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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is no denying that radio remains an important and relevant medium even in this time of internet and social media. It is immediate, portable (therefore accessible) and inclusive. According to UNESCO: “*As radio continues to evolve in the digital age, it remains the medium that reaches the widest audience worldwide*”. For a country like India where more than two-thirds of people live in rural and isolated areas, this is particularly significant. **Community radio (CR)** is a participatory form of radio where communities own, manage and run their own radio stations; driving their own needs- and interest-based, local language/dialect content. There are 310 CR stations operational in India as of November 2020 (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2020).

**People’s Power Collective (PPC)** is an NGO that specialises in CR training, capacity sharing and skilling. It sees CR as more than a tool for last-mile information dissemination; rather it is a dynamic people-centered two-way communication ecosystem that welcomes all stakeholders, including the community, to engage in progressive dialogue and solution-finding, via actionable content. PPC currently works across isolated regions in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, north India.

At the end of March 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak sent India into a total lockdown. Overall poor communication coupled with fake news, left communities, including in these isolated hills of Uttarakhand, in a state of panic and fear, with many unanswered questions. In an effort to formulate an effective, rapid response to this problem, PPC convened and led the ***Umeed network***, a coordinated effort between PPC and five CR stations in Uttarakhand – **Kumaon Vani, Mandakini Ki Aawaz, Pantnagar Janvani, Radio Khushi and Radio Zindagee** – with collaborative working with other core stakeholders, including state government, NGOs and experts.

**The *Umeed network*’s mission over the past months has been to:**

- Build awareness on COVID-19, its symptoms, precautions, treatment and recovery
- Disseminate daily updates on government directives and community relief policies
- Listen and respond to communities’ daily needs for information, reassurance and support, via tailor-made content

**This research report lays out the process, operations, challenges and achievements of the *Umeed network* since inception and until the end of the research period i.e., November 2020.** Working closely with academics and data science experts, PPC chose the **Participatory Action Research (PAR) model** of investigation for its inclusive and emancipatory approach to data collection. In the midst of the pandemic and in line with safety protocols, PPC travelled over 1,400 kilometres within Uttarakhand’s Garhwal and Kumaon regions to conduct the field work, with on-ground support at each location from our five CR partners. Qualitative data was collected via:



- Surveys with 86 respondents from within the five radio catchment areas
- One-on-one interviews with three external content experts for the network
- One-on-one interviews with the leadership teams of the six network partners and
- Two focus group discussions (FGDs) with a select listener cohort; one from within a rural and one from a peri-urban catchment community

Secondary research in the form of content (archival data) analysis and public document analysis, together with observation, were the other qualitative research tools used. An in-depth study and thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted by two external analysts. This guided the narrative report, while addressing the main research questions.

**Conclusions arrived at by the external analysts include: -**

- The *Umeed* network has proved to be a trustworthy, accessible and effective model of people-centered action
- It has played the role of a bridge between policies and people
- It has been successful in focusing on issues of vulnerable groups
- It has delivered rapid emergency response via real-time, actionable content
- It has provided vital relief in the form of inspirational and entertainment-based programming and has promoted collective well-being in the middle of the pandemic
- The overall approach to programming and content development of the network during the COVID-19 crisis, has been solution-oriented
- COVID-19 and the resultant lockdown exposed the critical need for a well-coordinated emergency response system; this urgent need met by the PPC led *Umeed network*
- The economies of scale, broad outreach and truly meaningful collaborations that have emerged via the *Umeed network* model, hold learning for the future
- The network's democratic approach to operations and its interdependent arrangement allowed for healthy discussions, debates and dissent
- With a collaborative community structure, enabling ground up two-way communication, it remains a holistic and accountable CR network

**The recommendations made by the external analysts are: -**

- Amplification of women's voice through CR and a more gendered approach towards CR programming, has the potential to raise awareness around gender inequality;
- Addressing needs and interests of people on the margins and filling the gap in CR programming for elders, disable groups and daily wage workers;
- Scope for training and capacity building of CR teams;
- The *Umeed network* to look at CR as a space for education, skills building and employment;
- Formalising a fluid model of partnership between the CR stations and PPC going forward, to improve accountability and help shape an effective and efficient network



## INTRODUCTION

### Learning by, and from, doing

*“We do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience.”*

(John Dewey, American philosopher, educator and proponent of the ‘hands-on’ approach to learning)

*January 5, 2021*

The COVID-19 pandemic has ensured that 2020 will remain one of humanity’s most challenging years, especially for rural, vulnerable and less-privileged communities across India and the world; including the Himalayas of Uttarakhand where our work and this research study are based. In our remote mountain communities, COVID-19 heightened physical and emotional isolation, anxiety at the loss of lives and livelihoods, and fear of an unknown disease, its spread and treatment via a fragile health care system. The rapid spread of disinformation and cleverly-crafted fake news, even at village level, left people confused, with many unanswered questions. **Drawing on deep knowledge of local contexts, effective trust-based relationships within the state, and strong proficiencies in delivering an organic and practical ‘learning by doing’ approach -- NGO People’s Power Collective (PPC) launched the *Umeed* community radio (CR) network initiative on day five of lockdown 1.0 to fill this gap and build community resilience to COVID-19.**

As India confronts the readiness of the COVID-19 vaccine and its roll-out to our billion plus population even as another wave looms large -- the moment calls for a quick step back to learn from and build on practices that have proven effective across sectors and regions since the pandemic began. **This study, part of the Azim Premji University COVID-19 research grant, seeks to reflect on the value of the PPC-led *Umeed network* and its effectiveness during this time.**

The findings of this research will:

- Assess what a people-centred approach to emergency response and good governance looks like in a pandemic;
- Engage a wider group of relevant stakeholders around the value of working with and investing in CR
- Impact on-going engagement with state and national-level policy-makers on the potential for delivery, accountability and empowerment via a localised and ‘*bespoke to community*’, two-way-communication and action approach; and
- Provide a road-map for further community engagement post COVID-19, across the Himalayan belt/ India



## CR and our work

CR is a participatory form of radio, where communities are responsible for running stations and creating engaging community need-based programming in their local language. “*Radio is the most democratic of media both in providing easy access to citizen participation and in being widely available... Radio (CR) stations are ...a catalyst for building community, for improving health and education, for fostering a civil society.*” (Siemering 2009). **Easily accessible via hand held radio sets and/or basic feature or smartphones**, CR also goes by the motto: “*by the community, of the community, for the community.*”

PPC is an independent, community-media-training, capacity sharing, and skilling organisation; an incubator for CR in India. As the partner capacity building organisation of CR Mandakini Ki Aawaz in Rudraprayag District, PPC has been working in Uttarakhand since 2013, nurturing Mandakini Ki Aawaz from pre-launch to live programming in 2014 and on to holistic self-sustainability. Over the years, this model has showcased CR’s potential to educate, empower and influence, individual and community action. Considered one of India’s flagship CR stations, the PPC-Mandakini Ki Aawaz collaboration has been another great ‘*learning by doing*’ opportunity. The devastating Kedarnath floods at the time (2013) has inspired PPC’s work in the field of CR and community-based disaster management, across advocacy, policy and practice. **Notable achievements include impacting policy in Uttarakhand – it is the first state in India to have a CR and Disaster Management Policy. The Disaster Management Department has signed an MoU with PPC to support impactful expansion of CR across isolated regions of this mountain state.** PPC is now in a syndication and growth phase, supporting other organisations interested in CR while conducting advocacy and policy work at the state and national level.

## The genesis of the *Umeed network*

“*We have seen more of the usefulness of community radio in India, since COVID-19.*” (Eric Falt, Director and UNESCO Representative to India, May 2020)

*March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020*

India went into a complete lockdown, throwing millions of lives into disarray. With social distancing and curfew in places, all forms of fieldwork and physical grassroots engagement that is standard NGO response at the time of human crisis, came to a grinding halt. Airwaves, however, have no such restrictions. Though All India Radio stations across Uttarakhand temporarily went off-air, CR stations continued to engage communities, albeit with limited – human and financial resources and access to state-level information and expertise.

PPC, based in the state capital Dehradun, extended an open invitation to eight existing CR stations to form a network. **Five stations - Mandakini Ki Aawaz, Radio Khushi, Radio Zindagee, Pantnagar Janvani and Kumaon Vani** - responded positively, driven by a collective belief that in bringing our individual strengths to the table, we’d achieve more together than we could alone. Parallel to broadcasting fresh *Umeed network* content on a daily basis,



partners would continue to run their regular programming. PPC further leveraged existing ties with key state-level stakeholders and conducted new outreach with relevant government departments, trusted NGOs and independent experts. Their interest and willingness to join our coordinated effort would directly impact the content quality. **Working together, since March 28, 2020 and to date, this collaborative multi-stakeholder effort is India's first Emergency Rapid Response CR Led Network, that we collectively named -- *Umeed* (hope).**

The *Umeed network's* mission is to ensure that communities themselves – their voices, concerns, changing needs amidst the pandemic, and potential solutions delivered through actionable content, remains at the core of the intervention. Encouraging community feedback loops, monitoring, reporting, iterating and documentation, are vital components of PPC's efforts and the *Umeed network* model as well.

### Setting the stage for this study

*“Community radio is a force for change; it has the power to touch both hearts and minds and is doing commendable work during this COVID-19 pandemic.”*

**(Prakash Javadekar, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, All India Radio, May 23, 2020)**

The *Umeed network*, via the five CR partners, reaches a rural, peri-urban, and urban community that is approximately 1.6 million strong, covering regions across 12 of Uttarakhand's 13 districts. Building on the pre-established catchment community culture of listening, interacting, and trusting their local friendly-neighbourhood CR stations, this multi-stakeholder network has been supporting its people right from lockdown 1.0.

The initial months of *Umeed network's* operations included daily editorial meetings via conference calls. Online meeting platforms were irrelevant, as the rural and peri-urban stations *Mandakini Ki Aawaz*, *Pantnagar Janvani* and *Kumaon Vani* struggled with poor to no connectivity. As convener of *Umeed*, PPC would facilitate these dialogues. Based on questions and stories coming from the field we would suggest content angles with supporting creative programming formats. Each of us six partners would accept responsibility for different tasks, ranging from identifying the potential source of content, verifying, logistics and planning, recording, editing and sharing with the network CR partners via messaging platforms or emails.

Staying true to CR good practice and the ideal bespoke nature of its content, PPC takes the onus of ensuring that centralised content generation only adds value. And where and when required, tailor-made programming is delivered. Additionally, while PPC designed and facilitated all *Umeed network* content in this collaborative manner, production was only done by CR partners.

Within the first two months of programming, the *Umeed network's* focus areas quickly emerged. Broadly we categorised them under 1) **Emergency Rapid Response** 2) **Right to Information** and 3) **Bringing Policy to Practice; all aspects of Good Governance**, the value of which the following analysis section will explore.



While an enriching experience, challenges inevitably arose and we tackled them together as we strove to respond as rapidly as we could to the changing situation. Some examples, include:

- While PPC and Mandakini Ki Aawaz have collaborated for over seven years, other partners had never worked together with each other or with PPC before;
- Working in a quick turnaround manner, while remaining continuously accountable to each other and the network, proved challenging at times for different partners;
- As *Umeed network* convenor, building trust quickly via phone calls alone was challenging; further, ensuring that our style of work synced with each partners' independent style was a continuous effort;
- Managing the emotional toll of disturbing stories that were emerging from the catchment via telephone calls, SMSes or WhatsApp;
- Funding gaps meant partners were stretched; and
- Managing pressures of delivering timely, quality content while remaining non-hierarchical and sensitive to each other's context on a daily basis, often left us totally overwhelmed.

Yet, keeping our eyes on the goal and pushing ourselves and each other, every day, kept us all committed and driven. The nature of the work and collaborative operational model that was fast developing, often led partners to share their own anxieties -- for their wider communities, their families and themselves. The limited fieldwork that was possible during lockdown remained risky and personal challenges were often discussed, with *Umeed network* team members supporting each other with suggested pathways to overcome them.

When the Azim Premji University grant came up, PPC and the *Umeed network* recognised an opportunity to highlight CR's role through research in community-based cross-sectoral work and showcase the myriad possibilities, to inform and inspire both practice and policy.



## METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to measure the effectiveness of the COVID-19 related CR programming and on-air engagement through the *Umeed network*; also, to understand the off-air interventions that enabled the quality and on time delivery of this programming, via advocacy work with critical external stakeholders.

A study based on a people-centred media landscape like CR, merited a people-centred approach to data collection and analysis; to listen to the stories and see things through the lens of the core participants (i.e., all six *Umeed network* partners including PPC; subject experts involved in the network and community members).

We proposed a **Participatory Action Research (PAR)** because it is practical, collaborative, and has emancipatory potential. *'PAR is a research method involving both participants and researchers throughout the process from initial stages to gathering and communicating final results. The method is unique as participants are regarded as experts due to their lived experiences related to the research topic ensuring that relevant issues are studied... The overall goal of PAR is to use research findings to influence social change.'* (Watters, Comeau with Restall. 2010)

The data collection tools included: -

**The survey** conducted among 86 respondents. For the survey respondents, each of the five stations shortlisted a minimum of 20 listeners that had tuned in regularly between March (end) and November 2020. A healthy gender, age, literacy, economy and caste balance was a given criteria for the shortlist

**Two FGDs**, conducted with a select cohort of regular listeners from two CR stations - one serving a rural, and one serving a peri-urban community

**Three in-depth interviews**, with selected stakeholders who participated and supported the *Umeed network* as subject experts

**Six in-depth interviews**, with the leadership of the six partner organisations of the network –

1. Kumoan Vani
2. Mandakini Ki Aawaz
3. Pantnagar Janvani
4. People's Power Collective
5. Radio Khushi
6. Radio Zindagee

Secondary research in the form of archival data analysis and public document analysis together with observation, were the other qualitative research tools used.



Good practice and research ethics were followed all through, ensuring 100% verbal consent of every participant was received prior to their engagement with us. Written consent from all participants was not possible as the face-to-face data collection was digital (non-paper) and some of the data was collected via telephone calls and written interviews owing to COVID-19 precautions and restrictions. Both FGDs have been audio-documented and transcribed and photos of the entire process are on record.

This PAR took PPC 1,400 Kilometres by road, working across the Garhwal and Kumaon regions of Uttarakhand where our *Umeed network* partner CR stations are based. Fieldwork in remote locations was conducted with trepidation, keeping physical distancing and mask wearing as a non-negotiable for all involved. COVID-19 cases and FM transmission breakdowns within the *Umeed network* partners set us back by fortnight.

Identifying the external analysts for this study was another interesting and time-consuming challenge. Professionals with expertise in their field; with an intuitive, empathetic and visionary approach to data analysis, a sound understanding of community and communication and the ability to story tell and visualise things in a powerful manner, were critical to this study. This could not be PPC's role alone as we are too close to the work and didn't want researcher and activist bias to inform findings. Through a lengthy and involved process of elimination, we arrived at two experienced and talented consultants, and we are excited to deliver this report with them.

The qualitative analysis entailed an in-depth reading of secondary and primary data to get a sense of its texture and range. Demographic data from the survey was then tabulated. Thereafter, a thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted, which guided the narrative report, while addressing the main research questions.



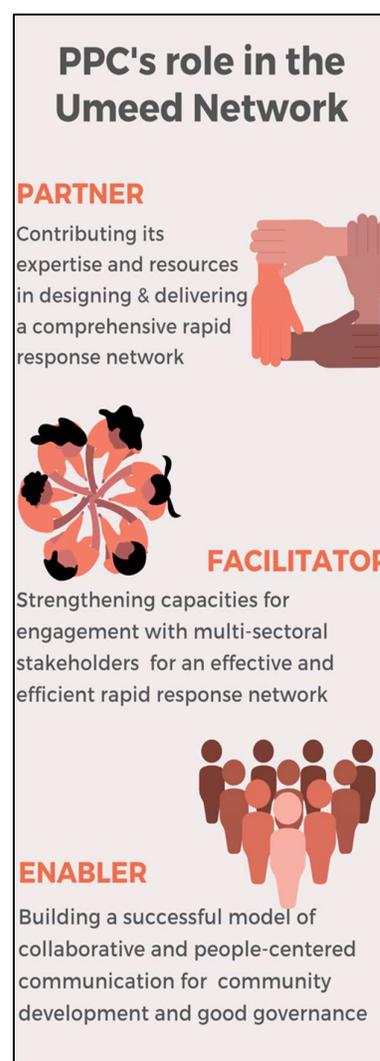
## ANALYSIS

During the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown in India, the *Umeed network* comprising six partner organisations that drive a people-centred CR model reached a potential listenership of over 1.6 million people spread across 12 districts in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand including: Almora, Bageshwar, Chamoli, Champawat, Dehradun, Haridwar, Nainital, Pithoragarh, Pauri, Tehri Garhwal, Rudraprayag and Udham Singh Nagar (*Annexure 1*). Communities in Uttarakhand have relied on their CR stations long before the pandemic. This made CR a critical communication partner during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Participatory Action Research (PAR)

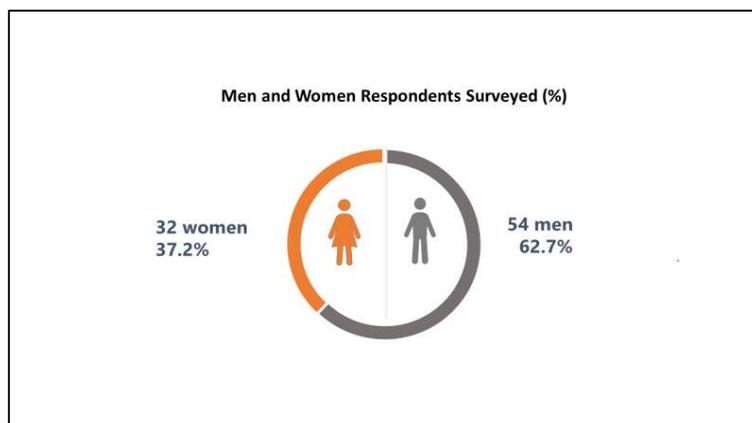
This section analyses data collected during the PAR by PPC with on-ground support from the individual *Umeed* CR partners. The survey with 86 respondents and interviews with the leadership team of the six partner organisations, revealed that the *Umeed network* strengthened and consolidated the already existing and deeply embedded individual CR stations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Led by PPC, the *Umeed network* provided a level of systematicity to these local CR stations despite operational challenges, and could potentially connect people and places at various levels- block, district and state. In its leadership role in the *Umeed network*, PPC ensured that issues and concerns raised by the listeners of the CR stations during the lockdown, were addressed in a timely and effective manner. It strengthened capacities of the five CR stations to respond to the crisis. In addition, PPC built strong relationships with multiple government departments and institutions at the district and state level. It further ensured that the *Umeed network* allowed-- access to information, news and updates, grievance redressal, as well as entertainment and well-being.

**This section assesses the strengths of this collaborative and community-driven model, identifies key learnings and challenges and recommends a road map for the future of the *Umeed network* in Uttarakhand.**

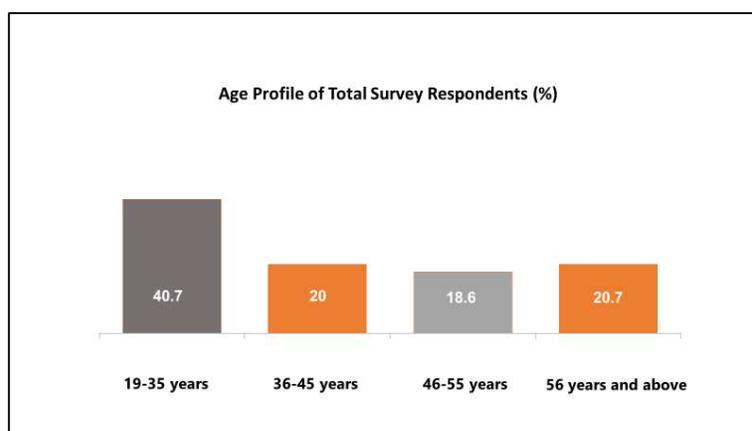


## Demographics

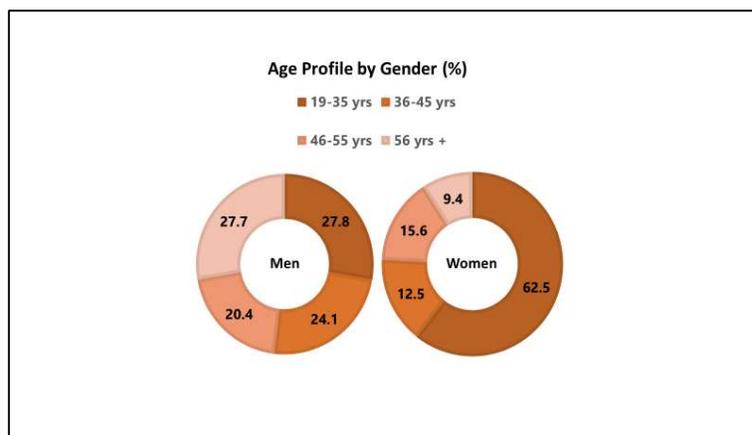
### a. Gender and age profile



Of the total surveyed, 54 (62.7%) were men and 32 (37.2%) were women between the ages of 19 years to 56 plus.



Overall, over 40 per cent surveyed were between the age of 18-35 years, while the rest of the age groups were spread evenly across the total respondents to capture a wide spectrum of concerns.



The age profile by gender represented an even spread of age groups among the men, while among women, the proportion of younger respondents between 19-35 years was significantly more (60%).

(Source: PAR Survey)



## b. Education

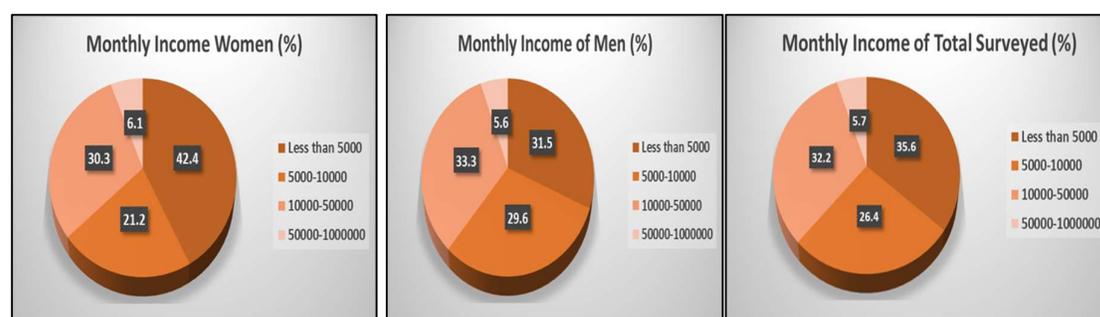
Education Level by Gender and Total (%)							
Gender	No formal education	Till class 5	In class 8 and 9	Matric level	Higher secondary	Graduate	Post graduate
Men	1.8	7.4	5.6	22.2	9.3	33.3	20.4
Women	12.5	0	6.3	3.1	6.3	50	21.9
Total	5.8	3.5	7.0	15.1	8.1	38.4	22.1

Over 12 per cent of women reported that they received no formal education, although 50 per cent reported to be graduates. Overall, around 6 per cent reported no formal education.

## c. Employment and Income Background

Employment Status of Men, Women and Total			
Employment Level	Men	Women	Total
Self Employed	22.2	0.0	14.0
Agriculture and livestock	33.3	18.8	27.9
Daily wage earner	1.9	0.0	1.2
Government job	13.0	9.4	11.6
Private job	13.0	25.0	17.4
Unemployed	3.7	37.5	16.3
Student	1.9	6.3	3.5
Retired/pensioners	3.7	0.0	2.3
Others (teachers and NGOs)	7.4	3.1	5.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: PAR Survey)

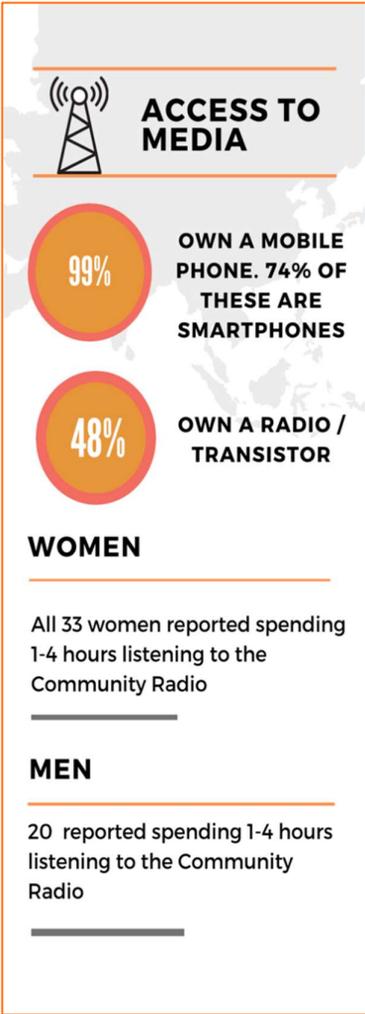


(Source: PAR Survey)





(Source: PAR Survey)



The survey revealed that 99 per cent of the respondents reporting owning a mobile phone while less than 50 per cent owned a radio or transistor. This in itself is quite revealing of the reliance on mobile. More women reported spending more time listening to community radio as compared to the men.

Almost 60 per cent of the respondents surveyed reported listening to CR as their main source of local news, information and local entertainment.



## Strengths of Uttarakhand's COVID-19 CR Response Network – the *Umeed network*

“Community Radio is so much more than a tool. It is a living, breathing ecosystem. For PPC, that has been the basis of our engagement on the ground. In the end, a strong community radio can be formed only when trust is built and that only occurs over time”

- Saritha Thomas, Founder/ Managing Trustee, PPC

PPC has leveraged CR to play the role of an emergency network during the pandemic. While CR itself is not a novel idea in India, its potential as a powerful multi-stakeholder ecosystem in this way has been seldom explored. Spearheading the formation of the *Umeed* (Hope) *network*, PPC brought together five CR stations across the state. The nature of the CR medium has meant it is truly a two-way process. For state institutions, the *Umeed network* has been a way to both reach out and hear about needs through a trusted one-point contact, leading to quick turnaround for critical situations. The economies of scale, broad outreach and truly meaningful collaborations that have emerged hold learning for the future. The ability of CRs to function through the lockdown (thanks to the passion and great personal investment of the CR team members) brought another dimension. Lockdown restrictions were able to be followed, while continuing to inform, educate and reassure people through the airwaves.<sup>1</sup>

“It has been truly phenomenal. *Umeed* could ignite hope and aspiration in the hearts of people across the state particularly for people in rural segments, unorganised sector, senior citizens and people with special needs”

-- Durgesh Pant, Director, Uttarakhand Open University

**The PAR conducted by PPC highlights the following strengths of the *Umeed network*.**

### ***Umeed* – a dependable source of information during COVID-19**

The *Umeed network* played a critical role in being an accessible and inclusive space for its communities to ask all kinds of questions, clarify their doubts and share with each other

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Community Radio as the Changemaker, Stories and Learnings from Uttarakhand, Vijayalakshmi Viswanathan



without any judgment. Across the first 100 days, the partner stations were flooded with questions, that were answered via *Umeed* programming. Here are some of them: -

The infographic features a central graphic with two icons: a radio on the left and a microphone on the right, both enclosed in a black rectangular frame. Surrounding this central graphic are several orange-outlined speech bubbles and thought bubbles, each containing a question. The questions are as follows:

- Top Left (Speech Bubble):** Will NCERT distribute syllabus books via home delivery for the new session as book stores are not open yet?
- Top Middle (Thought Bubble):** Can Covid be transferred from fruits and vegetables brought into the house?
- Top Right (Speech Bubble):** The season of sowing is now but because of the lockdown, we don't know where to get the seeds from?
- Middle Left (Speech Bubble):** Certain insects are ruining our maize crop. How can we get rid of them?
- Middle Right (Thought Bubble):** What kind of exercises can help us be mentally fit and strong during the lockdown?
- Bottom Left (Thought Bubble):** What is the ideal duration to isolate and quarantine after domestic and international travel?
- Bottom Middle-Left (Speech Bubble):** People in the community are discriminating between people of different communities and religions because of incomplete and inaccurate information. How can this problem be solved in our communities?
- Bottom Middle-Right (Thought Bubble):** There have been known cases of people traveling from the red zone to the green zone through forests and other short cuts. How is the government of Uttarakhand planning to
- Bottom Left (Speech Bubble):** If a region is declared as a hotspot- does that mean it includes people affected by corona virus?
- Bottom Middle (Speech Bubble):** What can we do at home to boost immunity, especially for children and senior citizens?
- Bottom Right (Speech Bubble):** Many farmers in the region practice animal husbandry and run small scale fisheries. In this lockdown, they are unable to sell their products. This is their only source of income. Can they get some help?



## Umeed – a trustworthy ally during COVID-19

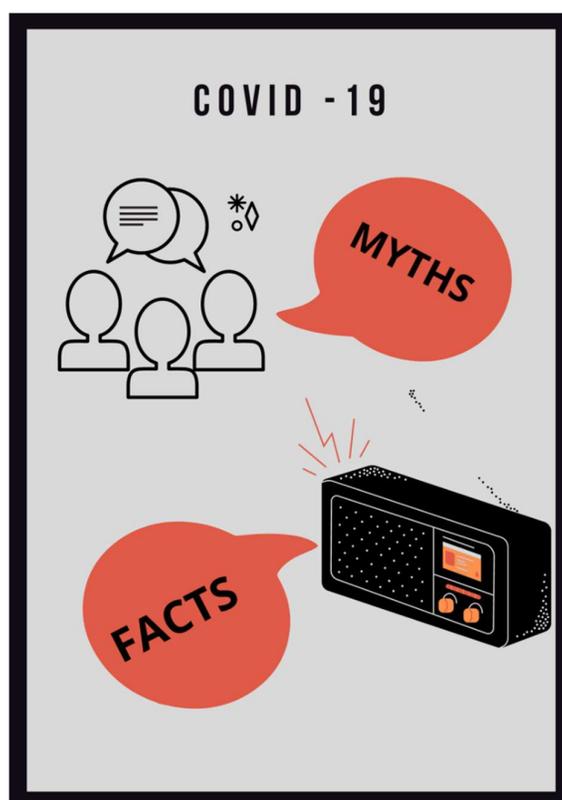
The *network* played a critical role in providing factual information and in busting myths around COVID-19, in the local languages of Garhwali, Kumaoni and Hindi. This helped address the biases and prejudices that had developed, owing to the lack of authentic information.

“We got timely and correct information about the disease and how to take precautions to keep ourselves safe - like wearing masks, maintaining distance, avoiding crowded places, sanitising and washing hands regularly and other general information. We got to know about containment zones and about migrants, where they are and what they need; about food supply, government announcements, about schools, colleges etc. Through the community radio, we also got direct information from doctors and scientists and this was very reassuring”.

**MYTH:** Eating chicken and other non-vegetarian items can be a source of infection

**MYTH:** The virus can spread from cutting hair and shaving in public

**MYTH:** Drinking tea and milk prevents the virus from entering the body



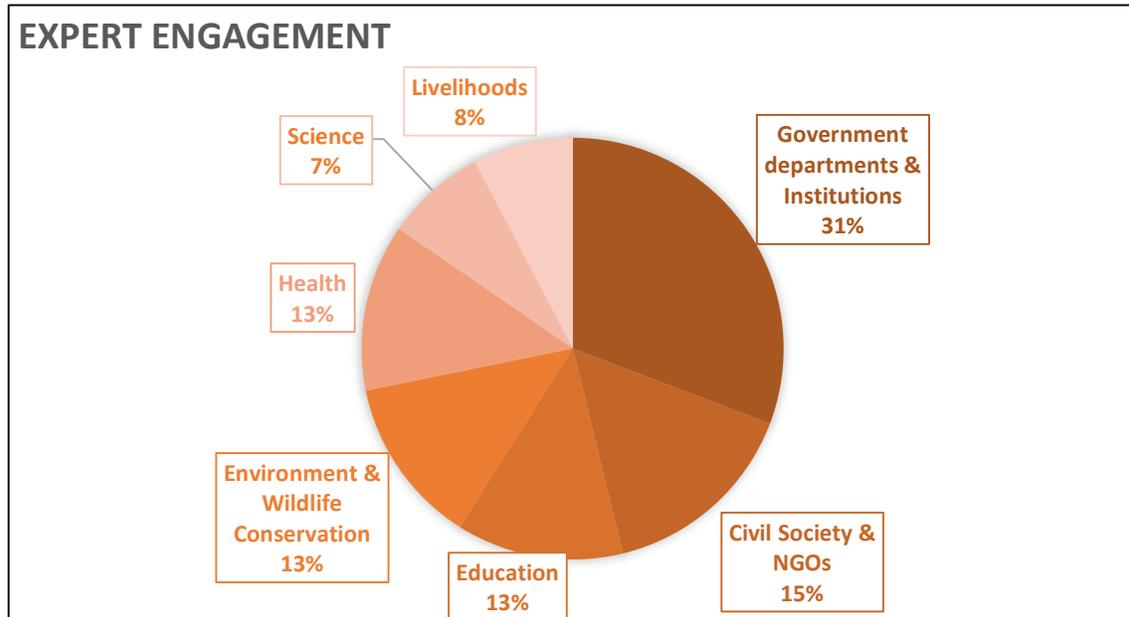
**MYTH:** Monkeys in the area that are offered food by COVID-19 patients, can get infected themselves and spread it further

**MYTH:** The virus can spread through the newspapers

**MYTH:** Washing hands with sanitiser and soap 10 times a day will lead to skin problems



The PPC led *Umeed network* played an instrumental role in facilitating conversations with 39 experts from multiple sectors, departments and institutions of the government of Uttarakhand like science, technology, wildlife conservation, environment, livelihoods, agriculture and farming, medicine and health. They shared their expertise and knowledge through pre-recorded or live programming.



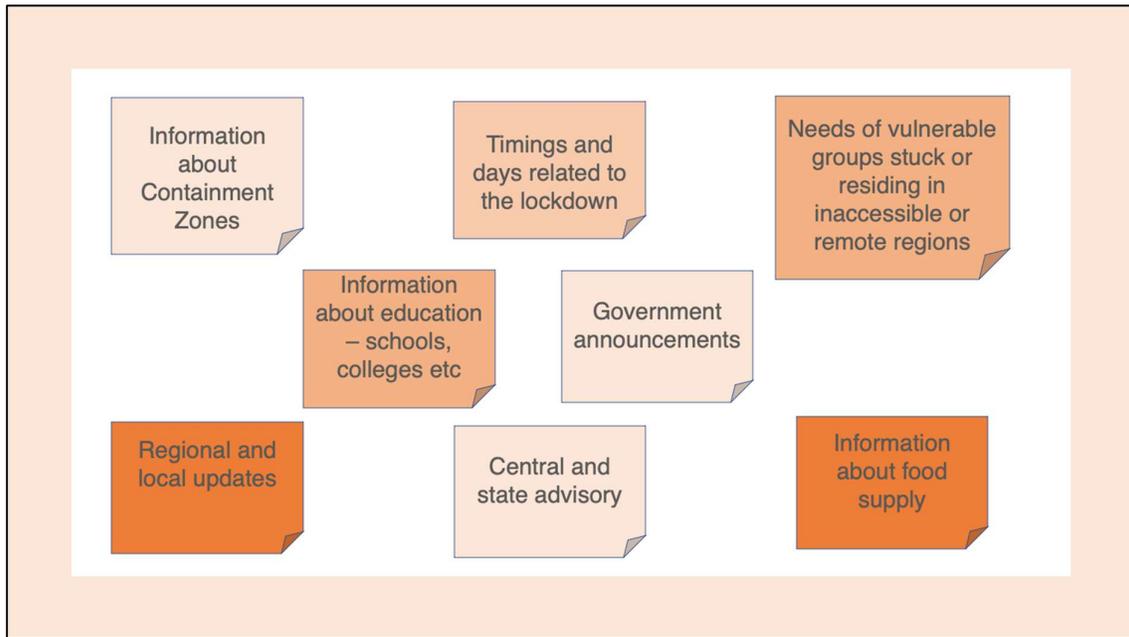
“I am a Science and Technology practitioner. COVID-19 in my opinion has openly proved that teaching and learning can occur without the physical presence of either the teacher or the learner. I strongly support this platform (*Umeed network*) for the dissemination of relevant information for the making of a holistic, knowledgeable generation of men and women.”.

-Durgesh Pant, Director, Uttarakhand Open University

One of the respondents shared, “we were able to get complete COVID-19 education in our local language. We understood the roles of Panchayat members & of Asha workers in addressing this crisis. Also on ways to improve immunity. Most importantly we heard how to help each other relax, and stay away from the fear of COVID.”

Respondents reported receiving important information, updates and COVID-19 news from the CR stations, which they could rely on and completely trust. Some stand out areas of content from the survey respondents’ perspective include:





Respondents stressed on the important role of the PPC led *Umeed network* in debunking fake news. There was a time when newspapers were stopped because there was fear that the virus could spread through them and many people relied only on TV and radio for news during this time.

“Receiving information from a close source like our local CR station is more reliable. It is hard to trust information coming from a far away source and through social media”

“Kumaon Vani released COVID-19 education every day. We got to know about recent updates related to the virus. A special message related to COVID-19, was included after every show”

“I got to know about the lockdown on Sunday, about the fact that COVID-19 centers have been increased, and other such updates from our radio station”.

“The doctors on the radio stations, explained the dos & don'ts. Pantnagar Janvani has helped the community of Udham Singh Nagar very much as they trusted the local voice of Dr. Gaurav Aggarwal. Most importantly tips for vulnerable groups like children and seniors have been useful. Durgesh Pant shared this information. Dr. Geetanjali also speaks about nutrition.”



## Umeed – a bridge between policies and people during COVID-19

“Organisations like PPC can raise the issues of community radios directly to policy makers to take corrective action. Not just the community radios, but the issues of the community. If there is something occurring, they bring it to the attention of the administration. That’s a big help! Such groups also bring out the best practices across states and other countries. When more demand is there, then more intense deliberations take place. Thereafter, the policy becomes more comprehensive. It strengthens community radio and sense of purpose also. That’s a very good thing”

- Amit Singh Negi, Former Secretary of Disaster Management & Current Medical Health, Medical Education and Family Welfare Secretary, Government of Uttarakhand (GOU)

*Source: Community Radio as the Changemaker, Stories and Learnings from Uttarakhand, Vijayalakshmi Viswanathan*

Working with the government to advance CR goals, intrinsically community goals, is a key focus area of PPC. During this pandemic, based on the effective rapid response the network was able to deliver and advocacy by PPC, the Disaster Management Department of GOU, issued a directive (on 30th April 2020) to all District Collectors, encouraging them to engage with local CR stations.

The two FGDs, part of this PAR, were conducted with a total of 24 participants (11men and 13 women); 6 from Radio Khushi and its peri-urban community and 18 from Mandakini Ki Aawaz and its rural community. They revealed an immense appreciation for the content on their CR stations in these COVID-19 times.

One of the FGDs focussed on a key and popular programme on **good governance**, conceptualised by PPC and broadcasted by Mandakini Ki Aawaz (Rudraprayag district), titled **Janta Milan**. The programme serves as an important and very effective link between the community and the district level authorities, ensuring accountability from different levels of local government (i.e., panchayat, block and district). The participants at this FGD had engaged with Janta Milan (JM) in some manner (i.e., listening, calling or messaging with a grievance, question or suggestion). At the FGD they shared -- how programmes like JM, ensure the voices of marginalised people are heard and their issues addressed directly by the District Magistrate (District Collector) via the airwaves.

One participant shared, “during the lockdown people were facing problems related to the online public distribution system for ration supplies. We shared this issue on the JM programme. In response, we received a phone number of a supply inspector who addressed our issues, and many people got their ration supply on time. This is praiseworthy”.

Until November 2020, in the eight JM episodes designed collaboratively by PPC and Mandakini Ki Aawaz, majority of the issues highlighted, presented and addressed, were from marginalised groups within the catchment community.



Another participant in the FGD expressed, “the opportunity to present our issues directly to the District Magistrate from our home especially during the times of COVID-19 is very good. This is very beneficial to people in the villages who otherwise have to leave their day’s work and wages and travel to the district office with their own money to solve pending issues related to schemes, paperwork, ration etc”.

“Mandakini Ki Aawaz has broadcast eight programmes since 11 May. We take concerns that come in via calls/messages and the DM gets all these concerns addressed by the relevant departments, and then shares these with the community via the radio. These issues could be related to education, digital knowledge, MGNREGA, etc.”

-Manvendra Negi, Mandakini Ki Aawaz



“This programme ensures people have their right to information and freedom of expression. Being able to communicate like this with government departments, officials, Pradhans ((elected leaders) and other authorities is very useful for people living in far flung remote areas”.

Photo from the FGD conducted in Nov 2020 at a location within the Mandakini Ki Aawaz catchment area

The PAR reflected the potential of the PPC led *Umeed network* in good governance by enabling connection and communication of local populations with government departments, NGOs, expert groups and improving access to specific policies for vulnerable groups. This assumed particular importance during the lockdown, when physical communication was impossible.

The overall approach to programming and content development of the network during the crisis of COVID-19 has been solution-oriented. **It addressed issues raised by the community such as alcoholism, mental health, information to improve access to government schemes, open schooling, livelihoods, conservation and infrastructure related needs.** The survey and



interviews showcase multiple examples of the CR stations connecting local concerns with relevant departments and agencies like Department of Disaster Management, Health, Food and supply etc.

The teams at the five CR stations also shared the following experiences and examples of impact achieved in pre-COVID-19 times.

“As a field reporter my main aim is to get stories about the civic problems faced by the communities and share these further with the District Magistrate (DM). The voice of Mandakini Ki Aawaz is respected by the district officials and they act immediately on the issues raised by Mandakini Ki Aawaz. For instance, during the pre-COVID-19 times, we went to district Inter College at Kotma, Kalimath and learnt that girls generally walk 7kms to reach their college and during their periods it becomes very difficult for them to reach back home. We made sure that this issue reaches the DM. ILST, an NGO then installed a sanitary pad vending machine in a nearby village for women and girls”

-Rajendra Negi, Mandakini Ki Aawaz

Rajveer Negi from Mandakini Ki Aawaz catchment area shared, “the main problem is poor health & medical facilities. At the district level we do not have a Gynaecologist or a Surgeon. There’s no ultrasound machine and other medical machines. There are very few physicians. On a personal note, after my 12th I did not know what career options were there. I got to know about NEET and medicine, on the CR station. We all need experts who can motivate and guide us.”

“I had never seen women attending Panchayat meetings before. But today women are eagerly participating in them and putting forward their opinions. I can say community radio has played a major role in this phenomenon”.

-Poonam Rawat, Mandakini Ki Aawaz

### ***Umeed – addressing educational need of children & young people during COVID-19***

According to the survey, education has been severely hampered by the closure of schools and colleges due to COVID 19. In the context of poor connectivity and with very few families being able to access internet services, online education is not universal. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the potential of the PPC led *Umeed network* as a platform for educational content is significant.



## Education suffering due to lack of digital coverage

Over 60 percent of those surveyed said that their children were not receiving any formal education.



Online education was reported by 19 percent surveyed, however they also complained of poor connectivity and digital education not being able to match physical education.

One student respondent summed up the essence of this; “I think not many privilege people really know the importance of CR! I belong to Uttarakhand where there are many challenges that ensure these modern digital devices are not nearly as handy as the radio”.

Many respondents asserted that the *Umeed network* must enable educational content. A few people appreciated the motivational and inspirational stories and career counselling on Radio Zindagee. Others highlighted the potential of CR as an enabling platform for skill building and career counselling for young people, as well as provide employment information.

### *Umeed* – preserving local art and culture during COVID-19

“If I compare CR to other radio, then CR is easily approachable where an individual can directly call, WhatsApp, or through FB can listen to local folk music.”

The value of CR as a people’s medium was expressed through many respondents. The regular programming on -- local food, music, arts, poetry and culture are valued by people across different age groups, at all the five CR partners. The communities themselves contribute regularly in creating this content. The CR stations therefore not only provide information and local news but also play an important role in preserving local language and culture. Some women respondents mentioned the programmes *Mehkta Aanchal*, *Puraane Kisse*, *Zindagi Ke Kisse*, and *Chuwani*, in which people shared their personal stories. The emotional connection that people have with their CR stations pre COVID-19, helped them trust and rely on the same CR station during the pandemic and across the lockdowns.



One person expressed the sense of ownership of CR by saying, “I like Garhwali shows a lot. It is the language that my mother and father were not able to teach me but Radio Khushi was able to teach me. I have also shared my personal stories based on experience and they have read it out on the radio.”

One of the respondents shared that, “the emphasis on traditional food, recipes and medicine was revived and returned during lockdown- Local medicine and food is still present and specially during COVID-19 when we did not get an access to market products, people have started using and reviving local medicine & food in homes”.

Understanding the need for temporary relief from COVID-19 related programming, the *Umeed network* conceptualised the Kalakaar Campaign, where popular Uttarakhand artistes performed their best content and shared uplifting messages with their state-wide fan base via the five CR stations. Another programme *Meelo Dur* encouraged returning migrants to share their inspirational stories. Such entertainment and human-interest programming helped people relax a bit.

### *Umeed – promoting collective well-being during COVID-19*

“The CR station played a very important role during COVID-19. See, communication is always critical and more so during crisis times. The *Umeed* collaborative network has provided a forum to share ideas, viewpoints, happiness, positivity etc, amongst people during Pandemic times which was fantastic”.

The FGD conducted with the six listeners of Radio Khushi in December 2020, brought out the comforting role that the CR stations have played for their communities during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

“I’ve been listening to Radio Khushi for over 5 years now. During COVID-19 the situation was fearful. We used to get news and information from various sources and it was difficult to believe what was right or wrong. I trusted Radio Khushi more than other sources and it helped me a lot to feel less scared”.

Another FGD participant shared, “Radio Khushi told listeners to ignore fake news and not to spread it. They asked us to look after people in our families, in our society; especially seniors and those living alone; also, those who have been affected by Coronavirus.”



“Radio Khushi has managed to make village communities and Pradhans understand a little about COVID-19. They shared how it doesn’t make one untouchable, so don’t neglect and discriminate against COVID patients and incoming migrant workers. With proper care, social distancing and following norms we can keep ourselves and others safe. I truly appreciated Radio Khushi’s message and effort to treat everyone equally.”



(Photo from FGD conducted in Dec 2020 at a location within the catchment area of Radio Khushi)

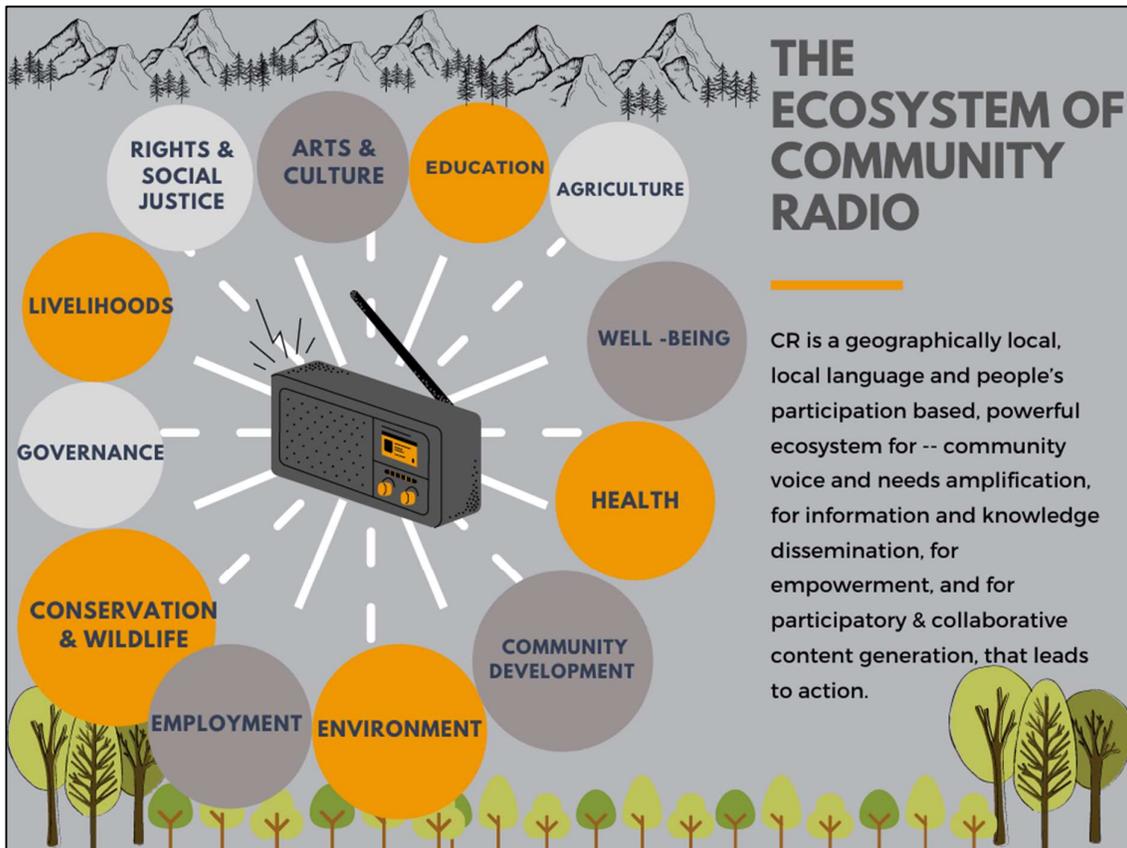
The five CR stations worked closely with the local Panchayat members and Pradhans of the community to gather stories, experiences, queries, concerns and issues that would then be addressed via the *Umeed* network. Many women participants felt positive about their role in CR. Programmes about health and in particular about COVID-19 were appreciated widely.

### *Umeed* – by the people, of the people and for the people

The *Umeed* network has proved to be a trustworthy, accessible and an effective model of collaborative and people-centered action. As a CR network, it addresses multiple issues impacting the community like– agriculture and farming, wildlife conservation, environment, youth skills building and employment, livelihoods, local language and culture, arts and media, health, equal access to services and resources for all in the community and social justice. A deep level of trust and a sense of community ownership of CR already exists at the block, village, and district levels. COVID-19 and the resultant lockdown exposed the critical need for a well-coordinated emergency response system. This urgent need was met by the PPC led *Umeed* network.



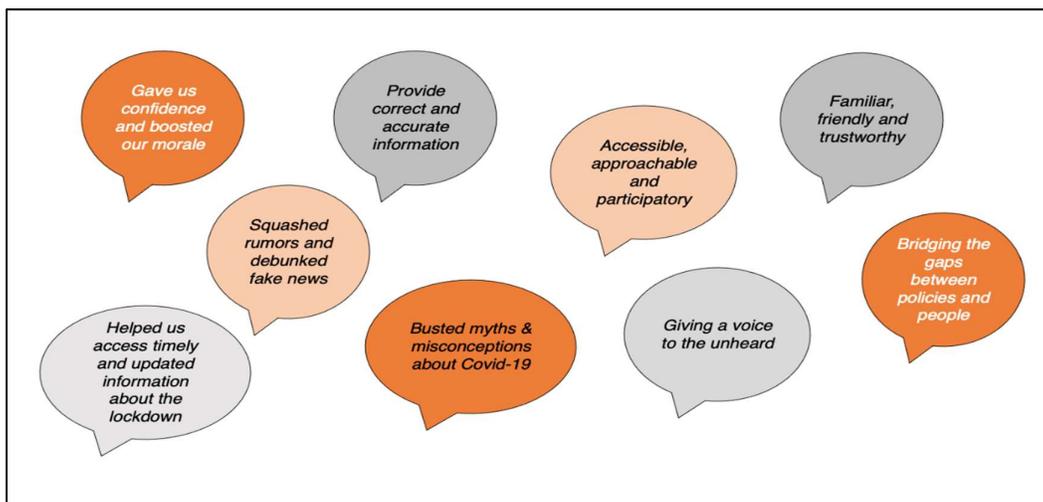
## CR Ecosystem in Uttarakhand



### *Umeed* - as an effective community driven collaborative crisis response radio network

Based on its strengths, this section highlights the potential of the *Umeed network* as a community driven crisis response collaborative space.

### Range of concerns addressed by the network



### Highlights of the PPC led *Umeed network's* Rapid Emergency Response

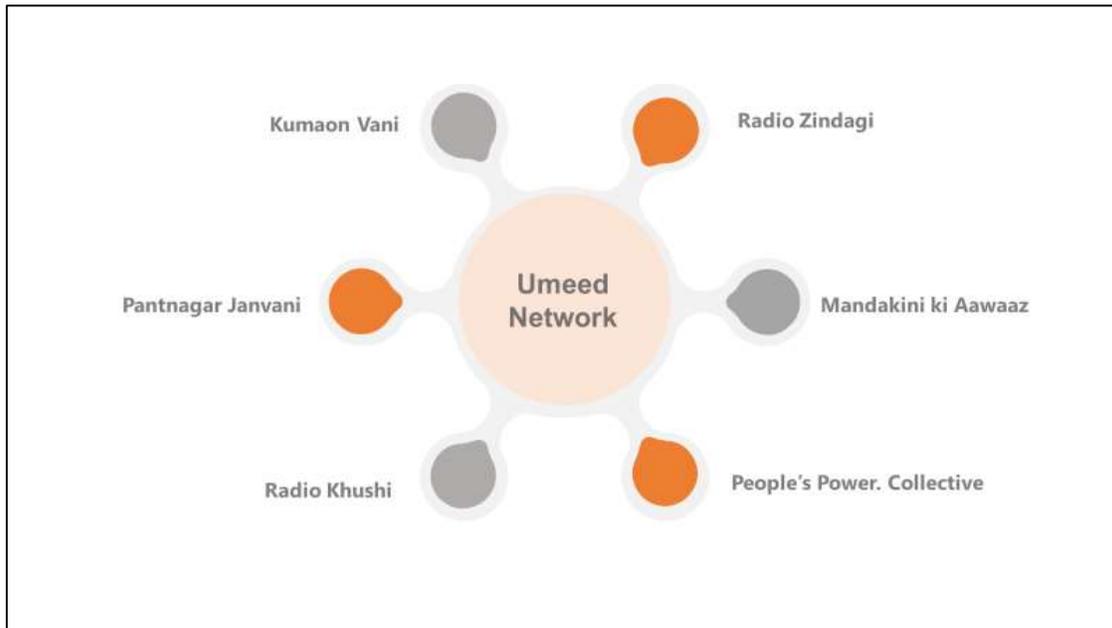
- Rapid and well-coordinated response between the network partners, reflected in the cases of **timely delivery of food supply to Nepali migrants** in Thallisain, Pauri-Garhwal. Kumaon Vani reported stranded migrants with no food or shelter. PPC took this issue to GOU via an enabling IAS officer and the state's COVID-19 Control Room. Remedial action was immediately taken.
- During week one of lockdown 1.0, a video went viral claiming that the presence of a black stone outside one's home would prevent COVID-19. Mandakini Ki Aawaz was inundated with calls. Immediately, on behalf of the *Umeed network* PPC, reached out to the Uttarakhand Science Education and Research Centre (USERC). Within 2 hours, the Director, Dr. Durgesh Pant was live on the station, **sensitively squashing this fake news**.
- This was at a time when government provided quarantine centres were clearly stretched beyond capacity and migrants were being indiscriminately released to travel into the hills. -- Thanks to Radio Khushi's timely interview with a returning migrant from Mumbai and his 30-member joint family (half of them testing COVID positive while in institutional quarantine), **a case of potential community transmission was averted**. PPC ensured that – the vital information of their COVID-19 test results reached the state machinery and the group was not allowed to travel into their home districts until they were 100% COVID-19 free.

## KEY LEARNINGS

### PPC led *Umeed network* –collaborative CR structure

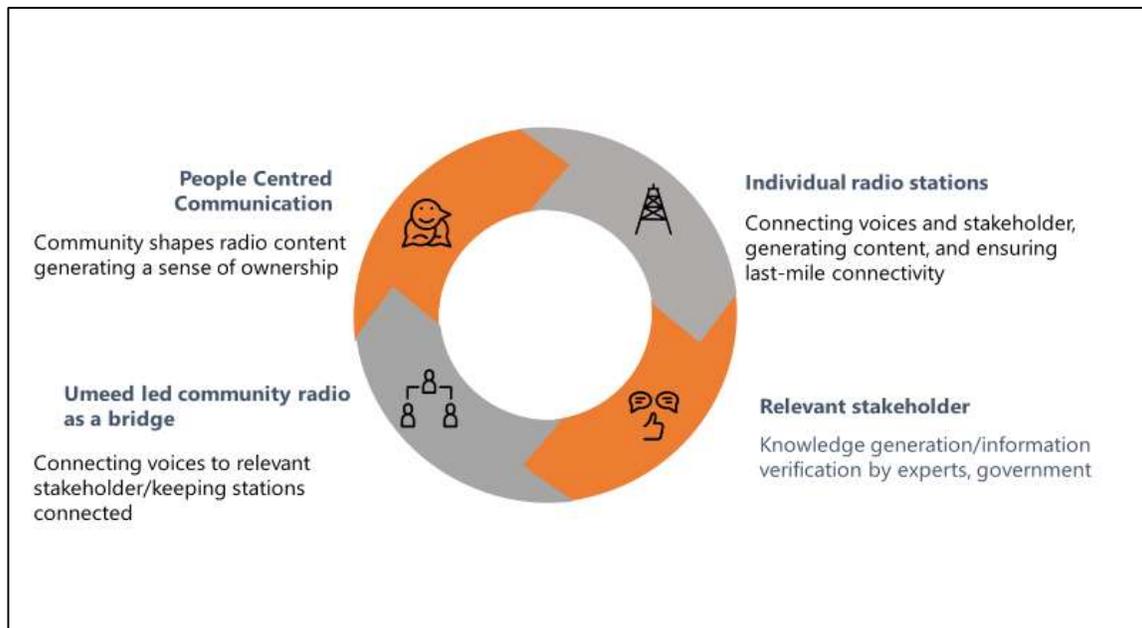
One of the main strengths of the *Umeed network* as a collaborative CR network was its democratic structure that provided overall support and coordination, while respecting the independence and philosophy of the five individual CR stations that have been working within their catchment areas for years. PPC's role in lending capacity building and emotional support also added to the strengths of this model. This interdependent arrangement allowed for discussions, debates and dissent. The learnings of this model could critically inform its future.





**PPC led *Umeed network* – enabling ground up and two-way communication**

The *Umeed* collaborative CR network employs a people-centred, ground up approach to communication. Local communities and their CR stations shape and drive the content and this is supported by the PPC led *Umeed network* which acts as a bridge to connect people’s voices and stories with relevant experts, agencies, government, and also among the community. With this network approach and support, individual CR stations have been able to amplify their existing work, reach, delivery design and scope of work.



## PPC led *Umeed network* – sustainable, holistic and accountable CR network

The interviews with operational heads across the CR stations indicated that the *Umeed network* has been able to provide a supportive arrangement and a collaborative platform. Through regular editorial meetings led and facilitated by PPC for the *Umeed network*, the stations managed to share region specific experiences and challenges coupled with focussing on capacity building efforts such as regular communication, coordination and documentation.

“*Umeed network* has helped the momentum of the community radio movement in Uttarakhand as not many state and national newspaper knew the community radio stations much before but through the *Umeed network* we have got recognition and our work has been appreciated and recognised.

I recall, Mr. Shridhar the pioneer of community radio broadcasting in India also appreciated the *Umeed network* and said in an article that it is a leading example that all CR stations of every states should be inspired by. Secondly, it is the first time in GOU departments like health, have put out a tender only for CR stations; it’s an *Umeed* effort. Now the Information, Disaster departments and other government wings know about the *Umeed network* and have approached the CR stations.”

- Arjun Kaintura from Radio Khushi

“A sense of inter-dependence also emerged through these conversations”, Navneet Gairola from Radio Zindagee said, “we have been living in Dehradun and this arrangement allowed us to connect with each other and draw inspiration that we will be able to sustain this despite challenges.”

Majority of the radio staff expressed appreciation for this model and hope for its continuation in the post-COVID-19 context. The PAR not only helped gauge people’s opinions about the *Umeed network*, but also enabled a vision for its future, a future that might ensure an effective and collaborative arrangement like the *Umeed network* to sustain itself amidst stiff competition with commercial radio stations which are fast making inroads in the Himalayan state.

“Every CR has a limited space if we work as individuals, but if we can join any network, automatically, our reach will expand and with group work, we can have lot of exposure and learning through working together.”

- Mohan Karki from Kumaon Vani

“it was an opportunity to meet other radio stations as actively. I was not aware of other radio persons, then I firmly decided that our radio stations should participate together as unitedly we can do lot of things for the community”.

-Rajinder Bhatt from Pantnagar Janvani

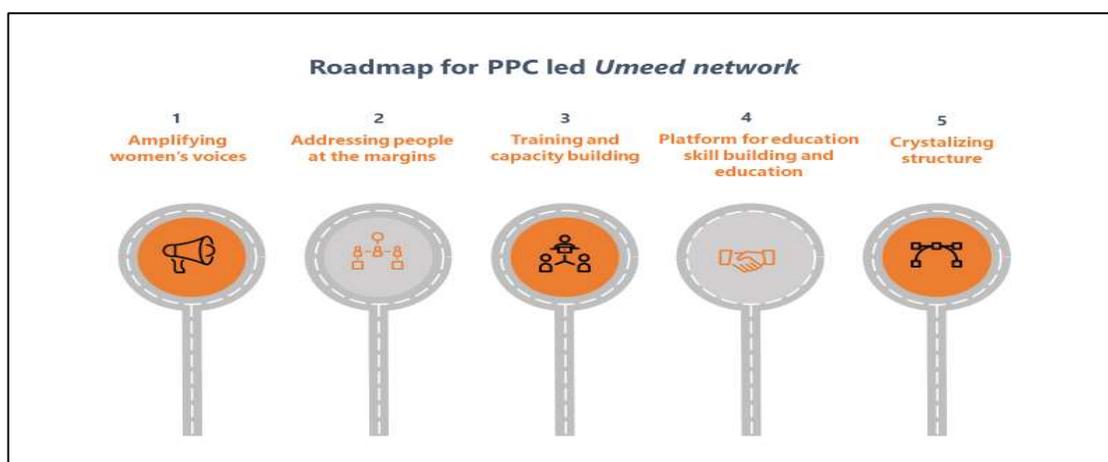




1. **It was difficult to get quick responses from external stakeholders** like government departments and the COVID-19 control room, in the context of the pandemic. A more coordinated mechanism will be needed with dedicated channels
2. **Paucity of financial and human resources** affected this powerful and wide-reaching initiative. This PPC led effort in coordination with the other radio stations faced significant challenges in these areas, given the already stretched resources in the context of the lockdown.
3. **Poor connectivity of CR partners** meant all editorial meetings and co-ordination had to be planned via phone calls
4. **Accountability from the other five partners** and external stakeholders would be on a case-to-case basis.



## WAY AHEAD – RECOMMENDATIONS



1. **Amplifying women's voices through CR**-The scope for CR to be able to connect women's concerns with relevant stakeholders, particularly with the Departments of Women Empowerment and Child Development, Information Department, Health Department and Department of Higher Education, is immense and needs sufficient engagement. Thus, a more gendered approach towards CR programming has the potential to raise awareness around gender inequality.
2. **Addressing needs and interests of people on the margins**- The PPC led *Umeed network* has been successful in bringing focus on issues of vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic which helps advance equality and social justice in their communities. At the same time, the PAR findings also revealed gaps in CR content for vulnerable groups such as elderly and disabled groups, as well as daily wage workers. The PPC led *Umeed* CR network could be used as a space to sensitise people and places towards the needs of marginalised groups.
3. **Training and capacity building of CR teams**- The PAR revealed scope for the PPC led *Umeed network* in capacity building among the individual radio stations. This arrangement has also helped some staff to upgrade their skills and help improve content, as well develop networks and a repository of experts.
4. **CR as a space for education, skills building and employment** - A significant percentage of the respondents surveyed stressed that CR could be a platform for skills, employment and education. The PPC led *Umeed network* can enable this platform.
5. **Formalising model of partnership among radio stations and PPC**- In order to ensure efficiency, accountability and commitment towards a shared vision, the existing model of partnership needs to be formalised. At the same time, the individual philosophy of the CRs of the PPC led *Umeed network* must not be compromised. A formal yet fluid model therefore could improve accountability, delivery, and help shape an efficient and effective crisis response communication network.



## Annexure 1

<i>Umeed network CR Stations Catchment Districts and Blocks</i>			
Station Name	Catchment District	Catchment Blocks	Catchment Region
Radio Zindagee	Dehradun		Dehradun City (till Harrawala & till Selaqui.
			Portion of Mussoorie & Dhanaulty
Mandakini Ki Aawaz	Rudraprayag	Agastyamuni, Ukimath & Jakhol	Karnprayag and Naryanbagar (since few years not received feedback and experiencing weaker signal)
	Pauri	Pauri block	
	Chamoli	Pokari	
		Pauri	
Pantnagar Janvani	Udham S Nagar	Rudrapur	
		Gadarpur	
		Kichha	
Kumaon Vani	Nainital	Bhimtaal, Dhari, Okhalkanda, Ramgarh, Betal ghat	
	Almorah	Bhainsiyachhana, Chaukhutia, Dhaula Devi, Hawalbagh, Lamgara, Takula, Tarikhet	
	Champawat	Pati, Barakot	
	Bageshwar	Garur, Kapkot	
	Chamoli	Joshimath, Gairsain, Tharali	
	Pithoragarh	Gagolihaat	
Radio Khushi	Dehradun	Raipur, Doiwala, Sahaspur, Vikasnagar, Chakrata, Kalsi	A bit toward Rani-Pokhri
	Pauri	Yamkeshwar, Kimsar	A bit toward Lansdown
	Tehri-Garhwal	Jaunpur, Narendernagar	A bit toward Suakholi, Rishikesh
	Haridwar	Roorkee.	



## Annexure 2

CR Station	Team Strength
Kumaon Vani	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Total Strength – 6 Members (4 Men, 2 Women)</li> <li>● April – November 2020 – Same as above</li> </ul>
Mandakini Ki Aawaz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Total Strength – 5 Members (1 Man, 4 Women)</li> <li>● April – September – 7 Members (3 Men, 4 Women)</li> <li>● October – November - 5 Members (1 Man, 4 Women)</li> </ul>
Pantnagar Janvani	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Total Strength – 4 Members (3 Men, 1 Woman)</li> <li>● April – November 2020 – Same as above.</li> </ul>
Radio Khushi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Total Strength – 12 Members (7 Men, 5 Women)</li> <li>● April – November – 10 Members (5 Men, 5 Women)</li> </ul>
Radio Zindagee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Total strength – 5 Members (3 Men, 2 Women)</li> <li>● April – November 2020 – Same as above.</li> </ul>

