

Book Reviews

Sunil Misra. *Voluntary Action in Health and Population: The Dynamics of Social Transition.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. Paperback. Indian Rs 225.00. 273 pages.

Health is a coefficient of development. Improvement in the health status of the people is generally preceded by the overall development of the area. Development to a great extent is contingent on the social and economic security of the people, social status of women, female literacy, adoption of new technology, work participation by women, and the internalisation of investments to generate resources and create conditions of economic development. In this process, non-government organisations at the micro level play an important role.

The book by Sunil Misra is an attempt to understand the process of change in the area of health and population as a consequent to programme intervention. It highlights the contribution of voluntary organisations in bringing about desired change in the individual and community value system. In view of the diversity of situation and topology of the different programmes, the collection has been bunched into broad categories based on thematic approaches. Qualitative evaluation studies taken up at 14 places, have been grouped thematically into five broad groups comprising the first five sections of the book. These include case studies on infant mortality, integrated health and development in rural areas, fertility, reproductive health and responsible social behaviour, family planning and reproductive health in the organised sector and, indolent of indigenous resource persons to promote family planning. The remaining two Sections VI and VII highlight the critical areas of action and the role of NGOs.

The case studies provide sufficient evidence of the importance of NGOs in carrying out programmes in the field of health and family planning. In every project the emphasis is on creating a group of locally selected and trained volunteers who act as a link between the programme and the people. These community health volunteers carry out activities like identification of the target groups and their health needs, imparting education at individual and community levels and arranging services in collaboration with the health functionaries. Moreover with intensive scientific training, they could even serve as health functionaries when the community needed expert advice. The job is assigned to a suitable NGO on the basis of its field of specialisation according to area specific programme needs. The information, education and communication strategies were devised in consonance with the local situation; community leaders were involved at the rapport building stage to help in

breaking initial resistance. Through mass information campaigns for creating general awareness about the programme. Involvement of government functionaries was encouraged. In this way micro level experiences were integrated into the programmes and policies of the health department.

The projects have more than one component, for example, the focus of some projects is on integration of health with development. In few others, maternal and child health, nutrition, morbidity, mortality and family planning are the focus areas. In selected urban slums, the focus is on promoting responsible sexual behaviour through education on reproductive health. Moreover due to shortage of project time, the NGOs were forced to prioritise among the various components.

Section I has three case studies on 'Accelerating the pace of Decline of Infant Mortality and Fertility', undertaken in high infant mortality areas of Orisa, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The common objective of these projects was to bring down the incidence of infant mortality through areas specific intervention strategies by focussing high-risk pregnant women.

Section II has three projects on Integrated Health and Development, carried out in two districts of Lalipur and Kanpur of Uttar Pradesh and Tonk district of Rajasthan. The main objective was to experiment with integration of various health, social and economic programmes like health, family planning, literacy, gender issues, agriculture, social forestry and animal husbandry and implement them as a package for all round development.

Section III has four case studies on promoting responsible sexual behaviour among the youth in selected slums, promoting health and family welfare through community participation and fertility reduction among women. These projects were carried out in selected urban slums of Bangalore, Bombay, Delhi and Hyderabad.

Section IV covers three projects to promote reproductive health and family planning in the industrial areas and surroundings colonies in Faidabad, Haryana; in Kota, Rajasthan; in Parwanoo, Himachal Pradesh. Practitioners of the Indian system of medicine were also involved in these programmes.

Chapter 15 of the book highlights the critical areas of action that provide a guidelines for future designing of action research projects for better results as in these projects sufficient attention was not paid to detailing the plan of action.

This book provides multifocussed and rich analysis in the field of health and population. Its main contribution lies in providing practical wisdom for developing similar programmes. It will also be useful to researchers, community workers, students and policy-makers in the area. The inclusion of quantitative analysis will have added to its usefulness from the students' and policy-makers' point of view.

Attiya Yasmin Javed

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics,
Islamabad.