**A Chatbot for FLWs on WhatsApp (WA) under Samvad Project**

**THE NEED:**
Due to Covid-19, on-ground video disseminations had come to a pause and we had to quickly think of new ways of reaching out to the community, when they needed our advisories the most.

Based on a survey conducted under the Samvad project, we found that 66% community members have android phones, 10% have a Jio/Reliance phone with WA facility and 10% are carrying feature phones or had access to at least one family phone. On enquiring further into their usage of the phone, we found that WhatsApp was the most used application by them. This is when we thought of leveraging the WhatsApp channel for disseminating community videos developed under Samvad project through our extension workers to reach to our community with health and nutrition messaging. We realized that dissemination of these community videos could be automated by using a Chabot because the manual process of dissemination was tedious, time consuming and prone to human error.

**THE PROCESS OF CHATBOT DEVELOPMENT:**
State program teams re-purposed the full length Samvad videos to shorter versions which could be shared over WhatsApp by extension workers either by forming a WhatsApp group with the beneficiaries, or sharing with the beneficiaries individually or showing the videos to them using their own phones during their door-to-door visits.

A content calendar was prepared in line with the program plan to share these videos as was our approach earlier with in-person disseminations. Next, thinking of the scale that we had to reach and further building engagement virtually with the community, we started exploring automated digital solutions to help us achieve this. This is when we thought of piloting the solution with WhatsApp Chabot.

Before investing resources into building the actual Chabot system, we thought of testing the workflow manually. Our preferred approach was to have the extension workers share videos by forming WhatsApp groups with the community, similar to the in-person video disseminations. We planned trainings for extension workers creating WhatsApp groups, managing them and having meaningful conversations on this platform. The dissemination workflow was structured into 3 parts.

- The first part was a pre-intervention assessment to learn the understanding of the Sahiyas with respect to the WhatsApp platform. This assessment comprised 4 multiple choice questions.
  - Do you know how to create a WhatsApp group?
  - If you wish to add people to your WhatsApp group, do you need to save their phone number in your address book first?
  - Is it possible to send a video using WhatsApp?
  - Is it possible to record a message and send on WhatsApp or you can send a message only by sending text?
The second part of the process focused on sharing training videos on WhatsApp—group-creation and management of groups and establishing group rules. A set of 5 videos were prepared for this purpose. Each of these 5 videos were shared with the FLWs every morning for the next 5 days.

The third part of this process was a post-intervention assessment to check the effectiveness of these training videos. After sharing these training videos, a multiple choice question related to the content shown in the training video was asked on the same day in the evening.

**Manual Testing Phase:**
The manual test of the workflow was carried out with 8 Sahiyas (ASHA workers in Jharkhand) using a WhatsApp business account and by templatizing the conversations. At the end of the 2 weeks long pilot, we found that 6 Sahiyas had completed the course. The feedback on their experience in this pilot suggested that their overall experience of interacting with the content over WhatsApp was useful and they were able to recall the content. We found that 2 of them had even created WhatsApp groups after the training. This led the team to test the solution with an additional 100 Sahiyas of Ormanjhi block using an automated WhatsApp Chatbot platform.

**Final Roll-out:**
The solution was developed using the Haptik platform and the Chatbot went live in the last week of September 2020 with 121 Sahiyas. Of them, 95 were on WhatsApp.

The first step was to get the consent from the Sahiyas to engage with us on this automated WhatsApp platform. We tested different modes to get consent from them. We split them into different groups including SMS, WhatsApp group and WhatsApp 1:1 chat. We found that the WhatsApp group was the channel that gave us the maximum conversions and hence we decided to reach out to all the other Sahiyas by forming WhatsApp groups to get their consent to participate in the pilot.

In the process we also found that the presence and involvement of the Sahiya Supervisors in the WhatsApp group played an important role in getting the Sahiyas to give their consent. So we created WhatsApp groups specific to the area of the BTT (supervisor) and included her/him in the group. We shared text and audio messages recorded in the voice of the supervisor and posted them in the group along with testimonials of Sahiyas who were already interacting with the Chatbot. These were helpful in motivating other Sahiyas to engage with the platform. We also created and shared short, one-minute demo-videos of the training in the group to give Sahiyas an idea of what they should expect, if they interact with the system.

**How it works:**
Once the users were on-boarded on the Chatbot, they were sent a pre-assessment quiz comprising 5 multiple choice questions related to the use of WhatsApp. After the quiz, we shared with them 5 videos designed to train them on topics such as how to create and manage WhatsApp groups. One such video was shared each day. Each video was followed by a knowledge recall question from the content shown in the video shared with the user on the same day to assess the knowledge gained. This process flow helped us measure the effectiveness of the videos.
RESULTS:

- Of the 95 Sahiyas, 40% gave their consent and 30% (of those who gave their consent) completed the training. 47% (of those who gave their consent) were unable to complete the training.
- Feedback calls were made to the Sahiyas (who completed the course) at the end of the pilot and we found that those who completed the training were self-driven and eager to learn new things. They felt that knowing about health practices was their duty which motivated them to complete the course.
- Sahiyas who participated in the pilot found that the content and the instructions were easy to understand and follow.
- In contrast Sahiyas who partially completed or did not go beyond the consent stage of the training, were seen to be less eager to learn in this new way. They had other priorities which made them focus less on this learning activity.
- We also found that Sahiyas who did not move beyond the consent stage, who dependent of the use of family phone. Those who move beyond this stage and completed the course were having their own smartphone.

CHALLENGES:

- Onboarding users to the Chatbot was found to be a big challenge. It was found that sending the bot link over WhatsApp chat for onboarding was not effective as it did not convert into registration of the bot. However, we sharing it on WhatsApp Group resulted in higher rate of conversion, probably because it helped discussion on the bot.
- Tracking the viewership of videos is a challenge because there was not tech-based solution to do that.
- Due to unstable network connectivity, sharing of YouTube links of the videos was not possible and hence tracking the duration to which users watched the video could not be done.
- Participants did not respond much by typing as they find it difficult to write.

LEARNINGS:

- WhatsApp Chatbot can be used as a successful channel for carrying out short refresher trainings of extension workers.
- Once the Chatbot is designed, scaling up the solution seems to be simpler, quicker and easier.
- Since it's a technology driven solution, usage data is available at run-time and hence reflections on program and mid-course corrections can be quickly done.
- SMS as a means to support onboarding users on Chatbot was not found effective. We learned that users generally do not read SMS.
- Getting support from the block officials led to improve onboarding of the participants.
- Sending reminders on messages which needed a response from the user worked. It helped to get more responses.
- Asking for too many inputs at the beginning of the Chatbot interaction was not found helpful to improve engagement.
• Users wanted to receive information from a trusted source hence it was important to share the identity at the beginning of the conversation where were they receiving the messages from.

HOW CAN WE SCALE:
To scale up Chatbot intervention, it is important to share the findings with the partner and build a strong case such that the partner gets convinced to adopt the solution. In the current situation in-person interactions have been reduced and adoption of technology for communication and data exchange by the community has increased. It would be strategic to reach out to the partners and promote digital platforms to reach to the community and engage FLW in learning and skill building.

➢ Document the experience
➢ Share the experience with the partner by clearly demonstrating the merits
➢ Engage the donors to support the work around proof of concept
➢ Share evidence and handhold in replication and scale.

RECOMMENDATION:
The qualitative feedback received such as videos are easy to understand, ease to access and directly related to their area of work which is encouraging. The solution seems promising and therefore it is recommended that it should be further replicated with a bigger sample size with active involvement of the supervisory cadre. This could help generate knowledge and experience necessary to influence the partners to use this solution for imparting short trainings and in information dissemination. This also seems to be a convenient and a non-intrusive way of reaching out to the community as well.

Going forward, one the important questions that should be explored include measuring the effectives of the bot from the perspectives of users and providers to make it more useful for them.