The Annual Report 2016

People’s Power Collective
Participatory Ownership Empowerment Radio

The Annual Report 2016
Real grassroots change takes place when a community rises up in awareness to act together for common goals. **Community Radio** \{CR\}, the participatory avatar of radio, can be a powerful catalyst for such positive behavioural, social and financial changes in the community. CR is accessible, cost-effective, and is based on open and equal participation and community ownership. True Community Radio is managed and run by the community it serves. It celebrates local languages and preserves the community's cultural heritage. Through programming that is relevant and timely, it effectively addresses issues, from education, nutrition, drinking water and sanitation, and women's and public health, to livelihoods, disaster management and community well-being.

In India, where around 350 million people are illiterate, 250 million live below the poverty line, 50% of children are undernourished, and 650 million people lack basic sanitation Community Radio \{CR\} has immense potential to empower communities to make their own future.
The Heart of Community Radio

A Glimpse of our CR past

Who we are

The Path to Sustainability

Community Radio is based on trust and rooted in relationships

If you nurture social sustainability, financial sustainability will follow

The change we seek takes many working together

The community does not stand alone, but is connected to the outside world

Stories are how we connect

Every person working at the CR station must feel enriched and experience self-worth through what they do

Stepping into the Future

Community Radio can play a unique life-saving role in disaster management
We began with a dream of enabling a sustainable community radio station in the village of Sena Gadsari in Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand, North India in 2013. Four years on, 300-odd villages in the Mandakini River valley have their own voice in CR Mandakini ki Aawaz 90.8 FM, a radio station that is truly owned, managed and run by and for the community.

If there is one lesson that we have learnt along the way, it is that at the heart of community radio is community. When we began the first baseline survey to understand potential listeners' better we were new to the region and its people. But as we lived and worked amongst the community, welcomed by many with warmth and hospitality, engaged in the common cause of building a robust and relevant radio station, we became partners and formed enduring friendships.

Through countless training sessions and field visits, we spread the message of community radio, its potential to be a source of timely information in the local language, as well as its scope as a tool for empowerment, self expression. At the same time, we worked outside the valley, harnessing institutional support and bringing the power of wider networks of know-how to the aid of the fledgling radio station. Now, as mentors from afar, we bear witness as the radio station thrives, and empowers its community to thrive as well.

The story of MKA is ours too. It is in partnering the community of this valley, and in enabling Mandakini ki Aawaz that we have found our metier and clarified our purpose and approach as People’s Power Collective (PPC).
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# A Glimpse into our CR past

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>The Supreme Court rule that airwaves are public property.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>After a short training initiated by a local NGO in Uttarakhand, Manvendra Negi and Devilal Bharti register a community-based organisation, Mandakini ki Aawaz Kalyan Sewa Samithi, with a view to a future CR station.</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Govt of India revises its policy to allow NGOs and CBOs to apply for licences to run community radio stations.</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>After working at the BBC, Saritha Thomas joins the School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE) to pursue her dream of helping communities set up radio stations in rural India. SSE supports individuals to establish new charities, social enterprises and social businesses by developing the individual entrepreneur and their organisation. Saritha won a SSE scholarship in 2009-10 and it is at the SSE London that the idea of PPC was born.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>With support from Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Saritha Thomas begins a field study to assess the challenges and opportunities for CR in India. Sustainability, especially at the early stage of a CR station, emerges as a key challenge. Hand-holding, capacity building and donor support emerge as important needs.</td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>Saritha Thomas meets Manvendra Negi at a CR conference in Bangalore and a partnership is born.</td>
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<td>June 2013</td>
<td>People's Power Collective is established as a charitable trust.</td>
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<td>June 2013</td>
<td>PPC begins the partnership with MKA with a baseline survey and listenership survey.</td>
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<td>June 2013</td>
<td>People’s Power Collective begins training and capacity building with Mandakini ki Aawaz.</td>
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<td>June 2013</td>
<td>Devastating floods in Uttarakhand bring life to a standstill. All communications are down. If only the community radio station was already up and running! PPC coordinates networks to send relief supplies, and begins work on CR as a tool for disaster management. The disaster coincided with the peak tourist and pilgrimage season. As per the state Government’s report on 09 May 2014, a total of 169 people were confirmed dead and 4,021 people were reported missing.</td>
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Sept 2013 onwards

PPC conducts on-the-job training programmes and field outreach visits to 35 villages. In the aftermath of the disaster, PPC-MKA narrowcasts people’s stories, as the station does not have a licence to broadcast as yet.

PPC is invited by the Government of Uttarakhand to share experiences on the ground during the 2013 disaster, at meetings of stakeholders.

September 2014

CR Mandakini Ki Aawaz 90.8FM is launched. One of the first CR stations in India to launch with a live broadcast!

May 2015

A disaster-resilient Community Radio studio built by PPC in collaboration with architect Didi Contractor is inaugurated at village Sena Gadsari, Rudraprayag district, Uttarakhand. The construction utilised locally available materials such as river sand and the mud excavated during digging of the foundation. It also employed stone masonry, traditionally practised in the region.

The June 2013 Kedarnath floods and landslides in Uttarakhand had Team PPC and our partners at Mandakini ki Aawaz working on the ground, interacting with local community members, district administration, emergency and relief agencies and NGOs. All of us were working on rescue and relief. The gap we collectively felt most acutely was that of timely and relevant information in the local language Garhwali or Hindi. Circumstances were changing by the minute and without connectivity and information flow, we found ourselves frustrated and helpless, and many of our efforts wasted.
“Radio could be the most wonderful public communication tool imaginable...if it were capable of not only transmitting but of receiving, of making the listener not only hear but also speak.”
- Bertolt Brecht

living amidst the community collaboration learning by doing CR embedded in local life participatory approach

Who we are

While internet, television and film dominate the urban ICT landscape of the 21st century, radio has an unmatched power to reach communities that are either geographically remote or simply far removed from the considerations of mainstream media. In media-dark regions where connectivity is sparse and literacy is poor and there are many parts of the country that fall under this category, radio, especially Community Radio presents a golden opportunity. According to UNESCO, “As radio continues to evolve in the digital age, it remains the medium that reaches the widest audience worldwide”. It is radio that can serve communities in their own language. Community Radio, owned and run by and for the community, further democratizes media by disseminating content that is local and relevant.

People’s Power Collective (PPC) is a registered public charitable trust committed to enabling communities to adopt Community Radio as a tool for empowerment through information, communication, and entertainment. PPC’s approach to training and capacity building is rooted in a holistic view of Community Radio embedded in the community. If Community Radio has to become a tool for transformation, it is not enough to impart technical radio training to its members, but also necessary to enable an environment of exchange and sharing, the acquisition of life skills and soft skills, fostering experience-based learning, all the while keeping the focus on the community’s needs and issues. It is also necessary to make members aware of the possibilities offered by Community Radio for positive change. Capacity building must be accompanied by institution building.

Our model for training and capacity building takes a non-hierarchical participatory approach that relies on everyday exchange and sharing over time. Members of PPC embed themselves in the community, residing with its members over an 18-month period. In living and working along with the community, PPC enables members to develop capacities and builds strong bonds of trust. We believe that this intensive time, commitment, and bottom-up approach, is essential to establish healthy roots in the community, and enable long-term social and financial sustainability of a CR station. The right local partner organisation and other grassroots collaborators who share a common vision are also vital to making this possible.

PPC has a team of dedicated trustees including Saritha Thomas (Founder), Vinita Suryanarayan and Ramaswamy Narayanan, as well as valuable advisors, Joeyta Bose, Christina Noble, Neil Curry and Uzma Hamid-Dizier. Arati Gupta has joined the board from 2017.
The Path to Sustainability

With MKA now established and well-entrenched in the community, People’s Power Collective has stepped back from the immersion in everyday life, which characterised the early phase of the project, to assume the role of a mentor.

The focus is now two-pronged, finding ways to deepen and strengthen the relevance of the MKA to ensure its sustainability, and charting a path for PPC for the future in keeping with our core vision. As MKA matures as a Community Radio station, its must deepen its engagement with the community to enable social sustainability, and find ways to be financially sustainable as well.

2016 for People’s Power Collective has been a time to consolidate the learnings from our work with MKA, formalise the plan to build a robust CR-led disaster management network, extend our collaborations and networks to other individuals and institutions, and deepen the process of mentorship with MKA to start looking more closely at issues and connecting them to content experts.

As we take stock of how far we have come as PPC, we must consider where to go next. Our work in Uttarakhand so far has given us not only a grassroots understanding of the region but also networks of collaborations with stakeholders. We have seen the benefits of immersive training and hand-holding and are now consolidating learnings from this model.

How can we now take Community Radio forward to maximise its impact where it is needed most?

How can we replicate the success of MKA among other communities?

How do we leverage our strengths, and how do we proceed to apply the lessons thus learnt?

These questions remain topmost in our minds as we chart our path forward, one that will enable us to sustain our core mission to take CR to communities. As we start a new year, we hope to build on this and realise our vision of CR as a powerful tool for disaster management and a much-needed tool for democracy.

“At Mandakini, we make critical weather announcements every hour, based on information received from the Dehradun Met. Department. When a listener called in to ask if the weather forecast would hold, while he plastered the walls of his home, I was so glad to be able to help. I realised then that the community has grown to think of Mandakini as a helpful friend and trusted advisor.

While earlier we in the team would ask for feedback from each other on how our voice sounded, today I see us focusing on whether we covered all aspects of the issue being reported. Yes we still listen to our voice, but we focus on what that voice is saying now.”

- Poonam Rawat, a resident of Gaon Bhanaj, and Head of Communication at Mandakini Ki Aawaz
Community Radio is based on trust and is rooted in relationships

“For Community Radio to thrive it must be part of the social fabric of the community. It provides a platform for members to know themselves, appreciate their own culture, and have discussions on issues, institutions, policies and social structures. It can inform and empower, bind a diverse people together, and be a force for social and behavioural change. At its core is trust, built over a period of time. Without trust, there can be no relationship, and no Community Radio.

This need for deep trust rooted in a rich web of relationships is also what makes Community Radio, as a tool for development, challenging to replicate quickly and efficiently with success. It is perhaps the reason why it has been neglected as an ICT for development. But while Community Radio demands generous investment of time and understanding, its rewards are unparalleled and its effects on the people it serves are overwhelmingly positive. Not only do individuals benefit and grow by listening to programmes, and participating in them, the community as a whole moves forward with positivity.

“People who didn’t have a platform to air their voices or showcase their talents now do thanks to Mandakini Ki Aawaz! It is making people happy. Isn’t that wonderful?”

- Devial Bharti, a resident of Village Bhanaj, and Head of Field Work at Mandakini Ki Aawaz.

“Community Radio is bringing fresh awareness to our isolated community. Today, our women and children enthusiastically participate in programmes like The Question of the Day; they are able to share their thoughts on the radio, using simple words that we use in daily conversation. This gives me such joy, and makes me want to work harder.”

- Shivanand Nautiyal, a resident of Village Badeth, and a member of the MKA team.
The community that listens together, celebrates together

September 21, 2016

Mandakini ki Aawaz completes two years of broadcasting!

Since the first broadcast on September 21, 2014, this day has been marked by a coming together of people. The second anniversary celebrations carried on through the day with visits from friends, well-wishers, and listeners, each bringing tokens of food and vegetable produce to mark the occasion - all through a live broadcast. They were welcomed with hot cups of tea. The outpouring of affection and support for the radio station confirmed that MKA has become an inextricable part of the people of this area.

The Chai-Pani box

A sign of the abundant goodwill at the station that team MKA, with the support of PPC, has garnered, is the chai-pani donation box - regularly topped up by community members and other visitors to the station. Proceeds from this collection box successfully fund the tea-and-biscuits that fuel members of the station and are offered to drop-in visitors through the year.

We're listening too!

Taking the pulse of listeners is paramount to making programming that is relevant to their needs. PPC surveyed 280 listeners of MKA in a listenership survey conducted at the beginning of the year. The results confirmed that our listeners rely on MKA as the foremost source of information on weather, market prices, government, health and local issues. This, and other feedback from the survey, will help PPC guide MKA to create more relevant programming in the future.

MKA Facts

Location: Sena Gadsari, Rudraprayag District, Uttarakhand, India
Reach: 318 villages of 250,000-300,000 people in Rudraprayag District, and parts of Chamoli, Pauri and Tehri-Garwal.
Broadcasts 8 hours on weekdays and 11 1/2 hours on Sundays

In this third year of broadcasting, CR MKA 90.8FM is raising 100% of its operating costs, a first for a small, NGO-backed CR station in India. This is being done through on-air awareness-building campaigns with NGOs and local government, via local advertisements, individual donations, and membership fees.

This multi-pronged approach to financial sustainability has been seeded by PPC. PPC has provided training to MKA, followed up on the licence process, sourced equipment, set up the station, constructed the radio station, connected MKA to stakeholders outside, and advocated for MKA among national CR forums. For the first 18 months, all operating costs were borne by PPC so that MKA members could focus on training and fieldwork.
Community Radio must be deeply rooted in the community it serves. Members of the community must see value in its offerings, and feel a sense of collective ownership over it. The greater its relevance to the people it serves, the greater the opportunities for it to find financial support. The radio station’s social sustainability is ensured through continued interactions, quality programmes and strength-based collaborations.

I advertised my juice business via community radio Mandakini. After the ad, I received so many calls placing orders; this never happened earlier. In fact, when I went to one village to sell my juice, the demand was more than I could supply! I’m considering making more juice next season.”

- Rajendra Negi, an avid listener, and resident of village Bhiri

If you nurture social sustainability, financial sustainability will follow

We at PPC are committed to a collaborative approach. We believe in the power of many working together. While on our own we may be held back by our limitations, together, we can overcome. The change we seek— transformation and empowerment of communities through Community Radio— cannot be effected by a few people in isolation. The only way forward is through active partnership, ongoing collaboration, and a ever-evolving shared understanding. We have a strong culture of collaboration both within our organisation and with volunteers and well-wishers. Most importantly, we have maintained our relationship with the community-based organisation as one based on mutual respect with both partners being equal.

True exchange goes both ways
From our own experience we have realised that a characteristic of true exchange is that it is two-way and personal. Successful partnerships enable both parties to imbibe value from the interaction. When the exchange is meaningful at an individual level it translates to value at an organisational level as well.

Teamwork with compassion and positivity
An honest appraisal and acceptance of both strengths and weaknesses, on both sides, is always coupled with positivity to draw on each other's strengths for the greater goal.

Immersive collaboration
Over the past three years, PPC has lived and worked with Mandakini ki Aawaz. The immersive collaboration has led to a deep sharing of values, ideas and approaches that would not have been possible through an external collaboration. In living with members of the community and experiencing life in the community, PPC has been able to help the radio station embed itself within the community.

"The MKA team and PPC team have sat together and worked together, understood each other's challenges and helped each other. We've worked on each other's ideas and collectively shown that it is possible to establish a community radio station in such a remote area, a task that is very hard and made more difficult by the circumstances. The most important thing about this collaboration is that we have learnt through it, and moved forward together.”

- Manvendra Negi, Founder, and Station Head, Mandakini Ki Aawaz

"In the past, we had to go door-to-door, spreading awareness about public health risks. Today, thanks to community radio Mandakini, lacs of people have access to crucial information in a matter of seconds: saving lives, time and energy.”

- Dr. Geeta, a Government doctor, avid follower of CR MKA 90.8FM and resident of Agastyamuni town.

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Mentoring Visits to team MKA

January-December 2016

In our current remote mentoring phase we have made several trips to MKA this year during which time we have worked closely with our friends and partner at MKA. These visits have only strengthened our confidence in our model and approach. On visits to Dehradun we have interacted with, and forged networks with Government of Uttarakhand, Plan Uttarakhand, and People’s Science Institute. The interactions with PLAN Uttarakhand, resulted in MKA becoming part of PLAN India’s World Girls Day Campaign.

Facilitating financial support from far and wide

January 2016

We submitted our application for a licence under the Foreign Contribution Regulations Act (FCRA), and this is in process, taking us one step closer to being able to accept support from our well-wishers, wherever they may be!

“I like Mandakini Ki Aawaz very much. I once heard a radio natak (play) on Mandakini Ki Aawaz, about alcohol addiction. It made me think deeply about the way in which we should live and run our homes; I learned a lot from that play.”

- Mathbar Bisht, an avid listener of CR MKA 90.8FM, and resident of Village Neni Pondar. Mathbar went on to quit alcohol and with the money that he saves each month, he makes a journey to the radio station, one he calls his monthly pilgrimage.

“Via Mandakini Ki Aawaz, the women of our community have a platform to share their thoughts. Before, we women used to be nervous and shy; now, through this radio station, whether we are men or women, we have our own medium that has given us all a voice.”

- Poonam Badiyari, a resident of Village Kyoonja, and a member of the MKA team.
The community does not stand alone, but is connected to the outside world

In serving communities bound by geography, Community Radio enriches connections within. But these communities are also part of networks that go beyond. This understanding of community as a live part of larger networks leads to another belief the importance of—communication across networks, and the power of the story to inspire.

Story telling is a fundamental part of PPC. Just as PPC has drawn on, and continues to draw on the experiences of other organisations engaged in achieving social change for inspiration, we believe that our story too, can make a difference to others. A single story can have varying effects; each person finds their own hook. The more we share, the more people are drawn to find out about our work.

Drawn by the story, individuals from far-flung contexts students, investors, city-dwellers have become stakeholders in their own way. Sharing our story calls for transparency in revealing our own internal processes, vision, vulnerabilities, and challenges. But in the process we also show the community as it transforms itself. And so we believe that sharing the journey is nearly as important as the journey itself.

“Mom decided it was time for a reality check. ‘Go see how the rest of India lives’… she would often tell my bro and me… So this was our trip to Uttarakhand to experience it for ourselves.

What I loved about the village? Chota B the buffalo, Misha the dog, Sundari and her kittens… Loved climbing the mountain… Loved the radio station when I was on air…”

- City dweller 6-year-old Aashna visited MKA in Sena Gadsari with her mother and brother.
Visitors welcome!

Students' study tour at MKA
Mandakini Ki Aawaz hosted students of the Social Communications and Media course at Sophia Polytechnic, Mumbai who visited the radio station at Sena Gadsari as part of a study tour. Students made short videos and took photographs. The school made a donation to MKA. It was particularly significant as Saritha Thomas, founder of PPC, was an alumni of the same course and college. Life came full circle!

A window to our world: a new website
Australian company Engagement HQ, (bangthetable.com), experts at community engagement online, offered their interactive platform pro bono to develop our website, www.peoplespower-co.org into a vibrant storytelling platform. Once ready, the new website design will make it easier for people to follow PPC and the journey with making CR a part of disaster management in Uttarakhand.

Mumbai network-building meetings
PPC met representatives of a number of organisations in Mumbai including Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, Samhita Social Ventures, Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Jamsetji Tata Disaster Management Department and TISS. The objective was to share our work so far and our plans for the future, and garner both moral and financial support.

Sharing PPC's experiences
Saritha Thomas, the only Indian alumni of the School of Social Entrepreneurs, London shared her story with the new cohort at the launch of SSE-India. In Sept 2016, she was a guest on the Ink Hour on Radio One 94.3.

A visit from our funders
Shishir Ranjan Das and Simit Bhagat of Tata Trust, made their second evaluation visit to MKA in Dec 2015. Over two days, they spent time with team MKA and visited the community in the field. As an outcome of this visit, PPC was invited to submit a phase II proposal for this collaboration to continue. We hope to roll out the same in 2017.

Sharing learnings of CR in Karnataka
We accompanied a group led by members of the St. Mark’s Cathedral, Bangalore to the village Hunsahalli in Kanakapura district of Karnataka. We shared our learnings with CR and discussed possibilities of using CR to deal with human-animal conflicts that often take place in this area.

Partnership with Crisil Foundation
In Sep 2016, PPC entered into an agreement with CRISIL Foundation to promote financial literacy through CR MKA 90.8FM, using programming content that is relevant and engaging. The process highlights PPC’s role and approach - to facilitate collaborations and partnerships that use the potential of a powerful medium like CR for community development.

A Radio of Our Own, a film on MKA
Shweta Radhakrishnan, an independent filmmaker and former PPC team member who lived in the village and worked at MKA during the 18-month period of immersive training and capacity building, won a grant from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences to document the radio station and its significance in the valley. The film was screened to audiences at venues in Bangalore including Indian Institute for Habitats and Settlements (IIHS) and NUMA. Watch a trailer of the film at...
Stories are how we connect

Power of Connections

The proactive follow up of MKA members literally brought light into one couple’s lives! After visiting a mela at Dandgikhor where they made a few recordings and conducted interviews, Manvendra Singh Negi and Devi Lal Bharti spent the night at the home of Purshotham Semwal and his wife Eaekadasi Devi. They noticed that there was no power supply even though there was an electricity pole close to the house. Semwal explained that although electricity had come to the village seven years ago, the connection to the grid stopped 500 metres from his house. His pleas to the Electricity Board since had fallen on deaf years. Negi and Devi Lal returned with recordings of Semwal’s plight. The next day they made calls from the MKA radio station to the electricity boards in Rudraprayag, Ukhimath and Guptkashi. Semwal was asked to take documents to the Guptakashi board immediately. Within a week, the connection was complete. Semwal thanked MKA for their efforts live on air.

The writer of songs

Anita Chaudry was a familiar face in her village Balsundi. She was known as the woman with all the details of all the families in the village. The MKA team went to the village for a field visit, met her and recorded one of her own written songs. The song was about MKA and how the radio station has given people something to look forward to every day. Her song was broadcast and became an instant hit! Since then she has been writing and singing her own songs, which listeners request often. She placed 6th in MKA’s top 10 requests for the year with people from 330 villages requesting her songs.

Danilal Tamta who quit drinking and overcame paralysis

Dangi Pathalidhar is where Danilal Tamta and his wife reside. An avid listener of MKA, he tunes in every morning to listen to the Bhajan program and keeps his radio handy throughout the day. Danilal was once an alcoholic but after listening to the programs on MKA about alcoholism he visited a doctor who asked him to gradually reduce his alcohol intake. A week after he quit drinking, he collapsed outside his house and was rushed by his family to the Doon hospital in Dehradun. He awoke three days later with the right side of his body paralyzed. He told his wife that while his was unconscious all he dreamed of was MKA’s programmes. It took him three months in hospital and many more months at home to recover. During this time, he feels listening to MKA helped him overcome paralysis. He believes that the station is divinely blessed. On his first visit to the studio he brought food and vegetables for the members of the radio station. Whenever the MKA team visits his village or a village near his home, he walks to the venue with his radio in hand so that he doesn’t have to miss the broadcast while carrying fruits, vegetables and food and for the team.
Community Radio is at heart, a warm people-centric experience. It is about bringing people together, fostering understanding, creating a steady source of information, knowledge and friendly support. But as with any endeavour, the process of enabling the radio station, setting it up and carrying out everyday operations, can be challenging. When battling uncertainties on the ground, it is easy to forget the larger vision.

But it is the ‘joy of doing’ that elevates work and produces startling results. And so at PPC the notion of a ‘happiness quotient’ is real, and is one that is taken seriously. A question asked at quarterly appraisals at the radio station is “Are you happy doing what you are doing?” We believe that every individual engaged in work with the radio station must feel enriched and experience self-worth in the process. This is essential to PPC’s vision. The road map of the collective, is made up of individual road maps. Every member must gain, grow, and find new roots, and as they do, so will the community.

With the focus of PPC’s efforts towards MKA on mentoring, we hope to institutionalise the mentoring process by bringing in mentors from within and outside the community who can enable and enrich members both individually and collectively.

Uma-ji goes to London

“Sarithaji from PPC and I from MKA travelled to London. I had been to Delhi and some places in India so I had an inkling of how to present myself at meetings and interact with people, but I was still nervous about going out of the country, and that too in a plane. For one there was language, I was worried that everybody would only speak English. I was also worried about how much support I would get from Sarithaji but she was there when I needed her. As for the flight, I really enjoyed it! We went to Desi Radio in Southall and it was full of women, and they were speaking in Hindi, so it was comforting. We went around their station, interviewed them and documented their stories. I felt that even in London there were certain constraints on women as there are here.

- Uma Negi, Content Head, MKA
Stepping into the future

2016 been a pivotal year for PPC in terms of orienting ourselves for the future. A key component of our work has been setting out the agenda for the next few years. To this end, we have worked on several proposals to take our work forward. With CRISIL Foundation we are collaborating to promote financial literacy through MKA. This year we also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Uttarakhand to work towards the establishment of a sustainable Community Radio-led Multi stakeholder Network for Disaster Management in the state, especially among the state’s rural and isolated communities.

With vast possibilities for work ahead of us, we are also in the process of raising funds. To this end, we have made appeals for financial support to various institutional donors and corporate foundations.
Community Radio can play a unique, life-saving role in disaster management

Over the last 20 years, India has faced numerous disasters (at least eight mammoth ones) in different parts of the country. While the causes have been varied, there is no denying that the impact of any disaster can certainly be mitigated by timely, reliable information in the local language.

First-hand experience of the Uttarakhand floods when we began our work in the area, left a deep impression. We witnessed how the absence of timely and relevant information in the local language was acutely experienced by people in this mountainous region. This areas are characterised by uneven connectivity (telephone and internet) through the year. During a natural disaster, they are the first to fail. In such conditions, community radio in the local language can offer a lifeline.

We at PPC believe that CR can play a critical and central role in disaster management, across this mountainous state of North India, as well as the rest of the country. To this end, we have reached out to the Uttarakhand government. Having seen our work so far, and been convinced of the value of CR in this region, the Government of Uttarakhand has entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with PPC to work towards the setting up of a Community Radio-led Multi-stakeholder disaster management network in the state by strengthening existing CR stations and setting up new ones. This, we see, as a step forward for CR, most importantly for the communities who will benefit from this valuable, resilient tool and medium in times of need.

“There are too many such disasters in India and it is time we together make a case for the unparalleled value of community radio in disaster management.”
- Supriya Sahu, Former Joint Secretary, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, speaking to PPC during the June 2013 Uttarakhand Disaster

“The value of this information in the local language, at the exact same time that information was needed, was sorely missed.”
- Saritha Thomas on the situation during the June 2013 floods in Uttarakhand

FAQs

Why should CR broadcast all year around, if it is meant to serve most during natural disasters?
A full-time CR station is so much more than simply a tool for disaster management as we have seen with MKA. It provides a platform for the community to work on multiple fronts, from their schools and roads to local jobs and market rates. It enriches lives and builds trust, among people and with the station. During a disaster, a fully functional CR station becomes a lifeline for the community, facilitating live updates from remote areas, and relaying information from villagers, local authorities and rescue and relief groups. In Uttarakhand, a state characterised by difficult terrain, local CR stations, communities and reporters, can become a strong source of information to make rescue and relief focused and impactful.

What is narrowcasting?
Narrowcasting entails playing recorded radio/audio programmes generated by the CR centre at communities events and informal gatherings using a simple device like an mp3 player, mobile phone or a USB to a limited, i.e. ‘narrow’ audience. It allows for immediate feedback that can drive action.

What is studio/radio-in-a-box?
Radio-in-a-box is simply a mobile transmitter, microphone, set of headphones, and a little mixer with batteries, stored in a box. It can be easily transported via aircrafts to reach remote locations and can be set up in a single hour. Radio-in-a-box can convey vital information from the field about relief measures, food, clothing, shelter, for the 30-day period after the disaster, the critical period for disaster relief. It has been used in Indonesia and Japan during natural disasters.
Over the last 20 years, India has faced numerous disasters (at least eight mammoth ones) in different parts of the country. While the causes have been varied, there is no denying that the impact of any disaster can certainly be mitigated by timely, reliable information in the local language.

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“There was no electricity for days on end, mobile networks went off, your security was the people you were with. There was no information. We didn’t know what would happen if we turned a corner. There were chopper drops of relief, but no one knew where, when, how to access it.

The value of this information in the local language, at the exact same time that information was needed, was sorely missed.”

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A Community Radio-led multistakeholder network for Disaster Management

Uttarakhand’s CR stations reach over 2000 villages, 3 towns and have a potential listenership of 11,00,000 people

The network will focus on the risk-prone districts of Uttarkashi, Pithoragarh, Chamoli, Bageshwar and Almora.

PPC will also strengthen overall content, build and sustain participation and listenership, and creatively weave disaster management on CR stations via broadcasting and narrowcasting.

Through the coordinated effort of setting up a Community Radio-led multistakeholder Disaster Management Network PPC hopes to also influence Community Radio Policy in India to cater for CR via studio/radio-in-a-box.

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Notes from Uttarakhand

Merely 20 kms from Chandrapuri, Rudraprayag (where 400 homes have been swept away!), the mood is very low in the village. Though we are located at the top of the hill, and have escaped flooding, the local community has lost more than what one can imagine. Most of the families here have members working as labourers/vendors in the holy city of Kedarnath during the season of religious pilgrimage. The havoc wreaked by the floods has left them with no news about their loved ones!

Our immediate neighbours, a simple Nepali immigrant family have no news of their three adult sons. Their parents have set out on foot this morning, with nothing but a packet of rotis, to hunt for their missing sons, leaving their 9 year old daughter in the care of their pregnant daughter-in-law whose husband is one of those missing.

The phone lines are very weak, and it is hard to reach anyone. There is absolutely no internet access. Relief efforts are slowly getting under way. About 15 minutes from Chandrapuri, in Agastyamuni, the Indian Government has organised air-lifts for the 'yatris' or pilgrims back to the safety of the nearest city.

The roads have all been washed away. We ourselves had a minor scare this week, with the rain water threatening to enter our homes (technically, the home of our host, Manvendra-ji). Along with the locals, we managed to dig out a little make-shift canal from the kachha road, and divert the water into the forest. We have, fortunately, had a brief respite from the rains for the last couple of days. There is just about enough water and food for everyone here. No vegetables/fruits are coming up from the village, but we are managing with whatever can be sourced from the local farms. Our hosts Manvendraji, Uma didi and even little Rishabh, are doing the best they can to keep us safe and secure.

Amidst this calamity however, we are incredibly fortunate to come across real life heroes… it is as if the whole village is very slowly coming together to help one another. They have indeed lost lives and property, but the human spirit still battles on.

-Saritha Thomas

PPC trustees visit Chennai and Cuddalore during the floods

In Nov 2015, coastal Tamil Nadu, received an unprecedented amount of rainfall from the northeast monsoon that resulted in severe flooding in many areas of Chennai, Cuddalore, and Pondicherry. As rescue and relief efforts were underway, an emergency CR station was set up overnight at the Collector’s office in Cuddalore, south of Chennai. PPC trustees visited this first emergency CR radio station, and met with groups working on relief and rehabilitation. We also met Mr Gagandeep Singh Bedi (former Collector of Chennai during the 2004 tsunami) and shared our experiences and learnings in CR and disaster management from Uttarakhand.

Exploring possibilities of CR on Wifi

CR programming over Wifi could potentially reach areas in the shadow of FM signal (a common challenge in the mountains) that are also at a high risk for natural disaster. By supplementing FM CR with CR on Wifi, CR can become a blanket tool for disaster management. PPC has begun exploring this with partners who have domain knowledge of the technology.

Getting to know other CR stations in Uttarakhand, March 2016

Our tour of the six existing fully-operational CR stations in Uttarakhand (other than MKA) was a much-needed exercise in forming relationships, sharing and building trust with others in the same field. We shared PPC-MKA’s story, the challenges and the successes, and got to know first-hand the conditions of each of the other stations in the state. This preliminary tour has yielded information and insights that are sure to be valuable as we build a Community Radio-led multistakeholder Disaster Management Network for Uttarakhand.

Presentation to the Government of Uttarakhand, March 2016

At a presentation to the State Govt., we found receptive bureaucrats and politicians who understood the merits of CR for disaster management. An outcome of this meeting was the Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Uttarakhand, that was then signed in Sep 2016.

Making the Case for CR before the National Disaster Management Authority, New Delhi, June 2016

PPC was invited to present to the Joint Secretary and Secretary NDMA, together with the Ministry of I&B on the reasons for adopting CR as a medium for awareness and information, for disaster.
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—Saritha Thomas
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