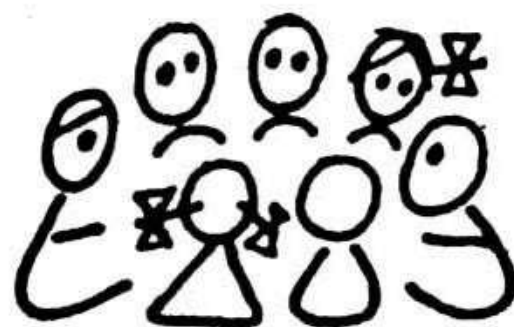
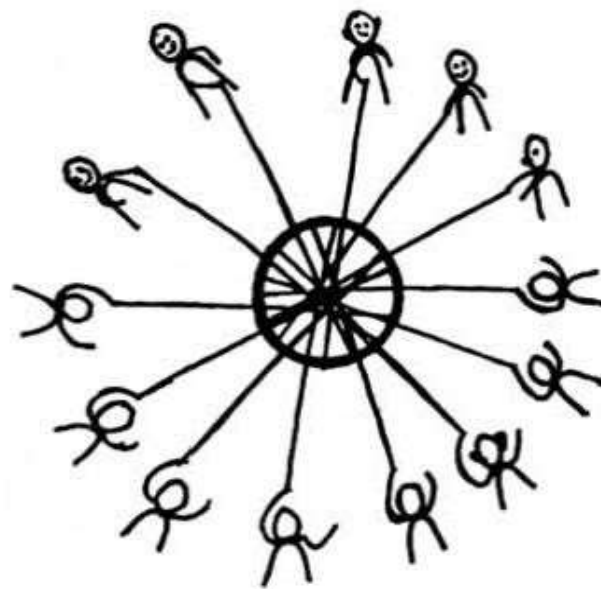
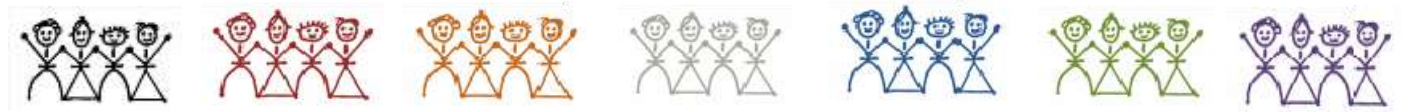


Community Health Learning Programme

*A Report on the Community Health Learning
Experience*

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(SOPHEA)**



Acknowledgments

I extend my deepest gratitude to the core team for giving me the opportunity to become a part of the CHLP 2021-2022. I offer my special thanks to Guru, Balaji, Denis, Radhika, Abu, Uma, and Karthik.

I am particularly grateful for the assistance and support provided by Denis, Radhika, and Abu. I would like to thank all the learning facilitators for sharing their rich knowledge and experience. A special gratitude to my mentor, Adithya for constantly encouraging and motivating me, and providing valuable guidance and feedback for the project.

Special thanks to my team Virya, and all the fellow travelers of the program for an enriching learning experience. I also express my deepest appreciation to the teachers, and students of the Zilla Parishad School, Bori located in Gadchiroli for participating and supporting me in my final project. I am extremely grateful to my mother for being my biggest pillar of support and strength.

Finally, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to Ravi and Thelma for their transformational leadership and truly being one of our most inspirational role models. Thank you- Much more than words can say!

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Executive Summary

CHLP has been an enriching learning experience. Coming from an engineering background and pursuing Gandhi fellowship with the community in Gadchiroli, my main purpose of joining CHLP was to build my knowledge, skills and gain a deeper understanding of the community health perspective in the context of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 conversations and the orientation sessions played an important role in getting to know my fellow travelers and understanding the rich history and the impact created by SOCHARA. Overall, the modules gave me deep insights and knowledge on various aspects of community health, in the context of COVID-19. The learning modules have truly deepened my understanding of the social paradigm of community health. It was inspiring to learn from the best learning facilitators in the country who have worked at the ground-level and also advocated for policy changes at various national and international levels. Apart from the knowledge and rich experience of the learning facilitators, I recognized their humility, dedication, commitment, and willingness to learn. I wish to impart these qualities along with the knowledge and insights gained in the future.

My mentor has truly been my friend, philosopher, and guide. I would like to thank the core team for the mentorship process and connecting me with Adithya. My chosen community action project was ‘An educational intervention of health and climate change in Z.P Upper Primary school, Gadchiroli’. It gave me an opportunity to reconnect with the school virtually and implement a short community action project in the school. The educational intervention mainly included short lectures, animated videos, and engaging discussions implemented by the teacher in the class regarding the basic concepts of climate change and the various health impacts of climate change. Evaluation was done through pre-intervention baseline assessment and post-intervention endline-assessment. I was happy to see the positive results of the evaluation. Moreover, the teachers expressed that the students enjoyed the sessions and were curious to know more about the topic. This intervention was a small step towards creating awareness among the students regarding climate change and health.

Overall, CHLP has been a journey inwards along with exploring community health guided by the principles of social justice and equity. I would like to thank the core team for giving me the opportunity to be a part of CHLP 2021 and the SOCHARA family. I hope to continue my journey with SOCHARA and together work towards the goal of “Health for All”!

PART-A

1. Introduction

I was born and brought up in the coastal city of Mangalore in Karnataka. My mother who is currently a practicing medical doctor and my late father who was also a doctor were my role models. From a very young age, I saw them serving selflessly and dedicating their lives towards the betterment of their patients and the community.

I pursued my Bachelor's in the field of Chemical Engineering from Manipal. My undergraduate degree reinforced the importance of research and innovation in tackling environmental health issues through interdisciplinary internship experiences. I then wanted to work at the grassroots level, so that I could integrate with the marginalized communities and understand their needs to bring about societal change. With this in mind, I pursued a two-year Gandhi Fellowship program under the Piramal School of Leadership in the tribal district of Gadchiroli, Maharashtra.

During the “village immersion” program in the Gandhi fellowship, I got an opportunity to live with a tribal community. I witnessed first-hand, the health inequities faced by the community. Low literacy, lack of healthcare facilities and a disproportionate burden of diseases were some of the major issues they faced. Another public health challenge, I encountered, during this period, was the habitual consumption of tobacco by school children and adults. Mothers fed tobacco to their toddlers to decrease hunger which resulted in malnourishment. Moreover, the social norm amongst the tribal community at Gadchiroli forced menstruating women to live in unhygienic ‘menstrual huts’.

The trials and tribulations faced by the community deeply concerned me. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges faced by the community. In order to make an effort to address some of these issues, I learnt their vernacular language and became cognizant of their social norms. I then set up some community-based service initiatives. While I experienced immense satisfaction from my successful initiatives, I also came across problems that were not immediately actionable. During the Gandhi fellowship, I was humbled by the unconditional love, hospitality and kindness, which motivated me to give back to the community from the abundance that I had received. I realized that I belonged to the minority who are privileged and I had the responsibility to pay it forward.

2. The purpose of joining CHLP

After my fellowship experience in Gadchiroli, I realized that while there were a few challenges I could solve through my initiatives, there were several public health challenges that required specific knowledge, skills and mentoring. The communities were also battling the challenges posed by the first-wave of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. My main purpose of joining the CHLP program was to build my knowledge, skills and gain a deeper understanding of the community health perspective in the context of the pandemic from the holistic curriculum of the program.

3. What were my learning objectives and were they met?

My personal learning objective for the program was to determine the linkages between COVID-19 pandemic and environmental health, and communicate scientifically through effective report writing. My broader learning objectives included broadening my understanding on the various concepts and approaches of community health as well as the various linkages associated with both the health and the health system. Through the course of the program, I'm happy that most of my learning objectives were successfully met.

4. Learning from modules and how I applied the learning in my work.

Reflections on use of the LMS, videos and participation in live online sessions. How was a balance between work, life and the CHLP maintained?

It has been an enriching learning experience to listen, understand, learn, and reflect from the rich and diverse experiences and insights of the learning facilitators, core team members and my fellow travelers. Initially, I was able to commit and dedicate time to attend all the live sessions, team meetings and share reflections on behalf of the team. I sincerely apologize for being unable to attend the live sessions and contribute fairly due to the time difference after I began my MPH course with a specialization in Global Health at the University of Alberta, Canada. I'm grateful that the course was offered online and all the material and live session was recorded. I'm happy that I could apply my learning from the CHLP modules to my present course work at the University and share my perspectives in class discussions. I would like to thank the core team once again for being accommodative and supportive at all times.

Initially, the COVID-19 conversations and the orientation sessions played an important role in getting to know each other and understand the rich history and the impact created by SOCHARA. It helped me to understand the structure of the program and also know more about CHAI and MISEREOR. During the orientation session, I remember Lino from MISEREOR sharing that SOPHEA translates to wisdom in Greek and I truly feel that the wisdom gained through the program is exceptional compared to any formal training or course. Apart from the knowledge and rich experience of the learning facilitators, I recognized their humility, dedication, commitment, and willingness to learn. I wish to imbibe these qualities along with the knowledge and insights gained in the future. I was also able to start developing my leadership skills by becoming the group moderator in our small groups at the beginning of the course. The interaction and group work within the team has also been a very good learning experience. Personally, the CHLP has been a journey inwards along with exploring community health guided by the principles of social justice and equity.

I also attended Dr Shiridi's memorial. It was truly a celebration of his life. I was inspired to see the remarkable work done by Dr Shiridi and the innumerable lives he had touched. In one of the videos shown, he mentioned that we are all spiritual beings having a human experience and he always tried to speak to the spiritual part of the person. Towards the end, I felt very grateful to be a part of the SOCHARA family.

The modules on mental health as well as palliative care have particularly influenced me deeply. I would like to reflect deeper on these two modules.

The overview of mental health and self-care techniques was particularly helpful. The various community mental health models gave me an understanding of the best practices in community mental health and the importance of treatment and healing within communities. In particular, the concept of the Dawa and Dua program shared during one of the live sessions was an inspiration to learn about the impact of working in collaboration with the community. In one of the case studies shared, I was shocked to know about the intensity of the mental health problem in India and it would take around 124 years to address the mental health needs of our country. In the past, I have come across some of my friends going through various mental health issues and I never knew how to offer help. The modules have now given me a better understanding of the types, treatment, management of the common mental illness which will be helpful in identifying and referring. The child and adolescent mental health module gave me an understanding of the importance of early treatment which could be life-changing for the child, empowering parents and solving the root cause/ core issues to solve the problem entirely. I'm currently taking an elective on maternal and child mental health as a part of my course. The learnings from the module has helped me to understand the concepts better and deepened my perspectives. The addiction session was overwhelming. It was shocking to see that the treatment gap was the highest for alcohol addiction. In one of the ALM's shared, the opinion - "while there is no silver bullet, open discussions and education is always a great starting point" was particularly motivating. I have personally experienced the impact of addiction in my family. I'm grateful to have attended the sessions which has helped me understand to change my perspectives and turn the negative emotions to positive actions. The concept of engaging with men and understanding their perspective in the context of addiction as shared by Thelma during one of the sessions helped me to further change my perspective and see the situation through a different lens. Further, the module on environment and health gave me an overview of the mental health impacts on the community due to climate change.

The sessions on communication in both the mental health module as well as the palliative care module was very helpful. I learnt the importance of active listening and whole-body listening. In particular, I learnt the need to listen to the other person non-judgmentally and not invalidating their experience by comparing it to others. Also, the importance for self-care. In the palliative care module, it was interesting to know that pain was more than just physical pain. Total pain included the physical, psychological, socioeconomic, and spiritual aspects. The modules helped me get a deeper perspective on all the aspects of pain. The importance of functionality was a helpful concept to know. As shared in the module, a simple conversation to the elderly person addressing their spiritual issue, such as "I need you and without you there will be a huge gap in my life" will give more meaning to the elderly person's life than just telling "You don't have to be useful". I felt that this was an important learning as I have seen elderly people going through this phase and it can help me communicate with them better.

The various modules helped to understand the core-concepts in community health and deepened my perspectives on the various determinants of health including the social, economic, political, cultural, and ecological determinants of health. I realized that these determinants played an important role in understanding the root causes of health challenges beyond the conventional

bio-medical framework. Reflecting on my experience in Gadchiroli- I had met a person in a medical camp who was infected with TB in a remote village. He was frail and very ill. The nurse kept expressing her frustration that the person is not taking medications despite knowing the consequences. That day, I wondered why can't the person take medicine? It was a simple solution. The CHLP program has helped me change my thinking and understanding the multiple layers associated beyond the biomedical approach. When I look back now, I think of the same person and his situation in a different lens.

Overall, the modules gave me deep insights and knowledge on various aspects of community health, in the context of COVID-19. Coming from a non-health-science background, the various modules helped me to understand the basic concepts of community health. It was interesting for me to learn about diverse topics ranging from child and adolescent health to health movements. The learning modules have truly deepened my understanding of the social paradigm of community health. It was inspiring to see that the learning facilitators worked at the ground-level and also advocated for policy changes at various national and international levels.

5. Mentorship process and reflections

I consider myself fortunate to have Adithya as my mentor. Adithya has been extremely supportive and always motivated and encouraged me during our meetings. The reading materials and blog posts shared by Adithya have been inspiring. Honestly, it was challenging for me to adjust and cope with the new environment in Canada. I wasn't able to commit fully to the process as much as I expected initially due to several challenges. I'm really thankful to Adithya for being so kind and supportive. Every meeting, Adithya would remind me to prioritize my health first and taught me the importance of prioritization. He always provided valuable and prompt feedback on my initial draft plan and the pre-test questionnaire. I'm also grateful that Adithya has agreed to guide me after the completion of the CHLP program. My mentor has truly been my friend, philosopher, and guide. I would like to thank the core team for the mentorship process and connecting me with Adithya.

6. Project learning experience

'An educational intervention of health and climate change in Z.P Upper Primary school, Gadchiroli' was my short community action project. I am thankful to the teachers and students of the school for supporting and participating in the project. I would like to thank my mentor for constantly motivating me and providing valuable feedback. I had meetings with the teachers virtually for the planning of the project. The educational intervention mainly included short lectures, animated videos, and engaging discussions implemented by the teacher in the class regarding the basic concepts of climate change and the various health impacts of climate change. Evaluation was done through pre-intervention baseline assessment and post-intervention endline-assessment. I was happy to see the positive results of the evaluation. Moreover, the teachers expressed that the students enjoyed the sessions and were curious to know more about the topic. This intervention was a small step towards creating awareness among the students regarding

climate change and health. In the future, I would like to continue the project and involve the community as we had planned initially.

7. Take away from CHLP and Looking Ahead -Where do I go from here?

Throughout the course, there were several AHA moments and inspiring words by learning facilitators which I have captured below-

Sandeep Pandey (Social Movements)

- ♣ *“Fortunately, there is light. Light has a source (Put on a switch, light a candle, put a torch on). But, darkness does not have a source and is essentially the absence of light (You cannot put a switch on and make a room dark. You can only hide the light to make it dark). That is my hope. It is only hope that is there and we despair only when we lose hope. So, only positive things have source and they are real things. Sometimes, we get depressed because we lose hope. A human being, inspite of however religious/ fatalistic he/she may be, nobody gives up effort. Everybody tries to improve their situation. We are all driven by positive spirit. We cannot live if we are driven by negative spirit/emotion. It is only our positive spirit and emotion which drives us. That is the only hope. Even if in a transitory phase, we may be pushed backwards, ultimately we will move forward because it is the only thing which moves life. **I always remind myself that only light has a source and darkness does not have a source. Darkness is the absence of light and Light will appear.**”*

Augustine Veliath (Communication for health)

- ♣ *“A health communicator, speaks with passion and listens with intensity and is constantly alert for new ideas and perspectives that would lead to a more just world”*
- ♣ *“Meet the unique Advocate in Everyone”*
- ♣ *“Listening is the heart of communication and compassion is the heart of listening”*

Dr. Suhas Chandran (Mental Health)

- ♣ *“You don’t have to only become a doctor to make a difference”*

Dr. Denis (One-on one meeting)

- ♣ *“Being an introvert doesn’t stop you from being a leader, and most importantly, a leader puts people’s interests first. The main focus of the leader is on the people.”*

Dr. Regi George (Comprehensive Primary Health Care)

- ♣ *“We always talk about the public and private sector. But, we never think about the people sector. People are our huge power and we should depend upon them. People can make changes. Our job as community health workers is to instill our knowledge into the collective community memory”*

Swami Dayapuranananda (Voluntary health sector)

- ♣ *“It is our choices that show what we truly are. Far more than our abilities”*
- ♣ *“ASK principle from management. We have the knowledge. We need the skills. Most importantly, we need to have the attitude (first in the ASK) to create change. Without the right attitude you can't make a change”*

Dr. Ravi Narayan (Orientation)

- ♣ *“Change history to herstory!”*
- ♣ *“If you are not confused, you are not thinking. If you are not thinking, you are not learning”*
- ♣ *“You can't be a part of the solution, if you don't know that you are a part of the problem”*

Dr. Thelma Narayan (Research methodologies)

- ♣ *“Research as a tool for the liberation and transformations of People's health”*
- ♣ *“People's participation in health research as subjects and not objects will help bring positive changes in the health system and addressing SDH”*

Sunita Chandrasekhar (Health Technology and innovations)

- ♣ *“Our best friends for life- “What, Why, Where, When and How”*

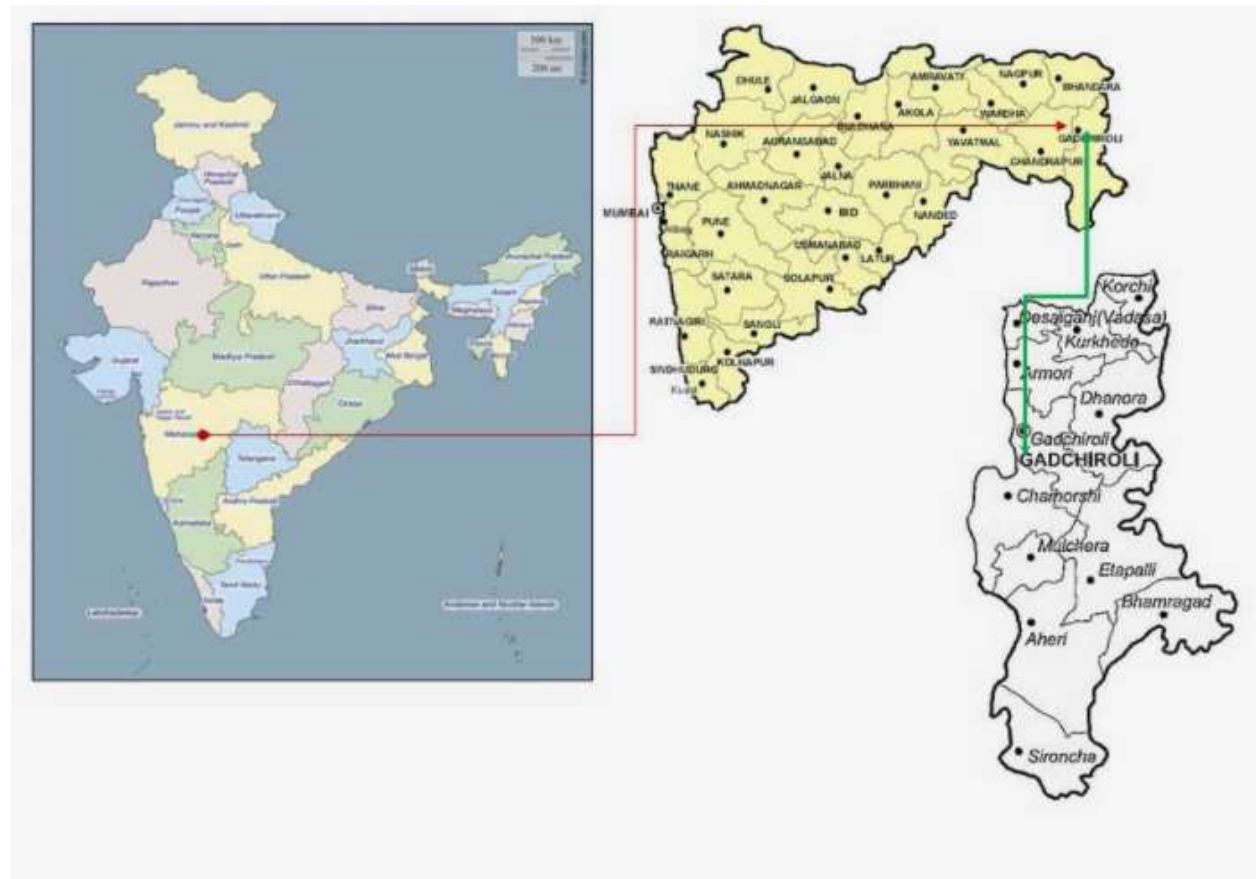
PART- B

Community Health Action Project

An educational intervention of health and climate change in Z.P Upper primary school, Gadchiroli

1. Background

Gadchiroli is a predominantly tribal district located in the North-eastern part of Maharashtra. The district is further divided into 12 blocks. The school selected for my intervention is situated in a village named Bori, located in the Aheri block of the district. The Zilla Parishad (Z.P) Upper Primary school has a total student population of 100 from grade 1 to grade 7. The majority of the students in the school belong to the Madia Gond community. Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, Gondi, Madiya are the common languages in the school. The main source of livelihood for the community is agriculture. The village is located very close to the state border of Telangana. In recent years, due to various challenges in agriculture, seasonal migration to Telangana have been increasingly common.



Source: <http://vayunandana.com/about-vayunandana.html>

2. Objective of the community health initiative

The overall aim of the project was to improve the knowledge, attitude, and practice regarding climate change and health among the students. During the planning phase of the project, three broad objectives were as follows-

- Initiating discussions and stimulating thinking regarding climate change and health in the classroom
- Students identifying local problems due to climate change and potential solutions after a discussion with the community
- Small initiative/ action undertaken by the students at the end of the project

3. Description of the intervention and implementation, community engagement process

Initially, during the planning phase of the project, the following steps were outlined

Prior to the implementation-

- 1) Virtual discussion for planning with the teachers
- 2) Developing short climate change and health modules
- 3) Designing interactive/ fun activities
- 4) Developing a pre-intervention baseline assessment and a post-intervention endline assessment which included the same questions as the pre-intervention baseline assessment and an additional section where the students will write a short-note about their understanding of the topic

Implementation-

- 5) Students completing the pre-intervention baseline assessment
- 6) Conducting interactive and engaging sessions through various modules
- 7) Recap and reflection after every session
- 8) Students completing the post-intervention endline assessment

Post-Implementation-

- 9) Debrief with the teachers and students virtually
- 10) Analyzing the assessment results

Due to various challenges, including my time difference and closures of the school due to the pandemic, I was unable to implement the project exactly as planned above. However, in a short time frame, I tried to do the best that I could.

First, I had a virtual discussion with the teachers regarding the project. I was happy to see their enthusiasm and support for the project. During our initial discussions, we decided to include the basic concepts of climate change followed by health impacts. Short animated videos were selected and finalized for the sessions. The pre-intervention baseline assessment included the questions on these basic concepts of climate change and health impacts of climate change. The post-intervention endline assessment included the same questions as the pre-intervention baseline assessment and an additional section where the students wrote a short-note about their understanding of the topic. The questions were translated from English to Marathi. I would like to thank my mentor for providing valuable feedback on the assessment questions.

The students from grade 7 (n=15) completed the pre-intervention baseline assessment. The teacher conducted interactive sessions. The initial session covered the basic concepts of climate change. The sessions included a short lecture by the teacher followed by short videos and an interactive discussion in class. The following sessions included animated videos describing the various impacts of climate change on health, followed by a discussion in class. Finally, a post-intervention endline assessment was completed by the students.



Students watching short animated videos

4. Impact of the community health action

The pre-intervention baseline assessment and the post-intervention endline assessment was used as the method of evaluation. The teacher sent the results of the assessment digitally. The pre-test and post-test scores were analysed. The figure below shows the graph of the percentage of questions answered correctly for each question for the pre-test and post-test assessment.

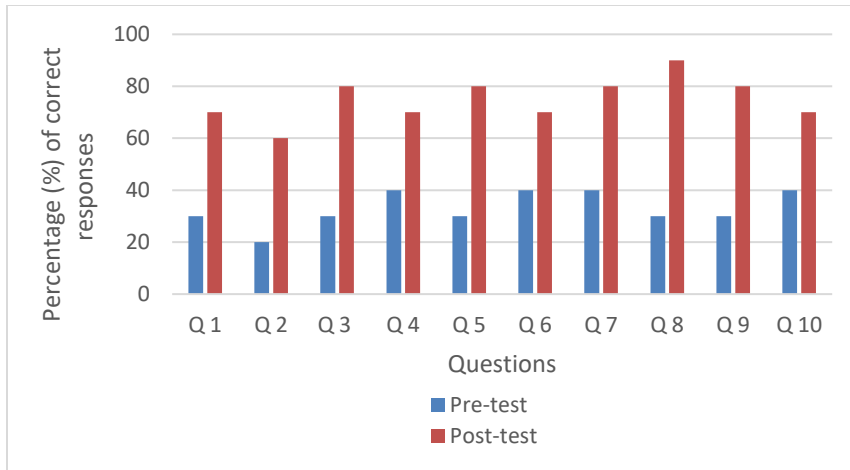


Figure 1: Pre-test and post-test results

The results indicated an increase in the percentage of correct responses for all the questions. The intervention led to an increase in the student’s knowledge and awareness on climate change and its associated health impacts. The feedback from the teachers was positive. During my virtual meeting with the teachers, they expressed that the students enjoyed the sessions and they were happy to see their interest and curiosity.

In the future, I would like to continue the project and involve the community as planned in the initial phase. One of the ideas proposed by the teachers was conducting sessions and having a discussion with the parents during the SMC (School Management Committee) meetings. Further, a small project/action will be taken by the students in their community.

Conclusion

Overall, CHLP has been an enriching learning experience. I would like to thank the core team for giving me an opportunity to become a part of CHLP 2021. I look forward to continuing my journey with SOCHARA and working towards the goal of “Health for all”.

Thank you!