



Boosting social solidarity and empowerment of women in building the local response to the Covid-19 pandemic in coastal villages of Gujarat, India – the experience of Utthan



A quest for justice, dignity and hope

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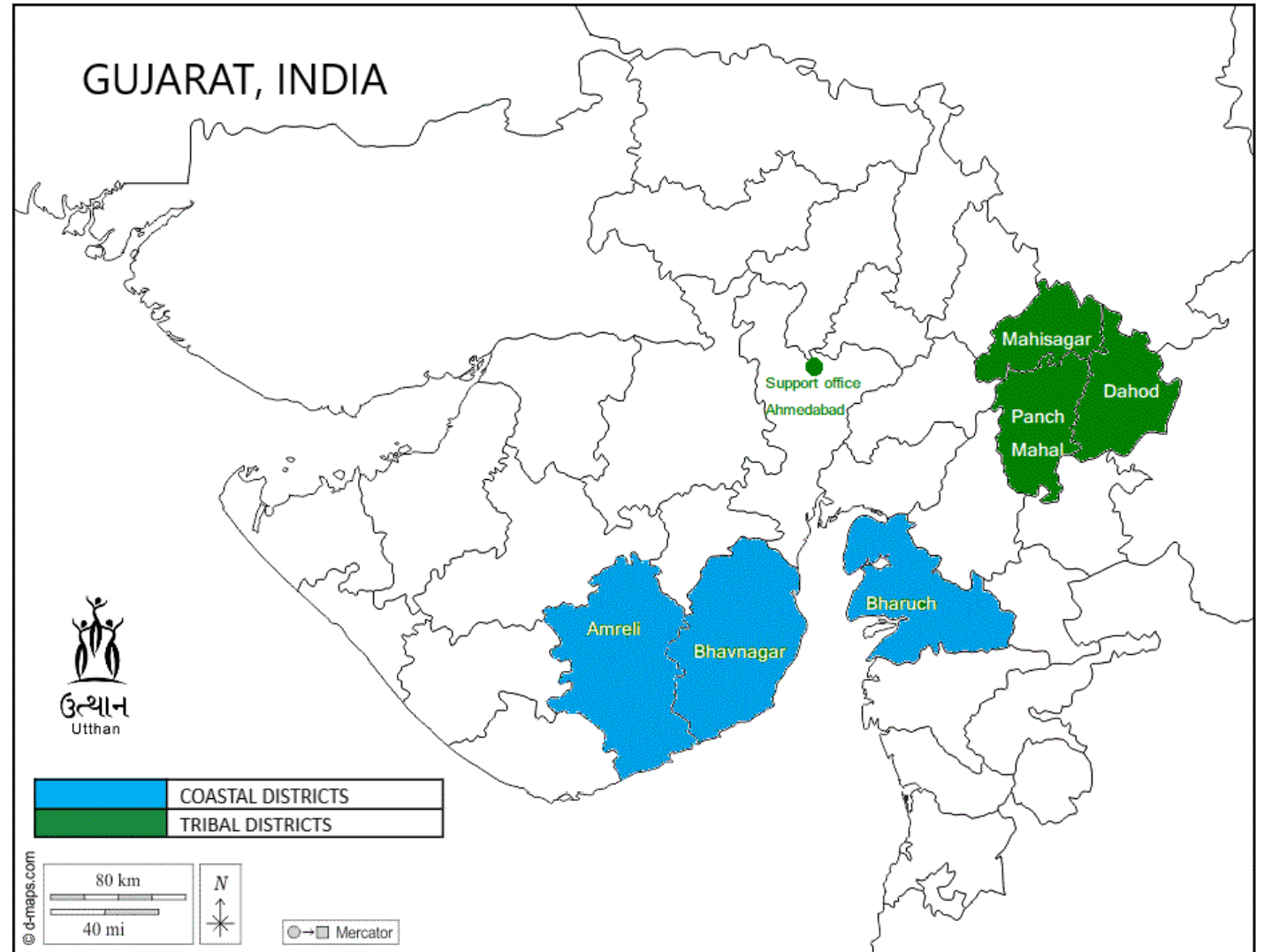


www.utthangujarat.org

Utthan's Outreach

Directly touches the lives of **1.4 million +** people of **412 villages** in six districts of Gujarat

Outreach	Gujarat
Districts	6
Blocks	19
Villages	412
Population	13,75,962
HH	1,94,409



Utthan, a non-profit organisation, working for the past 40 years with a mission to initiate gender-sensitive grassroots processes of empowerment among the most vulnerable communities in rural Gujarat, India.

GUJARAT's Intervention context - geographic, socio-economic, gender, governance



- Longest coastline in India ~1600km. of rich biodiversity
- Rise in extreme weather events; cyclones and prolonged droughts
- High industrialization, construction of dams, increasing commercial fishing and agriculture
- More than 41 ports and 90 percent of the state's Special Economic Zones located in region

➤ Land and waters of Gujarat are governed by national legislation including the Environmental Protection Act of 1986, the Water (prevention & control of pollution) Act of 1974, Coastal Zone Regulation 1991 & Biodiversity Act 2002.

➤ No decentralized governance of coastal resources → conflicts between various stakeholders

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com> > ... > vadodara News

138 women in Gujarat faced domestic violence daily in 2019
04-Jan-2021 — Vadodara: With Gujaratis locked up inside homes during the lockdown, incidents of domestic violence in the state also spiralled ...
Missing: coastal | Must include: coastal

<https://scroll.in> > India > Women's Rights

In their fight for land rights, Gujarat's women face long battles
03-Sep-2021 — In their fight for land rights, Gujarat's women face long battles Kanchan Kolipatel has faced violence at the hands of her brother-in-law ...

<http://ghminda.org> > 2018/06 > women's-health

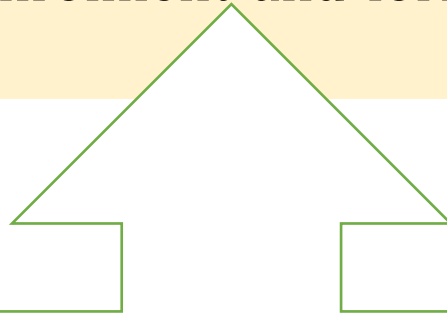
Women's Health - Jan Swasthya Abhiyan

Health Policies, Programmes pertaining to Women's Health . 64. Section V ... Gujarat was witness to systematic sexual violence unleashed against ...
83 pages



Women worse off than men across all social and economic categories

- Increasing income inequality and marginalization of artisanal fishers, salt pan workers, small agricultural farmers, daily wage labourers, livestock herders and migrant labourers and women
- Child sex ratio, secondary school enrolment and formal employment particularly adverse for women



Last 25 years of Utthan's empowerment mobilizational approach →

Three Women's Federations with over 7300 members

Area Resource Groups on Livelihood, Peace, Water & Sanitation, Watershed Mgmt., Youth issues, Economic Empowerment, Women's Land rights, alternative mechanisms for Justice for violence survivors; some mixed and some comprising only women.

Women's collective action → a significant role in securing water, sanitation, livelihood, land and property rights along with safety and security of women and girls.

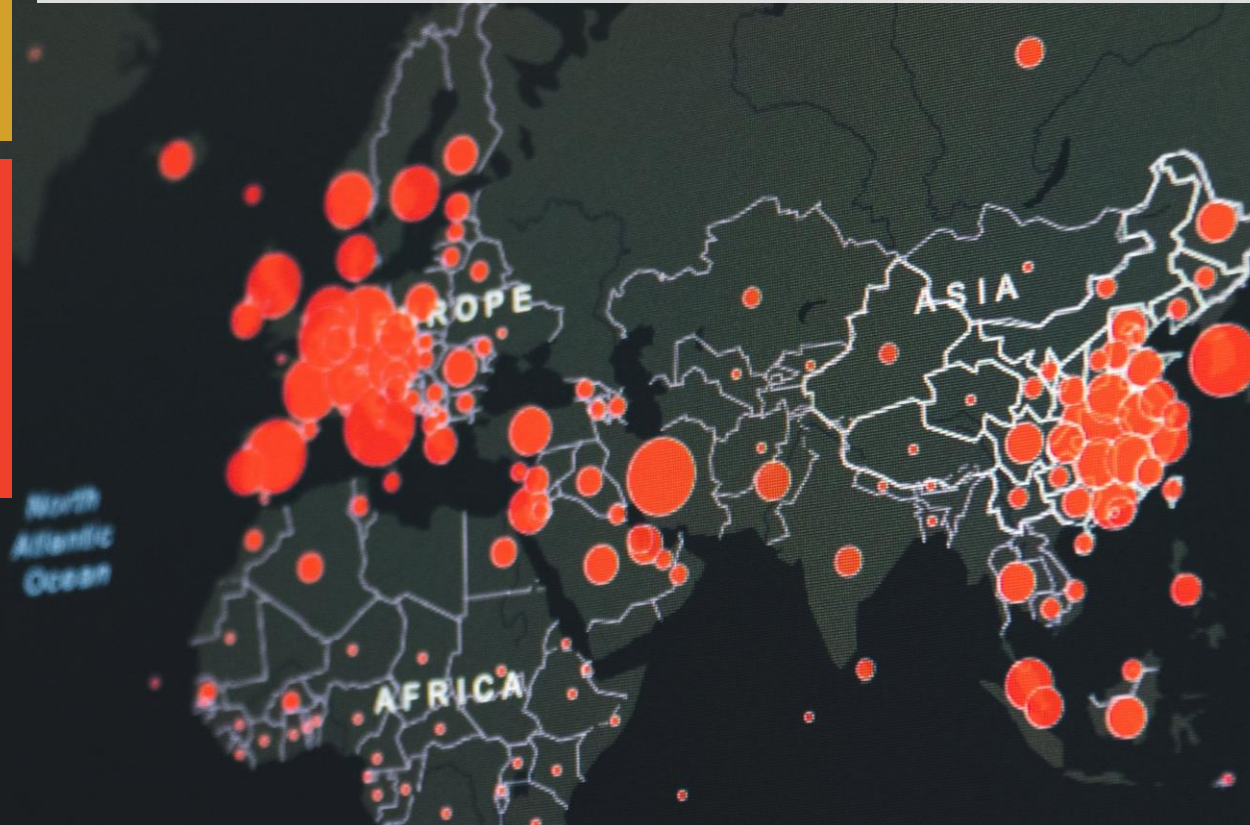
2 ZERO HUNGER



5 GENDER EQUALITY



Since late 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has spread swiftly over the world, posing serious threats to food security and nutrition.



Decreased earnings and higher food costs → placing food out of reach for many people

Pull back to efforts to achieve SDGs on Zero Hunger & Gender Equality



Lockdown was only the beginning of misery for those already on the margins



Government of India promulgated a Nation-wide lockdown as a preventive measure. Despite the fact that food value chains and related activities were spared, severe challenges experienced

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in coastal areas of Gujarat



- While Government intent was good, a huge gap remained in meeting the total food needs. Added burden of reverse migrants keen to return home, as cities shut-down and efforts to shelter and feed them, or provide daily work, were limited.
- Hunger and mental stress
- Women and girls suffered further distress:
 - Unpaid household and care work increased
 - Ate last and least as food availability fell
 - Were the last to seek treatment when their health failed and experienced more poverty
 - Lack of documents, updated bank accounts, fishing permits and negligible land ownership led to exclusion from Government's Covid-19 relief measures for poor rural households.
 - Increased violence

Based on Surveys & community consultations, Data available on request

Utthan's Case



**Leveraging
diversity, equity
and inclusion in
building local
resilience to crises**

EMPLOY & DEPLOY

- Locally available resources
- Knowledge
- Networks

TO BOOST

- Social solidarity between households
- Energise local economy



- *Rural community-centred, gender responsive approach in procurement and distribution*
- *Prioritizing the most vulnerable when directing relief and livelihood support*
- *Building alliances with different stakeholder groups for effective interventions*

Rural community-centred, gender responsive approach in relief procurement and distribution: PEOPLE TO PEOPLE SOCIAL SOLIDARITY MODEL

Immediate support, local procurement, money circulation : Food grain distribution and Masks



Food grains for relief purchased from local women farmers.



Relief including food grains, soap, masks and menstrual hygiene products to 7785 rural households across 130 coastal villages.

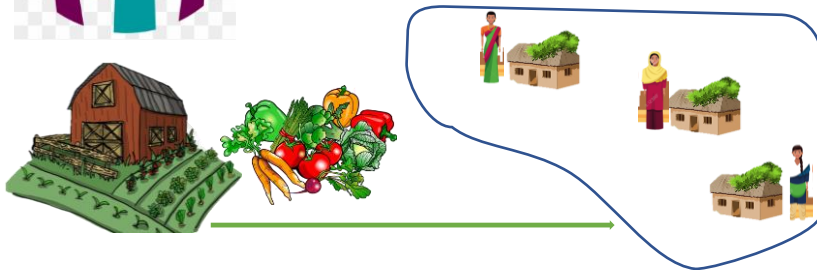
INR 10,12,883 (USD 13600) worth of food grains were bought from 61 women farmers

Face masks worth of INR 2,77,500 (USD 3700) bought from 68 women tailors

Social capital building and boosting social solidarity



Village community leadership mobilized towards this end. Youth and women from 55 villages were engaged as volunteers to support the process, also trained and equipped for Covid-19 prevention and care work.



Kitchen-garden kit including seeds & bio inputs to grow vegetables. Initial support to 1956 households led to nutrition for nearly 8000 households over a year.

Scaleup and share the experience in Networks

- Utthan shared experiences in Working Group for Women & Land ownership, Inter Agency group & Rapid Rural Community Response to COVID-19 (RCRC), the latter was featured as one of the top 50 last-mile responders in India (2021), in the World Economic Forum's [COVID Response Alliance for Social Entrepreneurs](#)

Local procurement and share while building social capital within the community

Prioritizing the most vulnerable when directing relief and livelihood support



Vulnerable families were identified with the support of village leaders, Women Federation members and local government representatives. Vulnerability assessment was based on house type, control over private or public resources, impact on livelihood, families with disabled and non-earning members, and women headed households.



Livelihood support to marginal fishers, farmers, migrant families and livestock keepers.

Women members of coastal village groups also brainstormed on improving income-generation within existing work, as well as alternative income-generating opportunities.

- 78 artisanal fisher women and 32 women fish traders provided fishing nets and weighing scales.
- 1400+ women farmers dependent on rain fed agriculture were supported with local seed and bio inputs for the monsoon crop and 230 farmers were supported for the winter crop.
- 17 migrant families helped to set up rope-making units and 15 poor families helped to sustain their livestock businesses.



Participatory and community led model of identifying "vulnerable" along with building economic resilience through livelihood enhancement.

Building alliances with different stakeholder groups for effective interventions

Establishing strong dialogue and feedback mechanism with the government



- A culture of establishing strong dialogue and feedback mechanism with the Government was encouraged at all stages of the relief intervention.
- Support government through participatory exercises & public disclosure of vulnerable households selected for relief distribution



Linkages with government health cadre in the second wave, when there was a spike in rural infections and deaths from Covid-19, provided timely support in prevention and treatment of Covid-19 infections.



Data on gaps in accessing reliefs like food rations under government relief distribution schemes, provided by Utthan and village leaders to relevant government officials, helped several vulnerable households gain their entitled benefits.

Information on mandated reliefs and opportunities like the rural employment guarantee programme helped communities gain some income security



Alarming rise in gender-based violence during the pandemic, the three Women's Federations provided counsel and support to 350 women and girls from April 2020 to July 2021.

Building alliance with system to ensure Government resources and facilities accessed

Lens of ensuring support to severely impacted & those with pre-existing vulnerabilities.

- Local grain procurement grains ensured farmgate purchase leading to cash circulation in the communities while supporting food security
- Sustainable farming approach based Kitchen garden improved nutritional needs of the marginalized.
- Strong women leadership and institutions at village & district level became important catalysts in preparing, implementing & monitoring interventions in an inclusive way.
- Regular monitoring and consultation with local women and youth representatives helped to assess and respond to evolving needs as the pandemic progressed
- Teaming up with government agencies particularly frontline health workers increased their involvement and efficiency of services
- Need of Counseling for women and girls suffering from gender-based violence increases during pandemic
- Grassroots based organisations like Utthan play a vital role in facilitating effective collaboration between community leaders, national civil society networks, government stakeholders and donors, for a more effective, efficient, sustainable and equitable disaster response and management.

Leveraging diversity, equity and inclusion in building local resilience to crises



