

BACK TO HOME BACK TO SCHOOL

**Navi Umeed: A documentation of the 2021
Maharashtra Deluge and its Response**

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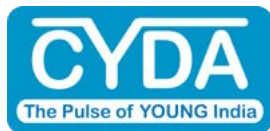
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We thank the **District Collectors, CEOs of the Zilla Parishads, the District and Block Administrations, and the District Disaster Management Officers** of the Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur, Ratnagiri, and Raigad districts for providing endless support throughout the response.

We thank the **developmental partners and the local NGOs** for facilitating essential communication with the **District Officials** and **stakeholders** for readiness in the response and relief efforts. We also thank them for their valuable inputs that have enhanced the quality of the stories told.

We also thank all the **individuals, communities, organizations, agencies, and all who worked together as one** to mitigate the effects of this deluge. Your stories of compassion, solidarity, hope, and humanity will resonate across the world.

UNICEF Maharashtra Field Office
26th January 2022

GLOSSARY

ANC: antenatal care

ASHAs: accredited social health activists

AWWs: anganwadi workers

BDO: block development officer

CACR: Citizens Association for Child Rights

CBO: community-based organization

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CSO: civil society organization

CYDA: Centre for Youth Development and Activities

DRR: disaster risk reduction

GSM: grams per square metre

HDKs / H&D kits: hygiene and dignity kits

IMD: Indian Meteorological Department

JRNA: Joint Rapid Needs Assessment

MHA: Ministry of Home Affairs

MoD: Ministry of Defence

NaDCC Tablets: chlorine tablets

NFIs: non-food item kits

NDRF: National Disaster Response Force

NGO: non-governmental organization

ORS: oral rehydration solution

PMNRF: Prime Minister's National Relief Fund

PRIs: Panchayati Raj Institutions

PSS: psychosocial support

SDRF: State Disaster Response Fund

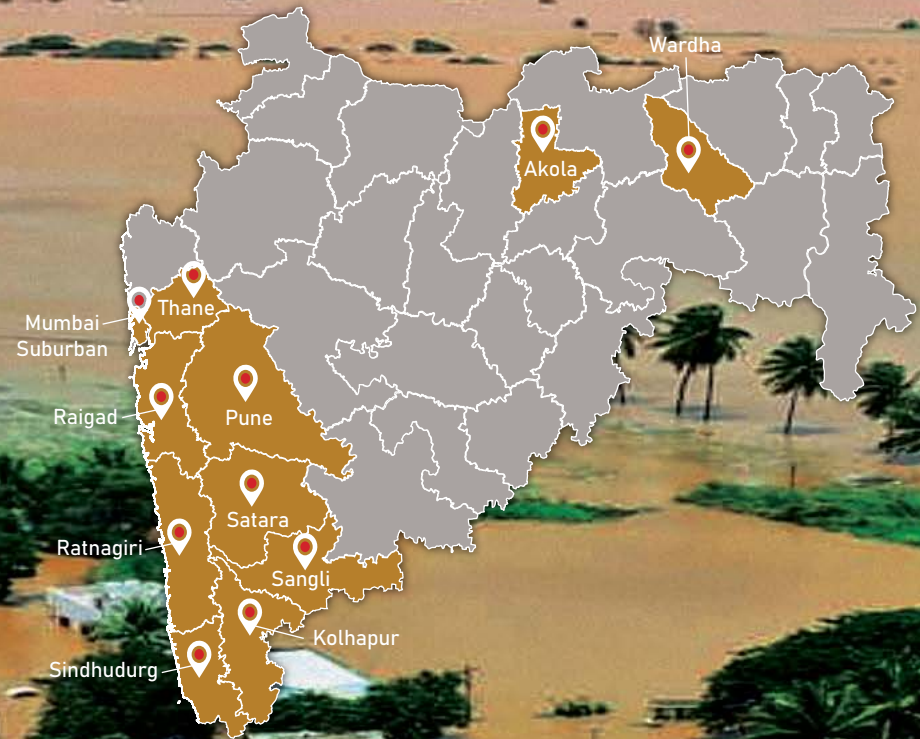
UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

WASH: water, sanitation and hygiene

WatSan: water and sanitation

YCSSW: Yashwantrao Chavan School of Social Work

CHAPTER 1 TROUBLED WATERS

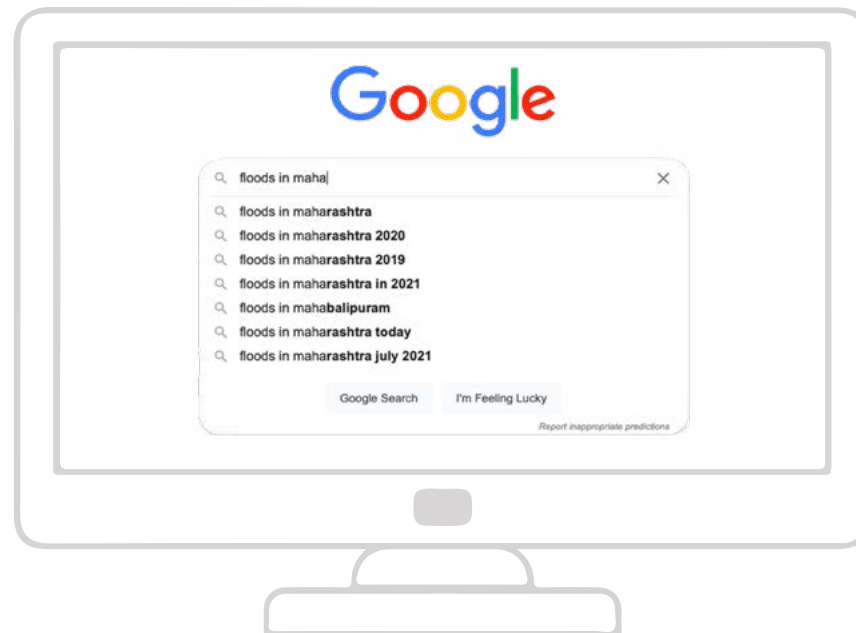




Maharashtra is a multi-hazard prone state, with floods being one of the most frequent disasters.

Causation includes both natural factors and human interventions. In 2021, floods and landslides claimed several lives and caused heavy damages to property in 11 districts of the state. As a response, a multi-sectoral Joint Rapid Need Assessment (JRNA) was conducted within 96 hours to identify the needs of the affected communities. The findings formed the base to launch the Back to Home, Back to School campaign, which aimed at providing immediate response and relief to the most impacted communities, children, and helping them with their basic needs till they were able to return to some amount of normalcy in their lives.

A simple Google search about floods in Maharashtra reveals that the state has been ravaged by calamity for three years in a row.



Floods destroy and damage houses, critical infrastructure, livestock, crops and food stocks. They strip farmlands, wash away houses, schools, anganwadis, health facilities, water and sanitation infrastructure and irrigation systems, and either erode large areas of cultivable land, or make them unusable. In addition, the past two years have been particularly difficult on account of the COVID-19 pandemic with Maharashtra as one of the worst affected states in the country.

Multiple disasters, multiple vulnerabilities

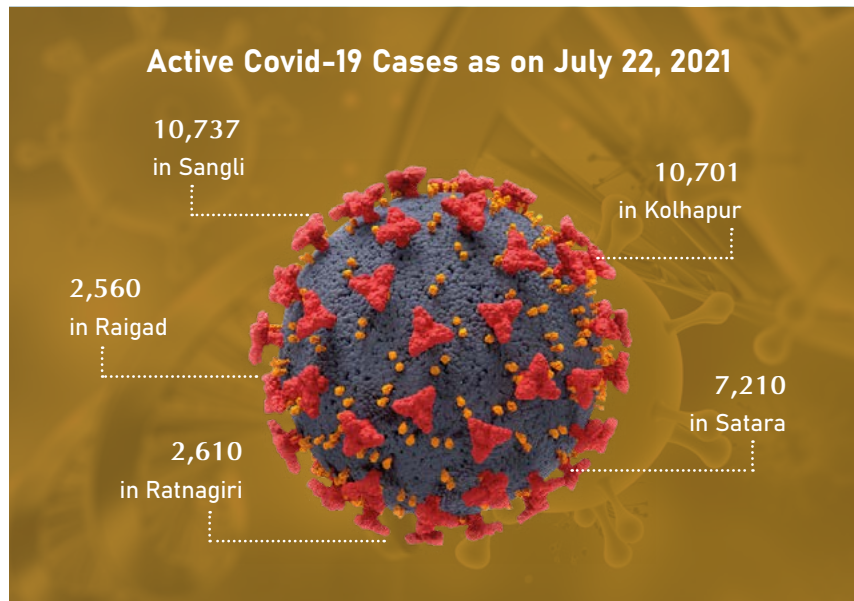
Even before the memories of the cyclone Nisarga in 2019 and the cyclone Tauktae in 2021 had faded, and just on the heels of the deadly second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the floods and landslides of July 2021 impacted 11 out of the 35 districts of Maharashtra: Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur, Pune, Thane, Mumbai Suburban, Wardha and Akola. Of these five districts in particular — Kolhapur, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sangli, Satara — were the most severely affected needing a concerted disaster response and relief efforts.

The torrential rainfall between 22 and 27 July 2021, during which some areas received precipitation of over 1500 mm, led to multiple landslides and floods. More than 1,035 villages and about 12,00,000 people, including 4,00,000 children, had to endure severe localized damage and hardships.

As a result of floods and landslides, many lives were lost and many others had gone missing by July 28, 2021, as per the local media reports and civil society organizations who had been actively working in the rescue and relief operations on the ground.



The situation became even more dismal when seen against the grim backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. As on July 22, 2021, the districts worst affected by floods had thousands of active COVID-19 cases and continued till October 2021.



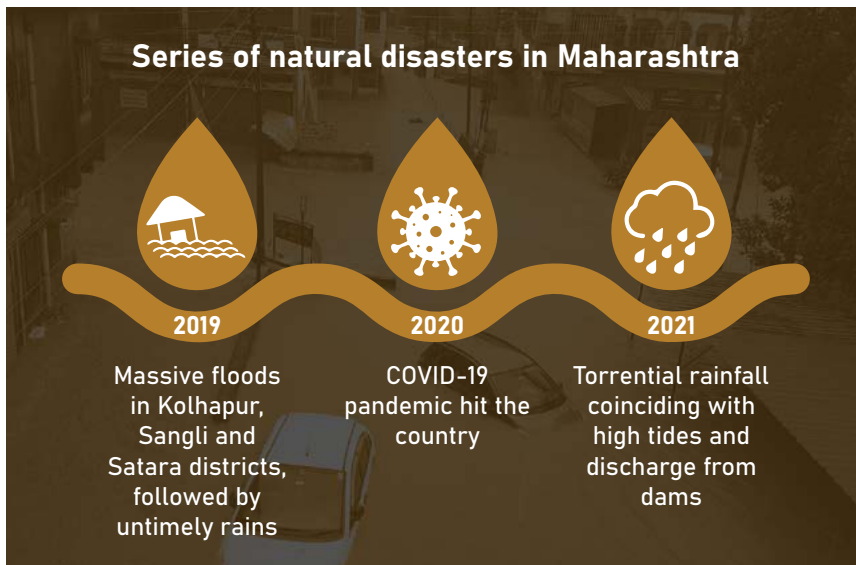
Due to the high load of COVID-19 cases, most families in the affected areas were reluctant to go into public places and so took shelter with their relatives, but nonetheless, almost 4,29,840 persons, including 1,28,952 children, had to take shelter in temporary or makeshift camps, which further put them at the risk of contracting COVID-19.

¹ Secondary Data Analysis Report: Maharashtra Flood July 2021 (Maharashtra PECOnet, RedR, Sphere India)

Disaster Risk in Maharashtra

The Konkan and Western Maharashtra regions have become vulnerable to multiple hazards as a result of increasing climate change. Over time, floods in Maharashtra have become painfully regular and increasingly extreme. According to a previous report of Maharashtra PecoNET¹, 33 of 36 districts of Maharashtra are flood-prone. There are many anthropogenic reasons for the occurrence of floods, as an analysis of the floods in Maharashtra from 2005 and 2006 onwards shows. The state has largely experienced flash floods due to nallah-overflows and poor drainage systems, or a release of excess water from dams that has led to breaching the embankments. Very few floods, such as the one in Konkan in 1983, occurred due to heavy rains in the region.

Increasing climate change has been marked by unprecedented rains in a short period of time, thereby aggravating the risk of recurring floods. In August 2019, massive floods ravaged the Kolhapur, Sangli and Satara districts. Soon after, untimely rains followed, which continued till November 2019. Since the COVID-19 pandemic followed a few months later, the flood affected communities, especially the landless and most vulnerable found recovery and rehabilitation elusive. In 2021, torrential rainfall in various parts of the state coincided with high tides as well as discharge from dams, snowballing into the disaster. This pushed the hope of rehabilitation even further. The 2021 floods were different and had a greater impact than any other floods in the state so far.



The Mahad, Chiplun and Patan towns and the rural areas of Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg witness small to medium-scale floods on a recurring basis.

The Konkan region and the western ghats — the Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts and parts of the Thane, Satara and Pune areas are especially vulnerable to landslides. The foothills of the Sahyadris, all along the Konkan region, are dotted with several villages that are vulnerable to landslides.

According to Dr Satish Thigle, retired professor of Geology at the Savitribai Phule, Pune University, the three causes of landslides in Sahyadri are heavy rainfall in short periods of time, cracks at the top of the hills, and human interference in the contours of the hills. The data in the public domain indicates that there are 103 villages in the Raigad district that are prone to landslides.

The 2021 floods triggered a string of landslides in Konkan, with the worst occurring at the Taliye village, in the Mahad taluka of Raigad. The tribal hamlet has about 45 houses with a population of over 120 people. Boulders fell from a height of 100 feet during the landslide, and locals estimated that 90 villagers could have been trapped under the debris.

In three villages of the Patan tehsil of Satara — Ambeghar, Dhokawale and Mirgaon², the landslides claimed many lives. The Patan district, along with the neighbouring Mahabaleshwar district, received record-high rainfall on 22 July 2021, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) stating that Mahabaleshwar had recorded an unprecedented 600 mm (approx.) of rainfall within 24 hours ending July 23, 2021. Due to continuous rainfall, the roads leading to many of the affected villages were either blocked or inundated, making it difficult for big earth-moving machinery to reach these areas in time to aid in rescue efforts.

² <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/maharashtra-13-bodies-recovered-from-two-landslide-sites-in-satara/articleshow/84709445.cms?from=mdr>

“

Our village wasn't one of the flood-prone ones and so no one had expected a calamity even when it rained continuously. But without any warning, our homes started filling up with water so much so that we didn't have time to gather many of our belongings. We moved some smaller and essential items, whatever we could, but there wasn't enough time.

— Vishnu Ganpati Sirodkar, resident of a village in Chiplun

”

Given the alarming situation on the ground, the local Government, NGOs, Support groups initiated the immediate rescue and relief while in few cases the SDRF and NDRF were called for support. The district administration reached out to the NGOs in their network to extend the support.

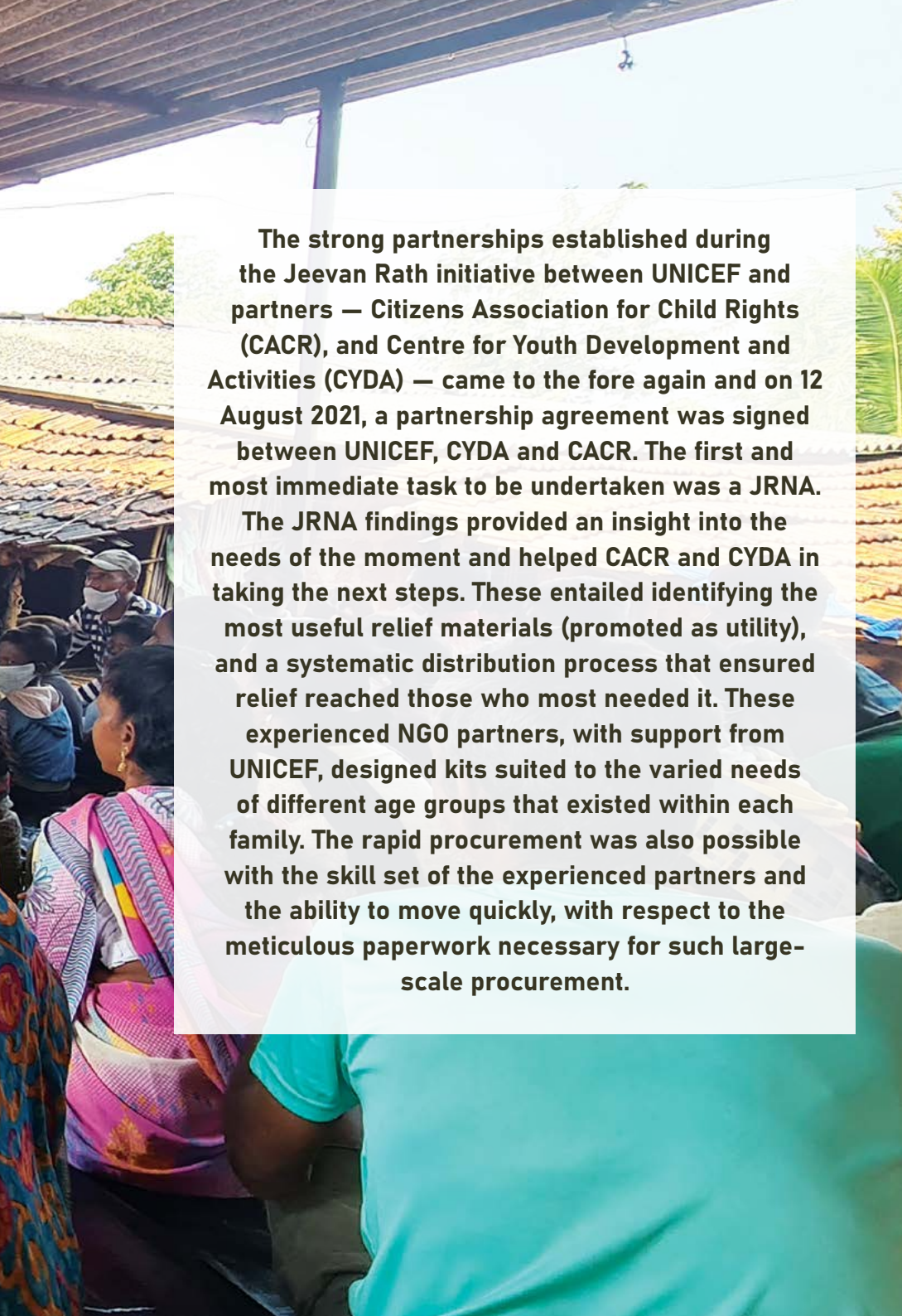
Soon after the floods, help was forthcoming from many quarters. These were mainly relatives of the affected families, local NGOs, or influential people who wanted to help. In no particular order and with no planning, vehicles laden with relief materials — usually dry ration, food and clothes — would park on the highway, as it was difficult to move on roads covered with several inches of mud or debris. As a result, the aid they carried only reached those who could themselves manage to reach the relief vehicles. News of these vehicles spread far and wide and many people spent hours waiting on a highway in expectation of a relief truck coming by. Other than this, people survived on the generosity of their neighbours and friends who were less affected by the floods as they had homes on higher grounds.





CHAPTER 2

CHURNING



The strong partnerships established during the Jeevan Rath initiative between UNICEF and partners — Citizens Association for Child Rights (CACR), and Centre for Youth Development and Activities (CYDA) — came to the fore again and on 12 August 2021, a partnership agreement was signed between UNICEF, CYDA and CACR. The first and most immediate task to be undertaken was a JRNA.

The JRNA findings provided an insight into the needs of the moment and helped CACR and CYDA in taking the next steps. These entailed identifying the most useful relief materials (promoted as utility), and a systematic distribution process that ensured relief reached those who most needed it. These experienced NGO partners, with support from UNICEF, designed kits suited to the varied needs of different age groups that existed within each family. The rapid procurement was also possible with the skill set of the experienced partners and the ability to move quickly, with respect to the meticulous paperwork necessary for such large-scale procurement.

Joint NGO assistance

In the first week of August 2021, Maharashtra PECOnet, UNICEF Maharashtra, Sphere India, RedR India, and other developmental partners, with support from local organizations and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), as well as various government line departments, conducted a JRNA in a sample of 946 households in 25 villages of 14 blocks across the 6 flood-affected districts in order to supplement programming along with immediate response.

During this time, people had started returning to their homes, many of which had been inundated by flood waters, had loads of silt deposited or had been washed away. Visits to some tribal hamlets (*adivasi padas*) revealed that they were even worse hit with almost nothing to go back to.

About 100 volunteers participated in the JRNA to collect data through secondary sources, field visits, personal interviews, observations, focus group discussions and information provided by local Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). On-ground information from the affected communities was collected using smart phones through Kobo data-collection mobile application and due consent was taken. The aim was to gather information on the humanitarian response initiatives and the recovery needs, collate and analyse the findings, and then disseminate the information to the state, national as well as international-level

³ Jeevan Raths, or Chariots of Life, was an initiative of mobile relief by Maharashtra PECOnet. This was done through pressing mini trucks into service in order to provide food and dry rations to travelling migrants at particular spots, sometimes at times distant places where other relief efforts could not have been possible.

agencies. With the convergence of disasters — the COVID-19 pandemic as well as severe floods and landslides that had driven thousands of families to relocate and spend days and nights under tarpaulins, or cramped in severely inadequate and unplanned shelters — the relief teams were looking at a multi-disaster situation.

The MAHA PECONet is a network of volunteers, corporates, government and technical bodies, and civil society organizations that came together during the COVID-19 pandemic to respond to the humanitarian crisis on the ground. UNICEF Mumbai was at the helm of bringing together 20 of its member NGOs who then added more members, taking the number from 20 to 100. The group exchanged ideas, offered resource support wherever required and worked towards rapid execution of the response efforts. This Platform came to be called the MAHA C19 PECONet (Partners who support with resources, Enterprises who provide solutions, Citizen volunteers who help on the ground, and individuals who sustain the impact. 'O' is for ownership, the glue that holds the team together).

The JRNA identified the urgent, mid-term and long-term needs of the affected communities across critical areas, including food and nutrition, health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), education, shelter, livelihood, transportation and protection. It also highlighted that the affected communities were already deprived and had no access to basic services and entitlements.

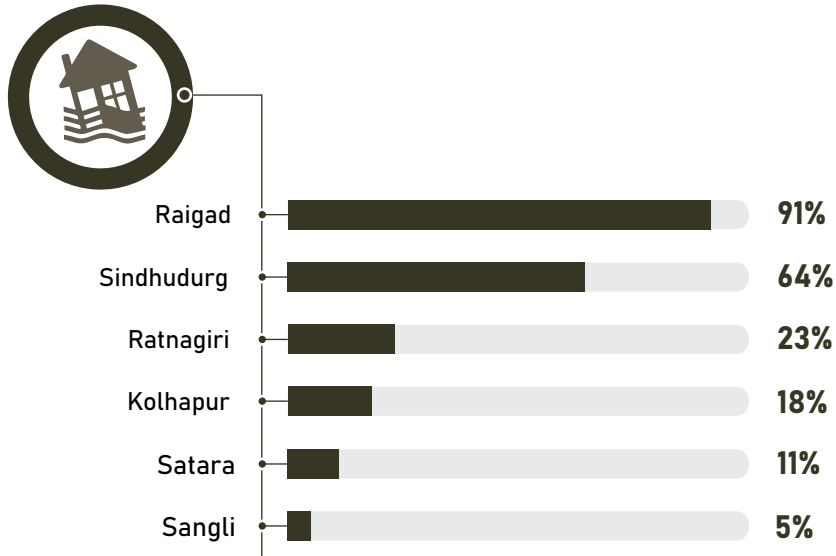
Thousands of affected families that were battling the multiple disasters — the uncompromising pandemic, cyclone, recurrent floods and landslide — had been driven to spend their days and nights cramped under tarpaulins, deprived of food and water, and threatened with the risk of infection. And thus, the humanitarian response efforts needed to emerge from a wider lens than that of a conventional disaster management approach, an approach which could imbibe the components of risk-informed planning and the development process, which would, in turn, enable pre-planning and early action.



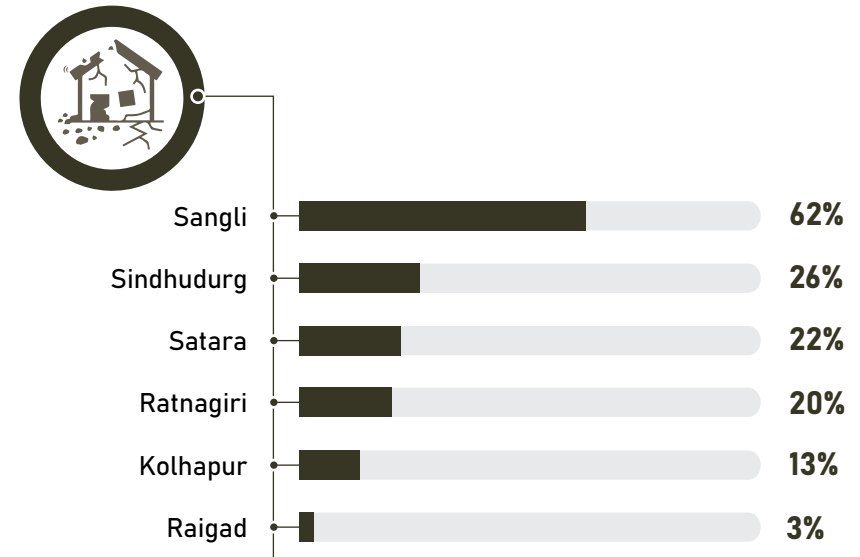
JRNA key findings: A summary

Shelter and Settlements

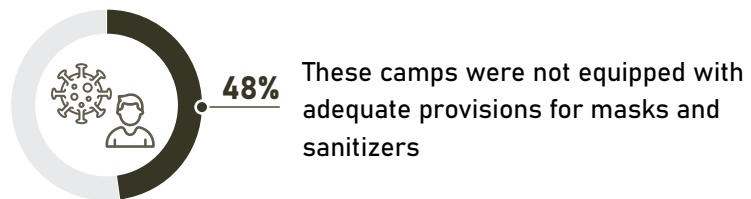
Inundated or completely washed houses



Partial damages to houses



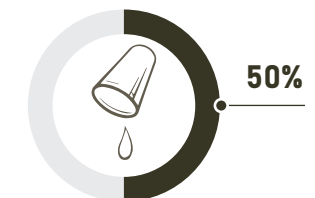
COVID appropriate behaviour followed in camps



Access to food in visited relief camps

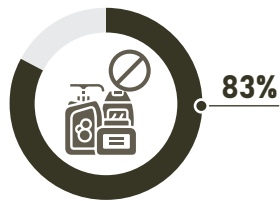


Shortage of water in relief camps

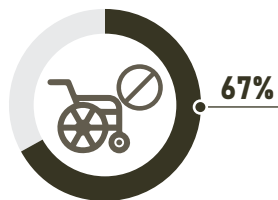


Shelter and Settlements

Camps not having access to bleaching powder, mosquito repellants or facilities for solid waste management

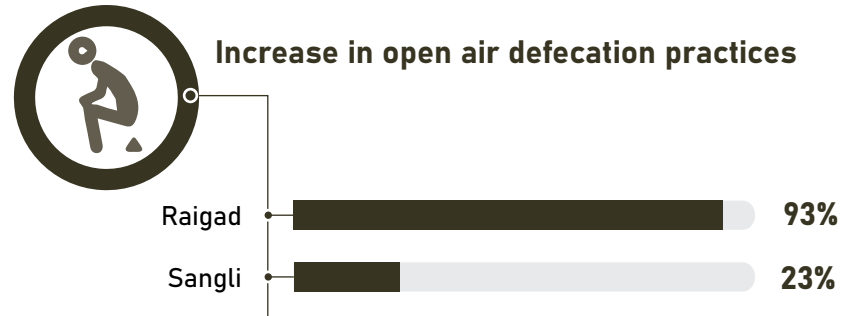


Lack of hygiene items and non-availability of assistive devices in camps

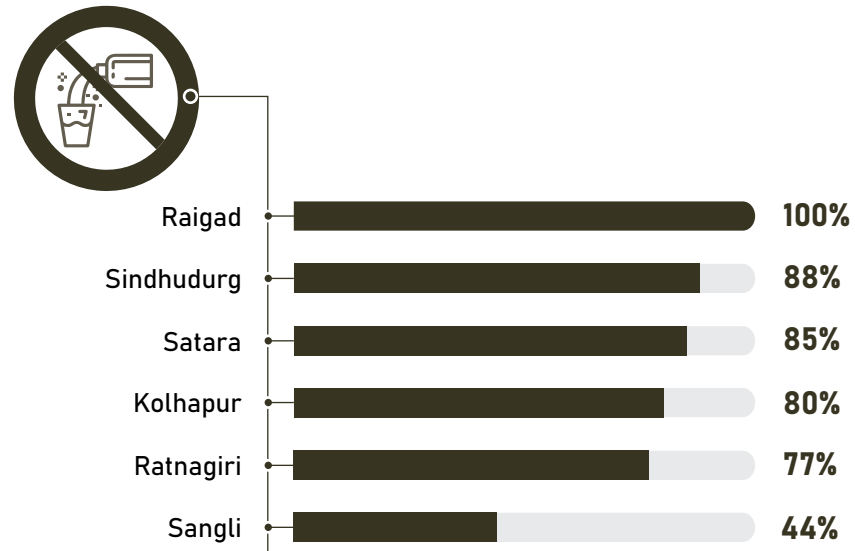


Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

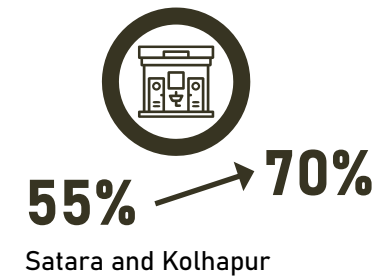
Defecation practices



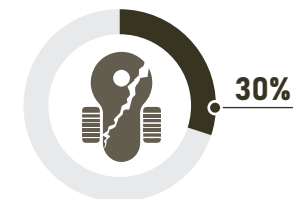
Lack of access to potable water



Increase in use of community toilets

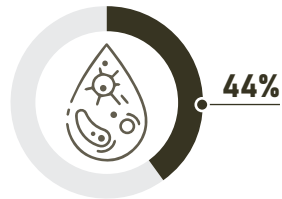


Percentage of respondents reporting damaged toilets

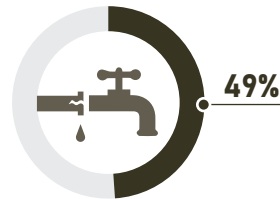


Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Percentage of respondents reporting contamination of water sources



Percentage of respondents reporting damages to water supply infrastructure



Education

Infrastructural damages to schools (including damages to study materials, boards, computers etc.)



Raigad



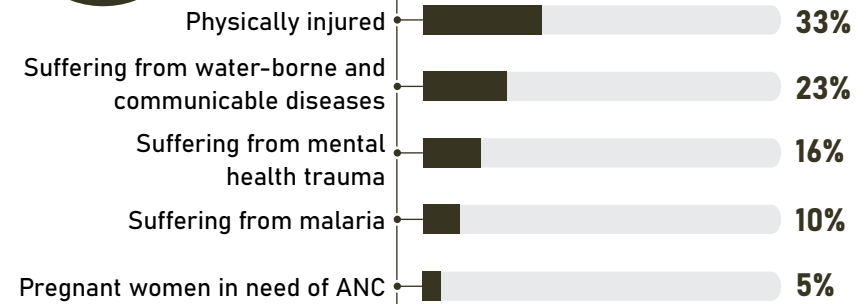
Sangli



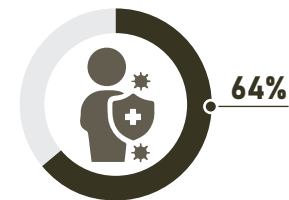
Kolhapur

Health

Responses on health, as reported by respondents

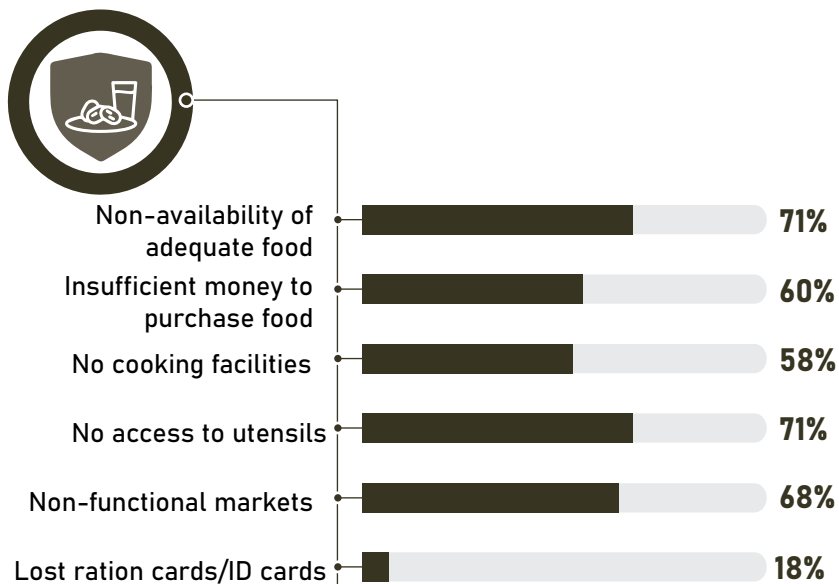


Percentage of villages where the disaster impacted COVID-19 vaccination process



Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihoods

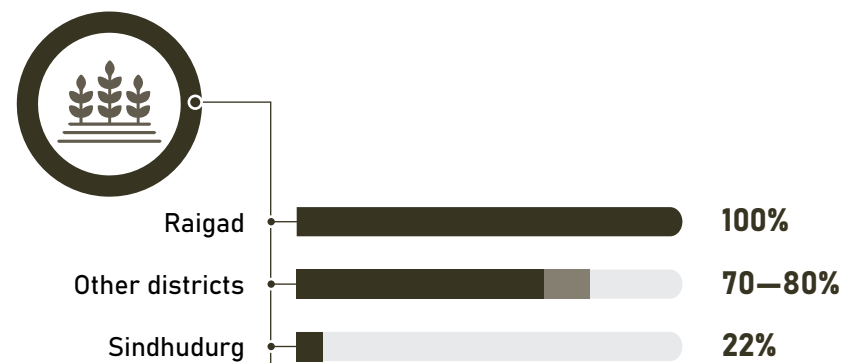
Responses on food security and nutrition



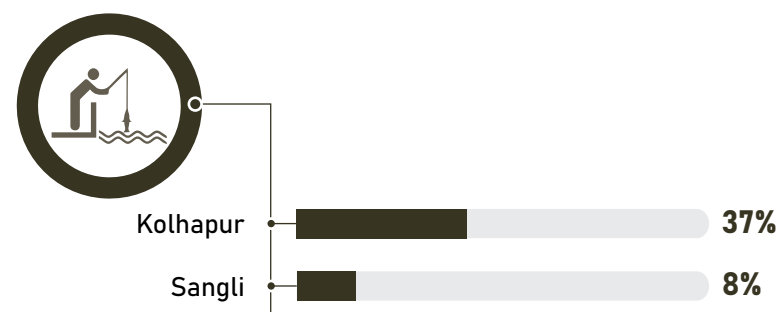
19 villages reported significant changes in food consumption patterns.

11 villages reported that there was no extra effort taken to provide special nutritive diets for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children.

Loss in crops and agricultural lands



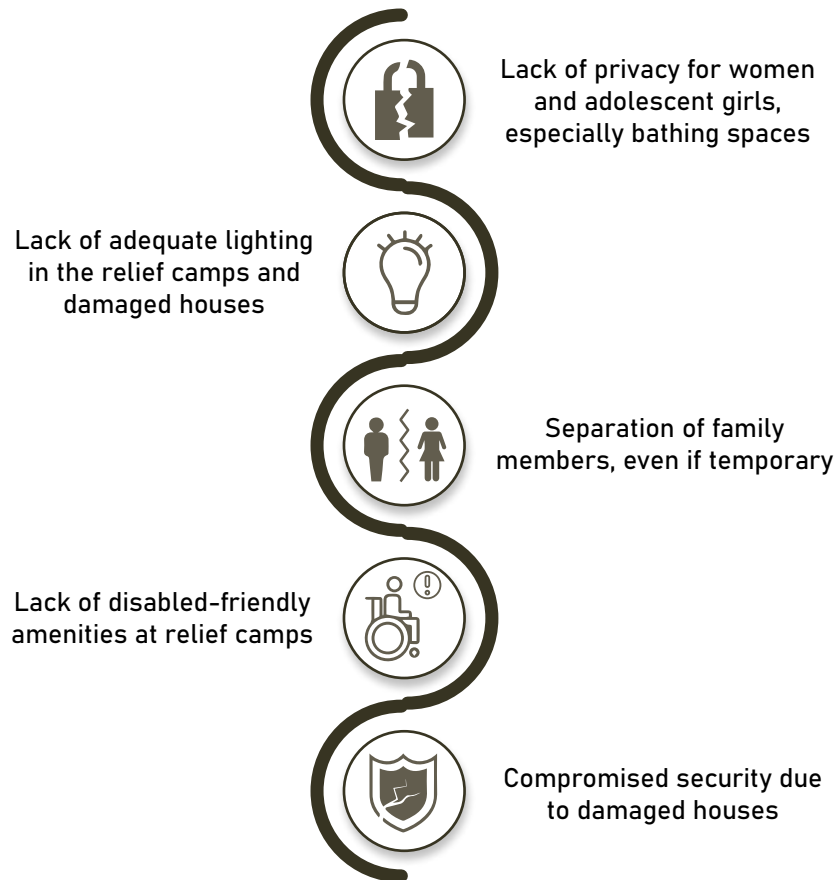
Loss in fisheries



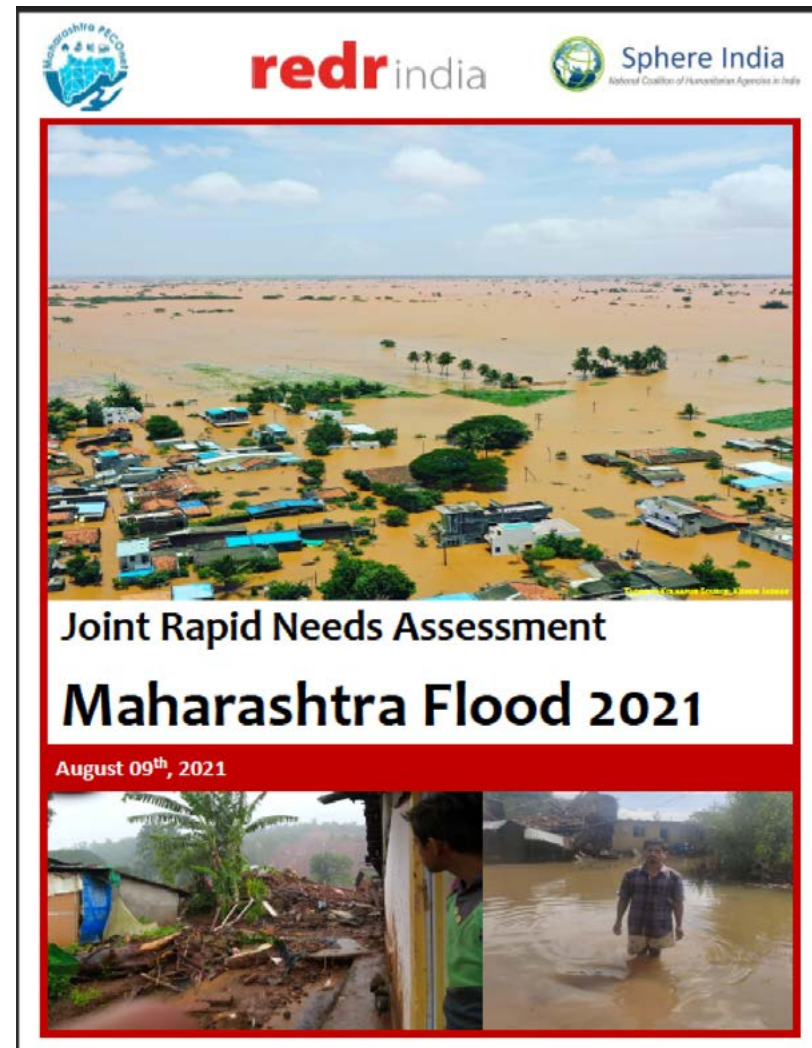
The other major losses reported are of livestock and assets.

Daily wage agricultural labourers and artisans were the most vulnerable and the hardest hit in all the surveyed districts. This was due to a combination of flood impacts and COVID restrictions.

Protection



Although no incidents of violations were reported from the affected areas, these concerns increased the vulnerabilities of the already at-risk communities. Possibilities of abuse, trafficking and child labour also increased with the COVID restrictions, loss of livelihoods, and the displacement due to floods. The damage of homes, belongings, livelihoods and disruption caused by the floods created distress and overwhelming feelings of sadness, loss and helplessness.

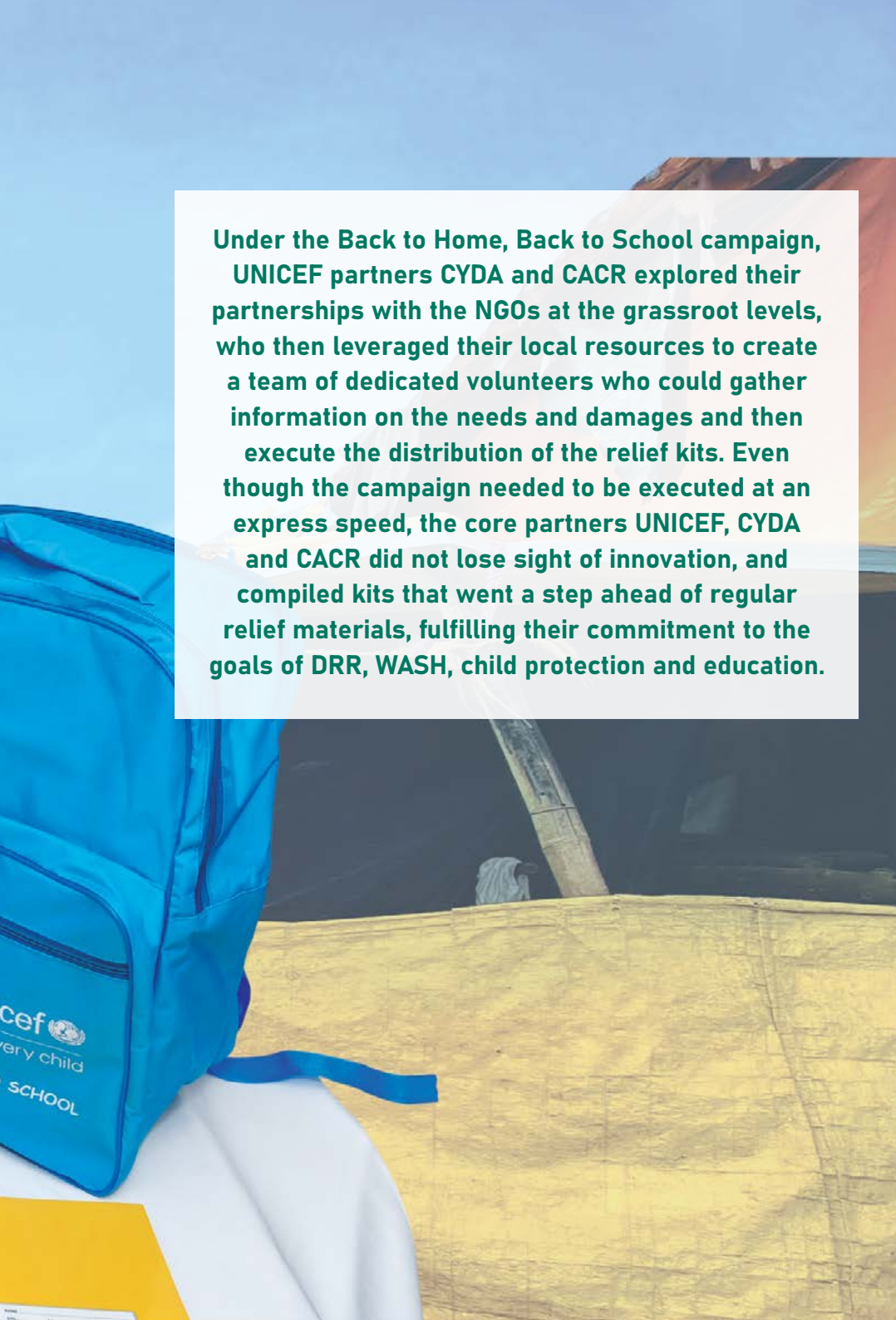


The JRNA set the groundwork for planning of the intervention. The findings provided insights into the different categories of needs that would subsequently be addressed by the Back to Home, Back to School campaign.

CHAPTER 3

CHARTING THE COURSE





Under the Back to Home, Back to School campaign, UNICEF partners CYDA and CACR explored their partnerships with the NGOs at the grassroot levels, who then leveraged their local resources to create a team of dedicated volunteers who could gather information on the needs and damages and then execute the distribution of the relief kits. Even though the campaign needed to be executed at an express speed, the core partners UNICEF, CYDA and CACR did not lose sight of innovation, and compiled kits that went a step ahead of regular relief materials, fulfilling their commitment to the goals of DRR, WASH, child protection and education.

'Back to Home, Back to School'

CYDA and CACR, with UNICEF support, undertook a campaign to aid rehabilitation for close to 26,000 of the worst affected flood families through a campaign called Back to Home, Back to School, (henceforth referred to as only 'Back to Home' for brevity) with a core aim to provide relevant relief material for the most affected communities.

Areas of responsibility for both the organizations were mapped and the districts, blocks and villages were demarcated based on the damage and the needs of the people. The focus was on reaching the unreached. Any humanitarian relief during such disasters needs to be delivered swiftly if it is to have any impact. Hence, in order to streamline the work and avoid duplication of effort by various entities, a detailed discussion was conducted with the local authorities. CACR, which is based in Mumbai, undertook the relief work in the Raigad and Ratnagiri districts, while Pune-based CYDA undertook the work in the Satara, Sangli and Kolhapur districts, where they had been active for long.

Meetings were held with district collectors, CEOs of Zilla Parishads, the disaster management authorities at the respective districts, and block education officers, who earnestly intimated their respective channels at the block and village levels to facilitate co-operation. They were briefed on the work that was being planned for the campaign and ways they could lend assistance. CACR and CYDA identified and collaborated with local partners who were active and had a good presence in their

respective districts. Selected partners had knowledge and experience of the area and a connect with local people and authorities, as they were already engaged in relief work in the district, including work related to spreading awareness on COVID-19 precautions, making water potable, etc. Through the partnership, CYDA and CACR gained valuable local insight while the capacities of the smaller partner organizations were also enhanced.



UNICEF Mumbai representatives and partners in a meeting

Partnerships at ground level

	Focus Districts	Blocks	Grassroots Partners
CACR	Raigad	Mangaon, Mahad, Poladpur	Aai Kankai Samajik Sanstha, Haritgram Seva Sanstha
	Ratnagiri	Chiplun, Khed, Guhagar	Dishantar, Maharashtra Jan Vikas Prasisthan, Janjagruti, Swargiya Mone Guruji Sanstha
CYDA	Satara	Wai, Mahabaleshwar, Satara, Patan, Jaoli	Yashwantrao Chavan School of Social Work (YCSSL)
	Sangli	Palus and Walwa	Prakash Shikshan Sanstha, Astitva Organization
	Kolhapur	Shirol	Gram Vikas Organization

The core team of CACR and CYDA visited the districts and oriented partners on the implementation strategy, kit contents and distribution. The local partners then onboarded almost 50 full-time volunteers from their volunteer database. With support from UNICEF, these volunteers were trained on the programme through two online and one offline training session.



Planning the kits

The usual procedure of packing a relief kit for flood-affected people looks at providing immediate relief — including food, drinking water and medicines — and then intermediary relief to help get their life back on track. The Back to Home kits were designed for the latter. CACR, CYDA and UNICEF teams brainstormed on the contents of the kits to be provided, and based on UNICEF's technical knowledge, the demands identified from the people, and the need and utility of each item, a shortlist of items was agreed upon. This was done while keeping in mind the key verticals: Disaster risk reduction (DRR), WASH, child protection, and education.

Since the kits were aimed at the worst-hit communities, the objectives were to:

1. **Provide safety (under DRR vertical):** Intended to allay the discomforts of those with partially/fully damaged houses, or those who had to stay in make-shift arrangements, the NFI kit included items that would give some degree of protection against natural elements (tarpaulin sheets), prevent diseases (mosquito ointment, toothbrush and toothpaste), facilitate self-sufficiency for nutrition (cooking utensils), allow some convenience since electrical fittings had been broken or electricity had not returned (candles and matchboxes) and safeguard their important documents (emergency bag), which was important because getting a fresh set of documents like the Aadhaar card and other papers was an uphill task for communities in the affected areas.

“

This was the fourth time for us doing flood relief work in Kolhapur and Solapur, and on each occasion, we have observed that people lose their essential documents like Aadhaar card or ration card due to bad storage practices. People don't keep their documents in one place, and when floods arrive, there is no time during the evacuation to look for them. Hence, we suggested UNICEF to add a waterproof bag in which people could safely keep all their important documents together, and thus it became a part of the NFI kit.

— Pravin Jadhav, programmer coordinator from CYDA

”

2. **Encourage the resumption of sanitary practices (under WASH and child protection verticals):** The Hygiene & Dignity (H&D) kits were conceptualized to ensure WASH practices like handwashing with soap, safe drinking water, and using water storage, masks, chlorine tablets, etc. These kits were specially intended for women, adolescents, and children, with items for carrying and storing water (bucket with handles/lids, jerry cans, plastic mug) and for disinfecting drinking water (chlorine tablets), for ensuring personal hygiene (bathing soaps/washing soaps/sanitary pads, lice combs, regular combs), for safeguarding children against diseases (NaDcc Tablets, ORS sachets/Zinc sulphate tablets) and for the families to clean their houses (plastic brooms — *kharratas*, and cotton mops). Since several people were observed without masks, five cloth masks were also added to the kit.

3. Rebuild children's educational habits and engage them in developmentally-appropriate games and learning activities (under education and child protection verticals): Since schools were due to partially reopen in the following months, children also needed to be eased back into their former routines, and needed care, especially of their mental health, given the psychosocial turmoil they had undergone during the pandemic followed shortly by the mayhem of the floods. Towards this objective, three kinds of kits were prepared. Two of these were meant to be distributed directly to children, and were called developmentally appropriate for learning kits. Of these, one was for children aged 3–8 years, and the other for children aged 9–14 years. For the younger age group, the kit included not only educational tools but also puzzles and games such as softball, stacking cups, doctor set, and kitchen set, all of which they could play with and divert their minds from the stressful situation they were in. The kit also had picture books, slates and chalks. All the material was packed inside waterproof school bags, which could be used when schools reopened. For the older age group, stationery and books were added to their kits to support the continuation of their education.

Developmentally appropriate for learning kits were conceptualized jointly with help of experts from UNICEF and the implementing partners and consultants to account for the needs of the children, who had already lost over one and a half years of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic and were now faced with another disaster.

The third kit, called psychosocial support (PSS) kits for children, were intended for shelter homes and anganwadi centres where groups of families and children were staying together with no means of recreation and psychosocial support. The kit had games such as Monopoly, UNO, snakes and ladders, a *dafli* (tambourine) and story books, all to keep both the children and adults engaged and entertained. All kits were well thought-out based on the anticipated needs of the children in the local context.

Each of the kits had a small instructional booklet in Marathi, to inform the user about its contents, and how it was to be used and maintained. The booklet was also used as an opportunity to remind users about the COVID-19 precautions and vaccinations. The distribution teams would read out the contents of the booklet before handing out the kits.

Market Research, Procurement and Packing

Detailed specifications with regards to ensuring the quality of each item were well-defined prior to sourcing. Visits were made to distributors to understand the quality and specifications of the products vis-à-vis prices before shortlisting them. For items such as document bags, school bags (developmentally appropriate for learning kit), and items in the psychosocial support kit, it was ensured the material used was durable as well as water-resistant. Other factors such as comfort, being able to carry the bags, and not making them too heavy, were kept in mind before finalization. Samples were procured from various dealers and distributors along with the prices, and the best ones were selected after consulting with the UNICEF team.

THE KITS OF HOPE

No. of kits distributed: 5000



Non-Food Items (NFI) kits

HDPE tarpaulin 18 ft x 12 ft, mosquito ointment, candles, match box, tooth paste, tooth brushes, emergency bag for storing important documents

Per Unit Cost:
INR 1470

Per Unit Cost:
INR 602

Hygiene and Dignity (H&D) kits

bucket with handle — 16 litres, 2 plastic pugs, bathing soaps, washing soaps, sanitary pads, NaDcc tablets, lice comb, regular comb, ORS sachet, zinc sulphate tablets, jerry can, plastic broom, cotton mops, 5 cloth masks



No. of kits distributed: 1370

Per Unit Cost:
INR 633

Developmentally appropriate for learning kit in a bag pack for children aged 3—8 years

School bag, building blocks, modelling clay, measuring stacking cups, crayons, chalk, slate, drawing book, colouring book, pretend play set, ball, simple puzzle, picture books



No. of kits distributed: 13550

% of total cost of campaign:

NFI kits

17%

H&D kits

35%

Developmentally appropriate for learning kits (3—8 years)

21%

No. of kits distributed: 1200



Developmentally appropriate for learning kit in a backpack for children aged 9–14 years

School bag, water bottle, notebooks, 1 blank book, plastic stationary pouch, ruler, 10 pencils, 2 sharpeners, 2 erasers, black ball point pen, blue ball point pen, pencil colours, drawing book, coloring book, skipping rope

Per Unit Cost:
INR 462

Developmentally appropriate for learning kits (9–14 years)

13%

No. of kits distributed: 800



PSS kits

Snake and ladders, uno game card, rubber ring, monopoly (*naya vyapar*) in Marathi, leather tambourine (*dafli*), set of 50 story books

Per Unit Cost:
INR 1827

PSS kits

3%

Communication, capacity building, administrative and monitoring cost

10%

Specialized wholesale markets like Crawford Market, Dawa Bazaar, Bhoiwada and Dharavi were explored to meet various manufacturers and wholesale distributors and understand the quality vs. price comparison of the products, and dealers and distributors across India were contacted prior to the procurement. It was found that most of the major plastic manufacturing units were majorly in Gujarat, hence items such as tarpaulin sheets, buckets, jerry cans, etc. were procured directly from the manufacturers/distributors. Negotiations were conducted with various suppliers prior to the placement of orders, keeping in mind the best possible combination of quality, delivery time, usability, etc. For example, only tarpaulin sheets of particular GSM, virgin material, size, color, etc. were selected to ensure top-tier quality. Buckets, water bottles, and jerry cans with food-grade plastic were selected and certificates were obtained from the dealers before

placing the order for the NFI kits. Once the items were procured, the warehouses for storing and packing them were insured and the packaging was done keeping in mind the COVID-19 safety protocols.

Kit procurement was a daunting task as almost 54 items had to be procured from over 25 traders in various wholesale markets, ranging from Mumbai to Vapi, Daman, Bhopal and Pune. Yet, given the urgency of the need, the entire procurement task took just 21 days, which included physical inspection of each product by UNICEF as well as the partners prior to purchase, procurement and transportation of the supplies to the warehouses (CACR in Raigad and CYDA in Satara), where a team was engaged in packing the kits. The procurement of the kits was done by experienced senior members of CACR and CYDA to ensure good quality along with cost effectiveness.



Packaging of kits at CACR Warehouse in Mumbai

Distributing kits, educating communities


The Back to Home project also focused on 3 types of behavior change — preparedness for similar disasters in the future; strengthening Covid appropriate behaviour such as using masks, ensuring physical distancing and seeking medical help when symptoms appeared; and lastly, encouraging and reminding people to follow good WASH practices. These concerns were addressed through engagement with the communities, which volunteers undertook when they went to distribute the kits. Demo sessions on the use and maintenance of the kits were also ensured and pictographic user manuals for every kit with simple instructions in the local languages were distributed along with the kits.



Making Safe Water Accessible

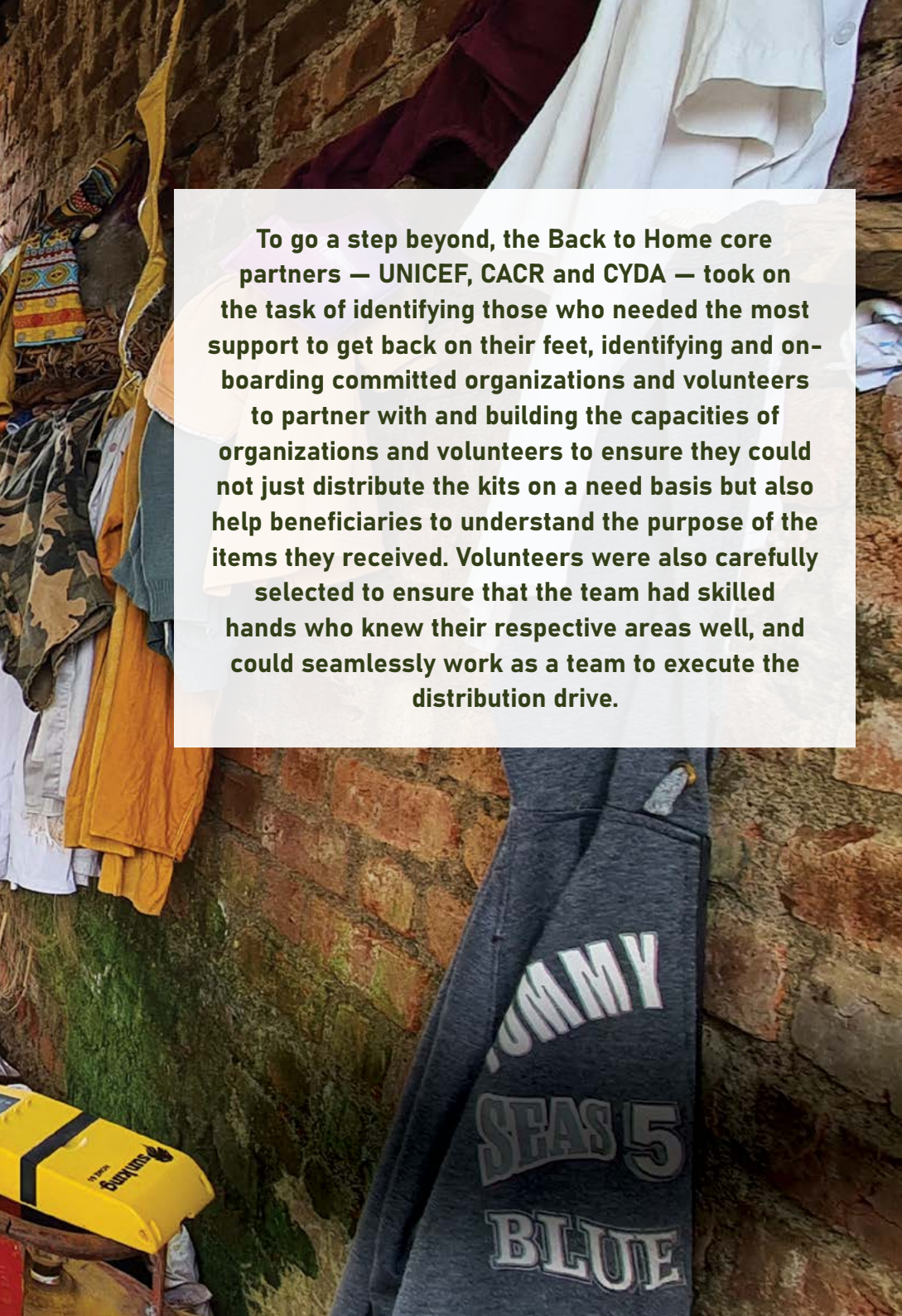
During disasters, especially floods, unavailability of safe drinking water becomes a tremendous challenge. As an intervention on this front, CACR — with support from Aquaplast as well as UNICEF Maharashtra — took necessary steps in installing non-electric water filtration units in addition to other ongoing relief work. As a result, safe and clean drinking water became available to 546 families from 21 villages in Mangaon block of Raigad district.



A photograph showing the interior of a makeshift shelter constructed from black plastic sheeting. The floor is made of red bricks, many of which are loose and scattered with plastic waste. Several people are present: a woman in a yellow top and blue pants stands in the center, another woman in a green and yellow sari stands to her right, and a man in a red and white striped shirt is visible in the background. Laundry, including a red patterned cloth and a blue garment, hangs from lines across the shelter. To the right, a brick wall and more hanging clothes are visible. The scene is lit by natural light coming from an opening at the far end of the shelter.

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING THE RAFTS



To go a step beyond, the Back to Home core partners — UNICEF, CACR and CYDA — took on the task of identifying those who needed the most support to get back on their feet, identifying and on-boarding committed organizations and volunteers to partner with and building the capacities of organizations and volunteers to ensure they could not just distribute the kits on a need basis but also help beneficiaries to understand the purpose of the items they received. Volunteers were also carefully selected to ensure that the team had skilled hands who knew their respective areas well, and could seamlessly work as a team to execute the distribution drive.

What makes the Back to Home project special is the attention that was given to the **who** and **what** of the relief effort. Usually, after a disaster, as a method of damage assessment, a *panchnama*⁴ is created by the Gram Panchayat, which lists the details of people affected by the flood, including the number of people in the family, and their needs. On the basis of this *panchnama*, the relief material is sent by the government to the Panchayat for distribution in the village. The relief package generally includes dry ration and monetary help.

Independent parties may also go into the community with truckloads of ration and other materials, and hand it over to the villagers on the basis of the *panchnama*. Usually, the work ends here. However, there are times when immediately after a disaster people move away from their homes to take shelter elsewhere or may not be present at home during the *panchnama* survey. It is also not uncommon for personal biases to cast a shadow on the decisions made. After the July 2021 floods, UNICEF and partner NGOs were keen on addressing the lacunae in this process.

Hence, with an aim to concentrate the distribution of relief among those worst affected by the calamities, CYDA and CACR set out to collect specific data as to how many people in an area had been severely affected, what was the nature of their loss, what was their family demographic, as in how many family members they have, the

⁴ *Panchnama* means a process which is conducted by local government officials, where they investigate about the damages and losses due to the impact of the disaster.

number and ages of children in each family, etc. Rather than depending on provided information, the organizations deployed their own teams for a preliminary survey of the fully or partially-affected villages and families, and based on that data, prioritized reaching out to the fully-affected families, i.e., whose homes had received heavy damages, before moving on to the partially affected, i.e., those whose homes had only some or minor damage.

“

This time, it was different. We had to identify the real beneficiaries, the absolutely unreachable population. With this in mind, we kickstarted the programme from the adivasi pada in Raigad because these communities had not received any assistance whatsoever. We recalibrated our strategy based on the data we had gathered on these communities, which lacked roads, electricity, mobile connectivity and so on, and ensured that they received the relief kits.

— Nitin Wadhvani, founder of CACR

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A survey to bring relief to the worst hit

A survey to determine the most vulnerable beneficiaries of the kits was initiated by the partners (CACR, CYDA) and grassroots NGO volunteers 15 days after the floods. The *panchnama* on the flood-affected and the landslide affected-villages was also available by then. The *panchnama* data came in handy for identifying the affected villages, and gave the



partners a page to start their survey with. As mentioned earlier, government representatives had also been briefed about the campaign and they were instrumental in providing important contacts who could be of assistance in the process of distribution. As part of the government's commitment to support the campaign, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), *anganwadi* workers and teachers were also mobilized to help in the process.

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Our efforts extended to five tehsils of the Satara district — Satara, Wai, Mahabaleshwar, Patan and Jaoli. Most of the areas in this region witnessed landslides and had been declared disaster-prone. So, people were shifted to temporary relief camps. When UNICEF and CYDA approached us, our first step was to identify the affected people, for which we trained our volunteers to use the Google forms to collect information through a house-to-house survey.

— Professor Jeevan Barote of the YCSSW, Satara

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For the survey, volunteers conducted home visits to identify actual beneficiaries, and assessed how many kits would be required in a particular community using a Google form to input data. For instance, if there were 500 families in a village, there was no need to provide NFI kits to all of them, and similarly, it was not necessary to provide education kits to all the families. A roadmap was created to identify the actual needs of the beneficiaries.

Shahaji Gadhire, CYDA board member and founder of Astitva, an NGO that has been working in the drought-prone blocks of Sangli and Solapur for 20 years on education, health, livelihood, disaster and natural resources management, said, “Our team went door-to-door in the affected communities and did a detailed assessment. Many people thought we had been sent by the government and said they needed more assistance. We had to explain to them that we were an NGO and have our limitations. People were expecting help in rebuilding their homes and in agricultural activities that had been affected by the floods.” Shahaji and his NGO worked in the Walawa block during the campaign.

The survey faced some challenges at the field level though. Prakash Yadav, also from the Prakash Shikshan Prasarak Sanstha, said, “When we visited the villages, although the volunteers and local Panchayat administration had cooperated with us, some village people got really suspicious of the surveys, especially when we asked for their Aadhaar details. However, most of the people cooperated and we slowly built trust and completed the assessment. Eventually when we started distributing the kits, the people who were suspicious earlier, understood that our sole aim was to help them, and thereafter welcomed the volunteers.”

“

Our organization has been working in Sangli since 1982 and has a good volunteer base. When the water levels rose in July 2021, some of the volunteers who had worked with us during the 2019 floods reconnected with us, asking to join the efforts again. We instructed them to initially work on raising awareness regarding precautions and preventions necessary to avoid health-related risks. When the water levels rose further, we decided to visit the affected areas to identify the flood and landslide-affected villages. We had worked here during the 2019 floods when we had sent primary relief materials such as dry rations, clothes, blankets and sanitation items such as phenyl, Dettol liquid, and naphthalene balls. After a door-to-door survey, a list of the most affected families was prepared and sent to CYDA to help them prepare accordingly.

— Seema Yadav, from the Prakash Shikshan Prasarak Sanstha

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Selection and training of the volunteers

Given the urgency of the project, it was necessary that the volunteers who came on board were smart and skilled, and moreover, had a high sense of commitment. This was essential to both minimize the losses in the handling of the products and control any personal biases. The partner NGOs, hence, only chose trusted individuals who had displayed their intelligence and integrity in the past.

“

In Kolhapur, volunteers were selected from the affected villages themselves, as they knew who was needy and must get the kits. This led to a smooth distribution process. It is interesting that most of these volunteers were women.

— Vinayak Kulkarni, secretary of the Gram Vikas Organization

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Topics for orientation of volunteers



Each of grassroots partner had a team of 5–6 volunteers who had received online orientation from the UNICEF team. The expectations, such as capturing data, taking pictures/videos, and recording testimonials once they completed distribution, were all well-defined so that all important information was captured. Subsequently, all NGO partners, including CACR and CYDA, conducted block and district-level trainings before the distribution commenced. This ensured clarity at every level. They were also oriented on how to distribute and demonstrate the use of the kits to the communities.

Kit distribution

After procuring the materials from Mumbai, CYDA sent it to the warehouse at YCSSW campus in Satara. They were stored here before being assembled in the kits as planned. Thirty-five volunteers from the college contributed in packaging and distributing the kits.

CYDA took up distribution in all its districts — Satara, Sangli and Kolhapur — at one time, for which they made a 30-day plan based on the villages which needed to be served, and the kind of kits to be distributed. In each district, the distribution effort was flagged off by a local official: District Collector, Mr Shekhar Singh in Satara; CEO Zilla Parishad, Mr. Sanjaysingh Chavan, in Kolhapur; and the BDO/Tehsildar, Mr. Appasaheb Pawar, in Sangli.

CACR's modus operandi was a little different from that of CYDA. While CYDA sent materials to the college warehouse, CACR stored all the procured material in its warehouse in Andheri, Mumbai. Under a supervisor, around six labourers were hired to pack the kits. The packed kits left for their destination in multiple trucks every day. When they reached their distribution points in Mangaon, Mahad and Poladpur blocks in Raigad, and Chiplun, Khed and Guhagar blocks in Ratnagiri, the respective NGO partner would take the distribution process forward. To avoid crowding at a single point, every location had multiple storage facilities for the kits and local transport was used for distribution in the nearby villages.

Both CACR and CYDA ensured that UNICEF's strict three-step verification process was followed during distribution. In every block where the kits were sent, an independent co-ordinator was stationed to supervise the movement of kits and to ensure that every kit reached its destination. Additionally, these block co-ordinators were crucial in planning ahead. For example, a block co-ordinator would convene with the local NGO to decide the number of kits required for the next day, which would be further relayed to CACR/CYDA for dispatch the next morning. The block co-ordinator would then count the kits and consign them to the local NGO. All records were maintained on a stock register or put down on a receiving letter to uphold accountability among all personnel involved in the movement.

Kolhapur Zilla Parishad CEO, Vijaysingh Chavan (centre), during relief distribution




Kit distribution by CACR

Description	Raigad	Ratnagiri	Total
NFI kit	1333	1167	2500
H&D kit	6899	5401	12300
9—14 developmentally appropriate for learning kit	3725	2248	5973
3—8 developmentally appropriate for learning kit	4414	2536	6950
Psychosocial support kit	224	176	400
Total number of kits distributed			28,123
Total number of villages reached	119	71	190
Local teachers / AWWs oriented on the use of developmentally appropriate for learning kits and psychosocial support kits	448	352	800
Caregivers and children trained oriented on the use of developmentally appropriate for learning kits and psychosocial support kits	8310	12950	21260

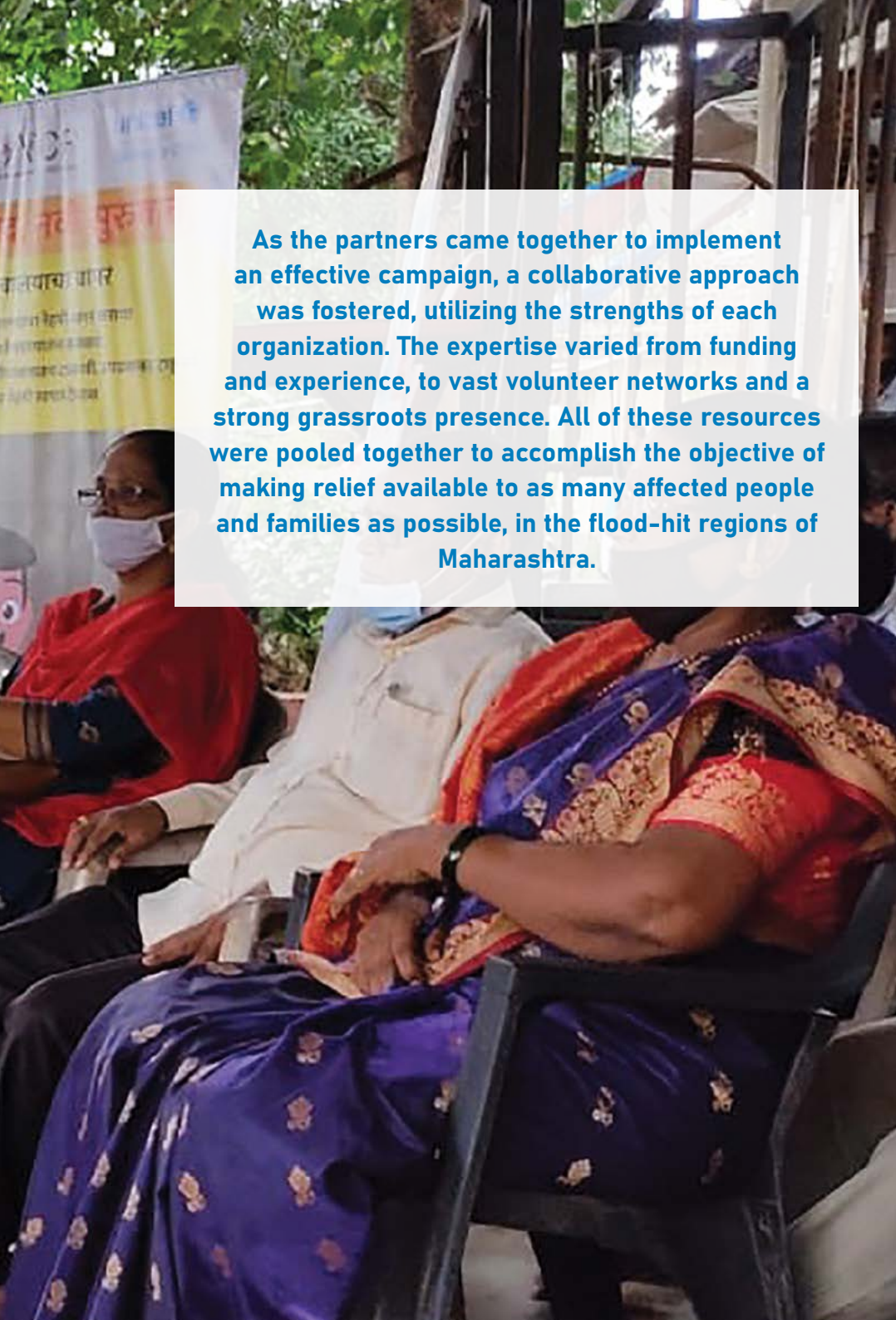
Kit distribution by CYDA

Description	Satara	Sangli	Kolhapur	Total
NFI kit	1153	674	673	2500
H&D kit	4345	3734	3921	12000
9—14 Developmentally appropriate for learning kit	1979	2016	2005	6000
3—8 Developmentally appropriate for learning kit	1935	2043	2622	6600
Psychosocial support kit	250	82	68	400
Total number of kits distributed				27,500
Total number of villages reached	99	35	23	157
Local teachers / AWWs oriented on the use of developmentally appropriate for learning kits and psychosocial support kits	236	78	86	400
Caregivers and children trained oriented on the use of developmentally appropriate for learning kits and psychosocial support kits	127	283	1402	1812



CHAPTER 5

ROWING IN TANDEM



As the partners came together to implement an effective campaign, a collaborative approach was fostered, utilizing the strengths of each organization. The expertise varied from funding and experience, to vast volunteer networks and a strong grassroots presence. All of these resources were pooled together to accomplish the objective of making relief available to as many affected people and families as possible, in the flood-hit regions of Maharashtra.

The Back to Home project was a collective effort, with UNICEF, CACR and CYDA at the forefront of the campaign. An effort of this scale, however, required extensive collaborations and thus, a number of government departments, local NGO partners, students and volunteers supported or partnered in the campaign.

Given the emergency, work on providing relief had to be carried out at many different levels simultaneously. While volunteers visited homes to identify the actual beneficiaries, another team worked on packing the kits, and designated CACR and CYDA members coordinated with their partners to ensure the accurate distribution of these kits in their allocated districts.

The JRNA assessment undertaken by Maharashtra PECOnet, Sphere India and RedR India, provided the first concrete window into the scale of the disaster. It was instrumental in local-level vulnerability mapping, and formed the basis for the selection of the relief beneficiaries.

CACR and CYDA collaborated to lead the relief efforts and signed partnerships with UNICEF Maharashtra for an effective response marked by complementarity. UNICEF, with its stronger fund base, provided guidance and technical support to CYDA and CACR as well as their vast on-the-ground networks in the different affected districts.

CACR and CYDA initiated the procurement processes by leveraging their existing wholesale distributor networks, establishing storage spaces, and by making packing and transportation arrangements using their respective human resources, including volunteers both on and off the field. All the efforts, on the various processes and financial parameters related to the relief materials, were undertaken in consultation with UNICEF.

The involvement of the local partners created a quick acceptance and trust by virtue of their long-standing presence in the region and their rapport with the local administrative institutions.

Support poured in from administration

CACR worked closely with the administration for an efficient implementation of the campaign. Meetings were conducted with Sub-Divisional Officers, Tehsildars and Gram Panchayats in each block. Along with their local partners, CACR was able to obtain the list of affected villages in respective blocks apart from the survey conducted by local partners. Block Education Officers from each block were approached to obtain information on the affected Zilla Parishad Schools in the target villages to ensure that all children were covered. Local Partners obtained a list of all *anganwadis* in the affected villages and established contact with Anganwadi Sevikas to carry out awareness sessions with them along with the distribution of psychosocial support kits.



District Collector, Mr Shekhar Singh (second from right), during relief distribution in Satara

CYDA volunteers who were assisting in Satara had said, “We’ve been closely associated with the local Panchayats and Disaster Management Cell in Satara, so we could quickly mobilize and seek their assistance. For the Back to Home project, messages were broadcasted from the Collector’s office to the local Tehsildars, who in turn communicated directions to their functionaries — Gram Sewaks, Anganwadi Sevikas, ASHAs and other health-care workers — so that everyone got involved in this distribution.”

They continued, “We had already informed the authorities that our teams would come on particular dates and we needed them to convey this message to the communities. The government functionaries were very helpful in community mobilization and management. Before commencing the distribution, we would give the beneficiaries a

15–20-minute demo on the kits. These activities ran for close to two and a half months, during which all the affected people in the Satara, Wai, Mahabaleshwar, Jaoli and Patan blocks were covered.”

“

The block level administrators such as Tehsildar, BDO and others were very supportive during the relief distribution drive. However, we faced some difficulties at the village level initially due to the question of who should get a kit and who shouldn't. Normally, the Sarpanch provides a list of the beneficiaries according to which the kits are handed over to them for distribution. In this scenario, there are chances of some needy families not making it to the list. However, this programme was different, as we did our own survey to identify the beneficiaries. So, everyone was involved in a supportive role and there was little to no interference in the process, which led to the smooth distribution of the kits.

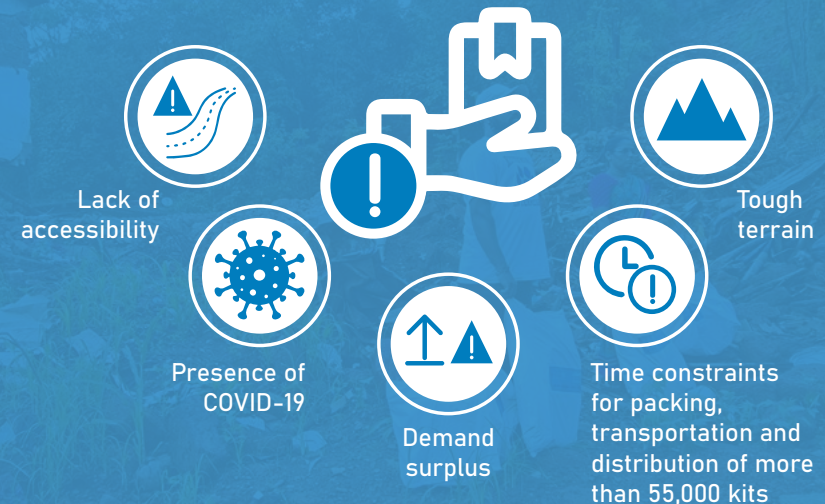
— Prakash from Jan Jagruti

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Overcoming challenges

There were many challenges in the process. The routinely tough terrain was made more inaccessible by the floods and landslides. As a result, reaching a village to conduct a session to orient people on handwashing, COVID preparedness and the proper usage of the kits, often meant a one-way journey of 4–5 hours for the volunteers. This was particularly problematic in the hilly regions of Satara, where access to many of the villages was only possible on foot and volunteers had to carry the kits on their shoulders.

Challenges in relief distribution: At a glance



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In Mahabaleshwar, landslides had cut off accessibility; people came by boats to collect the kits, even when it was raining. There were four or five villages like this where connectivity was a serious challenge. In some areas of Satara, distribution was done on two-wheelers as cars and other vehicles could not travel in the remote and difficult terrain.

— Student volunteers from YCSSW

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Symbiotic working and cooperation among the partners were a great benefit to the campaign. While CYDA and CACR ensured that a sufficient number of relief kits reached the maximum number of beneficiaries, for many hard-to-reach villages in hilly areas, the distribution could not have been possible without the grit of the volunteers from the local NGOs, who braved the unfriendly terrain and encountered multiple hardships to reach the affected households in these areas, even going so far as to carry the kits on their shoulders. On some days, the distribution would go on till late evenings or well into the night while the remote villages were covered, some of which were only reachable by boat.

“

One of the outlying villages near the Konya dam backwaters could be reached only by boat, and it took 4–5 hours from our nearest distribution point. We loaded the kits in boats and distributed them at the river bank. Then the villagers had to walk another 3–4 kilometres back to their homes.

— Advocate Jeevan Kashinath Relekar, civil supporter

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But terrain and accessibility were not the only challenges to overcome: some occurred in the distribution process as well. On seeing the relief vehicles, several people would gather around demanding the kits, including those whose names were not on the list. When denied, these people felt discontented and excluded from the process. Dealing with them and helping them to understand the situation took immense patience and tact. The teams responded to each person and although it took some time and convincing, most people, when explained the rationale about reaching the most affected, understood why they could

not get a kit. Through this approach of responding to each person with kindness, the volunteers managed to ensure a peaceful and fair distribution of the kits.



Distribution in Chikurde, Walwa Block, Sangli

Another distribution hurdle was that some families in need, who had relocated to a different place at the time of the surveys, had returned home by the time of kit distribution, creating a demand surplus. Although their names were not on the distribution lists, their needs were real and extreme. In such cases, the volunteers reached out to partners who arranged extra kits for this group of beneficiaries.


Packing, transportation and distribution of more than 55,000 kits at the same time, especially given the time constraints, required carefully planning, management and monitoring. This was not the usual relief distribution experience for the partners and volunteers, but was quite novel, in reaching out to specific beneficiaries based on actual groundwork and data. The work was challenging but it brought out the best in the partners and the volunteers who had developed seamless teamwork and had displayed remarkable dedication to their tasks.

Some volunteers also recorded the trauma they experienced at seeing the plight of the villagers. In some places, people were still living in the camps because they had not been rehabilitated. The conditions in the camps were dire, with a paucity of space, absence of basic facilities, etc. To see people who had lived their lives in houses of their own, albeit tiny, now living in filth and squalor — girls and women being forced to use extremely unhygienic toilets, no place to take a bath and so on — was a harrowing psychological experience for many of the volunteers. Immediate though informal measures for support were taken, and counselling was provided by peers and seniors who helped distraught volunteers to accept these realities as a part of their relief work.

Everyone working together to the best of their abilities made it possible for this uphill task to be achieved within the time constraints and was crucial to the success of the Back to Home, Back to School campaign. Although the campaign was a gigantic logistical challenge, collaboration ensured that all the target beneficiaries were reached.

A specific concern that constantly kept volunteers and partners on their toes was adherence to COVID-appropriate behaviour. Volunteers from CACR said, “When we visited the *adivasi padas*, they just did not believe in any COVID presence in their community. We also wanted to know their vaccination status but it turned out that it was not even a concern for them. So, we requested them to wear the masks that were given in the kits. Surprisingly, not even a single *adivasi pada* reported any COVID cases even after we had visited 40 to 50 of such hamlets.”



A photograph showing three individuals in a rural setting. On the left, a man in an orange shirt and blue jeans, wearing a blue surgical mask and glasses, is gesturing with his right hand. In the center, a younger man in a white patterned shirt and dark trousers, wearing a white surgical mask, looks towards the right. On the right, a woman in a dark blue patterned dress and a colorful shawl, wearing a blue patterned surgical mask, stands with her hands behind her back. They are under a simple structure with a corrugated metal roof. In the background, there are more buildings and greenery. A dark blue semi-transparent box with white text is overlaid on the lower left portion of the image.

CHAPTER 6

LISTENING TO THE VOICES



Despite geographical and logistical challenges, partners and volunteers ensured that relief kits were delivered to those who needed them most, as swiftly as possible. There were many traumas to face and hurdles to overcome in the process, while the joy on the beneficiaries faces, especially the children's, when they received the kits spoke of the unspeakable loss they had suffered. The voices of the human beings involved in this event, in any capacity, paint a poignant picture. We share here some of their words.

Shahaji Gadhire from Astitva said, “My organization has also worked during the last few floods. During the 2019 floods, a lot of organizations came forward with relief, but this time due to COVID-19, it was only us and the Back to Home team who were working on this. CYDA and UNICEF have offered tremendous help to the affected people because the poorest families have limited access to financial institutions such as banks or insurance and sometimes even government subsidies, and it was only the relief work through which they were provided the basic items such as cooking utensils, tarpaulin sheets, etc., which were necessary for them to be able to restart their lives. Some families didn't have money to buy even a couple of cooking utensils .”

“

The psychosocial support kits were great in helping the children to divert their minds from the situation around them, the pandemic lockdown and the floods. It was such a wonderful gesture for them.

— Shobha, an Anganwadi Sevika in Kolhapur

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Children studying in the schools in our district come from really far. During floods, the height of the water reached 17–18 ft. in the schools. The water spoiled all the study materials and swept away the games kept inside the school. The education kit and materials provided in the bag that was given to all children in our community gave a new hope and motivated them to come back to school.

— Chandra Jadhav, Principal of Zilla School, Poladpur



Through UNICEF, we received education kits for children from flood-affected families. The materials given were very nice and well-thought out. Our children here have never used such kinds of items. Even the teachers were excited for the children to learn to use them. This kit attracted the children and motivated them to come back to school. If the education department provides such materials, it can positively impact the enrolment of children in school. UNICEF has clearly identified the need of the children and given the relief materials.

— Sridhar Sigwan, a Block Education Officer from Ratnagiri



The heavy rainfall on 22 July did a lot of damage to the entire city of Chiplun, and from 23 July itself, people started engaging in relief work. With each passing day, we got worried because after weeks of experiencing floods, the schools did not receive help. Weeks later, a few organizations did come and help by providing bags, pens, pencils, etc. to the students, but the kits provided by UNICEF and CACR contained items which were all age-appropriate and well-assessed, not just for leisure but also for the psychosocial development of the children, and calibrated as per their needs.

It was very useful for each and every child. The floods affected the mental health of the children, and the kits were really helpful in bringing them out of the disturbed state brought on by the numerous disasters. I thank each and every person involved in this project for their efforts.

— Rajamat Desai, a Block Education Officer from Chiplun



The developmentally appropriate for learning kits provided to the students in Mahad and Mangaon blocks, jointly by CACR, UNICEF, Harit Seva Sangh Mahad, and Aai Kankai Sanstha Hodgaon, Mangaon, were very beautiful. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, people's economic condition was bad. Afterwards, the flood in Mahad damaged the people's household possessions, due to which they became helpless. In such a situation, schools were reopened. While the students were in dire need of help, they were provided the highly-required materials that enabled them to learn in a fun way through this initiative.

The material provided by UNICEF and CACR were a source of knowledge to the students while helping them enjoy the games. The quality of the literature was very good. Mr. Sushil Kadam Sir from the Mangaon block introduced the literature to the students in a very engaging way, inciting great curiosity in the students. They were so happy, that we cannot not express in words the joy present on their faces. On behalf of the Mahad and Mangaon blocks, I would like to thank you for providing these developmentally appropriate for learning kits to the students in the middle of such a big calamity.

— Dr. Sunita Amitkumar Chandorkar, Block Education Officer, Mahad & Mangaon

Prashant, a volunteer from Chiplun, Ratnagiri said, "When CACR came and met with us the first time, we expected them to be like all the NGOs that had come before them distribute items that have already been distributed several times. However, during the meetings, it was explained to us that we had to conduct awareness sessions with the flood-affected families. We were trained on how to conduct the sessions and why it was so important to explain the use of the items given in the kits. Extreme efforts were made to ensure that every village was reached, no matter how far or inaccessible. I am a local here and it made me proud to be part of such a beautiful project for the benefit of my hometown."



Hopes Means Life

(Case Study)

Shalan Balaso Sendage is a 67-year-old woman who lives alone in the Bichud village in the Sangli district. She receives no kind of support from her family. She lives in a hut and takes of her own survival. On 23 July, 2021, heavy rainfall resulted in the village being flooded. That heavy flood collapsed her hut and all her household possessions were swept away. There were no utensils or clothes that she could use. Also, rainwater was constantly coming inside the hut, damaging it completely. After the flood, she received support from UNICEF, CYDA and Astitva NGO, who provided her with tarpaulins, cooking utensils, a drum for storing water, and some necessary medicines, all of which gave her life-saving support and helped her survive in her new life situation.



People in villages did not have access to drinking water as supply lines had been disturbed. The jerry cans we provided played a very useful role. Those who received the NFI kits were especially happy. We had given special instructions to volunteers to gather information on the families who had suffered severe damage, such as those headed by women and with disabled family members, so that they could get assistance through the NFI kits on a priority basis. When children received their developmentally appropriate for learning kits, the happiness on their faces cannot be described in words. A similar sentiment was seen among the Anganwadi sevikas when they had received the psychosocial support kits because they had suffered damages or were affected because of the COVID situation; they said the kit contained important and relevant items for psychosocial support activities.

Jerry cans and buckets were especially useful in the slum community. Moreover, people were really pleased with the amount of detail in the kits with everyday essentials such as nail cutters, combs, lice combs, sanitary pads and other items.



Tushar Ramawat, a YCSSW student and volunteer who was involved in the packaging and distribution of 12,000 kits in Satara for over five months, said, “At YCSSW, we had to prepare more than 27,000 kits which were to be distributed in 100 villages in three districts. The paucity of time made it quite a challenging task. Then there were some hurdles during distribution as well. Several villages had been cut off from the main roads due to the flood, so we walked or used smaller vehicles to reach the beneficiaries. We particularly ensured that developmentally appropriate for learning kits and psychosocial support kits were distributed to the children and put in efforts to ensure that Anganwadi sevikas understood how to use the psychosocial support kits. Later, when we followed up, we learnt that these kits had fostered significant activities and games among the children, promoting their learning.”

Jeevan Relekar said, “The floods inundated the first floor of all the residential and commercial structures in Chiplun, which stand at a height of approximately 12–15 ft. The Vashishthi river flows on all the sides of the place where I live. There was damage and disruption with water everywhere and inside every building. There was no drinking water for two days and the roads were filled with mud and silt. I got a call from the Jagat Jagruti Organization telling me about the relief efforts and encouraging me to join as a volunteer.

‘While multiple players were active in the field immediately after the disaster, after two months or so, only the Back to Home campaign was still working in these areas, trying to fill as many gaps as possible despite the limitations.

‘First of all, I wish to say that I really admire that the campaign thought about the children — usually, no one goes so far as to think about them when we think of flood relief activities. ‘Clothes, ration, blankets have



their own importance but the joy on the children's faces when they saw the educational material and the toys/games, was just indescribable. I think children were the happiest group of people when the kits were distributed. Another item of significance was the tarpaulin sheets because they were immensely helpful for those who needed a roof over their heads or had houses where the walls had collapsed. We tried to reach everyone with the intention that each family should get what they needed the most, whether it was NFI kits, H&D kits, or children's items.”

Sejal Sawant, NGO partner from Jan Jagruti, Chiplun, said, “Between 21 and 23 July 2021, the area was completely flooded, particularly the slums in Chiplun city. CACR and UNICEF did a great job with relief, especially with the education kits. Every child got a developmentally appropriate for learning kit. My work included providing CACR with demographics and other data before the distribution and then maintaining a log of the number of kits distributed according to the areas and the demographic.

‘I personally felt that the survey before the distribution was an effective approach to reach the most in-need populations. Earlier, while relief was being distributed, the really affected households were busy in salvaging their belongings, cleaning their homes of mud and other waste left behind by the floods, and they remained left out of the relief effort. But through our surveys, we identified these households and took the required steps to bring them into the fold, and we used to inform the communities of the dates and timings of the distribution beforehand.

‘Cities have municipalities that take care of the surveys and the distribution but villages usually don't have any concrete systems in place. We utilized the Panchayats and other institutions' presence to help us with information, space, and distribution of the kits. Some villages even sent volunteers to other villages to help with the process.”

Vishnu Sirodkar, a beneficiary from a Chiplun village, said, “Two people had come to my house for the survey and took notes on the damages and our needs, information on the children, and our Aadhaar card numbers. Then a camp was set up to disseminate information to the community members on the use of the kits. The distribution took place on the same day.

Most of the people from the village had shifted to higher ground, where a couple of houses stood and offered a temporary abode with food arrangements. But we were scared that a landslide might occur any moment and take us all down with it. The bridge connecting this higher ground to the main village had also been swept away, so even the immediate help could not reach us. But eventually, we did get help, and these kits made it possible for us to deal with at least our most basic needs.

The children's kits stood out and my child was really happy to see the books and games.”



There was overwhelming positive feedback during and after the distribution. Beneficiaries expressed their gratitude for receiving the first concrete bit of help after the floods which went beyond ration and clothes, and for taking into account the needs of the children. Sharing their experience, a volunteer said, “A lot of the affected people were daily wagers and even a pencil/notebook/stationery is something that they can’t always afford. So the fact that the kits had all of such items was a big relief.”

Although the immediate response to the flood was an outpouring of relief at multiple levels, after two months, only the Back to Home campaign remained operational. The floods had not only accumulated silt and debris in homes, but had also inundated several connecting roads and streets, making them unfit for heavy vehicles to travel on, which could have easily transported the kits. In several instances, volunteers carried the kits on their shoulders, walking several kilometres to reach the beneficiaries. At times, beneficiaries crossed the rivers on boats to bring the relief kits to their own families and to those who could not reach out for them. Government functionaries joined hands in the support chain wherever they could. The campaign also took into special consideration the marginalized sections, such as the remote tribal hamlets (*adivasi padas*), because they usually remain at the margins of relief efforts.

The Back to Home campaign was an amalgamation of dedication, compassion and integrity, which brought hope to thousands of families for a better tomorrow.



CHAPTER 7

REFLECTIONS ON ROWING AHEAD




Back to Home was much more than just a flood relief campaign — it provided the partners an opportunity to delve deeper into the everyday negotiations of the affected communities. As the immediate relief measures give way to plans for long-term, sustainable response for affected communities, the scope widens to include long-term measures for securing lives, livelihoods and homes — an effort that will require examination of the lacunae in the system as it exists today and close cooperation between government agencies, donors, NGOs and communities to build a more resilient environment for those most affected by extreme climate vagaries.

To evaluate the impact and usage of the relief kits provided under the Back to Home campaign, UNICEF undertook an observational field visit from 8–10 November 2021.

Rini Bhargava, consultant with UNICEF Maharashtra who was part of the visit, pointed out that the kits received by children had not only helped as a morale booster but also made some of them feel as if they were active participants of the disaster response rather than passive victims of the multi-disaster scenario. Apart from diverting their attention from the stressful situation around them towards productive activities, the games and puzzles turned out to be robust bonding exercises, while some other items such as drawing materials had a therapeutic effect on some children.

Although the immediate response was delivered in a satisfactory manner, the work to rebuild and secure lives is vast and requires an analysis of the root causes and possible long-term solutions for disaster preparedness and mitigation. Some of the key areas on which work is required are encapsulated below:

Access to immediate relief supplies: The July 2021 floods revealed a gap between the resources available with the state disaster management authority, and the magnitude of the response required. This was most obvious in the area of NFI kits, and the campaign was quick to reduce this gap by making NFI kits as well as H&D kits available for more than 55,000 families within a short span of time.

A woman wearing a vibrant, multi-colored sari is seen from the back, holding up a large blue tarp to cover a severely damaged brick building. The building's facade is crumbling, with many bricks missing or broken. The scene is set outdoors with some green foliage in the foreground. The overall mood is one of hardship and the aftermath of a disaster.

Inclusion of all affected categories: A volunteer from Dishantar, working in Chiplun, pointed out, "Compensation did not include roadside hawkers who had already borne the brunt of the lockdown. Additionally, many farmers were not considered as an affected group even though their crops were destroyed, and mud and silt inundated their small holdings."

Inadequacy of information: While notifications about landslide risk areas were issued, there was no information furnished on where people could go or, on any compensation. Lack of complete information becomes a source of distress.

Timeliness of relief: As Mr Appasaheb Pawar, BDO, Walwa, said, “Sooner or later, the government assistance arrives and it is always monetary compensation for the damages. However, it may not always be adequate. For instance, a household with a damaged wall may be compensated for that. But that house may need to be completely rebuilt for safety and other reasons. So, there are gaps that exist. Moreover, by the time the assessment committees arrive on the ground, the situation would not be the same anymore, leading to an inaccurate assessment of the damages incurred by the public. Overall, this process usually takes several months.”

It is important to note that even while the damage assessment and compensation policies were implemented, albeit later than when absolutely needed, they were not always adequate and timely.



Nitin Wadhvani of CACR visiting the flood-damaged Akale Zilla Parishad school, Raigad

Gaps such as these highlighted the significance of the independent surveys (such as the surveys conducted for the Back to Home campaign) for local damage and beneficiary mapping, and also highlights the importance of timely relief distribution amongst the affected populations.

Rehabilitation and/or relocation: Ms Priyadarshini More, Deputy CEO, Water and Sanitation (WatSan), Kolhapur, mentioned that, “The government had been planning to rehabilitate the villages that experienced flooding most frequently. But this created a new set of problems, such as the uprooting of people from their lands and livelihood. So, for now, we’re hoping to advise on the new constructions, with the ground floor left for parking and the upper floors earmarked for residence. However, the only sustainable solution for villages which get inundated every year is to completely shift them to a new and safer location.”

Addressing anthropogenic factors: The issue of unanimous concern among the administrative and civil society bodies is that of the local factors which contribute to the frequent and worsening floods and landslides in Maharashtra. There are some man-made factors, such as the felling of trees, burning of forest patches, and other such activities, with the result that there is no retention of rainwater and all of it flows towards and into the rivers. In addition, the wastewater from village sewerage systems too flows into the rivers. What has further contributed to the problem is the encroachment of the riverbanks and lakes. So, all these combined factors lead to a flood situation, although this issue is usually overlooked during collective discussions.



Community outreach session by CACR in Dadli, Raigad

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) – Crucial stakeholders in emergency preparedness and response

On the role of CSOs and youth involvement, Mr Pawar's words are significant: "The administration is fully aware of the crucial role that NGOs fulfill when it comes to disaster response in the state. What's further needed is the involvement of more youth and a systematic approach to make people aware of their own responsibilities towards averting such disasters in the future. NGOs can play a significant role in creating awareness among the communities towards achieving that goal."

Ms Priyadarshini More, also underscores the role of CSOs in these efforts, "The kits provided by UNICEF/CYDA were really helpful in addressing the immediate relief needs of the affected communities. So, I would like to thank these organizations. Given the increasing frequency of the floods due to climate change and other local factors, we are possibly looking at this as a yearly phenomenon and should prepare for it accordingly by finding permanent solutions.'

She further said, 'An immediate need of the affected people is clothes, because usually there is no time to pack clothes while evacuating. Then, sanitary and hygiene items for women, and medicines, are always needed. Food and water are arranged for by the administration. The economically weaker sections particularly require more assistance, since they start from a position of vulnerability. In such a scenario, support from NGOs and CSOs has a significant impact.'



Action points for consideration

In the effort for an expanded paradigm of relief and rehabilitation based on long-term sustainable solutions that focus on the humanitarian-to-development continuum, there are many lessons to be learned. Work is needed on multiple fronts such as the health services; livelihood precariousness of people uprooted from their homes; need for permanent and multi-purpose shelter houses; parallel water-supply schemes; systems to deliver immediate relief such as food, medicines, etc., to the affected populations; and systems to help children continue schooling and recover from the emotional trauma arising from a disaster. Each experience throws up new learnings.

The following points may be relevant in forging the ways forward.

In context of general issues:

- » The existing state mechanisms of damage assessment and beneficiary identification (for e.g., *panchnama*) can be utilized as an initial database. However, it is advisable that volunteers/local NGOs conduct independent field surveys in order to create a reliable database of the beneficiaries who need relief on a priority basis.
- » Utilizing already existing bureaucratic and civil society networks in the affected regions facilitates a wider reach, accurate and timely distribution of relief materials, and trust-building amongst all the stakeholders. Capacity building for the same should also be planned as a preparedness measure.
- » Considering disaster events are only likely to become more frequent in the coming years, there is a pressing need to take holistic, long-term action. State funds should be invested in community resilience and preparedness efforts, e.g., establishment of permanent flood relief and cyclone shelters with a shelter management protocol; immediate assessment of the landslide-prone zones of the Western Ghats and Sahyadri belt and their restoration, early warning system and rehabilitation plan.
- » A renewed focus on the local factors that lead to disasters, such as the burning of forests, encroachment of riverbanks and lakes, etc., needs to be undertaken and addressed through widespread campaigns, information, education and communication (IEC) material, and behaviour change initiatives. NGOs/CSOs can play an influential role in this.
- » Involving youth in disaster response and preparedness is essential in both immediate and long-term efforts. This is possible in multiple ways: incorporating disaster management components in school and college, capacity building of local youth networks in disaster management along with provisions of adequate equipment and accessories.
- » Local groups can include a volunteer women's task force capacitated on the immediate rescue and response measures. The active participation of women volunteers and health workers during the Back to Home campaign provided ample evidence of their crucial role in such situations, highlighting the need to build their capacity for future preparedness efforts.



Issues specific to the Back to Home campaign

- » Some changes on the contents of the Back to Home kits can be considered to make them more appropriate for the cultural context. Hence, games like UNO or Monopoly could be replaced by a dhol for community singing. Also, as anganwadi centres were closed, usage of certain materials was compromised.
- » The report of UNICEF's observational visit draws attention to the emotional turbulence faced by the volunteers while they were working in the field. Due to the exigencies of COVID, training remotely made it more difficult to build capacities of volunteers, for some of whom the experiences in the field were emotionally taxing. The need for mindful and meditative practices as part of the orientation training were noted for the future.



If I believe that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.

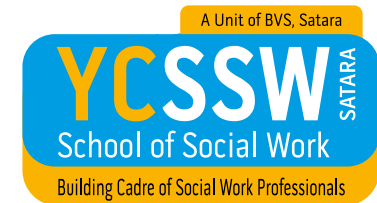
— Mahatma Gandhi



BACK TO HOME, BACK TO SCHOOL — IN THE NEWS



PARTNERS OF THE CAMPAIGN



ANNEXURE

Government Response

I. Central Government

- » PM announced ex-gratia of INR 2 lakhs each from PMNRF for the next of kin of those who lost their lives due to landslides in the state.
- » MHA deployed 34 NDRF teams with all the necessary rescue equipment, in the affected areas. As of 26 July 2021, NDRF rescued 3,804 persons, evacuated 2,077 persons and retrieved 101 dead bodies.
- » MHA coordinated with MoD for the mobilization of following resources:
 - A) 7 Naval Rescue Teams (including specialist naval divers and diving equipment) equipped with Gemini rubber boats, loud hailer, first aid kits, life jackets and life buoys were deployed in the affected areas.
 - B) Airlifting of marooned personnel from the Raigad district undertaken.
 - C) One Sea King 42C Helicopter from INS SHIKRA, Mumbai, was deployed at Poladpur/Raigad for rescue operations.
 - D) Indian Army had also deployed 06 officers, 24 JCOs and 305 Other Ranks comprising of Infantry, ETF, Medical team, EME (Recovery) and Signal in the districts of Ratnagiri, Kolhapur and Sangli.
 - E) Indian Coast Guard had deployed 03 Disaster Response teams with Gemini boats and necessary lifesaving equipment.

II. State Government

- » CM conducted emergency meetings with the line departments to review the situation and guided the district officials towards response activities. Field visits to the flood and landslide-affected areas were conducted to assess the on-the-ground situation. Further relief packages by the state government will be announced soon, along with setting up lines of NDRF in the vulnerable districts to ensure quicker disaster response.
- » 259 relief camps have opened and are being operated by the government, which house 7,832 people. Food, clothes, cooking materials, etc. are also provided at these relief centres.
- » The state government provided a fund of INR 2 crores to Raigad and Ratnagiri each for disaster response, from the State Disaster Response Fund. A fund of INR 50 lakhs has been allocated to all the other affected districts for immediate disaster response.
- » Restoration of the telecommunication and electricity lines is in progress.
- » The government rescue teams have evacuated 3,75,178 people so far, with the highest number of people rescued from Sangli, i.e., 2,06,619, followed by 1,50,365 people rescued from Kolhapur.



unicef 
for every child