The Radiophone Project
Technology and Storytelling,
Together Changing Rural Children’s Lives
“The girls never used to go to school because their job was to herd the cows. After the Radiophone program, the community came together and appointed one person to herd everybody’s cows so that the girls can go to school. I call it cowpooling!”

- Sashwati Bannerjee
Managing Director, Sesame Workshop India
“Cow-pooling” so that girls can go to school, is one community’s creative response to the dual concerns of female education and keeping the cattle safe. It is also emblematic of the success of the Radiophone Project, which brings educational content to children and communities that might otherwise have none.

The Galli Galli Sim Sim (GGSS) Radiophone Project, a signature children’s program delivered over radio and telephone, is the latest expansion of the Indian adaptation of the popular children’s show Sesame Street. With its proven education model, GGSS is increasing its reach and base to include hitherto underserved rural populations.

BACKGROUND

Sesame Workshop India’s Galli Galli Sim Sim made its debut on TV in 2006. Each year more than 18 million children watch it regularly on national cable channels - Pogo and Cartoon Network and national public broadcaster, Doordarshan. GGSS, like its local Sesame Street counterparts all over the globe, uses the power of media to help children reach their highest potential and prepare them for school and for life.

We develop and distribute high-quality and engaging content through television, radio, community radio (CR), print, digital and outreach, to reach children aged zero-eight. Our content is geared towards developing young Indian children’s basic academic and life skills, while celebrating India’s rich cultural diversity, in order to promote their overall cognitive, socio-emotional and physical development.

Galli Galli Sim Sim, like the global brand, is grounded in research and uses the power of Muppets to educate and entertain children every day. On GGSS, our protagonists are five-year-old Chamki, a friendly schoolgirl who stands for girls’ education; Googly, a six-year-old furry blue monster with a curious streak; Grover, a tall, gangly, dark-blue monster who speaks in a variety of Indian accents and Boombah, an eight foot lion who loves to eat healthy and do the “Bhangra”.

The Radiophone Project extended the reach of GGSS further into communities and areas with little or no access to entertaining and educational content, especially for young children. The GGSS radio program, was an extension of the Sesame philosophy, integrating community-based program with emerging media to reach many more children and their parents. As explained on the next page, our radio audience can use their mobile phones to listen to the program.
WHY?

While GGSS onscreen is immensely popular and effective with children across India, almost half the population has no access to television.

The Radiophone Project was based on the reality that phones are ubiquitous and radio more common than television. According to recent FICCI-Frames-KPMG data, the number of radio listeners in India has increased from approximately 230 million in 2003, to 250 million in 2013.

While new technology develops at a dizzying speed, people living in remote or marginalized communities remain heavily dependent on older technologies. Some populations have traditionally been hard to reach and consequently underserved. Migrant families top this list.

Children in migrant families do not have access to continuous schooling since they are seldom in the same place long enough to establish a routine. They remain part of a community, albeit a mobile one.

Sesame Workshop India is proud to have successfully merged old and new technologies in the Radiophone Project, which brings educational content to children and communities who might otherwise have none.

Ramachandra is a regular listener of 'Gurison Ki Awaz' and is particularly fond of GGSS. He wants his children to listen to it but his village, Tigra, does not receive any radio signals. He was told about the toll-free number of the radio show.

He carries the only mobile phone in his household. Since he is a driver and only home in the evenings, this has created an opportunity for the whole family to listen to the program through Radio over Telephone (RoT) every evening.

The Radiophone Project offers families the option to access GGSS program wherever they are, at any time of night or day, providing on-going access to content that is both engaging and educational.

The program set out to increase learning outcomes in children and generate a community movement focusing on the importance of education and learning for children.

1 Federation of India Chamber of Commerce and Industry
The project uses a combination of radio and telephone technologies to address the educational needs of disenfranchised children. Listeners tune in to the voices of the GGSS television show’s popular characters, which draws both children and caregivers into the program through stories, songs and games.

The radio programs focus on:

- Literacy and Language
- Health and Hygiene
- Social-Emotional Skills
- Environmental Awareness
- Math and Reasoning

Every broadcast takes relevant content and presents it in a **fun and accessible way**.

For instance, in the episode “Shik Shik”, characters eat corn with great enjoyment and then have a “manjan break” (brushing-teeth break), when they brush their teeth and extol the advantages of good hygiene. In the episode “Road Safety”, characters discuss how to safely cross the road in order to get to a fair:

> “Priti and Raunak decided to brush their teeth regularly after listening to the GGSS program. Everyone in their village used to brush with the bark of neem tree, which is quite bitter, due to which they used to throw it away.

> Later they would lie to their mother that they had brushed their teeth. Consequently, they suffered from bad breath.

> However, once they heard Chamki was brushing her teeth in the program, they decided to ask their father to get a brush for them. Since then, the siblings have started brushing regularly.”
The project involves 10 community radio (CR) stations in the Hindi-speaking belt of North and Central India. It reaches approximately 1.4 million people, including 200,000 children, many of whom had never before heard any children’s program.

Sesame Workshop collaborates with several key partners: Gram Vaani, a social tech company, which helped design the radio-over-telephone interface and supports the CR stations in managing data from the Gramin Rural Interface Network System (GRINS); The Restoring Force, which provides health, education and livelihood opportunities to rural children, participated in the pilot phase and helped design the current Radiophone project; and Ideosync Media Combine (IMC), specialists in development communication, conducted research for us at each stage of the project.

As mentioned above, we paid particular attention to disenfranchised groups: migrants who have no access to regular education, girls who must cope with gender discrimination at several levels and families that are left out of the social and technological changes sweeping the country.

**WHO?**

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**LIST OF RADIO STATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.N.</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>RADIO STATION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Supi (Uttarakhand)</td>
<td>Kumaon Vani</td>
<td>90.4 MHZ</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Chamba (Uttarakhand)</td>
<td>Hervalvani</td>
<td>90.4 MHZ</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Kanpur Dehat (Uttar Pradesh)</td>
<td>Wazir Ki Awaaz</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Orchha (Madhya Pradesh)</td>
<td>Radio Bundelkhand</td>
<td>90.4 MHZ</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Solan (Himachal Pradesh)</td>
<td>Radio Solan</td>
<td>90.4 MHZ</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Lallipur (Uttar Pradesh)</td>
<td>Lalit Lokvani</td>
<td>90.4 MHZ</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Shikpuri (Uttar Pradesh)</td>
<td>Radio Sambhav</td>
<td>107.8 MHZ</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Mewat (Haryana)</td>
<td>Alfaz e Mewat</td>
<td>107.8 MHZ</td>
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Reaching over 1.4 million people across 10 community radio stations.
The bulk of the project lasted two-and-a-half years, although some stations continue to broadcast the show. We started production in September 2011 and broadcast the first show in June 2012. The 10 stations continued to broadcast until mid-2013. Some stations are still airing the shows, whereas others discontinued after three broadcasts.

WHEN?

We use radio as a way to promote behavior change and improve learning outcomes. For the first time, local CR stations can access world-class global content and combine it with content from their own communities. They make universal academic and social issues applicable in the local context. Most importantly, they give the community a voice in the program.

HOW?

“A caller told us that he had bought his children a new game two days ago, which they had played with and spoilt. This made him angry and he decided to scold and punish them. But he heard GGSS over the radio and it caused him to pause and reflect upon his anger. This made him realize that children are supposed to make mistakes and it is the duty of the adults to correct them. He said today’s episode made him think about using practical experience rather than punishment to educate.”

The GGSS program gives voices to children and communities and makes universal issues applicable in local context.
Community participation is the core of the Radiophone Project’s formula and research proves the reason for its success. A canned program would have no takers without community participation.

What exactly does the phrase “community participation” mean? In this context, it means acknowledging that people, whether they live in mountain villages or urban skyscrapers, know their own lives and needs best and are the experts of their own ecosystem. When given appropriate support and information, people will rise to the occasion and become agents of their own transformation. We simply provide some tools for this transformation.

We remain committed to this principle through every step of the process, from planning and execution to follow-up. We invited the CR stations to review our content plan and to collaborate on integrating this new children’s program within their limited broadcast schedules and community interactions.

The project provided a promising opportunity for CR stations to collaborate with local schools. Station staff members approached schools as a way of informing children about the program and also to hear about the impact of the show once it began airing. Schools have responded positively to both - the initiative and to children’s participation. This connection holds potential for future partnerships with local institutions.

The radio stations further localize the content by adding a community segment at the end of each episode. These segments focus on specific themes that are locally relevant and are scripted and produced by the CR stations. In all, the 10 CR stations have produced more than 400 localized community segments so far. The project enables the CR stations in producing a bank of locally relevant content, which can be used beyond the life of the project. In addition, each GGSS episode has a vox pop (voice of the people) segment, with pre-recorded voices from the community talking on specific themes.

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While GGSS is aimed specifically at children, a significant outcome has been the response of people of all ages. IMC’s independent research on the project’s impact found that all age groups listen together.

To increase community participation about local issues, the program design required all CR stations to further organize community events after the launch. CR stations brought together local leaders, key opinion leaders, regular listeners of the GGSS program and other members of the community to discuss what had been identified through the program. The 10 CR stations held 60 events. These events were designed to raise awareness around issues of local importance and relevance, such as various schemes announced by the Government of India to increase children’s attendance in schools, information under the Right to Education Act, the need to improve sanitation & environmental conditions in the community, improving access to education for girls and others.

A few examples of event themes:
- **Gurgaon ki Awaaz** - Tree plantation drive, storytelling, science activities
- **Radio Bundelkhand** - Water conservation, girls’ education, monsoon, health and safety
- **Henvalvani** - Food safety, sharing, hygiene
- **Radio Dhadkan** - Environmental degradation, seasonal diseases, nutrition
- **Lalit Lokvani** - Creative writing, health, maths and money sense
- **Alfaz e Mewat** - Traffic rules, storytelling, World Environment Day
- **Waqt ki Awaaz** - Zoo visit, sports, dental hygiene
- **Radio Solan** - Trash disposal, road safety, water conservation

Shaheen’s family had to discontinue her studies even though she wanted to study further. She could not voice her opinion before her father. She narrated what she wanted to tell her father over the phone when the episode "Kahani Sunao" was played.

When the episode was broadcast by Radio Mewat, her father realized his mistake and allowed Shaheen to continue her studies.

Addressing local issues have led to increased awareness and behavior change.
The format of the show allows community members to call in and share their views, experiences and give feedback. Each radio station is equipped with GRINS. GRINS is a plug-and-play server for CR stations that helps with managing broadcasts and thematic archiving and retrieval of the content. Stations can use playlists, an answering machine service and a phone-in system. (In addition, each radio station as part of Radio over Telephone (ROT) has a unique phone number.) Audience members can leave a “missed call” and the system calls them back so that they can listen to radio episodes from anywhere in the country with no airtime fee. CR stations can store, retrieve and play back calls. From June 2012 to July 2013, we received over 70,000 calls on Radio over Telephone.

The radio program, broadcast twice a week, has three key components:

- A pre-produced GGSS show provided to the local CR station
- A community segment produced by the local CR station
- A call-in interactive segment where local audiences participate in the show with their suggestions, input, stories and so on

The program focuses on delivering thematic messages for children and parents, especially on concepts of literacy and maths as well as health, hygiene and nutrition. The project also provides community members with a platform to address the most critical issues in their town/city. The content is light-hearted with a serious message and is delivered in an entertaining manner by GGSS Muppets.

Grover is the narrator and Chamki & Googly the main characters. Boomah and Aanchoo join the program and human characters such as Ahmed Chacha and Doctor Aunty round off the cast of characters. Over many decades, Sesame Muppets have been an influential and beloved part of childhoods all over the world. With the Radiophone Project’s expanded reach, the GGSS content is now available to a new group of eager children and families who otherwise would have no access to something like this. CR is replete with challenges: geographic limitations and the ever-present need to generate new local content. The Radiophone Project meets these challenges head-on and provides fun, learning and change to the communities it serves.

**NUTS, BOLTS & BANDWIDTH**

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When Muskan heard “The Hungry Dustbin” episode of GGSS, she started throwing trash in the dustbin. Earlier her mother used to keep telling her not to throw trash around but she would pretend not to have heard. However, now she makes it a point to throw trash without being prompted and also cleans up if any trash is strewn around the house.
IMPACT

GGSS has been an outstandingly effective learning medium for the Radiophone Project's close to million-and-a-half listeners. IMC's rigorous research study showed a solid and heartening impact.

In the short term, the broadcasts have had clear and concrete effects. Researchers found myriad stories of immediate impact: people stopped using tobacco; took their children to get inoculated; spent more time with their children; appreciated the art and usefulness of stories; developed better waste-management systems; held a women's rights rally; started using soap; saving money and going to school. While a radio show cannot change societal norms overnight, there is no doubt that this one has had a significant impact in places where children and their families had little or no exposure to outside information and little or no agency to affect this information.

IMC conducted both qualitative and quantitative research. CR station staff filled out diaries and community focus groups generated mind maps. IMC also collected Most Significant Change stories, which are stories that reflect some significant change in the community, based on discussions with the CR station. Researchers visited families and analyzed data from GRINS.

The quantitative study included Learning Outcome Workshops held both before and after broadcasts. The study aimed to assess the impact of the GGSS radio program on young children's learning in the areas of social health, literacy, health & hygiene, language, maths & reasoning, environmental awareness and emotional health. Fifty children between the ages of five and eight were assigned to a treatment group where they had access to the GGSS program content through community radios and fifty children were assigned to a control group that did not have access to GGSS community radio programs.

Overall, around 550 coded diaries and 80 mind maps were generated. Multivariate regression analyses found that the GGSS program had a statistically significant impact on children in five out of six outcome measures: social health, literacy, health & hygiene, language, environmental awareness and emotional health. These effects were over and above the influence of children's performance at baseline, age and family income. Findings reveal that the GGSS program has contributed to children's learning.
The Radiophone Project has had some interesting effects on gender dynamics.

CR has traditionally been predominantly the domain of men. GGSS is helping change that, as station staff reported increasing numbers of calls from women and children.

In addition to imparting information and meeting communities’ educational needs, the Project helped challenge traditional dynamics and gave voice to those who have previously gone unheard.
Summative research shows significant impact on literacy and language outcomes for children exposed to GGSS content.

More community and commercial radio stations have approached Sesame Workshop India and have expressed interest in the Radiophone Project.

We would like to expand the initiative, while preserving the local empowerment component, which is its defining characteristic.

12% respondents shared about behavior changes as a result of the radio show

3X improvement in vocabulary and storytelling ability in children exposed to GGSS content
Fun, learning and community belong together. The Radiophone Project has dramatically shown that providing children with access to engaging content will improve their educational and developmental outcomes. It has also proved itself as an excellent way to engage the community at large in crucial governance and social issues.

We have been able to:

• Reach previously-unreachable populations with engaging and entertaining content
• Increase community participation
• Develop CR stations’ capacity to produce children’s programs and add women listeners, among other things

Creative use of technology, excellent content creation & planning and most significantly, sustained community engagement & involvement have paid exciting dividends on every level: plants are getting watered, children are having breakfast and communities are coming together to question the status quo.

This project has brought to light the need for creating and broadcasting children’s content across community media platforms. There is a requirement for capacity building of community radio stations to create quality children’s content and having a dedicated space for such content on different media, especially in the community radio forum.

There is still much to do. As a GGSS radio station staffer reports, “A listener, Rajpal, who sounded almost 60 years old, called up and told me that it is not correct to encourage imagination. If a child imagines some place where she is not able to go or cannot be taken by her parents, it would break her heart. He even told us that he tells his grandchildren not to imagine.”

What could be sadder than telling your grandchildren not to imagine? This story captures the mission at the heart of the GGSS Radiophone Project:

Our children deserve to imagine a different world. We aim to help them do so, so they can build that world.

CONCLUSION

This phase of the Radiophone Project has been made possible with generous support from the Echidna Giving.

We also thank MetLife Foundation for supporting us in developing the first 30 radio episodes, lessons from which were critical for this phase.

Assistance and encouragement from Qualcomm through Wireless Reach and HSBC through Future First have helped us in developing components that enabled us to test the initiative.

The project was designed along with a team of innovative partners, specifically Arv Jaiman (The Restoring Force), Aaditeshwar Seth and Zahir Koradia (Gram Vani), Venu Arora (Ideasynic Media Combined) led the research implementation and also helped in driving discussions with community radio stations. Pooja Murdia (Institute of Rural Research and Development) extended her support during our visits to CR stations closer to Delhi, and offered us a venue to host our learning events. We would also like to thank Shambhu Singh Raathli for extending his support in research.

The project would not have been successful without the wonderful support, enthusiasm and partnership with the 10 radio stations: Aflaaaz-e-mewat, Gurgoan ki Awaaz, Harvakaisi, Kumaonvaani, Lahdikai, Radio Bundelkhand, Radio Ghazian, Radio Mewat, Radio Sujan and Wajit ki Awaaz.

A very special thanks to Suhaila Abdulali for her efforts in putting the report together and making it come alive. We would also like to acknowledge and thank our creative team of story & scriptwriters, producers and muppeteers for their continued support in making Galli Galli Sim Sim one of the best children’s programs in the country.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Sesame Workshop India, the organization behind *Galli Galli Sim Sim*, uses the power of media to help children reach their highest potential. We develop and distribute high quality and engaging content through television, radio, community radio, print, digital and outreach, to reach children aged 0-8. Our content aims to facilitate young Indian children’s basic academic and life skills, while celebrating India’s rich cultural diversity, in order to promote their overall cognitive, socio-emotional and physical development.

To learn more, please visit
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