

EMERGENCY AT ARACHARI

Late one evening in October 2007, we received a call telling us that several villages in a remote part of our project area had been struck by an outbreak of severe diarrhoea. We had little more information apart from the fact there had been a number of deaths. An emergency meeting of the central CHP team was held, a group of 11 staff mobilised, and before dawn the next morning we set off with the Union Chairman and a number of porters who helped us to carry supplies of oral rehydration solution, intravenous fluids, drugs and other emergency kit.



To reach the location we had to travel by car, then 2 hours by boat, then another 2 hours rough hiking through the jungle. We reached the first village at about 11.30am. On arriving we found it was empty. At the next village we found some people from the first place as well as the second. The headman was called and he summoned as many people as possible back to meet us. They told us that many villagers had run away because they thought the illness was the result of God's curse or an evil spirit attacking their place, and if they stayed they would die.



On closer enquiry we found that many villagers had been struck down by severe and sudden-onset diarrhoea, which had already resulted in 4 deaths before our arrival. We were taken to the next 2 villages where we found 20-30 adults and children in varying states of illness and dehydration. Treatment was started immediately using oral rehydration where possible, but IV fluids were required in 6 patients. One man was so sick we decided he had to be brought back to the nearest government hospital with us.

We also discovered there was no safe drinking water source in these villages at all – they were only using river or canal water. This was undoubtedly the source of their problem. After stabilising the rest of the patients we set off on our return journey taking the sick patient with us. Happily he survived. We got back to Chandraghona late that night.



After this episode CHP started an intensive programme to educate all the people of these 4 villages (including the schoolchildren) about diarrhoea, the causes, how to prevent it, and how to treat it in the early stages. We also provided the funding for one deep tube well to provide clean safe drinking water, which was installed with the support of Government and the local UP Chairman. This well now supplies all 4 villages and is the only source of safe drinking water for these communities. To date there have been no other outbreaks of diarrhoea in this area.



This story shows the importance of having a comprehensive community outreach programme which has built up trust so that people will call us when they are in trouble. The CHP successfully made an emergency plan, mobilised a team and supplies, controlled the outbreak and then completed a programme to prevent a repeat occurrence.