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Addressing Stigma and Discrimination around COVID-19

In the initial phase of the pandemic, stigma and discrimination due to COVID-19 became a common phenomenon. Besides the suspected and confirmed cases and their families, other groups most affected by this were the Frontline Workers (FLWs). Due to the nature of their work, all cadres of healthcare providers, sanitation workers and police had greater chances of being exposed to the virus.

In response, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) by convening key development partners to ensure a comprehensive response through the National Anti-Stigma and Discrimination Campaign. The communication strategy implemented for the campaign aimed at countering stigma and discrimination associated with COVID-19 and to show solidarity and support to all service providers on COVID line of duty. The strategy also aimed to create an enabling environment for people who had contracted COVID-19, to seek help for testing and treatment. The campaign results were achieved with generous contribution and support from USAID.



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On behalf of the development partners, UNICEF coordinated the efforts of various stakeholders at the national level and through its 13 field offices across states. While each state office adapted strategies and interventions to meet the state specific needs and requirements, the four broad pillars under the campaign were:

Advocacy

Capacity Building

Community Engagement

Media and Social
Media Engagement

Development partners that included BMGF, CFAR, CHAI, DASRA, JHPIEGO, NIPI, PCI, PFI, Piramal Swasthya, Tata Trusts, UNDP, UNFPA and WHO supported the MoHFW in developing and adapting key interventions to respond to the behaviour challenges posed by COVID-19 at various stages. Initially, as awareness level about the disease was low and fear was high, the campaign messages were focussed on COVID-19 prevention, dispelling myths and providing information to counter the stigma associated with the virus. As India went through its highest number of cases in September and October 2020, partners focussed on supporting the Jan Andolan campaign launched by the Government of India (GoI) to promote COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviours (CAB). In December, as the vaccine journey started, the campaign focus altered course in providing information about the vaccine while retaining the core messages around anti-stigma and discrimination, and CAB.

Four pillars of strategy and communication approaches were employed to reach and engage 4,382,520 community members in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

The Key Interventions Targeted at Addressing Stigma and Discrimination Supported by UNICEF are highlighted below:



Advocacy and Capacity Building



Implementation of a multi-media **360° campaign** with the development of more than **100 communication** and capacity building materials and products to reinforce advocacy, capacity building and community engagement interventions to address stigma and discrimination at the national and state level.



UNICEF, in partnership with **WHO** and **Sphere India**, hosted a series of nation-wide orientations for **faith leaders under the Interfaith Humanitarian Alliance** in 17 states, and each was attended by more than 30-40 faith leaders.



Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
Government of India

Technical assistance to MoHFW was provided to develop training modules to **orient healthcare functionaries and frontline workers**. The modules, replete with simulations, were adapted for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), youth, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and others. UNICEF, with partner support, oriented and trained 1.4 million health functionaries and built capacities of 813,400 PRIs, 370,680 Self-Help Groups (SHGs), 104 Helpline counsellors across all states and youth network members on anti-stigma and discrimination messages.



Community Engagement

- As part of the community-centered Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) interventions, UNICEF enabled state governments to sustain and scale up interventions around anti-stigma and discrimination, combined with promotion of CAB. **UNICEF's engagement with high-level state officials, faith leaders, well-known celebrities, including Amitabh Bachchan and Sachin Tendulkar**, as well as partnership with various stakeholders such as youth networks, PRIs, SHGs, NGOs, volunteer networks and CSOs, enabled communities to join the social movement to address stigma and discrimination and promote CAB.
- **UNICEF** engaged with **Community Radio Associations and achieved broadcasts on issues of COVID prevention and stigma and discrimination in 25 states in 11 languages, 21 dialects reaching approximately 2.6 million people (65 per cent women)** in remote and tribal areas with around 40 per cent feedback calls from women listeners.
- **UNICEF** implemented an innovative RCCE community engagement partnership with Digital Empowerment Foundation which reached **~3.19 million people and engaged 425,715 people with COVID-19 messaging on prevention and access to services in 71 districts of 16 states**.



Evidence Generation

UNICEF employed an evidence-based approach to target and understand the levels of stigma and discrimination related to COVID-19 among the general population to provide inputs to communication planning. With support from Kantar Public, two rounds of telephone-based surveys were conducted with more than 3,700 respondents in seven states (Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (UP)).

The first wave of results pointed to the need to focus on home returnees, migrants and people in self-quarantine as subjects of discrimination. Based on this, UNICEF and all development partners initiated targeted interventions. The second wave of results showed a significant decline in discriminating attitudes against those recovered from COVID-19 and quarantine completed individuals. However, the findings related to stigma and discrimination against coronavirus workforce were not as encouraging, implying the need for continued focus on stigma and discrimination.



Media Engagement

- UNICEF organized a series of webinars for RJs and Programming Heads of All India Radio and private FM networks to help fight stigma and discrimination around COVID-19, under the aegis of MoHFW in partnership with the Association of Radio Operators for India (AROI). Four webinars were organized in which more than **400 RJs and Programming Heads of All India Radio and private radio networks across the country participated.**
- UNICEF along with NGO partner **Shikhar Organisation for Social Development (SOSD)** engaged faith leaders from underserved communities and created dialogue spaces with Radio staff and senior Urdu media editors through a National Web Conference in September 2020.
- UNICEF supported the GoI in disseminating messages on stigma and discrimination through the development of **caller tunes in Hindi, English and other regional languages.**



Social Media Engagement

UNICEF India highlighted the profiles of diverse **health** and frontline workers, **everyday young individuals** and **volunteers** with the aim of creating positive collective action. UNICEF **shared small, positive and kind actions for audiences to take** for their families and communities, such as neighbourly support for those who have COVID-19 or choosing to post accurate and trusted information. UNICEF also showcased **other actions on the field**, such as the Jeevan Rath mission to support domestic migrant workers in Maharashtra. UNICEF engaged young champions to **co-create content** on why it is important to stand up against stigma and discrimination. To date, the campaign has reached more than 150 million people and engaged more than 1.2 million people.

UNICEF Support to the COVID-19 Jan Andolan Campaign across India

UNICEF field offices supported the state governments in implementing the COVID-19 Jan Andolan campaign. These included:

- UNICEF Bihar worked with Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) and developed a **Communication Action Plan for a Digital Public Health Response on CAB** and oriented all state and district level functionaries in October 2020 to engage them in the campaign
- Worked on a campaign with folk artists called **'Stage on Wheels'** across 30 districts in Odisha
- Street plays** through Song and Drama Division, A/V and print materials were provided along with training to stigma and discrimination teams (mobile units, folk troupes, exhibition teams) in Karnataka
- In Chhattisgarh, UNICEF was a part of the state level core group that was formed for coordination, working with officials from the Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) Dept, Press Information Bureau (PIB), Railway Over Bridge (ROB), Doordarshan (DD), All India Radio (AIR) Prasar Bharati to promote CAB across the state
- In West Bengal, the focus was on five high priority districts where UNICEF supported the **Apanar Mask I Apanar Parichoy: 100 per cent mask usage campaign**, community mobilization through SHGs, faith leaders and youth clubs
- In Jharkhand, support was provided to National Health Mission (NHM) to develop a comprehensive communication strategy engaging all departments for the **"Unlock with Precaution"** strategy

State Campaigns Supported by UNICEF



“SAHYOG SE HI SURAKSHA” campaign was launched to promote CAB as well as to curb stigma and discrimination in **Madhya Pradesh** on 15 August 2020. The campaign was led by DoHFW in close collaboration with **20 departments**



In **Gujarat**, the Hon'ble Chief Minister e-flagged off the state-wide **publicity and awareness campaign on COVID-19: “COVID Vijay Rath”**



In **Rajasthan**, a social media-based campaign, **“Souls of Rajasthan”** was launched identifying local heroes and sharing their powerful stories through media and social media platforms across the state



“Maaske Kavacham”, a state-wide campaign on 100 per cent use of mask was launched in **Andhra Pradesh** in September 2020



State-wide campaign endorsed by the Chief Minister for **“No mask No entry”** in public spaces was supported in **Rajasthan**



“Gratitude and Motivation”- Anti-Stigma and Discrimination campaign was launched in **Andhra Pradesh** and **Telangana** to promote solidarity and compassion to those affected by COVID-19 including the healthcare workforce



“Corona Saghan Samudayin Survey Abhiyan” was initiated by the Health Department to reach each household to create awareness on CAB in **Chhattisgarh**



In **Maharashtra**, the Hon'ble Chief Minister launched the campaign **“Mazhi Kutumh, Mazhi Jababdari/My family, My responsibility”** with a focus on anti-stigma and discrimination and CAB to cover the entire state



UNICEF **Madhya Pradesh** office and Public Relations Society of India (PRSI) joined hands to organize a **National orientation webinar** titled **“Curbing COVID-19 related Stigma and Discrimination- Role of Media and Public Relation Professionals”**

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