

Improving Health Care for Mothers and their New-Born Babies in Rural India

In 2003, Amila Bag from Raidunipadar village in the Kalahandi district of Orissa was selected by her community to participate in 90 days of village health worker training organised by a local NGO - Seba Jagat. Through its Community Health Programme (2002-5), Skillshare International placed experienced development workers with Seba Jagat to share their skills with health workers in remote areas of India.



The majority of Raidunipadar's inhabitants are from tribal communities. The village lacks communications infrastructure and facilities, and this situation becomes worse during the rainy season. Health care services are limited and basic, particularly for maternal and new-born care. The nearest hospital with facilities to deliver babies is more than 25 km away and women have traditionally given birth at home, usually with the support of untrained relatives. Before Amila and the other village health workers were nominated and trained, two pregnant women in the village died during childbirth because of unhygienic practices and the lack of facilities. Skillshare International's partner organisation, Seba Jagat, trained village health workers including Amila to assist mothers during delivery, identify critical cases and administer basic medicine.

Photo (left): Amila with two daughters and her son.

Once Amila had completed her training, she was able to provide basic treatment and support to her community. She has helped deliver babies, given simple injections, set up drips, treated malaria and learned some simple techniques including how to deal with cases where the placenta does not appear after the baby has been delivered. She has been able to identify critical cases and refer patients to the hospital. Amila has also taken a lead role in controlling diarrhoea.

In addition to providing health care services to her village, Amila has formed a Women's Health Group which regularly saves money and has taken out a bank loan to set up a small business rearing goats. This means that the members are able to earn their own incomes and can save money to pay for health care services for themselves and their families.



Amila with her husband and eldest daughter.

Since Amila and the other village health workers completed their training, there has been a change in the villagers' behaviour and attitudes to health care. Pregnant women in the village now take iron supplements, have regular check-ups to monitor their weight, and benefit from improved hygiene practices during delivery. Amila has even managed to involve her husband, Sanurjya Bag, in the community development activities. He has attended a health training programme, supported women in his village to establish their self-help group, and played an important role in the formation of the forest committee. Amila now also works in another village, Anganwadi, to help them improve their mother and child health services.