

Case study for the impact of Certification on the Livelihood of the Folk Healers of Gujarat

A large part of India, especially the rural and tribal regions, is serviced by folk healers who rely on local health practices using medicinal plants and herbs in treating patients for various illnesses. There are an estimated 1 million folk healers across the country. Interestingly, while they form an integral part of rural and tribal life, there is no formal recognition for them.

The Quality Council of India (QCI), as the apex quality facilitation body set up by Central Government, launched the Voluntary Certification Scheme for what are now being called the Traditional Community Healthcare Providers (TCHPs). This term was first mentioned in the National Health Policy to certify the knowledge and skills of the folk healers. QCI adopted the same term. As a result, the Voluntary Certification Scheme for the Traditional Community Healthcare Providers (VCSTCHP) had its national launch on March 24, 2017 at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

Prior to the launch of the national scheme, a pilot project was conceived, formulated and implemented during 2010 – 2012 by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) with support from the Quality Council of India (QCI) and the Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT). The project was mentored and funded by the then Department of AYUSH, Government of India. The National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB) in QCI provided expertise in designing and operating a competent third party evaluation and certification system. The objective was to create a uniform and standardized framework - perhaps for the first time in the world - for the Voluntary Certification for persons who manage various streams of health services based on their traditional knowledge, experience and expertise. A total of 517 such folk healers were certified during the pilot project, of which 91 were from the Dang district of Gujarat.

On a recent trip to the same areas in Gujarat, it was encouraging to interact with the folk healers who were certified during the pilot project (2010 – 2012) and find out how their lives have been impacted after their certification. A few cases are mentioned below.

Sri Sukarbhair Bhangubhai Pawar of village Jamlapada of Dang district was certified for managing jaundice and common ailments (1). According to him, prior to his certification, although he had the knowledge and skills to provide healthcare services, nobody knew him. He worked mostly as a daily labourer in the farms and would earn Rs. 30/- per day for his healthcare service which was his secondary occupation. After he was certified, people in his village and other neighbouring villages got to know him for his skills. He no longer works as a daily labourer as he is exclusively a healthcare provider today. His monthly income has risen to Rs.25000/- to Rs.30,000/-. With his increased earning, he has bought a plot of land where he has set up the facility for his services and named it *Charak Vanoushodhi Evam Kudarati Pratham Upchar Kendra*. Besides setting up the Kendra, the certificate has allowed him to access raw materials easily as the Forest Officials know him as a genuine, certified folk healer. With the increase in his income, his family (2), especially the son and daughter, have also started assisting him. His daughter has established a registered SHG in the name of Disha and has a small outlet next to the National Highway.



Pandit Motirambhai Choudhary of village Sonunia of Dang district was also certified for jaundice and common ailment during the pilot project (3). He said that being a tribal, he could collect raw materials for his medicines but was not allowed to enter the forest areas. With the certification, he now faces no problems in entering the forest to collect raw materials for preparing his medicines. His earnings have increased after his certification. He earns Rs.15,000/- to Rs. 20,000/- per month. With the increase in income, he has developed a herbal garden on his own land and is not totally dependent on the forest for collecting raw materials. He has earned respect amongst his community and the surrounding villages by which he is able to motivate the community to undertake medicinal plant cultivation on their respective plots of land.



Sri Soniabhai Kasiram of Nilosi village of Valsad district was an evaluator for jaundice during the pilot project (4). He believes that his participation as an evaluator helped him to understand the certification process. He learnt the healing tradition from his father Kashiram Raoji and has the knowledge of all the 6 streams that are being taken up for certification under the QCI-FRLHT Scheme. It is a family tradition for them and all his 4 children - 3 sons and 1 daughter - are continuing the tradition. He has cultivated medicinal plants on his one acre land and has engaged daily wagers for his cultivation work whom he pays Rs 200/- per day and one time meal. He spends approximately Rs.5000/- to Rs.7000/- per year as payment to his daily wagers.

He runs 4 centres in the name of *Parampara Raoji Kendra* at Dharampur, Vapi, Nilosi and Valsad. He caters to approximately 400 patients every month in each Kendra for arthritis, back pain, sugar, blood pressure, common ailment, and stones. He is referred to by

allopathic doctors of Valsad district for paralysis cases and gets 10-15 referred patients for paralysis. He also provides free treatment for the needy and has an ambulance service. He has an earning of between Rs. 1,00,000/- to Rs.1,50,000/- per month.



4

Sri Manubhai Pilubhai Chavadari of village Wangan of Navsari district was an evaluator for common ailments during the pilot project (5). He is 65 years old and provides his service for cases pertaining to paralysis, sugar, blood pressure, jaundice, common ailment, poisonous bites and bone setting. He has 2 sons. The elder son, Ishwar (6), has studied upto class V. Although Manubhai was well known for his services, since the pilot project, his name spread widely and the number of patients rose. He was unable to handle his work alone. His son Ishwar, who was working in Mumbai in a steel polishing factory, left his job and joined his father.

Now, both the father and son together have set up 4 centres at Rumla, Dharampur, Kangwai and Manpurwada. They attend to 300 – 400 patients in a month for all 4 centres and earn about Rs.20000/- to Rs.25,000/- a month. They have good understanding with the allopathic doctors as well.

While we were at their centre, a patient was brought on a two wheeler from Nashik, a 3-hour ride. The patient (7 – elderly person seated on the two wheeler) has paralysis. This was his third visit. On his first visit he had to be carried but now he walked with support and could sit on the two wheeler although the right side, which is still affected, had to be tied to the vehicle for balance.



5



6



7

All the four persons - Sri Sakurbhai Bhangubhai Pawar, Pandit Motiram Choudhary, Sri Soniabhai Kasiram and Sri Ishwar Chavadari - attended the 3-day evaluator training programme conducted by QCI resource persons, Dr. Debjani Roy and Dr. Anil Saraf. The training was organised by the QCI approved Third Party Personnel Certification Body - Etica Clinpharm Pvt Ltd. (ECPL), Raipur at the Dhruva-BAIF Adivasi Training Centre at Lachhakadi in the Navasari district of Gujarat on June 15 – 17, 2019.

It was a touching experience to see the positive impact which been created by the healer certification process in the lives of disadvataged people. The certification has given the much awaited recognition for the folk healers. They now are recognised not only by their immediate beneficiaries but are known to the concerned government officials as genuine persons having the knowledge and skills for their tradition; their family members are motivated to keep the tradition alive as their family heritage and the communities in close association to them have been encouraged to establish medicinal plant gardens on their own land. Overall there has been a remarkable upliftment for the sustainability of their practice as traditional community healthcare providers and livelihood.

Considering that the Central Government itself has chosen to honour traditional healers on the Republic Day in 2018, and the Niti Ayog and the Ministry of AYUSH have extended support for the QCI-FRLHT scheme for certification of TCHPs, the Central as well as the State Governments are being requested to adopt the Scheme as a national scheme for certification of traditional healers and induct them into the national healthcare delivery system. The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare is responsible for policy making in respect of providing healthcare services which ideally needs to integrate various systems of medicines available to provide healthcare to the common man. With the certification scheme for traditional healers being available, it would now be possible to integrate such healers into the healthcare system.

The policy makers should recognize traditional healers certified under the QCI scheme in the healthcare delivery system and incentivize the traditional healers to go for such certification by various means including subsidizing their cost of certification under the National Health Mission or other schemes.

Dr Debjani Roy

Advisor, QCI, New Delhi

Email : tchpscheme@qcin.org

Contact : 01141052296 / 8800762777

