

PRESS RELEASE



Meghalaya Harnesses the Power of Faith to Improve Maternal, New-born and Child Health

Shillong, Meghalaya | 14 October 2026: A two-day capacity-building workshop on “*Harnessing the Power of Faith for Maternal, New-born and Child Health*” was held on 13–14 October 2026 at Taraghar, State Guest House, Shillong. The workshop brought together faith leaders, faith-based organizations (FBOs), government representatives, frontline health workers and development partners to strengthen community engagement and improve maternal, new-born and child health (MNCH) outcomes across Meghalaya.



The Mind-Heart Dialogue workshop was graced by the Director of Health Services (MCH&FW), State Nodal Officers of Maternal Health, Child Health and Immunization and Multi-Faith leaders from the Catholic Archdiocese, KJP Assembly, Sein Raij, Seng Khasi, Sikh Community, Muslim Union, Ram Krishna mission, Buddhist Association, Unitarian Church, Seventh Day Adventist, Garo Baptist Convention, North East India Christian Council, Naga Christian Fellowship, Mao Christian Fellowship, Presbyterian Church of India, All Saints Cathedral, Kner Sha-Ki Mission Organisation, Church of God and members of the Shillong All Faith Forum (SAFF)

The initiative aimed to harness the influence and trust of faith leaders to promote positive health-seeking behaviours, strengthen supportive social norms and improve the uptake and continuity of essential health services, particularly among remote, underserved and vulnerable communities.

Despite progress in strengthening health services, gaps remain in early pregnancy registration, antenatal care, institutional delivery, postnatal care, exclusive breastfeeding and full immunization. Human-Centred Design (HCD) consultations across all 12 districts of Meghalaya have highlighted that fear, trust, family influence, social norms, transportation constraints and previous experiences of care can influence health-seeking decisions.

Building on Meghalaya's experience with Behavioural Insights for Routine Immunization (BI for RI), the workshop uses **Mind-Heart Dialogue (MHD)**—an approach that connects verified evidence with faith values, empathy, lived experiences and practical community action. It also builds on collaboration involving UNICEF, Assam Don Bosco University (ADBU) and the Northeast SBC Alliance, alongside wider multi-faith engagement through the Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committee (MFACC).

The workshop strengthened the capacity of faith leaders and Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) to promote early antenatal care, birth preparedness, institutional delivery, postnatal care, breastfeeding, nutrition and routine immunization. Through their existing platforms, including congregations, women's and youth groups, schools and community gatherings, faith Leaders are encouraged to address myths respectfully, support families in making informed decisions and connect vulnerable households with appropriate health services.



The two-day programme included experiential learning, community-barrier mapping, role-play, inclusion exercises and practical action planning. A key outcome will be the development of institution-specific 90-day action plans identifying priority MNCH behaviours, target audiences, communication platforms, key activities, referral pathways and measurable indicators. The insights and practical learning generated through the programme will inform the development and operationalisation of the HCD-MNCH Roadmap, ensuring that human-centred design approaches are integrated into relevant government planning, capacity-building initiatives and Social and Behaviour Change(SBC) mechanisms to strengthen community engagement and improve maternal, new-born and child health outcomes in Meghalaya.

The workshop aimed to promote stronger convergence between faith institutions and government health systems, including the National Health Mission (NHM) and the State Health Systems Resource Centre (SHSRC). A proposed **Meghalaya Faith and MNCH Community of Practice** will support continued coordination, peer learning, documentation and follow-up, with linkages to the Northeast SBC Alliance and MFACC.



The initiative reinforces the importance of collaborative, inclusive and evidence-based action, with faith leaders complementing—not replacing—the clinical roles of health professionals.

By connecting trusted community networks with public health services, Meghalaya aims to strengthen community participation and ensure that every mother, new-born and child has better opportunities to access timely and quality healthcare.