In the summer of 1980 CARE, Gujarat, placed an advertisement for a nutritionist for their Community Development Program, in collaboration with The Vikram A Sarabhai Community Science Center (VASCSC). Not mentioned in the advertisement, the three criteria for selecting the candidate were willingness to travel 20 days a month to remote rural and tribal areas, knowledge of the local language and capacity to drive a four wheel jeep!

A fresh graduate from Maharaja Sayajirao University (M.S.U.), Vadodara with a post graduate degree in Foods & Nutrition, Indu Capoor responded to the advertisement with enthusiasm and was subsequently appointed. Indu’s first assignment was to coordinate the nutrition and health education program developed by a senior scientist started in 1978, for the slum children who visited the science centre. Minaxi Shukla who was working on the nutrition programme at VASCSC volunteered to assist her in translating documents into the local language. With a specialization in Nutrition Indu could address problems and doubts concerning these and was therefore frequently consulted. Her involvement was encouraged and appreciated by others, particularly by the Managing Trustee, Nehru Foundation for Development, Dr. Kartikeya Sarabhai.

Following this, a pilot program was proposed, which would cover 100 villages, spread across ten blocks, all over Gujarat, including tribal, rural and urban centers. This was proposed with the view to develop suitable educational strategies for the entire state. The name given to the program was INHAP (Integrated Nutrition And Health Action Program). A year later Pallavi Naik, who had been a junior of Indu at MSU joined the project to share responsibility. Later, Minaxi who had started volunteering time joined the project formally. The team came to be known as the ‘Trio’ and the organisation known as Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA) emerged as an independent activity, under the umbrella of Nehru Foundation for Development.

This phase was action oriented. In order to conduct meetings more effectively, which were organised all over Gujarat, several resource materials were prepared in simple language with attractive visuals. The materials were related to information about programmes and activities on Nutrition and Health.

Several programmes were conducted in Ahmedabad with St. Xaviers, Non-Formal Education Trust at Gulbai Tekra (urban slum) for increasing awareness about nutrition among women managing homes in different housing societies.

The material produced under this program during this course of time, were mass produced by the Government of Gujarat for their supplementary feeding centers all over the state. This led to greater publicity of the teams work and soon visitor’s lined up the VASCSC, querying about their Health and Nutrition programs.

UNICEF, Delhi approached the team to develop an educational kit on Childcare, emphasising the Growth Monitoring, Oral rehydration, Breastfeeding, Immunisation, Family Planning & Female Education (GOBIFF) messages. CHETNA conducted extensive field testing in various districts of Uttar Pradesh. It was basically to be prepared for the Hindi speaking belt.

To demystify knowledge on health they started developing information packages. The Bal Sevika (Child Care) kit, Anemia and Women’s Health Kit were among the first information packages they developed.

A workshop organised for Training Centers of Creche workers in 1982 provided an opportunity to understand Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). In May 1984 Ila Vakharia joined as the fourth member of the team. Jyoti Gade, a trainer who had participated in the training, joined the team in August 1984.

1984-85 was the year of many firsts. An exhibition of Nutrition & Health material was showcased in Delhi. The first Maternal Care Health Training was conducted, exposing the team to the existing delivery practices in rural and tribal areas. In her enthusiasm, Indu sent the INHAP report to several funding agencies. One of them caught the Ford Foundation Indian representative’s eye. Impressed, he approached Kartikeya Sarabhai, Managing Trustee of Nehru Foundation, enquiring about the origin of the report.

In August 1984, CHETNA received a core grant from Ford Foundation on child survival project, CHETNA moved to a rented building on drive-in road behind drive-in cinema which was fondly called Parde-ke-peeche (behind the curtains).

By now CHETNA was widely recognised as a resource centre for nutrition and health activities, especially for capacity building training and development of educational materials.

An year long participatory evaluation process, facilitated by PRIA, New Delhi during 1990 enabled reflection and widening of the perspective of CHETNA team. During this period, CHETNA formulated its vision and mission and moved from mother and child health to women’s health in life cycle approach with focus on Traditional Health and Healing Practices as a strategy.

CHETNA has completed more than 25 years journey and empowered herself with knowledge and skills related to capacity building of organizations.
working on the issues of women, young people and children, developing health communication material, networking and advocating for comprehensive and gender sensitive women, young people’s and children’s policies and programmes.

CHETNA designs illustrative print education material in simple local languages. The materials are extensively field tested among the community members before mass production. More than 50 IEC materials developed by CHETNA, effectively integrate relevant technical information with gender-sensitive messages and are perceived to be user-friendly and successful in creating desired behaviour change in the community. Many of the printed health education materials have been mass-produced by Government of India and Government of Gujarat to be used in their programmes. CHETNA is a pioneer in designing innovative health communication strategies which are being mainstreamed in government and non government programmes and schemes.

Today CHETNA, by networking with other partner NGOs at state, national and international levels, works to bring forward the voices and realities of communities at the policy formation and programme planning levels. The methods include organizing consultations and ensuring participation of the community level stakeholders and civil society. CHETNA has also participated in the creating process of national and state level population policies and state level women’s empowerment policies as well as the National Youth Policy. CHETNA takes its learning and understanding to the South Asian Region through its partnerships in the region.

CHETNA is identified as a Regional Resource Centre (RRC) for Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) for Gujarat state and the Union Territories of Daman, Diu and Dadra Nagar Haveli by Government of India. As the RRC, CHETNA extends its support to Non Government Organizations to systematically and effectively implement the programmes related to women, young people and children. RRC- CHETNA is an important link between the CBO/NGOs and the Health department both at the state and national level.

CHETNA is committed to continue working in the area of empowerment of women, young people and children to take control over their own, their families’ and communities’ health and development.

Changemakers Taxonomy:
Health care [1]
Health education [2]
Maternal health [3]
Early childhood development [4]
Women's issues [5]

Source URL: https://www changemakers.com/nutrition/nominations/chetna-centre-health-education-training-and-nutrition

Links
[1] https://www.changemakers.com/browse/health-fitness/health-care