

Case Study: **India**

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THE MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT AND UNICEF PARTNER TOGETHER TO BUILD THE CAPACITY OF WASH STAKEHOLDERS DURING COVID-19



■ Background

Access to safe water and sanitation is essential for unlocking economic development and improving the health and education of all. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 6 aims to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030. Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) also contributes to numerous other goals, including those relating to nutrition, health, education, poverty, economic growth, urban services, gender equality, resilience and climate change.¹ India's consistent efforts towards access to safe water and sanitation include the launch of various timebound programmes like Swachh Bharat Mission and Jal Jeevan Mission among others. It is a humongous task to provide safe water and sanitation facilities to the 18 crore households in India located in around 6.63 lakh villages across the 755 districts of 36 states and union territories. India self-declared itself as open-defecation-free (ODF) in 2019 and aims to provide functional household tap connections to every household by 2024. To achieve the targets, set under these programmes, there is a requirement for convergent support across the operational ladder in planning, implementation, capacity building, monitoring, audits, documentation, etc.

The Maharashtra state has been a pioneering state in the water and sanitation sector in India. The Maharashtra state has continuously provided effective solutions and pathways to the nation through its

¹ UNICEF Strategy for WASH (2016-2030)

innovative programmes and approaches (for example the Nirmal Gram Puraskar, Integrated Watershed Development Programme, etc.).

However, recent floods, cyclones, landslides, COVID-19 pandemic, and mission mode engagements (programmes like Jal Jeevan Mission, campaigns), etc., have severely put pressure on the WASH services as well as the stakeholders engaged in it. It was therefore required to enhance and strengthen the knowledge and capacities of these stakeholders for providing effective service delivery.

■ Strategy and implementation

India has several stakeholders engaged in multilayer administrative units. The programmes like Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) have embedded the capacity building, monitoring, and evaluation elements in the national guidelines. These programmes have also made financial and technical provisions for these activities and seek support from UNICEF and various other development partners. The stakeholders engaged in these programmes includes the human resources from the government, non-government and government-appointed support agencies. The Jalsurakshaks, Swachhagrahis², the BRCs, District Water and Sanitation Mission (DWSM) staff, and government officials working at village, block and district level units have been the front runners in these programmes.

In Maharashtra, there are 21,287 Jalsurakshaks, 45,703 Swachhagrahis and 135 district officials that have been engaged in water and sanitation service delivery operations. An additional set of human resources have been engaged for water source identification, certification and strengthening activities by the Groundwater Surveys and Development Agency. The state has also entered partnerships with government departments, development partners (under JJM, SBM, and Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABhy) programmes), government agencies, foundations (like Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK), and Village Social Transformation Foundation (VSTF)) and academia for convergent programme implementation. These stakeholders are providing support in the day-to-day operations of the WASH facilities and services across the state.

With this situation, UNICEF's response was to support the government to strengthen the WASH service delivery through the enhanced capacities of the stakeholders. UNICEF provided capacity building and real-time information dissemination and monitoring support through RapidPro technology, implemented from June 8, 2020, to September 13, 2020, and weekly webinar series (implemented from January 5, 2021, to August 25, 2021) for capacity building on water resource management.

The main objective of these two programmes was to reach out to the stakeholders engaged in WASH service delivery, share information, collect real-time feedback from them and monitor the WASH service delivery using the technology. The government decided to provide WASH facilities without any interruption during the pandemic, floods, cyclones and other natural hazards. To implement the programme, permission was granted by the state to continue their work for the service providers during the pandemic

² Jalsurakshaks and Swachhagrahi are volunteers and motivators of JJM and SBM respectively.

and was provided protocols for safe WASH practices during the pandemic, instructed for effective functioning of the services, and also decided not to stop the capacity building initiatives without fail.

Both the programmes were joint initiatives under the Department of Water Supply and Sanitation and UNICEF and were monitored by the officials and consultants engaged by the respective entities. The following is a summary of the strategies and implementation of the two programmes.

1. RapidPro for Jalsurakshaks, Gramsevak and block and district level officials:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Water Supply and Sanitation, Government of Maharashtra used the RapidPro system with technical support from UNICEF to connect with the field level functionaries and service providers (i.e., Jalsurakshaks and Swachhagrahis), using voice calls. The pilot was implemented for 12 weeks from June 8, 2020 to September 13, 2020. Daily calls were made to more than 55,000 Swachhagrahis and Jalsurakshaks from all villages and district officials in the state. Key activities carried out for running the pilot have been a phone number collection drive, development of 1-12 weeks of thematic WASH survey questions, recording of 12 weeks of survey questions into the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, and repeated campaign to mobilize and create awareness about the RapidPro pilot among participants with support from the government department and dashboard development for weekly calls with analysis of survey questions. During this pilot, stakeholders received information about COVID-19 and WASH (knowledge, practice, and attitude), WASH material (availability, use and demand) and understanding of SBM and JJM.

For Rapid Pro, the selection of the target stakeholders was done in collaboration with WSSO, and the respective 34 *zilla parishads* in the state. The target stakeholder's list was compiled in given formats.

2. Aao Bhujal Jane ("let's know groundwater") Webinar series:

During the COVID-19 restrictions, the government continued with capacity-building initiatives. The government with technical support from UNICEF organized weekly digital webinars on curated/priority groundwater themes/subjects where experts working in the groundwater sector were engaged. The participants of these webinars included officials and personnel working with government, non-government, academia, etc. Key activities carried out for and during the webinar series included deciding the theme of the webinar, identification of suitable experts, developing brochures, inviting the participants for the webinars, documentation of the webinars, press releases and social media releases, etc. In the Aao Bhujal Jane Webinar Series, the participants were invited through the district mechanism where partners were engaged in the webinar series.

Monitoring of these two initiatives was jointly done with the government counterpart Department of Water Supply and Sanitation through the establishment of feedback and reporting mechanisms. This helped the state to take timely actions during the programme implementation.

■ Progress and results

RapidPro

The department has reached out to more than 55,000 registered Swachhagrahis and Jalsurakshaks from all villages in the state. As the department had received real-time data from the field directly, it was essential for the success of the programme. This data was shared with the department to take immediate decisions to improve the programme intervention with its quality. Under this pilot, the questionnaires, recordings and mode of transmission of the information were adapted by seeing the user-friendliness of the stakeholders. The desired information has been transmitted from the state to the field and required inputs about the current situation from the field were received back.

Aao Bhujal Jane

The Aao Bhujal Jane webinar series reached out to 2,355 groundwater sector participants from the state. The participants gained clarity regarding the various issues (including technical, operational, social, health, managerial and various cross-cutting areas), approaches, challenges and emerging challenges in the sector. A total of 79 sector experts were engaged in the webinar and continued to provide input to the department from time to time. They actively participated in 2022 World Water Day in a brainstorming session, which was held at GSDA, Pune wherein they provided inputs and suggestions for the next 25-year strategy for groundwater and groundwater management improvement.

■ Lessons learned and way forward

Both the pilots focused on the implementation of the WASH services and programme activity during the pandemic and floods situations. The programmes connect the state and district units with the villages. The pilots also helped the state to think and widen the perspective beyond routine monitoring and information dissemination activities.

- **RapidPro**
 - The RapidPro system has been proved to be effective as the respondents are informed about its purpose and district teams take a proactive role in alerting the field-level functionaries.
 - User fatigue leads to a lower answering rate as multiple agencies are reaching out to the same group of FLWs. For a similar campaign, a mix of multiple channels, like IVR, WhatsApp calls, or phone calls could potentially be used to achieve increased coverage.

- **Aao Bhujal Jane**
 - High frequency with low doses of capacity-building webinars is more productive than the low-frequency high doses of capacity-building sessions.
 - Follow-up webinars can be conducted for the actions suggested during the webinar

Related links:

- RapidPro- [Concept](#)
- Maharashtra - [RapidPro Dashboard](#)
- [Aao Bhujal Jane Webinar Series Report \(Marathi\)](#)

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