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Their health is in their hands.... And it's impressive

Special Correspondent

JAIPUR: An efficient integration of health, nutrition and water and sanitation interventions to improve the quality of life of the rural populace was showcased during the visit of top representatives of Save the Children – an NGO working for child rights – to a couple of villages in the tribal-dominated Banswara district in southern Rajasthan. Save the Children chairman Harpal Singh, who is also the chairman-emeritus of Fortis Healthcare, and the NGO's CEO Thomas Chandy interacted with a large number of villagers to get exposure to the state of affairs about health and nutrition at the grassroots.

The NGO has launched "Aapno Swasthya Aapne Haath" (our health in our hands) project in for catalysing community structures to improve health and nutrition outcomes for children below five years of age. Through the project started last year, Save the Children proposes to reduce the newborn and child mortality and malnutrition by increasing access and availability of quality health services, improving health practices and enhancing the capacities of various stakeholders. The project has targeted three districts – Banswara, Churu and Tonk – in the State to benefit pregnant mothers, lactating mothers, newborns, infants, and children up to the age of

- Project has targeted three districts in Rajasthan
- Efforts on to mobilise the Govt. functionaries

five years. The number of beneficiaries is estimated to be 1.20 lakh in 120 villages of the three districts.

Save the Children has partnered with a local group, Vaagdhara, while covering 60 villages in Ghatol block of Banswara district. Vaagdhara secretary Jayesh Joshi told *The Hindu* from Banswara that the group had been working in the backward district for quite some time for the empowerment of rural communities and taking development to the marginalised sections of society.

Community health worker Tulsi Devi explained to the two visiting representatives in Garnavat village the process of project's benefits extended to the rural community. Mr. Harpal Singh was impressed by the use of newly-built toilets in houses, maintenance of cleanliness around hand-pumps and the habit for personal hygiene.

During the visit to Himmat Singh Ka Gadha village, the two representatives visited the Anganwadi centre to interact with workers and ben-

eficiaries and also saw child-friendly toilets and new hand-pumps installed with ground water recharge system. Mr. Joshi provided details of "value addition" to the community life through the project. He said Vaagdhara was also working closely with women's self-help groups and support groups to create awareness on water and sanitation issues. With more than 75 per cent of the population belonging to Scheduled Tribes and Castes, 42 per cent of the households living below poverty line, female literacy rate reported at 28 per cent and just 19 per cent of pregnant women getting medical support, Banswara is a fit case for Save the Children's intervention.

Mr. Joshi pointed out that efforts were being made to mobilise the Government functionaries as well to address the difficulties faced by rural communities in the target villages. Networking with other stakeholders working in the similar fields has also been developed.

The Vaagdhara secretary affirmed that the project had proved to be a boon for the backward region in Banswara district bordering Gujarat. "It has increased access to quality services, improved the awareness and acceptance of key health practices and enhanced the capacities of public health outreach workers, besides improving the quality of life of children below the age of five," he said.