing the need for a more comprehensive approach. Acknowledging the critical importance of addressing land-related challenges for both establishing new UHWCs and upgrading existing ones, a pivotal meeting was organized with the superintendent engineer on 22nd February 2023. The aim was to shed light on the prevailing issues within the region.

Challenges On The Way

During the meeting, several critical issues emerged as major obstacles:

1. **Urban land disputes:** The existence of land disputes within urban areas posed a substantial challenge to the identification and establishment of UHWC sites.

2. **Local residents resistance:** In specific regions, opposition from residents presented a setback to the efforts of the UHWC establishment, causing additional delays.

3. **Ownership disputes:** Complications arose when it was discovered that the identified land was owned by individuals rather than the government, leading to disputes and complications in the land acquisition process.

To overcome these challenges, Assistant Program Manager (APM), PHC from Samagra team, and the health department engineer collaborated with the revenue department (Sub Divisional Magistrate, Gwalior). By effectively coordinating with the revenue department, facilitated by engagement with the local Patwari, the team embarked on the task of identifying suitable government-owned land for UHWCs.

Obstacles in UHWC establishment and their resolution

Within the set target of 35 Urban Health and Wellness Centers (UHWCs) allocated for Gwalior; a total of 19 facilities initially encountered challenges in the process of site identification, and 18 of these obstacles were successfully overcome.

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To effectively address the intricate land ownership matter, a meeting was convened under the leadership of the Municipal Commissioner on 15th March 2023. This gathering brought together various stakeholders, including esteemed journal officers, engineers, the superintendent engineer, the Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO), Assistant Program Manager (APM), Engineer Health, and the PATH PHC from Samagra team. During this meeting, a proposal was made to conduct joint visits in conjunction with the revenue department. These visits aimed to finalize the UHWC sites. A cooperative effort was initiated, involving relevant officers and zonal officers, who collaborated to evaluate potential sites.

As part of the site identification process, survey numbers of potential sites were collected from Patwari. To ensure streamlined management and accuracy, the National Health Mission (NHM) engineer collated these survey numbers into an online portal. Subsequently, this correspondence furnished comprehensive details about the identified land for UHWCs, marking the official initiation of the process to secure necessary approvals for the selected sites.

**Achieving a Breakthrough**

With a methodical and coordinated strategy, the joint visits, and concentrated efforts to address site identification issues yielded remarkable results. Out of the initial 19 facilities encountering site identification challenges, 18 sites have now been successfully finalized, marking a noteworthy achievement in the journey toward establishing UHWCs in the designated locations.

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