

ADVOCACY MEETING FOR THE MOTHER KANGAROO METHOD IN THE UVA PROVINCE IN SRI LANKA



November 2010



The 12th of October marked the official start for the implementation of the Mother Kangaroo Method (MKM) in the Uva Province of Sri Lanka. By means of organizing the Advocacy Meeting for MKM in Badulla, the Provincial Authorities, in collaboration with UNDP ART GOLD Sri Lanka (AGSL) program, set the first milestone in Uva for the introduction of MKM in the provincial health care system.

The Meeting was headed by the Provincial Director of Health Services, Dr. Neelamani, the Provincial Secretary of Health, Dr. Ambanwela and the National Programme Officer of the Family Health Bureau, Dr. Dhammika Rowel.

The initiative is a key step of the South-South partnership on newborn care between Albania and Sri Lanka, which was launched after a specific request made to AGSL by Uva Provincial authorities. Such request was related to the several constraints the provincial health system is facing, namely the lack of infrastructures and equipments to provide care for the high percentage of premature and low birth-weight babies.

Since MKM represents an innovative and effective strategy to counter most of those issues, AGSL linked the UVA Province with the Regions of Shkoder and Durres in Albania, where MKM was successfully implemented through the support of ART Albania program. The IDEASS program – Innovations for Development and South-South Cooperation – has been the main facilitator of this partnership.

The joint efforts of ART and IDEASS arranged the first mission of Sri Lankan experts to Albania, on May 2010. Two doctors from the Uva Province, Dr. Kumuduni Cooray and Dr. Shiromi de Silva, together with a



national level representative, Dr. Dhammika Rowel of the Family Health Bureau, visited the Albania regions and met Albanian health authorities and staff. Doctor Edi Tushe, Chief of the Neonatology Ward of the Obstetric-Gynecological Hospital Koco Gtizheni of Tirana, pioneer of the implementation of mother-kangaroo method in Albania, provided technical assistance to the Sri Lanka delegation.



This first mission allowed the Sri Lankan experts to directly understand the MKM and see it “in action” in the Albanian context. Based on the mission, Uva Provincial authorities planned a series of initiatives to translate MKM in Sri Lanka. The first one was the Advocacy Meeting, to introduce the MKM to a large audience of actors in the Province and promote the approach among the provincial health staff, a key element in the implementation.

The Advocacy Meeting in the Uva Province

The Advocacy Meeting met the objectives. The event saw a consistent number of participants – 40: Secretary of the Provincial Ministry of Health, Provincial and Regional Directors of Health together with medical staff from the Province took part into the meeting. The invitation was extended also to other institutions working on newborn care in the country: the national level was represented by the Family Health Bureau, as well as UNICEF participated in the meeting.

The three Sri Lankan doctors, who took part in the mission, led the event. The doctors outlined the latest development in the newborn care practices of the Province, while making comparison with the national level situation. Moreover, they illustrated the Albanian experience, the MKM features and the strategy for implementing the approach in Uva.



What is the Mother Kangaroo Method?

The Mother Kangaroo Method (MKM) is an efficient and cost-saving approach for providing care to premature and low-birth weight babies, especially in contexts of scarcity of resources and equipments.

MKM places the mother-child relationship at the center of the care. It focuses on increasing the bond between the baby patient and the mother through the kangaroo care position, lactation and warmth provided by the mother's body to the newborn. The name derives from the similarity between the way that a kangaroo carries her baby after birth, and the way the mothers in the program carry their premature newborns

MKM was ideated in Colombia in the late 70's and proved to be an efficient and cost-saving methodology to provide care in contexts where lack of incubators, over-crowding and limited resources led to high mortality and morbidity rates among new-born babies.

The method has expanded to several countries, thanks to the support of various institutions such as UNICEF and WHO. The IDEASS program and the ART Initiative of UNDP have established a series of technical partnerships for MKM, which increased the reach of the MKM approach.

One of the main elements to arise from the discussion was related to the urgency of the problems affecting the Uva Province and, as a consequence, the appropriateness of MKM strategy for the context. Uva Province reports, comparatively in the country, very high percentages of low-birth weight babies – 22% -, and the situation is even worse in the local plantation community, where the percentage rises to 35%. Lack of equipments – beds, incubators, etc – in Provincial hospitals is the rule rather than the exception.

As it emerged during the meeting, in the last months the medical staff of the Dyathalawa Hospital has already started to test MKM in the

department, thanks to the experience acquired during the Albanian mission. At the same time another unit in the Province, the Monaragala hospital, has been adopting the MKM as a practice at its Baby Care Unit, after following Essential New Born care training provided by Family Health Bureau under the support of UNICEF.



The event offered the opportunity to share their experiences of “hands on practice” and on how Sri Lankan mothers involved in the small-scale tests showed to be motivated by the innovation and keen to continue it. The Provincial Director coordinated and focused the discussion on the implementation, appointed focal points for MKM in each major structure of the Province.

