



ABHIVYAKTI HULCHAL

April-Sept 2020



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The lockdown period was the most difficult in our existence since we began so many years ago. Working from home assumed a different meaning. Working online was something which we learnt quickly. Of course, the lockdown gradually eased but many things remained. Wearing masks, maintaining social distance, washing hands at a regular interval, and conducting most of our activities through the internet became the new normal! Despite the strict lockdown, we attempted to reach our communities and learn from their Covid experiences. We are happy to share a few glimpses of our varied activities through yet another edition of Hulchal. This time, though it's a six-monthly edition as we were not able to connect with you earlier. We ask for your understanding as times were difficult. Do go through this edition and hopefully it will provide you with an opportunity to dialogue with us. Needless to add we look forward to your views.



Hulchal Activity

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The first few months of the lockdown was about trying to reach our varied constituency members. We had a good field-level contact and from them we learnt that the main issues in the initial days of April/May was about the severe food crisis faced by many rural communities. The other major issue was the lack of information available to them about COVID and the immense flow of misinformation and false news that reached them causing confusion and anxiety leading to resorting to unnecessary rituals. Some communities even assumed that the Corona was incarnation of a devil! You can imagine what that might have caused in the minds of the people. We decided to address a few of such issues on urgent basis.

Making sense of the crisis



Food security

The major crisis which needed immediate attention was the severe food crisis experienced by many families. Most of them had no ration cards, were migrant workers, single women or the landless. Seeing the severity of the crisis, we decided to take swift action. We collected the list of such families and sent the list to the district officials urging them to release ration on immediate basis. We also reached out to **'Right to food Committee'** and based on their suggestions took follow up actions to ensure that immediate relief reached the neediest.

We also raised our own resources and made it available to families in villages near Nashik. Our timely action and coordination with the government agencies led to distribution of ration to the needy families in North Maharashtra region.





In the wake of lack of information about Corona, we decided to work on a media campaign that will try to provide information of the Corona virus and how to take precautions. We made series of posters addressing the issue of hygiene, social distancing, isolation and prevention, and combating stigma. The posters were based on the series developed by WHO. We translated the messages into Marathi and made the posters based on the above themes. We release the set of posters in the villages where we work and shared it with our partners. A video film on the same subject was also made and disseminated. Our field contacts were responsible to distribute the media to others in the villages where we work..



Media campaign



In collaboration with ASPBAE we also conducted a research on the impact of COVID on the girls lives in the villages. Shodhini (Community Researchers) collected data from three villages situated in the Trimbakeshwar block from twenty girls each. The findings of the research clearly indicated the impact of COVID on girls health, education, mental makeup, loss of livelihood and financial situation.

Many girls expressed fear and said that the workload on them in doing household chores has increased considerably in absence of attending school. They also expressed that the chances of getting married are very high.

Action Research on COVID



The research by the Shodhini also highlighted the reality of online education which has become very popular in the urban areas. According to the findings, online education is not accessible to girls as only 20% of them have smartphones. If schools remain closed and online education continues to be the norm, 33% of girls said that they are then likely to drop out of education. Girls studying skills development course are suffering due to this big gap and which is ultimately shrinking the livelihood opportunities they can get in the future.



Situation of Online education





The effect of COVID on our activities particularly facilitating training workshops was serious. Many of our planned workshops had to be cancelled. It took us time to organise online workshops given the Covid context. We conducted the following online workshops mainly for the youth and our field contact in the rural areas of North Maharashtra.

- a) Online session on how to use Zoom Application and basics of Computer with the rural youth on 18th and 20th May 2020
- b) Online Zoom meeting with Madhyam Sakhi about PDS concerns on 18th May 2020
- c) Orientation for the first-year students of design of MET and CANS college of Architecture and Design. Total of five sessions of three hours each was organised for the students on understanding their self and others.



Online Workshops



We organised several online sessions on different themes. A couple of them were on PRI and PDS system addressed to the needs of the rural communities. Datta Gurav from RSCD was the speaker on PRI functioning, Gorakh Adhav of 'Ration Kriti Samiti' delved on the PDS and how to understand its functioning to enhance its availability. Both the webinars were well attended largely by the rural populace who also raised number of questions on their lived experiences. We were also part of online sessions organised by other Institutions. We facilitated sessions for youth on relationships, for parents on communication and parenting, and for social groups and individuals on home-based learning, education and other important aspects of self-directed learning.

Online sessions



The world we inhabit was already complex which COVID accentuated further. But how we understand it and deal with its ever-changing context is many times based on simple assessment. To understand what complexity is and what are its challenges, a few online courses were organised by '10 in 10' organisation. 10 in 10 is a new type of organisation; a cross between a foundation, a marketplace and a university. It has been designed because of two decades of disciplined practice tackling complex challenges. Abhivyakti member participated as one of its coach in the two online courses offered in the month of May and August. The course offered understanding of what complexity is and how do we deal with its challenges by looking at strategies, prototyping and peer learning processes. It was well attended by an international audience who worked on reducing one tonne of carbon emission.



Understanding Complexity

An abstract background featuring a dark, textured surface with a prominent, bright red and orange comet-like streak streaking across the upper portion. The lower portion of the image is a solid, vibrant cyan color.

Understanding Complexity

Brave hearts wanted for most hazardous journey. Self-doubt. Angst. Hard work. No benefits. Mortal danger. Good karma all but certain upon inglorious death.

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Many villagers have lot of issues regarding ration cards. Many don't have one and struggle to provide basic documentation. Working on such issues is a challenge which we have decided to tackle. Dahegoan village situated in Dindori taluka has a responsive 'Sarpanch' who decided to solve the ration card issues of the villagers who were new and who were not getting their quota of ration. Through an online dialogue, Abhivyakti team was able to get the concerned Ration officer in direct communication with the Sarpanch. The officer listened to the issues presented by Kavita tai (Sarpanch) and invited her to the Tahsildar office in Dindori to understand the issues better. Gradually, we will take up such cases in other villages as well.

Addressing Ration Situation



The impact of COVID on the mental health of people is now emerging and needs to be a priority. Sitting at home in isolation, the risk of losing livelihoods, uncertain future and inability to understand the mental struggle and share it with others is taking a heavy toll on individual as well as collective functioning. Number of cases of acute anxiety, depression, loneliness, confusion, guilt and helplessness is on the rise across different age groups. It is affecting the elderly, the young, the students, professionals and many more. Many suffer in silence as mental disorder is not seen kindly.

Addressing mental health



Lack of support services and access compound the matter further. At institutional level, in families and in communities there is very little understanding of the problem and providing care and support is singularly lacking. In fact, most times emotional upheaval is not shared in the open and even if it is then it is dismissed or nor attended with care and understanding. The need to create awareness of mental health and for institutionalising proper services cannot be overemphasised enough.

Addressing mental health



I-Card is a public initiative which collaborated with Abhivyakti during the month of June and July on collecting information in a few villages.

I-Card is a public dashboard to monitor the situation of vulnerable groups in the current situation (India - Covid Assessment and Response Dashboard, I-CARD). This initiative, in collaboration with multiple Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), presents fortnightly data on the Covid-19 humanitarian crisis for vulnerable groups across multiple geographies.

The data enable comparisons across geographies and humanitarian issues to support CSOs, government agencies, media and funders for crafting response strategies. A few villages based in North Maharashtra were chosen. Our field contacts and a few Shodhinis helped in sharing data from their villages.

Collaboration with I-Card





Our work with the rural girls has opened windows to a world of violence experienced by them in silence. In most cases the violence is seen as 'normal' and so the practice continues. A slap by an elder either in the family or in a school is seen as part of an act that is imparted to 'correct' behaviour. It is common for girls and young women to experience such 'behaviour correcting' measures. Add this to other kinds of violence – abuses, insults, molestation, teasing and inappropriate touch is part of the experiences a rural girl grows up with. She also knows that reporting such incidence is futile and, in many instances, have led to curtailment of mobility or forced marriage. Many girls face extreme indictment instead of getting support and care. It goes without saying that the perpetrator goes unnoticed and is emboldened further as no action is ever taken to stop such behaviour!

What do you think? Do you have any experiences of ending such common but harmful practices ? Do share.

Lets learn from each other.



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