



Swasthya Swaraj

A People's Movement For Swaraj In Health



NEWSLETTER

Reflections | News Clippings | Resources

Celebrations,
Challenges,
Reflections – New
Beginnings and
Some Endings. See
what marked the
last six months at
Swasthya Swaraj in
this latest issue.



Community Hospital at Kaniguma

ISSUE 17
DECEMBER 2024

Editor's Note

The past few months at Swasthya Swaraj have been marked by a spirit of celebration. From inaugurating our new Community Hospital to celebrating the graduation of the 3rd Batch of DCHP students and reflecting on a decade of impactful work, these moments have brought together nearly everyone who has ever been a part of our journey. The celebrations were a testament to what Swasthya Swaraj stands for—a sense of community at its peak. Every detail of the event was a collective effort, and the day felt like a beautiful reflection of our organisational spirit.

At Swasthya Swaraj, we believe that every small change ripples outward, creating a broader impact. Whether it's Saibani Naik's journey toward healing, the transformative role of rural crèches like Suhani's, or the quiet revolution sparked by better meals and infrastructure in Kerpai and Silet schools, these stories are a testament to what hope and collective effort can achieve.

Yet, amidst these successes, we are reminded of the work that remains. As mentioned in the last issue, this year's Malaria season has been devastating. In July, the positivity rate stood at 47.3%, and this past month alone, we recorded 406 positive cases during our clinical outreaches. The numbers are alarming, underscoring the urgency of our mission. Each story in this newsletter is a call to action, urging us to continue striving for a world where health is not a privilege but a fundamental right.

This issue of the newsletter carries the flavour of these past months—reflections on our journey, moments of joy and togetherness, and the bittersweet beginnings and endings that mark life in the field. We hope you find it as meaningful a read as it was for us to put together.

Warm Regards,
Aarti Kala

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the village. The scene they encountered was one of desperation. Government officials from Thuamul Rampur and Bhawanipatna also arrived, shifting some patients to Kashipur CHC for further care. In total, more than 30 residents were affected by the outbreak. Four lost their lives, and two required treatment for complications like acute kidney injury at higher centres.

Tracing the Roots of the Crisis

The outbreak was not merely a consequence of the monsoon and the ‘carelessness’ of people. It revealed systemic neglect. The absence of sanitation facilities forced the community to rely on contaminated water sources. Open defecation, combined with poor awareness of hygiene, created a breeding ground for waterborne diseases.

Turning the Tide

The Swasthya Swaraj team, with local volunteers, launched a multipronged response. Immediate efforts included rehydration therapy, isolating the critically ill, and shifting them to Kerpai hospital to prevent further spread. The team also disinfected the village’s water sources, cleaning the tank with bleaching powder and distributing chlorine tablets. Villagers were taught the importance of boiling water, handwashing, and proper waste disposal. Hygiene education sessions were conducted to address underlying issues.

Within a week, the outbreak was contained, but the scars remain. Podapoi’s residents lost four lives to a disease that is entirely preventable.



Podapoi Village youth cleaning the water tank during one of the Diarrhoea Awareness and Prevention Sessions

Learning from the Tragedy

Dr Sachin T and the health team conducted an epidemiological survey of the village, tracing the index case and the sequence of events. Meanwhile, Rahul Kumar and Jayshankar created a documentary featuring the voices of villagers and the grieving families of those who passed away, capturing the harrowing experience.

A Lesson for All

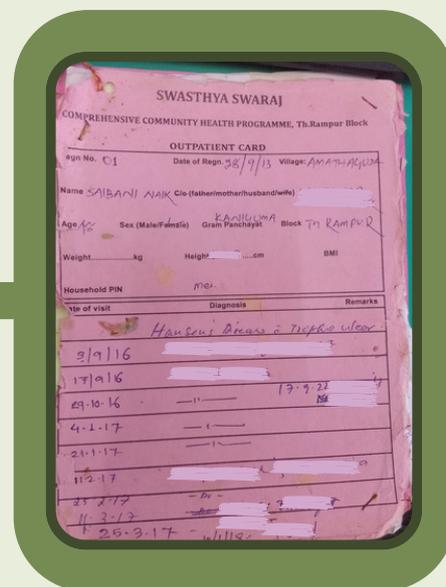
The tragedy of Podapoi stares us in the face and underscores the urgency of addressing health inequities in tribal and remote areas.

It is not enough to respond to crises; we need sustainable solutions that empower these communities to safeguard their health.

Podapoi's story is a poignant reminder of the silent struggles of India's tribal communities, their resilience in the face of adversity, and the urgent need for systemic change.

As the village rebuilds, its people hope for a future where clean water is not a privilege but a right, and where none succumbs to a preventable disease like diarrhoea.

The wilderness may be their home, but their cry for health and dignity resonates far beyond its boundaries.



Saibani Niak's Swasthya Sathi Certificate (left), proudly kept as a record of her achievement.

Her outpatient card from 2013 (right ; edited to preserve patient privacy).

Providing health services in remote tribal areas like Thuamul Rampur block is a matter of pride for us. Swasthya Swaraj sent dedicated medical staff and provided excellent treatment. Didi even spent her own money to provide patients with medicines, slippers, and essential items. Her service was unparalleled and memorable. Because of the hard work of the Swasthya Swaraj team, my mother recovered fully after five years, in 2018. Today, she stands as a testament to the transformative impact of healthcare services in remote tribal areas. The journey of my mother's healing has not only brought her back to good health but also inspired our community to take charge of their well-being.

Siabani Niak (right) receiving a check-up at the newly inaugurated Swasthya Swaraj Community Hospital in Kaniguma



Women of Karlapat: Resilience Amidst Poverty

Dr Abhay Nelson

With a kangaroo sling to carry their baby, breastfeeding as freely and naturally as it is—even working while breastfeeding—carrying their home key as a locket on their neck chain, wearing a saree, and with a characteristically pierced nose (not just both nostrils but the nasal septum too), the sight of the women of Karlapat caught my eye.

How Differently Does Poverty Affect Men and Women?

When a girl child is born here, it is not just hunger, not just the lack of shelter, not just being sick and unable to see a doctor, not just not having access to school or not knowing how to read and write, not just the everyday hurdles life throws at her that she is struggling with, but so much more.

It begins with the lack of childhood and neglect as a girl child, as she is deprived of any fair chances at education, growing up in an environment ignorant of her needs. Then comes the strangeness of adolescence in such an ignorant environment, followed by early marriage and childbearing, and thereafter the immense burden of carrying a family on her shoulders, often all alone.

Her life revolves around working all day under and along the shift of sunlight, performing heavy labour at the donger and taking care of chores at home. Victims of





Addressing Health Challenges: The Podapoi Experience

A diarrhoea outbreak in Podapoi village recently highlighted the need for immediate health interventions. Tragically, the outbreak claimed three lives.

Our seniors and staff stayed in the village for four days, identifying unhygienic practices, poor sanitation, and unsafe water as the root causes. They educated the community on hygiene practices, demonstrated ORS preparation, and helped clean the village environment.

This collective effort not only contained the outbreak but also equipped the villagers with knowledge to prevent such incidents in the future. It was an invaluable learning opportunity for us students, as we interacted with the community and understood the practical challenges of healthcare.

Gratitude and Reflection

I am grateful for the supportive teachers, the engaging lessons, and the cultural activities that bring joy to our days. Our seniors take care of us, guiding us as we navigate this challenging but fulfilling journey.

I feel privileged to be part of SSS and this program. It has not only prepared me to become a skilled nurse but also shaped me into a more compassionate and capable individual.

A Vision for the Future

My ultimate goal is to become a professional nurse, fulfilling my dream and my family's expectations. This course has shown me that dedication, education, and empathy can transform lives. I am confident that one day, I will make my dream and my family's dream come true.

In the Shade of the Mango Tree

Dr Sachin Thankachan

One serene morning in the stillness of the Kaniguma forest, gently warmed by the sun's bristles, a heartwarming gesture brought tears to my eyes—a tender act that will forever hold a golden page in my memory.

A 60-year-old woman, admitted to the Kaniguma Community Hospital for more than ten days with diabetic ketoacidosis and under insulin treatment, rose that day. Her husband arrived with warm water, gently helping her sit under the leafy shade of a big mango tree. With quiet devotion, he began to clean up the mess from the past days, assisting her with eating and tending to her every need. She started afresh with his care, a small yet profoundly beautiful act of healing.

As I stood there, witnessing this living poem unfold, it touched my heart deeply. **Real medicine, I realised, is often the tender love and care of those who stand by us in our hardest moments.** This scene brought back memories of my own mother, whose nurturing presence healed me during my hospital days.

These are some of the images etched in my heart throughout the journey of the tribal fellowship programme. This experience helped me foster a strong emotional connection with the tribal people. The unspoken beauty of nature often mirrors and amplifies the quiet strength of human connection, leaving lasting impressions on the soul.

The deepest connections and acts of kindness remind us of the universal bond we share as humans. The greatest treasures in life are intangible—love, care, and emotional presence. For me, these treasured memories are woven into the opportunities I have been given at Swasthya Swaraj Society over the past year. In the middle of nowhere, I was nurtured with generosity and guidance. I stand in awe of your unwavering commitment and extend my deepest appreciation for all that you do.

Thank you, SSS.

SWASTHYA SWARAJ INAUGURATES COMMUNITY HOSPITAL IN KANIGUMA



Kaniguma, Kalahandi: On 2nd October 2024, the Swasthya Swaraj Society celebrated its 10th anniversary with the inauguration of the new Community Hospital in Kaniguma. The event, attended by local communities and dignitaries, marked a decade of unwavering dedication to primary healthcare in tribal areas.

The hospital aims to provide accessible, affordable healthcare, including maternal and child health services, treatment for malaria, tuberculosis, and malnutrition. In her keynote, Dr. Sucheta Pani, Chief District Medical & Public Health

Officer, emphasised the importance of bridging healthcare gaps in remote areas, while Prof. Dr. Sarat Chandra Singh highlighted the hospital's role in advancing medical education and training. Smti. Jayashree Mohanty spoke about the critical need for maternal and child healthcare, and Dr. Supriya Pattnayak stressed the importance of skill-based training for tribal girls under the Diploma in Community Health Practice (DCHP) programme.

The event also celebrated the launch of the Rural Creche Initiative, supported by the Azim Premji Foundation, which aims to provide

early childhood care and supplementary nutrition for children aged 7 months to 3 years in tribal areas. The Graduation Day of DCHP students was also observed, marking their successful training and readiness to serve their communities. On this occasion, Swasthya Swaraj released several key publications, including ODYSSEY: The 10-Year Journey of Swasthya Swaraj, the Swasthya Sathi Training Manual, the Health and Nutrition Promoting School Manual, and the Handbook of Dermatology, Volume 1.

As Swasthya Swaraj celebrates their 10-year journey, the new community hospital stands as a testament to their dedication to empowering tribal communities through accessible, high-quality primary healthcare.

MICROBIOLOGIST DR. MONIQUE VAN GOUBERGEN

VISITS SWASTHYA SWARAJ

On 3rd October 2024, Dr. Monique Van Goubergen, a renowned microbiologist and supporter of the Swasthya Swaraj Society, visited Kaniguma to attend the hospital inauguration and the graduation ceremony of the 3rd batch of Diploma in Community Health Practice (DCHP) students.

During her visit, Dr. Monique conducted a special revision class on microbiology for the 1st-semester DCHP students. Her sessions



TRAINING ON VITAMIN A SUPPLEMENTATION BY VITAMIN ANGELS

offered valuable insights and hands-on knowledge, greatly benefiting the students in their academic journey. She also held both theoretical and practical examinations, providing a rare and enriching learning experience.

On 25th and 26th November 2024, Vitamin Angels conducted a two-day in-person training programme to enhance child-wise recordkeeping using the CommCare App. The training included a classroom session on the first day, followed by practical field data entry exercises on the second day.

Participants practised mock interviews with caregivers using MCP cards to simulate real-world scenarios, gaining valuable experience in using technology for effective health and nutrition recordkeeping.



ASRH SESSIONS IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

In December 2024, Swasthya Swaraj Society successfully conducted training sessions on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) under the TULSI Program across various government residential high schools and junior colleges in the Thuamul Rampur Block, Kalahandi District.

These sessions aimed to bridge critical gaps in health knowledge while fostering confidence and autonomy among tribal adolescents. Key topics covered included bodily changes during adolescence, menstrual health and hygiene,



sexual and reproductive health rights, safe practices like contraception and STI prevention, communication skills, and the prevention of sexual violence. The trainings were designed to be age-appropriate and culturally sensitive, creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for all participants.

DEVDAAS MOHANTY JOINS AS ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Swasthya Swaraj Society is pleased to welcome Devdas Mohanty as its new Associate Director. With over 25 years of experience as a development practitioner and social science researcher, he brings a wealth of expertise to the organisation.

Devdas has successfully managed large-scale projects focused on livelihoods, CSR programmes, and Resettlement & Rehabilitation (R&R) initiatives. His core competencies include strategic planning, community mobilisation, project implementation, impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation, and education.

The team at Swasthya Swaraj warmly welcomes him to and looks forward to his leadership and vision driving impactful initiatives.

SJRI CONDUCTS MOLECULAR BIOLOGY TRAINING IN KANIGUMA

Swasthya Swaraj recently hosted an enlightening training session on molecular biology, conducted by resource persons from St. John's

Research Institute. The training was designed for lab technicians involved in the Point-of-Care Technologies for Nutrition, Infection, and Cancer for Global Health (PORTENT) study. This effort aims to equip local healthcare professionals with advanced skills to utilise newer and more precise technologies, enhancing their diagnostic capabilities

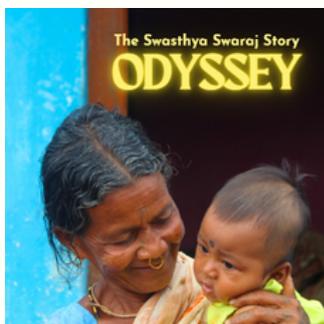
RESOURCES

- ▶ The Swasthya Swaraj Story
- ▶ 10-years Journey of Swasthya Swaraj
- ▶ Documentary on the Diarrhoea Outbreak in Podapoi—
COMING SOON

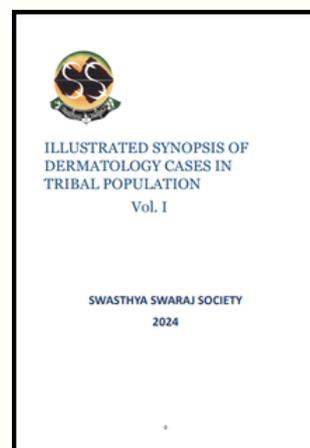
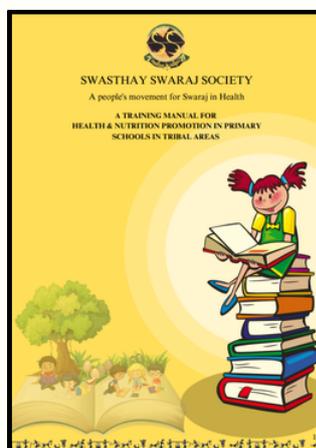
www.youtube.com/@swasthyaswaraj6154

We have released many publications this time around...

COFFEE TABLE BOOK



A photo journey
compilation and
story telling of a
decade of
Swasthya Swaraj



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