

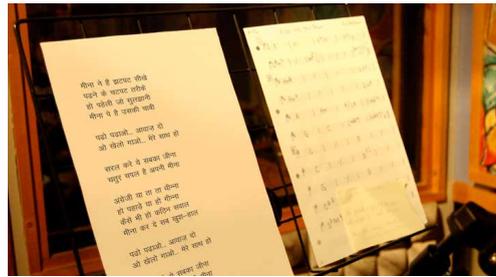
Meena Radio

cruises through India's heartland



Capturing nuggets of Meena Radio's journey across seven states





Capturing the Airwaves

Meena Radio's Journey from 2010-2014

Before the pig tailed, impish and agile character of Meena through the Meena Radio series came into the lives of students in seven Indian states, select pathbreaking innovations in communication set the stage for her friendly entry. The Meena Communication Initiative (MCI), launched in the 1990's, addressed gender imbalances in rural communities, emerging as a major child rights intervention campaign in South Asia. Supported by UNICEF in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal, its impact was evident. Altering perceptions and behaviours that hampered survival, protection and development of girls, it demonstrated how stories from daily lives could be brought alive through print, audio and video formats, creating a strong emotional appeal with equally powerful messaging.

Strategic timing of Meena's birth

Coinciding with the decade of the Girl Child by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Meena entered the world of young girls with the purpose of addressing discrimination and promoting their participation in development.

Meena, a character, audiences immediately fell in love with

Playful and sharp, the 9-year old Meena along with her brother Raju and pet parrot *Mithu* have become familiar characters in the lives and homes where Meena Radio is aired. Her stories beamed on radio sets have become conversation points as girls, their parents, families and teachers have got drawn into animated discussion. Her interactions at home, in school and neighbourhood appear familiar to them. Even her trials and tribulations are those that any of the girls in the audience could have experienced. As listeners warmed up to Meena, her spunkiness, courage and victories began to guide them, and before they knew it, she became their guide and role model.

Daily episodes drew parallels with real lives. Her stories questioned stereotypes and mindsets. Ensuing dialogues drew attention to societal mores, assessing safety nets and raising concerns on exploitation and abuse. They began to inspire change, as issues related to gender discrimination, sanitation, child marriage, school drop-outs and nutrition emerged from the closet and began to be viewed from the lens of the girls and their lives.

Meena Radio set in the powerful 'Entertainment-Education' format

As an innovative entertainment-education (EE) radio series, Meena ki Duniya (Meena's world), harnesses potential of mass and interpersonal communication to foster dialogue and discussion. Expanding MCI audio-visual content to radio format, it has become a trigger for action for initiatives like Meena Manch (Platform) and Meena Cabinet. Envisioned by UNICEF with *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, it was first piloted in Uttar Pradesh and has since taken flight, moving from state to state, motivating children to adopt right behaviours, empowering young girls to question and encouraging boys to partner and support them.



"I love Meena because she can achieve anything. This is one school programme that reaches children directly and its impact is visible, be it in increasing school enrolment, constructing toilets in the house, delaying marriage or negotiating for equal rights."

Usha Rani, State Project Director, Andhra Pradesh



Uttar Pradesh



Andhra Pradesh



Maharashtra



Karnataka



Chhattisgarh



Odisha



Madhya Pradesh

Behind the Scenes

Effectiveness studies and a baseline-midline comparison in Uttar Pradesh generated efficacy of Meena Radio, leading to its replication in other states.



Encapsulating information in a fun and interactive way: Meena Radio's content, story line and messaging has an educational feel. Its interactivity hinges on the magazine format using drama, music, theatrics, sound and games to make it entertaining.

Valuable inputs from research guide production process: Formative research, secondary review of materials and field study guided research team on crafting the script, highlighting barriers and motivators. Findings from pre-tests confirmed that children loved the episodes which reflected their own likes, dislikes and experiences. The game and interactivity component was engaging since it was central to the story line and narrative.

Creating a winning script: Five content workshops were held, orienting writers to draw a content map for all 200 episodes. Ideation sessions helped them brainstorm and strategize with creative and production teams. Meena Radio Teachers' Guidebook & Ready Reckoner served as a guidance document and a familiarisation visit to Lalitpur provided on-ground insights.

Production gets under way: Findings from formative, baseline, effectiveness studies and pre-test studies were used to refine treatment, content and individual episodes. Sound effects were carefully selected to stimulate listeners' visual imagination, matching mood and setting.

Validating content and presentation through peer review prior to production: An external agency was hired to pre-test select episodes. Feedback on characters' voices, format and messaging was sought and used.

Ready to go on air: Prior to airing, teachers got trained, set the stage, got students ready and positioned the radio. Post broadcast, they played a critical role of facilitating discussions.

Scripting a Story of Hope, Change and Promise

Meena on radio and teacher in classroom make for animated dialogue and discussion: The series engage children through teacher-aided discussion using drama, music, games and short story plots. These social themes are familiar to the rural audiences. Teachers are trained to facilitate discussion and reinforce messages. Post broadcast, students are encouraged to take learnings to their families and communities. Little wonder that schools buzz with excitement on days Meena Radio is aired; attendance is better and so is attentiveness of students.

Content was king: Stories had a strong appeal since they connected with listeners and their lives. Few habits and attitudes of the locals were studied, finding resonates through the different characters.

Interaction with communities helped identify real issues of concern: Knowing financial constraints kept parents from sending children to school, helped script writers to build it into their episodes. Finding high incidence of *gutka* chewing amongst boys, led to this aspect being woven into some stories.

Modifying details based on pre-test findings: Slowing down the title track, adding more songs and riddles, eliminating dialogues that ridiculed children were some of the changes made, based on valuable feedback.

Contextualising episodes with strong messaging: Stories had a local flavour with incidents that could be easily identified. In *Shart* (the bet) a local lad realises that girls are no less than boys in undertaking sporting activity. They can climb trees and show their athletic skills too and must therefore be allowed to participate in games. "*Nayedost*" (new friends) showed how a polio afflicted boy is accepted when his class mates stop making fun of him, appreciating his talent of poetry.

"Students of primary school would rush to upper primary school to grab good seats before the broadcast. Excitement in the air was palpable with pin drop silence – something we could not achieve during our regular classes!"

Satyamwada,
Assistant Teacher,
Bhewarkarmanpur
Primary School,
Mirzapur



Strong audience connect

Each of the states modified the title of the radio series to make it relevant to its audience. In Maharashtra, Meena Radio was called 'Meena Chi Duniya' while in Andhra Pradesh, it was referred to as 'Meena Prapancham.'

What did Meena Manches do?

They mobilised families to ensure age appropriate enrolment, attendance and completion of primary education. Post broadcast, they mobilised social action prompted by the radio show.



Uttar Pradesh

The Journey Begins....

Meena Radio series was launched as a pilot in Lucknow and Lalitpur districts of Uttar Pradesh in March 2010, before being broadcast across the state. It then expanded to Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. Pre-launch activities in each of the states included advocacy with state governments, exposure visits to Uttar Pradesh, constitution of core groups, holding planning meetings, conducting baseline studies, re-versioning Hindi episodes in local languages, printing IEC materials and procuring radio sets for broadcast and training teachers.

Uttar Pradesh pilots the initiative and leads the way

Uttar Pradesh was the first state where Meena ki Duniya was broadcast on All India Radio¹. The State Education Department which already had more than 35,000 girls groups called Meena Manches in upper primary schools, got a boost with the Pilot. Formative and Baseline studies provided valuable inputs in shaping the design and implementation plan. Collaborating with State Department of Education in a 130-episode broadcast in 2010, it reached children in the 11-14 age group from grades VI to VIII. Each episode was based on themes of child rights, child protection, child-friendly schools, gender, life skills, health and hygiene.

Dateline for Uttar Pradesh

- ❑ Formative Study, October 2009
- ❑ Baseline Study, March 2010
- ❑ Pilot launched in Lucknow and Lalitpur, 8th March, 2010
- ❑ Project expanded to Allahabad, Varanasi, Jaunpur, Mirzapur, Bhadohi, Sonebhadra & Moradabad, July 2010

Reach data

- ❑ Outreach during Pilot phase: 948 schools, 2433 teachers & 99353 students
- ❑ Since July 2010, reach expanded to 5457 schools, 12566 teachers and nearly, 50,000 students
- ❑ In 2011-12, coverage extended to 746 KGBVs with around 70,000 girls
- ❑ In 2013-14, coverage extended to 114,904 primary schools and 52716 upper primary schools, reaching 43,19,362 teachers and around 2.9 crore children

¹ India's national public radio broadcaster

What changed after listening to Meena

Meena Radio Effectiveness Study Rounds 1 & 2 conducted in Upper Primary Schools of UP in 2011 measured changes from baseline to end line. It showed marked change in knowledge, attitudes and practices/actions on themes that were taken up. Not only did the radio programme infuse knowledge, prompting discussion/reflection amongst the audience but also assessed effectiveness of means through which the messages were disseminated.



Earning accolades among one and all

Usha and Asma, students of Class VIII, Varanasi convinced their parents to postpone their marriage and allow them to go for higher studies.

Karishma Maurya of class VIII of KGBV Deegh, Bhadohi, was thrilled to find her spoken skills in Hindi and English language showing marked improvement.

Manu Saron of class VII of KGBV Deegh, Bhadohi, reported installing garbage bins in his home and ensuring that the refuse be disposed off daily in a designated pit in the village.

Anilesh of class III of PS South Malaka, Nagar Kshetra, Allahabad said he now bathed daily.

Raj Kumar of Class V of PS Dhoorpur, Jasra, Allahabad was happy that he had been able to teach his mother to write her name.

Kamla Devi, Principal, Kanya Poorv Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Varanasi, felt that just the way mid-day meal was food for the body, Meena Ki Duniya was food for the mind and soul.

Key Findings of Effectiveness Study in 2011

- ❑ 94% students recalled at least one message
- ❑ 78% reported new information gain
- ❑ 69% took positive action after listening to the episodes

Key Findings at End line in 2012

- ❑ As against 22% students having high self esteem during baseline, endline showed an increase to 43%
- ❑ % of students having knowledge of proper steps of handwashing increased from 87% to 95.10%
- ❑ Knowledge of birth registration nearly doubled from 26.40% to 54.20%
- ❑ Awareness on ORS to be given during diarrhoea increased from 43.60% to 69.50%



In Andhra Pradesh, perceptions change and there is rise in 'Copy Effect'

Launched on 5th September, 2012 in 23 districts of combined Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the series reached approximately 13 million children in 19,000 schools. Majority of the students said that their world view had changed with the information they received. Many turned into active promoters of healthy behaviours in their communities, motivating others to join them in what became 'mini movements of change'.



-  Reached 92% children
-  98% reported post session discussion
-  87% found it to be of educational value
-  97% recalled at least one message
-  98% reported new information gain
-  93% reported extending messages among peers

Vikas, student of Class VI, Medak District, after listening to Meena, found himself becoming more empathetic towards students who were physically challenged, standing up for them and forbidding those who teased and bullied them.



Maharashtra sees emergence of fearless, outspoken young voices

Meena Radio was piloted in Aurangabad, Jalna and Parbhani districts in 2012-13. Meena Raju Manch and Meena Radio were proposed as part of a state-level strategy under the Girls' Education Innovation programme budget of SSA. Currently the programme is being implemented in all 24,775 upper primary schools of the state, reaching a total of 59,60,254 students.

The 110 Master Trainers at state level and 4470 teachers and House Masters at district level who were trained, reported sea change in the thought processes, attitudes and behaviours, especially in conservative pockets. Boys and girls began to articulate their feelings and views on difficult topics such as child marriage and child rights, talking of legal and social implications to village elders and family members in ways they could earlier never muster courage for.

For Rishikesh, a student of Class VII, Somthana Government school in Jalna district, overcoming his awkwardness around girls and developing easy friendship with them was a pleasant surprise.



Bihar's health communication strategy gets shaped with Meena Radio

Launched on 7th April 2013, Meena Radio is currently narrow-casted in 45 middle schools of Rajapakar block of Vaishali district, 57 in K. Nagar block of Purnea district and 36 in Amas block of Gaya district, reaching 245 teachers and 20,005 students. The success of the programme contributed to finalisation of the state preventive communication strategy, '*Das kadum-swasthrahengey hum*' (10 steps towards a healthy life) incorporating Meena Radio in a comprehensive communication toolkit for adolescent girls. This was an official stamp of approval, getting endorsed by the state government and being shared with key departments.

Karnataka's teacher community appreciates training via satellite

Meena's arrival in Karnataka was heralded with much enthusiasm and excitement. In less than two years since its launch in 2013, it succeeded in reaching a staggering 1.75 million children in 22,000 schools across 30 districts. The radio slots of 30 minutes each carried two episodes on a specific topic. Supported by the Education department under their Distance Education programme, the series penetrated minds of students, teachers and parents in ways that made them think, question and assess their current scenarios and make commitments that promised better health and lives, based on the guidance that came from Meena.

Government of Karnataka's allocation of resources for broadcast and training of teachers, using satellite communication via SATCOM saw nearly 22,000 teachers benefitting from the training which minimised generational loss of cascade, since instructions were all via satellite. Block Resource Persons (BRPs) were available as facilitators beaming messages and instructions to teachers who received the programme in the comfort of their own classrooms.



Chandrakeshwar Kumar, Vikas Mitra from Bakarpur Panchayat requested episodes to be made available as communication tool during village meetings. Demand had been generated amongst women, Panchayati Raj Institution members and other village groups, thanks to excited feedback of school children.



A strong Meena wave sweeps Madhya Pradesh

In Madhya Pradesh, the Meena Radio programme was launched in October, 2012 with the aim of taking its cross-cutting themes to students by incorporating it into their school curriculum. Very quickly the programme spread its wings and reached a record 50 lakh children in about 29,000 government upper primary schools. Government support for broadcast and other activities ensured no break in the programme. Schools reported marked improvement in students' skills of problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, communication, negotiation, coping with emotions and stress, self assessment, conflict resolution and relationship skills like empathy.

"We like Meena ki Duniya, as we get to learn about many interesting issues like – taking care of our health and information about sports"



Ajay Bhati from Middle School Bordia Kalan, Neemuch district

Kavita Sahu, Class VII, Poorva Madhyamik Abhayasshala, Raipur says that everyone loves Meena because she is clever and witty. She asks: "If Meena can carve an identity for herself with all the good work she does, why can't I follow in her footsteps?". Her friend Geeta Sahu echoes her sentiments, saying: "Meena's wise and helpful demeanour has inspired me to be a do-gooder. Like Meena, I too want to be of help to those around me."

"Every word that Meena utters is lapped up. Many girls say they want to be like Meena. They want to clean their surroundings, guide their mothers on giving them a nutritious diet and do everything she does!."

Ranjan Kumar Pati, Teacher Facilitator at Kathamana KGBV

Chhattisgarh experiences many "I want to be Meena" moments

Launched on 3rd February, 2014 in Raipur, currently the radio series is narrow-casted in 30,000 upper primary schools, reaching 15,00,000 students. As many as 45,000 school teachers have been trained. Phase 1 (Feb to March 14) was the trial period, following which baseline activity was planned for July in Phase II.

Odisha finds Meena episodes interesting and the discussions even more so

In Odisha, every afternoon from 2.45 pm to 3.00 pm, as many as 50,000 students get hooked to the radio sets in their classroom. Getting the highest political support, the Chief Minister launched the Meena Radio programme in the presence of senior officials like the Minister, School and Mass Education on September, 2014. Integrated into the SSA teachers training programme to ensure sustainability and ownership of the government, the plan is to reach all 30 districts with training planned in a phased manner.

While an audience research study will assess Meena's impact on improved indicators for school attendance and retention, anecdotal evidence and reports from field visits already show a sea change in teachers and students' attitudes and habits.

The State Training of Trainers' post training evaluation indicated participants finding sessions on role play most useful. They were confident of using this methodology in the real classroom session. Field reports also showed excitement amongst children, especially during 'community-listening' when they sat together with teachers and listened to a story.



Making Schools a Happy Place to Be

- ❑ Children become peer motivators, facilitating enrolment, attendance and retention
- ❑ Create demand for radio series among their parents and home communities
- ❑ Help teachers/facilitators get new ideas to engage with students, making classrooms vibrant
- ❑ Introduce repertoire of songs with simple tunes for use in morning assembly
- ❑ Translate the appeal and message of stories into role plays

What lies ahead.....

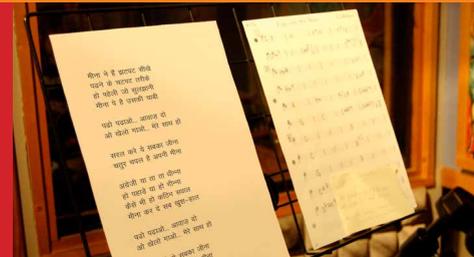
Meena Radio's success as a powerful social and behaviour change communication approach is endorsed by the very people it is meant for. Engaging children, partnering with teachers and motivating parents to discuss, reinforce and observe messages, it will gain more traction in states it has a presence in, getting refined as rest of the country embraces it, through radio stations and school curricula. It once again shows how an innovative concept can bring alive a fictional character, making it larger than life and inspiring entire communities to adopt healthy behaviours and lifestyles.

Meena Radio evaluation results for three States (Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh) is expected by mid 2015. The same will be used to advocate for the future expansion of the programme.



“The radio programme tapped into all possible audio elements, making it hugely entertaining and gripping, so much so that it acquired a graphic, visual experience too.”

Teachers and Principals in most schools where Meena Radio was introduced





विद्यालय के होते अच्छे, साफ स्वच्छ जिनमें बच्चों,

आपका बच्चा भी पढ़े और खेलें।

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