



VOICES FROM *the* FIELD

in pandemic time

Maharashtra Urban WASH and Environmental Sanitation Coalition

A joint initiative by UNICEF Maharashtra and RCUES of AILSG, Mumbai



Voices from the Field

in pandemic time

Knowledge Product no: 2/5

Prepared by Maharashtra Urban WASH-ES Coalition

A joint initiative of UNICEF Maharashtra and
Regional Centre for Urban & Environmental Studies,
All India Institute of Local Self Government, Mumbai

under the project

**Community Outreach for Promotion of IPC through WASH Supplies and
Service Delivery in Vulnerable Groups
of urban Maharashtra**

Knowledge products include

- ▲ Assessment of Rapid Needs Assessment Report and Micro Plans for fourteen slums
- ▲ Voices from the Field encapsulating experiences during the pandemic, focusing on challenges of accessibility in WASH, inducing vulnerability
- ▲ Project documentary on on-ground awareness activities aimed at behavioral change and capacity building at the local level
- ▲ Multi-Stakeholder Engagement in WASH, IPC, RCCE for addressing COVID-19 issues and challenges
- ▲ Pocket-booklet on FAQs related to COVID Appropriate Behaviour and good WASH practices in (post) pandemic times

The project was executed in collaboration with the following local partners

- ▲ Citizens Association for Child Rights – Kalyan-Dombivali, Mira-Bhayandar, Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Navi Mumbai
- ▲ Centre For Youth Development and Activities – Nashik
- ▲ Ecosan Services Foundation – Pune
- ▲ Society for Action in Creative Education and Development – Aurangabad
- ▲ Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action – Akola, Nagpur

About the Project

Maharashtra is one of the worst hit states of India in the first and second wave of COVID-19 pandemic. Dense settings and sharing of WASH facilities among communities in urban areas had increased the risk of transmission of COVID-19 virus. In order to break the chains of transmission and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19, the Maharashtra Urban WASH and Environmental Sanitation Coalition (MAHA-UWES-C) - a joint initiative of UNICEF Maharashtra and Regional Centre for Urban and Environmental Studies of All India Institute of Local Self Government, Mumbai undertook the project named "Community outreach for promotion of Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC) through WASH supplies and service delivery in vulnerable groups of urban Maharashtra".

The project had been designed as a 'Hub and Spoke Model' in order to ensure decentralization of efforts with cohesion of best practices. The project covers 14 slums and other vulnerable communities in 9 cities of Maharashtra representing 6 administrative divisions and geographical settings of Maharashtra. The project elevated the role of risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) through encouraging behavioural change, ensuring safety through facilitating access to PPE / hygiene kits & WASH supplies and disseminating information on infection, prevention and control (IPC).

Another key focus of the project had been to facilitate collaborations and support the organizations working in response to COVID-19 with a focus on community outreach, innovative IEC, promotion of IPC & WASH supplies to the targeted vulnerable groups. The activities were coordinated by the Secretariat, Maharashtra Urban WASH-ES Coalition (Hub) at the RCUES of AILSG, Mumbai and implemented by the selected partner organizations (Spokes) in selected cities in Maharashtra. Further, for effective implementation and impact, local stakeholders, including local governments, SHGs, youth groups etc., have been involved in the process of community outreach for promotion of IPC through WASH supplies and service delivery in vulnerable groups.

About this Book

VOICES FROM THE FIELD is a collection of variegated realities of communities living in urban slums and low income settlements of Maharashtra. During the interaction with the beneficiaries and the health & sanitation workforce, the teams from the Secretariat, Maharashtra Urban WASH-ES Coalition and partner organizations, documented the experiences of residents of fourteen slums during the pandemic in water, sanitation and personal hygiene access and practices and otherwise, to bring out the difficulties faced by the urban health force at the local level, sanitation workers, social mobilisers, domestic workers, and the residents including children. These experiences were documented and are published after seeking consent from all the beneficiaries.

This booklet entails stories of human hardships that emerged during the pandemic, while focusing on major challenges of accessibility in the WASH sector and other issues faced by vulnerable groups during these unprecedented times.

The booklet offers an assortment of humane experiences, encapsulating & highlighting stories of lack of access, struggles & their conquest, directly from the grassroots. To lend an ear to the unheard and pay an ode to the frontliners, the Secretariat, Maharashtra Urban WASH-ES Coalition presents a compilation of first-hand account of our communities across nine cities in Maharashtra.





Content

STORIES FROM THE GROUND

Communities **7**

1. Youth participation to drive change at local level **8**

2. Mobilising communities for promoting good WASH practices **10**

3. Interaction with communities & Feedback on WASH challenges **12**

4. Sanitation & Children's health **15**

STORIES OF RESILIENCE

Frontline workers: Triumphs & fears **17**

5. Mitigating risks of COVID-19 **18**

6. Liaisoning with citizens to foster positive relationships **20**

7. Gratitude & Appreciation towards urban health force **22**

Sanitation workers **24**

8. Plight of the sanitation staff **25**

9. Women in the Pandemic: Tales of perseverance & grit **27**

STORIES FROM
THE GROUND



Communities

The outbreak of COVID-19 heavily impacted overall health and the mental health of citizens across the country. Communities living in urban slums were most susceptible to getting infected by the virus, due to adverse living conditions, high population density and the overall socio-economic fabric. Mitigating the impact of the virus in these communities is the most crucial and challenging task. The team along with partners under the project, have engaged with these communities for their capacity building, conducted awareness programs along with provision of essential WASH supplies while reinforcing COVID Appropriate behaviour (CAB).

Youth Participation to drive change at local level

Overview

Youth participation for outreach and citizen engagement is a substantial way to achieve positive outcomes within communities. Fostering youth participation in key COVID-19 and WASH interventions have led to incremental and long term impact on citizens in many past programs. Investment of young energy into such interventions can help facilitate IPC and COVID appropriate behaviour (CAB) in communities.

1.1 Youth group discusses solutions for promoting IPC in their community

A youth group from Navjeevan Lokvikas Sanstha, a community organisation, in association with CACR, conducted a street play in Kalyan, to reach out to their community and to promote Infection Prevention & Control. Additionally, through other IEC activities, they spread awareness on the importance of wearing masks and reinforced the idea of social distancing, to contain the spread of novel coronavirus.



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After witnessing a street play in our own community, we felt that the youth needed to come together and create awareness amongst people to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. We, then, conducted a street play and informed citizens about precautions to be taken during the pandemic.

Aboli

Trainee, Navjeevan Lokvikas Sanstha, Kalyan



Further, if we get more such opportunities, our group, as the responsible youth of the country, will try to create more awareness programs on wearing of masks, washing hands regularly and social distancing

Aboli

Trainee, Navjeevan Lokvikas Sanstha, Kalyan

Their Learnings from the field

- *We realize and appreciate the efforts put in by the government to promote Infection prevention and control through IEC activities and persistent community outreach.*

1.2 Men's SHG group on prioritising mental health in their community during the pandemic

Navneet Mitra Mandal, a self help group in Pune took the initiative to spread awareness and promote IPC, busting myths around COVID-19 as well as providing people in the community with all kinds of support. A special focus, however, was placed on provision of counselling and other mental support to citizens in the community and guarding mental health.



Initially, people in our community were extremely petrified and afraid as they did not understand what the virus was all about. We decided to come together and bust all the myths around the virus and spread awareness amongst people of our community

Navneet Mitra Mandal

Self-help group, Pune



About 8-9 members of my family were infected with the virus and were hospitalised. Our group members not only provided us with the financial and medical support, but were constantly present over calls to boost our morale and provide mental health support

Member

Navneet Mitra Mandal, Self-help group, Pune

Mobilizing Communities for promoting good WASH practices

Overview

Improving community awareness and reinforcing Covid Appropriate Behaviour (CAB) in urban slums is extremely critical, as these are the most vulnerable groups in cities, and are most susceptible to getting infected due to the dearth of hygiene maintenance and lack of social distancing in slum pockets. Community mobilisers and social workers have worked tirelessly in reaching out to these communities, promoting IPC and distributing essential WASH and other supplies during the pandemic.

2.1 Social mobiliser discusses ways to engage with & enhance outreach in communities

Representatives of Navjeevan Lokvikas Sanstha, in association with CACR, visited slums of Indira Nagar, Adivasi Pada & Pisoli area of Kalyan, to educate slum dwellers and communities on the prevention of COVID-19, as well as distributed WASH supplies for their protection and overall hygiene.



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Initially, the communities that we approached were apprehensive about the initiative, but, as we presented our work and built their confidence, they were open to sharing their difficulties and were receptive to various engagement activities.

Pallavi, Mobiliser

Navjeevan Lokvikas Sanstha, Kalyan

2.2 Veteran social worker encourages youth in her community to spread awareness

Vimal Tai is an experienced social worker and mobiliser, who encouraged young women in her community to come forward and create outreach in their communities during the pandemic. Her grit to create awareness and advocacy on COVID-19, inspired many other women to join hands with her in her initiative. She, alongside these women, conducted workshops and awareness programs for people of all age groups in her community.



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Through our advocacy efforts, we got the Nagpur Municipal corporation to start sending vehicles to collect waste at the doorstep. Now, women in our community do not litter anymore, they even segregate the waste at source.

Vimal Gulgule

Social worker, Nagpur

3.

Interaction with Communities & **Feedback on WASH Challenges**

3.1 Woman voices her opinion on matters of sanitation in her locality



Toilets in our communities are unclean and are not looked after regularly. From time to time, we have to clean it ourselves

Urban slum dweller
Kalyan



3.2 Deliberations with the ragpicking community on waste management & sanitation

The teams from Secretariat and CACR in association with Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation, visited and reached out to the ragpicker community, residing within the premises of the dumping yard. Their living conditions were rather appalling. The teams spent some time gathering feedback and addressing doubts from the community, pertaining to sanitation and Covid appropriate behaviour (CAB).

The community came in direct contact with untreated bio-medical waste and other forms of waste, and segregated all such disposed waste daily. No amenities including PPE kits or WASH supplies are provided to carry out this process. The community had to fend for themselves, as there was only minimal external support.

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We go to the dumping ground every day to segregate the waste, after which, we come back home, have a bath and later, cook for our families

Ragpicker community

Dumping ground, Kalyan



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Earlier, there were not many WASH supplies and facilities available in community toilets, but, since the outbreak of COVID-19, toilets were being cleaned regularly, WASH supplies were made available and social distancing was maintained

Mina Kamble

Domestic worker, Navi Mumbai

4.

Sanitation & Children's Health

Overview

Even though children were not the face of the pandemic and thankfully have been largely spared from the direct impact of the virus, the adverse situations caused by the pandemic have had a profound effect on the overall development of children and disrupted their day to day lives. The social and material well being of the children has changed and they, along with the adults, have had to adopt rigorous sanitation and hygiene measures. Growing up in a secure and clean environment with good hygiene practices is the basic right of every child.

4.1 Student shares sanitation related challenges in her school



I wash my hands regularly and use a hand sanitizer, since the outbreak of COVID-19. Currently, my school is closed. However, when my school was functioning, I would never use the school toilet, as it was not very clean

Slesha
Student, Nagpur

4.2 Student speaks about her key takeaways from an awareness activity in her community



An awareness program was conducted in our community, wherein they taught us the right way to wash our hands and spread awareness on wearing masks & using hand sanitizers regularly, for our safety. I do not like wearing the mask all the time, however, I wear it while stepping out for my tuitions as it keeps me protected. I use a blue coloured mask

Mishti
Student, Nagpur



STORIES OF
RESILIENCE



Frontline Workers Triumphs & Fears

During the outbreak of COVID-19, the Frontline workers' sheer will and intrepidity to fight the pandemic, gave hope and life to many ailing and needy families. These COVID warriors worked around the clock to provide health services and other necessary support to the residents. However, with sheer grit and perseverance, they performed their roles and attenuated the impact of the pandemic within their communities.

5. Mitigating Risks of COVID - 19

Overview

While serving the citizenry, it was also crucial for the frontline workers to mitigate the high-risk exposures of the virus during the global health emergency. Along with physical risks, they were also battling the burden to fight the pandemic and endangering the lives of their loved ones.

5.1 Asha worker shares her personal experience



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We were scared to go back home, as there was always the looming risk of infecting our own family members; but, we consider these patients also our family, and to save the lives of a 1000 citizens, we had to put up a brave front and step out of our comfort zone. Many of our staff members had also tested positive along the process.

Asha worker

Primary Healthcare Center, Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation

5.2 Healthcare worker on key tasks performed during COVID-19



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We would conduct door to door surveys and even disseminate information on the virus constantly

Auxiliary Nurse

Primary Healthcare Center, Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation

6.

Liaisoning with Citizens to foster positive relationships

Overview

The pandemic brought unprecedented pressure and immense stress on the health workforce. They had to perform their duties despite great health risks. They not only had to understand the pulse of the ground, cater to their physical and medical needs, but also deal with panicked citizens with predisposed notions about the novel Coronavirus.

6.1 Excerpts from Asha workers dealing with communities during the pandemic



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We were allotted areas, and we had to visit every building in that area for 14 days at a stretch. This really took a toll on our health. Citizens were also not speaking kindly and were not considerate with us in the beginning.

Asha worker

Primary Healthcare Center, Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation

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We faced a lot of resistance from citizens to get vaccinated, our job was not only to give them the vaccine, but also to promote vaccine awareness & eagerness.

Asha worker

Primary Healthcare Center, Kalyan Dombivli
Municipal Corporation

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People panicked around us; and even asked us to not come into their building premises, as they believed, we would have been contaminated and would spread the virus further.

Asha worker

Primary Healthcare Center, Kalyan Dombivli
Municipal Corporation



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People were skeptical while interacting with us during surveys, as they believed we would ask them to quarantine. Getting hold of COVID-19 positive patients was also challenging, as people who misguide us sometimes, some other times they would miscommunicate information.

Asha worker

Primary Healthcare Center, Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation

7.

Gratitude & Appreciation towards urban health force

Overview

While many citizens found it challenging to interact with these groups during the pandemic, there were many others who stood in support and appreciated the valour and courage showcased by the frontline heroes. Many paid tribute to these sentinels of the soil by clapping their hands whenever they came across them, others extended support whenever they needed.

7.1 Asha worker shares personal story of humane spirit during the pandemic



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Many citizens were extremely considerate and supportive. I remember this one instance, during a visit, I started feeling sick and almost fainted. This was during the first wave and everyone was petrified of coming in contact with another person, however, this family next door understood my plight and welcomed me into their home and treated me with first aid. They also accompanied me and made sure that I was feeling better.

Asha worker

Primary Healthcare Center, Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation

7.2 Asha workers acknowledges the appreciation received from citizens



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A lot of citizens would also constantly reach out to thank us and clap for us. This really encouraged us to keep doing the good work.

Asha worker

Primary Healthcare Center, Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation

Sanitation Workers

Sanitation workers, the silent frontline COVID-19 warriors, were at an increased risk of exposure. The already marginalized groups in sanitation and waste management faced occupational and health hazards with no formal guidance or support. Sanitation workers were expected to disinfect and sanitize the outsides of homes of known COVID-19 positive patients. Interviews with these workers, once again, bring to light the issues of this systemically overlooked section of the community.

8. Plight of the Sanitation Staff

Overview

Even during the pandemic, the sanitation workers dealt with waste collection and management and worked in high risk settings including health care facilities, quarantine centres, and containment zones. They have been long marginalized and the pandemic only magnified the considerable occupational and health hazards.

8.1 Sanitation worker speaks about the challenges of his job



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We had lots of issues while travelling during the lockdown, even if we were categorised under essential services, we still faced some challenges to reach work in time. While working we would fear for our lives, but we kept going and did not lose hope. We were determined to work and fight the virus. Our families were also constantly living under fear of getting infected.

Sunil Baburao Gadve

Sanitation worker, Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation

8.2 Sanitation worker speaks about the duties performed during the pandemic



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We had to deal with COVID-19 positive patients everyday. We would make arrangements to transfer them to the quarantine centres and then disinfect & sanitize the area around their home and place a board outside. This was difficult and we were fearful, but, on a humane level and for the benefit of society, we had to step up, and eventually, it felt rewarding to be able to serve people in their time of need.

Sanitation worker
Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation

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Some people were also harsh on us, they believed that since we interface with COVID-19 patients, we are responsible for spreading the virus further, however, what they did not understand was, if we did not do our duty as employees of the municipal body, then who will? We faced difficulties in obtaining food and water, while on duty, even if an eatery was functional, due to a stringent lockdown, we did not have access to them.

Sanitation worker
Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation

9.

Women in the Pandemic: Tales of Perseverance & Grit

Overview

Women have been on the frontlines in all arrays of work to serve the COVID-19 pandemic stricken nation. They have displayed true resilience with their never say die attitude during these unprecedented times. They not only played a key role in health services, but also, spread large scale awareness on COVID & mask appropriate behaviours, as well as other neglected issues of menstrual health & hygiene.

9.1 Health worker speaks about ways to promote IPC



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I believe it is key to promote IPC through awareness programs, street plays and distribute such supplies to citizens, only through proper usage of these products can we overcome the pandemic.

Smita Dewar

Sevika, Pune Municipal Corporation

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Local organisations provided us with WASH supplies to be distributed within our community. Outbreak of the COVID-19 virus deterred people in the community from using the common toilets, however, once all the WASH supplies were distributed, we encouraged them to restart using the community toilets and spread awareness on use of these products

Smita Dewar

Sevika, Pune Municipal Corporation

9.2 Women's health worker emphasises the importance of menstrual health & shares ways of safeguarding menstrual health

Providing guidance and awareness on menstrual hygiene and health was extremely crucial. The women frontliners have done a marvellous job of addressing these issues within their communities.



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During the pandemic, we would receive phone calls inquiring about various menstrual problems and other pregnancy related queries. Chemist stores and clinics were also shut back then. Our organisation had provided us with essential items to be provided to women in times of these needs, like calcium, iron supplements, contraceptives etc. We would even visit their homes, to collect samples and reports.

Archana Kasbe

Organisation working on family planning & Women's health , Pune

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People were averse to meeting and interacting with us while we were donning our masks and other gear. They believed wearing masks was not important and we had to interact with them on their terms.

Archana Kasbe

Organisation working on family planning & Women's health , Pune

Partner Organizations

- ▲ *Citizens Association for Child Rights – Kalyan-Dombivali, Mira-Bhayandar, Mumbai, Navi Mumbai*
- ▲ *Centre For Youth Development and Activities – Nashik*
- ▲ *Ecosan Services Foundation – Pune*
- ▲ *Society for Action in Creative Education and Development – Aurangabad*
- ▲ *Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action – Akola, Nagpur*

AILSG Mumbai

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Voices
from the Field