



Department of Anthropology

Brainstorming session on Tribal Malnutrition

17 May 2014, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi

Delhi- 110007

Session Report

Documented by:

Nilisha Vashist
Department of Anthropology
University of Delhi, Delhi 110007.

Program Agenda

2.30 pm – 2.35 pm	<p>Welcome & Introduction</p> <p>Prof. P. C. Joshi, Professor of Social Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University.</p> <p>Prof. V. K. Srivastava, Head of the Anthropology Department, Delhi University.</p>
2.35 pm – 2.40 pm	<p>UNICEF perspective on creation of common platform</p> <p>Ms. Geetanjali Master, Communication Specialist, UNICEF India</p>
2.40 pm – 2.50 pm	<p>Brief on Tribal Malnutrition</p> <p>Mr. Karanveer Singh, Nutrition Specialist, UNICEF India</p>
2.50 pm – 3.00 pm	<p>Work done by Department of Anthropology on Malnutrition</p> <p>Prof. P C Joshi, Professor in Social Anthropology, University of Delhi</p>
3.00 pm – 3.30 pm	<p>Brainstorming session on creating common platform – Experiences that work</p> <p>Prof. V. Rao, Dr. Karan Veer Singh, Ms. Geetanjali, Ms.Sonia Sarkar, Ms. Mohuya Chaudhuri,Dr. P R Mondal, Dr. Dolly Florence Murmu, Dr. K. N. Saraswathy, Dr. Kiranmala.</p>
3.30 pm – 3.45 pm	<p>Learnings</p> <p>Prof. P C Joshi, Professor in Social Anthropology, University of Delhi</p>
3.45 pm – 4.00 pm	<p>Vote of Thanks</p> <p>Ms. Geentanjali; Master, Communication Specialist, UNICEF India</p>



SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Welcome and Introduction: P. C. Joshi and V. K. Srivastava

Following the brief introduction of delegates from UNICEF India and researchers working on tribal malnutrition in Department of Anthropology, Prof. Joshi stressed on the need to pool resources from both sides for a comprehensive understanding of malnutrition.

Prof. Srivastava, in envisioning long term collaboration between UNICEF and the Department of Anthropology, suggested the need to utilize anthropological understanding of the tribal populations gained through inductive research. Raising some terminological debates in anthropology, he criticized the idea of stereotyping sections of population like the tribals by associating with them tags like tribal religion or tribal malnourishment. As a vantage point of being an anthropologist, he contended with the fact that in order to discuss malnutrition among tribals, it is imperative to understand the cultural context of the processes of outside influence like development, migration, etc. While we have tried to gather all types of resources from the indigenous communities, this increasingly commercial stance

has led to deterioration in socio-economic and cultural aspects of tribals including their lifestyle and nutrition.

So, he appealed for a collaborative action-research to eradicate the scourge of malnutrition wherein anthropologists can not only inform UNICEF on the extent of malnutrition among the tribals but also the cultural context and issues like tribal viewpoint and their idea of nutrition.

UNICEF perspective on creation of common platform

Ms. Geetanjali put to table a few points which would be of significance to a joint effort against tribal malnutrition by both the Department of Anthropology and UNICEF India.

- 1) Role of anthropological perspective and knowledge on tribal nutrition should be sufficiently used in order to bridge the gap between different sources on malnutrition from various databases. The deeper understanding of anthropologists on this issue can lead to building of a robust information base rather than a sketchy preconceived idea on malnutrition.
- 2) UNICEF India is interested in how the anthropology department can play a convening role to engage with the target population. This should lead both the participating institutions to work together on some points of mutual interest.

Brief on Tribal Malnutrition

Dr. Karanveer Singh, a paediatrician having experience in Andaman & Nicobar Islands, drew insights from his 15-18 years of practice where he felt of a gap between public health programs and academia. Though such gaps have narrowed down in recent past, yet there is a strong need for collaboration between academic research and ground-based action programs like the UNICEF-Anthropology collaboration in order to arrive at a sound and culturally effective work plan for eradicating malnutrition among tribals.

Commenting on terminological issues raised by Prof. Srivastava, he asserted that some terminology needs to be adopted for documentation and other such purposes. Terms like malnutrition may refer both to under or over nutrition. Hence, it is not to be taken as stereotyping of the tribals.

He briefed on the major areas of work by UNICEF, which are:

- 1) Anaemia reduction.
- 2) Preventing Stunting (first 1000 days)
- 3) Prevention & eradication of Youth Malnutrition
- 4) Nutrition & care for women.

Stressing on the links between social changes and their effects on tribals, he articulated the need for like-minded people from both academia and organizations like UNICEF to come together to restore proper nutrition among tribals.

Work done by Department of Anthropology on Malnutrition

Prof. Joshi briefly introduced some of the work done on malnutrition by researchers in the anthropology department. Various researchers in the Department have been working on various aspects of nutrition among children in different communities in India since long time. Some of the studies discussed were on nutritional status among children in flood affected areas in Uttar Pradesh, growth and nutrition among scheduled caste children in Haryana, malnutrition and obesity among Sunni Muslim school going girl children in Delhi, under-nutrition and thinness among children in rural Bengal and Himachal Pradesh, childhood and adolescent obesity in Delhi.

Brainstorming session on creating common platform – Experiences that work

An active discussion among the researchers in anthropology department and representatives from UNICEF raised several points of mutual interest on malnutrition.

Prof. V. Rao raised the issue of lack of effective interventions despite having an extensive information base. He talked of various interventions based programs which are problematic or have failed like the iron supplementation program run by AYUSH which prescribes iron supplementation for all without first ascertaining the sickle cell trait prevalence or the tuberculosis intervention. Another issue with the tribal populations is inaccessibility to certain pockets of tribes which need the interventions most. Likewise, many tribes in transition also suffer from comorbidity from other ailments like diabetes, CVD, etc.

Dr. Karanveer Singh stressed on a more ground based approach rather than a top-down one in order to find those pockets/ target populations among tribals which are in most urgent need of interventions. Giving the example of Onge population in Andamans, he highlighted the desirable practice of skin to skin contact between new born and mother already widely practiced among the tribals. So a downwards-up approach would focus on gaining knowledge on already in use good practices among the tribals so that newer interventions can be more focused.

Ms. Sonia commented on Prof. Rao's concern on interventions saying that UNICEF is committed to shape appropriate interventions and find quickest ways to feed them into policies for actual applied dimensions.

Dr. Murmu highlighted some issues embedded in the socio-cultural context that also aggravate the problem of malnutrition among tribal children. Remembering some study on breast-feeding, she discussed how tribals are moving away from traditionally important practices of breast-feeding. This may be due to lack of motivation on good aspects of such traditions in rapidly transiting tribal societies.

Ms. Mohuya Chaudhari added to her perspective saying such deterioration in good nutrition practices is not simply because of lack of awareness but also a structural lack of access, where the tribal women are forced to reduce breast feeding period due to socio-economic compulsions like time constraints due to work or lack of availability of materials, etc.

Dr. Kiranmala substantiated Ms. Chaudhuri's argument by citing her study in Haryana where breast-feeding as a practice is declining due to compulsion of women to tend the fields as well as home when their husbands go to jobs.

Ms. Geetanjali opined that there is an urgent need to understand the will/desire and socio-cultural constraints on nutrition among tribals for a better dissemination of already available extensive data. The packaging and dealing with such questions is important in order to arrive at practical interventions. Hence, it is of utmost importance to find appropriate target groups, focused geographies, etc. through the convening role of anthropology department.

Dr. Karanveer Singh summarized this proposition into an approach where actual field based research would shed light on prevailing nutritional practices and then interventions can be chalked out.

Dr. P. R. Mondal also raised the problems with standardization of various instruments used to gather data on mal nutrition as well as invariably flawed research designs that sometime give misleading data, mostly in cross sectional research. So, there should also be better standardization for studies as well as an emphasis on longitudinal research.

On a query by Dr. Mondal on WHO growth standards being developed predominantly in western countries and being used for others, Dr. Singh clarified that now WHO growth standards developed in six countries are available of which India is also a part.

Dr. K. N. Saraswathy highlighted the need of better funding opportunities for anthropology students in order to draw more research potential, which could also be one of the contributions from UNICEF. Sharing experiences from her own ongoing research on nutrition, she asserted that one umbrella program for entire tribal population can never be the solution against the problem of malnutrition. So, it is essential to have target specific interventions.

Agreeing to Dr. Saraswathy, Dr. Karanveer Singh urged the gathering to try to come up with a few typical areas and populations where both UNICEF and anthropology can collaborate. The role of UNICEF, he affirmed, would be to generate evidence out of the community based anthropological research and lend the finding a place in the policies for the tribals.

Ms. Geetanjali, though agreeing on ideas related to operational part of the prospective collaboration, stressed the need to find out a particular locale and a specific population as a beginning point of the collaborative work on malnutrition.



Discussion outcomes/ Steps for future

The very fruitful discussion led to a broad consensus on the following points that need to be worked upon as a roadmap for a successful probable collaboration:

- Some particular area and the tribal populations residing there can be studied in joint collaboration between UNICEF and Anthropology Department.

- Prof. Joshi suggested Rajasthan and the tribal populations of Bhils and Meena as a beginning point, due to current departmental research focus on that area.
- Another joint meeting could be organized focusing on available resources at both sides and strategies to combine them and also to finalize the initial area of research.
- A bigger national level meeting can be organized involving policy makers and area leaders for the identified location for a better out reach.

List of Participants

1. Prof. P. C. Joshi, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007.
2. Prof. V. K. Srivastava, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007.
3. Prof. V. R. Rao, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007.
4. Dr. P. R. Mondal, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007.
5. Dr. Dolly Florence Murmu, Department of HDCS, Lady Irwin College, Delhi University, Delhi.
6. Ms. Astha Bansal, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007.
7. Ms. Anu Bhawana, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007.
8. Ms. Kh. Gyanabati, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007.
9. Ms. R. K. Nonibala, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007.
10. Ms. Bharti Indora, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007.
11. Dr. R. P. Mitra, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007.
12. Mr. B. Deben Singh, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
13. Dr. B. Murry, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
14. Dr. K. N. Saraswathy, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
15. Dr. Shivani Chandel, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
16. Dr. N. Kiranmala Devi, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
17. Ms. K. Sonia Devi, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
18. Ms. Suniti Yadav, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
19. Ms. Shobha Yadav, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
20. Ms. Mamta, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
21. Ms. Shipra, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007

22. Ms. Sunita Rawat, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
23. Ms. Ketaki Chandiook, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
24. Ms. Divya Mishra, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
25. Ms. Lovejeet Kaur, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
26. Dr. M. Kennedy Singh, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
27. Ms. Himanshu Gautam, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
28. Ms. Kitoholi V. Zhimo, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
29. Mr. Chongloi Lukhanao, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007.
30. Ms. Nilisha Vashist, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
31. Ms. N. Monisha Devi, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
32. Ms. Rupalika, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
33. Ms. Mary Panmei, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
34. Ms. Astha Ranjan, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
35. Ms. Nitu Goswami, Department of Geography, Delhi University, Delhi 110007
36. Ms. Geetanjali, UNICEF, India Country Office, 73, Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110003.
37. Ms. Sonia Sarkar, UNICEF India Country Office, 73, Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110003.
38. Ms. Mohuya Chaudhuri, Independent Researcher
39. Mr. Alankrit, Journalist & Computer Scientist
40. Dr. Karanveer Singh, UNICEF India Country Office, 73, Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110003.