

Jharkhand wants Dhoni to bat for woman and child health

Citing Indian cricket captain M.S. Dhoni's leadership skills and product endorsing acumen, the government in his native Jharkhand state is planning to rope him in to promote woman and child health.

'As a new state we have many challenges. Looking at the condition of woman and child health in the state, we are going to carry out a major awareness campaign,' said D.K. Saxena, special secretary (rural development), Jharkhand.

'We know that the message of better health and hygiene must reach the masses and here Dhoni can play a major role. As a role model and young achiever from the state, he can help rural Jharkhand,' Saxena told IANS.

'Though we have not reached a final decision yet, chances are he will not say no. We are constantly in touch with him and the people concerned,' said Saxena, who was in Delhi last week.

Currently, out of every 100,000 pregnant Jharkhand women, 371 die during pregnancy or childbirth. The national average is 301 per 100,000.

More than 80 percent women are anaemic in the state. Malaria, worm infections due to poor sanitation - just three percent of rural Jharkhand has toilet facilities - and poor hygienic practices are aggravating the health of young mothers.

The state also has the dubious record of 80 percent of its pregnant women giving birth at home without any assistance from trained medical professionals.

In case of infant mortality, at least 49 children of every 1,000 live births die before turning one-month-old. The major cause of newborn deaths is infection, pre-term births and asphyxia.

Saxena, who has been overseeing all the work under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in the state, said the authorities were in touch with the cricketer.

'We know that celebratory endorsement gives a big boost to health awareness campaigns. Besides Dhoni, we are also in touch with a few hockey stars who have played at the national and international levels,' he said.

He said former Indian women's hockey captain Sumrai Tete too had been approached for the purpose. 'She is involved in some awareness campaign and we hope she will join us.'

He said the state government was focusing its attention on six districts, including West Singhbhum, Gadwa and Simdega, where the health situation is really worse.

'While the state and central governments are trying to improve the health infrastructure and facilities, celebrities like Dhoni can help bring awareness among the people.

'They speak the same language and have made their mark in the international sphere. People recognise them and will certainly listen to their advice on health,' he explained.

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