

Stakeholder Workshop and Focus Group Discussions with
NGOs, workers' associations, corporate groups and researchers
4th to 6th March 2021, Pune

Venue: Hotel Ambassador, Model Colony, Pune, India

Background

COVID-19 has had significant impacts on cities across the globe. The pandemic has forced countries to implement various movement control measures and closure of businesses that have resulted in shrinking economic activities in cities and massive revenue loss of local governments. While the effects of COVID-19 provided some positive environmental outcomes, such as temporary reductions in emissions and improved urban air quality, the opportunity to have a sustainable and green urban recovery is still to be realised.

Similar to other cities in India, Pune too is impacted the citizen health and safety including their social and economic wellbeing. In Pune, the urban poor and informal sector workers are among the hardest hit and have been affected in many different ways. Transportation is a sector that enables economic recovery; however, the public transport utility as well as paratransit have been adversely affected with shortfalls in revenue. The formal sector industry appears to be recovering more rapidly than the informal and government services sector. The Government of India has announced strategies, stimulus plan and programs. Municipal bodies have a role in implementing schemes such as the SVanidhi yojana towards economic recovery. PMC has also taken measures for prudent financial management and recovery of operations and public services. Beyond these efforts, developing measures to support the worst affected segments of society and sustainable recovery needs the combined wisdom and innovation of multiple stakeholders.

Objectives

The discussions aimed to get insights for the following

- Nature of economic impacts of the pandemic and lockdowns
- Identify sectors in which the city government and local stakeholders can play a significant role
- Brainstorm actions in local stakeholder domains
- Identify next steps towards developing localized economic recovery plans

Discussions were done mainly with representatives of organizations and individuals involved in domestic work, intermediate public transport, street vending, construction work, as well as NGOs, academics, relief work volunteers and corporate support groups. An attempt was made to gather information on the following aspects.

1. What has been the nature of Covid impacts, in relation to
 - a. Occupation and income
 - b. Family or community life
 - c. Health aspects
 - d. Any gender and age specific impacts
2. Welfare schemes in operation, extent and experiences of beneficiaries; any additional specific

supports were felt to be necessary due to Covid impacts

3. Any new technologies used in recent years, computerization or digitalization in the occupation, if any
4. Are any platform/ gig work type structures emerging?
5. What are the major areas of improvement of work condition in the sector, long-term, short-term, Covid related
 - a. Enumeration, documents
 - b. General welfare - access to shelter, health, education, financial services, extent of banking
 - c. Occupation specific - space for work, access to public services (e.g. water, toilets, shade, resting spaces)
 - d. Skilling, training
 - e. Study / survey needs in the sector

School Education

Covid 19 impact

- While the government and civil society organizations working in the Right to Education sector had made immense efforts to improve school enrolment over the past few years, the pandemic has eroded these gains to a very large extent.
- Across the state or the country, children have been excluded from formal school education, and it's becoming very challenging to take education to them due to a number of reasons: families have migrated, government school teachers have been involved in Covid 19 emergency works for several weeks, lack of connection devices for online education, etc.
- Students who had a weak link to their schools and were on the verge of dropping out, have now totally dropped out, and they have lost access to the school; once they lost access to a physical school, there was no other alternative available for them.
- Parents are fearful of infection, health issues, survival, and unemployment, and school education is only one among many worries that
- Children and parents have also lost contact with the NGOs and the system and it was difficult to track them. Many people have families that have migrated, both within the state, and interstate migration.

Coping mechanisms, changes made, if mentioned

- Some NGOs started community-level centres where they could provide equipment and digital devices, to groups of children within that community, so that they can access the government programs or centralized broadcast programs and sessions conducted at the school level.
- NGOs helped access the sessions broadcast by the school and placed their community education staff at the community centres to keep the children engaged
- Some activities were conducted with parents as well to provide them educational ideas to engage students
- The following resource was shared:
COVID-19: 24/7 PARENTING provides Evidence-based parenting tips in more than 100 languages, Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) provides open-source and evidence-based parenting resources to support parents and caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Covid 19 Parenting resources at <https://www.covid19parenting.com/resources/index.html>

Future activities/ what support is needed

A rethink on the idea of schools is needed. Decentralized, locale specific community oriented solutions need to be evolved, as a single central or state-level solution may not work. Specific requirements currently are:

- Govt of India/ State government have initiated a time-bound survey of out of school children to be completed in March 2021; however teachers have been reluctant to go out into the community to conduct the survey. Civil society organizations have requested that the survey of out of school children be kept open through the year. CSOs are also trying to contribute their own data to the survey. Public support is needed to contribute to the survey of out of school children.
- Education Dept support, and parents support, community and CSR contributions are needed to set up and run safe community study centres and satellite schools, especially
 - Space, educational resources, educators and volunteers in the community
 - Enrolment will continue at a formal school, though children may not go to the formal school regularly since classes are not being conducted in the school campus
 - The understanding that students would return to the formal school over the course of few months as the situation stabilizes
 - Accessibility and quality of the community facility centre
- Local platforms for dialogues between Education Dept, NGOs, parents, school management committees are needed where the situation can be discussed from time to time
- Parents counselling should be made available at the neighbourhood and community level, encouraging home-based educational environment, participation in developing community learning centres. This may be done in online modes, as well as small group meetings for in-person orientation
- Training of community based educators and care givers for children. This may be done in online modes, as well as small group meetings for in-person orientation.

Support from civil society, corporate groups, higher education institutions

Covid 19 impact

- Many volunteers, citizens groups, donors came forward for relief work, but there was a lot of misunderstanding and communication gaps between the local and government system and the different volunteer efforts.
- Microlevel and last mile connectivity was challenging because whenever we go to a particular place to distribute something, the preparedness of the team, the reach of the team, and the people involved in it were going through very many challenges.
- The media was highlighting a lot of death cases and people were getting afraid of the situation, instead of getting the support or the realistic picture. How many people are survived, they were not giving the figure of that, but they were giving the figure of how many people are dying every day. There was a little bit of insecurity and uncertainty created because of this propaganda
- Six to seven peoples are living in one 10 X 10 sq feet house, how they are supposed to maintain the social distance that was a major challenge.

Coping mechanisms, changes made, if mentioned

- Technology has helped for online coordination and payment and reaching relied materials, medicines etc. Through connecting shops to people in need and arranging for payments from remote locations was the way we adapted.
- Use of social media platforms, small videos for information, especially in coordination with the govt mechanism set up. WhatsApp was used a lot for coordination were the tools most used.

Future activities/ what support is needed

- Strengthening digital + in-person platforms for people to be connected in all the neighbourhoods and slum communities; while digital modes are very useful, the community networks have helped a lot. Creative ways to strengthen community ties would be helpful as a resilience measure.
- Online platforms to publicize volunteering opportunities, solicit and manage volunteers, as well as link to area-based self-help groups, common interest groups, and groups that cut across socio-economic categories would be especially useful.
- New programmes of community-embedded studies for Covid recovery may be developed; new approaches such as 'real world labs' that are flexible and adaptable, would be especially helpful considering high uncertainty, and change; these can be taken up by Higher Education institutions as partnership efforts along with the city government, community organizations and communities.

Focus Group Discussion with Domestic Workers

Covid 19 impact

- Domestic workers were impacted in many ways: loss of jobs and incomes and depletion of savings are the main impacts; many apartment blocks, housing societies have asked domestic workers not to work for many months.
- Many domestic workers have lost their work, unemployment is very high.
- In many cases, the remuneration per household has gone down as not all works are permitted to be done since household members are working from home or have themselves lost their jobs
- Earlier efforts made by the domestic workers' association had resulted in the state government setting up a Welfare Board for Domestic Workers; however, the Board is non-functional for some years, the enumeration or registration of domestic workers was started but not continued and many did not register as it was a cumbersome process and there were no benefits. Had the Board been functional, it could have been of great help in providing some types of relief.

Coping mechanisms, changes made, if mentioned

- Food and ration distribution to union / association members and NGOs
- Some households helped their domestic workers during the lockdown by giving their wages
- Some domestic workers have taken to supplying tiffin/ cooked home meals, or taken up home-based work for stitching or tailoring with piece-based income.

Future activities/ what support is needed

- Efforts for a Welfare Board for Domestic Workers should be renewed. Such a board is also recommended by the ILO. The Welfare Board should conduct survey, provide a mechanism for enumeration or registration of domestic workers, provide identity, security, and set up a regulation framework with weekly holidays, minimum wages and other standards of 'decent work'.
- Being connected to opportunities for home-based work, or getting new customers / households for domestic work is possible through phone, but many domestic workers do not have access to phones. Efforts to improve mobile phone connectivity of women would be useful (such as through providing phones, or helping to evolve inclusive arrangements to reach a number of women through networks).

- The domestic workers' association had made an attempt in 2018 to provide an online portal of domestic work services; this attempt had not been thought through completely at that time and phone connectivity was an issue. However, as the demand for domestic services has changed, a renewed effort to provide a gig-work platform, suitable for women-based domestic services may prove helpful. Philanthropic and technical support for the same would be helpful.
- Community Facility Centres or Help Desks in slum neighbourhoods would help meet multiple needs for informal sector workers to register for different welfare schemes, access livelihood opportunities, connect to marketing avenues, map skills and occupations, and provide access or information to skill building etc.

Focus Group Discussion with Street Vendors

Covid 19 impact

- Income was greatly affected as very limited street vending of only vegetables was allowed during the period of strict lockdown
- Street vendors faced difficulties for basic needs, and some left for their home towns due to the uncertainty
- Lockdown led to a different type of body pain due to change in work and domestic conflict, due to economic stress

Coping mechanisms, changes made, if mentioned

- The number of street vendors in Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad was estimated to be about 70000 before the pandemic. There have been changes in the number since some have left the city and gone to their hometowns. People who had other occupations and jobs but have lost their livelihood during lockdowns may have also shifted to some form of street vending, or scrap dealing.
- Some street vendors shifted to selling vegetables during lockdown as supply chains and demand of other products was almost absent
- As vendors were not allowed to sell by the roadside, some started the business from their homes and took phone orders
- People preferred to pay by digital methods using phone apps and the vendors who had smart phones for mobile payments were able to get better business
- The government has introduced SVANidhi loan scheme offers a sum of Rs 10000 for street vendors with an interest subsidy @ 7% per annum on regular repayment of loan.

Future activities/ what support is needed

- Street Vendors Act, which was passed by the Government of India in 2014 should be implemented by the state and city governments. The municipal corporation should conduct the survey of street vendors, hold elections, set up the Town Vending Committee (as per the law), provide vending certificates and allocate serviced spaces to all the vendors.
- The implementation mechanism of the Act and especially creating a desk for year round enrolment of vendors will be most helpful at this stage; rent seeking can be avoided and municipal corporation can charge a vending fee which can be used to maintain street vending zones and it won't be a financial burden on the government.
- Govt of India's SVANidhi loan scheme can help, but vendors lose 2 to 3 days of livelihood in preparing the paperwork and follow up to get loans; if communications about loan requirements are made clear, and systems brought closer to applicants that will be very helpful
- Training on hygiene practices, using technology for digital payments are needed

- Supply of pre-cooked standard items in sealed packs that can retain good quality for a few days at least, can be made for hygienic heating before serving as a new way of providing cooked food by street vendors (though it would increase packaging waste).
- Online portals linking area-based demand to street vendors of the same area, for home delivery / neighbourhood vending may help to link street vendors to customers.

Focus Group Discussion with auto-rickshaw & tempo drivers, and Construction Workers

Covid 19 impact

- “The lockdown period was like zero for us, it was like nothing happened good for us, like we were not existing for that time”
- In construction work, daily wages have gone down tremendously even after lockdown has opened up; earlier where an auto driver used to get 700-800 rupees per day, now they get 300 rupees. The options for work are less, and the wage rate is lowered by contractor. Labourers have to work for 12 hours. In 300 rupees how can they feed their 5 family members? They also have to work as per the contractor’s conditions as they don’t have any other skills or job options
- Daily wages of informal sector are down tremendously, they have to work more for less money as they lost bargaining power and also have to compromise on dignity and work culture.
- Even now people are refusing to give us work, they ask for Covid test reports
- It was difficult to survive as people did not get basic food, medicine and treatment in time. Lockdown was enforced but good policies were not made, relief fund was not released, no implementation of any good policies or interventions decided.

Coping mechanisms, changes made, if mentioned

- Many informal sector unions and association, NGOs people have helped with food and ration to all needy ones. We also saw some sharing the relief rations with people who are more needy.
- Rickshaw Panchayat (union) has arranged a few awareness programs for auto rickshaw operators on safety and hygiene aspects and how to interact with customers in the Covid period.
- Autorickshaw union worked with PMC city authorities to provide emergency passenger services with 500 auto rickshaws, for people who wanted to go to hospitals or had other emergency needs.

Future activities/ what support is needed

- The cost of the insurance policy is very high for auto-rickshaw drivers. The rickshaw is among the safer vehicles as they go slower. Change in the insurance policy structure (risk factor slab) or based on ‘no claims’ could be a great help for all auto-rickshaw drivers
- Auto-drivers Welfare Board (Kalyan Mandal) can be formed to deal with and secure the livelihood of auto and tempo owner and insurance and promote different business issues
- The transition from current CNG based auto rickshaw to electric may be considered, and a suitable scheme should be prepared in discussion with autorickshaw
- The autorickshaw association is interested to develop a new model of environmentally and socially sound model of shared, intermediate transport services that functions in the interest of the workers (rather than an external company), the customers and the city. They envisage it as a model of a drivers’ owned cooperative or company that can run shuttles, shared and intermediate transport services with technology integration.

List of Participants

Forty nine participants attended the focus group discussions, other than colleagues at CEE who provided facilitation and documentation support on the three days.

4 March 2021, morning session: School Education	
1. Sushant Asha	Association for the Rights of the Child ARC Network
2. Mandar Shinde	Association for the Rights of the Child ARC Network
3. Kranti Salve	Association for the Rights of the Child ARC Network
4. Jyoti Dhiwar	Association for the Rights of the Child ARC Network
5. Ms. Anupama Silas	Vanitashray, Organisation
6. Sanskriti Menon	Programme Director, CEE
7. Avinash Madhale	Programme Coordinator, CEE
8. Kunal Jaiswal	Project Officer, CEE
9. Swapnil Borade	Video Documentation
4 March 2021, afternoon session: Support in pandemic by NGOs, corporate groups, higher education institutions	
1. Lakshmi Lokhande	Community sanitation committee member, Yardi CSR
2. Sweety Jagtap	Community sanitation committee member, Pandavnagar, Yardi CSR
3. Archana Shelar	Community sanitation committee member, Mula Road, Yardi CSR
4. Jyoti Randive	Community sanitation worker
5. Vatsyala Rathod	Community sanitation worker
6. Sangita Ishavar Tusam	Community sanitation worker
7. Vaishali Patkar	Aundh Vikas Mandal
8. Sathyanatarajan	Aundh Vikas Mandal
9. Samaiirah	Vaghmi Foundation
10. Prof Shruti Tambe	Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) Head of Dept of Sociology
11. Vishnu Shinde	Dept of Sociology, SPPU, Research staff
12. Rasika Savale	Savitribai Phule Pune University Research staff
13. Geeta moharkar	Yardi software Industries LTD
14. Vijay Pagare	Yardi CSR
15. Ramakant Padwal	Yardi CSR
16. Laxmi Lokhande	Community sanitation worker, Patil Estate, Yardi Software
17. Sanskriti Menon	Programme Director, CEE
18. Avinash Madhale	Programme Coordinator, CEE
19. Kunal Jaiswal	Project Officer, CEE

20. Swapnil Borade	Video Documentation
5 March 2021, morning session, Domestic workers views on pandemic impact and future needs	
1. Jayashree Tapkir	Gharkaamgar Sanghatana (domestic workers' union), Rajendra Nagar
2. Papital Baliram Sonatakke	Janvadi Gharkaamgar Sanghatana, Rajendra Nagar
3. Manisha Sidheshwar Mohite	Gharkaamgar Sanghatana
4. Khatun shafil sayyad	Gharkaamgar Sanghatana
5. Kiran Moghe	Gharkaamgar Sanghatana
6. Surekha Mane	Unique Foundation
7. Meena Suresh Bansaode	Janvadi Gharkaamgar Sanghatana, Sinhgad Road
8. Hirabai Ghonge	Gharkaamgar Sanghatana
9. Maya Chavahan	Janwadi Sanghatana
10. Sangeeta Kendre	Janwadi Sanghatana
11. Padma Shinde	Janwadi Sanghatana
12. Saraswati Bhandirge	Janwadi Sanghatana
13. Sanskriti Menon	Programme Director, CEE
14. Avinash Madhale	Programme Coordinator, CEE
15. Kunal Jaiswal	Project Officer, CEE
16. Swapnil Borade	Video Documentation
5 March 2021, afternoon session, Street Vendors and workers views on pandemic impact and future needs	
1. Sandeep Yadav	Janiv Sanghatana (street vendors union member)
2. Kailash Borage	Janiv Sanghatana (street vendors union member)
3. Sanjay Shanke	Janiv Sanghatana (street vendors union leader)
4. Santosh Kadam	Janiv Sanghatana (street vendors union member)
5. Prasad Kulkarni	Kulkarni Hospitality Services Pvt Ltd
6. Sanskriti Menon	Programme Director, CEE
7. Avinash Madhale	Programme Coordinator, CEE
8. Kunal Jaiswal	Project Officer, CEE
9. Swapnil Borade	Video Documentation
6 March 2021, Autorickshaw, tempo drivers, construction workers views on pandemic impact and future needs	
1. Nitin Pawar	Rikshaw Panchayat union leader
2. Azim Haji Nadaf	Construction Worker
3. Nisar Pirjade	Construction Worker
4. Aslam Nadaf	Construction Worker

5. Vishal Bagul	Rikshaw Panchayat member
6. Bapu Kamble	Rikshaw Panchayat member
7. Manjarekar Ishwar	Rikshaw Panchayat member
8. Ravindra Poredi	Rikshaw Panchayat member
9. Mubarak Shaikh	Tempo Panchayat member
10. Bharat Gidewad	Tempo Panchayat member
11. Sopan Ghogare	Riksha Panchayat member
12. Sanskriti Menon	Programme Director, CEE
13. Avinash Madhale	Programme Coordinator, CEE
14. Kunal Jaiswal	Project Officer, CEE
15. Swapnil Borade	Video Documentation