SNEHA
RAISING HEALTH FOR ALL

Dissemination Event- 2026

Sustaining Impact THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

ABOUT SNEHA

Founded in 1999 by Dr. Armida Fernandez, recipient of Padma Shri 2026, SNEHA (Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action) works to break the intergenerational cycle of poor health among women, children and adolescents living in vulnerable urban communities. Over the past 25 years, SNEHA has evolved from implementing community-based health programmes to becoming a trusted partner of communities and the government, continuously adapting its approaches based on evidence, implementation experience and the changing needs of vulnerable urban populations. Through programmes in maternal, child and adolescent health, safety, gender equity and prevention of violence against women and children, SNEHA has demonstrated how strong partnerships with communities, government systems and civil society can translate evidence into sustainable improvements in health outcomes.

Evidence-based public health interventions have contributed to significant improvements in maternal and child survival, immunisation coverage, communicable disease control and primary healthcare across low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). Yet, sustaining these gains beyond externally supported implementation remains one of the greatest challenges in global health. The World Health Organization emphasis that resilient health systems depend on strong governance, capable health workers, effective service delivery and empowered communities; while the Declaration of Astana (2018) reaffirms community participation as the cornerstone of Primary Health Care.

Against this backdrop, SNEHA has continuously refined its implementation approaches, recognising that sustainable health outcomes depend not only on effective interventions but also on progressively strengthening community ownership and embedding successful innovations within routine public systems.

As several of SNEHA's programmes reach important milestones in their implementation journey, this dissemination provides an opportunity to reflect not only on what has been achieved, but also on how these gains can be sustained and institutionalised.

This dissemination brings together the evidence, outcomes and implementation learning from SNEHA's programmes to stimulate dialogue and contribute to policy and practice. Beyond sharing programme achievements, it reflects on the evolution of SNEHA's implementation model and its journey towards sustainable community and public system ownership.

FROM IMPLEMENTATION TO SUSTAINABILITY

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 1988) defines sustainability as the ability of a programme to continue delivering benefits after major financial, managerial and technical assistance from external donors has ended. This understanding has guided SNEHA's approach to programme design, recognising that sustainability must be intentionally built throughout the programme lifecycle rather than considered only at its conclusion.

Years of implementation across urban informal settlements have enabled SNEHA to develop what it now describes as the Sustainability Continuum, a phased approach that progressively transfers ownership of health interventions to communities while simultaneously strengthening public systems to institutionalize successful innovations.

For SNEHA, sustainability is the gradual transfer of knowledge, leadership, accountability and ownership from field staff teams to communities and public institutions.

SNEHA Sustaining Impact through Partnerships

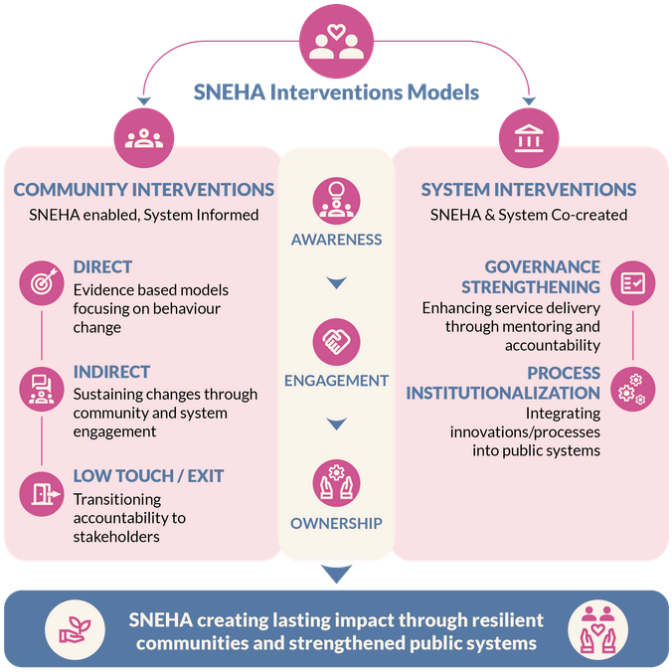

FIGURE: THE SNEHA SUSTAINABILITY CONTINUUM

SNEHA's Sustainability Continuum is anchored in two complementary pathways: **Community Ownership** and **Public System Strengthening.**

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

SNEHA begins with a **Direct Intervention approach**, where programme implementation is led entirely by the SNEHA staff team. During this phase, SNEHA establishes implementation systems, demonstrates effective practices, builds community trust and generates the evidence required to inform programme refinement. Although resource intensive, this phase enables close engagement with communities, behaviour change communication, supportive supervision and continuous monitoring to establish evidence-based models of care in some of the most resource constrained urban informal settlements.

As community capacities strengthen, SNEHA progressively transitions to an Indirect Community-led approach, in which an increasing share of programme implementation is undertaken by trained community volunteers in collaboration with government frontline workers who have been mentored and supported over several years. The programme team's role gradually shifts from implementation to mentoring, technical assistance and quality assurance, enabling communities to increasingly mobilise household members, facilitate referrals and promote healthy practices.

Once the Indirect Community-led approach demonstrates sustained outcomes and community readiness, SNEHA transitions to a Low-Touch model through phased handover, technical mentoring and exit preparedness. Currently being piloted in select geographies, this model will generate evidence to validate and refine SNEHA's transition framework for long-term community ownership. This phase seeks to understand how programmes can maintain quality and outcomes with minimal external support while strengthening community ownership and local capacities.

While SNEHA's programmes continue to evolve through this transition pathway, the experience has demonstrated the value of structured transition planning, community leadership and low-touch implementation in moving towards long-term community ownership.

PUBLIC SYSTEM STRENGTHENING

Alongside fostering community ownership, SNEHA works closely with municipal corporations, the public health system, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programmes, and other government institutions to strengthen existing systems rather than create parallel structures. Through streamlining processes, building the capacities of frontline workers, mentoring, promoting data-informed decision-making, and establishing effective monitoring mechanisms, SNEHA supports the integration of successful practices into routine government systems. This approach contributes to improved service delivery, stronger systems, and enhanced access to essential services for communities.

SNEHA’s Public Systems Partnership Programme has successfully reached the sustainability phase by handing over the strengthened maternity referral systems, which have been integrated within public systems.This model has demonstrated how collaborative partnerships can enable government systems to independently manage and sustain programme innovations.

Together, these complementary pathways illustrate that sustainability is not a single end point but a progressive journey, shaped by programme maturity, context and readiness for transition.

LEARNING AND DISSEMINATION FORUM

Drawing on over two decades of implementation experience, this dissemination forum will explore what enables public health programmes to transition from externally supported initiatives to locally sustained systems. As governments and development partners increasingly prioritise localisation, systems strengthening and sustainable development, there is a growing need to move beyond sharing programme outcomes towards understanding how successful interventions can be sustained, adapted and institutionalised.

The event will foster dialogue among government leaders, development partners, researchers, and civil society on practical strategies for creating resilient, scalable, and sustainable health programmes that continue to improve health outcomes long after project completion

The forum seeks to contribute to a broader discourse on sustainable urban public health by sharing implementation experiences, encouraging cross-learning, identifying opportunities for collaboration, and informing advocacy and policy to strengthen community and public system partnerships.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The dissemination forum will:

- Disseminate evidence, programme outcomes, and implementation learning from SNEHA's programmes to inform future public health policy and practice.
- Strengthen dialogue and collaboration between government, academia, community and civil society and development partners.
- Generate learning and practical recommendations on future programme design, policy and strengthen sustainable community-based health interventions and public system resilience.

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