

Contributing towards Response to COVID-19 and Building Resilience of Local Communities through the Inter-Agency Group in Gujarat

(May to July, 2020)

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I. Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented public health emergency. The behavioral adaptation like physical distancing, wearing masks, quarantines, testing has direct link to contain the spread of the infection. Research suggests that vulnerable individuals, like those with co-morbidities and elderly people are more likely to get infected and have significantly higher mortality rates. The workforces who are young suffer significant losses of employment and income. At the best of times, the poor, the migrant workers, daily wage labourers face insecurity of work and income, insufficient levels of food and nutrition security and even basic social security. Besides financial hardship, the population faces four major issues which need to be addressed with sensitivity, care and respect to privacy. CSOs with long standing relationship with community have been effective in addressing the issues.

The members of the Inter Agency Group (IAG) in Gujarat have been actively engaged in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in different ways. From distributing ration and hygiene kits to the most vulnerable people to creating livelihood avenues for people who have lost their source of income due to the lockdown. Within these there have been various activities that the CSOs have been engaged in from the State to the Gram Panchayat levels in both rural and urban areas.

In this context, the IAG has been broadly focusing on three main things for responding to COVID-19 in Gujarat for migrant workers:

- 1) Assistance to avail essential items for the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, most CSOs have prioritized their services for women, children and the elderly;
- 2) Immediate relief to migrant workers, in terms of food and accommodation initially and then for creating livelihood options for them; and
- 3) Coordination with government officials and locally elected representatives for the Proper implementation of government schemes.

II. IAG Coordination for COVID-19 Response

The regular coordination at individual level was done with the IAG members regularly through the project duration. Cumulatively, 8 IAG meetings have been organized in which around 90 organisations have been reached directly across Gujarat. They got a platform for sharing their experiences and wisdom. Through these meetings the excellent work done by the CSOs, especially those working the block and district levels could be mapped. The IAG coordination meetings have proved to be very effective in terms of the reach out. Where there were limitations earlier when they had to physically be present in a meeting, through these virtual platforms they have been actively taking part in all these meetings. On two occasions, the DPOs of Jamnagar and Porbandar DEOCs joined the IAG coordination meetings held on June 13 and July 21, 2020 respectively.

S. No.	Date	Districts	Theme
1.	June 2, 2020	Bhavnagar, Surat, Amreli, Bharuch, Navsari, Anand	Nisarga cyclone
2.	June 3, 2020	Banaskantha, Patan, Mehsana	COVID-19 response
3.	June 5, 2020	Anand, Vadodra, Kheda	COVID-19 response
4.	June 11, 2020	Surat, Panchmahal, Bharuch	COVID-19 response
5.	June 13, 2020	Jamnagar, Devbhumi Dwarka, Porbandar	COVID-19 response
6.	June 20, 2020	Morbi, Rajkot, Surendranagar	COVID-19 response
7.	July 3, 2020	Dahod, Panchmahal, Mahisagar	COVID-19 response
8.	July 21, 2020	Gir Somnath, Porbandar, Devbhumi Dwarka, Junagadh	COVID-19 response

Overall, the main areas of intervention are as follows:



Weekly and monthly reports: A total of 10 weekly reports and 1 monthly report were submitted with the details of all sessions and coordination meetings. The details for each of the other intervention areas of the IAG members for the COVID-19 response are there in the monthly report. A few cases stories of good initiatives taken by CSOs, SHGs and the GPs were also mapped during these meetings have also been elaborated in these reports, along with the detailed account of block and district level coordination done by the IAG members.

Special intervention for migrant workers: Some CSOs had been working exclusively to assist the migrant workers, since the initial lockdown throughout the month of June, mostly located in and around Surat, Maliya, Anand districts. Listing the migrant workers, articulating their needs and complaints, through platforms of labor sangathans are also being done on a daily basis and being conveyed to the local and district administration. However, not much response has been received from administrative end. A unique initiative was taken up by Janvikas, which supported the Institute of Social Studies and Transformation to set up Dignity Community Kitchens for the migrant workers, where they operate their own kitchens through community support. Some companies and the local sangathans have been done a very good job in supporting the stuck migrant workers for example in Banaskantha, Panchmahal, and other North Gujarat districts.

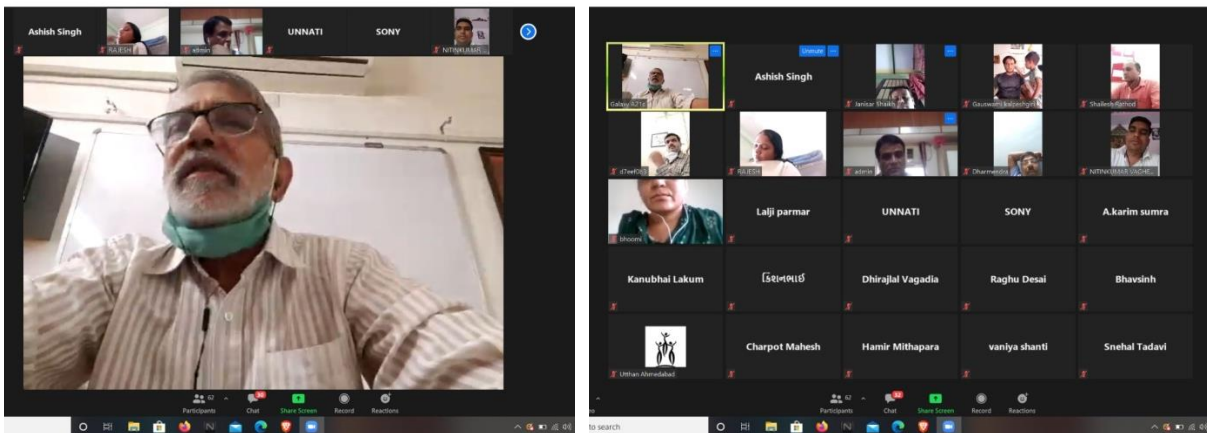
Most of these workers belong to Rajasthan, southern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. The state government declared that no migrant workers would be allowed to leave on foot. Some state transport and private buses were allotted initially for their transportation but was discontinued. The helpline number 1077 has been provided for their assistance. No official guidelines have been prepared for the response for assisting the migrant workers from the government as yet. However, the state did announce for arrangement for their food and accommodation. Until recently, they were stranded in different pockets across the state before the government announcement of arrangements for their transport. At least 20 lakh workers were identified to travel back to their homes.



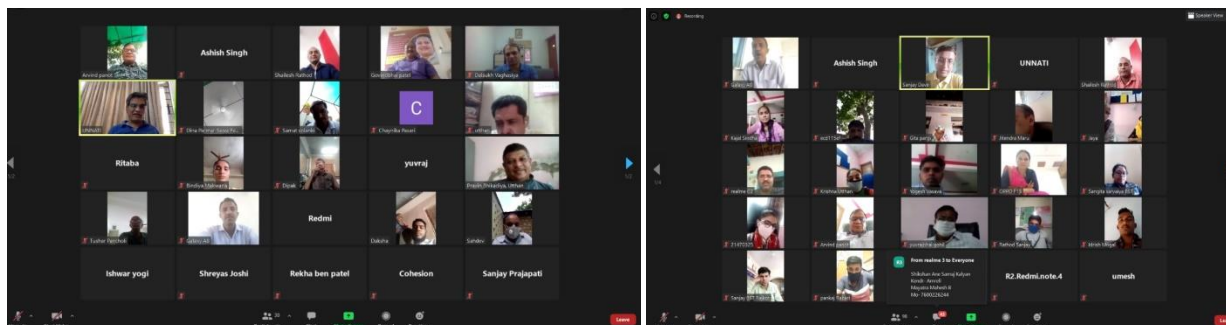
III. Capacity building through facilitating the COVID Academy Trainings amongst IAG members and the “Samvaad Series”

Around 30 individuals from across the state have been identified within the IAG network and they are participating in the training initiated by Sphere India COVID-19 Academy. These individuals are expected to take the initiative forward by reaching out to the district and block officials and local leaders, towards bringing about behavioral change with regard to the preventive care and precautionary measures. 80% of these individuals have attended most sessions. See Annexure 1 for list of persons engaged in these trainings.

Taking the learnings of the COVID-19 Academy further, a “SAMVAAD SERIES” was launched by UNNATI. This constituted of 10 sessions on issues that were identified through the IAG coordination meetings and the whole response phase in Gujarat amidst the COVID-19 crisis. Each session had resource persons who had experience/expertise in the decided topic of discussion.



The Samvaad Series turned out be an extremely successful initiative. The licensed version of Zoom was used as a platform to conduct these sessions. A large number of participants were able to participate in issue specific discussions including PRI member and community leaders. The ground realities were shared for each of the sessions and very productive discussions were done to address those issues. Throughout these sessions one thing that was reiterated again and again was the role of Gram Panchayats in all of thematic areas mentioned in the following table. Whether it is for implementation of public schemes and programs or issues related to education, health and livelihood, the Gram Panchayat has a crucial role to play for response and recovery from the impacts of the pandemic and for “Building Back Better” towards risk informed overall development of the GP.



Details of the sessions are as follows:

S. No.	Date	Session	No. of Participants
1.	July 10, 2020	The role of Gram Panchayats in COVID-19 response in Gujarat	55
2.	July 11, 2020	Public schemes and issues of social security	32
3.	July 13, 2020	Primary Education-Online/offline teaching and learning Challenges	63

S. No.	Date	Session	No. of Participants
4.	July 18, 2020	Issues of labor and employment, informal sector after the lockdown and way forward	32
5.	July 20, 2020	Basics of Public Health Behaviour and Preventive Care - Covid 19	98
6.	July 27, 2020	Issues of slum dwellers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic	39
7.	July 28, 2020	Issue of sanitary workers during lockdown and the pandemic	26
8.	July 30, 2020	Issues of women and children during the lockdown and COVID-19	33
9.	July 31, 2020	Observations and key learnings by grassroot CSO workers on health functionaries and PRIs in rural areas	21
10.	July 31, 2020	Issues in agriculture and of pastoralists during the pandemic and way forward	39

IV. IEC Materials

The thematic areas of the messages to be spread through IEC materials were identified according to the needs of the community. The following table shows the thematic areas on which the IEC was prepared.

S. No.	Topic of IEC	Status
1.	Home-quarantine guidelines	Prepared and displayed
2.	Resource envelope for GPDIP implementation	Prepared and displayed
3.	Information in the context of "Atmanirbhar Bharat"	Prepared and displayed
4.	Care of mothers, lactating mothers and new born child	Prepared and displayed
5.	Care of elderly and severely ill	Prepared and displayed
6.	Care of children 0-3 years	Prepared and displayed
7.	Care of children 3 and above years in context of COVID-19	Prepared and displayed
8.	Do's and Don'ts with regard to COVID-19	Prepared and displayed

The IEC were designed and printed in banner form and displayed in 10 Gram Panchayats of Bhachau block of Kutch district which is UNNATI's direct intervention work area. This initiative has been proved to be very effective. Done with the PRI members who decided the place of display and had discussions at the time when the IEC was being displayed.



Impact: PRI members have held discussion on exploring the resources envelope for developing WASH centric GDPs and trying to create enabling environment for livelihood avenues and responding to the pandemic. People have been observed to be stopping and reading these messages related to COVID-19 and the behavioral changes required associated with it. It has been reported that the nurses in the Gram Panchayats, who were having some troubles without any IEC, have used this material to explain to the women the health related facets of COVID-19 and precautionary measures that they need to follow, especially for the pregnant and new mothers and their children. Community leaders have been actively engaged in explaining these messages with the children of these Gram Panchayats.

V. Gram Panchayat COVID-19 Response Plans

UNNATI has been facilitating the PRI members to plan and execute the response against COVID-19. Right information, important announcements have been shared continuously and linking with the block and district level authorities have been regularly done with the GP leaders. Similarly, coordination with the health workers, ASHA and block level medical authorities were also being done. Coordination is also being done for updating the Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GDPs).

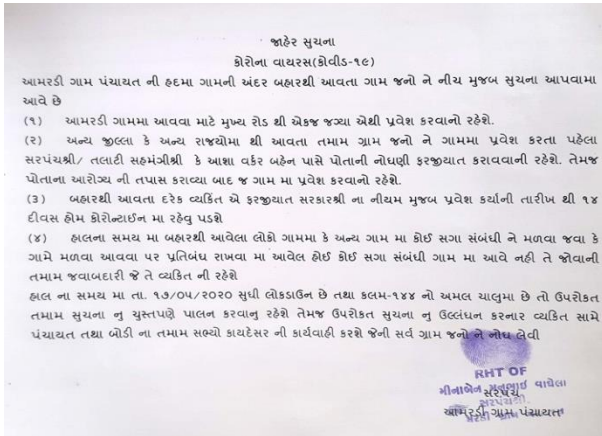
During the lockdown, people have been returning to the villages amidst the crisis. There was and is a pressing need to strength the capacities of the local governing bodies and service providers to be able to stand resilient against COVID-19 with their micro-planning. With that in mind, a comprehensive response plan needs to be outlined for each GP incorporating the activities to be done in the next few months with immediate effect, clearly stating financial arrangement for the same. The recent government resolutions have declared various schemes for social security of the people and use of grants like that of the Fourteenth/Fifteenth Finance Commission, which may be utilized for these activities.

These plans outlines the response against COVID-19 planned along three major areas:

- 1) Preventive care;
- 2) Immediate response for tracing and tracking potential and/ or identified COVID-19 cases; and
- 3) Social security of vulnerable population.



Gram Panchayat and the community leaders are best placed to monitor the spread of the virus from closely as they have personal knowledge about all the members. They can make best contact for tracing and tracking. If any person violating the institutional and home quarantine they can make them understand it value without any intrusive and harsh method. By this, the community engagement improves and the persons in isolation or quarantine do not feel alienated. The arrangements at the local level can be planned in a manner with peoples' participation. The quarantine persons can be entertained by use of folk songs played by the youth, family members can interact with appropriate physical distancing. This will remove the fear and stigma that has been unfortunately created. In a situation when people are not being able to carry on their livelihood activities, it becomes very difficult to survive without any income. For this, the government has announced certain schemes and flexibilities within various programs which have to be implemented effectively at the GP level, so that the most vulnerable groups get by this pandemic safely. The Gram Panchayat has had a crucial role in all of the above mentioned aspects.



Keeping this role of GPs in mind, a framework and template document was prepared in line with the issues arising from the ground. As pilots, the preparation of this COVID-19 response plan was facilitated in 5 Gram Panchayats in Bhachau block of Kutch district. The GPs are Kanthkot, Amardi, Vondh, Chhadvada and Kharoi. Initially facilitated telephonically, visits were done to the villages to meet with the critical functionaries like the Sarpanches, AWWs, ASHA workers, teachers, among others. Each plan outlines the contextual reality of each GP taken and their respective issues. Through this facilitation process, awareness was also done and the solutions for the issues were discussed and put in the plan. Many actions were already being done by the GPs which were captured in the plan and gaps were identified with actions to be taken to address them.

District and Block level coordination in Bhachau: The response plan of Kanthkot was shared with DDO, Kutch, along with PMGKY relief schemes online study report, the facilitation support to Panchayat regarding quarantine. He has taken some prompt action regarding the same with the PO, ICDS department, etc. He stated that the GP response to be shared with other talukas and Zila Panchayat. He has shown interest in further interaction regarding the methodology to preparation of COVID-19 GP response plan and the efforts of UNNATI in this initiative.

Subsequently, the plan was also shared at the block level officials in Bhachau and with 55 Sarpanches and Talatis of Bhachau. Meetings were done with them separately as well on various topics like the tree plantation campaign under the MGNREGA; COVID-19 response plans of the panchayats, activities related to WASH in GPDP according to the 15th FFC and the COVID relief schemes under the PMGKY.

VI. Urban Slum Settlements Assessment

A study has been initiated by ReDR and IAG members and supported by UNICEF to understand situation in urban slums in the context of COVID-19. For the study 82 slums will be covered from Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Surat Municipal Corporations. The slum areas in these corporations are potential to the COVID risk and many of the pockets are in risk zone and in and around the containment zones. The study will cover status of basic amenities and health services, which are very essential in the pandemic and also analysis on WASH. This study will further help UNICEF and IAG members to develop strategy to intervene improvement of the services and local governance.

The data needed to be collected at two levels – one is from the community members residing in the slums and the other is from government offices and the process is completed.

The status of the survey is as follows:

Municipality	Total slums to be studied	Completed Community survey	Completed survey from Govt. offices
Ahmedabad	37	37	37
Surat	25	25	25
Vadodara	20	20	20
Total	82	82	82



A letter of GOG, UD to AMC is useful in availing data of health, demographics, WASH etc. similar letter for Surat and Vadodara municipalities will be useful, however members have collected information by visiting the offices multiple times. There are some difficulties while getting data from the government offices because many a times, there is reluctance in sharing data by these offices, so it took a little longer. Some organizations' in normal time get into confrontation with local public offices to ensure rights and entitlement of slum dwellers and for any data or information they use RTIs. Few of such members faced some difficulties in getting the required information from government offices, as there was reluctance in share of data/ information with them.

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ANNEXURE I

List of persons across the state of Gujarat are participating in the trainings under the COVID-19 Academy by Sphere India.

Sr.	Name Of Participants	Name of organisation	District
1	Jarshesh Gai	Four legs	Vadodara
2	Komal Brahmbhatt	Four legs	Vadodara
3	Divyaji	DRR Practitioner	Vadodara
4	Dhrupal Pawar	Maratha Voriyers voriyer	Vadodara
5	Pragneshbhai	Grahak Surkha Trust	vadodara
6	Parulben	Collective for Integrated Livelihood Initiative	Vaodara
7	Adesh Sabale	SAATH	Surat
8	Nitinbhai	Barari Foundation	surat
9	Jogendrabhai	Helping Hand	surat
10	Priyanka Patel	Helping Hand	surat
11	Vishal Vasoya	Surat Seva Sangathan	surat
12	Sanjay Patel	Ajeevika	surat
13	Vasudev Charupa	HDRC	Ahmedabad
14	Ashish Padvi	Manav Sadhna	Ahmedabad
15	Iswarbhai Parmar	Thavar GP	BK
16	Ajaybhai Solanki	Bapla GP	BK
17	Dineshbhai Vankar	Cohesion Foundation	Patna
18	Himmatbhai Chauhan	Pochabhai Foundation	Anand
19	Bindiabhen Makvana	Pochabhai Foundation	Anand
20	Snehal Tadvi	Unnati	Kutch

21	Rahul vasava	Unnati	Kutch
22	Jitendra Makwana	Unnati	Kutch
23	Dharmendrabhai	Gram Swaraj Sangh	Rapar Kutch
24	Pradipsingh Vaghela	Adani Foundation	Mundra Kutch
25	Dineshbhai	Samarthan	Rapar Kutch
26	Shailesh Rathod	IAG Gujatat, Unnati	Ahmedabad
27	Ketan Kotecha	SAVA	Jamnagar
28	Maheshbhai Rathod	Shree Vikas Charitable Trust	Jamnagar
29	Hitesh Pandya	Chaitanya Charitable Trust	Jamnagar
30	Chandrajit Chudasama	Four Legs	Vadodara