

COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA:

# UNSUNG HEROES IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Author: Ritu Srivastava

Co-Published by



JADEITE SOLUTIONS

"WHAT MATTERS TO PEOPLE" TO SHAPE "PEOPLE WHO MATTER"

# COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA: UNsung HEROES IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

**Author:** Ritu Srivastava

**Editor:** Ranjana Narayan

**Design & layout by:** Sapna Subba

This work is licensed under a creative commons Attribution 4.0 International License



You can modify and build upon this document non-commercially, as long as you give credit to the original authors and license your new creation under the identical terms.

Published & distributed in 2021 by Jadeite Solutions Pvt. Ltd

You can read the online copy at <https://jadeite.co.in/>

**Jointly published by**



**Contact**

Jadeite Solutions Pvt. Ltd.

South Extension, South Extension I,

New Delhi – 110049

Email: [info@jadeite.co.in](mailto:info@jadeite.co.in)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement	04
Foreword	05
Introduction	07
Community Radio's COVID Programmes in South Asia	09
India's CR Response to COVID	12

---

<b>NORTH &amp; CENTRAL INDIA</b>	<b>17</b>
Radio Mewat	18
Alfaz-e-Mewat	20
Gurgaon ki Awaz	23
Radio Gunjan	25
Henalvani	27
Waqf Ki Awaaz	29
Salaam Namaste	31
Radio Chitkara FM	33

---

<b>WESTERN INDIA</b>	<b>35</b>
Mann Deshi Tarang Vahini	36
Yeralavani	38
Radio Madhuban	40

---

<b>EASTERN &amp; NORTHEAST INDIA</b>	<b>42</b>
Radio Namaskar	43
Radio Bulbul	45
Radio Surabhi	47
Radio Salesian	49
Radio Swayamshakti	51
Radio Dhimsa	53
Radio Brahmaputra	55
Jnan Taranga	57
Behliangchhip Radio	59

---

<b>SOUTHERN INDIA</b>	<b>61</b>
Rathinavani Community Radio	62
Radio Mattoli	64
Radio Benziger	66
Radio Active	68
Sarathi Jhalak	70
Pasumai Radio	72
Kadal Osai	74
Thendral Radio	76

---

CR Challenges During The Pandemic	78
Policy Recommendations	80



---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This publication is dedicated to community radio stations of India that are working tirelessly in the times of COVID-19. The researcher is grateful to all the community radio operators, who shared their practices and experiences in the area of the study. The researcher would like to thank CR partners Radio Bulbul, Radio Rathinavani, Radio Mattoli, Kadal Osai, Radio Alfaz-e-Mewat who provided support in giving shape to this publication. Sincere thanks to Prof. Vinod Pavarala, UNESCO Chair on Community Media, University of Hyderabad, who gave valuable inputs and suggestions for this publication. Lastly, the researcher would like to thank its Partner – Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) that supported in the publishing of this booklet.

---

---

# FOREWORD

Community radios in India, with their presence in the media landscape for over 15 years, have indeed come of age. Over 300 community radio stations during this period might seem insignificant given the country's vast population characterised by geographic and cultural diversity, but their contribution to fostering multiple conversations across the national public sphere cannot be underestimated. Despite the rather lethargic movement of the regulatory bureaucracy and continued challenges of financial sustainability, community radios in India have managed to firmly establish an alternative media culture with its diverse ownership structure, community participation in programme production and station management, promotion of local issues and identities, and articulation of the country's linguistic diversity.

It is at times of crises, such as natural disasters and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, that the general public and the media notice the value of community radio stations. These crises, of course, bring out the best in community radios, with their ears to the ground and programming that is sensitive to the needs of the most vulnerable sections of the community, including women and children, the disabled, and Dalits and tribal groups. The pandemic has shown in sharp relief the deep socioeconomic inequalities and the precarious existence of the poor and marginalized all over the world. While the mainstream media have their limitations in terms of their largely urban middle-class outlook, alternative media such as community radios have reached out to rural communities and to the deprived sections of urban India most effectively to ensure that they receive locally relevant information in local

languages and dialects.

This booklet is a valuable effort in documenting the work of community radio stations in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastation it has caused to the economic and social dimensions of people's lives in India. Methodologically, the interviews with community radio practitioners and managers as well as case studies of some of the significant contributions across the country add, more generally, to our understanding of the critical role of community radios during crises and, more specifically, to what these people's media outlets have been able to do in tackling the spread of the novel coronavirus during the past nine months.

While this publication mentions the initiatives of the government as well as multilateral agencies, such as UNICEF, to work with community radios in the country to disseminate information and create awareness, it would be a mistake to not acknowledge the independent and autonomous service rendered by them to their respective listening communities. The metaphor of 'last-mile connectivity' often reduces the role of community radios to being merely faithful transmitters of information provided by state agencies and other national/international organisations. Enabling and empowering community radios to function independently and facilitating their regular communication with their communities through public funding and periodic capacity-building measures are the most effective ways of ensuring that this third-sector media sector (outside of the government and the market) gets its pride of place in a pluralistic media landscape.

I hope this booklet serves to not only inform and educate the government and multilateral agencies



# Community Radio's



# Rural Areas



# Development





# INTRODUCTION

---

The coronavirus pandemic is not only a public health crisis, but also an economic and humanitarian crisis for South Asian countries. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the wider society across South Asia, especially those already facing existing structural discrimination and social and economic exclusion, and are thus particularly vulnerable to the pandemic's most devastating impact in the short and longer-term. With 1.94 billion people, South Asia is home to nearly one quarter of the world's population. As of September 15th 2020, South Asia contributed to 19 percent of the global reported cases and 10 percent to the global reported deaths, skewed due to India's contribution of 87 percent of South Asia's cases and 86 percent to South Asia's deaths<sup>1</sup>. Despite the increasing penetration of mobile phone networks, many people in South Asia have limited awareness of

public health issues or the resources to access public health facilities.

It is here that Community Radio plays a critical role. Community Radios (CRs), the low-tech information dissemination tool, act as the voice of rural and marginalised communities. In times of the COVID-19 pandemic, community radio stations 'CRs' have become the most popular and effective medium for information dissemination to a larger audience, specifically in marginalised and rural regions. The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, announced the nationwide lockdown through the programme, 'Mann ki Baat' on March 29, 2020<sup>2</sup>. While Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) mobilized CRs for developing and broadcasting the COVID-19 related awareness-building programmes.

---

<sup>1</sup>The ORF; COVID19: The New 'South Asian Enigma'?

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/covid19-the-new-south-asian-enigma-73553/>

<sup>2</sup>Hindustan Times; PM Modi addressing nation on Mann Ki Baat, focus on Covid-19 situation; <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pm-modi-to-address-mann-ki-baat-at-11am-today-focus-likely-on-covid-19-situation/story-28Do83sK2TtrRSQ4ZM-dTQK.html>; accessed on July 29, 2020

Since April 2020, community radio stations have seen a spike in their listenership. According to a study by the Association of Radio Operators for India (AROI), the radio industry witnessed a listenership of 51 million people which is close to the reach of television with 56 million and social media's reach of 57 million<sup>3</sup>. One of the reasons for this is that CR stations are primarily managed by local people and they provide credible and informed news in the local language. Moreover, CR stations have also complemented the work of the district authorities in busting myths and disseminating updated and relevant information regarding the pandemic in their regions. They have regularly broadcast the bulletins and briefings of the Government of India as well as of the states and district collectors, chief medical officers and the police department.

This publication aims to compile the experiences of community radio stations from India that stepped forward to help local communities living in loneliness in the farthest regions, to build awareness, demolish fake news and bring awareness about social distancing during the ongoing pandemic, in the form of case stories. This publication attempts to understand the commonalities, differences and uniqueness of the programmes broadcast by CR stations.

As an independent researcher, the adopted methodology was twofold – firstly to conduct in-depth interviews of CR stations, and secondly, monitoring of media reports in the last six months that are publicly available. These in-depth interviews were conducted with CR

station heads and staff members. The structure of this publication is divided into two sections. The first section reflects on different awareness programmes around COVID-19 across South Asia. The later section covers region-wise case stories of CR stations in India deep-diving the quality of programmes and efforts by CRs to reach out to the masses.

This publication is dedicated to all CR stations and to the countless unknown faces behind the CR stations who have worked tirelessly to bring relevant information timely to the people who are deprived of information, in the local language and dialect.

“ According to a study by the Association of Radio Operators for India (AROI), the radio industry witnessed a listenership of 51 million during the lockdown, which is close to the reach of television with 56 million and social media's reach of 57 million. ”

<sup>3</sup>Money control; Coronavirus lockdown: Radio listenership increases by 23% : Study; <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/india/coronavirus-lockdown-radio-listenership-increases-by-23-study-5129011.html>; accessed on 20 October 2020



# COMMUNITY RADIO'S COVID PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH ASIA

---

**T**he Coronavirus pandemic and its consequent lockdown situation have completely changed our lives and the way of working style. The COVID-19 pandemic, that has created an unprecedented global health, humanitarian, socio-economic and human rights crisis, has spread across 215 countries and territories. According to the World Bank<sup>4</sup>, around 71 million people worldwide have been pushed into extreme poverty and the pandemic is continuing to put significant additional pressure on already overburdened social and health service delivery systems, specifically public rural health systems. Four out of five countries in South Asia are middle-income economies while Nepal has been classified as a low-income country, according to the World Bank<sup>5</sup>. Their economies are hugely dependent on external resources including textile exports.

This pandemic has crumbled their economies.

In response, international bilateral organisations, including UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), WHO (World Health Organisation), UNESCAP (UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) and the World Bank forthwith came forward to respond to the deadly virus, supporting countries' health systems with optimum care. One of the challenges that countries face is to reach out to the rural and isolated regions with relevant information in the local language through the mainstream media during the time of lockdown. In this scenario, governments in South Asia have been using CR stations as a medium to reach out to communities living in rural and unconnected regions to provide health awareness, bringing awareness about social distancing, and dealing

---

<sup>4</sup>Technical Note: Child Helplines and the Protection of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic here (The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Child Helpline International, Child Protection Area of Responsibility, UNICEF, May 2020)

<sup>5</sup>World Bank; South Asia Overview; <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/overview>; retrieved on 13 September 2020

with misinformation and disinformation about COVID. Humanitarian organisations UNICEF and UNESCO have recognized the importance of CRs to maintain the free flow of information, unruffled and genuine.

There are around 5,000 community radio stations globally, over 70% of them are in the Asia Pacific region. Around 500 CR stations in South Asian countries are located in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The CRs in these regions act as a third communication medium to cater to the people who are living in rural regions and specifically excluded from the mainstream media, providing the platform to share their voices and opinions<sup>6</sup>.

UNICEF South Asia along with its country offices and governments initiated several COVID related media and outreach campaigns from health, hygiene and wash to explaining the concept of 'Quarantine', 'Prevention and Reporting of Symptoms', 'Care for the Elderly', 'Home-based care' to 'Message to Pregnant Mothers'<sup>7</sup>.

In Bangladesh, UNICEF trained Imams from 238,000 mosques to disseminate COVID-19 awareness messages, reaching out to 200,000 people as part of Friday prayers. Community radio stations through their interactive programmes reached to over seven million marginalised people including children and adolescents with

“ There are around 5,000 community radio stations globally, over 70% of them are in the Asia Pacific region. Around 500 CR stations in South Asian countries are located in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. ”

COVID-19 messages. The Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC)<sup>8</sup>, the largest community radio stations network in Bangladesh, has been mobilizing and developing awareness programmes on COVID-19 since March 2020. Around 18 CR stations in Bangladesh have been broadcasting 41 hours of educational programmes in line with the National Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19, published by the Directorate General of Health Services, Health Service Division, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of the People's Republic of

<sup>6</sup>Malik, K. K., & Pavarala, V. (2007). Other Voices: The Struggle for Community Radio in India. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 15(2), 282-284. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/19376520802397557>

<sup>7</sup>UNICEF in South Asia: COVID-19; [https://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF\\_ROSA\\_COVID19\\_Situation\\_Report\\_No12\\_\\_21\\_28\\_May\\_2020.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_ROSA_COVID19_Situation_Report_No12__21_28_May_2020.pdf); accessed on 19 September 2020

<sup>8</sup>Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC); <https://bnnrc.net>;

Bangladesh, in the local language and dialect. Over 200 community broadcasters are engaged in broadcasting programmes like 'Hello Doctor', live-in phone programme, interview, radio spots, Public Service Announcement (PSA) including Bangladesh Betar PSA, songs, jingles, Kothika (Narration), Puthipath (Folk talent programme), Drama, Magazine, and Radio talks, etc. Out of 200 community broadcasters 72 of them are women, known as 'Corona fighters'<sup>9</sup>.

In Nepal, World Vision and Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal (ACORAB) collaborated to bring awareness about symptoms of Corona, dealing with misinformation and myths around the virus and providing correct and relevant information such as the importance of sanitation, hygiene and maintaining social distancing. Broadcasting these programmes through over 300 radio stations, ACORAB is reaching to over 15 million people across 77 districts of Nepal<sup>10</sup>.

UNICEF collaborated with the Government of Nepal, ACORAB and the Ujyaalo 90 radio network to broadcast the 'Corona Capsule' programme in an effort to fight against misinformation that has been circulating online and offline amongst rural communities in the country<sup>11</sup>. It is also an effort to interact with the public directly and answer questions concerning the pandemic.

In India, CR stations played a vital role in reaching out to rural communities not only in providing COVID-related health and awareness programmes but also helped migrant workers to reach their native villages safely. The Information and Broadcasting Minister, Prakash Javadekar, recognised community radio stations as 'agents of change' in spreading awareness amongst rural communities<sup>12</sup>. Being located in diverse regions, CR stations in India are united in reaching out to the marginalised and unconnected communities which are taken for granted. The next section elaborates CR responses in the fight against COVID in India.

---

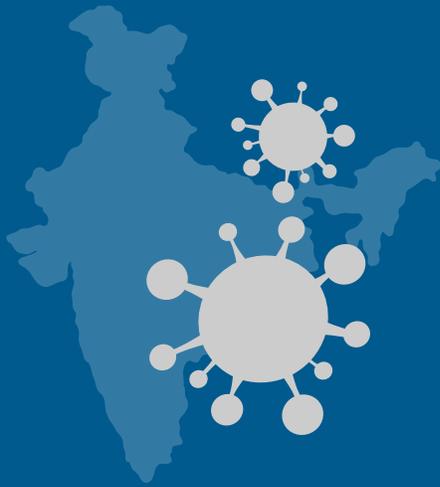
<sup>9</sup>In an interview with AHM. Bazlur Rahman, CEO, BNNRC; conducted on

<sup>10</sup>World Vision; Using radio to engage with remote communities during COVID-19 crisis; <https://www.wvi.org/stories/nepal/using-radio-engage-remote-communities-during-covid-19-crisis>; Accessed on 14 September 2020

<sup>11</sup>UNICEF; Bite-sized doses of fact; <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/stories/bite-sized-doses-fact>; accessed on 21 September 2020

<sup>12</sup>The Wire; Despite Battling COVID Misinformation, Community Radio News Still Seen as 'Security Threat'; <https://thewire.in/media/community-radios-covid-19-misinformation>

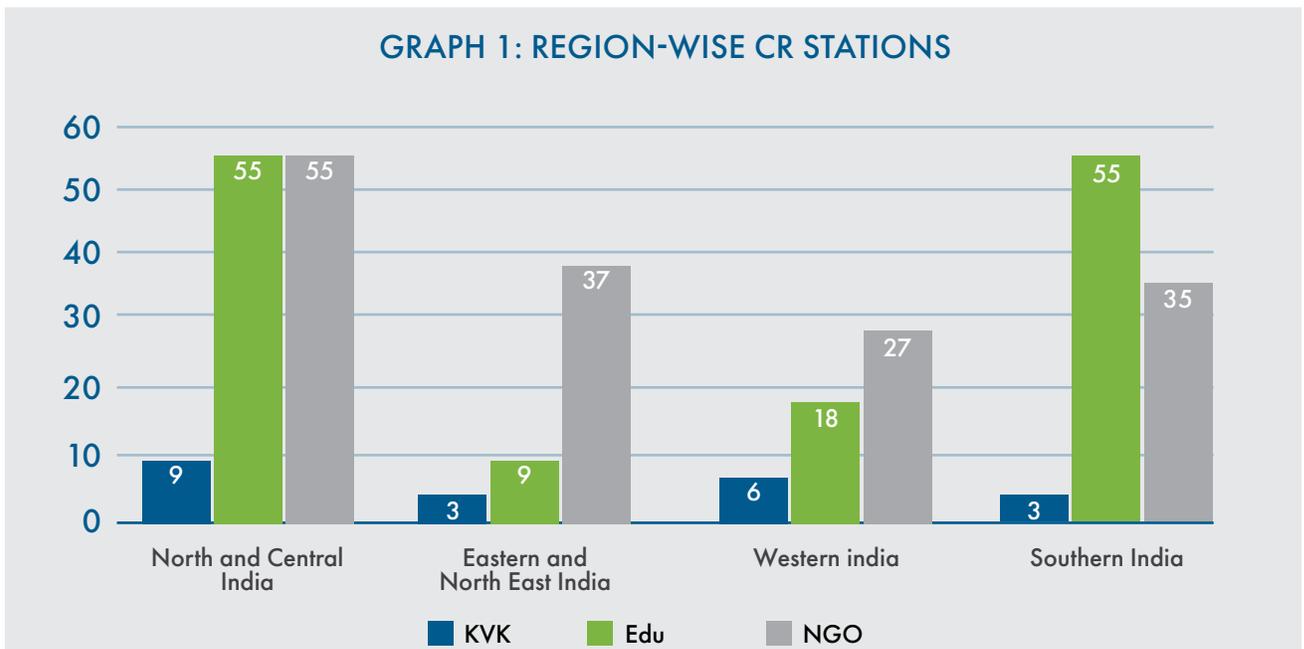
<sup>13</sup>Mehra, Preeti (2020): "On the Margins, but the Frequency is Right," Business Line, 17 April, 2020; On the margins, but the frequency is right - The Hindu BusinessLine



# INDIA'S CR RESPONSE TO COVID

There are 310 community radio stations in India, according to the Ministry of Information Broadcasting<sup>14</sup>. North and Central India have the highest number of CR stations with 119, followed by the

Southern and Western regions with 93 and 51 respectively. Half of the CR stations (50%) are managed and operated by NGOs and only 7% of them are operated by KVKs (Krishi Vigyan Kendras) (**Graph 1**).



<sup>14</sup>Ministry of Information & Broadcasting; <https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/Details%20of%20310%20Operational%20Community%20Radio%20Stations%20in%20India-converted.pdf>

2020 saw India combating the spread of the COVID-19 virus along with misinformation blended with lack of access to official safety guidelines and verified information from the medical officials and receiving essential and necessary items.

The country has 22 officially recognized languages and over 1,600 local dialects are spoken in an area of 3.2 million kilometres. Given its diversity, from geographical region-wise to tribal and minority cultures, it was burdensome for the central and state governments and philanthropic organisations to reach out to the rural and remotest regions. In these times, community radio stations became the first choice for the government, civil society organisations and humanitarian organisations to disseminate relevant and updated information regarding the lockdown, health measures and busting myths around the virus.

The CR stations in India took the responsibility of reaching out to the remotest locations with the help of local government authorities, village councillors, district magistrates, and medical officials. Fighting against the pandemic, CR stations ensured continuous access to verified information in timely manner. Acting as a bridge between the locals and local authorities, CR stations not only battled against misinformation but also resolved various problems that locals were facing during the time of the pandemic. In an interview with 30 CR stations, it was found that prime broadcast programmes were focused on providing updated information about the lockdown, relief updates and battling against the virus and busting myths around the virus and pandemic.

Advocating about maintaining physical distancing, special programmes such as 'Ekis Batein, Ekis Din' (21 Dialogues, 21 Days) by Radio Alfaz-e-Mewat (AeM) helped to sensitise people about various aspects of the pandemic and on how to avoid getting infected by the virus. Another programme, Savdhan (Alert) by the station also attempted to bust myths, rumours and misinformation that were circulating on social media platforms and the local community. Rathinavani radio station in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, provided verified and authenticated information through local administrative officials, doctors and through their NGO partners – SMART, Ideosync Media.

It is noteworthy that CR stations within the region joined hands to reach out to the wider audience and in multiple ways. In Uttarakhand, six CR stations, including Mandakini Ki Awaaz, Hevanvani and others joined together under the banner of Umeed Network (Hope) to broadcast relevant locally produced content, not only tackling fake news but also providing listeners with valuable insights.

“

The country has 22 officially recognized languages and over 1,600 local dialects are spoken in an area of 3.2 million kilometres.

”

“

In an interview with 30 CR stations, it was found that prime broadcast programmes were focused on providing updated information about the lockdown, relief updates and battling against the virus and busting myths around the virus and pandemic.

”

When migrant workers were forced to travel to their homes due to the lockdown amid uncertainty of their jobs, Radio Hirakhand, Odisha, set up a help service for migrant workers and connected 60-70 migrant labourers to the District Magistrate Office. Whereas Radio Rathinavani organised a drive for cash collection to help daily wage labourers in association with Mithra Technology Foundation.

Education and health services have been the most affected services during the time of pandemic. As part of many initiatives, CR stations took several steps towards addressing the concerns of people within the community. Radio Janadhwani, Karnataka, conducted a 'Teleconsultation and Telerehabilitation' programme for People with Disability (PwD) as the lockdown had a deep impact on students and children with disabilities. Similarly, Radio Yeralavani, Maharashtra, broadcast a programme based on a query from a Standard 12 biology student regarding the impact of the virus, helping clear her doubts.

During the time of lockdown, one of the challenging conditions that took an unprecedented toll on everyone's health was mental health. Radio Charminar, Telangana, aptly made a programme, named 'Zindagi Kaise Jiye' (How to live life), initiating a conversation about mental health and how it is considered a taboo. Similarly, Gurgaon Ki Awaaz, National Capital Region, broadcast several mental health programmes through its series 'Udaan'. The next section delves into region-wise case stories of community radio stations and how they are stepping forward in the fight against the virus – COVID-19.

# COVID- 19 Relief Work by Digital Empowerment Foundation since 2020- Present

*Anoushka Jha*

The Covid-19 pandemic erupted as a major health crisis and all other ailments were side lined. People also overlooked their symptoms due to the fear of coronavirus infection and preferred home treatment. People in the rural areas who were dependent on government hospitals, had no place to go but to bear the pain and pray to get well on their own.

One such persons was Noordin living in Jakhopur village in Rajasthan, he was in pain for long time due to a stomach ailment. His stomach had grown in size in an abrupt manner, he had consulted many nondegree allopathic practitioners in the village but nothing helped him.

After being in pain for a long time Noordin decided to go the city private hospital and get treated. Before he could materialize his decision, he heard about virtual health camp organized by the Smartpurt center in his area. He was checked by a doctor and was prescribed medicines. Within few days of taking medicine, he started to feel better, his pain was gone and stomach started to shrink.

*-Noordin Lives in Alwar district, Rajasthan*

This is quite a prominent scenario, especially in rural regions; many people lost their lives other than Covid deaths. Responding to this situation DEF, India based organization, act swiftly and through its 10000-field mobilizers provided support to save more lives. Virtual doc-consultation is giving immediate medical assistance to people living in rural areas with bare minimum medical support. It is playing a vital role in connecting rural India to the health care system.

In the year 2020, DEF started Digital Emergency Relief Program (DERP), still continuing as DERP 2.0 in the second wave of Covid-19. The DERP was launched through its Community Information Resource Centre (CIRCs) across 600+ locations. The CIRC centres, with the help of the 5,000+ digital foot soldiers, mapped the needs of the communities in rural regions, identified their immediate need related to information dissemination and creating awareness. DERP has been providing awareness regarding the information on Coronavirus, its symptoms, preventive measures as well as countering fake news and misinformation using various means like WhatsApp groups, leaflets and word-of-mouth. Further, awareness around the relief package announced by the government- Prime Minister Gareeb Kalyan Yojana- was raised through Digital Mobile Van, public address system and WhatsApp groups. DERP is being implemented across 1000 locations in 12 states of India.

DERP is being implemented across 5 pillars namely, education, healthcare, governance, finance and livelihood. Under education pillar, e-learning is being imparted to students on STEM learning, women entrepreneurs are being trained on digital entrepreneurship as well as constant digital literacy training through its CIRCs.

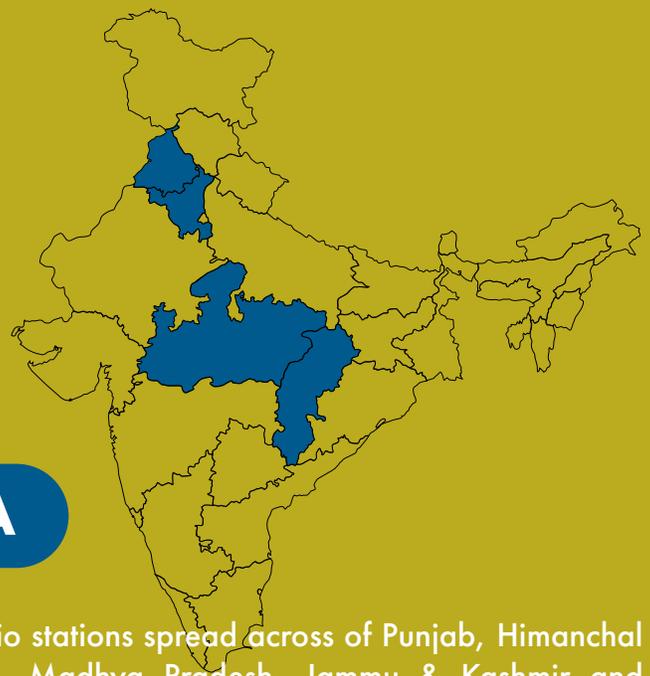
Tele health consultations are provided under the health pillar to communities residing in underserved settings. Samarth SoochnaPrenures (SSPs) are leveraging digital services under the governance pillar in making social security schemes accessible to people. The banking correspondent in CIRCs are providing e-banking services during lockdown by ensuring money withdrawal and deposit. DEF also managed to create entrepreneurs during the crisis under its livelihood pillar. Women were encouraged to make masks as an alternate source of livelihood activity in pandemic and sell it to the local shops.

The Smartpur program which works across the above-mentioned five pillars organised online and ofAine health camps during Covid-19, benefitting thousands of people. This drive is being run in more than 1000 location across India and touching the lives of millions of people. Key area during the drive areCovid-19 vaccination, monitoring health of infected people, advocating the Covid appropriate behaviour etc. To draw an actual picture of the prevailing situation DEF is running DEF Dialogues, a special video series capturing reports from 600 locations in India, initiated by Osama Manzar, Founder & Director DEF. Alongside the relief and response work, DEF is also contributing in publishing research and advocacy reports. These reports captures the dire situation the of migrant workers, weavers and artisans.

The Research and Advocacy Team, at DEF has been publishing series of research and advocacy reports on Covid-19. A report, titled Chronology of Misinformation and Rumours During Covid-19, which analysed five themes around which misinformation was spreading in communities across 15 states in India namely-Islamophobia, Conspiracy Theories, Poultry and Food, Blind Faith and Fake Medical Advices. Other reports like- Reverse Migration during COVID-19: Precarious Labour, Economic inequality, and Inadequate Social protection in India, narrates the precarious condition of migrant labourers during nation-wide lockdown caused by the pandemic. Shramik Sampark Setu: A Rapid Assessment survey on Access to Information, Facilitation, Rehabilitation of Returnee Migrant Workers during Covid-19, talks about the migrant labourers who returned to their villages and their access to information related to Covid-19 relief packages and their rehabilitation. Another survey, jointly done by DEF-USIPI, tried to understand the food shortages and scarce medical supplies in rural India and how rural areas are coping during Covid-19 pandemic.

Another DEF report titled The Negative Impact of Covid-19 Lockdown in Rural India brings to light the various challenges faced by the people residing in rural areas and their access to information and resources. A five-part series on M-Health titled Understanding the Role and Potential of M-Health during Covid-19 Crisis in India discusses in detail the rise of mhealth in India and its contribution in the current pandemic.

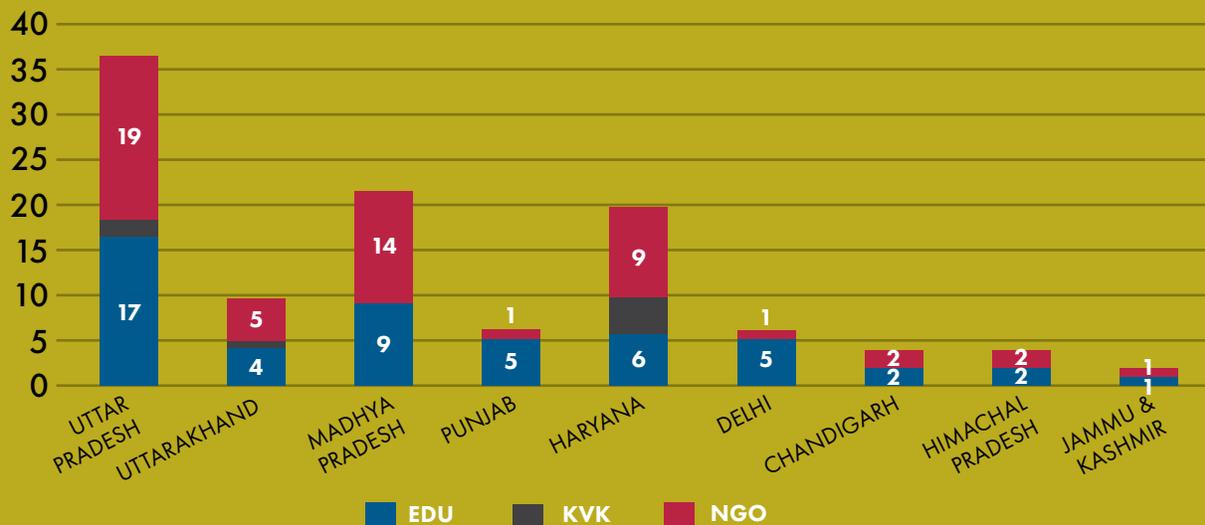
DEF has also published a number of articles on how people especially the underprivileged have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Article titled Why Millions Cannot Claim Emergency Food Rations elaborates on how migrants were left outside the fourfold of accessing food rations during Covid-19. Article Lockdown Leaves Handloom Weavers Hanging By A Thread showcases the condition of handloom weavers during the pandemic, exclusion from major policies that aim to provide Covid related relief packages as a recovery plan after the nation-wide lockdown. Another ground reports, Covid-19 Lockdown Leaves Delhi Migrant Workers With Neither Jobs Nor Social Security; Experts Blame Political Apathy, Lack Of Legal Protection throws light on the apathy of migrant workers in Delhi, their social and economic condition during the pandemic. The report Impact Of Covid-19 On The Weavers Of Musiri talks exclusively about the Musiri handloom cluster and the impact that Covid-19 has had on their business.



# NORTH & CENTRAL INDIA

In North and Central India, there are 119 community radio stations spread across of Punjab, Himanchal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand. Out of 113 CRs, 54 of them are managed by NGOs and educational institutions manage 51 community radio stations in the region.<sup>15</sup>

Graph 1: Number of CR stations as per categories in North & Central India



Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of CR stations with 38 radio stations followed by Madhya Pradesh and Haryana with 23 and 20 radio stations respectively (Graph 1). Whereas Jammu Kashmir has only two community radio stations – one being managed by NGO - Pir Panchal and another managed by an educational institute. Dealing with fake news and myths around the COVID-19 virus and providing relevant and updated information from the government are the major themes of CR stations for broadcasting their programmes. In Uttarakhand, Mandakani ki Awaaz, a CR station located at Rudra Prayag along with other CR stations as partners - Kumaon Vani, Radio Khushi, Hello Zindagee, Pantnagar Janvani, is reaching out collectively to 16,22,000 people across 10 districts of the state. Broadcasting the content in Kumauni, Hindi and Garhwali, these radio stations have been broadcasting concerns and queries regarding COVID-19, interviews with medical experts, scientists and nutritionists. This section reflects the case-stories of community radio stations located in north and central India.

<sup>15</sup>Calculated on the basis of sheet, List of 251 operational Community Radio Stations in India; published at <https://www.mib.gov.in/broadcasting/list-251-operational-community-radio-stations-india#:~:text=List%20of%20251%20operational%20Community,and%20Broadcasting%20%7C%20Government%20of%20India;>



## RADIO MEWAT

**Frequency:** 90.4 MHz

**Establishment date:** September 01, 2010

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 12 hours

**Coverage area:** 20-25 KM; 168 Villages, 5.5 lakh people

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/radiomewat90.4>

**State:** Haryana

**Name of the promoter organization:** Smart

**Programme name:** Corona Se Jang, Radio Mewat Ke Sang; Hinsa Ko No (No to domestic violence); Mission Corona; Communicating SDGs from the perspective of COVID19, TheNewNormal campaign

**Programme category:** Awareness about social distancing, domestic violence, supporting migrant workers

**R**adio Mewat, an initiative of SMART organisation, became the voice of Nuh people and district administration officials when COVID-19 cases were at a spike in around 120 villages of the district in Haryana. The Collector broadcast the message of sealing the 120 villages and enforcing a complete lockdown post April 8, 2020. This was not the only time when the district administration sought help from Radio Mewat to reach out to people of the villages, but ever since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Superintendent of Police, the Chief Medical Officer and others used the radio to inform the people of Nuh about the spread of the disease, how to stay safe, how to protect

one's self and their families, what time the fair price shops would open and where migrants could get free food and more.

Ever since April 2020, Radio Mewat rescheduled its radio programmes and focused on broadcasting COVID-19 related awareness programmes, as well as outreach and behavioural change campaigns. These campaigns included programmes related to symptoms and prevention, de-escalation measures, daily updates, social cohesion and solidarity, busting myths and addressing misinformation, and messages by district authorities. The radio broadcasts five to six shows

daily, ranging from stories of people affected due to the lockdown, on women's health and domestic violence. During its 12 hours of daily broadcast time, it includes content targeting its range of stakeholders, from women, children, farmers, migrant workers to vulnerable groups. Besides being the voice of people, Radio Mewat also captured the voices of frontline health workers, including ASHAs (Accredited Social Health Activist) and ANMs (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) discussing their struggles, and measures to create a safe environment in the district.

The programme, 'Corona Se Jang, Radio Mewat Ke Sang', a live programme in Mewati dialect hosted by presenter Imran Khan, focuses on various issues. Imran, one of nine reporters, including two women at Radio Mewat, walks seven km from his village, Ghasera, to the radio studio. He says, *"We have been at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 in the Mewat region. Being a community radio, we have to keep the community informed during the pandemic and bring their concerns to the fore. Senior district officials see us as partners in fighting COVID-19 in the region and often call us to record their messages. We were able to build trust between the locals, most belonging to the ethnic Meo-Muslim community, and the administration."*

As a non-profit organisation, SMART with support from UNESCO developed exclusive content and brief bulletins for CR stations across the country. Over 60 scripts and 13 interviews were developed in seven languages with all 295 operating radio stations. These languages include Hindi, English, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Assamese, Gujarat.

The lockdown imposed by the government in a bid to contain the spread of COVID-19, resulted in many in Mewat being rendered jobless and confined to their homes. The condition of women especially became a matter of concern as violence against women is extremely common in the region. With reports of increased domestic violence coming in from many parts of the country, Radio Mewat felt the need to remain engaged with our women listener groups during this time. The parent organisation SMART, through its community radio station Radio Mewat, decided to engage its women groups spread across 30 panchayats for mask-making.

The cloth and stitching material were sourced and acquired by the team of Radio Mewat during the lockdown by taking permission from the district authorities to get the go-downs opened. The team member Sunita went to different villages and trained the women who assembled in small groups on how to stitch the masks. During these interactions, Sunita also spoke to them about domestic violence and encouraged the women to come forward and share their stories or incidents, especially if they are facing violence during the lockdown. Each woman was promised Rs 6 per mask as compensation. The women were initially asked to make 2-3 samples which would be examined by Sunita. The women made the masks according to the feedback they received.

The exercise was started in mid-April with support from Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives (APPI) as well as some voluntary contributions through friends of SMART. So far, 284 women across 28 villages of Nuh have made around 52,000 masks. Of these, around 50,000 have been distributed free-of-cost to the people of Mewat through the respective Sarpanches. The free distribution of masks has been carried out in order to inculcate a habit of mask-wearing within the community and protect themselves.



## ALFAZ-E-MEWAT

**Frequency:** FM 107.8 MHz

**Establishment date:** February 2012

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 13 hours

**Coverage area:** Over 225 villages in Nuh district

**State:** Haryana

**Name of the promoter organization:** S M Sehgal Foundation

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/alfaze.mewat/>

**Broadcasting hours:** 3 hours

**Programme name:** 'Savdhaan'; '21 Din 21 Baatein' (21 Days, 21 Messages); programme '19 Din Aur Sambhalke' (Be Careful for Another 19 Days); 'Gaon Ki Chaupal'; 'Aaj Ka Hero', Radio School, Mission Corona

**Programme category:** Fight against COVID-19 related fake news; adopting Covid-19 preventive practices; education

Community radio, Alfaz-e-Mewat FM 107.8, an initiative of S.M Sehgal Foundation, a rural development NGO located in Nuh, Mewat district of Haryana, aired its first awareness programme at the beginning of February 2020 before the outbreak of COVID-19 in India. Alfaz-e-Mewat uses local folk songs to discuss contemporary issues, including the coronavirus outbreak and social distancing. Each day, the station presenter broadcasts the information shared by the concerned departments over WhatsApp

and emails, and conducts interviews with district officials, including the district collector, chief medical officer, and other government authorities to bring awareness.

The radio station has initiated a variety of programmes related to COVID-19, covering issues from fighting against fake news, adopting preventive measures, education and practices, and also played an instrumental role in broadcasting information received from the district collector, chief medical officer and

government authorities. These programmes include 'Savdhaan', '21 Din 21 Baatein' (21 Days, 21 Messages), programme '19 Din Aur Sambhalke' (Be Careful for Another 19 Days), 'Gaon Ki Chaupal', 'Aaj Ka Hero' (Today's hero) and 'Radio School'.

**Fakat Hussain, a Radio Jockey at the CR says,**

“ We do different programmes on information received from the district collector, chief medical officer and other government authorities, including entitlements of extended schemes. We also did a series called '21 din 21 baatein' with a message by an expert along with a thematic poem on frequent hand washing, access to healthcare services, physical distancing, the importance of yoga, and time for self-learning daily to spread positivity in people. Discussions on contemporary issues, including the coronavirus outbreak, and local folk songs on social isolation are presented to listeners. Some are live and interactive sessions, with listeners asking questions. Officials cannot possibly go to every village, but through this medium, they can communicate to the maximum number of people. ”

To combat anxiety and lessen the confusion among people about staying indoors and not venture outdoors due to the nationwide lockdown, the CR station partnered with Rajbala Foundation, a national NGO working in the area of healthcare and education, and initiated a programme, '21 Din 21 Baatein' during the first phase of the lockdown, from a mental health perspective. In the second phase, the programme continued with '19 Din Aur Sambhalke'. As the lockdown got extended, the format of the programme changed, inviting experts to share their opinion and information on how to deal with the 'new normal'.

A special programme, 'Savdhaan' focused on battling fake news, myths and rumours that were spreading in the region. Through the programme, they requested listeners to verify the information with the authorities. Short audio capsules were broadcast on how to protect oneself. These short capsules were broadcast in collaboration with GramVani.

Another programme, 'Aaj ka Hero', featured positive stories of how people were following the lockdown. This half-an-hour live-in programme featured over 10,000 people from the community. With the pandemic and lockdown affecting students' education, the CR started helping students to continue their studies through its 'Radio School' programme. The programme has episodes on the subjects of Maths, English and Science from primary and secondary classes. Station Principal Lead, Ms. Pooja O. Murada says, they used the existing pre-recorded programmes of the government school teachers

<sup>1</sup>The Statesman, Rural schoolchildren in Nuh tune in to radio for education amid the pandemic; Accessed on 10 October 2020.

as part of the 'Dastake-taaleem' campaign facilitated by the State Education Department. Pooja O. Murada is a representative of Alfaz-e-Mewat FM 107.8 and S.M. Sehgal Foundation director. "With changing time and needs, the programme has adopted different methodology to share knowledge, but our aim has remained the same — to spread education to all those who seek it in our broadcast area."<sup>1</sup>. A variety of educational programmes are being broadcast regularly during the pandemic to make up for the educational loss of schoolchildren.

Besides these programmes, Alfaz-e-Mewat CR with support from UNICEF and Community Radio Association started broadcasting a radio series 'Mission Corona' from June 18, 2020. The 10-episode radio series is focused on coronavirus symptoms, self-care, home quarantine, food and nutrition during COVID, and others.

Alfaz-e-Mewat reaches 225 villages, serving the vulnerable sections of the population who need credible information in their local language on how they can protect themselves against coronavirus.





## GURGAON KI AWAAZ

**Frequency:** 107.8

**Establishment date:** November 2009

**Population coverage:** Over 500,000 in Gurugram

**State:** Haryana

**Name of the promoter organization:** The Restoring Force

**Website:** <https://www.gurgaonkiawaaz.in>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/GurgaonFM/>

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 22 hours per day

**Programme name:** Udaan, Call our WhatsApp Number, TheNewNormal campaign

**Programme category:** Mental health, food, emergency services, helping migrant workers

Amidst the lockdown when migrant workers of Gurugram were struggling to have their voices heard, Gurgaon Ki Awaaz came as a ray of hope for them. The CR station closely worked with the District Administration of Gurugram, through the Civil Defence team working directly under the Deputy Commissioner of Gurugram, to broadcast the daily updates, health advisories and notifications as well as a list of important helpline numbers every day.

Addressing the stress and anxiety issues during the prolonged lockdown, the radio station started the bi-weekly live call-in show 'Udaan' where counsellors were on air to take listeners'

calls. In partnership with Rajbala Foundation, the Udaan series invited callers to connect with counsellors over phone and share their coping strategies to deal with the lockdown.

The radio was broadcasting every sort of information - from telling the masses about the timing of food delivery vans, their schedule and location, and guiding them about the kind of restrictions placed on movement, and the quarantine status in various parts of Gurugram district.

During the lockdown, the radio was receiving several desperate calls from people for food, seeking help in identifying trains and buses to go to their hometowns and seeking nodal numbers

Founder of Gurgaon Ki Awaaz, Arti Jaiman, says,

“ We never worked this closely before. The administration realised that we were the best hyperlocal media around to address the local concerns. We get officials from civil defence on the programmes to answer the queries of the citizens. They also provide transport to Preeti, presenter of the station who has been running the programmes from the studio, while a team of five others, including two other reporters, two volunteers and me provide the back-up for the programming. ”

and links so that they could register for transport or food. Despite the fact that the radio was broadcasting helpline and emergency numbers, listeners kept calling back and stating that the helpline was not responsive or they didn't have food. To tackle the emergency situation, the CR station collaborated with Raahgiri Foundation and Latika Thukral of 'I Am Gurgaon' initiative to help the migrants and daily wage workers. As part of the strategy, the radio broadcast their WhatsApp number and announced the 'Call our WhatsApp Number' programme where listeners could reach out to the station for help, and in return the presenter, Preeti, forwarded the request to an Agrasar ([www.agrasar.org](http://www.agrasar.org)) volunteer, Sakshi, who had been requested to take on the task. Similarly, the radio station noted down the requests of people needing ration and coordinated for the distribution of the same. Initially calls started with 20 to 30 names a day, later the number of calls reached up to

300 a day from a single village, Sarhaul. The village is known for the Maruti Suzuki factory surrounded by the industrial area of Udyog Vihar, where millions of workers were starving and stranded. Everyone started calling the radio station and enquiring about buses and trains to leave for their hometowns.

During the lockdown, Gurgaon Ki Awaaz radio was broadcasting for 22 hours a day airing special shows for migrant workers and local villagers in Gurugram. As part of #TheNewNormal campaign partner, anchored by SMART, the radio broadcast several awareness programmes around social distancing, wearing of masks and practising hand hygiene in times of COVID-19.

Chief warden on Civil Defence, Gurugram, Mohit Sharma says,

“ During the lockdown, the administration used the channel to tell people about what all would be covered and which services would remain open. Also, we told people that if they develop symptoms of COVID-19, then they should not go to the local doctors but to the designated hospitals. Also, there is a large working population in the area this channel covers and we urged it to not leave the city, assuring that food would be supplied to every person. We also got 'pradhans' or village headmen to appeal to landlords to waive the rent for a few months so that migrant labourers did not flee in panic. ”



## RADIO GUNJAN

**Frequency:** 91.2 MHz

**Establishment date:** 2016

**Coverage area:** 30 kilometres, in Dharamshala

**State:** Himachal Pradesh

**Name of the promoter organization:** GUNJAN Organisation for Community Development

**Website:** <http://gunjanindia.org/radio-gunjan-crs/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/GunjanRadio91.2FM>

**Total hours of transmission in a day::** 24 hours per day

**Programme name:** Mission Corona, Our Health, TheNewNormal campaign, WhatsApp Covid-19 Managing Group

**Programme category:** Awareness programmes around social distancing, wearing mask, health

**G**unjan Radio has become the voice of the hills of Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh where information provided in the local dialect is very important. The radio station is making a difference in the lives of people living in Dharamshala by disseminating information and area-specific advisories of the government and local administration on a real-time basis. Since the lockdown was announced, Radio Gunjan started airing special programmes on COVID-19 24x7 in three dialects — Hindi, Pahari (Kangri) and Gadyali (tribal dialect). These awareness programmes are related to the importance of

social distancing, hand wash and wearing face masks, broadcast in the local dialect to help people understand the issue in a better way. In order to air the voices of local people and bridge the gap with the local administration, Radio Gunjan broadcasts a live-in programme focusing on various issues faced by locals and the responses from the administration.

As part of the Mission Corona programme, an initiative of UNICEF, the radio station broadcast several shows on adopting new strategies during the pandemic, discussed measures that needed to be taken during the lockdown. Broadcasting

the shows only with four team members and with support from volunteers, Radio Gunjan broadcast interviews of doctors, health officials under their 'Our Health' show. Through their WhatsApp group 'Covid-19 Managing Group', Radio Gunjan connected 250 people representing all development blocks of district Kangra to establish communication between communities in the district. The radio station as an effective tool in the crisis, had the District Collector (DC) the Superintendent of Police (SP), Chief Medical Officer and other officials and line agencies actively participating in the programmes. Besides, Radio Gunjan raised Rs 47,000 from the public for the Corona Relief

Fund of the District Administration in Kangra through direct bank transfer between 7-20 April, 2020.

**Meenakshi, Director, Programmes at Radio Gunjan Community Radio Station Dharamshala, says,**

“ Our awareness programmes on the importance of social distancing, hand wash and face masks in local dialect help people understand the issue in a better way. ”





## HENVALVANI

**Frequency:** 90.4

**Establishment date:** September 2001

**Coverage area:** 600 villages in Chamba

**State:** Uttarakhand

**Population coverage:** 240,000 people

**Name of the promoter organization:** Henvalvani

**Website:** <http://www.henvalvani.wordpress.com/>

**Facebook:** FM 90.4MHz Community Radio Henvalvani

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 18 hour per day

**Programme name:** TheNewNormal campaign, 'Corona se dar na hai, ladna hai' ('Don't fear Corona; fight it')

**Programme category:** Fake news; awareness programmes,

In the hills of Uttarakhand, Henvalvani coordinated with other community radio stations, including Mandakini ki Aawaz, Kumaon Vaani, Pantnagar Janvani, Radio Zindagee, Himgiri Ki Awaaz, and Radio Khushi, to create a multi-stakeholder network platform to reach out to the remotest villages in order to tackle the misinformation about COVID-19. The network, known as UMEED, worked to educate people and provide relevant and correct information related to the coronavirus.

Another programme, 'Corona se dar na hai, ladna hai' ('Don't fear Corona; fight it'), aired doctors' interviews to bring awareness about COVID-19 symptoms and how to prevent the infection. Another awareness show, TheNewNormal campaign in partnership with SMART NGO was broadcast to bring awareness on following the new normal practices, like wearing masks, maintain social distancing, sanitation and hygiene, etc.

**Rajendra Singh Negi, station head of Radio Henvalnani, says,**

“ We serve the cause of the community by involving locals and keeping the content niche. We don't want to be preachy; the aim is to inspire, empower and engage. The station's biggest challenge is explaining abstract terms such as 'social distancing' and 'quarantine'. One listener called in to ask if the latter meant that a warrant had been issued for him! There's also anxiety about hospital beds and the distribution of essential supplies. We collate all queries and send them to various stakeholders -- the district administration, health institutions or [nongovernmental organizations]. The received answers are relayed through broadcasts.”

Named after the Tehri district's Henvall Valley, the station connects 600 villages with a daily audience of 240,000 people. Besides its regular shows, the radio also broadcasts specific audio messages, one of which was about 21 Nepalese migrant workers who were stranded in a remote corner of the district without food and water. In collaboration with the local administration, the radio helped in tracking migrant workers and helped them with food and emergency kits. During the time of pandemic, the radio station has been working in 6-hour shifts in rotation during its 18-hours-a-day operations with eight people. Voice inputs are sent by local reporters over WhatsApp.





## WAQT KI AWAAZ

**Frequency:** FM 91.2 FM

**Establishment date:** September 25, 2013

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 9 hours in a day

**Coverage area:** 300 villages located in Maitha block, Akbarpur block, Rasoolabad block, Chaubepur block and Sivrajpur Block of Kanpur Nagar and Kanpur Dehat

**State:** Uttar Pradesh

**Population coverage:** 300,000 people

**Name of the promoter organization:** Shramik Bharti

**Website:** <https://www.shramikbharti.org.in/about-waqt-ki-awaaz.html>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/WaqtKiAwaaz91.2FM/>

**Programme name:** Mission Corona

**Programme category:** Education, sanitation, domestic violence

In Kanpur Dehat district of Uttar Pradesh, Waqt Ki Awaaz community radio station has been broadcasting a 26-episode series based on the World Health Organization's facts and figures, directives and regulations since the lockdown. As part of Mission Corona, an initiative by UNICEF and CRA (Community Radio Association), radio Waqt Ki Awaaz broadcast shows related to the importance of wearing three-layer masks, handwashing, quarantine and maintaining social distancing. While this messaging was built into the radio's usual programme mix of education, sanitation,

domestic violence and entertainment in the local dialect, the radio also broadcast specific programmes for lactating mothers, farmers, taking care of elderly people in times of COVID-19. Radio Waqt Ki Awaaz has listeners from 300 villages across five blocks.

During the time of the lockdown, the number of calls from listeners increased -- not only from the regular ones, including women and elderly, but also from young people who were worried about the situation. Having a team of six members, the radio created five-minute

awareness capsules, and coordinated with local teachers to provide exam tips for students from 5th to 8th standard. The radio station broadcast programmes specifically for migrant workers and coordinated with the administration for their food and ration. Station coordinator Radha Shukla had shared her personal contact number so that any listener could reach out to her at any time. The radio station regularly brings in experts to allay fears about the pandemic of its listeners.

Though the station has not experienced any frequency issues or hardware challenges during the lockdown period (barring the non-availability of rechargeable cells), however, it was a difficult time for the field coordinator to manage operations from the station office. Three team members would come in turns to record their bytes. Due to travel restrictions, community reporters were facing difficulties in capturing field voices. The station's vast reach also means that it connects with Accredited Social and Health Activists (ASHAs) to help them keep an eye on the people they reach.

Radha Shukla says,

“ We are besieged by worried callers. Some want to know when they will be able to conduct marriages that have already been fixed. Some want tips on how to explain to children why they cannot go out to play as usual. Some are worried about what to do with their rotting flower crops as they cannot reach the markets. Others do not know how to deal with migrants who have returned home. We once had a call from listeners who were worried that no doctor was coming to them to check on some suspected cases. We called up the doctors, explained to the villagers that it would take them long to get to them and guided them on how they could get their patients to the nearest hospital while taking all precautions. ”





## SALAAM NAMASTE

**Frequency:** 90.4 FM

**Establishment date:** 2009

**Coverage area:** Noida and Ghaziabad

**State:** Uttar Pradesh

**Name of the promoter organization:** IMS Noida

**Website:** <http://imsnoida.com/ims-salaam-namaste/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/salaam.namaste.cr/>

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 8 hours per day (10:00 am to 6:00 pm)

**Programme name:** TheNewNormal campaign, DOC-ON-RADIO, Ghar Se Sehat (Health from Home), Gutargoo (The Pigeon), Radio Classroom, Radio4Local, Corona Self Check

**Programme category:** Health, education, dealing with stress, social distancing

**S**alaam Namaste community radio is managed and owned by IMS Noida, broadcasting in areas of Noida and Ghaziabad. Since the lockdown, the radio has been airing several programmes ranging from free tele consulting services, educating people about social distancing, on boosting immunity, and sharing stories of Corona survivors.

The programme 'DOC-ON-RADIO' offers free tele-consultations with doctors, whereas 'Health from Home', provides tips by pulmonologists on the prevention of COVID-19, and 'Corona

'Salaam' is aimed at distance education for local underprivileged children. During the early days of lockdown, in partnership with Apollo Hospital, the radio aired the 'Corona Self Check' programme, offering a quick self-assessment online test to prevent suspected corona cases from queuing at hospitals and to keep the panic and confusion away due to seasonal illnesses.

Every week, Salaam Namaste in association with UNICEF Uttar Pradesh showcases corona survivors as 'Citizen Heroes', stressing on following precautionary measures to beat the coronavirus. Under its Mission Corona

programme, the radio broadcasts interviews of food and nutrition experts to bring awareness about eating immunity-boosting food. Gutargoo, an initiative by Salaam Namaste, encourages children and youth to tell stories through pictures. The station mobilised children and youth of village Harola, to Gutargoo (The Pigeon's call) their stories through art and poetry.

A feast to the eyes, the narration of stories by children and the youth through drawings showcases the creativity of their thoughts and expressions especially in the difficult times of COVID-19. The station also invited artists like Sangeeta Srivastava and conducted shows on how the integration of arts and nature can help deal with stress and to learn new things during the lockdown.

To promote local and home-based ventures and strengthening the vision of vocal for local, Salaam Namaste introduced a new Radio Program titled "Radio4Local"

Apart from the health awareness-based programs, Salaam Namaste initiated a regular feature of "Ghar Se Sehat (Health from Home)" where the community was made aware of home-based remedies and knowing kitchen secrets, knowing the nutritional value of foods and knowledge about foods that help to boost immunity and help to fight with the Coronavirus. The radio also introduced a novel concept

of 'Radio Classroom' of bringing class wise educational programs supported by NCERT to help students who could not reach their schools during the lockdown. This program also brought the local school teachers on board bringing special programs during the exams. In order to help the kids from village schools and the underprivileged Salaam Namaste organized a Book-Drive and Digi-Bank drive to collect classwise books for the students and old devices like mobiles, tablets, etc to help such kids attend online classes and continue their education.

The Social Ambassadors from the community helping the people in need during the pandemic, like community groups working on 'zero hunger' drive-through community kitchens, volunteers spreading awareness about COVID appropriate behaviours, use of masks, etc were also promoted on the community radio under Corona Salaam.

**Barsha Chabaria, station head, Salaam Namaste, says,**

“There has been a 40% increase in our listenership during the Covid-19 crisis. We host a mix of health and education programmes and worked closely with local communities as well as RWAs.”



## RADIO CHITKARA

**Frequency:** 107.8 FM

**Establishment date:** 2012

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 9.00 AM - 4.00 PM

**State:** Punjab

**Name of the promoter organization:** Chitkara University

**Website:** <https://www.chitkara.edu.in/fm107-8/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/salaam.namaste.cr/>

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 10 hours per day

**Programme name:** Mission Corona, Online Chitkara University, Explore

**Programme category:** Awareness; mask and sanitizer distribution

**R**adio Chitkara, the community radio of Chitkara University, started broadcasting COVID-19 awareness programmes 24x7 since the last week of March 2020 in a radius of 15 kms of five villages in Punjab state. These programmes were related to disseminating information related to spread of the virus, its symptoms and preventive measures that need to be taken by the public for avoiding community transmission. Through its programmes, the radio encourages people to use the COVA Punjab app and Aarogya Setu app and provides updated information from the Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh administrations, so that listeners can be aware of the latest policies.

Chitkara University started using its own initiative "Online Chitkara University" for giving online sessions on streaming, trending and state-of-art topics to the students to support their educational and employability skills. Sometimes these sessions were planned as a series of hands-on sessions. Experts from outside were invited to give industry perspectives on the emerging new normal. At times, simulation packages were run online for giving insights into a complex topic. Very many cases of team teaching could be witnessed in these live seminars, thus benefitting the students multifold.

Dr. Ashutosh Mishra of Radio Chitkara says,

“ It provides details of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s radio programme ‘Mann Ki Baat’. It also provides information about the guidelines given by the different state governments.”

Radio Chitkara has integrated web-telecast to its broadcast talks with medical professionals, the district administration, locals, Members of the Legislative Assembly, influencers or heads of villages, and civil society organisations. This has helped the radio reach out to a wider audience and continuously bring global coverage to the people.

Special bulletins on the coronavirus outbreak from a national perspective, taken from All India Radio, and daily at least two special programmes on Punjab and Haryana each, with updates from both states on COVID-19, are being produced and aired.

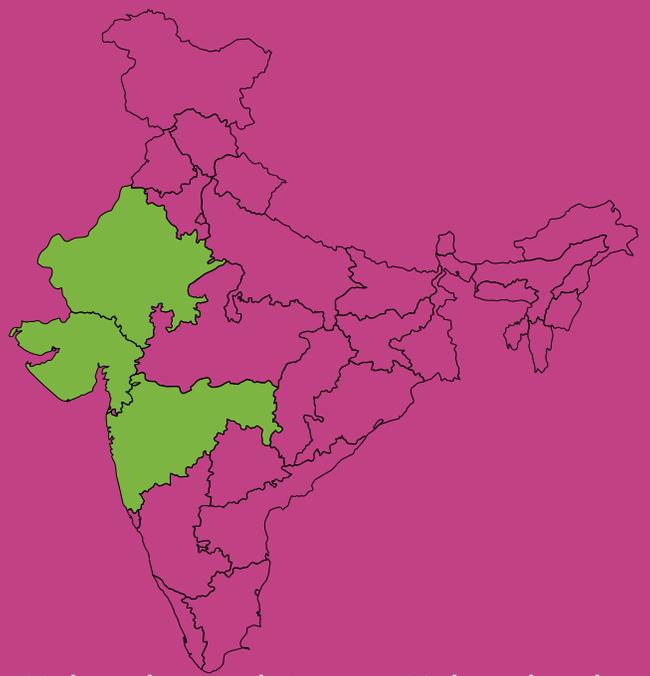
As part of Mission Corona programme, the radio distributed masks and hand sanitizers at Basma and neighbourhood villages. The radio is reaching out to 1.5 million people.

The radio was operated remotely during the lockdown, with Executive Producers Rupinder Kaur and Ranjit Singh Chopra working from the city of Patiala, Programming Head Pankaj Garg based at Kurukshetra, and Station Head Dr. Ashutosh Mishra contributing from Chandigarh.

All were working from home to run the radio round the clock so that the very purpose of this mass media tool could be well addressed, and the efforts are supported by the Chitkara University Leadership Team.

Chitkara University started the new online “Explore” series of lectures and interactions with eminent personalities Chetan Bhagat, Chef Sanjeev Kapoor, mythologist and illustrator Devdutt Pattanaik and many illustrious speakers addressed the students and staff.

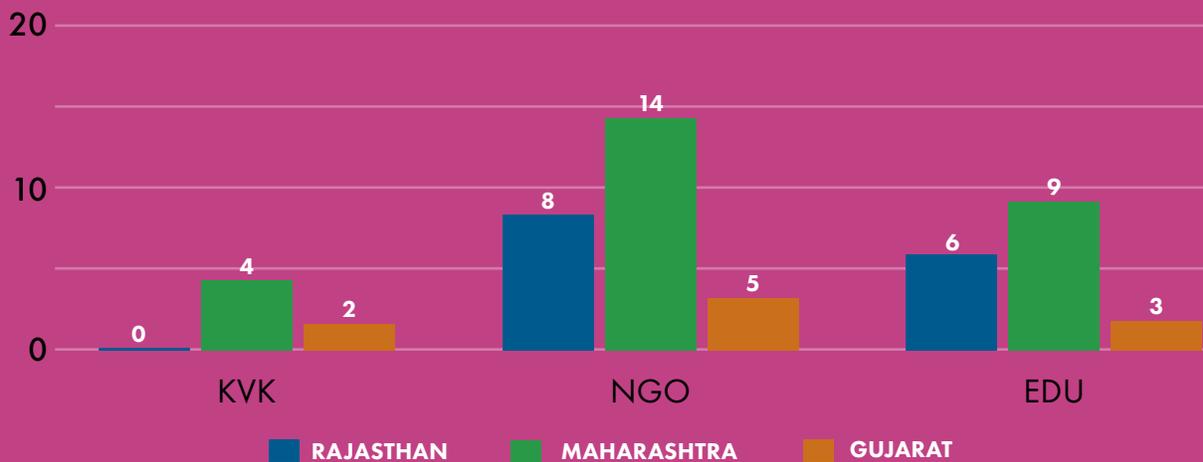




## WESTERN INDIA

There are 51 CR stations across three states – Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat. Maharashtra has the highest number of CR stations with 27, of which 14 are owned by NGOs and 9 are managed by educational institutions, while four are run by Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK).

Graph 2: Number of CR stations as per categories in Western India



Amid the surging coronavirus cases in Maharashtra, the state government has been using community radio stations to appeal for maintaining social distancing, broadcasting hand washing and sanitation awareness programmes, and providing information regarding state relief programmes. The outbreak of the virus shifted the focus of community radio stations from daily routine programmes to COVID-19 related initiatives. Radio Madhuban, run by Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Iswariya Vishwa Vidhlaya in Rajasthan's Sirohi district, has been instrumental in serving the local communities in the fight against coronavirus since March 2020. Similarly, Mann Deshi Tarang Vahini radio station in Satara, Maharashtra, has been serving the local community.



## MANN DESHI TARANG VAHINI

**Frequency:** 90.4 MHz

**Establishment date:** 17<sup>th</sup> November 2008

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 8 hours

**Coverage area:** 130 villages in about 15 kilometres radius in Satara

**State:** Maharashtra

**Name of the promoter organization:** Mann Deshi Foundation

**Programme name:** Mahila Vishesh Prasaran Sabha

**Programme category:** Health & hygiene; misinformation; domestic violence

Situated 81 km east of Satara district in Maharashtra at Mhaswad village, the Mann Deshi Tarang Vahini community radio station is helping the Mann Deshi community in the time of the pandemic. Mann Deshi Foundation is using its community radio station to reach out to the far flung communities which are not connected by traditional media. With an outreach of about 50,000 people across 110 villages in the Mann block, the radio station has been raising awareness about maintaining social distancing, especially while buying essential commodities, and wearing of masks, by regularly broadcasting interviews of experts, and instructions from local administrative officials and the municipal corporation.

The parent organisation, Mann Deshi in partnership with RHYTHM Foundation initiated several campaigns to educate people about the pandemic. During the time of the lockdown, Mann Deshi Tarang Vahini 90.4 MHz aired several interviews of frontline workers, including ASHA, ANM, psychologists, teachers, local authorities. These interviews included a range of topics from following the norms of social distancing, applying for government relief funds and how to practice quarantine.

Before the lockdown announcement, the radio team held hand-washing workshops for communities in nearby villages. To address the issue of domestic violence, the radio came forward with a programme titled 'Mahila

Vishesh Prasaran Sabha' where they advocate against domestic violence and abuse. The show is anchored by a woman reporter and has the option for live-in phone calls and support from experts. Ensuring that people receive correct information and bust myths around COVID-19, the radio provided relevant information and distributed pamphlets and banners with important safety instructions.

The live-in phone call service by the radio helped people to highlight the challenges they were facing during the lockdown and was shared with the district collector. Ensuring the safety of the radio team, all staff members broadcast programmes from their homes.

RJ Anup Gurav of Mann Deshi Tarang station, says

“ We asked them for short one-minute messages, which we then converted into PSAs (Public Service Announcements) and jingles and broadcast. They are also involved in spreading the awareness. ”





## YERALAVANI

**Frequency:** 91.2 FM

**Establishment date:** July 31, 2010

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 11 hours and 30 minutes

**Coverage area:** Within 20 Km air distance in Sangli

**State:** Maharashtra

**Name of the promoter organization:** Yerala Projects Society

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/yeralavani.crs>

**Programme name:** Radio classroom, Mission Corona

**Programme category:** Education, health

At the time when the lockdown was going to be announced, the station head of Yeralavani community radio, Uday Godbole, was receiving frenzied messages on the station's WhatsApp group to broadcast the Prime Minister's address on the inevitable 21-day lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the country. Due to limited internet access and electricity problems, villagers were not able to access TV. As a result, Uday quickly broadcast the Prime Minister's speech live through the community radio station.

Since the lockdown, Yeralavani through its rural development work in 22 villages of Sangli district,

has been broadcasting programmes related to health, education, agriculture. As the pandemic affected school education, the radio station started the programme 'Radio Classroom' under its Scope Digital School (School of Progressive Education Jalihal), enabling teachers to use the radio station to teach students from standards 8th to 12th.

As part of the Mission Corona programme, an initiative of UNICEF, the radio station broadcast several shows on adopting new strategies during the pandemic, and discussed measures that need to be taken during the lockdown. Under this programme, the station broadcast shows on the importance of wearing three-layer masks,

handwashing, quarantine and maintaining social distancing. The radio also aired interviews of doctors, ASHA workers, psychologists, teachers and local authorities who were contacted over the phone. Through these programmes, listeners were informed where to get essential services, how to apply for government relief funds, how to practice quarantine and social distancing.

“ Be it programmes on coronavirus awareness, water conservation, economic literacy, women emancipation, literacy for children, effort to preserve and promote the culture of the Mann Deshi community we cover them all, ”

said station head Shivaji Yadav





## RADIO MADHUBAN

**Frequency:** 90.4 FM

**Establishment date:** 2011

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 24 hours

**Coverage area:** 82 villages in Mount Abu, Sirohi

**State:** Rajasthan

**Name of the promoter organization:** Radio Madhuban Community Society (RMCS)

**Website:** <http://radiomadhuban.in/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/RadioMadhuban>

**Programme name:** COVID Mission, Young Warriors, Poshan ki Potli, Hinsa ko No, Administration with You, HEROS & SHREOS, BRAVO, Lockdown Chit Chat, Corona Jingles, Swasth Mann

**Programme category:** : Health, sanitation, nutrition, mental health, awareness on COVID protocols, hygiene; awareness about Aarogya Setu

The outbreak of Coronavirus shifted the focus of Radio Madhuban, run by the Brahma Kumaris, immediately from broadcasting their regular programmes to COVID-19 related issues. Located in a tribal-dominated area in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, where essential information in local language and dialects is difficult, Radio Madhuban started broadcasting COVID-19 programmes since March 2020 in the local language and dialect. The radio has been instrumental in serving the local community in the fight against the pandemic. The radio initiated several programmes not only disseminate information about the virus but also keeping local community engaged through its various

programmes including 'Hinsa ko No', BRAVO, HEROS to SHREOS and Young Warriors. The radio centred all its programmes on COVID-19 ranging from providing updated information about the virus and lockdown period, coordinating between the local administration and the community people, keeping children and young people busy and helping the community to deal with mental issues and emotional fatigue caused by the lockdown.

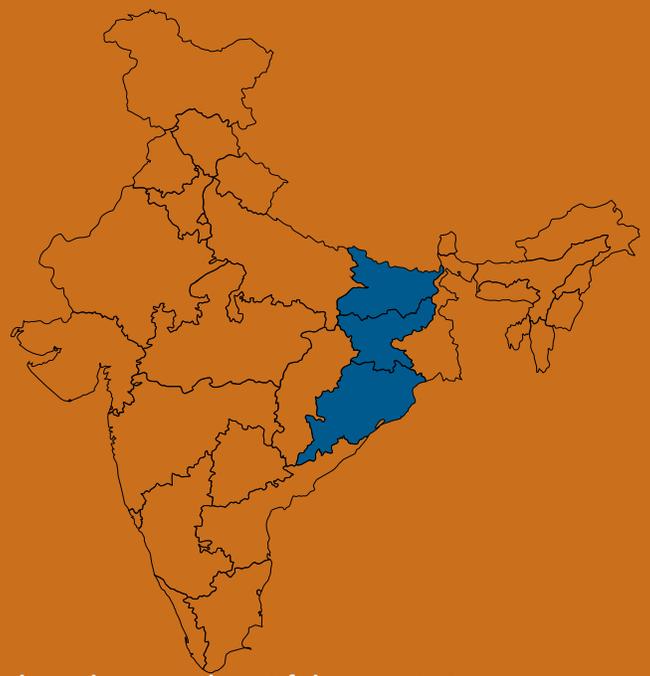
Pitching their effort to ensure the safety of the local community, Radio Madhuban provided essential information to help keep the threat of COVID-19 at bay. The programme, 'Administration with

you' bridged the gap between the district administration and the local people. District Collector of Sirohi, Mr. B.S. Kalalji, every day recorded the necessary precautions, available facilities and shared the contact number of administrative officials in case of emergencies. Radio Madhuban broadcast their WhatsApp number that provided daily and hourly announcements from the District Collector's office. The radio started bringing awareness on wearing mask and washing hands regularly to adopt the concept of 'the New Normal' through

its program 'Young Warrior and 'HEROS & SHEROS'. The radio started 'Bravo' programme bringing experts from different fields to engage youth and resolve local issues. At the time, when youth were losing jobs, education expert from NGO and local youth participated to interact in different job related activities.

The station created specific programmes on sensitising people to make effective use of the Aarogya Setu app to check developments related to COVID-19 and the situation around

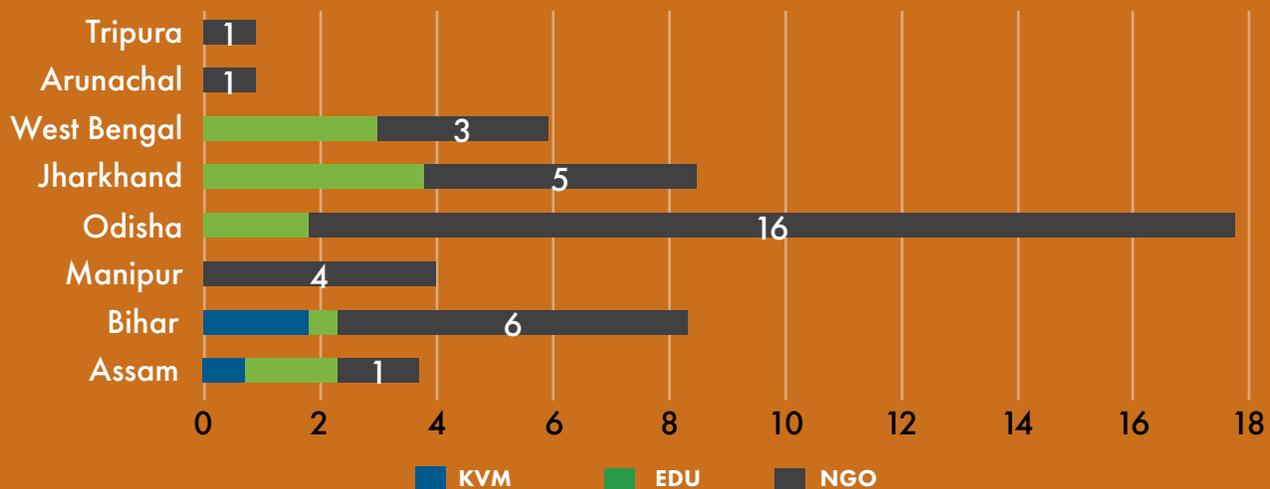




## EASTERN AND NORTHEAST INDIA

There are a total of 52 community radio stations in east and northeast India. Of these, 18 CR stations are located in Odisha, followed by Bihar and Jharkhand with 9 CR stations each. Around 69% of CR stations in the East and Northeast region are managed by non-profit organisations (Graph 3).

Graph 3: Number of CR stations as per categories in East & Northeast India



The network of 18 CR stations in Odisha started disseminating COVID-19 related information as soon as the lockdown and the pandemic were announced. CR stations operating in remote pockets of Puri, Jagatsinghpur, Bhadrak, Nayagarh, Kandhamal, Khordha, Nuapada, Balasore and Koraput districts of Odisha, saw broadcasters engaging with local people to understand their circumstances.

During the time of lockdown, over 1.5 million migrant workers returned to their homes in Bihar state. Radio Rimjhim, a CR station in Gopalganj district, spread awareness about maintaining social distancing and quarantine when they returned home.

In the North East region, besides community radio stations, the local youth too came forward to set up community radio stations to bring awareness amongst local communities about COVID-19. A 27-year-old UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) aspirant, Saisingliana Sailo of Behliangchhip village, set up his



## RADIO NAMASKAR

**Frequency:** FM 90.4 MHz

**Establishment date:** February 12, 2010

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 12 hours

**Coverage area:** Intensively in 4 Blocks of Puri District (Odisha)

**State:** Odisha

**Name of the promoter organization:** Young India

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/RadioNamaskarLive>

**Programme name:** Mission Corona

**Programme category:** Health & hygiene; misinformation

In the outbreak of coronavirus, community radio stations are reaching out to rural parts of Odisha by narrowcasting their programmes specifically focused on advocating social distancing, wearing masks, maintaining hygiene, and lockdown protocols. Radio Namaskar located at Konark in Puri district of Odisha broadcasts required important information and updates in hyperlocal format from authenticated sources to bring awareness on social distancing, quarantine, mask, hygiene, and preventive measures to fight against this deadly virus.

During the initial days of the lockdown, it was a difficult situation for Radio Namaskar as the station was not only broadcasting the government's instructions on COVID-19 but also

helping migrant workers who were returning home from different cities.

**N.A. Shah Ansari, founder of Radio Namaskar, stated,**

“ Many migrant workers of Odisha have returned home due to the pandemic scare. So, we're helping in the strict enforcement of the lockdown ”

He added, “Most villagers don't watch TV, so the radio is the only medium to reach out to them. In a coastal and disaster-prone state like Odisha, especially, community radio's role in

assisting local communities becomes critical.’

Radio Namaskar has implemented a campaign “Nua Sakala’ra Katha” supported by Young India and US Dept. of State to create sensitized local communities who will take action against Covid-19, violence against women and child marriage and to prevent Misinformation. The campaign is also aimed to ensure employment opportunities for jobless migrant labours through different Govt. schemes like MGNREGS etc. During the campaign different capacity building workshops have organised to train community radio listeners’ groups on focused thematic areas and they are now playing key roles in community awareness. To fight against child marriage, Radio Namaskar has adopted 30 villages in its coverage areas to sensitise community people and to make child marriage free villages.

During the lockdown, Radio Namaskar aired interviews of Govt. officials from local administration and line departments like Block Development Officers (BDOs), Police officials, Public Health Officers and local PRI members like sarpanch (elected village council representative), to provide the authentic and right information and sharing the new orders on their locality. These interviews help to make people aware about actions taken by the administration to prevent corona virus, assuring people not to be panic. Apart from this Radio Namaskar has implemented different campaigns supported by UNICEF India, UNESCO and other organisations to mobilize communities to accept and adapt to a life with safety measures to prevent themselves from COVID-19.





## RADIO BULBUL

**Frequency:** 90.4 Mhz

**Establishment date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2016

**Coverage area:** Over 178 villages in Bhadrak district, including Bhadrak Block, Dhamangar block & Bhanadaripokhri block

**State:** Odisha

**Facebook:** radiobulbul91.2

**Programme name:** COVID Series - Kar Bhala Toh Ho Bhala, Mission Corona, End Violence, Fight Against Child

**Programme category:** Health & hygiene; misinformation

Amid the outbreak of COVID-19, Radio Bulbul located in Bhadrak district of Odisha, immediately launched two special programmes 'Kar Bhala Toh Ho Bhala' and 'Katha Re Katha Re' centered around the pandemic. In association with Salaam Jeevan, the programme, 'Kar Bhala Toh Ho Bhala' is a theme-based programme. So far, 'Kar Bhala Toh Ho Bhala' has featured 21 programmes on social distancing, the importance of blood donation, myths about COVID-19, launched a health drive for homeless people, and many more. The broadcast is in typical 'Bhadraki' dialect, which is a mix of Odia, Urdu and Hindi. Because of the majority Muslim population, it has programmes in Urdu and Hindi, besides Odia.

During the lockdown, the presenter, Md. Imran Ali travelled to neighbourhood communities to spread awareness about social distancing and for collecting their stories. Reaching out to the wider community, Radio Bulbul has been broadcasting these two programmes through its social media platforms – Facebook and its app which can be downloaded through the play store. Alongside these two specific programmes, Radio Bulbul also initiated discussions with state parliamentarians and local government authorities to engage with the community and bring perspective from the government on tackling the pandemic. One of its unique features is that Radio Bulbul created these programmes alongside other awareness drives such as End Violence, Mission Corona, Fight Against Child

Labour, Menstrual Hygiene Day, and many more. Radio Bulbul has provided its listeners with fact-checked information. Narrow broadcasting is another method that Radio Bulbul uses to reach tribal communities advocating social distancing and hygiene protocols.

The presenter, Md Imran Ali says

“The CR station helped spread information amongst many citizens about each topic in detail.”

To stop the spread of misinformation, Radio Bulbul has provided its listeners with fact-checked information.

S.K. Mohd Niyaz, Director, Radio Bulbul stated,

“We engaged with the District Collector and other government authorities who used our medium to reach out to the public and informed them about the important government announcements besides our programmes.”





## RADIO SURABHI

**Frequency:** FM 90.4 MHz

**Establishment date:** 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 28 hours per week (COVID related)

**Coverage area:** Dasapalla, Gania and Nuagaon blocks under Nayagarh district

**State:** Odisha

**Name of the promoter organization:** Indian Institute of Education & Care (IIEC)

**Website:** <https://www.iiec-odisha.org>

**Twitter:** [https://twitter.com/90\\_surabhi](https://twitter.com/90_surabhi)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/iiec.org/>

**Programme name:** Mission Sikshya Surabhi, Mission Corona

**Programme category:** Education and Mental health

**W**hen the outbreak of Corona virus closed the schools and due to limited access of digital devices and services disrupted the education, Radio Surabhi from Dasapalla under Nayagarh district in Odisha led the way with Sikshya Surabhi, a programme specifically designed to provide inclusive study programme for visually impaired primary school students from standard I to V.

The programme is designed in a way that has fixed appropriate learning outcome catering as per students' needs in an enjoyable format

such as storytelling, folk songs, dramas and other demonstrable narratives. Under this programme, 100 episodes were produced covering all the subjects of primary classes and carefully curated by 20 subject experts; and it has been authorized by the Odisha School Education Programme Authority (OSEPA) for circulation amongst students in audio formats.

Besides broadcasting these episodes in all CRs of Odisha, the programmes were circulated through other social media channels such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube for wider dissemination. The scripts were scrutinized and

verified by experts in related subject areas and dramatically transformed in the studio, so that maximum possible sound effect and transcription of images/pictures into aural imagery which simply turn on children's imaginative potential and help them roam in make believe world without being distracted from the mainstream topic. This unique initiative was supported by the Australian High Commission, Kolkata Consulate.

**Awareness programmes for empowering the marginalized communities supported by MISEREOR, coordinated by IGSSS (Indo-Global Social Service Society) and executed by IIEC in collaboration with Radio Surabhi.**

- » Broadcast health warnings, updated information on the government's plans and preparedness for the virus as well as more in-depth coverage of how the virus is impacting communities.
- » Disseminated public health messages on people's safety
- » Instead of disseminating dull health warnings, used innovative approaches like playing songs and jingles by musicians prepared with light hearted tips about how to have fun and relax while staying safe.
- » Broadcast technical and business management tips to homebound urban poor in the project area to utilize their time in productive manner in view of the Corona pandemic
- » Broadcast mental health awareness programmes created by sociologists and psychologists addressing mental health and psycho social support needs.
- » Counselling programmes by Experts and

**Radio Surabhi Chairman Dr. Shishir Kumar Das says,**

“The OSEPA has asked its Block Resource Teachers and District Coordinators to ensure that students access all the episodes. The state-level OSEPA office has sought monthly reports from the officials on the reach of ‘Sikshya Surabhi’ in their areas. So, our endeavour to help primary students get basic education has been integrated with the government system.”

Along with Sikshya Surabhi programme, the CR station broadcast Mission Corona programme in partnership with UNICEF and CRA. The Mission Corona shows are COVID-19 specific and support Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE).

The following episodes were broadcast based on specific themes using different formats:

- Physical and social distancing;
- Jingles to protect the elderly to reduce risk of COVID-19 and promote home care during quarantine
- Storytelling programme on wearing triple layer surgical masks
- Songs on nutrition and food safety
- Organised discussions around breastfeeding

Sikshya Surabhi played a vital role in bridging the gap between the district administration and health department for the proper registration of corona patients, advocating with the department of labour and police to bring social justice benefits to migrant workers who were mostly affected due to the pandemic.



## RADIO SALESIAN

**Frequency:** 90.8 Mhz

**Establishment date:** 28 October 2016

**Coverage area:** Darjeeling and Siliguri as well as Kurseong, Mirik, Salugora, Sonada, Sukna (all in West Bengal), Pashupati (Nepal), Sukiapukuri, Balsun Valley

**State:** West Bengal

**Name of the promoter organization:** Indian Institute of Education & Care (IIEC)

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 12 hours per day

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/radiosalesian>

**Podcast platform:** <https://anchor.fm/boscom>

**Programme name:** Mission Corona; 'Corona Kaal Ka Yathartha Katha Haru' (True Stories of Corona Times)

**Programme category:** Mental health, social distancing; wearing masks

Radio Salesian, run by Salesian College Sonada (SCS), Darjeeling in West Bengal, a Don Bosco Institution, has come up with a novel way to bring COVID-19 awareness through its radio plays on social issues. UNICEF partnered with Radio Salesian to broadcast the Mission Corona programme, featuring a 25-minute weekly programme in Nepali language in the valley of Darjeeling. The programme focuses on issues related to the usage of masks, home quarantine, physical distancing, building the immune system, elderly care and others. Radio Salesian broadcast

interviews of local administration authorities including Addl. Superintendent of Police (HQ), Darjeeling, Abhishek Gupta, frontline health workers – ASHAs & ANMs and health officials, so that the district administration can engage with local communities and bring awareness on how to be safe in the time of the pandemic.

In addition to Mission Corona, Radio Salesian broadcast 'Corona Kaal Ka Yathartha Katha Haru' (True Stories of Corona Times), featuring testimonies and experiences of COVID-19 survivors and their relatives or friends. Under its

'Psyche and Soul' programme, the radio station airs 'self-care' programmes, primarily focusing on the stress and anxiety during the pandemic.

As the country began unlocking, through a process of new safety measures, Radio Salesian carried forward the national campaign, #TheNewNormal, anchored by NGO, SMART, to mobilise local communities to accept and adapt to a life with masks, social distancing and practising hand washing in times of COVID-19.

Five local radio journalists are part of the production team, led by Programme Coordinator RJ Samir. Radio Salesian is also available 24X7 on web radio worldwide through the App 'Listen2MyRadio'.

**Radio Salesian Programme Director & Radio Journalist Samir Chhetri said**

“ We held a radio drama series from Monday 23rd March 2020, during which we featured a series of social dramas recorded in our studio. Radio Salesian programming also looks at nutrition and hygiene aspects as well as a poster campaign through social media. ”





## RADIO SWAYAMSHAKTI (The power of self)

**Frequency:** FM 90.4 MHz

**Establishment date:** 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 11.5 hours

**Coverage area:** Over 232 villages in four blocks of Nuapada district, two blocks of Balangir district and one block of Kalahandi district

**State:** Odisha

**Name of the promoter organization:** SRUSTI (Society for Rural Upliftment & Socio Technological Initiative)

**Programme name:** Reaching the unreached; radio campaign

**Programme category:** Awareness about wearing mask; social distance

The importance of community radio stations is magnified in remote and inaccessible rural regions due to limited access to internet connectivity or non-availability of any other media. As the outbreak of coronavirus started, Radio Swayamshakti, located in Khariar, Nuapada district of Odisha, has been broadcasting several campaign programmes related to wearing masks, social distancing and handwashing in Kosali language, a local dialect of Odia language, to help the local population. The radio used jingles for these campaigns. When local milkmen were not able to deliver milk to local communities, Radio Swayamshakti started a radio campaign

to connect buyers with the milkmen who had suddenly lost business due to the lockdown.

The six volunteers of Radio Swayamshakti disseminated information across the four blocks of Nuapada, two blocks in Balangir and one in Kalahandi. They educated villagers about the government schemes, rules and regulations that were in force during the time of the lockdown. The volunteers also gathered information from the district administration and narrowcast several programmes to reach out to specific communities, including farmers, migrant workers and nomads in villages. At the time of lockdown, the station shifted its focus to educate people

about not crowding in public spaces and on availing direct cash benefits.

The radio station serves selected areas of districts in Odisha that are the hotspots of migration. This has worked to inform migrants too about how to manage COVID-19.

**Biswajit Padhi, Station CEO of Radio Swayamshakti, says,**

“ Information was shared with inputs from government officials to inform the migrants about how to manage COVID-19, about how to avail quarantine facilities, testing and others. A number of queries and confusion of migrants were solved through us by linking them to the concerned officials.”





## RADIO DHIMSA

**Frequency:** FM90.4 MHz

**Establishment date:** July 2008

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 9 hours

**Coverage area:** 60 villages including Koraput Township

**State:** Odisha

**Name of the promoter organization:** South Orissa Voluntary Action (SOVA)

**Website:** <https://www.sovakoraput.org/community-radio-station-dhimsa/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/radiosalesian>

**Programme name:** New Arunima

**Programme category:** Education; awareness programmes;

Located in Koraput district of Odisha state, Radio Dhimsa is reaching out to 1,000 pre-primary and primary school children who are not able to go to school due to the pandemic. Radio Dhimsa is helping bridge the digital gap in 60 villages of Koraput and Lamtaput blocks through its programme, 'New Arunima', a curriculum-based programme specifically designed for school children who cannot afford a computer or online education. The programme uses the format of poems for the state curriculum for pre-primary school children

and stories, jingles, songs and social messages for primary school children.

Kamakhi Prasad Das, the head of the history department at Government College, Koraput, who designed the programme, used 20 questions per episode, making sure the episodes remain short and crisp and students maintain their interest in the programmes<sup>1</sup>.

Tribal children came forward to create awareness about coronavirus in the Desia

<sup>1</sup>Times of India; As education remains in lockdown, Odisha's community radios do a 'class act'; <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/as-education-remains-in-lockdown-states-community-radios-do-a-class-act/articleshow/76901029.cms>

tribal dialect through Radio Dhimsa. As part of the special programme, the tribal children shared information about the virus and the precautionary measures needed to be taken to avoid getting infected from the disease. The programme reached the remotest villages bringing awareness about the virus. A local musician named Harishchandra Mali has directed and produced the radio drama, and the tribal children performed the play in their local tribal dialect, Desia.

**Udaynath Hantal, Programme Editor at Radio Dhimsa, says,**

“ We decided to keep the tribal people informed on this issue so that they can convey the information to other people as well. ”

The CR station is serving the tribal indigenous community by carrying out a wide range of activities both on-air and off-air to enable community members deal with the pandemic.

**While narrating his experience as the station manager, RJ Uday said,**

“ Desia people can't understand the information that is conveyed to them through mainstream media outlets because of language and cultural barriers. As a result, vital information remains out of reach for the community during these trying times. We have roped in local experts from the community and trained them to convey important messages in the Desia dialect. ”

With the strong community bond built over the years, the station's staff and volunteers visited villages to demonstrate things like physical distancing norms, proper wearing of masks, and personal hygiene.





## RADIO BRAHMAPUTRA

**Frequency:** 90.4 FM

**Establishment date:** July 10, 2015

**Coverage area:** Dibrugarh and Dhemaji district of upper Assam

**State:** Assam

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 14 Hours (8 AM-10 PM)

**Website:** radiobrahmaputra.org

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/Radiobrahmaputra90.4FM>

**Programme name:** Puwar Brahmaputra, Katha COVID, Radio Parhasali, Brahmaputra Live, Akanir Parhasali, Bingul Bajila, Igarekun, Phola Agaam, Jindegi Khulkoi Jiwa

**Programme category:** Awareness programmes

Amidst the pandemic, Radio Brahmaputra 90.4 FM has been the only source of receiving information about coronavirus for Assam tea garden workers and neighbourhood villagers. The community radio assisted people during the lockdown period and helped check the spread of coronavirus in tea gardens and riverine villages by generating awareness about the pandemic in the local dialects. Radio Brahmaputra 90.4 FM, situated near the banks of Brahmaputra river in the district of Dibrugarh, Assam, serves around 700,000 people belonging to various ethnic communities of Upper Assam.

In collaboration with the District Health Society & ASDMA (Assam State Disaster Management Authority), the radio station started two hours of live-in COVID-19 awareness programme everyday where listeners could participate through phone calls and WhatsApp before the lockdown was imposed. Radio Brahmaputra broadcasts 12 hours of programme, ranging from quiz shows to awareness on COVID-19 from all around the world. Radio Brahmaputra has been broadcasting special programmes for farmers, municipal workers, frontline workers (including ASHA, ANM, AWW- Anganwadi worker), and parents on child protection and

safety from the virus. Engaging with their audience, the radio started a live interaction programme with doctors of community medicine, psychiatrists, local MLAs, PRI (Panchayati Raj Institution) members, and government officials. As part of awareness shows, Radio Brahmaputra follows UNICEF and WHO guidelines and also broadcasts information received through the DIPR (Directorate of Information and Public Relations), National Health Mission and the local district administration related to COVID-19. CR serves as an information bridge between the government and the public in remote areas. Breaking the barrier of language, Radio Brahmaputra has been broadcasting programmes in the Assamese language and local dialects like Shadri, Bodo, Hajong and Mishing.

The radio is also making radio spots, focusing on bringing awareness about COVID-19 and how it can be avoided by maintaining social distancing and hygiene. Agriculture experts were also brought in to help farm-based entrepreneurs during the lockdown. At present, the community radio reaches 32 tea plantations and more than 180 villages within a radius of 10 to 15 kms.

Station head Bhaskariyoti Bhuyan stated,

“People in the tea gardens do not understand English. We first translate the guidelines of WHO and the health department on coronavirus into Assamese. After that, the contents are translated into Shadri (the dialect of the tea tribe community), Bodo and Mishing languages for those living inside the tea gardens in Dibrugarh and in the remote riverine villages in Dhemaji district.”





## JNAN TARANGA

**Frequency:** 90.4 MHz

**Establishment date:** November 2010

**Coverage area:** Housefed, Ganeshguri, Beltola, Hatigaon, Lokhora

**State:** Assam

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 24 hours

**Website:** <http://jnantaranga.kkhsou.in/index.php>

**Promoter organisation:** Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU)

**Programme name:** Manar Khabor (Mind Matters);

**Programme category:** Combating misinformation;

Jnan Taranga, one of the first community radio stations in India's Northeast, is run by the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) in Guwahati, Assam. It started operations in 2010. The radio station has made tireless efforts in providing information related to COVID-19, listening to community issues and providing people a strategy to deal with the pandemic.

Manoj Kumar Deka, announcer at Jnan Taranga, singlehandedly ran the station for 333 hours amid the nationwide lockdown. Manoj worked continuously from April 1 to May 7, 2020, broadcasting over 10 hours of programme every day. He would start his day with the morning show from 9 am to 1 pm, that caters to the youth, then the noon programme from 1 pm to

2 pm, that focuses on pre-recorded education, and the evening programme from 2 pm to 8 pm dedicated to the general public where a variety of topics and issues were covered during the lockdown.

The interactive programmes enabled listeners to call in for information related to the lockdown and its relaxation, which they would not have been able to get through other means. Since most of the listeners are from poor backgrounds and illiterate, it was vital for them to get the correct and relevant information. The service covers an area of 15 km radius. Apart from Assamese, the other languages are Bodo, Mishing and Karbi. For listeners who need advice, the CR station devotes over an hour to their queries. On average, 10 people call the radio station every day.

Manoj Kumar Deka says that among others, people like fish vendors and auto-rickshaw drivers would call him frequently.

“ It was very interesting. Sometimes, they would call me to enquire how I am doing. I felt very connected and it’s vice versa. I let them share their experiences and I tried to make them feel comfortable. That’s how they feel welcomed and I tried to clear their confusion. Rumours were going on social media that alcohol kills the coronavirus. On the basis of that call, I made a promo to make the listeners aware of this kind of fake news. ”





## BEHLIANGCHIP RADIO

**Frequency:** 90.4 MHz

**Establishment date:** July 2020

**Coverage area:** Residents of Behliangchhip village, in North Tripura

**State:** Tripura

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 2 hours

**Website:** <http://jnantaranga.kkhsou.in/index.php>

**Promoter organisation:** Saidingliana Sailo

**Programme name:** Hla Thlan, Biahthu, Speech, Discussion, Special Talks

**Programme category:** Awareness programmes on mental health, inspirational messages

**D**uring the outbreak of COVID-19 as community radio stations started providing information on the pandemic to rural regions across the country, there was no community radio station in unconnected Behliangchhip village located in Tripura state to disseminate the updated information. At this time, a 27-year-old UPSC aspirant Saidingliana Sailo of Behliangchhip village in Jampui Hills of Agartala started Behliangchhip community radio to spread awareness about COVID-19, after a man from his village tested positive for the virus.

Sailo broadcast a range of programmes, including 'Hla Thlan' through which listeners

could request songs to dedicate to someone. While 'Biahthu' programme broadcast a compilation of voice records of the villagers at different places, and on how people were spending time during the lockdown, the 'Speech' is an awareness programme on mental and physical health during the pandemic.

Through the programme, 'Discussion', Sailo invites audiences through conference calls and broadcasts live interaction programmes on select topics, while his 'Special Talk' section invites special guests to deliver their messages on vital social issues. Airing the programme for two hours, from 8:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. every evening.

Saidingliana Sailo states,

“I did not have any equipment to start a radio, so initially the radio was started using the YouTube platform by inviting my friends using zamzo.org and I started a series of programmes for two hours every day in the local Mizo language. In a matter of four days, the channel recorded 1,200 listeners.”

Saidingliana, who holds three post-graduate degrees in English, Sociology and Political science from Tripura University and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), says that after a villager tested Covid positive, “the SDM (Sub-Divisional Magistrate) reached the village, issued a set of restrictions and declared the area a red zone. Local task forces were formed and severe restrictions were imposed on public movement. They all got worried about community transmission. So, I thought something had to be done to help people fight this total lockdown and handle the situation. The idea of FM radio broadcasting in the local language flashed in the mind<sup>2</sup>.”

The radio has now got listeners even from Mizoram and other parts of Tripura having Mizo population, who are demanding extension of the programme as it caters to all age groups.

---

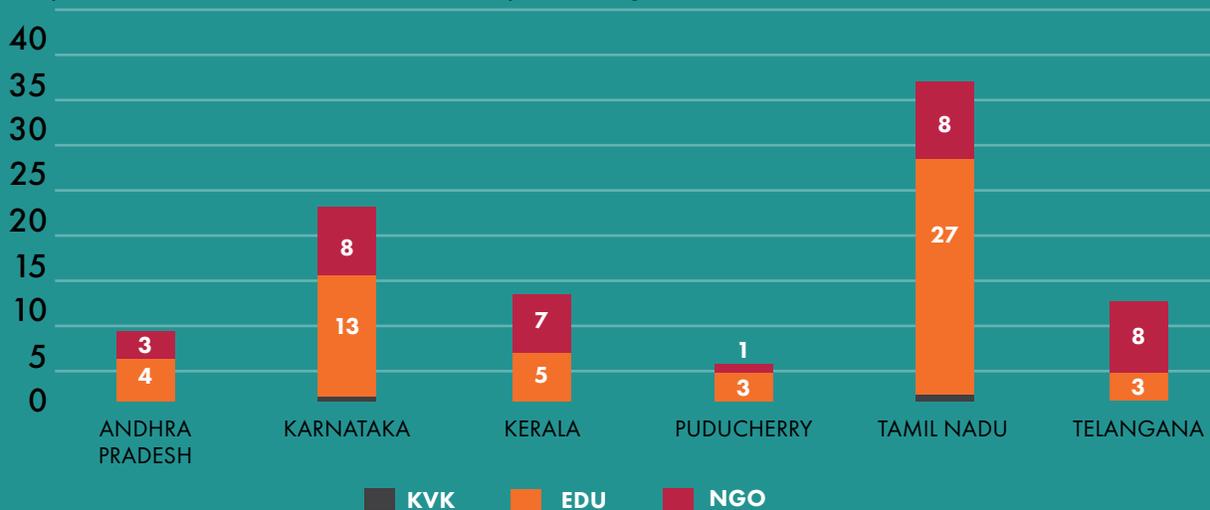
<sup>2</sup><https://newsmove.in/upsc-aspirant-starts-community-radio-spreads-awareness-in-tripura/>



## SOUTHERN INDIA

In southern India, there are 93 community radio stations located in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and Telangana states. Around 40% of CR stations are located in Tamil Nadu, whereas 24% of them are in Karnataka. Educational institutions manage 59% of CR stations in Southern India (Graph 4).

Graph 4: Number of CR stations as per categories in Southern India



CR stations in this region had a difficult time conveying the news of the lockdown among different sections of the people, from the tea garden workers located in the Nilgiri hills to the fishermen community on the island of Pamban in Tamil Nadu. The team of Radio Kotagiri was broadcasting all relevant information to tea garden workers in the Nilgiri hills. The radio invited health experts to resolve the queries of workers about the pandemic. In Pamban, Tamil Nadu, Gayathri Usman, the station head of community radio station Kadal Osai, found it difficult to convey the meaning of lockdown to the fisherfolk. The radio took all efforts to broadcast awareness about social distancing, regulations around quarantine and also helped bust fake news. On the other hand, Radio Rathinavani, located in Coimbatore, helped migrants and daily wage workers through phone calls, giving them information about the daily food arrangements made by



## RATHINAVANI COMMUNITY RADIO

**Frequency:** FM90.8 MHz

**Establishment date:** May 17, 2013

**Coverage area:** Within 20 Kilometre radius (Ukkadam to Malumichampatti, Coimbatore District)

**State:** Tamil Nadu

**Population coverage:** 35,000 and 50,000

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/Rathinavani908>

**Podcast link:** <https://anchor.fm/rathinavani-908-fm-mukesh>

**Broadcasting hours:** 9.00 am, 1.00 pm and 4.00 pm

**Programme name:** 144lilum Kuzhanthaigal Nalan and CoViD 19 Janata Curfew

**Programme categories:** Health & hygiene; tackling misinformation;

On January 30, 2020, just days after India reported its first case of the coronavirus, Rathinavani 90.8 CR broadcast the first COVID-19 talk show by Dr. M. Neminathan, pediatrician at Coimbatore Child Trust Hospital, Singanallur, initiating discussion about the virus. Rathinavani CR initiated two programmes – 1) the talk series, '144lilum Kuzhanthaigal Nalan' and a caller show, 'CoViD 19 Janata Curfew', to bring awareness about the pandemic.

The talk series – '144lilum Kuzhanthaigal Nalan' was a six-week programme to guide young people on how to cope with the lockdown.

Using creative and productive methods, the series tried to ensure physical and mental wellness during the lockdown period. The series was jointly put together by the District Social Welfare Office, and Adolescent Empowerment programme and Ending Child Marriage initiative (UNICEF and CRY). The programme included government officials, medical officers, experts, representatives from civil society and others discussing crucial and vital themes for adolescents and children during the lockdown, mental wellbeing, health and hygiene. Under this series, the radio station with the support of Coimbatore Corporation and Panchayat Officials broadcast programmes on issues like

drinking water, hygiene, health and many more.

CoViD 19 Janata Curfew was an audience calling programme connecting migrant and daily wage labourers through phone calls to know their daily food requirements during the lockdown. As part of the programme, the talk show collected the number of daily wagers, their location and demographics and connected them with

concerned civil society organisations such as No Food Waste for supplying food packets.

One of the unique aspects of the programmes broadcast by Rathinavani is that the shows were based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With help of the District Social Welfare Department, the CR organized quizzes for students using the narrow-casting method.

### BOX ITEM 1:

**SDG 2.1:** Universal access to safe & nutritious food – providing food and ration to daily wage labourers through NGOs like No Food Waste

**SDG 3.2:** End all preventable deaths under 5 years of age – programmes based on interviews of doctors' advice for mothers and arrangements done in their hospitals (both government & private)

**SDG 3.8:** Achieve universal health coverage – Broadcasting interviews of young doctors who feel unsafe in a hospital or from their community who are not allowing them inside a colony or not providing safety measures during the pandemic. So Rathinavani was acting as the voice of the anonymous voiceless doctors' community.

**SDG 4.3:** Equal access to affordable technical vocational & higher education – Broadcasting shows related to how online teaching platforms and mobile apps will help the contemporary situation as far as equal accessible education. With the support of Coimbatore UNICEF CRY, Rathinavani CR has broadcast interviews of academicians from both primary & higher classes and community feedback with the hurdles they face.

**SDG 6.1:** Safe & affordable drinking water – Rathinavani CR broadcast community-issue programmes related to drinking water supply and repairing of broken water connections by providing visual and ward details, helping the concerned officials to reach the location in times of COVID.

**SDG 6.B:** Support engagement and sanitation management – In case of a request from the community to fight against the stigma about COVID-19 sanitation issues, CR broadcast programmes requesting health inspectors to sanitize the localities. The programme has a feedback service where listeners can report their query to 104 State/Central Health helpline Number.

**SDG 8.7:** End modern slavery -Coordinated with Odisha-based NGO, Focus Odisha in helping daily-wage labourers to travel back to their home town, and facilitated food and hygiene kits with support from government officials and activists.



## RADIO MATTOLI

**Frequency:** FM 90.4 MHz

**Establishment date:** June 01, 2009

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 20 Hours

**Coverage area:** District of Wayanad, Kerala

**State:** Kerala

**Population coverage:** 3.5 lakh tribal population

**Name of the promoter organization:** Wayanad Social Service Society

**Website:** <http://radiomattoli.com/index.php/Home/homeMain>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/radiomattoli>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/radiomattoli>

**Programme name:** Live-in phone

**Programme categories:** Health, mental health, awareness on wearing mask, handwashing

**R**adio Mattoli, Kerala's first radio station that has become the voice of the tribal community, broadcasts programmes in the Paniya dialect, in Wayanad district. Radio Mattoli aired the first COVID-19 awareness programme in early January 2020 before the detection of any case in Kerala.

Father Bijo Thomas, the station head of Radio Mattoli, suspended over 80 regular programmes and shifted the priority to broadcasting programmes on the pandemic. The radio broadcast seven hours of COVID-19

related programmes every day during the time of lockdown. The radio station invited doctors to talk about the importance of handwashing, social distancing, wearing a mask, and mental health. The programmes included a Live-in phone where listeners could directly talk to experts. The programmes were broadcast in the local Malayalam language as well as tribal dialect, Paniya, and other languages like Hindi, English, Odia, Kannada and Tamil.

Since the mainstream awareness programmes are not available for the tribal population due

to socio-economic circumstances and also owing to the language barrier, Radio Mattoli's programmes become all the more relevant for the Paniya tribal community. Amrutha, one of the representers hailing from the Paniya community, has produced many programmes in her native dialect. To reach out to the wider community, Radio Mattoli distributed over 4,000 radio sets among the Paniya community, so that pandemic-related messages could reach them. The Wayanad district and Kerala state administration are actively engaging and participating in community radio programmes. The over-a-decade-old community radio, under the Wayanad Social Service Society, covers 3.5 lakh population of the total 8.17 lakh tribal population.

Father Bijo says,

“ We have conducted interviews and discussions with more than 40 officials including DSP and collector, to raise awareness and clarify the do's and don'ts to stop the spread of the virus. With the support of the district administration including collector, National Health Mission (NHM), Kudumbashree, we run about 25 different shows daily. From airing government scheme details on skill development programmes and Women and Child Development to disseminating information on social distancing, availability of ration and market linkages to farmers, we have done it all.”





## RADIO BENZIGER

**Frequency:** 107.8 MHz

**Establishment date:** November 07, 2010

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 15 Hours

**Coverage area:** Around 10 to 15 KM from Kollam town

**State:** Kerala

**Name of the promoter organization:** Bishop Benziger Hospital

**Website:** <https://radiobenziger.com/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/Radio-Benziger-305364449532848/>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/BenzigerRadio>

**Programme name:** Jana Sabdam

**Programme categories:** Health, mental health, awareness on wearing mask, handwashing

**R**adio Benziger is the only radio station managed and owned by Bishop Benziger Hospital in Kollam district of Kerala. The hospital was assigned to treat Corona positive cases. Thus, it became the priority for the radio station to broadcast awareness programmes on COVID-19 for people living in Kollam. In the live phone-in programme 'Jana Sabdam' people call and ask for help or share important information or seek clarifications. The programme acts as a communication platform between government officials and listeners to share their concerns. As a result, people formed volunteer groups to help the needy. Most of

programmes are related to COVID-19 preventive measures, information about available treatment in case of infection, tracking of positive cases, and providing relevant information regarding coronavirus. It also had programmes related to free ration and services.

The radio produced nearly 200 jingles on coronavirus infection-related subjects to educate the people. Special programmes related to the safety of transgender people were broadcast. During the lockdown, the radio station aired several counselling programmes to help people facing psychological issues. Stories

of COVID-19 warriors were also broadcast to bring awareness within the community. In order to provide reliable information, the radio sourced information directly from the public relations department of Kerala, the district medical office, various medical personnel from the campus and off the campus and mainstream media.

In order to help migrant daily wage workers, the CR broadcast information regarding the government schemes in Hindi, Tamil, Odia, Bengali and Assamese languages. Through phone-in programmes, the migrant workers were identified and reported to the District Collector. Information was given to them about community

kitchens — an innovative scheme of the Kerala government.

Ensuring the safety of the studio staff members and volunteers, Radio Benziger’s staff members started recording the programmes from their homes which were sent via email to a sound engineer, who after editing would transfer it to the RJs, who in turn were managing the playlist from home. Phone-in programmes were done by RJs from their homes. As a result of the pandemic, the radio staff members were able to operate and manage their radio station and programmes from their homes.





## RADIO ACTIVE

**Frequency:** FM 90.4 MHz

**Establishment date:** 25<sup>th</sup> June 2007

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 23 hours on weekdays & 24 hours on weekends

**Coverage area:** 15 kms radius

**State:** Bengaluru

**Name of the promoter organization:** Jain Group of Institutions (JGI) , Jain University (Sri Bhagawan Mahaveer Jain College)

**Website:** <https://radio-active.in/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/radioactive90.4/>

**Twitter:** [https://twitter.com/RadioActive90\\_4](https://twitter.com/RadioActive90_4)

**Programme name:** Mission Corona; 'Kasa Shramika Parisara Rakshaka' (Litter Labourer, Environment Protector); VCARE; Strengthening Community Media Crisis Preparedness and Response in India, COVID Special Series

**Programme categories:** Waste management; street animals feeding programmes, health, mental health

**R**adio Active CR 90.4 MHz is Bengaluru's first community radio station catering to urban-centric communities. Licensed to Jain University, since March 2020 Radio Active has been broadcasting a series of programmes, including official updates from different government departments, focusing on mental health, dealing with alcohol withdrawal, tackling misinformation, among others.

The pandemic has raised a variety of crucial issues, ranging from maintaining daily hygiene to managing and disposing of biomedical waste. Radio Active is the only community radio station that has been broadcasting awareness programmes around biomedical waste collection. Mansoor Gous, a waste collector who has now become RJ, advocates for proper collection of biomedical waste, including PPE kits, masks, etc. through its regular programme, 'Kasa Shramika Parisara

Rakshaka' (Litter Labourer, Environment Protector). The show broadcasts dialogues on waste, a special audio series aimed at fostering an ongoing and inclusive conversation around waste management. Radio Active is among the 13 stations working on #COVID19 Response through community radio within the framework of the IPDC (International Programme for the Development of Communication) project titled 'Strengthening Community Media Crisis Preparedness and Response in India', with the cooperation of UNESCO, New Delhi, and facilitation partner Maraa, a media and arts collective. The aim is to bring awareness and build perspective on issues related to COVID-19 and look at disaster more holistically.

This pandemic has not affected just human beings, but has also afflicted street animals. Understanding that street animals have also been badly affected by the pandemic, the radio with help of its volunteers organised feeding of stray animals under its VCARE programme.

The radio also broadcast a COVID-19 Special Series episode focusing on mental health and managing depression during the time of lockdown. Unlike other community radio stations, Radio Active created explicit programmes not only focussing on mental health and bringing awareness about COVID-19 but also aired features on how the pandemic was impacting different segments of society, including domestic workers, manual scavengers, and talked about the struggle of sexual minority communities.

With support from 11 full-time employees and 45 volunteers, Radio Active is producing 24x7 programmes, from documenting the concerns of frontline health workers to countering fake news and myths around the virus.

**Pinki Chandran, Station Director of Bengaluru's Radio Active CR 90.4 MHz, says**

“ We have been working on a series of programmes since March, including official updates from different government departments, programmes on health – with special focus on mental health, dealing with alcohol withdrawal, spotlight on the various initiatives by individuals and NGOs, appeals on understanding facts and the importance of fighting misinformation, besides community testimonies. This is happening because community reporters, producers and volunteers are on the frontline, acting as responders in bringing out information. It is a mix of problem-focused reporting and solutions showing possibilities. Everyday reporting is allowing communities to highlight their neighbourhoods and issues. ”



## SARATHI JHALAK

**Frequency:** 90.4 FM

**Establishment date:** 22 August 2012

**Total hours of transmission in a day:** 6:00 am to 10:00 pm

**Coverage area:** 15 km radius, centre at Anugondanahalli, Hoskote Taluk

**State:** Bengaluru

**Name of the promoter organization:** Sarathi-A Resource Centre for Communications

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/SarathiJhalak90.4FM/>

**Programme name:** Mission Corona;

**Programme categories:** Well-being, stress management, STPD (Schizotypal personality disorder) disorder, depression

In the time of the pandemic, community radio stations have emerged as one of the sought-after mediums of succour, especially during the lockdown. Sarathi Jhalak, a community radio station owned and run primarily by women in rural Bengaluru, had drawn up a three-pronged strategy to fight against COVID-19 even before UNICEF reached out to them with awareness programmes. Its three-layer strategy on the content comprised of the medical, psycho-sociological and financial impact of COVID-19.

The radio station serves 250 villages in and around Hoskote sub-division. During the pandemic, the station broadcast a range of stories, from the experiences of members of

the minority community, the struggles of waste pickers, and doctors reflecting on mental health as well as busting fake news. The station started broadcasting a series on COVID-19 in February, featuring doctors who imparted detailed information to listeners. Shamantha DS, founder and station head of Sarathi Jhalak, says "Issues like well-being, stress management, STPD disorder, depression are also being regularly dealt with to help the listeners. Regular participation from gram panchayats ensures that government guidelines are also followed at the ground level."

The station focused on the pandemic from various perspectives – cultural, historical and

medical. In March 2020, the radio station in partnership with UNICEF started addressing psychological issues around COVID-19 and also covered medical and economical aspects. By broadcasting various aspects related to the pandemic, it provided listeners with proper knowledge of the subject. The increased popularity of its programmes during the pandemic has made the broadcasters increase the duration of shows as well.

During the lockdown, the situation at Sarathi Jhalak station was stressful with only one person managing 9.5 hours of daily broadcast.

**Shamanthaka Mani from Sarathi Jhalak says,**

“ While the international and national media focus on cities, there is little effort to understand villages. It is the duty of CR stations to understand the local needs and engage with the local police and gram panchayat members to connect with the community. ”





## PASUMAI RADIO

**Frequency:** 90.4 MHz

**Establishment date:** April 2007

**Coverage area:** 25 km of radius in the blocks of Athoor, Rediyachatram, Sanarpatty, Vedasandnur, and Dindigul, in Dindigul district

**State:** Tamil Nadu

**Name of the promoter organization:** Peace Industrial School of Dindigul district

**Coverage population:** 5 million across 1,500 villages

**Website:** <https://www.pasumaifm.tv/intro.php>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/pasumaifm/>

**Programme name:** Mission Corona; #TheNewNormal campaign

**Programme categories:** : Awareness programmes, health, sanitation and hygiene

Located in Dindigul district of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, Pasumai Radio has been spreading awareness about COVID-19 in 1,500 villages in the blocks of Athoor, Rediyachatram, Sanarpatty, Vedasandnur and Dindigul.

As the 'Janata Curfew' lockdown was announced, the radio station started reaching out to people by providing information about the essential items available in shops, providing health tips to increase immunity and on social distancing, in their programmes aired from 6 am and 11 pm. Amid the COVID-19 crisis, the

station also aired bytes of the Tamil diaspora, narrating their stories about how they have been coping with the pandemic.

As the country began emerging from the prolonged lockdown, Pasumai CR station, under #TheNewNormal campaign anchored by SMART, mobilised the communities to accept and adapt to a life with masks, social distancing and practising hand hygiene in times of #COVID19. Pivoted through radio, this is the first-of-its-kind countrywide behaviour-change initiative.

J. Paul Baskar, Pasumai Radio's station head, says

“In villages, nobody stays indoors, unlike cities. So we have to keep reinforcing the message of social distancing to warn people that this is a matter of life and death. Our listeners are mostly humble farmers or fisherfolk. So, our radio jockeys compose folk songs, skits or jokes in the local dialects to connect with them. Positive messages about villages who have successfully battled COVID-19 are also relayed to inspire them.”



திண்டுக்கல் மாவட்ட ஆட்சியர் அலுவலகத்தில், மாவட்ட ஊரக வளர்ச்சி முகமை அலுவலர்கள் சார்பில் 43 தூய்மைப் பணியாளர்களுக்கு அரிசி உள்ளிட்ட மளிகை பொருட்கள் அடங்கிய தொகுப்பினை மாவட்ட ஆட்சித்தலைவர் திருமதி மு.விஜயலட்சுமி, இ.ஆ.ப., அவர்கள் வழங்கினார். உடன் மாவட்ட ஊரக வளர்ச்சி முகமை திட்ட இயக்குநர் திருமதி கே.கவிதா உள்ளார்.



## KADAL OSAI

**Frequency:** 90.4

**Establishment date:** August 15, 2016

**Coverage area:** Over 10 km in Pamban Island, Rameswaram

**State:** Tamil Nadu

**Name of the promoter organization:** Armstrong Fernando

**Website:** <https://www.kadalsai.fm/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/kadalsai.fm/>

**Programme name:** Pamban News; Live-in Programme; Quiz;

**Programme categories:** : Busting fake news; awareness about social distancing;

**K**adal Osai FM 90.4, the world's only community radio station for fisherfolk, is located in Pamban Island, off the sea coast in Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu. Armstrong Fernando, a fisherman himself, started Kadal Osai (meaning 'sound of the sea') 90.4 FM in August 2016 to broadcast information on marine affairs and issues related to fishermen and women.

In the time of the pandemic, the fishing community, much like others in India, were not aware of the new measures to contain the spread of the virus. In such a scenario, Kadal Osai has been the only radio station in Pamban Island to broadcast information on COVID-19, on maintaining social distance, the importance of hand washing, wearing masks, and related

matters. During the lockdown, Kadal Osai's programme Pamban News helped to bust fake news on COVID-19 and create awareness about social distancing. The programme also aired general information, including information related to fish markets, rates, and restrictions in place during the lockdown, thus helping the fisher folk maintain their sales during that time. This effort was a great help in assisting fisher folk to earn on a daily basis.

Officials from the fisheries department, police and panchayats used the radio station to announce the new lockdown protocols in place, social distancing measures and other administrative updates. The fishermen in Pamban island believed that no virus can enter their village, and even if it does, the virus will not

infect the community members as they eat fish every day. These kinds of misconceptions and myths were everywhere, so it was challenging for the radio station to convince the people about social distancing during the time of lockdown. A regular live session was aired from morning 9 am to 12 noon covering various topics around COVID-19. Though the lockdown did not permit the fishermen to venture into the sea, however some traditional fishermen did break the rule.

**Gayatri Usman, station head of Kadal Osai says,** “students have been mentally affected by this unprecedented situation. Many students were preparing for their board exams and the exams were postponed. We have tied up with teachers and they are teaching them through the radio every day from 3 pm to 5 pm. We are also actively working with the local administration and giving updates to the community. The fishermen could not fish due to the bad weather and then the lockdown came.... They have been stranded at home; the trawling ban period is also approaching. We are trying to provide them with local information so they will maintain social distancing but will have access to essential services”.

Busting the myths and rumours around the virus amongst fisher folk was one of the prime tasks for the radio station. People from the fishing community used to call the radio station with questions about the pandemic. Thus, Kadal Osai started broadcasting shows with local municipal

staff, doctors and police to help them understand the concerns of the fishermen and local people and address their issues and concerns.

**General Secretary of the National Fishworkers’ Forum, T. Peter said,**

“ The central government decided that fish was essential and fishing was allowed. However, opening markets was not allowed. There were no guidelines on how to operate logistics initially. ”

Due to the lockdown and since Tasmac (Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation Ltd) outlets were closed, many fishermen started gambling and incidences of domestic violence increased. The station held a conversation with women to discuss their problems, and to resolve this issue they started broadcasting awareness programmes on the adverse effects of gambling. At the same time, when schools were closed due to the pandemic and students were mentally affected by the unprecedented situation, Kadal Osai radio tied up with teachers and started teaching programmes every day from 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm.

Pamban Island, located off the eastern coast of Tamil Nadu, has a population of about 100,000 with 80% of residents belonging to the fishing community. Apart from the station manager Gayatri Usman, the other 12 staff members of the station are part-time fishermen or their family members. As the radio station is only able to reach a radius of 10 km, Kadal Osai started broadcasting audio clips through its social media platforms.



## THENDRAL RADIO

**Frequency:** 91.2 Mhz

**Establishment date:** 22nd January, 2014

**Coverage area:** Neelankarai, South Chennai

**State:** Tamil Nadu

**Name of the promoter organization:** Nalamdana

**Website:** <https://nalamdana.in/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/nalamdana/>

**Programme name:** Covid Response; InfoGraphics; Video Series

**Programme categories:** : Awareness on hand washing, tackling misinformation

**T**hendral CR, an initiative of Nalamdana society, serving the community located in Neelankarai, South Chennai, started broadcasting several shows under its Covid19 Rapid Response programme targeting the high risk communities. During the lockdown, Thendral CR broadcast seven phone interviews reaching women via mobile phone and asking them to share their COVID-19 prevention and coping strategies. As part of this series, short video films on COVID-19 in audio format were broadcast every day. These audio-based shows were in different formats – audio spots (3), awareness songs (3) and audio jingles (3).

These COVID-19 based audio programmes were broadcast four times a day. The radio station created 3-5-minute films that were widely circulated on social media and within corporate employee networks. Reaching out to the wider audience, audio shows were shared with corporate employee networks and through social media and also distributed to other Tamil radio stations. Partnering with SMART and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, these audio spots on COVID-19 were broadcast twice a day daily from September 2020.

Thendral CR translated several infographic-based posters, developed by CCCI (Centre

for Communication and Change), New Delhi, in Tamil and English language which was further circulated widely through social media platforms. Around, 1,000 copies of these posters were printed in English and Tamil and displayed at key retail areas and in workspaces.

**EPISODE 1** - Nalamdana explains Coronavirus prevention: Stop the spread of the virus by covering nose and mouth correctly when coughing and sneezing. If sick, use a face mask to avoid infecting others (1:59)

**EPISODE 2** - Stopping the spread by physical distancing: Wash hands well with soap before touching the face. Don't forward misinformation (3:48)

**EPISODE 3** - Continuing Prevention: As the country gets ready to open businesses again, there will be many challenges. People will forget their newly learned behaviours and quickly start going back to old ones. Reminding people why it is important to continue infection prevention because the threat has not gone away (4:14)

**EPISODE 4** - COVID Prevention, Stigma and Discrimination Part 1: Teaching each other prevention habits (social norms) Physical distancing may not always be possible when you have to take public transport like the bus, share auto, metro or MRTS (Mass Rapid Transit System) (4:49)

**EPISODE 5** - COVID Prevention, Stigma and Discrimination Part 2: Teaching each other prevention habits (social norms) Physical distancing may not always be possible when you have to take public transport like the bus, share auto, metro or MRTS (4:14)

# CR CHALLENGES DURING THE PANDEMIC

**T**he pandemic has once again shown how CR stations have proven to be one of the potential mediums of local media, highlighting not only the local issues but also helping the local community stay connected. On the one hand, CR stations in India became the key medium to spread awareness about the virus, the preventive measures, and bringing the latest government updates to the local communities. On the other hand, during the nationwide lockdown and despite having minimal staff support, it was challenging for the CR stations to not only cover the stories from the ground but also create different set of programmes, as well as editing the shows and broadcasting them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the most daunting challenge was to maintain the mobility and accessibility of the staff members within the villages covered by the CR station. Radio Surabhi team members faced obstacles in carrying out radio programmes due to the extended lockdown and shutdown. Some of the programmes are preceded by workshops, orientation/training of teachers, collection of material, research and scriptwriting, etc. Also obtaining permission from the local authorities was challenging for the radio station. As the radio station was creating programmes for students, the next challenge was to convert and mould the written and pictorial study materials into audio imagery for Visually Impaired students. Whereas CR Benziger, being a hospital-based radio, faced the issue of maintaining social distancing for their staff members.

One of the common challenges that CR stations faced is limited number of human resource availability. Rathinavani 90.8 radio was working with two full-time employees at the studio and 3 student volunteers. The radio station was not able to hire new employees due to non-availability of funds. Broadcasting the

programmes through low bandwidth connection was another challenge for Rathinavani 90.8 radio.

*Father Bijo of Radio Mattoli pointed out the irony of the situation, “in the last six years, we won the sustainability model award twice. But even then, we have difficulty in sustaining ourselves. Funding is the most critical thing here. We are running out of advertisements. The lockdown has made it worse. I need to pay Rs 5-6 lakh in salaries every month to my 22 staff members.”*

Fund crunch is one of their prime challenges, community radio stations said during discussions. The payment of rent, salary of staff members and other miscellaneous expenditures are worrying factors for CR stations. For Radio Brahmaputra involving their staff in other activities, outside of broadcasting, has become a necessary source of sustenance.

In the last eight months, community radio stations have shown immense commitment by complementing the work of the district authorities in broadcasting the official updates, busting myths and providing information during the lockdown in their areas.

Orissa Gramin Vikash’s Samantaray says, *“Revenue is a huge issue for us. We need a minimum of Rs*

*20,000 per month to run the radio station. There are salaries, power bills and rent to worry about. There is no profit in running a community radio station. The only hope is that you might get a few projects.”*

Without any financial support from the state or Centre, it is stressful for community radio stations to create and broadcast the programmes and fulfil staff requirements.

This is despite the Government of India’s claim of providing financial support to CR stations for not only setting up but also helping with maintenance costs by raising the advertising air time<sup>18</sup>. According to the government’s CR policy, they are allowed to air advertisements for seven minutes every one hour presently<sup>19</sup>. The Union I&B Minister, Prakash Javadekar announced that the advertisement air time will be raised to 12 minutes to an hour of broadcast<sup>20</sup>. However, many radio stations in their interviews stated that they are not even able to raise five minutes of advertisement per hour of their broadcasting time because of serving in low socioeconomic demographic regions.

Moreover, funds allocated under the Community Radio Support Scheme (CRSS)<sup>21</sup> go to organising national Sammelans (conferences) and awareness workshops for encouraging organisations to apply for a CR license. Thus, these funds do not support the existing CR stations toward their maintenance fees, the cost for programming, volunteer support and training or staff support.

It should be noted that broadband penetration in rural India is limited to a mere 29.2 per cent<sup>22</sup>. Unreliable internet connectivity and shortage of power supply are a major challenge for CR station staff members for creating and broadcasting programmes from their homes. As many of these community radio stations are located in remote or geographically difficult terrain, they need to keep a backup internet connection for broadcasting which is burdensome for them. Working remotely and transferring heavy audio files via the internet also poses a problem with costs of the data connection going up

These are the challenges faced by CR stations in India working to help tackle the pandemic while at a considerable financial cost to them and also putting the health of their staff members at risk, without much support from the government.

*N.A. Shah Ansari, President Community Radio Association states, ‘Even though CR stations play an important role in educating people in remote areas of the country, they are yet struggling for funds and the lack of advertisements.’*

<sup>18</sup>Brand Equity; I&B ministry considering raising air time for ads on radio to 12 minutes: Prakash Javadekar; <https://brandequity.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/media/ib-ministry-considering-raising-air-time-for-ads-on-radio-to-12-minutes-prakash-javadekar/75910879>

<sup>19</sup>Community Radio Policy; Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (I&B); <https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/Revised%20format%20for%20fresh%20GOPA%20%281%29.pdf>

<sup>20</sup>Economic Times; Govt approves 2,636 new charging stations in 62 cities: Javadekar; <https://energy.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/renewable/govt-approves-2636-new-charging-stations-in-62-cities-javadekar/73084186>

<sup>21</sup>Community Radio Support Scheme (CRSS); Ministry of Information & Broadcasting; [https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/Guidelines\\_for\\_financial\\_assistance\\_under\\_CRSS.pdf](https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/Guidelines_for_financial_assistance_under_CRSS.pdf)

<sup>22</sup>Financial Express; Modi’s ‘Digital India’ still a far-fetched dream for hinterland; not even 30% of rural India has internet; <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/modis-digital-india-still-a-far-fetched-dream-for-hinterland-not-even-30-of-rural-india-has-internet/2085452/>; accessed on 20th November 2020

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Community radio is often defined as radio 'for the people, of the people and by the people', that understands the local issues of the local people in a local language. Thus, this media platform acts as the eyes and ears during a disaster and serves as the prime vehicle for sharing information for preparing communities and for reducing risks. Being a persuasive, flexible, speedy and powerful local medium, it is sensitive towards understanding the needs of people. Community radio stations are trusted sources for disseminating information in the remotest regions of the country and have the ability to establish last mile information connectivity.

Like every other media agency, CR stations in India have been working during the pandemic at considerable risk and cost to their staff members without having any support from the government. Moreover, CR stations do not enjoy the formal recognition as media in many parts of the country, so it was challenging for CR station reporters to get local administrators and authorities to speak to them over the phone or including them in social media groups meant for distribution of official circulars.

While in many countries, in recognition of community radios as a valuable public resource, their governments extended emergency funding to stations and offered other kinds of financial assistance, in India, there was no specific financial support provided to CR stations by the government.

The community radio policy in India permits CR stations to broadcast seven minutes of advertising for every one hour of air time. On financial support to the stations, the Minister of Information and Broadcasting suggested the advertisement time could be raised to 12 minutes. However, this shows an ignorance towards the fact that very few CR stations in the country are able to raise even five minutes of advertising time per hour of broadcast due to their locational disadvantages,

lack of marketing skills and the socioeconomic status of audiences.

The current pandemic period is a gentle reminder to authorities to bring adequate policy-level changes for leveraging CR stations in order to cover each block in India and thus provide uniform access to information and bring communicative equity.

## **The policy recommendations are as follows:**

The support toward setting up costs mentioned by the Union Minister have been disbursed scantily over the last few years and much of the funds allocated under the ministry's much-vaunted Community Radio Support Scheme (CRSS) goes mostly for organising national sammelans in Delhi and funding awareness workshops across the country with the objective of encouraging more organisations to apply for a CR licence. That, despite these workshops, there are only under 300 CR stations in a country of our size (as against 350 in Nepal) calls for an in-depth analysis of the reasons, including nearly insurmountable bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining a licence. The long-standing demand of the community radio movement that the government establish an autonomous community radio support fund, as it exists in many other democratic countries, with transparent grant-making for a range of needs, including setting up costs, acquisition of infrastructure, salary support, volunteer training, and content production, has fallen on deaf ears. The Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP) of the ministry, which had started issuing government publicity advertisements on various welfare schemes at considerably low rates, has been defaulting on prompt release of payments. During the current pandemic crisis, there have been suggestions that if the government at least releases the payment of arrears to stations, leave alone emergency funding, it would be a big help.

As India is signatory to the Constitution and Convention of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU),

the government should sincerely consider reserving a small proportion of the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) for supporting community radio stations in the way USOF has been established to promote small internet service providers (ISPs) in the country.

As of January 31, 2020, 1.34 lakh gram panchayats (village councils) have been made service ready under all the phases of BharatNet<sup>23</sup>. In order to address the issue of unreliable internet connectivity, it is recommended that BharatNet's internet connectivity be given to the community radio stations at marginal cost for alleviating their financial burden due to internet data. This will help them to serve the community in a better way.

In India, over 70% population lives in rural regions, out of which 7.3% rural households have electricity<sup>24</sup>,

which means that accessing information through other mediums such as TV becomes challenging. In such a scenario, community radio plays a potential role to offer discursive spaces for those left out of the digital dream.

The reach of CR station in the plains is around 25 to 30 kilometres, but in mountainous regions where there is dense forestation, the signal does not reach very far due to low voltage radio – 50 watt. Nepal, a small neighbouring country, has almost 300 plus CR stations. However, in a country like India where in every 10 kilometres, the mode of agriculture, culture and dialect changes, there is need to encourage community-based organisations to own and run radio stations that speak in local languages catering to local needs.

---

<sup>23</sup>The Indian Express; Panchayat net connectivity project set to miss deadline: Only over half service ready; <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/panchayat-net-connectivity-project-set-to-miss-deadline-only-over-half-service-ready-6286719/> ; accessed on 20th November 2020

<sup>24</sup>Forbes; Modi Announces '100% Village Electrification', But 31 Million Indian Homes Are Still In The Dark; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/suparnadutt/2018/05/07/modi-announces-100-village-electrification-but-31-million-homes-are-still-in-the-dark/?sh=194971d-63bae>







**Ritu Srivastava**, representing Jadeite Solutions, has over 14 years of experience in the development sector specifically focusing on the ICT domain, using digital technology towards sustainable development of underprivileged communities /marginalised sections of society. Her research interest lies in areas of broadband policies, gender and access, gender and internet governance, violence against women, open spectrum policies and community development. Ms Ritu holds a Masters' degree in Electronics & Telecommunication.

**Jointly published by**  
Jadeite Solutions Pvt. Ltd. and Digital Empowerment Foundation

Knowledge Partner:



CR partners:

