

**Minutes of 42nd Meeting of the Advisory Group on Community Action - National Health Mission
Population Foundation of India
June 3, 2021**

Members of Advisory Group on Community Action (AGCA)

1. Dr Abhay Shukla
2. Dr Abhijit Das
3. Mr Gopi Gopalakrishnan
4. Dr H Sudarshan
5. Ms Indu Capoor
6. Ms Mirai Chatterjee
7. Dr M Prakasamma
8. Dr Narendra Gupta
9. Ms Poonam Muttreja
10. Dr Sharad Iyengar
11. Dr Thelma Narayan
12. Dr Vijay Aruldas

National Health Systems Resource Centre (NHSRC)

1. Mr Arun Srivastava, Consultant

AGCA Secretariat

1. Mr Bijit Roy
2. Mr Daman Ahuja
3. Mr Saurabh Raj
4. Ms Seema Upadhyay
5. Mr Smarajit Chakraborty
6. Ms Jolly Jose

Population Foundation of India

1. Ms Dipa Nag Chowdhury, Director Programmes

Ms Poonam Muttreja, Member AGCA welcomed all the members to the meeting. She mentioned that Mr Vishal Chauhan has taken charge as the Joint Secretary- Policy, MoHFW. The Secretariat has reached out to Mr Chauhan with a brief on the AGCA and Community Action for Health (CAH), and requested for a meeting. Mr Chauhan could not join the meeting due to prior commitments. A briefing meeting will be organised with him in the next two weeks to share about the CAH work and brief on the AGCA meeting along with the plan of action.

Ms Muttreja mentioned that the Secretariat team has put in a lot of effort, and provided need-based support to the state governments over the last one year. This includes development of the resource materials, including guidance notes, social and behaviour change communication materials (SBCC), facilitation of online trainings, and conducting

virtual Jan Samwads. In addition, the Secretariat is supporting and working with the NHSRC team to roll out Jan Arogya Samitis (JASs), and developing a training module, and reference book for Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

The objectives of the Advisory Group on Community Action (AGCA) meeting were to: (a) share the progress update on support provided to state governments on COVID-19; and (b) discuss on strategies to further strengthen community engagement in the current COVID-19 context.

A. Progress update

Presenting the progress update, Bijit Roy, Team Leader, AGCA Secretariat said that based on the feedback from Mr Vikas Sheel, former Joint Secretary- Policy, MoHFW, the AGCA Secretariat redirected its technical support to state governments primarily focusing on strengthening community engagement for COVID-19 mitigation since May 2020. The technical support included: (a) development and dissemination of guidance notes for PRIs, Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNCs), Rogi Kalyan Samitis (RKSs), Mahila Arogya Samitis (MASs), and Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs); standard operating procedures (SOPs) for organisation of Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Days (VHSNDs) and Urban Health and Nutrition Days (UHNDs); (b) social behaviour change communication materials around COVID-19 such as videos and posters; (c) documented and disseminated 30 good practices with state governments on community engagement initiatives during COVID-19; (d) facilitated 101 online trainings on COVID-19 mitigation for engagement of VHSNCs, MASs and RKSs in which 5,642 block, district, and state nodal officers participated; and (e) facilitated 11 virtual Jan Samwads in Bihar and Rajasthan to enable community interactions and feedback to health officials during COVID-19.

Members shared the following feedback:

- There are many initiatives taken by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to support the government efforts on COVID-19. Efforts should be made to document and devise strategies for a more effective, and coordinated response between government and CSOs at the ground level.
- Appreciating the SBCC material and its translation in nine regional languages, it was suggested that resource materials can be translated in Telugu as well.
- Virtual Jan Samwad is a good innovation, combines and balances the elements of physical and virtual interactions between the communities and health officials. The platform has potential for sharing and resolution of common grievances during this period of crisis. A separate conversation should be held on how to make virtual Jan Samwads more inclusive and community oriented.
- In many states, there have been delays and issues in payment of incentives as well as lack of provision of protective gears for ASHAs. The Secretariat should compile, and share these issues with the state governments and the MoHFW.
- There are several information gaps between the community and the public health system around prevention, vaccination and home isolation. The Information, Education and

Communication (IEC) cells of the state governments should reach out to be for appropriate messaging and communication.

- A WhatsApp or Signal group can be created for regular interactions among the AGCA members, NHSRC and MoHFW officials. The Secretariat will seek concurrence from the MoHFW officials to be included in this group.

B. Discussion on strategies to further strengthen community engagement in the current COVID-19 context

The session was co-chaired by Ms Mirai Chatterjee and Ms Poonam Muttreja, Members AGCA. The group discussed the following:

- The community view point is critical in formulating guidelines. For example, the guideline for home isolation does not match with the local situations, and diversity across various geographies in the country. The AGCA can provide specific feedback on these aspects to the government.
- The current approach for home isolation should be shifted towards home management considering lack of sufficient physical space, and the difficulty of isolating COVID patients in most of the homes. Regular monitoring of health parameters by the frontline health workers including temperature, saturation level of oxygen, and consumption of prescribed medicines should be done. This will considerably reduce morbidity and mortality.
- A demonstration model on community based epidemic monitoring and response system can be piloted in a small geography to show effectiveness of coordinated action among the community, local CSOs, and the government.
- Community action should focus on issues around mental health, nutrition, especially monitoring levels of malnutrition, since pandemic, and access to its services are centred on adolescents and elderly.
- Target based approach on COVID vaccination is putting lot of pressure on administration to adopt coercive approaches resulting in strong reactions from the community in terms of vaccine aversion, fear, reluctance, and distancing themselves from the health and social workers. AGCA should work with the MoHFW and state NHMs to develop strategies and resources to address vaccine hesitancy. An AGCA sub-group comprising Dr Thelma Narayan, Dr Sharad Iyengar, Dr Narendra Gupta, and Ms Poonam Muttreja, has been constituted to meet on June 5, 2021 to deliberate, and plan out the priority actions. In addition, the Secretariat and the AGCA members should provide feedback to the state and district officials on coercive practices adopted for COVID-19 vaccinations.
- Community action during the next phase of COVID can focus on three areas: (a) strengthen support mechanisms for community such as help desks, counselling services, and helplines; (b) engage and strengthen community action through VHSNCs, MASs, JASs, and RKSs; and (c) establishing effective communication and response mechanism between the community and the health system through Jan Samwads. A strategy document can be drafted and shared with the MoHFW, NHSRC, and the state NHMs. AGCA members- Ms Mirai Chatterjee, Dr Abhay Shukla, Dr Thelma Narayan, Dr M Prakasamma, and Mr Arun

Srivastava, NHSRC volunteered to support the Secretariat on this. A separate meeting will be organised soon. The task is to be completed in the next three months.

- Contribution of the frontline workers comprising ASHAs, AWWs, ANMs, and community members especially women on curbing the spread of COVID-19 needs to be acknowledged, documented and disseminated to boost their morale.

The meeting ended with vote of thanks by Ms. Poonam Muttreja.

Action points from the meeting

Sl. No.	Action Points	Responsibility
1.	Organise meeting of the AGCA sub-group to deliberate, and plan actions to address vaccine hesitancy	AGCA Members and Secretariat
1.	Organise a briefing meeting with Mr Vishal Chauhan, Joint Secretary-Policy, MoHFW	AGCA Secretariat
2.	Develop a strategy on community action for next phase of COVID-19	AGCA members and Secretariat
