



Gender Integrated Response to Emerging COVID-19 Priorities in India

STRENGTHENING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE REFERRAL AND RESPONSE THROUGH COMMUNITY RADIO

BACKGROUND

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a critical issue that demands attention due to its detrimental impact on individuals and societies. GBV is rooted in unequal power dynamics, and perpetuated by social norms, cultural beliefs, and structural inequalities. This form of violence, often targeting women and girls, takes various forms including physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse.

Nearly half of married women in India (44.5%) were reported in the National Health Family Survey 5 to have experienced spousal violence at least once in their lives.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this situation, causing significant social disruption and causing violence and abuse against women to surge. In 2021, the National Commission for Women reported 30% more complaints of gender-based maltreatment compared to 2020, encompassing both physical and emotional abuse.¹ GBV is a violation of human rights, denying individuals fundamental freedoms, dignity, and safety. It undermines social cohesion and hinders the development of inclusive and equitable communities. Moreover, GBV has long-term consequences, affecting the mental and physical health of survivors. The COVID-19 pandemic also led to increased child marriage in India as families struggled economically, hindering girls' education, and limiting their future economic opportunities.²

Efforts to combat GBV must be comprehensive, encompassing legal, social, and educational approaches. Promoting gender equality, challenging harmful stereotypes, and fostering awareness are essential steps toward building a society free from GBV. To mitigate GBV and support those experiencing it, the Indian government launched the Sakhi One Stop Center (OSC) scheme in April 2015. The objective of the OSCs is to provide integrated support and assistance to women and girls who have been impacted by violence.³ It is imperative to create widespread awareness about GBV, and to inform the public about the OSCs, about the services that the centers offer, and familiarize the public with how to access them. Community radio is one such avenue to build awareness.

Established infrastructure makes community radio an ideal platform to disseminate information and initiate dialogue on sensitive issues (such as GBV) and to spread awareness about OSCs. Community radio is locally led and employs two key approaches: broadcasting and narrowcasting. **Broadcasting** involves transmitting audio content to a wide audience, ensuring that information reaches diverse communities and promotes a broad understanding of issues. **Narrowcasting** enables the transmission of targeted content to specific audiences,



tailoring information to resonate more effectively with the intended community.^{4,5} The MOMENTUM Safe Surgery in Family Planning and Obstetrics project, through its Gender Integrated Response to Emerging COVID-19 Priorities in India activity, worked with partners to address the critical need for strengthening GBV prevention and response mechanisms at the local level through community radio.

APPROACH

The community radio activity in India focused on addressing GBV with support from a local partner, Seeking Modern Applications for Real Transformation (SMART), and community radio stations in eight districts across five project states (Assam, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha). SMART mapped out the intervention districts and selected the stations working within these areas. The selection criteria included reach of the radio station, estimated listening audience, number of villages covered, number of permanent and temporary staff and volunteers, and interest and capacity to work on GBV. After vetting existing stations based on the above parameters, nine community radio stations were selected (Table 1). The activity was carried out for ten months.

Table 1. Community Radio Stations Implementing the Intervention

	Community Radio Station	District	State
	Radio Gyanmaline	Dibrugarh	Assam
	Radio Lokvani	Durg	Chhattisgarh
	Radio Sahyogi	Durg	Chhattisgarh
	Arpaa Radio	Bilaspur	Chhattisgarh
	Radio Samvad	Raipur	Chhattisgarh
	Radio Sarang	Dakshin Kannada	Kanartaka
	Radio Goonj	Gwalior	Madhya Pradesh
	Radio Sampark	Cuttack	Odisha
	Radio Namaskar	Konark	Odisha

Local Partner Station Capacity Building

Five online and in-person workshops were conducted with the radio partners. SMART organized two online workshops at the start of the project to brief the stations about the scope of the project, GBV, the need to create awareness of existing institutional systems, as well as discussion around program deliverables. In September 2022, SMART organized a three-day workshop with all nine radio station partners including two representatives from each station. This workshop focused on building a deeper understanding of GBV, the importance of monitoring and evaluation, and the “Do No Harm” framework. The project developed the framework to anticipate, prevent, and respond to any potential harm that could result from implementation. The workshop also covered the components of the planned activity: co-creation of content, production, and broadcast of 18 episodes on themes related to GBV; production and broadcast of seven promos (short ‘teasers’ for the episode played during other programs); formation of seven women's groups to participate in

narrowcasting and disseminate messages via outreach activities; baseline and endline surveys; and development of a three-month strategy. In February 2023, SMART organized a day-long mid-term review workshop to observe and analyze each stations' progress, discuss day-to-day challenges, and understand the community response to the programs and interventions. A final workshop involving community radio partner staff, program managers, and technical partners was held in May 2023.

Formation of Women's Groups

Each radio station selected villages located within broadcast range based on project-specified criteria and supported the formation of women's groups within each village. Next, it was important to establish connections with the local Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and Anganwadi workers, the OSC, and with women from within the community. A team from each radio station engaged with the women, built their comfort to mobilize other women from the villages, and nurtured an environment of trust and confidence through simple exercises and gameplay, enabling the women to share their experiences. The radio partner captured the experiences, and if necessary, referred women to the OSC. A specified form for program reporting was used to capture information, including the type of GBV experienced. Each group selected a leader or supervisor to ensure regular meetings. Supervisors were also responsible for maintaining attendance registers, writing reports, hosting narrowcasts, and motivating group members to share this information in their respective areas so that others could benefit from the learning from the community radio women's groups.

Station Visits and Ideation With Women's Groups

SMART and the MOMENTUM Safe Surgery technical team visited each women's group monthly. During these visits, the team provided training to the supervisors of each group, visited the villages, interacted with group members, reinforced protocols, and evaluated the stations' training and capacity-building skills as well as that of the group supervisors. SMART hosted extensive discussions and training sessions with each of the stations on evaluation and documentation processes, content development, and fieldwork. The women's groups generated many unique ideas to disseminate GBV information within their communities. For example, a group member from Durg wrote a song about domestic violence and included information about the OSCs, the 181 helpline number, and wrote a script for a street play on discrimination against women. Another group from Raipur suggested organizing a rally within the villages on "Say No to Violence." Groups from Dakshin Kannada decided on the distribution and pasting of leaflets in public spaces. The stations chose to use cultural events, festival meetings and gatherings, weddings, and other public events to disseminate information about GBV.

Broadcasting

The radio partner recorded the approved scripts, and then aired the content according to the previously developed activity plans. To maximize exposure and impact, community radio stations broadcast 18 episodes a total of 486 times in their respective regional languages across intervention locations. By airing repeatedly (on a weekly basis), the episodes reached a wider audience. New episodes were played every 15 days. This regular scheduling allowed for a consistent flow of fresh content to raise awareness about GBV and the role of the OSCs in providing support to survivors.

Narrowcasting

Narrowcasting is the dissemination of information in a group setting where a recorded radio broadcast is played to the audience followed by facilitated discussion. Narrowcasting is a core strength of community radio.

It fosters engagement with community groups through discussion (including daily life examples) and allows groups to connect personally with issues. The project built the capacity of community radio stations to host narrowcasts with women’s groups as well as others who gather during events and festivals. Each narrowcast focused on a specific theme related to GBV and OSC services, such as the difference between ‘gender’ and ‘sex,’ gender discrimination, various forms of violence, and the cycle of violence. An informative leaflet was also developed by the community radio stations in their respective regional languages to disseminate during the narrowcasting sessions to foster awareness and encourage those in need to visit their local OSC for support.

Broadcasting and narrowcasting allowed important information to be shared with the community, including the national helpline number, the existing legal and institutional framework for GBV redressal, and the services available at the OSCs. Listeners were encouraged to interact and engage with the community radio stations through the narrowcasting sessions, as well as through calling in to the station broadcasts. This two-way communication allowed community members to share their thoughts and experiences with the radio stations, creating a sense of active participation in addressing GBV, and gave the radio stations an opportunity to address specific questions and areas of interest in their respective communities. See Table 2 below for achievements.

Table 2. Key Achievements of the Community Radio Approach for GBV Response

INDICATOR	VALUE
Total number of trainings conducted to build capacity of women’s groups and supervisors	68
Total number of women in the women’s groups	1,650
Total number of villages under all nine community radio stations	73
Total number of women’s group meetings conducted across all groups	1,604
Total number of narrowcasting activities done by community radio stations	557
Total number of people reached and sensitized through all activities	307,273

STORIES SHARED BY THE COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS

Success Story 1

A women’s group called the radio station and informed them about spousal violence in the neighborhood. A husband hit his wife with an axe, and she was bleeding. The community radio station team referred the wife to the OSC. The station staff were able to register a complaint against her husband. The woman and her five-year-old child were given shelter at the OSC as well as medical care and support. The OSC also conducted counseling sessions with the couple; they were informed about the various laws and provisions related to domestic violence and their consequences. The woman was provided the required support for her protection and safety. [Radio Samvad]

Success Story 2

During a narrowcasting session, the radio station team came across a 23-year-old married woman who was continuously being harassed by her husband and her in-laws because of dowry-related issues. During her pregnancy, her husband sent her away to her mother’s home. Even after the delivery of the child, he did not accept her back in his house. Nine months passed since the baby’s birth and the husband was still not providing her with any support. She informed the local ASHA about her situation who informed the community radio station team. The team had an in-depth discussion with her and advised her to visit the OSC as the OSCs work

to help mediate family conflict where appropriate and are often able to reconcile couples who are having difficulties. The team discovered during their next visit that the woman and her husband had been counseled by the OSC and they are now living happily together. [Radio Sarang]

Success Story 3

During one of the narrowcasting sessions, the community radio session supervisor was approached by a woman for her phone number. During a subsequent phone call, the woman explained that her daughter was a domestic violence survivor. The community radio station supervisor referred them to the OSC. After a fortnight, the woman along with her daughter reached the OSC and the OSC referred them to the Women Police Cell Counselor to discuss the legal implications. Based on the testimony the woman and her daughter registered a case with the police. [Radio Gyanmalinee]

KEY LEARNINGS

The project learned several lessons about the strength of community radio over the course of implementation, including the following:

- Community radio stations play a vital role in reaching and engaging with local communities, especially on sensitive topics like GBV. The localized approach via broadcasts in regional languages enhances the accessibility of messages and serves as an effective platform for raising awareness and facilitating access to OSCs.
- Community radio stations led the content creation that enabled them to ensure that the messaging in the scripts was contextually appropriate and culturally sensitive, making the episodes relatable.
- Narrowcasting was important in raising awareness about OSCs and the services they offer to women and to GBV survivors. The in-person approach enables discussion of key messaging, prompts participants to reflect on their deep-rooted beliefs around gender norms, and builds knowledge of and trust in locally available services.
- GBV is a sensitive and challenging topic. Interventions in this area can potentially spur backlash amongst community members, or towards activity organizers. A well-planned “Do No Harm” framework is a crucial step for programming and is needed to guide implementation and address any issues that may arise.

CONCLUSION

Recognizing and actively engaging community influencers or known personalities in the community such as local government representatives, teachers, Aanganwadi workers, and ASHAs through community radio can be a strategy to raise awareness about GBV and OSCs. Community influencers can help in promoting messages and generating trust and credibility amongst community members. Future programs can draw on a similar approach, utilizing community radio to foster collaboration with local NGOs and government agencies to strengthen the GBV referral and response pathways, with a focus on the OSCs.


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MOMENTUM Safe Surgery in Family Planning and Obstetrics is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of the MOMENTUM suite of awards and implemented by EngenderHealth with partners IntraHealth International, Johns Hopkins University Center for Communications Programs and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine under USAID cooperative agreement # 7200AA20CA00011. For more about MOMENTUM, visit www.usaidmomentum.org. The contents of this brief are the sole responsibility of EngenderHealth and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.


Suggested Citation

Alam, D., Mahar, M., Jain, R., Pal, M., Khera, A., Khan, F., Malakoff, S., Levin, K. (2024) *Strengthening Gender-Based Violence Referral and Response Through Community Radio*. Gender-Integrated Response to Emerging COVID-19 Priorities in India. Washington, DC: USAID MOMENTUM.

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