

# Swachhagrahis ensuring COVID appropriate behaviours in rural Madhya Pradesh



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Sanitation foot soldiers (Swachhagrahis) are once again geared up for ensuring COVID appropriate behaviour in Rural Madhya Pradesh

"We all are together in the fight against COVID-19!"; this fits appropriately with the *Swachh Bharat Mission-Rural* arm (India's flagship programme on Sanitation) of Panchayat & Rural Development, Madhya Pradesh.

In 2020, a pool of 23,000 Swachhagrahis (front line sanitation mobilizers) engaged under this Rural Sanitation programme reached out to every corner of the state to enable COVID-19 risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) and infection prevention and control (IPC) in rural communities. The Swachhagrahis promoted appropriate behaviour to tackle COVID-19 among the rural households, such as frequent handwashing with soap, maintaining social distance, wearing a mask, proper use of a toilet, and managing water collection. Over 23000 Swachhagrahis and frontline worker reached 12.3 million people in communities to

promote and monitor COVID Appropriate Behaviour (CAB) in over 50000 villages of the State. In addition, the SBM mobilized additional resources to set up over 13,500 COVID sensitive handwashing services in communities and institutions to help people access safe behaviour of handwashing with soap in public places.

In 2021, the rules of the game have not changed, but the magnitude has. While India battles the second wave of COVID-19 with a massive caseload coming in, the need for such outreach initiatives looks more obligated. Panchayat & Rural Development quickly mobilised SBM support in time and along with its sector partners National Health Mission (NHM) and UNICEF on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021, and together organized a one day workshop for 354 district & block-level functionaries and Swachhagrahis. The training addressed COVID-19 appropriate behaviours (CAB) and response preparedness, clarification on myths & misconceptions of vaccination, Home-Isolation protocols and Liquid Waste Management (LWM). The department also used the opportunity to unleash its outreach strategy to rural areas. The training also focused on the technical aspects of liquid waste management under SBM and dovetailing funds from 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission and other rural development schemes such as MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Scheme) and Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).

In light of the COVID situation and lockdown, the training was held virtually using Zoom online platform and YouTube Live and was attended by more than 12,000 participants from targeted sections of SBM. National Health Mission and UNICEF Health team disseminated information analogous to the need to vaccinate and demystified myths commonly prevailed in the society.

State Programme Officer of Swachh Bharat Mission Nidhi Nivedita, IAS, emphasised the critical role played by Swachhagrahis in reaching the community to achieve goals set under the mission. She illustrated the approach matrix to community engagement under this initiative and common health goals set under NHM and SBM. Vaccination, the first line of prevention, is crucial to a healthier society at this pandemic stage, as she explains.

UNICEF contribution from the WASH Specialist , WASH Officer and Chief of Field Office included: i) technical support for the co facilitation of the workshop where the WASH Team specified key COVID preventive hygiene behaviours and protocols for home isolation, ii) Development of training materials and monitoring package for the initiative iii) Reiteration of Key messages Including: - the importance of a) consistent practice of COVID19 preventive behaviours (CAB including adhering to lockdown protocols at the individual level). b) the need for additional support to communities for dissemination of correct information on the COVID 19 Vaccination initiative. c) prioritizing home-based care for the asymptomatic patients ( currently forming 80-90% of the total caseload) as this would allow the healthcare system to effectively function.

**Generous Swachgrahi visits neighbours every day to teach about masks, hand washing and social distancing**



**AARTI NINMA**

**Let's show our respect for our #CoronaWarriors**



Let's show our respect for our #CoronaWarriors



Ms. Nidhi Nivedita, SPO, SBM-G emphasizing the key role of Swachhagrahi in promoting CAB in rural areas



Margaret Gwada, CFO and UNICEF team members highlighting key steps for prevention and containment of COVID19

To ensure continued safe learning, UNICEF advocated for the sector to put in place adequate COVID 19 protocols to ensure a COVID Free learning environment when Schools and Anganwadi Centres re-open. The team advocated for optimal utilization of funds available under SBM to leverage towards the common goal to promote personal hygiene and safety gears (mask, soap and sanitizer) for front line workers against COVID-19 and the setting up community handwashing units and mobilization campaigns. Maintaining a clean and healthy environment requires robust waste management systems in Rural Areas: Deputy Commissioner SBM Ajit Tiwari disseminated the importance of Liquid Waste Management (LWM) and "Catch The Rain", a water conservation initiative by the Government of India As part of comprehensive resources for participants, organizers provided COVID-19 resource materials packaged in a google drive.

The key outcome of the training is to mobilise communities in rural areas in all 52000 villages of Madhya Pradesh with the help of Swachhagrahis for the next three months, to focus on practicing COVID-19 infection prevention and control (IPC) measures and COVID19 appropriate behaviour (CAB). Department seeks to monitor this by deploying a three-layered self-reporting monitoring system. One each at district and block for cumulative reporting and to adjust guiding principles - (should this be there? on the key activities and outcomes accomplished. UNICEF remains committed to supporting SBM in implementing innovative and sustainable initiatives that contribute to the realization of the rights of children and women in the State.