WhatsApp based dissemination of videos under Project Samvad

INTERVENTION AT A GLANCE

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the need for adopting alternative approaches for social and behavior change. Under Project Samvad, Digital Green demonstrated how the WhatsApp platform can be used for sharing information on the key issues related to maternal and child health. For that existing videos on the first 1000 days period were repurposed. Some new videos were also developed for training FLWs on operating WhatsApp based dissemination. This approach has been implemented in 25 districts across 5 states.

Digital Green teams, across five states, followed several steps in institutionalizing the process of WhatsApp based dissemination through engaging the partners, both government and non-government. The approach helped in addressing some of the challenges in generating awareness that emerged due to restrictions imposed during the pandemic.

First, virtual training of FLWs, using video messages, imparted new knowledge and skills related to operating WhatsApp.

Second, it enhanced their ability to counsel the target beneficiaries.

Besides, these videos are available to the FLWs and beneficiaries always, so they can access them as and when the need arises. It was shared with other districts outside the project area. Notwithstanding these benefits, some problems remain to be resolved. One of them is ensuring that these videos reached the beneficiaries and the second is to track how many of them watched these videos.

OUTLINE OF THIS DOCUMENT:

This document captures the process of WhatsApp based dissemination of videos promoted under the Samvad project. It aims to inform the readers about the steps adopted, the challenges faced and the insights gained in course of the process. Further, the document can be useful for other organizations and development practitioners planning a similar intervention. This document is divided into three sections. The first section presents a background and rationale for the project Samvad, especially focusing on WhatsApp based dissemination. The second section describes the process adopted for this intervention. This section is further sub-divided into three stages – planning, execution and monitoring. The next section discusses the key challenges and the final section delineates the way forward.
BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE INTERVENTION

Project Samvad, funded by USAID –India and implemented by Digital Green, commenced in September 2015 and completes in September 2021. In these six years, the project aimed to enhance the knowledge and behaviors related to two key aspects of maternal and child health (MCH) –
(i) the first 1000 days and
(ii) modern contraceptives.
Another objective was to build capacities of partner organizations to institutionalize video-based Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC).

Dovetailing these three objectives, context-specific video messages were developed that responded to the MCH related needs of the women in the reproductive age group and their families. These videos were screened in the community, by the frontline workers of the selected government departments and other non-government partners, using pocket-size Pico projectors. Samvad project is implemented in six states – Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Uttarakhand, and Assam.
Since March 2019, due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the pico-projector (human-mediated face to face dissemination) based dissemination was stalled. Hence, it was necessary to leverage other platforms for awareness generation. The DG teams at the national and state level decided to repurpose the original videos to meet the requirements of the WhatsApp platform because, with the penetration of smartphones, WhatsApp had become quite a popular mode of sharing information, even in the rural areas (DEF, 2018).

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS

PLANNING

The process of sharing videos through the WhatsApp platform was first adopted by the DG team in Bihar two years ago. The idea was to reinforce the health and nutrition messages imparted through the pico-based dissemination. During COVID-19, the DG team in five focus states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand, used the same approach in select project sites. This was followed by a discussion with the different government departments who were partners in the SAMVAD project in each of the states. In four out of five states, namely Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand, the government departments were open to this idea but in Odisha, it was decided to engage the non-government partner to disseminate Samvad videos.

Currently, 16 videos have been repurposed for WhatsApp based dissemination. These can be divided into three categories, based on their content – pregnancy care, childcare, and general health (Fig 1). The DG staff sent one video per week to the Frontline Workers (FLWs). The tentative schedule of the videos was prepared by the DG state-level teams in consultation with the partners.

In the states where a government agency was the partner, formal approval of these videos were also sought before sharing them. Sometimes, the schedule is altered based on the demand expressed by the government officials.

**Fig 1: Themes covered in WhatsApp based dissemination**

- **Pregnancy Care**
  - Importance of First 1000 Days
  - What happens at Ante- Natal Care (ANC)?
  - Importance of 4+ ANC
  - Garbhawastha ke dauraan Iron ki goli ka mahatwa
  - IFA supplement
  - Dietary diversity during pregnancy
  - Maternal nutrition

- **Child Care**
  - Early and exclusive breastfeeding
  - Complementary feeding
  - Age-Specific Complementary Feeding NHM
  - Basket of Choices
  - Family Planning (Humsafar)
  - Family Planning (Khushhali)

- **Other topics**
  - ORS in diarrhoea management
  - WASH
  - Formation of WhatsApp groups and sharing videos
  - Role of FLWs during COVID-19
  - Dos and Don’ts during COVID-19

**EXECUTION**

The execution was divided into a cascade of steps (Fig 2). Once the repurposed videos were created, the first step was to ensure that these reached the FLW. There were two types of approaches adopted by the state – direct and indirect. In the majority of the states, both these approaches were being followed simultaneously, depending on the field situation and after consultation with the partner organizations.

In the direct approach, the DG staff created groups of FLWs working in the selected project locations. For this, the DG team in the state first briefed (telephonically) the supervisors of the FLWs about the process of WhatsApp based dissemination of videos and also conveyed that they were expected to share the same with the community, especially with target beneficiaries.
Next, the team collected the telephone numbers of the FLWs under each supervisor and formed their WhatsApp groups. The first two videos shared in these groups – (i) role of FLWs in COVID-19 and (ii) do’s and don’ts for FLWs during COVID-19, were primarily to build the capacities of FLW in using a virtual platform. There were some follow-up questions along with these videos to capture the understanding of the FLWs. The responses to these were in the form of typed messages or in some cases the FLWs wrote the answers on a paper and shared a photograph of that, through WhatsApp. To ensure that the videos have reached all FLWs, the DG team also telephonically contacted those who had not responded to the follow-up questions. In Jharkhand, another platform, Chatbot, was also used on a small scale to train the FLWs in moderating WhatsApp groups (Box 1). Once this process was over, the DG staff started sharing the repurposed videos in these groups.

For the indirect approach, the DG staff networked with the implementing partners to get entry into the pre-existing WhatsApp groups of block-level supervisors of the frontline functionaries.

Once included in those groups, the project staff explained the purpose of the WhatsApp dissemination process and also shared some preliminary videos regarding the same. Through that, they informed the group members about the organization (DG) and also tried to generate interest among them about WhatsApp based dissemination. Later, the repurposed videos were also shared in those groups.

**Fig 2: Approaches for WhatsApp based dissemination**

**Box 1: Chatbot based approach**

This approach was adopted to automate the transfer of the videos to the community and the FLWs using a bot. An experiment was conducted in one of the project states in which five video of 30-40 secs each on different features of WhatsApp were created and shared in the groups. A manual testing was done to assess the improvement in the capacity of the FLWs. The results of this experiment were very encouraging.
The next step was the circulation of these videos to the target population. For that, the FLWs created WhatsApp groups of the target beneficiaries and then posted the videos on the group. In some cases, the FLWs were also instructed by their supervisors to use their phones to directly show the videos to these beneficiaries when they conducted home-visits. As of date, 283866 beneficiaries across five states have been reached through this alternative platform (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of states</th>
<th>No. of districts</th>
<th>No. of community viewerships for videos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regular Savmad videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
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<td>17103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>195797</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MONITORING**

Currently, the project is being monitored using two indicators – message sent and message read. The data for these two indicators are collected at two levels. First, the DG staff at the state level maintains a log of the numbers of block-level staff who received the video messages. They also track the number of blue ticks to understand how many of the members have, at least, seen the message. They also request the block-level cadres to share similar information related to the FLWs with whom the videos have been shared. Second, the DG teams also motivate the FLWs to maintain and share the list of beneficiaries with whom they have shared the videos, and out of them how many have seen the videos.

While the first step is being done diligently, there are many difficulties in gathering data related to the beneficiaries reached. To resolve this problem, the DG staff as well as that of the partner organization contact a sample number of FLWs to get the information regarding the number of women with whom the videos have been shared. Further, to examine the quality and...
the reach of the WhatsApp videos, a quality assurance telephonic survey was conducted in October 2020 with 224 FLWs and 299 across five states. While 80% of mediators and 53% of community members reported that they had received the videos through WhatsApp, 79% (N=224) and 49.5% (N=299) respectively had watched those. However, there was variation across the states in the percentage of respondents who had seen these videos (Graph 1 and 2).

Going forward it would make better sense if the statistics of the messages sent, the messages delivered and the messages read are available to assess the effectiveness of the content delivery under the program. This is primarily because the message sent alone is not a good proxy of the message read.

The project tried to address this problem by introducing follow-up questions and also telephonically contacted sample beneficiaries from the groups to understand if they have understood the topic and also clarify their doubts.

### ADVANTAGES
- Videos have been used in all districts of the state.
- Imparted new knowledge related to WhatsApp among FLWs and also enhanced their skills to counsel.
- Information reached many women who would have otherwise remained underserved.
- Assisted the FLWs in counseling

### KEY CHALLENGES
- Viewership was low due to lack of information or difficulty in watching due to some problems with phones.
- Difficulty to track the viewers and also assess their understanding.
- In this mode of communication, the scope for discussion was limited.

### WAY FORWARD
The experience from Project Samvad demonstrated that using WhatsApp based dissemination has been able to elicit many benefits across different categories of stakeholders. Keeping in mind the above-mentioned merits, it is important that the project first focuses on measures that will help in improving viewership. The starting point could be to take stock of the factors that impede the watching of videos and address those that are within the remit of the project. There is also a need for a technology-based solution to assess the reach of the intervention until the beneficiary level. The next challenge, translating the video messages into practice. It is believed that such digital platforms will definitely complement the human-mediated SBCC conducted by the FLWs.