

We open eyes.

Lessons learned from responding to COVID-19 in India*

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Quick Facts

Countries: India

Date of Commentary: November 2020

Keyword 1: Disability Inclusive Development

Keyword 2: Humanitarian Action

Keyword 3: Health



Purpose and scope of this lessons learned summary

COVID-19 came at a time when non-governmental organisations in India faced several challenges, such as shrinking resources from donors, increasing government restrictions and regulations, and increasing inequalities. A commentary written by Sara Varughese, Director of CBM Country Office India and India Trust, reflects on the factors that enabled the swift and effective response from CBM and its partners to the COVID-19 crisis. In particular, the commentary reflects on *‘What made some organizations quicker and more active than others? What helped make a response relevant?’*. The response included partners with different mandates and capacities, in different geographical locations.

Main Findings and discussion

Alertness and preparation, financial readiness, responsiveness, engagement, consultation and leadership were the key contributing factors to the collaboration and response from CBM and its partners to COVID-19. These enabled the continuation of effective work during lockdown. For example, financial processes were swiftly adapted and communicated to partners to enable closure of financial year. The speed of reaction of partners to the crisis was not linked to their capacity and resources. Thus, activities with partner organisations were implemented in a phased manner, according to partners’ readiness. Good communication and sharing of experiences led to increased engagement and participation. Consultation with experts and other organisations enabled the development of activities that were relevant and had impact. For example, providing accessible hand-washing facilities. Finally, leadership was essential to focus on the mandate and priorities of the organisation and to ensure that response is not hijacked by donor agendas.

Lessons Learned

- Information sharing at all levels enable adequate identification of needs, appropriate decision-making and deployment of scarce resources.
- Ability to adapt and change is essential to respond effectively to developments.
- Stable and strong processes are essential for quick and adequate decision-making.
- Empowerment of field staff is essential to strengthen communication and decision making at all levels.