



# Building capacities of Saathins to accelerate social change

## A typical week for a Saathin

<b>Monday</b>	Discussion on routine immunisation
<b>Tuesday</b>	Meeting with adolescent girls
<b>Wednesday</b>	Meeting with self-help groups
<b>Thursday</b>	Activities around social security schemes
<b>Friday</b>	<i>Jajam</i> meetings
<b>Saturday</b>	Panchayat meeting/pensions

## Introduction

The Saathin is the key frontline functionary in Rajasthan who takes the women and adolescent empowerment agenda of the Directorate of Women Empowerment, Department of Women and Child Development to communities. The post of the Saathin was created in 1984, in six districts of Rajasthan, with the aim of appointing a village-level female resource for empowerment and awareness generation among women. She plays a critical role in translating this vision into reality by facilitating information dissemination among women and adolescents to enable access to schemes and programmes benefitting them, building a conducive environment for empowerment of girls and counselling them on issues related to gender discrimination, exploitation, health, nutrition, menstrual hygiene etc.

The Government of Rajasthan created this cadre as counsellors and guides to all women and girls in gram panchayats and one of their key mandates is to work towards prevention of child marriage. A Saathin is selected by the Mahila Gram Sabha at every gram panchayat.

## Capacity gaps assessment

Though the Saathin cadre was envisioned as an empowered resource pool, visible gaps in their capacities have been identified in terms of skills, accountability and resources. In 2019, a systematic capacity gap assessment\* was undertaken in three districts – Karauli (Karauli and Hindaun blocks), Udaipur (Gogunda and Girwa blocks) and Jaisalmer (Sam block). This assessment was a precursor to a comprehensive capacity building initiative for the Saathins and their newly recruited supervisors.

\* Conducted by Envisions Institute of Development with support from UNICEF



## Key findings of the assessment

The assessment findings focused on gauging the knowledge, attitude and skills of Saathins, and the scope for improvement in these areas.

### Knowledge of Saathins

- Scope for improvement and enhancement of Saathins' knowledge on basic health and nutrition, life skills, laws and acts for women, issues related to women in the community, adolescent girls and SHGs
- Need to prioritise issues and provide training based on this prioritisation.

### Skills of Saathins

- Scope for improvement in skills related to conducting group meetings, emotional thinking and empathy, communication and negotiation
- Need to prioritise and provide skills training contextualised with knowledge and actions required.

### Attitude of Saathins

- They have good qualities such as commitment, trustworthiness and honesty which can be encouraged
- Their opinionated and judgemental attitudes need to be reworked
- Attitudes such as empathy need to be enhanced, to help overcome the tendency to be opinionated and judgmental.

### Objectives of the assessment

- Understand the level of knowledge and skills of Saathins to address women's issues at the gram panchayat level
- Identify the current support that Saathins get from the community
- Prioritise capacity gaps for the Saathins.

The assessment tried to identify the gaps between possessed and required capacities and capabilities for Saathins to deliver the desired objectives of their job profile.

### Sample

A total of 172 respondents were met for the assessment. They included district and block-level officials, gram panchayat members, self-help group (SHG) and community representatives and Saathins themselves.





Photo Credit: © UNICEF/Abhinav Soni/2019

## Recommendations to help Saathins work more effectively

### Engagements that can be taken up by Saathins



- Engage with school boys and girls for positive socialisation
- Hold joint meetings with the beat constable to address school safety
- Organise meetings with adolescent girls through girls' SHGs
- Organise meetings with child protection officers for child marriage and other protection issues
- Organise meetings with School Management Committees (SMCs) for out-of-school children (most vulnerable girls)
- Organise meeting with Aparajita Centres.

### Resources that can be mobilised for Saathins



- In some areas like Jaisalmer, villages are very far from each other. The Saathin's compensation package should adequately cover her travel expenses
- Provision of resources such as a designated place and mats for *Jajams* etc. would be of great help for Saathins. A standard uniform with a bag and a simple reusable banner to be placed at the *Jajam* venue will also help increase awareness about the Saathin's presence.

### Recommendations for supervision



- Supportive supervision process needs to be strengthened
- Supportive supervision and monitoring should match job priorities set up by the department.

## Comprehensive plan to build capacities of Saathins

Based on the recommendations of the capacity gaps assessment, the Directorate of Women Empowerment has designed a well-rounded capacity development plan for Saathins. The plan envisages building a cadre of Master

Trainers who would then conduct training of trainers in a cascade mode at the block level to strengthen capacities of Saathins across all districts.

### Objectives of Saathin training programme

- Get clarity on their role and responsibilities towards women and girls in the community



## Parameters for assessment of trainers

- Ability to listen when others speak
- Demonstrating attentive listening through eye contact or nodding
- Ability to paraphrase and providing the other an opportunity to speak
- Ability to ask open ended questions
- Maintaining eye contact with all
- Confidence while answering questions
- Ability to use training aids/ materials with ease
- Interest in the programme
- Prepared for the session (notes, handouts, charts etc.) in advance
- Ability to deliver content fully with theoretical knowledge of the content
- Use of examples on issues related to women and girls
- Knowledge of schemes and acts

- Hone their skill sets to carry out these responsibilities
- Strengthen their ability to use social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) effectively to plan and implement suitable interventions for women's empowerment in Rajasthan through uptake of government programmes and services for women's safety and security, education, livelihood, health and nutrition
- Provide support for adolescent girls to bring them back to school, stop early marriages and provide health education through proper linkages.

## Training of trainers

A five-day training of Master Trainers was held in February 2020, where 44 Master Trainers were trained.

The Master Trainers were assessed using two criteria: self- assessment and facilitator assessment. Twelve parameters were utilised to assess their competencies and gauge their facilitation skills and content knowledge. Nearly half the participants performed well in this assessment.

## Creating a resource pool

From here on, the capacity building plan will include training of 10 trainers' batches at the divisional level from all 33 districts.

- 330 district-level trainers will be developed
- These 330 trainers would then hold 268 batches at the block level (for 295 blocks) and train 8,472 Saathins.

## Way forward

The training programme has brought focus on crucial aspects such as negotiation skills, conflict resolution and engaging with men, which are of utmost importance for Saathins. To train and develop the Master Trainer cadre, UNICEF has developed a Saathin Refresher Module for the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Rajasthan. This initiative to develop capacities of the Saathins is testimony to the Government of Rajasthan's resolve to equip them with the skill sets to bring social change and empower women and adolescent girls.

UNICEF's adolescent empowerment programming in Rajasthan focuses on increasing opportunities for education to reduce the vulnerability of girls and building their life skills to empower them with an enhanced ability to speak against early marriage and for child rights.

To this end, UNICEF is providing technical assistance to the Department of Women and Child Development, Department of Education and Department of Social Justice and Empowerment to build awareness, sensitisation and capacities among frontline workers and mobilise communities to make them active partners in planning and decision making. UNICEF is also strengthening the alliance of civil society organisations towards ending all forms of violence against children and women.

In its adolescent empowerment efforts, UNICEF has also actively worked for inclusion of child protection programming in schools of Rajasthan and for out-of-school children, with components such as strengthening of adolescent forums in and outside schools, self-defence trainings in schools and by giving an impetus to the enrolment of dropout girls in Open Schools. UNICEF's programming is facilitating access to various government schemes and programmes influencing children's education, among economically weaker sections, to ensure that entitlements reach all children and they can continue their education.