

KHAGRACHHARI

Dhumnightat CC Leads Awareness for Mothers and Children



Dhumnightat CC ensures Maternal and Childcare services

Khagrachhari is a land of breathtakingly beautiful landscapes and diverse communities with an area of 26,999.56 square kilometers among the rolling hills of Bangladesh is a shelter for 714,119 people, among whom 48.93% belong to various ethnic minority groups, but beneath its natural beauty lies a daily struggle. As the climate of this area is hot, humid, and rugged terrain, people here face many health issues, and they also have a limitation of access to health care.

This region has long battled with inadequate healthcare, and now the overall situation has changed significantly for this hard-to-reach region through the relentless efforts of the Health Rights Forum.

The positive changes include enhancing consciousness among people on waterborne diseases, ensuring equipment and beds for childbirth, and grooming the mother to take care of her baby and get vaccinations for her children.

However, the past poses a different or the opposite situation including people's health awareness is very low here, for years illness went ignored, maternal health was neglected and primary healthcare was a non-existent matter, and still the scenario has yet remained unchanged when the overall situation is being considered for the time being.

For being a mountainous area, the lack of safe water and nutritious food is accurate here and treatments after childbirth were like impossible dreams.

HRF volunteers had faced many obstacles and rejections from the tribal groups who are unwilling to seek modern medical help but they did not stop. They went physically to the houses and educated them about waterborne diseases like diarrhea, cholera and dysentery. They regularly do campaigns on the prevention of these diseases providing them saline and necessary medicines with the help of Upazila Health Complex and Community Clinics.

Previously, only a handful of patients 30-50, visited the clinic but now 300-400 people seek medical attention every month which is a great change for this hard-to-reach area.

The forum organizes workshops every month, where people of all ages from the village attend, which has changed the mindset of people in remote places like Khagrachari. In addition, the forum volunteers go door to door to discuss primary health care, maintaining hygiene among adolescents, and post-natal mother and child care.

Karmachan Tripura (52), Shabhapati of Dhumnighat Community Clinic and also the Karbari of their Para, appointed by the government to solve various land-related problems in the village, vividly recalls the struggles of the past.

"Today, things have changed positively with the persistent awareness campaigns led by Health Rights Forum."

He can only read, but he is educating his three children, the eldest daughter is studying at a degree college, the eldest son is studying for intermediate and the younger son is an SSC candidate.

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A tragic incident took place here in 2014, when an outbreak of diarrhea affected 40 people at once, among them was a poor pregnant woman who lost her child due to a lack of timely intervention, although she was taken to the hospital.

"Now times have changed, our regular campaigns and workshops on waterborne diseases have made them more conscious than in the past time," says Karmachan proudly.

The Community Clinic has the necessary equipment and beds for childbirth but the lack of doctors has been a significant challenge.

The people would greatly benefit if arrangements could be made for pregnant women to deliver here and for regular check-ups the presence of one or two family planning professionals would ensure safer deliveries, he points out.

Activist of the Forum says, *"We held meetings every month in this clinic to discuss and address community health issues."*

On average, there are 50 families in each village.

"We all know that, when people are educated, they are better equipped to make informed decisions about their health and well-being," he said adding, *"There is no school in this area. I can only read, many cannot even do that."*

In 2003, an NGO took the initiative to provide education for local children, highlighting the crucial link between health awareness and education.

"Now people here are mostly hospital-oriented, they visit Community Clinic willingly and this shift in the mindset of mostly uneducated, unconscious people is nothing short of a revolution, where healthcare was once a daydream," he says.

Rimra Marma (42), a dedicated Community Health Care Provider (CHCP) at Dhumnigarh Community Clinic says, *“I joined here in 2011, I took basic training on health for 3 months at Khagrachari Sadar Hospital and also did health-related training at various times from Health Rights Forum.”*

“People at that time avoided vaccines and basic health precautions, but today, they come on their own to get vaccines and treatments for the door to door”, he said.

Health Rights Forum holds monthly meetings that involve the local community and health officials, and this involvement has played a crucial role in driving this change.

Health Rights Forum's meeting focuses on how to provide services to pregnant and lactating mothers, how would they ensure the healthcare of the young girls and boys of the village and bring them under the care of the service as he highlights.

“Now a separate room has been set up for delivery, but delivery is not possible due to water shortage. Moreover, there are no nurses or necessary manpower here to treat pregnant women, so they are sent to the Health Complex.”

“But after delivering at the Health Complex, we groom the mother how to take care of her baby and herself, we give them calcium, vitamins, iron, vitamin B complex to pregnant mothers,” says a volunteer of HRF.

The shortage of manpower and necessary medicines is still an obstacle, for example, paracetamol is the only solution for many health issues sometimes.

Despite the unfavorable environment, the improvements in healthcare infrastructure have also been remarkable.

“Once, when a government secretary visited, I requested a new clinic building for our Community Clinic as the