

More Than a Shave at a Time: A Pilot Initiative to Improve Male Participation in Routine Immunization through Local Barbers in Uttar Pradesh, India

Sudipta Mondal, Director – Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation, PCI, India, Yatender Singh, Sub-Regional Coordinator, CGPP, PCI India



Background: Funded by US Agency for International Development (USAID), Project Concern International/India (PCI) has been implementing the CORE Group Polio Project (CGPP) in 24 blocks in 5 districts in Uttar Pradesh since 1999. Over time this polio eradication program has included the strengthening of routine immunization (RI) system as a core part of contributing to the efforts of maintaining India polio free. Currently, PCI led CGPP caters to around 250 High Risk Areas covering more than 270,000 households through a group of 550 dedicated female Community Mobilization Coordinators (CMCs). The program uses multipronged strategies to mobilize community for RI including interpersonal and group communications, mass and mid media campaigns. At present more than 77% children in the program areas are fully immunized – a rate higher than the state average. However, taking the current level to near universal coverage requires concerted efforts and more so much larger involvement of men from the community.



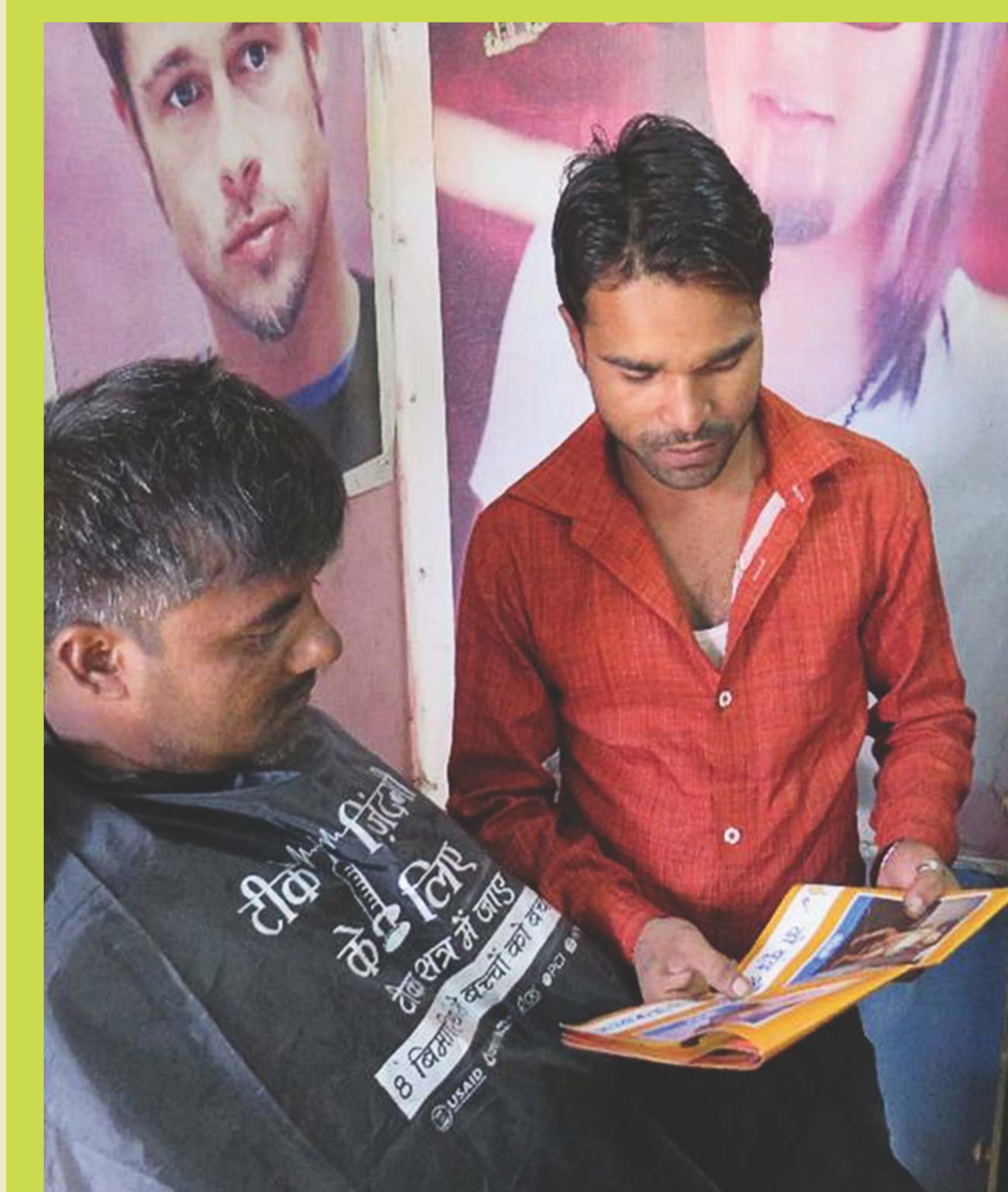
Objectives

There has been sporadic efforts to reach out to the men in the community but often the measures remain elusive due to the absence of men at home when the CMCs frequent their places. With not many options at hand, the program decided to experiment an idea of roping in the local barbers for canvassing messages to men who visit their shops for a shaving. This paper intends to share its experience of working with local barbers for raising male participation in RI.

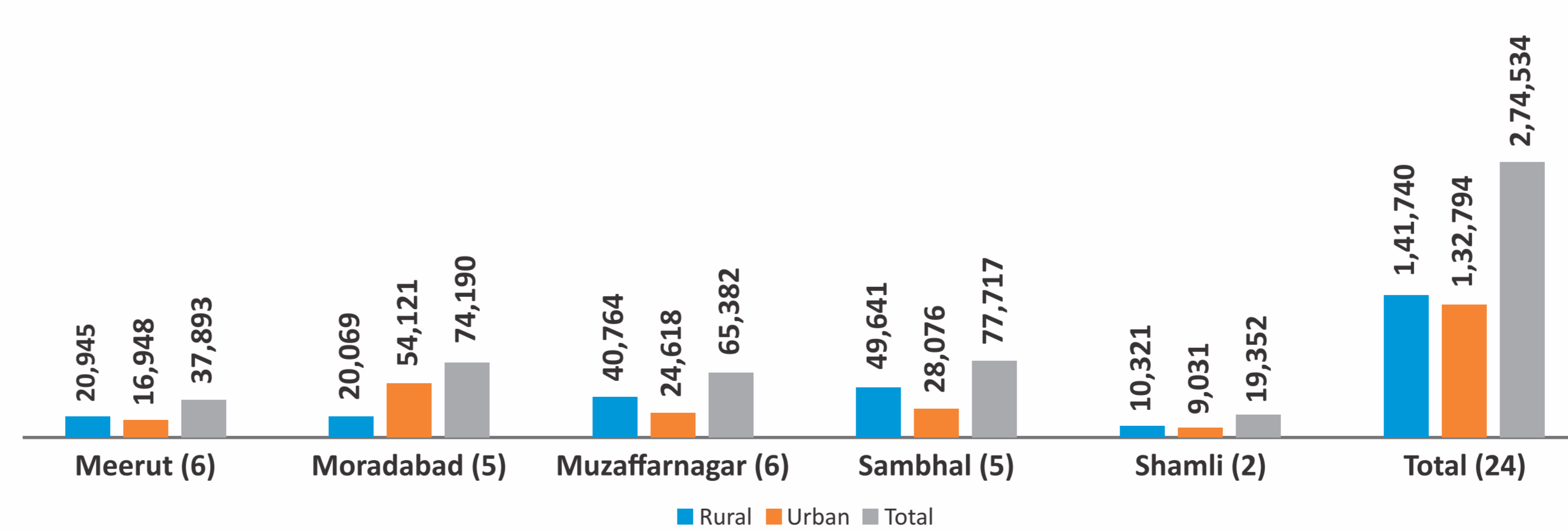


Intervention Description

The barber initiative was rolled out, as a pilot program, only across 5 blocks covering around 32,000 households and managed by 50 CMCs in August 2016. Approximately 219 barbers were found during a rapid mapping, 173 could be contacted and finally 136 joined the program for free including one floating barber. The barbers were given group orientation and Information, Education and Communication materials. They also received a free apron and a printed rate card from the program.



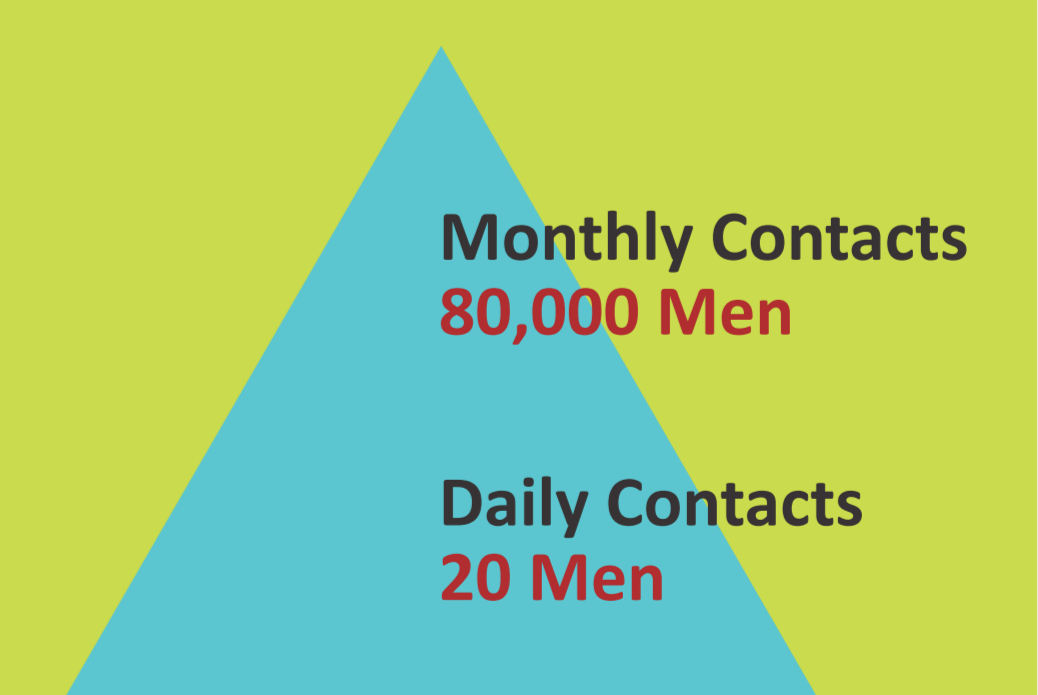
Number of Households Covered



Results and Significance:

It has been found nearly 20 men visit each shop daily generating around 80,000 monthly contacts with about 20,000 men. Given the overall size of the population, the volume of contacts with males is quite impressive. However, to discern the effect of these increased number of interpersonal communications with men on RI requires large scale empirical study. A rapid qualitative enquiry revealed a number of facets of the program – the enthusiasm of the barbers emanated mainly from the feeling of contribution towards societal cause and their ability to transpire relevant messages with utmost quality.

Implications for the Field



The current pilot suggests the barbers can be used as a potential agent for conducting BCC with men especially in areas where it is difficult to involve men either due to deep rooted patriarchy or operational inconveniences. Perhaps this is a unique vehicle that has not been exploited enough for ushering social changes at least in India.