

Jan Chetna Manch Bokaro

Newsletter January 2014

Greetings from Jan Chetna Manch! Jan Chetna Manch, which means ‘forum for people’s awareness’, is based in a small village in Jharkhand, India. It’s a beautiful place, with colourful, vibrant people and culture. But it also faces its share of problems, including poverty, inadequate healthcare, corruption, and oppression of the weak by the strong. JCMB was started in the 1980s by Ranjan Ghosh and Lindsay Barnes as a practical response to such problems. Despite its growth to serve an area of 100,000 people, JCMB remains based in the same village, committed to addressing real needs on the ground.

--- Women’s Health ---



Nomita’s twins – a typical story. Two weeks ago, Nomita was admitted to the health centre in the eighth month of pregnancy but in early labour. Suspecting twins, Lindsay suggested she go to a nearby hospital to check via ultrasound. To save the cost of JCMB’s ambulance, they took public transport, which was so bumpy that Nomita entered active labour. The ultrasound showed twins with a high risk of entanglement – a caesarean was required. With no ambulance, they had to have the caesarean in the hospital. Nomita gave birth to twin girls. Because of the cost of staying in hospital they left after just a day, knowing that the underweight babies were unlikely to survive the cold, bumpy journey. The babies arrived at the health centre vomiting and close to death. Against the odds, both survived. They needed to stay in the warmth of the health centre for a few days until they had put on weight, but the husband was worried about the cost. Eventually, a subsidy persuaded him to allow his wife and children to stay. They’re doing well.



Uma (left) is a Swasthya Sakhi (health friend) – one of 55 trained women who give advice and treatment to those in her village. Like all Swasthya Sakhis, she is elected by and accountable to her community, understands her patients, and advises JCMB, ensuring that their work is

entirely on the needs of patients on the ground. When she can’t treat a patient herself, she sends them to JCMB’s health centre (above). The health centre gives sensible, high quality treatment for pregnancy and childbirth, care of babies, and diagnosis and treatment of diseases like malaria and malnutrition. It is more compassionate, honest, affordable, and clean than alternatives tend to be.



Post natal care in the community



Keeping warm



Nomita and her twins

Jan Chetna Manch Bokaro

Newsletter January 2014

JCMB's mental health programme began in August. Most mental health patients currently remain untreated, left suffering at home. But their illness can often be easily treated, through counselling, community support, and in some cases like epilepsy, drugs. So far there has been training of health workers, Swasthya Sakhis, and doctors, a monthly visit from a psychiatrist, and a public awareness campaign. Success stories so far include a boy with epilepsy. He hasn't had any fits for the last few months, and has been able to restart school, and normal life.



Mental health awareness stall at a local fair

--- Self help groups ---

Every week, a group of 20 women meet to deposit or withdraw their savings, and possibly take or pay back a loan. This is a self help group (SHG). Around 8000 women are involved in such self help groups under JCMB. Before SHGs, no one saved money, and there was certainly no prospect of a loan. This left people at the mercy of loan sharks, and they were often forced to pawn their land at an unreasonably low rate. Either way there would be increased poverty for a long time. Self help groups were set up in response to this problem. Now women can save money, and take loans to buy animals, or start a small business like a shop or clothes making. As well as this, self help groups are a great place for women to get together and support each other, and form a platform for united action – the Swasthya Sakhis, for example, are elected by the SHGs, and remain accountable to them.



Gayatri Devi (above) decided to start a shop after attending a women's day, where all the vendors were men! With the help of a loan from her SHG, and her husband who buys the food, Gayatri's shop is flourishing. She has gained confidence with her customers, the loan is being paid off, and she even has plans to expand her business.



An SHG meeting



Purnima's new sewing machine



Self Help Groups AGM

Jan Chetna Manch Bokaro

Newsletter January 2014

--- Strengthening local democracy ---

Panchayats are local councils, elected to fairly administer government benefits and ensure fair treatment of their constituents. But they tend to be unaware of their responsibilities and powers. Most people don't know how to access their rights, and are at the mercy of corrupt and apathetic officials and touts. Last year JCMB started to inform the public using SHG leaders to disseminate information. Fifty people obtained birth certificates and other forms, enabling access to pensions and other benefits. This year in addition panchayats will be trained, posters and street plays will inform the public, and help desks will give information and assistance. This will speed the progress towards a fairer and less corrupt society in which people can access the justice and benefits that are rightfully theirs.

--- Building a new health centre ---



Local workers using local bricks



Patients suffering from anaemia, TB, and mental health problems really need to stay in the health centre for several weeks, to rest and recover rather than just receive treatment. At present, however, there is no space, and so they are simply sent home. **One woman**, for example, had to be sent home after only a week despite suffering severely from TB. Even though medicines were arranged from the local government hospital, she died. So in summer 2013, JCMB started construction of a new building, to be used in addition to the existing health centre. It is 2½ times the size (by ground area), and will have, four rooms and an operating theatre, with potential to add up to two more stories if required. Despite the unavailability of an architect (none were willing to travel so far from major cities), work is progressing smoothly – with the pace limited by the availability of funds for bricks. The new health centre should be in use within three years.

The rat trap bond (left) reduces the cost of materials and labour, and improves thermal properties, reducing energy use.

--- Additional and Upcoming Projects ---

Jeeva: an ongoing research project on the effectiveness of traditional birthing practices. These are often safer, and are accepted in the west but not yet recognised by Indian medical establishments.

Global Green: A project to increase forest cover (with global and local environmental benefit), by demonstrating that it is easy and profitable to plant trees on fallow land as a source of fuel and timber

--- Contact us ---

We'd love to hear from you! Email is best: janchetnamanch@rediffmail.com.

We're always on the lookout for competent, good hearted people to help us! Expect minimal or no payment, hard and often frustrating work, experience of life in a mud house, and the chance to save and change many lives for the better! For more information, or financial support, please get in touch!