

Services Within Reach: Breaking Down Barriers for Informal Workers



3D Program
FOR GIRLS & WOMEN

Case Studies in Convergence Series, No. 2

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Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) is a trade union in Pune, India, that brings together waste pickers, itinerant waste buyers, waste collectors and other informal recyclers. We recover, collect, categorise and sell scrap materials for recycling. We also provide garbage collection, composting and related waste management services. Our members are self employed workers.

Website: <http://www.kkpkp-pune.org/>



SWaCH is India's first wholly-owned cooperative of self-employed waste collectors and other urban poor. It is an autonomous enterprise that provides front-end waste management services to the citizens of Pune. Our mission is to engage an entrepreneurial workforce of waste pickers into an efficient, responsive and accountable organisation and work in partnership with the municipal solid waste management system to transform the SWM situation in Pune. SWaCH envisions a society that is socially just, economically equitable, culturally plural, politically democratic, environmentally sustainable, peaceful and humane.

Website: <https://swachcoop.com/>



The **3D Program for Girls and Women** advances gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment by helping local governments work more efficiently across departments, and with civil society and the private sector, to increase economic opportunities for girls and women and address their health, education and safety needs.

Website: <https://the3dprogram.org/>

This report is part of the 3D Program's *Case Studies in Convergence Series* which documents insights and lessons learned from pilot initiatives implemented by the program and our partners to demonstrate convergent solutions to advance gender equality and generate recommendations for stakeholders in government, civil society and the private sector. Pilot initiatives are being implemented in response to priority issues raised by girls and women through collective platforms in Pune City and District, Maharashtra, India.

Suggested citation:

"Services Within Reach: Breaking Down Barriers for Informal Workers." *Case Studies in Convergence Series*, no. 2, Washington, DC: 3D Program for Girls and Women, 2020.

Foreword and Acknowledgements

This case study documents findings from the first year of implementation of a unique service delivery model for informal workers in Pune City in India. The hub-and-spoke model, comprised of a central workers resources center or Kashtakari Sadhan Kendra and a network of community-based satellite centers or Kashtakari Seva Kendras, is being implemented by the waste pickers' union Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) and cooperative SWaCH. The goal of the model is to improve access by waste pickers, and ultimately other informal workers, to programs, opportunities and benefits they are entitled to.

The 3D Program for Girls and Women facilitates convergence of services and partners to strengthen programs for girls and women. We are proud to partner with KKPKP and SWaCH in this effort because the model skillfully demonstrates how to converge access to a range of services from across various sectors through a decentralized model with a broad reach.

The Kashtakari model was put in place in Pune City about a year before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Pune City has been hit hard by COVID-19. At the beginning of the pandemic, waste pickers were deemed essential workers in Pune and with the support of KKPKP and SWaCH have courageously provided vital waste management services at significant risk to themselves and their families. Many programs and services they rely on have been disrupted and long-standing disparities and barriers to access have been exacerbated. The model was designed to address those disparities and barriers well before the COVID-19 pandemic. With some adjustments, it is now proving to be effective in facilitating vital flows of information and lifesaving supplies during the crisis. By demonstrating its effectiveness during the COVID-19 crisis, the model has gained support among KKPKP members, and partnerships with local government and other organizations have been accelerated. The need for convergence in a decentralized way has been validated, and those who staff the centers have been empowered as community mobilizers.

Special thanks go to Lakshmi Narayanan, Poornima Chikarmane and the leadership of KKPKP and SWaCH for their visionary work to ensure that waste pickers and their families have access to the opportunities and resources they are entitled to. Thank you to Maitreyi Shankar who staffs the central Kashtakari Sadhan Kendra, and Sayali Pradeep who coordinates the Kashtakari Seva Kendras or satellite centers, located in slum communities across Pune City. Thanks to the enumerators, Sunbais (community mobilizers) and volunteers who staff the kendras. We hope by telling their stories, their work will be recognized and emulated.

Finally, we extend our admiration and gratitude to the members of KKPKP and SWaCH, who continue to show courage and power in their contributions to Pune City and through their collective action.

Sia Nowrojee

Executive Director, 3D Program for Girls and Women

INTRODUCTION

The waste pickers of Pune provide an essential service for Pune City in Maharashtra, India. Organized by the union Kagad, Kach, Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) and the cooperative SWaCH, over 3,500 waste pickers service around 840,000 households of the city daily, collecting waste from each doorstep, and either composting it or taking it to secondary collection points. They provide reliable, reasonably priced garbage collection and materials management services to 840,000 properties, collect 1,100 tons per day (TPD) of waste, divert 200 TPD of waste from landfills, compost 3 TPD of waste and are often the sole breadwinners of their families. Depending on their work schedule, waste pickers earn a range of INR 10,000-15,000 (approximately USD 140 to 210) a month.

About 80% of all waste pickers in the city are Dalit women who live in slums and face discrimination. Due to advocacy through collective action by the union, they are eligible for social services and entitlements, including scholarships for their children, subsidized health care and insurance policies and housing allowances and food rations. In 2015, the Maharashtra Right to Public Services Act was passed to increase access to government services and make government departments accountable. The implementation of the Act is overseen by the Maharashtra Commission for the Right to Services and the online Aaple Sarkar (our government) portal and application facilitates provision of specified services.

Those without access to the internet can in theory access services through various municipal citizen service centers. Additionally, KKPKP has run a helpline since 2018 to assist waste pickers with various issues, including accessing government programs.

However, these pathways to inclusion are hampered by a range of barriers, resulting in underusage of government benefits. An analysis of scheme enrolment, outreach to waste pickers, and a review of calls to the KKPKP helpline revealed a range of barriers to access, including:

- **Lack of information and knowledge** among waste pickers about schemes and benefits, about changes to schemes and eligibility requirements, as well as lack of outreach by the government to informal workers.
- **Enrolment challenges**, including confusing and changing eligibility criteria, cumbersome documentation requirements, inaccessible digitized application processes due to poor access to phone and internet coverage, and high opportunity costs, including income lost and transportation and time costs to reach municipal citizen service centers during work hours.
- **Systemic failures**, including inadequate and problematic financing of schemes, complex implementation architecture, and failure to act and lack of accountability of officials.¹

¹ For more information on barriers to access and the actions KKPKP is taking to overcome them, see Poornima Chikarmane, with Sia Nowrojee and Kalkidan Shebi, *Pathways to Inclusion: Social Protection and Public Services*

To address these barriers, KKPKP is working with their members and advocating with the Municipal Corporation of Pune (PMC) to ensure waste pickers receive the benefits and services they have a right to and create practical avenues to increase awareness of and enrolment in programs across all sectors.

To this end, an innovative hub-and-spoke service delivery model was implemented in Pune City, to bring information and enrolment support about a range of schemes from across sectors to waste pickers in the communities in which they live. The model was developed through a partnership between KKPKP, SWaCH and the 3D Program for Girls and Women, and was implemented as a demonstration project to increase social inclusion of informal workers across Pune City. The model provides a decentralized option that converges access to programs from a variety of sectors and service providers and enables waste pickers and other informal workers to receive the help they need to access the programs they are entitled to in one convenient place and at convenient times. An additional objective is to create a replicable model that can be accessed by other informal workers with multiple vulnerabilities, such as domestic workers and street vendors, within the jurisdictions of the PMC and the Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) in Pune City and other cities across India.

The model benefits from the ongoing advocacy by KKPKP and SWaCH to facilitate the socioeconomic empowerment

of their members. This includes advocacy at the municipal, state and national levels to ensure that current information about programs is shared with marginalized populations; that eligibility requirements and enrolment procedures for programs are streamlined; and that informal workers, including waste pickers are included in new or revised programs. KKPKP representatives often meet with local and state government officials, organize community meetings with local officials, and engage in policy advocacy at the national level on issues ranging from pensions to universal health care.

The model also benefits from the strength of the collective action of the KKPKP and SWaCH members themselves, which has established waste pickers as a recognized and respected group of professionals who contribute to municipal processes and health, engage directly with citizens, and have a collective voice that can and should be heard.

This case study describes the operations and outcomes of the model in its first year of operation. It captures insights and lessons learned in this early phase, and offers recommendations based on what we have learned to date about engaging informal workers and removing barriers to their access to social programs and entitlements. It also captures the role the model and its staff have played during the COVID-19 pandemic, leveraging its reach within vulnerable communities, to ensure that they receive the support and resources they need.

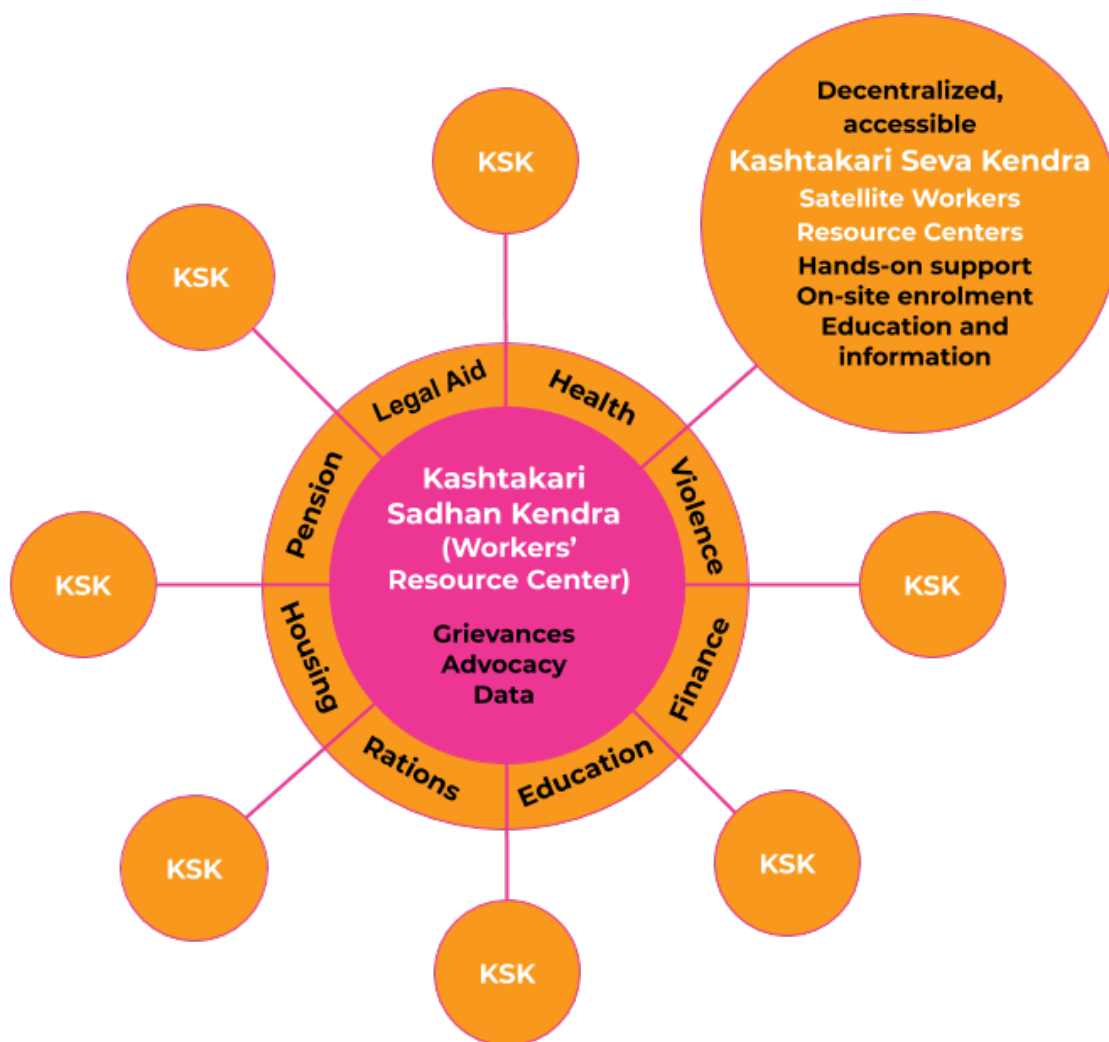
PROGRAM MODEL

Decentralized and Accessible

KKPKP's hub-and-spoke model, the Kashtakari model, was designed to efficiently link waste pickers to public service delivery systems and private programs across sectors. The hub of the system, the central Kashtakari Sadhan Kendra, includes the Kashtakari Helpline, the next iteration

of an existing helpline, to facilitate access to services, and a team of responsive advocates who conduct advocacy, help file and address grievances, and collect and analyze data. They also provide back-end support to nine decentralized, community-based Kashtakari Seva Kendras (KSKs) that serve as the spokes in the model to facilitate information sharing, problem solving

Figure 1: The Kashtakari Model

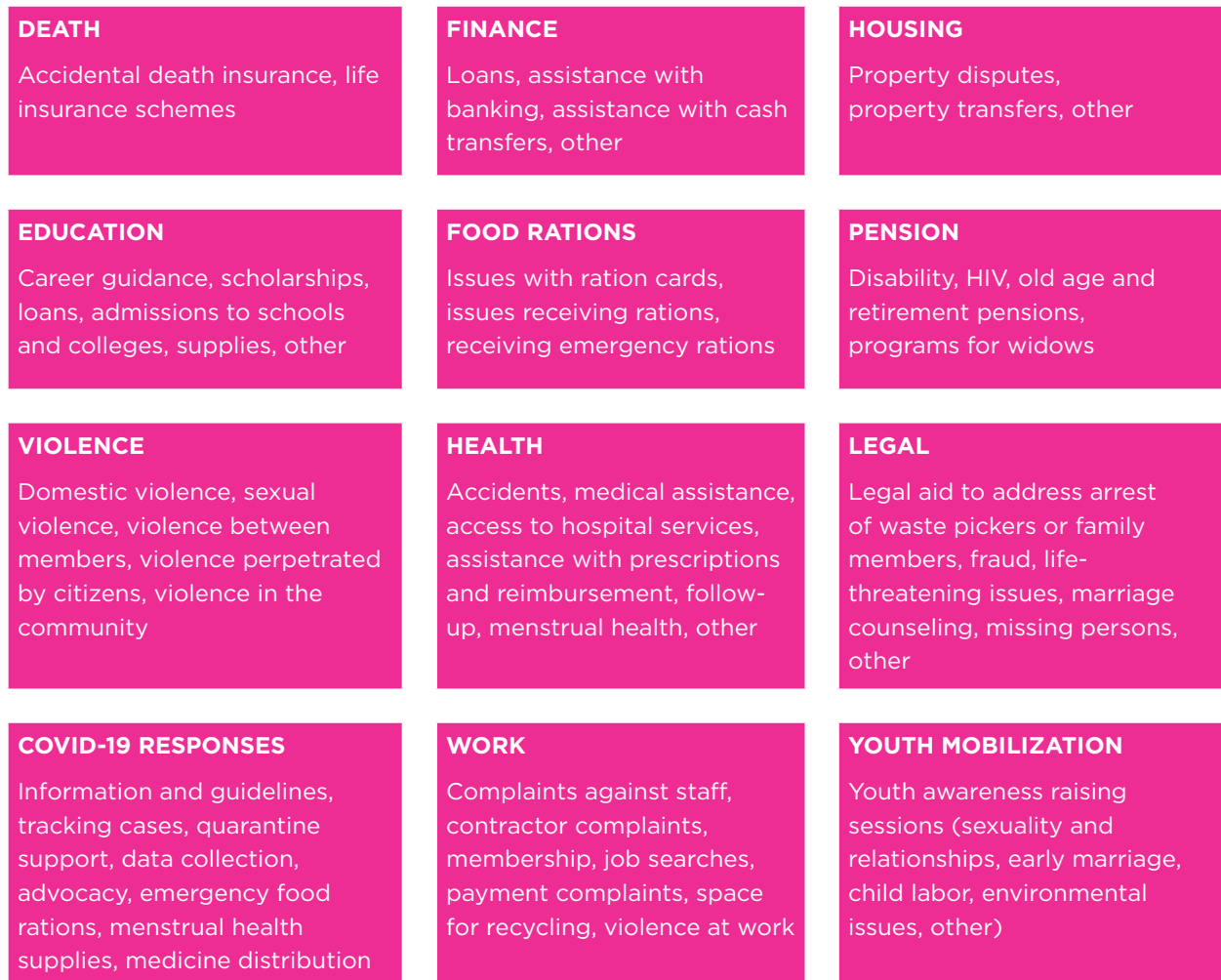


and on-site enrolment for entitlements and programs across multiple sectors and services, including health, education, housing, pensions, food rations and legal services (Figures 1 and 2). Implementation of the model began in July 2019, with KSKs progressively added in different locations.

Strategically Located

Currently there are eight KSKs within the jurisdiction of the PMC and one in neighboring PCMC, each catering to approximately 500-700 KKKP members. The locations of each kendra and the

Figure 2: Services Provided by the Kashtakari Model



members assigned to each were decided based on demographic densities. All but one are housed in municipal spaces, formally or informally allocated to KKPKP by the PMC Social Development Department, Solid Waste Management Department or elected representatives of the PMC. The KSKs are locally governed by pratinidhis (waste picker representatives) who live in those locales.

Locally Staffed

Each kendra is staffed with a local team, consisting of an enumerator and two community mobilizers, who typically are Sunbais (daughters-in-law) of the waste pickers, and youth volunteers. When each kendra opened, an introductory meeting was held with enumerators, Sunbais, youth leaders and pratinidhis to understand, reflect and discuss the plans, and commit to their respective roles.

Enumerators ensure that members have the required documentation and help them access entitlements under several municipal, state and central government schemes in various sectors, including health, education, legal aid, credit, housing and social security. Digitally literate, enumerators are equipped with internet connectivity and basic equipment, including furniture, a laptop, printer, scanner and stationery. They are trained in digital uploading of data, government systems and processes, minimum criteria requirements, and steps to ensure enrolment in various schemes. Each month, an effort is made to increase

the range of schemes the enumerators cover, without overloading them. Most of the enumerators live close to the KSKs and work between noon and 8 pm, a timeframe that is convenient for the waste pickers.

Sunbais or **Community Mobilizers** are young women, typically daughters-in-law of the waste pickers. They are trained in digital literacy and communications skills, including how to communicate with members, using mobile phones and social media to gather and share information, conduct conference calls, and take and share photos of documents. To date, KKPKP has organized digital literacy training conducted by college students and corporate information technology engineers and communications skills training conducted by a partner NGO. Through in-house training by the union, the Sunbais are also equipped with relevant knowledge about government schemes to mobilize members. While the Sunbais use their own smart phones, KKPKP provides SIM cards and internet access. They are encouraged to get their license to drive a scooter to be able to cover their full catchment area. To facilitate consistent communication between Sunbais and the union, KKPKP has assigned one activist to serve as the point of contact. See Box 1 for Sunbai responsibilities and activities.

Youth Volunteers, young men and women who are the children of waste pickers, are emerging as an active pressure group, driving the community towards broader social change by engaging in social issues. KKPKP's youth program encourages youth

Box 1: Sunbais at Work

As community mobilizers, the Sunbais have engaged in the following activities:

- **Member mapping:** Each Sunbai covers a geographic area that includes 500 to 700 members. They are responsible for connecting with those members, documenting contact information and household composition, and identifying the needs and vulnerabilities that could be addressed through government and other programs and services.
- **Facilitating educational schemes:** Sunbais identify the children of waste pickers who are eligible for private and government scholarships, including those who are doing well in school and those in difficult circumstances. They then mobilize them to gather their documents and visit the enumerators to fill and submit the application forms. The Sunbais also distribute scholarship checks to children who are awarded scholarships, provide progress reports to scholarship providers and organize programs to celebrate the achievements of scholarship recipients.
- **Accompanying members:** Sunbais accompany members to ensure that they receive the services or benefits they are eligible for.
- **Intervening in cases of violence:** Some Sunbais have intervened in cases of domestic violence and have called and engaged the police.
- **Documenting needs:** Sunbais have played an important role in documenting and sharing the needs of members with the union, particularly during crises such as floods and COVID-19.
- **Sharing information:** Sunbais have used their networks to share messages and information between the union and its members.
- **Collecting member fees:** The Sunbais serve as decentralized administrators for the union and collect member fees.

participation in community activities to address issues that are relevant to them and the kendras offer additional local platforms through which to engage them. They are supporting the kendras by reporting issues

and supporting members in emergencies, and during the COVID-19 lockdowns, have been instrumental in the distribution of rations.

FINDINGS

Access to Government Programs Increased

Since implementation of the Kashtakari model began, enrolment in schemes has increased across most sectors. A comparison of enrolment in 2018 and 2019 found significant increases in enrolment in health schemes and education scholarship schemes. Notably, once the KSKs were in place, enrolment in schemes mitigating the impact of violence and schemes providing rations began for the first time. Data collected in the first quarter of 2020 (before

COVID-19 lockdowns began) showed consistent enrolment across sectors with significant enrolment in schemes mitigating the impact of violence (Tables 1 and 2).

Member Satisfaction Improved

There is no formal system in place yet for union members to provide feedback on how the Kashtakari model is working. However, members have expressed that they appreciate that the KSKs are located in their neighborhood and are open in the

Table 1: Number of People Enrolled in Schemes through the Kendras

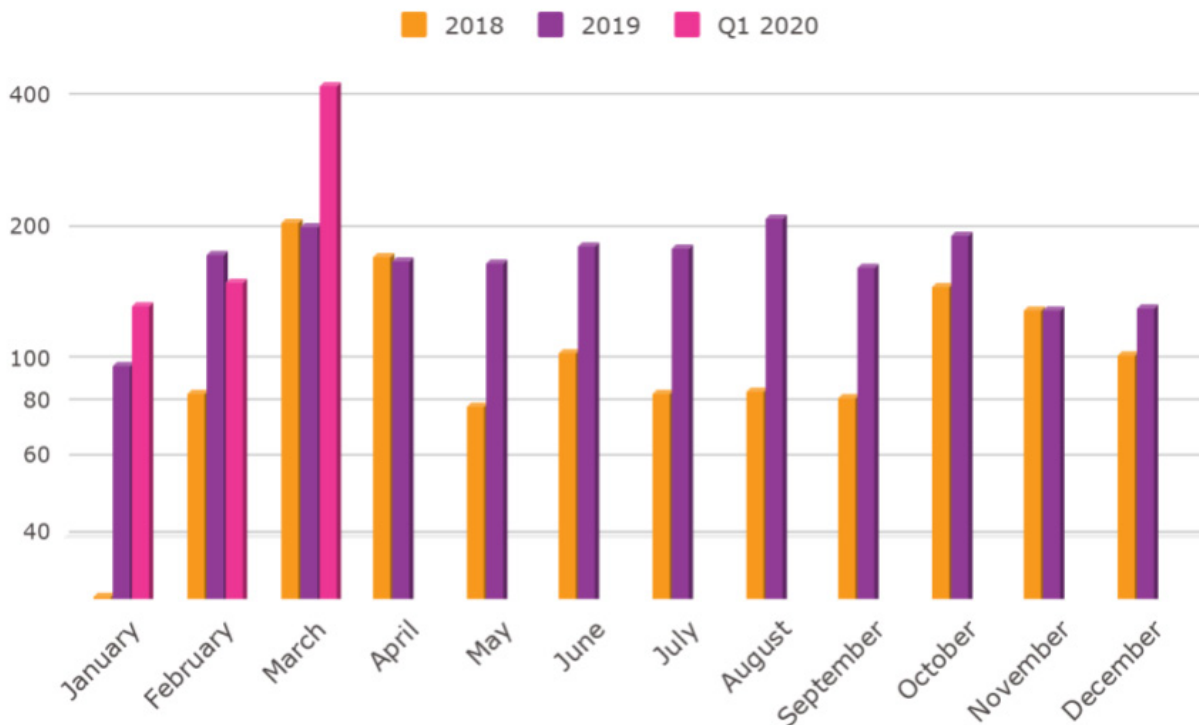
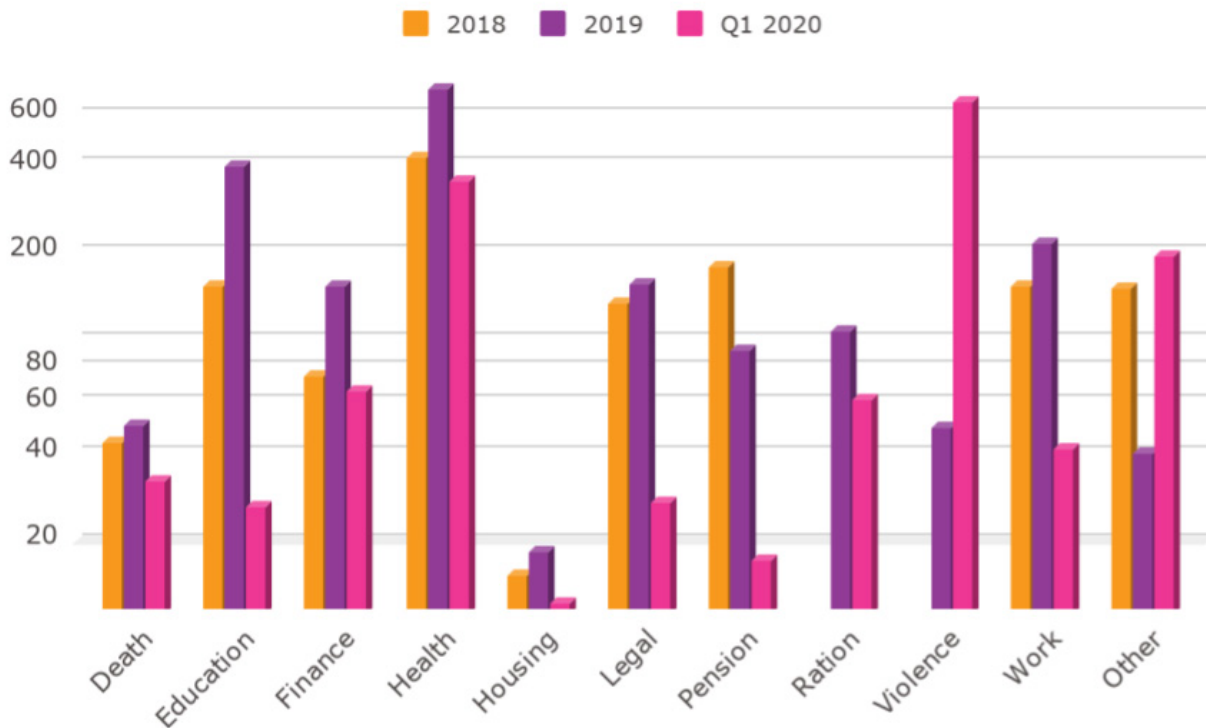


Table 2: Number of People Enrolled in Schemes by Sector

afternoon and evening, after they have finished their workday. This differs from existing municipal support services, which are either located away from where waste pickers live and work or are open only during waste pickers' work hours. While many government schemes have now been digitized, most informal workers do not have access to smart phones or computers, and few know how to troubleshoot digital issues. Members therefore value having an equipped and trained enumerator on-site,

in their neighborhood. They also welcome being able to access programs from various departments in one place and not having to go to various municipal departments to submit applications, check on the status of their applications, or file grievances.

Access to Other Programs Increased

The Kashtakari model has provided KKPKP with an additional platform through which it can link waste pickers and their families

In Their Own Words: Sunbais Share Their Experiences

Vijeta Salve, 31 Dandekar Pul KSK

Our organization KKPKP is our extended family. That is why we are called 'Sunbais' (daughters-in-law)! A Sunbai is the backbone of any family, the one who does all the work and addresses every family member's issue lovingly yet firmly. I am proud to be a Sunbai, addressing each KKPKP member's issue. During the times of COVID, we can see the relief members feel when they see that KKPKP has supported them, unlike others who claim to represent them- whether corporators, well-wishers or administrators! Only the organization stood by us, they say.

My experiences with members are mixed. Some speak to me affectionately, while others complain. I explain I have been appointed to be a liaison and since I live near them, they can approach me anytime. It has been a year now and I have a good relationship with most members. They come to my home or call me, share their worries and problems and treat me as their own. They have many problems and sometimes I have no answers, but I keep asking, learning on the job and figuring it out.

A lot of my work is about communication. If I can learn to communicate better, the work will be more effective, I would like to learn computers too and develop new skills and

roles. True satisfaction comes when I actually resolve member issues. I remember when a member's husband was in hospital and the bill was very high. No amount of arguing with the hospital authorities worked. We finally went to the Charity Commissioner, who recommended a reduction. These experiences are fulfilling!

My perspective on work and life has changed, and so has my family's! I had never been beyond my community, but since meetings are organised in different kendras each month, I now travel. I learnt to use Google maps and can travel confidently anywhere. I usually finish most of my house work in the morning. I finish my work as a Sunbai by about 7 pm and then return home and do the remaining housework. Sometimes I have additional field work and get delayed, but my family is supportive. They like the work I do.

My work has changed the dynamics within my family. Everyone views me differently now. They respect me more now, for what I do for others, and for what I am. I now make decisions confidently and my family accepts my point of view without argument. My opinions matter and often shape theirs too. In the same way, KKPKP members also question me less and accept my recommendations.

**Madhuri Baswant, 30
Dandekar Pul KSK**

I have known about the work of KKPKP for a long time. My mother-in-law is a member, so I was already a 'sunbai' of the organisation! And when I got the opportunity to actually work as one and join the group of Sunbais, I grabbed it and I feel like I am working for my family.

Members are all different. Some are active, and others need to be drawn in and convinced. Either way, they consider me a person they can approach for help, challenge and question. And that is fine. As I interact with each member, hear their issues, and share their joys and sorrows, I feel even closer to them. Their satisfaction is my source of inspiration.

When I started this work, I had no experience and was a little apprehensive, especially since I really had not interacted with so many people. I am now an empowered member of society, fulfilling my duties and contributing to significant work.

I understand the various facets of the organization as well as the issues of members better and am also better equipped to help resolve them. My hard work, patience, communication skills, and willingness to follow things through to their resolution have all stood me in good stead, but these are also areas where I can keep growing and improve.

My family is very supportive. They take me seriously and help me with my work, so balancing work and home is easy. The fact

that I also bring an income strengthens my position within the home and I command higher respect from everyone due to that as well! Also, the entire community looks at not just me, but my family as well, with respect. This means my family has started valuing me more. I am seen as a responsible, contributing member to society and to my family. Working during the pandemic has also been empowering. Knowing I am needed, even at this time, and can contribute to the sense of security waste pickers feel is gratifying.

**Sandhya Jangam, 33
Yerwada KSK**

I enjoy working as a Sunbai. I have become a Sunbai in each member's family! They make me laugh and cry, like every family does, and have accepted me as their own. When I can resolve their issues, I feel I have done something meaningful. Everything is about good communication. We are open and honest with each other. Members share their concerns with us and we make decisions on the best way forward. In a way, this process has helped me with making decisions in my own life.

Balancing work and home is not tough. It's a breeze. My family has been very supportive. They are proud that I've broken from the shackles of 'Chool ani Mool' (the stove and children) and ventured into the real world, brave and confident. I often return home late, but they know the other waste pickers and their issues and understand that it is

my job to resolve them. This takes time, and often issues come up without any notice. They understand that this is my larger family, just as it is theirs. For years, they have seen KKP KP karyakartas (workers) work late in the community, so they accept me doing it as well.

We were initially worried about working during the pandemic, but now, just take more care to maintain hygiene, follow the protocol, wear masks, sanitize frequently, maintain distance, and keep washing ourselves, our hands, our clothes, and educate members to also do so. Our worries took a backseat when we saw the members, who were deemed essential workers, dealing with bad conditions and no guarantee of their next meal. Many kept their fears aside and continued working. That experience has shaped me in many ways. The distribution of rations by KKP KP helped strengthen the Sunbais' relationships with members. They see that we have stepped in where no one else has.

The trainings I have received so far as a Sunbai have been useful. I would like to learn English and how to use computers and understand the kind of work other organisations do so that we can replicate some of the better ideas they bring to the table. I am interested in understanding wider issues and developing a better perspective on everything.

My own confidence surprises me! I am ready to try new things, speak to men and women, argue and share ideas and information without apprehensions.

I used to vacillate about the smallest of decisions earlier and think about what people would say about what I did. Somehow, things are clearer now, and it is much easier for me to decide, act and face the consequences of my decisions as well. Travelling around the city as a Sunbai has also been an empowering experience. It has made me more confident and more capable. These are all big changes in me.

Gauri Waghmare, 31 Shivajinagar KSK

As a Sunbai, I have learnt a lot from the waste pickers. I enjoy spending time with them, listening to them and understanding their issues and resolving them. I also enjoy meeting with other Sunbais. It is great fun to be with them, to experience the camaraderie and the sharing. It's a lovely feeling. But there is nothing more fulfilling than the satisfaction of members when their issues are resolved- their problems solved. Some members actually call me 'Sunbai', some call me 'Madam'. Whatever the name, they all share their issues and concerns and expect me to resolve them and thank me when I do. I am like a family member to each waste picker. They ask after me fondly, tell me to rest when I'm unwell, and they treat me with so much love. When they come and tell my family about how I handled some work effectively, my family members beam with pride and that is worth much more than my salary!

Communication is a critical part of my role and our training definitely helped. My role model for good communication is my mother-in-law, who is a pratinidhi (waste pickers representative) in KKPKP. I learn just by watching her. Looking forward, I want to learn to use the computer and to ride a two-wheeler- both are musts in today's day and age and will help me in my work as well. I would also like to understand how to support members and handle domestic violence issues and alcoholism.

I used to be lost in household chores. Now, I have stepped out and I feel I have seen the world. My problems seem trivial in the larger context. Earning some money and being able to contribute to the family is empowering.

My family is supportive. I manage all my work - my composting work at SWaCH, my house work and my role as a Sunbai. Occasionally my in-laws ask me why I work so late, but when I explain they understand. They can see the change in me. I used to travel only with my mother-in-law or husband, and now I travel around the city alone. They tell me I have become the stronger and encourage me to become even stronger.

We were a little worried to work during Corona but saw that waste pickers had to be supported. They had to get rations, so we just stepped up and did it. The organization shared the safety protocol and provided training, and we have been following it.

Reshma Barik, 33 Taljai KSK

I enjoy my work as a Sunbai. I like speaking to waste pickers, explaining the work of the organization and letting them know how we can support them. As they listen, I can see them gradually accepting what I say. I think that if I can watch the seniors in the organization speak to waste pickers and conduct meetings, I'll do an even better job! I would also like to learn to speak English and to use the computer, so I can improve the way I work.

During the pandemic my initial fears of stepping out were quickly dispelled when I saw how bravely KKPKP members continued their work, in such difficult situations. My own work seemed much easier compared to theirs, so I just started doing it without worrying too much about my own health.

My work has helped me grow. I am out of the house, and I have started interacting with more people. I understand people better now. I have begun to make big decisions comfortably. Traveling used to be a big challenge, but now I have stepped out, it is easy, and my mobility has increased my overall confidence. I ask my husband to help with some of the housework and he obliges. Now we take all decisions together and consult each other on everything.



I used to go to the central office to fill out my children's scholarship forms. Now it is so nearby, I can do it at my convenience and at no cost to me. The Sunbais and enumerators are in the community...so that has made life much easier. With the Sunbais, communication has also improved significantly and if they don't know the answer to our questions, they can immediately call the Helpdesk or the coordinator, and our questions are answered right away. Even during Corona times, we felt we were being taken care of and that someone was looking out for us.

Shalan Milind Mane, KKP member, Yerwada, KSK

to services, programs and opportunities offered by NGOs and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. This includes scholarships for school children of waste pickers and vocational training for youth through the Lighthouse program of Pune City Connect, a public-private initiative that includes job skills training and placement programs. Additionally, corporate entities have provided digital training to all the Sunbais and partner NGOs have provided communications training to the Sunbais, and facilitated youth workshops at the kendras on a range of issues, including sexuality and relationships, and environmental issues. During the COVID-19 pandemic, corporate support has led to the implementation of a prescription filling and reimbursement program and a menstrual hygiene management (MHM) program, both facilitated through the kendras, to address service interruptions and supply chain gaps.

COVID-19 Responses Facilitated

To date, during the COVID-19 crisis, with the help of the Kendra teams, KKP has been able to reach 8,500 members with information, services and emergency supplies. This includes:

- **Coordinated Action and Advocacy:** The union has increased its engagement with other organizations to coordinate community-based action and share information. Along with 33 other organizations, they formed the Corona Virodhi Jan Abhiyan, Pune to share experiences and ideas on the pandemic,

strategies and resources to control it, ways to work with government authorities with a focus on community participation, and to increase government accountability to provide adequate and effective services, systems and protections.

- **Tracking and Addressing COVID-related Needs:** Many Sunbais live in slum communities that are being locked down or contained. This has made communication, tracking, information sharing, reporting, grievance redress and other processes within communities much smoother. They have also played a pivotal role convincing people to get tested, identifying and tracking those who test positive, identifying where those in need are (at home, in quarantine, in containment zones) and helping to address their needs.
- **Sharing Accurate Information about COVID-19:** The media has focused primarily on COVID-19 rates and not on prevention or available relief. Sunbais coordinated with other organizations working in slums and used video messaging on their smart phones to share vital information and dispel misinformation about COVID-19.
- **Increasing Food Security:** Lack of food and barriers to accessing rations have been a critical issue for low income communities, include those of the waste pickers during the pandemic. Through the kendras, KKPKP was able

to distribute rations secured from corporate contributions, when many members did not qualify for rations under the Food Security Act. Youth volunteers provided enthusiastic and courageous help, packing and delivering ration kits and maintaining crowd control during distribution. When the government began to allow for free or subsidized rations for those without ration cards, the Sunbais documented who was excluded, informed members of the changes in eligibility, accompanied them to ration shops and held ration shop owners accountable.

- **Increasing Access to Medication:** Waste pickers have a range of health conditions that have been exacerbated during the pandemic due to lack of resources, sealing off containment zones, and an inability to access medication. These include musculoskeletal pain, heart problems, diabetes, cancer and gynecological problems. Sunbais gathered data and found that about 17% of members surveyed in are experiencing health problems, most of which require medication. Waste pickers suffering from chronic illnesses requiring ongoing medication are being supported through a short-term grant secured by KKPKP from a local corporate partner. Decentralized pharmacists are being identified and designated for the sale of prescription drugs. The enumerators and Sunbais ensure that the prescriptions are shared with chemists and medications are



When the pandemic struck, my first thought was for my family; what will happen to us if we contract COVID? But when work started and we had to distribute rations, and each kit meant a family could survive for two more weeks, I realized that is a much bigger priority and I just immersed myself in that work. My family is proud of my work, as it helps so many, so I have their complete support.

Pravin Khilare, Enumerator, Hadapsar KSK

The youth volunteers' enthusiasm has been infectious. The times are difficult but the presence of youth in these relief activities keeps everyone's morale and spirits high.

Atul Bhalerao, Help Desk Lead, Education

picked up. To minimize delay, travel, and multiple handling of documents and to maximize physical distancing, scanned receipts are procured and waste pickers are reimbursed for the cost of their medications via bank transfer.

- **Increasing Menstrual Health Options:** KKP KP has procured reusable cloth sanitary napkins through corporate partners,² providing a subsidized, environmentally sound option. Sets of four pads, which last up to three years, are being distributed by Sunbais, who also provided basic information about their use. The users are being tracked to document their experiences. The pads are proving to be popular and there are plans to expand the program to reach up to 5,000 women.

INSIGHTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Decentralization Plus Convergence Works

The Kashtakari model demonstrates how a decentralized approach that converges access to programs from a range of sectors can successfully make programs more accessible. The model provides a conveniently located and timed one-stop shop, with single-window access to the programs and benefits of various departments from national, state and city

² Partners include Yardi Software India Pvt Ltd's Corporate Social Responsibility initiative, Yardi Vasti Vikas Prakaalp (YVVP) in Pune, and EcoFemme, a women-led social enterprise, based in Tamil Nadu.

government, as well as NGO and corporate programs. The burden of access is taken off the client, who is already vulnerable and overstretched.

Location is Important

The location of the kendras has proved to be important and requires careful consideration. The union has found that the proximity of a kendra to a critical mass of waste pickers has led to increased ownership and participation by members. There is greater awareness that the kendra is there for them to help them access services, address issues with local municipal officials and councilors, and address grievances and other issues. Additionally, placing the KSKs in municipal spaces embeds them within the public sphere, ensures a partnership with the municipality, and provides a good foundation for scaling up across the city. However, since they are assigned, sometimes informally, by different PMC departments or elected representatives, the kendras can be subject to the interests of their respective benefactors and have to contend with the demands of local community groups who may feel they 'own' them. In some cases, they have had to change location which has disrupted services. A longer term, sustainable alternative, including the option of investing in formal offices that a collective of organizations can fundraise to invest in, is being considered.



The decentralized approach has enabled us to reach members in smaller, manageable pockets and we are reaching more people in a shorter span of time. A deeper personal rapport is built with the members and communication has significantly improved. Follow up has become smoother and simpler. Getting documents together has become more systematic. And, all programmes have become easier to implement and take to scale in a shorter time frame...But not all members benefit from the kendras yet. The need for protected, long-term space and infrastructure cannot be overemphasized.

Sayali Pradeep, KSK Coordinator

The Model Empowers Women

In addition to providing vital community-based services to waste pickers, so far, the kendras have provided opportunities to empower the young women who work with them (see In Their Own Words). By working as community mobilizers, the Sunbais are earning a livelihood, many for the first time. They are also challenging prevalent social norms and stereotypical expectations that young wives and mothers should prioritize their family's domestic requirements and be home in the evenings. The Sunbais are learning new skills, increasing their mobility, and growing in confidence and becoming more assertive. As they are being recognized as indispensable resources in the community, their social status within the families and in the community has increased.

The Model Empowers Youth

While the youth volunteer's participation is less consistent than the enumerators and Sunbais, they are becoming actively involved in the kendras. They have raised awareness of educational entitlements and scholarship programs, tracked scholarship recipients, and have participated in awareness raising sessions on issues such as child labor, child marriage, domestic violence, environmental degradation and caste-based injustice. Through these and other activities, they are building their leadership and advocacy skills.

Decentralized Operations Strengthen Outreach and Collective Action

After over 27 years of mobilizing waste pickers to gain voice and strength at the municipal, state and even national levels, the Kashtakari model is proving to be a platform through which the union and cooperative can re-energize and expand mobilization, strengthen collective action, raise their profile and level of activity in communities across the city, and engage newer and less active members. Outreach to members has improved through the Sunbais, who can quickly and easily reach the members within their jurisdiction. The union has been able to reconnect with members they lost touch with and reach younger, new members. Other informal workers, such as domestic workers, could be reached and mobilized in the same way. Additionally, the success of the kendra teams in facilitating emergency responses during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the power of both the model and collective action at the local level. Finally, youth participation has increased because of the decentralized model. Youth are visiting their community kendras to attend programs on issues of importance to them, including sessions on the environment, and on sexuality and relationships. Ultimately, the Kashtakari model is not just a service center, but can be seen more broadly as a political and community mobilizing platform.

Increase Links to Government Programs

To further improve access to schemes and increase accountability by government

programs, there are plans to link the kendras more directly to relevant municipal and other government officials at the community level, including government health outreach and early childhood development workers, as well as National Urban Livelihood Mission officials. As accountability increases, the union will track both enrolment in schemes, as well as perceptions of waste pickers of government programs and processes to feed back to government authorities.

The Kendra Network can be Mobilized in an Emergency

The Sunbais were hired just before a terrible flood hit Pune City, during which many waste pickers lost their homes and belongings. Since they were from those communities that were directly affected, the Sunbais were instrumental in helping the union identify those in urgent need and in facilitating flood responses.

The COVID-19 pandemic initially disrupted the work of the Kashtakari model. However, since the waste pickers were designated as essential workers and since their socioeconomic conditions were further challenged, their need for services and information continued and the kendras quickly adapted. In fact, community networks and services, such as the kendras, put in place earlier to mitigate disparities, have proved to be critical conduits of information, services and supplies in COVID-19 responses, reaching the most vulnerable. KKPKP's recent investments in these community-based platforms has helped the relief work significantly.



The KSK staff are all local and therefore able to reach every member at their doorstep. This has improved contact and soon, we will be able to see the results and members will recognize the need for collectivization and action at the local level. Regular, decentralized meetings will further strengthen this model, and issues like access to rations in the Public Distribution System, effective resolution of domestic violence issues, and other civic issues will be taken up and redressed locally.

Sayali Pradeep, KSK Coordinator

During the quarantining of entire communities, it's been a great advantage to have Sunbais who can immediately share information about the situation on the ground - what are the needs and concerns, and who is where. Due to the regular interaction between the Sunbais and the members during the COVID pandemic, their confidence in KKPKP has gone up.

Mariavva Mallagi, Waste picker Representative, Shivajinagar KSK

CONCLUSIONS

In its first year of operation, the Kashtakari model has successfully increased access to and enrolment in government programs and entitlements, and some NGO and CSR programs by waste pickers and their families. In addition to facilitating social inclusion through access to financial, social and emergency services, the kendras are creating opportunities for more local mobilization and advocacy. While it was conceived of as a service delivery platform, the model can now be seen more broadly as a political and community mobilizing platform for the union and its staff and members and a community-led accountability mechanism for the government.

The Kashtakari model was put in place in Pune City about a year before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. At the beginning of the pandemic, waste pickers were deemed essential workers in Pune and with the support of KKPKPK and SWaCH have courageously provided vital waste management services at significant risk to themselves and their families. The Kendra model, because it is decentralized, has proved to be extremely useful in times of crisis, as demonstrated through the effective distribution of information, services and goods during COVID-19. The need for convergence in a decentralized way has been validated, and those who staff the centers have been empowered as community mobilizers.

Given these successes, even within the context of a global crisis, the Kashtakari model has proved itself as a model that

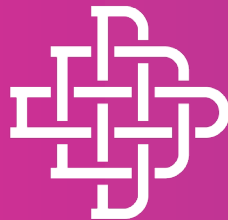
should be fully resourced and, with technical support from KKPKPK, scaled up across Pune City by the municipalities. It should be extended to reach all vulnerable families, including those of other informal workers in the city. As part of that process, the municipalities should designate neutral spaces where community-based staff and volunteers can operate.

Partnerships lie at the heart of the 3D Program.
We are grateful for the support we receive from
our partners to help us advance our work.

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