



WaterAid/ Srishti Bhardwaj



COVID-19 response by
Urban Local Bodies:

Measures to address water,
sanitation, hygiene-related
challenges in slums and
informal settlements



Provision of adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are important for prevention of COVID-19 outbreak. In absence of these facilities and lack of awareness about disease-prevention measures, urban poor, including low income groups and vulnerable households living in slums and other informal settlements, are at even greater risk of COVID-19. This brief highlights measures which could be undertaken by urban local bodies to address these challenges.

As per Census 2011, more than 17% of India's urban population lives in slums, which are usually densely populated settlements, with inadequate facilities for water, sanitation and hygiene. Apart from these, there are other informal settlements which are not officially classified as slums but face similar challenges as well. The populations residing in these settlements comprise of several informal and daily wage workers, who have lost their source of livelihood since the lockdown was imposed. They would face difficulties in accessing health care, as well as basic essential items such as soaps and menstrual products, and lack of access to information on disease prevention can further increase their COVID-19 risk. In such a situation, the vulnerable in these communities, such as elderly persons, persons with disabilities, adolescent girls and women would face even more challenges.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India has issued an advisory on 'Safe Management of Water Supply and Sanitation Services during COVID-19 crisis', which mentions suggestions for urban local bodies regarding water safety, community toilets, waste management, and sanitation workers' safety. However, several field reports suggest that challenges for the urban poor, related to disruptions in water supply and access to sanitation and hygiene facilities have multiplied in the last two months. In order to address these challenges, suggestions for urban local bodies (ULBs) have been listed below.

SUGGESTIONS FOR URBAN LOCAL BODIES

1. Designate nodal officer for each ward/ slum area:

- The urban local body to appoint a nodal officer for every ward/slum area, who would be responsible for ensuring regular provision of water and sanitation services, hygiene facilities (handwashing and menstrual hygiene), and other support required.

2. Identify community-level volunteers:

- Every nodal officer to identify community volunteers in their respective allocated areas. One community volunteer may be identified for a cluster of households (possibly 1-2 volunteers for each mohalla).
- These volunteers would coordinate with the nodal officer, ULB officials and service providers for ensuring that support measures reach the most needy and vulnerable persons in the community.
- The volunteers can also support frontline workers such as urban ASHA for community level support measures.
- These volunteers could be identified from the youth, women, self-help group (SHG) leaders, and community cadre under urban development programmes such as National Urban Livelihoods Mission.

3. Identify a pool of trained technicians:

- ULB to prepare a list of locally available trained persons for completing repair, retrofitting and maintenance work and make it available with all nodal officers, so that they may contact the technicians as required.

- Provisions can be made to authorize nodal officers to issue work orders and approve payments, in order to avoid any delays during the disaster/pandemic period.

4. Ensure regular water supply and distribution, and water quality:

- Nodal officer to coordinate with community volunteers to estimate daily water requirements at household level, and at community toilets based on the population in each settlement.
- Nodal officer to map the current provision of water supply in each settlement, and identify the areas facing water stress, and the additional requirements, with support from community volunteers.
- Nodal officer to coordinate with tanker-based service providers to make arrangements for water supply to meet additional requirements, with a roster-based system to streamline the supply.
- For settlements dependent on tanker supply, nodal officer to make arrangement for water storage tanks at various points in the settlement, each having four taps facing different directions, as shown in Figure a. Tankers should replenish these storage tanks on a regular basis. Each storage tank be built on a raised platform (about 2 feet) and should be have a capacity of minimum 5000 litres, such that it can be used by 12 households. This system will help in preventing crowding at water distribution points, and ensure that people don't have to walk long distances to fetch water.

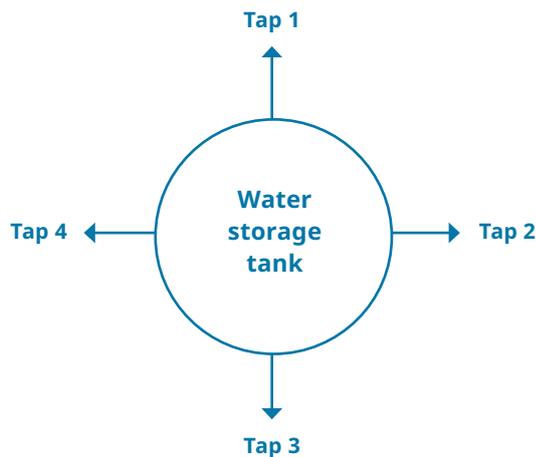


Figure a: Water storage tank

- Nodal officer to monitor the supply and distribution of water among all households, with support from community volunteer, on a daily basis. Volunteers may ensure that all persons, especially vulnerable persons in the community such as elderly persons, persons with disabilities, etc. are able to access water without any difficulty. To the extent possible, they should not be put in a position to come and collect water personally, and possible support for helping them should be organized.
 - In case multiple tanks cannot be provided in some of the settlements which are dependent on tanker based water supply, the community volunteers to be trained for organizing the people in a way that equitable supply is possible and no chaotic rush is happening around the tanker to collect water. Here again, support to the most vulnerable categories of people should be prioritized.
 - Community volunteers to report to the nodal officer in case of disruption in supply or its quality, or issue requiring repair or maintenance.
- Nodal officer to take steps to resolve all types of issues related to water supply, repair and maintenance (including those in storage tanks) within 24 hours.
 - Wherever feasible, simple methods of rain water harvesting can be promoted, to meet requirements for hand washing and toilet use.
 - Nodal officer, with support of community volunteers, to ensure that chlorination of water is undertaken as per the advisory by MoHUA, to ensure water quality.
 - In case piped water supply is being provided in any settlement, the nodal officer to identify any potential points of contamination of drinking water with waste water and faecal matter, and address these immediately.
- 5. Ensure adequate and functional sanitation facilities:**
- Nodal officers to undertake daily monitoring of community toilets with the support of community volunteers, to ensure that these are open and accessible to users dependent on these, and are being cleaned and disinfected regularly. It is also useful to keep the community toilets open and accessible 24*7, so that crowding at specific times may be reduced
 - Nodal officers to ensure that all community toilets have regular water supply. If required, additional storage arrangements may be made using water storage tanks, as described in point 4.
 - Nodal officers to ensure that all important supplies required for cleaning and disinfection of toilets, as well as personal



protective equipment for toilet cleaners are provided and replenished regularly.

- Nodal officers to ensure that caretakers and cleaners of community toilets are oriented on disinfection protocols, use of personal protective equipment, and handling of waste.
- Community volunteers to report to the nodal officers in case of disruption in access to community toilets, or any issues requiring repair or maintenance (including water supply).
- Nodal officers to take steps to resolve all issues related to repair and maintenance in community toilets within 24 hours.
- In case any community toilets have been closed down due to the lockdown or are not available in some locations, pre-fabricated/ mobile toilets to be arranged to meet the requirements.

6. Ensure facilities for regular handwashing and hygiene

- Nodal officers to ensure that adequate number of handwashing stations, with regular supply of water and soap, are installed at community toilets, water collection points, and at other common points such as shops, schools, anganwadis etc. which would be frequently visited by the population in these settlements. If public transport is operational, it is important to provide such facilities in bus stops and commuting points close to these settlements.
- Community volunteers to be trained in making simple arrangements for handwashing at household and community levels such as simple handwashing stations using locally available materials, which would utilize less water. These volunteers, in turn,



can support community members for setting these up.

- Menstrual products may not be available or affordable for many women and adolescent girls. Use of cloth may not be possible due to insufficient water for washing. Thus, to address these challenges, urban local bodies can make provisions of free sanitary napkins at community toilets along with waste disposal facilities, and also distribute these to households as required.

7. Build community awareness on preventive measures

- Nodal officers, with support of community volunteers, to ensure that important information and messages on COVID-19 prevention are reaching all community members. Door-to-door campaigns as well as

meetings will not be possible due to limited mobility and prohibition of gatherings.

Therefore, other communication media such as calls, SMS, video and audio messages through WhatsApp, radio, TV, posters at community toilets and water collection points, public announcements etc. could be used.

- Community volunteers to encourage community members to undertake regular cleaning and disinfection of surfaces which are touched frequently, at community toilets and community water collection/distribution points, as well as at household levels using sodium hypochlorite solution. These include: pillars, door handles, taps, etc.
- Community volunteers to make sure that physical distancing norms are being followed and regular disinfection is being done at

community toilets and community water collection/distribution points, especially at times when water is being distributed to households through tankers.

8. Ensure affordability of services

- Urban local bodies could waive off user fee for water supply and community toilets for at least six months, since most users would be facing financial challenges due to lockdown.

9. Ensure availability of funds for supportive measures

- Ensuring regular provisions of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in slums is very crucial for preventing COVID-19 outbreaks. Thus, urban local bodies might be required to identify additional sources of funds and allocate adequate amounts for meeting the emerging requirements. This can be done from schemes such as AMRUT, state-sponsored urban development programmes, or funds from disaster management initiatives.

10. Strengthen community based organizations and collaborate with local NGOs and civil society organizations

- To undertake the above measures, urban local bodies may require support in some activities such as community mobilization, building awareness, etc. For this purpose they can partner with local organizations working on water, sanitation and hygiene and issues of urban poor. Community based organizations too, could be strengthened, which would help in effective implementation.
- In order to avail civil society support for urban poor settlements, the urban local bodies may undertake a mapping of existing civil society organizations which are ready to extend their support for these specific areas. Such a database can be used for providing institutional support mechanisms at the community level.
- Community-based institutions such as area and cluster-level federations under National Urban Livelihood Mission too can be leveraged for support, wherever feasible.

Resources:

1. Posters and audio-visual communication materials on hygiene practices for COVID-19 prevention in 7 languages: (WaterAid India): <https://www.wateraidindia.in/covid19>
2. Handwashing with soap facilities: compendium of indicative layouts, designs and cost estimates (UNICEF): <http://sujal-swachhsangraha.gov.in/sites/default/files/COVID%E2%80%9319%20HANDWASHING%20WITH%20SOAP%20%28HWWS%29%20FACILITIES.pdf>
3. Interim technical note on water, sanitation and hygiene for COVID-19 response in slums and informal urban settlements (UN-Habitat and UNICEF): https://aa9276f9-f487-45a2-a3e7-8f4a61a0745d.usrfiles.com/ugd/aa9276_df4caca1767d4a80849c9713c6cf3eb4.pdf



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