

Women's rights, health technology, and social norms

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Equitable health outcomes and women's rights: Equitable health outcomes require not only accessible and equitable quality health services, but changes in social norms related to health and health determinants at intra-household, community and market levels. There are good examples at establishing community level monitoring (women men, teachers, local government) of nutrition, infant health, child health and maternal health in Nepal under the project Decentralized Action for Children and Women (DACAW) by UNICEF. Intra-household distribution of food improved, as well as rest that women add after delivery leading to lowered infant, child and maternal mortality. Under this programme paralegal women workers have been trained and formed into a network who support women survivors of violence and refer them to legal, health and counseling services. This programme is presently being expanded through the Ministry of Local Development (cited in Murthy and Sachdev, 2008). At another level, women earn lower wages in the market place. In India, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme which pays equal wages for women and men, has pushed up the market wages for women. This has improved women's health seeking behaviour and women's health (Panda et al, 2009).

Women's rights and accountable use of health technologies: To give one example, day to day new technologies are emerging which can be abused like for sex selection. Sex ratio at birth is skewed in favour of males in China, India, Republic of Korea, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Vietnam, and Pakistan. It was not so, twenty five years back. Together these countries make half of the world. It is important to permit only accredited institutions (with a watchdog committee for each) to provide access to technologies which can be used, but are necessary for other health purposes. Campaigns against sex selective abortions are a must, and may be represented in the boards and committees of clinics which use the technologies.

Murthy, R.K and N Sachdev, 2008, Country Case Study Nepal, in UNICEF (ed), Evaluation of Gender Policy Implementation in UNICEF, UNICEF New York.

Panda, B, A.K, Dutta and S Prusty, 2009, Appraisal of NREGA in the States of Meghalaya and Sikkim, Rajiv Gandhi Indian Institute of Management, Shillong.