



COVID-19 Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)

A Report

From:

Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF)

New Delhi





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1. Programme Introduction

COVID-19 Risk Communication and Community Engagement

From 2020 to 2022, many people were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it had a profound impact all over the world. Lack of accurate information resulted in the deaths of millions of people. To stop the horrifying spread of the virus, extraordinary measures were taken on a global scale. The level of people's awareness of the disease greatly impacted their ability to follow preventive measures in those circumstances.

DEF and UNICEF

In collaboration with Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), UNICEF provided valuable assistance and guidance to communities in 885 locations across 90 districts through their COVID-19 Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) program. This initiative was deemed as one of UNICEF's top priority areas of intervention to facilitate informed decision-making, mitigate rumours, and promote effective information and advice sharing between experts, communities, and officials. The program aimed to actively involve communities in the response to control the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this initiative, 5.3 million individuals were reached, and 1.2 million vulnerable individuals, including children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers, along with their communities, were engaged. The program's key themes included:

Lucky, July 2022, Awareness on CAB, vaccine booster and misinformation Community meeting, Nagaon, Assam

- Covid-19 Appropriate Behaviour-- Prevention & Practices
- COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviors – Considering GHD & Festivals
- COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy & Eagerness – Vaccination
- COVID-19 Sensitive Health
- COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviors –Concerning Omicron Variant
- COVID-19 Sensitive Nutrition
- COVID-19 Psychosocial care
- CAB considering Precautionary Dose
- Considering Myth Buster/Misinformation & Fact Check, Booster Dose



Key Highlights

1. COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviors – Prevention & Practices

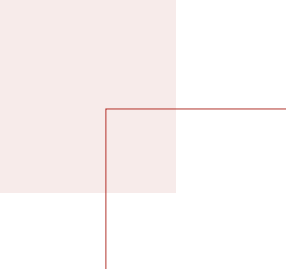
- The activities around the theme were carried out to emphasize on the COVID or Covid appropriate Behaviors CAB (frequent and thorough hand washing using soap and water, wearing a mask/face cover and physical distancing of 6 feet) for personal safety and prevention of community transmission. Leveraged existing WhatsApp groups, social media handles and Community based organizations (CBOs) to disseminate key messages of CAB. The messages were also promoted at state and regional levels using content in vernacular languages.

2. COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviors – Considering Global Handwashing Day (GHD) & Festival Season.

- Direct Benefits of Hand Washing with Soap (HWWS), Critical Times of Hand Washing, 20 Seconds Handwashing Lesson, 8 Steps of Handwashing, Covid Protocols and Precautionary measure during Festival season, Virtual meet with relatives during Surge helps etc.

3. COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy & Eagerness

- Hesitancy of public was addressed on the COVID-19 vaccination



process, provided correct, consistent and timely information on the new COVID-19 vaccine(s) (availability, safety, and timelines) and vaccination processes.

- Ensured understanding and acceptance of the phased and prioritized approach to overcome concerns of the population waiting for vaccination.

4. COVID-19 Sensitive Health

- Make the Environment safer: Avoid the 3Cs: spaces that are closed, crowded or involve close contact. Keep Good Hygiene

5. COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviors –Concerning Omicron Variant

- Ensured prompt testing, prompt self-isolation, frequent and thorough hand washing using soap and water, wearing a mask/face cover and physical distancing of 6 feet) for personal safety and prevention of community transmission.

6. COVID-19 Sensitive Nutrition

- For COVID-19 sensitive messages on nutrition, different communication methods were used to disseminate information on nutrition for women and adolescent girls. The topics covered were Immunization, Breastfeeding and complementary feeding, Nutrition for women, Diarrhea management, Iron and Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation, and Hygiene and sanitation behaviors.

7. COVID-19 Psychosocial care

- Spent time on recreational activities, spent time with family, making some time for exercise, getting involved in daily activities.

8. Covid appropriate Behavior (CAB) considering Precautionary Dose

- Awareness of Precautionary Dose and convincing people to get all their dosages.

9. Considering Myth Buster/Misinformation & Fact Check, Booster Dose

- All people received the correct information and were not influenced by mis/disinformation, myths, or misconceptions. Ask questions, educate oneself and get information from reliable sources.

2. Programme Geographic

S. No	State	No. of Districts	No. of Centre Coordinators (CCs)	No. of Centre Coordinators (CCs)	Gender	
					Female	Male
1	Assam	6	3	68	23	45
2	Andhra Pradesh	4	3	34	13	21
3	Bihar	7	2	62	27	35
4	Chhattisgarh	2	1	23	22	1
5	Delhi	2	2	15	12	3
6	Haryana	1	1	30	28	2
7	Jharkhand	3	4	43	28	15
8	Karnataka	1	1	12	9	3
9	Kerala	6	1	31	11	20
10	Madhya Pradesh	14	4	113	58	55
11	Maharashtra	3	1	14	7	7
12	Odisha	8	2	48	34	14
13	Rajasthan	4	5	140	81	59
14	Tamil Nadu	4	2	46	22	24
15	Telangana	7	1	26	4	22
16	Uttar Pradesh	7	4	67	51	16
17	Uttarakhand	3	1	28	18	10
18	West Bengal	8	2	85	64	21
Total		90	40	885	512	374

States with Districts (Programme Implemented)

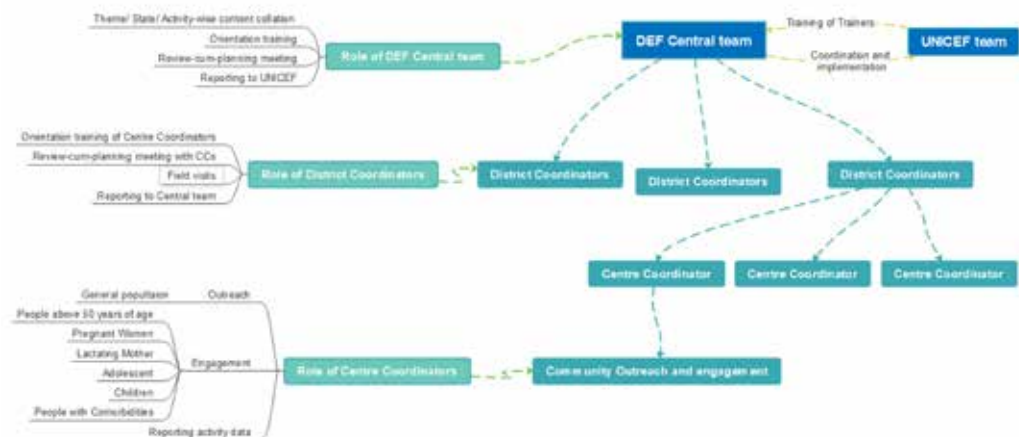


3. Programme Design & Methodology

The program was designed with a focus on promoting community participation and engagement, building local leadership, and establishing a strong network of local influencer front-line workers and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). The program catered to the following target audiences:

- i. General Public comprising of community members, panchayat, representative, line department officials, youth & SHG women
- ii. Vulnerable and marginalized population (Pregnant and Breastfeeding women, children 0-18, and people with co-morbidities like diabetes, hypertension, etc.)
- iii. Existing network of volunteers formed with the help of YuWaah UNICEF platform and network of Digital Entrepreneurs present across the intervention areas.
- iv. All citizens; vaccine eager and vaccine-hesitant groups
- v. School Children
- vi. Frontline Health Workers
- vii. Opinion leaders/influencers/Panchayat representative

The program methodology was based on a participatory approach that involved the engagement of the target audience at every stage. The program aimed to empower communities and foster a sense of ownership among them towards tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the involvement of local leaders and influencers, the program sought to build trust and increase the reach of information dissemination. The program also emphasized the importance of leveraging technology and digital platforms to facilitate effective communication and engagement with the target audience.



4. Programme Implementation

Implementation of the awareness and community mobilization plan was done through several activities like wall paintings, announcements, WhatsApp messaging, door-to-door visits, community and youth meetings, and Chatbot tools, and social media. The program covered beneficiaries comprising of Panchayat representatives, line department officials, elderly, youth & SHG women, marginalized and vulnerable population (pregnant women, infants and children till 18 years, and people with co-morbidities like diabetes, hypertension, and heart condition).

In support of UNICEF, The Digital Empowerment Foundation rolled out a 1-year COVID-19 Awareness Campaign - Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) from July 2021 to July 2022. DEF utilized a variety of channels at all levels, ranging from traditional to digital media, to reach out to communities and disseminate key messages related to COVID-19 prevention and mitigation. The program aimed to create awareness and promote behaviour change by engaging with local influencers, community-based organizations, and frontline workers. With technology and digital platforms, the program sought to increase the reach and impact of its messaging and ensure that communities were well-informed and prepared to tackle the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Planning Phase

The idea of organizing Risk Communication and Community Engagement took shape in the month of July 2021 when a team from UNICEF and DEF were brainstorming on a community outreach plan to address the issues of COVID 19 among Vulnerable groups (Pregnant and Breastfeeding women, children 0-18 and people with co-morbidities like diabetes, hypertension, etc.). The team held several meetings to design a layout for the entire project for the planning phase. The project layout involved:

- Selection of locations
- Identifying the District Coordinator (DC)
- Identifying the Centre Coordinators (CC)
- Collating and finalizing the Training content State wise and Theme wise.
- Creation of Monitoring Form and Dashboard for Monitoring.
- Creating Chatbot for inquiries regarding Covid-19.
- Creation of form on Online Data Collection (ODK Application)
- ODK Application Training.
- Training of Respective Theme every Month
- Fortnightly Review Meetings with District Teams.
- Documentation (Photos/ Videos, Data verification State & District wise).



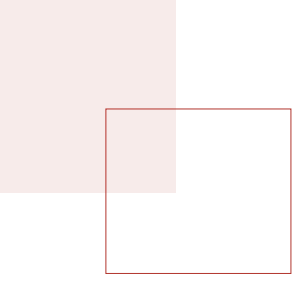
Key elements of the Programme

- i. The 1st quarter was used for program readiness which also includes the assessment which is prepared to conduct a need assessment for all the SoochnaPreneurs/Centre Coordinators to capture their profile, role, and their alignment with other functionaries as well as their current knowledge, practices, myths, and gaps from the gender paradigm.
- ii. To implement the key themes, total 3 key themes (COVID-19 Vaccine hesitancy Eagerness, COVID-19 Appropriate behavior (CAB), and COVID-19 sensitive behavior (immunization, diet, IFA, toilet use, completing school education, learning at home) will be covered in 9 cycles.
 - a. The theme of “COVID-19 Vaccine hesitancy & Eagerness” was covered in 4 cycles
 - b. The theme of “COVID-19 Appropriate behavior (CAB)” will be covered in 2 cycles
 - c. The theme of “COVID-19 sensitive behavior” will be covered in 4 cycles.

These themes were covered through outreach and engagement activities- wall messaging, public announcements, WhatsApp groups, Door to Door visits, Social Listening, and Community and Youth meetings. Moreover, the activities were focused on reinforcing the COVID 19 Appropriate Behaviour and CAB+ among the people and the community such as promoting the use of face masks and cloth face coverings through Wall messaging, WhatsApp groups, Announcements, Door to Door visits, i.e., information dissemination using audio visual aids on the benefits of wearing mask and how to put it on/use it. Engaging the social leaders (Religious Leaders and market committees), locally respected elderly, youth and female leaders, Community Leaders who will act as “influencers” to aware the people about wearing and usage of masks through Youth Meetings & Community Meetings and Periodic in-person mask monitoring at public spaces including mask distribution.

Further, the strategy of “Social Listening” was used to capture the pulse of the discussion across the locations about the topics related to vaccine eagerness, vaccine hesitancy and any misreporting or false information regarding COVID-19 themes, thereby, helping in building a positive narrative and public discourse around the topics.

Social listening played a significant and important component of RCCE in the second phase to influence and motivate the information design, communication process and final delivery of messaging. Social listening was defined as a process and methodology where communities and population would be looked at as how they are thinking, how their narratives are creating belief system and how different narratives are being made viral through media, messaging, and consumption and production of information across both online media (Social media) and offline meeting called nukkad, chauraha, panchayati, chowks, and across community level gatherings including haats and bazaars.



Under the project, social listening will be a two-mode process (offline and online)-

i. Online Social Listening:

Various social media platforms form major addas of consumption of information and narratives, for example: Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook Watch, and so on. Besides, there are platforms, which are majorly mainstream media platforms and their apps and websites, such as NDTV.com, NDTV App, and several others. It was hereby planned to create a systematic and keyword based structured tracking of narratives of major selective online and social media platforms using specialised software and application which helps crawl trends and narratives and do analytics to derive suggestions how to either follow the trend or fight the trends in further RCCE messaging.

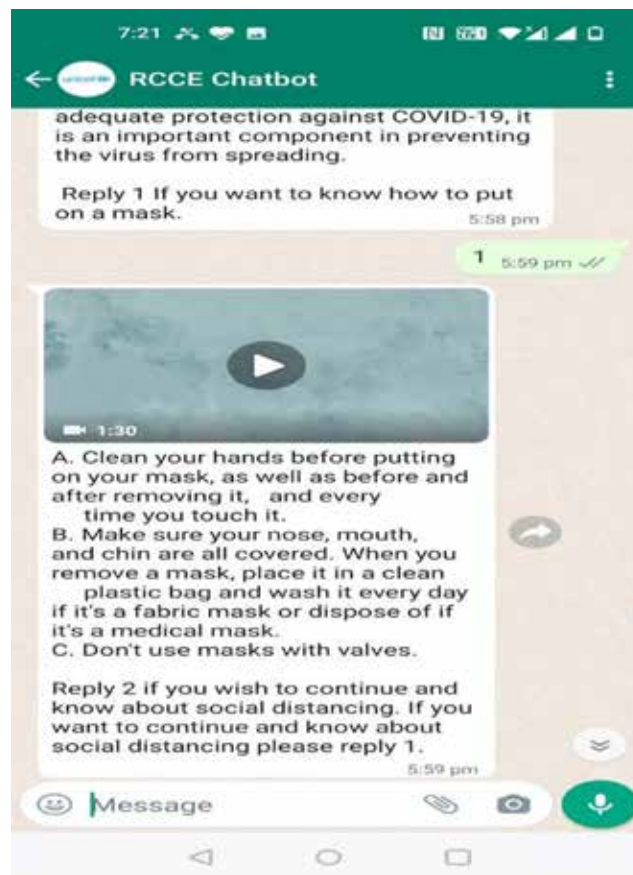
Through Curated Bot based or ChatBot-based message analysis and messaging:

Development of dedicated chatbot which was supported with a FAQ database to work on curated messaging, answering queries, fighting unhealthy trends, rumours, fake news and misinformation. Gradually, with an incremental database, the chatbot almost became automated to pick and choose the right answer to all queries to reply to them promptly and correctly. Further, this tool was helpful to us to do real time monitoring and rapid coordination response across messages for appropriate response management. It helped us in fact-checking, collate, share key messages and track large volume of conversations on the theme of -COVID 19 vaccine and vaccination processes, COVID 19 appropriate behaviours and COVID 19 sensitive messages.

RCCE CHATBOT ON WHATSAPP-Social Listening Online

Tool towards debunking the misinformation and fake news and providing relevant information Related to Covid Appropriate Behaviors, Sensitive Behaviors & Vaccination.

- We have reached people of myriad backgrounds on questions ranging from information around COVID-19 behaviors, Sensitive Behaviors & Vaccine related Information.
- The response on chatbot highlighted the reach of online social listening and the importance of countering misinformation and providing relevant information.
- The content was in English, Hindi, Telugu, Assamese & Gujarati Language with the support from UNICEF
- Reached 9578 people through Chatbot, out of which we have received queries from 1183 people



ii. Offline Social Listening:

When it is a matter of working among the masses, and especially when there is a sizeable population who are not connected but yet affected by online narratives, it is very important to find and develop mechanism to capture the narratives which are used, shared and believed and repeated in an offline or word of mouth mode. To capture such narratives and also to hear individuals and communities in real-life without the use of digital media; there was a large-scale use of cadre-based information entrepreneurs and the volunteers at the last mile. To that end, there was a mechanism to capture localised voices through meetings, door to door visits, talking to gatherings, listening to local social and village and panchayat level leaders, and so on. The offline social listening was a two-way process of not only gathering narratives but also translating online narratives to result oriented information packaging and dissemination.

Engagement Activities

- Youth Meeting

Youth are an integral part of the country, therefore recognizing the importance of their role in the community, youth clubs were formed in 90 districts of India. One of the objectives was to protect themselves and their community against COVID-19. Each youth club had ten members who reached out to the community through wall messaging, door-to-door visits and engaging fellow youth from their communities through youth meetings.



Raju Ranjan, July 2022, Awareness on CAB, vaccine booster and misinformation Youth meeting, West Champaran, Bihar



Rajani, July 2022, Awareness on CAB, vaccine booster and misinformation Youth meeting, Pune, Maharashtra.

- Door to Door Visits

Door to Door activity was designed to especially focus on the vulnerable population comprising of old people, PwDs, Children, pregnant women, lactating mother, adolescent. For each theme, centre coordinator got engaged with 25-40 families. Door- to- Door visits by the centre coordinators/district coordinators helped them to create an avenue for two-way communication by interacting and answering the queries at household level. It helped them to dispel the myths and rumours around COVID 19 and thus acting as myth busters.



Ritika Noutiyal, July 2022, Awareness on CAB, vaccine booster and misinformation, Door to door, Tehri Uttarakhand



Uddip, July 2022, Awareness on CAB, vaccine booster and misinformation, Door to door, Morigaon, Assam

- Community Meeting

Community meetings were conducted with an objective to involve all the key community stakeholders-SHG leaders, religious leader, front line delivery personal, schoolteacher, ASHA worker, local representatives and discuss around CAB, COVID Sensitive Health, COVID Sensitive nutrition, Vaccine Hesitancy & Eagerness. It helped to establish an effective Dialogue with the affected population.



V.muthuraman, July 2022, Awareness on CAB, vaccine booster and misinformation Community meeting, virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu.



Anshu, July 2022, Awareness on CAB, vaccine booster and misinformation Community meeting, Darbhanga, Bihar.

Outreach activities

- Wall Messaging

The wall messaging was done around three themes- CAB, COVID Sensitive Health and COVID Sensitive Nutrition. The messages were collated through UNICEF 's IEC warehouse in Hindi, English and other regional language. The messages were written down by the centre coordinators on public walls. The Wall Messaging was one of the effective activities that created awareness among the community people.



Sunita Sahu, July 2022, Awareness on CAB vaccine booster and misinformation Wall messaging, Rajpur Chhattisgarh.



Tumpa barma, July 2022, Awareness on CAB, vaccine booster and misinformation, Wall messaging, Malda, West Bengal

- Announcements from loudspeaker

In a setting where a high percentage of the population is illiterate, a public announcement is an essential way to reach the last mile especially, during a crisis similar to COVID-19. The COVID-19 Soochnapreneurs broadcasted the messages in the most adapted and suitable way for local populations. COVID-19 Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) and Stigma & Discrimination Communication Campaign. An initiative of COVID-19 response Announcements were made through loudspeakers installed on a bicycle and information vans (Soochna Vans). Radio was also used as a platform to impart critical Information on COVID-19 in the community.



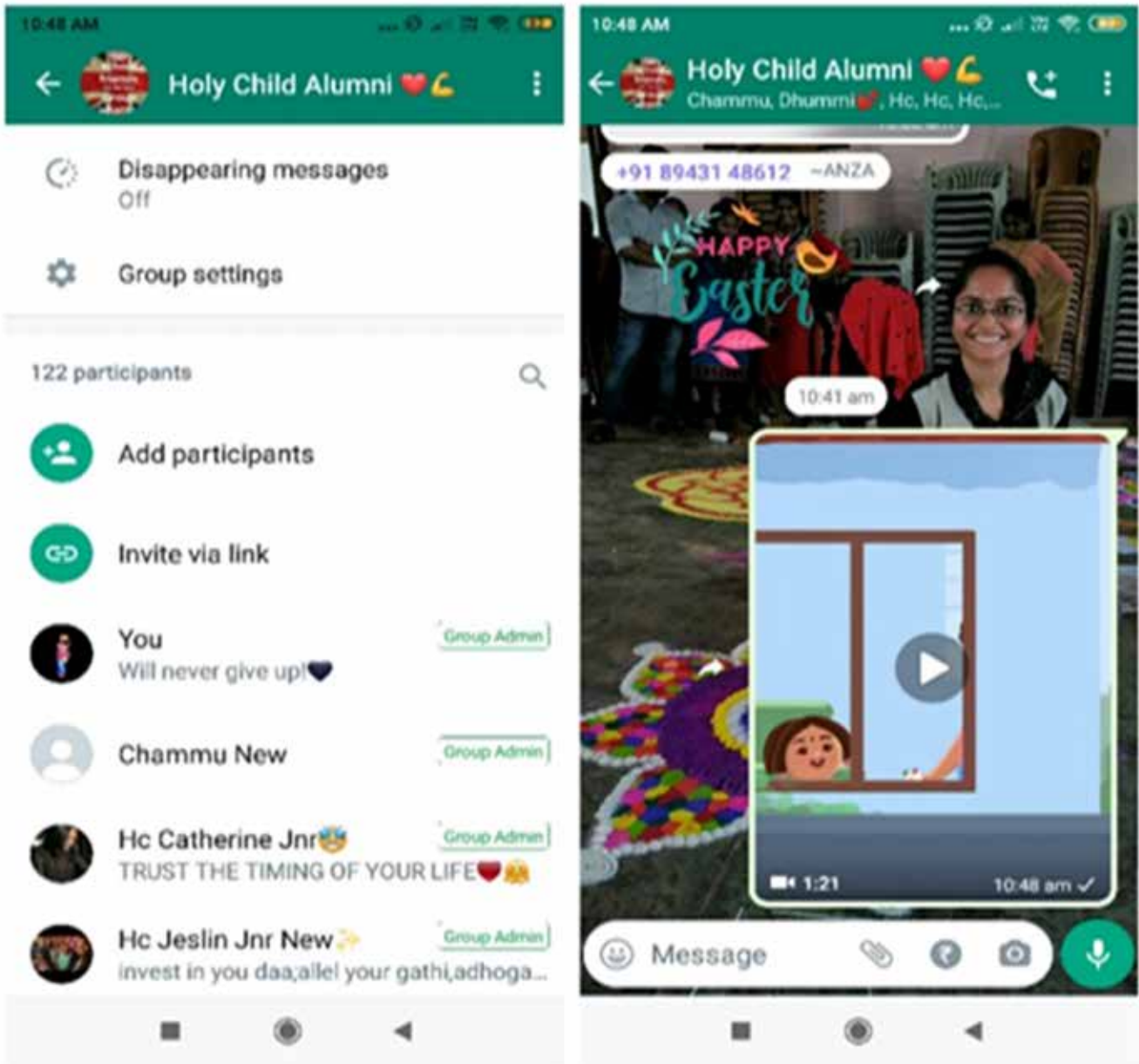
Namita mondal, July 2022, Awareness on CAB, vaccine booster and misinformation, Announcement, Mursidabad, WB



Nidhi, Feb to March 2022, Awareness on CAB Concerning Omicron variant, Announcement, Nuh Haryana

- Information Dissemination through WhatsApp groups

To combat the fake news around the COVID-19 disease, the COVID-19 Soochnapreneurs used the community group on WhatsApp to stay connected and ensure the timely flow of relevant information. The groups were used to disseminate the RCCE messages comprised of audio, video, text, images.



Nimitha, March 2022, Awareness on CAB Sensitive nutrition Wall messaging, Thrissur, Kerala

Moreover, chatbot also helped in analysing and potentially prompting behaviour and perception of people around the proposed themes. DEF in support with UNICEF worked on designing framework and workflows to capture and support the process of social listening to combat the myths and rumours by disseminating correct information

among the people in the community. RapidPro - an open-source platform that supported in collecting & analysing data through outreach and engagement activities.

This acted as a sustainable platform for Digital Empowerment Foundation as it supported innovative approach which promoted adaptive learning among the people (with or without technology) in the community. Digital Empowerment Foundation integrated this platform in 885 Community Information Resource Centres aligning with the different projects/funders in a way that we provide attractive content/information to the people, expand their knowledge and collect non-functional feedback to improve the program structure and the services.



Anshu, July 2022, Awareness on CAB, vaccine booster and misinformation Community meeting, Darbhanga, Bihar

Implementation Phase

The first step was to select the 18 state locations and 90 Districts as DEF's presence in even remote pockets of the said Geographical Coverage in the form of Community Information Resource Centers (CIRCs), also it was one of the criteria behind the selection of target districts. These CIRCs were then planned to be used as centers for information dissemination around creating awareness of COVID-19 under the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) program. Hence, locations mentioned under geographic coverage provided a cohesive ecosystem for implementing the, COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviour {wearing masks, maintaining physical distance and hand

washing with soap) and Covid Appropriate Behaviour+ (proning, home isolation, caring for children, psycho-social care etc}.

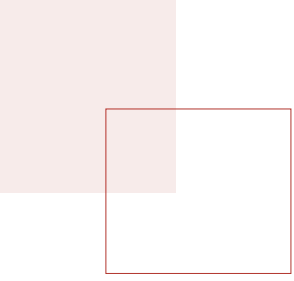
COVID-19 Vaccine hesitancy and Eagerness Reaching out to people with prompt and focused communication on the COVID 19 vaccination processes and address vaccine hesitancy that could arise because of apprehensions/misinformation around vaccine safety, efficacy; and any other myths and misconceptions. In this regard, undertake offline social listening and establish and system of fact checking and counter communication

COVID-19 sensitive behaviour (complete Routine Immunization RI for children, diet of children, vitamin A supplementation and de-worming to every girl and boy up to 5 yrs., adolescent and pregnant/breastfeeding women, compliance to Iron Folic Acid IFA, regular use of toilet, delay child marriage/right age at marriage and /all children in school and learning i.e., (provide infrastructure, appreciate school work, create together, keep track, ensure safety etc.) Themes.

The RCCE interventions in the target locations was reached to the people through Community Information Resource Centres (CIRCs) present across 2000 locations in India. Since 2007, Digital Empowerment



Jayakrishna, July 2022, Awareness on CAB, vaccine booster and misinformation Community meeting, Trivandrum, Kerala



Foundation has been setting up CIRC in rural and semi-urban areas as its main access point for achieving digital inclusion, providing digital literacy and rolling out its various ICTD interventions. Community Information Resource Centres (CIRCs) are community-oriented infrastructure and bottom-up public space built to create digitally literate, information-empowered and equitable communities across the country. The CIRCs primarily offer digital literacy, digital services, information services, citizen services and business development services to create an information-rich society under a sustainable model. These centres are manned by Centre Coordinators/District Coordinators who acted as “Community Warriors” during the time of pandemic. Centre Coordinators reached out to families and communities with Covid-19 specific information on preventive awareness and de-stigmatization through message dissemination (social media, announcements, wall messaging, WhatsApp groups, and Chatbot) and engagement activities through (community meetings, youth meetings, and door-to-door visits). In this process of information dissemination and addressing stigma & discrimination and Vaccine hesitancy & Eagerness, center coordinators/district coordinators were able to create a sustained engagement and community with the community people that helped them build trust and confidence in response efforts, and enabled community participation and action for the COVID-19 response.

“In the beginning, I encountered a lot of challenges and strong opposition from the community. Door to Door visits helped me a lot in spreading awareness as they connected me with the people at a personal level, and as a result, I could observe the change in community, not just in the people’s mindset for COVID – 19, but also being sensitive towards each other”- Meera Gautam, Centre Coordinator of Siddhi district (Madhya Pradesh).

Door to Door visits of the centre coordinators/district coordinators helped them to create an avenue for two-way communication by interacting and answering their queries at a personal level. It helped them to dispel the myths and rumours around COVID 19 thus acting as myth busters.

Centre Coordinators/District Coordinators were trained through cascading method. Online training of central team (trained by the central team of UNICEF), DCs (trained by the central team) and CCs (trained by the DCs) were done through IEC materials provided by UNICEF. Following were the topics covered during the training of the intermediaries-

- i. Coronavirus and its transmission
- ii. Behaviors crucial for prevention of transmission
- iii. Communication skills while dealing with COVID-19 positive patients
- iv. Importance of being sensitive and non-judgmental
- v. Ways of counteracting stigma and discrimination associated with COVID-19

Further, to commence the GLOBAL HANDWASHING event, DEF Central Team organized the orientation training for 40 District Coordinators, across 18 states comprising of 90 districts.

- Orientation Training of Volunteers was conducted by District Coordinators.
- Field Activities regarding Hand washing with soap HWS took place in October.



Center Coordinator Training, July 2022, Awareness on Handwashing Covid appropriate behavior, Tehri Uttarakhand.

Objectives

- Raise social awareness about combating Stigma.
- Show solidarity, encouragement and support to all healthcare workers and sanitation staff on COVID line of duty
- Create an enabling environment for people with mild symptoms to seek help and go for testing and persons affected with COVID 19.

5. Reporting and Monitoring system

To capture the field level activity and reach out, in discussion with UNICEF, the format was created using ODK. The training was provided to COVID-19 Soochnapreneurs to report the progress of the field activities through ODK. District Coordinators also created a WhatsApp group for that COVID-19 Soochnapreneurs whom they were supporting and monitoring. The activity photos were shared timely by the COVID-19 Soochnapreneurs on the WhatsApp group.

For monitoring and evaluation, a monthly review-cum-planning meeting was organised by the central team for District Coordinators. All the DCs conducted the review-cum planning meeting for their respective CCs.

The central team reported the progress on a fortnightly/ monthly basis to UNICEF.

The Reporting & Monitoring framework supports the implementation of communication and demand generation strategies. Concurrent communications monitoring at state, district, and session site is proposed to be part of the program concurrent monitoring and on-line activity progress tracking via ODK (Open Data Kit)



Krishnaveni, Feb to March 2022, Awareness on CAB Concerning Omicron variant, Community meeting, Viruthunagar , Tamil

Assessment Format & Delivery

The assessment format was developed by UNICEF & DEF to assess the change in knowledge of the audience targeted under Risk Communication & Community Engagement Programme (RCCE). It was systematically designed based on covering all themes i.e., COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviour, COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviour +, COVID-19 Sensitive Nutrition and COVID-19 sensitive Health.

Monitoring of the reach and engagement of the programme was done monthly through the online activity progress tracking, which is through ODK, fortnightly review cum planning meeting, Photos & Videos Folder. The progress update was shared monthly to ensure the timely and effective delivery.

Assessing Impact

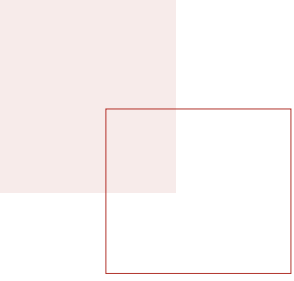
Despite all the challenges faced by the RCCE Centre Coordinators, they were able to spread awareness and make people more sensitive to a great extent. This project didn't just bring an attitudinal change to the beneficiaries but also resulted in a transformation of the RCCE Centre Coordinators.

Kiran Sahu, Village - Raipur

COVID-19 awareness program "Risk communication and community engagement" is being conducted. Under this program, I have done wall writing activities related to Covid-19 at various Chowk intersections of my village. Along with the COVID-19 awareness, i also did extensive public engagement meetings to break the misinformation and myths that have been circulated in the community. Due to this positive information was communicated among the people of the village. The youth of the village has also contributed to this work. In this way, a better environment was created in the village to fight against Covid-19.



Kiran Sahu, July 2022, Awareness on Covid-19 Vaccination, through wall Massaging, Raipur, Chhattisgarh.



Schools, outside the hospital, market, and people around her house got the right information through wall messaging and made people aware. In certain situations, wall paintings were not allowed, then they had to be requested and explained why it was being done. But by doing this work, I was able to make an identity in society and give correct information to the people.

Practical measures have also taken to address and ensure three critical components - Gender, Equity and Sustainability under Risk Communication & Community Engagement Programme:

A. Gender

i. Ensuring women's engagement and lead in program

- The principle of promoting women's leadership is based on the understanding that as participants, community members and staff members- women possess the expertise, skills, knowledge, capacity and will to bring about changes in structures, norms and values. To make informed choices and decisions related to COVID 19 behaviours and the vaccine, the partnership will be:
- Enrolling 50% of women as programme staff and as coordinators/ volunteers.
- Community meetings and door to door visits were also done with a focus to reach out and involve greater number of women/girls. The time of meetings and door to door visits were scheduled according to the availability/ convenience of girls/women to ensure more female participation in these activities.

ii. Building the capacity of the programme staff i.e., the centre coordinators and volunteers to address the gender inequalities

- Through pre-service and in-service training of the programme staff especially male centre coordinators, information was provided, and awareness was generated on how gender inequalities increased vulnerability to COVID 19
- Helping the programme staff especially the male members to observe or examine the knowledge and practices of women in the communities. This helped them to address the issues more effectively.
- Emphasizing that the responsibilities of programme staff especially the male staff in addressing gender inequalities lie primarily in listening, being empathetic and non-judgmental, providing accurate information, and providing appropriate referrals to other resources when necessary.

B. Equity

- i. Promoting equitable, inclusive community engagement i.e., participation of people from minorities, differently abled people and people irrespective of caste and class participated in and executed` the programme activities as staff members, volunteers and community members/target audience. Wherever, if deeper social inequality practices were found, the program design would ensure equitable participation in decision making as well as in implementation.



C. Sustainability

- i. The sustainability aspect was addressed through the engagement of the volunteers from the local community that inculcated a sense of ownership among them to carry forward the activities thereby also ensuring the quality of work during the programme period.
- ii. The existing Community Information Resource Centres (CIRCs) in the target locations also played an essential role in bringing sustainability as they were community driven entities that engaged the community and helped creating a personal bond with the people. These centers helped in expediting the objectives of the program, thereby making collective action possible. CIRCs also acted as access points for democratizing the structure and making the transition of action from macro to micro level.

6. Programme Result

- The program was not only a success in reaching out and engaging with the community, but it also helped in improving the self-esteem and confidence of the District Coordinators, (DCs) and Centre Coordinators (CCs) involved in the program. Not only was the program successful in reaching out and connecting with the community, but it also helped the DCS, and CCs involved in the program learn to rectify the misinformation among the community. Accepting the challenge, completing the work, and staying among the people, brought true information to them.

S.No	CP Output	Target	Achieved
1	Number of People reached on COVID-19 through messaging on prevention and access to services.	52,04,250	53,37,382
2	Number of People engaged on COVID-19 through RCCE actions.	12,99,180	12,99,180

State-wise Result Matrix:

S. No	State	Districts	Performance Indicators	
			Number of People Reached on COVID-19 through messaging on prevention and access to services.	Number of People engaged in COVID-19 through RCCE actions.
1	Assam	6	169652	47992
2	Andhra Pradesh	4	187554	45021
3	Bihar	7	459697	132038
4	Chhattisgarh	2	209290	42290
5	Delhi	2	114142	24276
6	Haryana	1	204663	41329
7	Jharkhand	3	231606	64969
8	Karnataka	1	74504	17472
9	Kerala	6	158033	37254
10	Madhya Pradesh	13	820247	200250
11	Maharashtra	3	131034	24344
12	Odisha	8	239417	69516
13	Rajasthan	4	1118154	258567
14	Tamil Nadu	4	59064	39994
15	Telangana	7	135274	34857
16	Uttar Pradesh	7	297466	104761
17	Uttarakhand	3	191825	39553
18	West Bengal	9	536596	74697
	Total	90	5338218	1299180

7. Changes in life of DC/CC/Communities/Families

Experience Sharing by District & Centre Coordinator

Thirupathi, District coordinator from Andhra Pradesh, Vizag district.

We worked in in the Parawada block of Vizag District, Andhra Pradesh, Thirupathy was working with 14 Centre Coordinators under Risk Communication & Community Engagement Project.

At the time, the community members were not aware of the COVID-19 instructions. So, the Centre Coordinators (CC) visited each household door-to-door, personally meeting with the villagers, and sharing information about COVID-19. They also did the wall messaging in the villages and making announcements through autos and private vehicles. To further ensure that the villagers understood the gravity of the situation, the coordinators held meetings with stakeholders, including the panchayat team, ASHA workers, and youth. Together, they discussed and emphasized the importance of handwashing, mask usage, and social distancing. However, there were challenges along the way. Sometimes, the coordinators were not granted permission to hold meetings or



Thirupathy, District Coordinator, people about Covid 19 Outbreak, Vizag, Andhra Pradesh.

conduct door-to-door visits. But they persisted and explained the crucial nature of the information they were sharing. Through persistence and understanding, they managed to reach most of the communities.

We were happy to be a part of such a meaningful project, and the team worked together to ensure that everything was executed well. They are proud of the positive impact they had on the community, and the knowledge they shared may have helped prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the area.

Poonam Bai, Untwal Block Ramgarh District Alwar Rajasthan,

In the Untwal Block of Ramgarh District, Alwar, Rajasthan, Poonam Bai, a dedicated SoochnaPreneur/Centre Coordinator, faced numerous challenges when the news of COVID-19 first emerged in 2020. False rumors and misinformation had spread throughout the community, leading to fear and reluctance to receive vaccines. Some community members even believed that the pandemic was nothing more than a government conspiracy, resulting in widespread skepticism and refusal to wear masks. They dismissed the severity of the virus and considered it all nonsense. However, with the support of UNICEF, a positive change began to take place. Masks were distributed to the people, and Poonam Bai, along with other youth members, conducted informative meetings within the community. These meetings served as a platform to dispel misconceptions, clarify doubts, and provide accurate information. Additionally, the community meetings proved effective in raising awareness and encouraging people to get vaccinated.

To ensure widespread dissemination of correct information, Announcements, Wall messaging, Information dissemination on WhatsApp groups were utilized as effective outreach communication



Poonam Bai Awareness vaccine booster and misinformation Community meeting. Rajasthan Alwar.

channels. Moreover, the introduction of a chatbot helped reach individuals directly, providing them with accurate information and addressing their concerns. Apart from that Poonam has also reached and engaged with community members through door-to-door visits for the most marginalized members of the community.

This period became an opportunity for people like Poonam Bai to engage in meaningful social service by disseminating correct information and creating awareness. Not only did they contribute to the welfare of their community, but their involvement also brought financial support during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Poonam Bai's journey has been empowered through the support of the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF). Today, she stands as a strong woman with a distinct identity in her community, having made a significant impact by promoting accurate information, dispelling myths, and ensuring the well-being of her fellow community members during the COVID-19 crisis.

BEST PRACTICES- COVID WARRIORS FIGHTING THE DIFFERENT LAYERS OF PANDEMIC

Ms. Sarla & Ms. Neelam, Coordinator from Jaipur have organized a Vaccination camp and with the help of the Local administration, they have managed to provide vaccination to 1800 numbers of Children of age group 15- 18 years, almost 500 women between January to March Out of which many children don't have the mobile numbers or were not able to get the vaccination due to unavailability of the documents and also managed to convince people who didn't had their vaccination dose yet.



Ms. Sarla & Ms. Neelam, Coordinator from Jaipur have organized a Vaccination camp

Earlier people were scared of taking the vaccine, there were rumors of people dying because of the vaccine. As some people started taking the vaccine, they explained to others that the side effects are very mild, it is not something that one has to worry about so much.”

“When I went to do the first survey asking people if they got vaccinated or not, they told me to go away. They said, ‘oh it looks like she wants to get us killed by giving us the vaccine.’ People of my own colony actually started threatening me to say that I am just doing this because I am getting money and I won’t be anywhere to be seen once they die because of the vaccine.”

“People gave me examples of some others they knew who died of the vaccine but when I further questioned how they knew this person they were unable to explain. Once I showed them, they were victims of fake news I then explained to them how important it is to take the vaccine not just to save themselves but also all those around them.”

Swati, a Coordinator from Gadchiroli, Maharashtra

Swati, a Coordinator from Gadchiroli, Maharashtra, creating awareness among Youth on using chatbots as a tool to debunk the misinformation and fake news on COVID-19 Appropriate Behavior.

Fake news, misinformation, and fraud are the biggest challenges of the digital world. With the pandemic everyone has been forced to learn digital tools, however, not everyone has received the training to use digital devices and the internet in a safe manner. This can on some occasions prove to be more dangerous than being unconnected altogether. Identifying and verifying fake news and misinformation is a big ask from someone who hasn’t received training in the field. So, there are thousands of people who are spreading misinformation and fake news unknowingly, often through WhatsApp forwards.



Swati, a Coordinator from Gadchiroli, Maharashtra, creating awareness among Youth on using chatbots as a tool

Sunita Yadav, a Coordinator from Khunti, Jharkhand

One of the Beneficiaries of RCCE Program, Sunita Yadav from Khunti village of Jharkhand, shared her response to the engagement. Her father is a farmer and she is part of a joint family. In her vicinity one of the Centre Coordinators regularly organizes different sessions enumerating measures to avoid Covid-19 with lots of innovative activities. Sunita Yadav and her family members were not fully convinced to get vaccinated but through Centre Coordinator constant effort, she got vaccinated and encouraged her family members to follow the same. She says, “You are contributing to mass wellness by getting vaccinated. Once you are vaccinated your body is much better prepared to shield off viruses by making your immune system stronger”.



Preventing and Addressing the Consequences of Covid-19

8. Key Challenges:

1. Due to the Flood Situation in the Assam Region pace of Field Implementation got slow.
2. For the Announcement Activity, it is difficult to convince Religious Leaders to give support to make the announcement from Temples, Masjids, and Gurdwaras.
3. Identification of Walls for Wall messaging Activity.
 - Difficulty in Wall messaging in Uttarakhand Region due to rain and Assam as most of them are bamboo walls.
 - Coordinators arranged/ hired Autos, Rickshaws, and through speakers and the miking system, they have done announcements in the area.
 - Took Support of Local Authorities., First theme it was a challenge and now it is going smoothly.
 - For Uttarakhand & Assam we have also proposed for Banners and Posters as per the need.

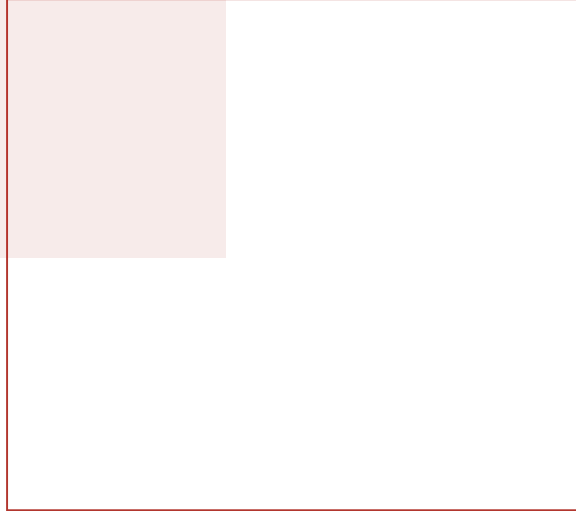
9. Learning's/ Insights

- Due to Themes Flexibility, it was easier to reach the last mile community as per the Field Needs.
- Currently, it takes approximately 25 days to disseminate any program-related information to the community. However, the program team is aware of this and is reflecting on ways to minimize this time frame. The implementation process of the program involves a cascading approach where the central team provides trainings to the district team, which then trains the center coordinators..
- Chatbot numbers can be more popularized through the outreach Activities wall messaging, through Announcements.
- While chatbots provide a direct means of reaching smartphone users, it's worth noting that in rural areas, access to smartphones is predominantly limited to males, whereas women tend to use feature phones. Therefore, it's crucial to explore alternative ways of reaching out to individuals who rely on feature phones, especially women in rural areas.



10. Recommendations

It's highly recommended to continue running similar programs at the grassroots level to enable communities to better prepare for and respond to emerging health threats. Moreover, these programs can help combat the spread of misinformation and rumour's related to such diseases. To achieve this, DEF can leverage the network of trained centre coordinators created through the program to disseminate accurate and timely information. By doing so, DEF can ensure that communities are well-equipped to handle health crises while also addressing the issue of misinformation.



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