Combating COVID-19
Experiences from the Ground

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Mewat (now Nuh), Haryana is the most backward district in India
Home to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in the country, including ~2000 Rohingya refugees
Very conservative in outlook and the birthplace of Tablighi Jamaat in 1926
Largely a Muslim community that subsists on seasonal livelihoods
Literacy rate is 34% among women and 54% among men
THE SPREAD OF COVID

- Safe till around 31st March – not a single case reported
- Between April 1 to 5 – 8 positive cases
- Between April 5 to 20 – 58 cases
- April 20 onwards, the curve started to flatten
- April 24 – 15 patients discharged
- April 30 – another 15 patients discharged
- May 23 – not a single patient in the hospital
THE CHALLENGES

- Total lockdown without ample notice
- No mobility, no clarity if CR is a media organisation or not
- Confusion in the minds of the local authorities
- Problems of access
- Negotiating unknown territories with a tsunami of misinformation
- Messaging was clear regarding handwash only
- Confusion on who should or who should not wear a mask, and millions of advise and misinformation
Local issues, to local people in local language
Run by the community so total awareness of the developments
Credibility and Trust
Capacity to check authenticity of message
Map the community and their need
Assess skill sets and create a demand for their skills
Work closely with the Local administration and civil society organisations
Make this fight everybody’s business
TAKE GUARD FOR COVID-19

- Shift system for reporters to reduce exposure
- Curfew passes for all reporters during lockdown
- Permission to travel to villages to record their stories
Access to CMO/ADC/DC/SP to receive updates on a daily or alternate day basis

All important announcements recorded either face to face, or on phone and shared with our sister station Alfaaz-e-Mewat

A 24-hour helpline to bust myths and misinformation, rumours and fears
Broadcast on COVID for 2 hours from March 20, 2020. Within a week, it was increased to 4 hours daily.

COVID Bulletins every 4 hours, awareness promos every 30 minutes, dedicated programmes titled *Covid se jung Radio Mewat ke sung*, songs produced and packaged by the Merasis, 3–4 minute COVID Special packages to address myths and misinformation, live programmes.
Building trust between administration and community

Being available 24/7

During surveillance and lockdown dispelling myths and misinformation

Special focus on women through the Hinsa Ko No program and elderly
Caring for the Community

- Regular visits to the villages
- Interaction with women’s groups
- Support livelihoods
- Production of masks by women
CARING FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Distribution of Rations
- Distribution of masks through Panchayats
- Special hampers on Eid
The way forward
STRENGTHENING THE NETWORK OF CR

- Revisit our roles as CR stations to bring to community to centerstage
- Prepare communities for the long battle: Looking at life post lockdown, adapt to the new normal
- Reimagine content: Mental stress, violence, unemployment, education
- Demystify advisories and keep the community informed
- Sustain the campaign: Conversations on COVID different dimensions
- Share experiences: Develop/share scripts/content in 6 languages
- Interact and negotiate for the CR sector with stakeholders
- Launch a series of webinars on SDGs from the perspective of the pandemic