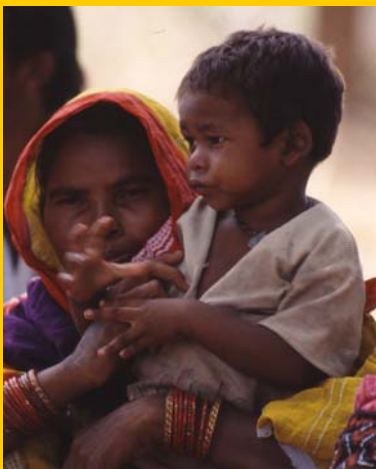


Jayanti Sahu – a Woman to Emulate Seba Jagat

Deep in the dense forests of Kalahandi District, the poorest in the state of Orissa in south-eastern India, a quiet revolution has been changing the health habits of some of India's most socially excluded tribal communities. Much of this success can be attributed to a partnership which began nearly 3 years ago between Seba Jagat, a local NGO, and Skillshare International. Braving constant poverty and near starvation, a group of about 30 young tribal men and women took up the challenge of changing the mindsets and health-seeking behaviour of themselves and their communities through intensive and sustained health education. The training was facilitated by Seba Jagat and provided by Dr Dinesh Baliga, a committed medical doctor who joined Skillshare International in 2003.

These voluntary village health workers (VHWs) were chosen by their own communities for their commitment to community development, willingness to work on a voluntary basis and their aptitude to learn and transfer knowledge. In a community facing stark poverty and socio-political exclusion, the sheer enthusiasm of these volunteers has been simply inspiring. Dr Baliga and Ambika, Seba Jagat's Health Co-ordinator, led 90 days of theoretical training interspersed with practical sessions in the field to equip the volunteers with key skills in preventive medicine and the ability to share those skills and knowledge with communities.



The volunteers, particularly the women, were not only empowered to manage their own health, but suddenly found themselves as respectable members of the communities, with both men and women seeking their advice on nutrition and health issues.

Jayanti Sahu, a tribal woman who had barely moved beyond the borders of her village, is one of these motivated and empowered volunteers. With the health training she received from Dr Baliga and the motivation from the Seba Jagat team, Jayanti slowly transformed from a quiet homemaker to a dynamic health worker and an effective change agent.

Photo shows Seba Jagat beneficiaries in Kuntaijhavan village.

Pregnant with her fourth child, Jayanti developed labour pains when she was alone at home with her elderly mother-in-law, who did not know how to help with the birth. Jayanti had gained confidence because of the skills and knowledge she had acquired during the health training. This gave her enough courage to instruct her mother-in-law to gather the materials for a clean and safe delivery. However, as the baby emerged, Jayanti saw to her horror that the baby's neck was entangled in the umbilical cord. Once again, the training in preventive and maternal health care came to Jayanti's aid and she managed to remove the cord and deliver her baby safely. An utterly overwhelmed mother-in-law was then guided in tying the cord and cutting it. Soon, Jayanti breast-fed her newborn baby, thus helping to expel the placenta and prevent post-natal bleeding and mortality.

Jayanti has now become a role model not just for the other women in her village, but also to Seba Jagat and Skillshare, where her story of courage and confidence is used to motivate other disadvantaged and socially excluded women whose right to life are constantly denied through man-made barriers and gender discrimination.