



Fund for Innovation
and Transformation

Fonds pour l'innovation
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NORQUEST COLLEGE

Empowering Women in Rural India by Debunking Feminine Eye Health Myths

Context

India contains nearly 25% of the world's visually impaired. Of the 9.2 million who are blind, over 80% could have had their vision saved with early detection and simple treatment. Despite the Government of India's support for eye health care, members of India's most disadvantaged communities, such as rural women, remain least likely to access eye health services.

The Innovative Solution

Funded by FIT, NorQuest College and local partners Operation Eyesight India and Rotary Eye & ENT Hospital (REEH) tested a two-pronged innovation directly impacting more than 27,000 people in 15 villages including 12,974 women and girls by providing access to eye health services and improving community capacity to address the specific barriers to eye health among women and girls.

Advancing Gender Equality

The Gender Equality Strategy engaged men and boys in communication, education, and health services delivery so that all residents could re-evaluate women and girls' eye health needs, and benefit from women and girls' improved eye health. Additionally, targeting women's access and control involved providing free or low-cost sight-saving surgeries and glasses so that families would not have to prioritize health needs by gender and could learn first-hand the benefits of meeting the eye health needs of women, families and communities.

Testing Framework

The innovation test utilized a pre-post methodology and included a mixed-method participatory approach to gather data, validate findings, and learn from the implementation of this innovation. All tools and approaches including health surveys were selected for their gender-appropriateness, feasibility, and effectiveness in the local context.



COUNTRY	AMOUNT
India	\$149,107

TESTING PERIOD
12 months
Ended December 2022



GENDER RESPONSIVE (GE2)

THEME: HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Results and Impact

The innovation test successfully addressed gender inequities and myths linked to negative eye health outcomes for women and girls while increasing access to eye health services. Over 27,000 people (12,974 women and girls) or 90% of village residents were educated on eye health and screened for eye health ailments while cataract surgery was provided to 39 women, increasing access from 14% to 100%. Most importantly, by testing end all 15 targeted villages were declared avoidable blindness free.

Key Lessons

1. Utilizing women who were former patients to act as ambassadors of eye health treatments was vital to disseminating knowledge of gender-responsive eye care practices.
2. Despite having training in eye health, it was discovered that Local Female Community Health Workers (LFCHWs) believed in feminine eye health myths. In response, the team provided additional training as a mitigation measure.
3. Information and Education Communication materials must be designed for and with the target communities. The local team co-created the messages so that the right information was delivered in a culturally relevant manner.
4. The local team's ability to build relationships and leverage them quickly meant that health-related data was collected on time despite initial delays. Local skills, experience, commitment, and knowledge improved the quality of the project.

“In the early meetings, it was seen that whenever the women were asked a question, they used to turn to each other to answer it, but now if a question is asked, they try to answer it independently. Their confidence level increased identifying a rapid change in their thought processes and body language.”

– Innovation Facilitator

PARTNER ORGANIZATION

Operation Eyesight India, Rotary Eye & ENT Hospital (REEH)

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

9,590 women and 3,384 girls

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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ABOUT FIT

The Fund for Innovation and Transformation supports Canadian small and medium-sized organizations (SMOs) testing innovative solutions that advance gender equality in the Global South.

