

### Photo essay: Immunization camp in Girwa

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of every month, Seva Mandir holds an immunization camp in a small village in Saru Zone, Girwa Block. The camp is very well attended by pregnant women and mothers with young children. They know they can count on the regular attendance of Seva Mandir-trained medical staff who administer inoculations and antenatal care competently and hygienically, and are also at their disposal for advice.

After a drive of 90 minutes and a walk across a river and up a hill, we reached a small, two-roomed building and are invited into a little room with Aesop's fables depicted on the walls



to find two female Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs), two female *Balsakhis* (infant health advisors)

and two male inoculation staff, all trained and equipped by Seva Mandir, already hard at work,



as other young mothers, carrying their children, arrived on foot.



A retired gynecologist who now works in Seva Mandir's health unit, had accompanied us to the camp and she explained proceedings to us, and kept a close eye on the care being given as well as offering valuable advice.

Over the course of a couple of hours, the two men administered inoculations against DPT (diphtheria, pertussis or whooping cough, tetanus) measles and hepatitis,



as well as oral polio vaccine to about 20 children. The infants ranged from three months to just a year,



and before long the small room was ringing with cries as startled babies objected to the injections.

All the mothers were sitting on the floor



or standing to rock their little ones in their arms,  
and all comforted them by breastfeeding them.



Before long, the little ones regained their composure.



As an incentive to bring children for immunization, mothers receive 1 kg of lentils after each inoculation, and a set of stainless serving utensils when their child finished his or her course.



Each child has an immunization booklet with notes, a growth chart and a space for recording the regular immunizations, and the health workers keep careful records. Mothers sign with a thumb print to acknowledge their child's treatment and receipt of their gifts.



The *Balsakhis* examine the children and give mothers advice on feeding (exclusively breast milk up till six months), introducing solids, and also help with advice on common ailments and contraception.

After the babies, it is the turn of the pregnant women, who are examined by the TBAs. Their eyes, nails, abdomen, blood pressure and weight are checked and their urine tested,



and they receive iron and folic acid tablets. The empty packaging seemed to be a delicacy for some little ones!



Antenatal checks and the immunization of infants are the responsibility of the government, and there is a clinic in the Zone, but it is a long way for pregnant women and mothers with infants to walk, so they prefer to attend Seva Mandir's regular and reliable camp. A great job being done by dedicated and competent staff.