



UMANG Vaani Newsletter

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Times are Critical but our Enthusiasm and Spirit will Prevail

COVID-19 has wreaked havoc in children's lives. Lockdown, school closures and physical distance - all these have had a severe impact on children. The children's education has been affected the most during the COVID-19 pandemic. The four hours of continuous on-line studies as well as the household chores' load have been quite challenging for them. Staying at home, in front of a smart phone, studying four subjects one after the other has not been easy for young children. This pandemic has turned the happy lives of the children into a difficult one; their lives have changed completely. Earlier, where children used to come home and do the homework, now their life has become confined to their homes. A ray of hope had appeared after the second wave of COVID-19. Children were seen going to school, carrying their bags, but even this happiness did not last long, the third wave arrived, casting the darkness of COVID-19 again.

During the pandemic, some adolescent girls were married off and some parents started thinking that they should not send their children to school anymore. Among all this, UMANG sessions were continued with adolescent girls, which was a positive aspect.

In the challenging times of Corona, the lives of adolescent girls have changed completely. Although now, when the third wave has made us and the children reconsider everything, the UMANG sessions during the lockdown with the new means of education such as Digi-SATH remained the ways staying connected and succeeded in giving us courage to fight this battle for education and empowerment during COVID-19 again. As per the instructions given by the government, the UMANG sessions were started with adolescent girls in small groups and large groups. Due to the third wave, when schools have been closed again and the girls have to stay home, adolescent girls are participating openly in the UMANG session.

During the COVID-19 predicament, a committee was formed at the state level by the Jharkhand Education Council of which ICRW is also a member. Through this we have started reaching out to the children. Some

audio-visuals of GEMS Comic were also shared with children through (Digi-SATH), which have been seen by about one hundred fifty thousand children and one hundred eighteen thousand teachers.

According to Archana, an adolescent girl from UMANG Group, "We adolescent girls, deprived of education and burdened with household work, have been badly affected during the lockdown. As soon as the session of UMANG started, we got a chance to come out, and talk with our friends. After the second wave of COVID-19, as the situation started returning to normal, the demand for training started coming from the teachers too. JEPC approved the implementation of UMANG and GEMS programs in Godda and Jamtara, online training was organized in view of the demand of teachers under these projects. During online trainings, the teachers asked for individual support. Therefore, trainings were organized with the teachers. Seeing their enthusiasm, UMANG's sessions were started in the school as well.

Monika, the nodal teacher of UMANG, says, "The sessions of UMANG sow the seeds of innovation in us. This has given me confidence, I participate in UMANG training with great enthusiasm and conduct sessions with children. I have benefitted a lot by this training."

"It was a challenge to continue education during the COVID epidemic, but this experience also taught a lot. The department also took steps like Digi-SATH and Digi School and even today the effort is going on to keep more and more children connected with education."

***-Kiran Kumari Pasi (IAS)
State Project Director,
Jharkhand Education Project, Ranchi***

Dear Friends,

I am extremely pleased to share with you the 5th edition of UMANG Vaani. We hope that we have better days ahead of us and despite the challenges the pandemic posed, we are now better equipped to deal with such challenges.

Sadly, the pandemic, the consequent school closures and discontinuation of community-based group education activities took a heavy toll on children's education. The risks enhanced for adolescents of dropping out of school, being pushed into informal wage employment, and child marriage. Therefore, it was important to adopt strategies that could help adolescents and that could be implemented quickly.

The pandemic restricted human interactions, which had negative impacts, however, it also made us explore with alternative ways of staying connected. The new information technology and communication platforms played a crucial role. We learned how to use new phone and computer-based platforms like "WhatsApp", "Microsoft Teams" and "Zoom". We used these to stay connected, conduct meeting, training and discussions. These were also helpful in learning about the situation in the field and in reflecting collectively, which was immensely helpful in chalking out our future strategies.

It also provided opportunities for new collaborations. We partnered with Govt of Jharkhand to support the e-learning platform of Digi-SATH by developing digital learning content for adolescents. These were developed as animated stories focusing on gender equality. These stories were developed by adolescents, based on their experience at home, school and community. We also harnessed the strength of radio to educate the community about covid appropriate behaviours, prevention strategies and importance of vaccination. We developed 9 radio spots focusing these issues which were broadcasted on Radio City FM and All India Radio.

In order to prevent further loss to adolescents and their families, it was decided to initiate the teachers training program. For the first time the orientation of Head Masters was organized through digital platform. To continue the learning engagement with girls, the community level group education activities in smaller groups were started, following COVID-19 precautions. The street theatre activity, with focus on continued education for girls was initiated. The activities have received positive response on the ground. The recognition and felicitation of girls and their families who supported education of girl child was motivated many more parents. Many enthusiastic parents took pledges to support their daughters' education.

In these difficult times our work has become even more important. We must make additional efforts to get the girls back to school, continue engagement with teachers and school; restart community level group education activities, sports-based-activities; street theatres, engagement with self-help groups and male support groups.

We have also learned how to optimize on technology going forward, but should use it with in-person activities. This issue of UMANG Vaani would provide the readers the glimpse of how we have done it in past six months, our successes and lessons learned. I hope you would enjoy reading it!

**Amajit Mukherjee
Director of Operations,
International Center for Research on Women**

To Keep Yourself Safe from COVID-19, Always Keep These Four Things in Mind



Always wear a mask



Wash hands frequently with soap



Keep a distance of two meters from each other



Get both doses of the vaccine

UMANG - Now with Radio

Behavioral change involves a change in one's own attitude, the impact of the society, as well as. various media, which play an important role. Be it television, radio or newer mediums such as FM. There was a time when we used to get all the information only through radio, be it the news of the country's independence or India's first ever Cricket World Cup victory. Gradually that has been replaced by television, but radio is still an important medium of communication, especially in rural areas, and FM radio is still making its mark in urban areas. As with other electronic media, the of FM radio hosts, popularly known as "RJs", are no less than a celebrity. You must be thinking why are we telling you so many things about radio today! In fact, when during the second wave of COVID-19 this year, the UMANG program had to stop its street play activity midway, we started thinking of alternative media like radio, and after an intense brain storming session, a unique 30-day long radio program was born.

Under it, we made some radio spots on the most useful topic for this time, safety against COVID-19, in which information was given regarding prevention of COVID-19 and the vaccination course. Simultaneously, the UMANG program started its first mass communication program with All India Radio and Radio City 91.1 FM channel, with a total of 9 radio spots, approximately 20 times a day at the Bhagalpur Center of All India Radio, and in Ranchi and Jamshedpur cities. Broadcasted through Radio City FM, the program went on for 31 consecutive days, in which the details about the COVID-19 vaccine and proper usage of masks and hand washing were explained in an interesting and creative manner.

The program brought to the front issues that were not covered by most other mass media, such as when and how to wear a mask, how and for how long to wash hands with soap, and the side effects of the vaccine and both doses of the vaccine and why is it necessary, etc. Radio FM received such good feedback for its program that they invited Dr. Nasreen Jamal, the head of the UMANG program, to its studio and the famous RJ Aman and RJ Shruti broadcast their live interviews, in which Dr. Nasreen explained the goals and activities of the UMANG project to the audience in detail. She also shared the outline of this unique radio program to be run on the theme of COVID-19.



UMANG Head of Project
Dr. Nasreen Jamal with Radio City
FM RJ Aman and RJ Shruti at
Jamshedpur and Ranchi studios.

As part of this radio campaign, UMANG has brought important information related to COVID-19 to about 10 million listeners. There are plans to do similar radio programs under the UMANG project in the future, in which we will reach people through radio, along with COVID-19, special programs based on adolescent empowerment, prevention of child marriage and adolescent education.

SPECIAL INFORMATION:

UMANG street theatre program, closed suddenly due to the second wave of COVID-19, has resumed from the 28th of November 2021 and 76 plays have been successfully conducted by 14th of December. During this time, a total of 3 street play teams performed in 30 villages of Jamtara and 32 villages of Godda. In which about 11000 villagers participated and parents of 2200 adolescent girls were felicitated, who ensured the higher education of their daughters. During the program, 76 villagers signed an affidavit and also took an oath to continue the education of their daughters.



A two-day training of school teachers was organized under the UMANG program, in which 160 teachers from Jamtara and Godda participated. Describing the importance of training, the teachers shared their experience with Umang Vaani:



"We have seen a lot of discrimination against girls. Such as boys are given nutritious food, but not girls. But now we teachers will motivate everyone equally by running this program in the school."

**Hari Prasad Thakur, BEO,
Mahagama, Godda**



"We will try and organize small events and at school and encourage girls and boys to sit together. Gradually they will gain gender-equitable attitudes."

**Vivek Kumar
(Chowdhary, HS Saidapur, Godda)**

"We are trying to implement the things mentioned in GEMS Training in our school. In the past, we had also organized a group activity. Earlier we used to feel a little uncomfortable, but now we have a support that we have taken training on gender equality through the project and this training was done with administrative support. If other teachers also get this training, then the program will be able to run optimally."

**Kumudni Roopa Tudu
(Nodal Teacher, RK-2 High School)**



"We have changed a lot. We now join hands with our family's work in the morning. It is seen from this that working together benefits both of us and both feel comfortable. My wife also went through the training and feels very proud that I am involved in this campaign. In school, I have started the task of distributing the work and making the children sit together. There will be some hurdles but they will be overcome with everyone's cooperation."

**Tapan Kumar Mandal,
(Nodal teacher, UMS, Banka)**



"We should talk about menstruation during the assembly. Children's hesitation will end when we initiate a conversation around menstruation."

**Nitesh Verma,
(UPG Gov- HS Adarsh Banka, Godda)**



"We are striving hard to bring gender equality in our school. I believe that the GEMS program and the training given in it will prove to be an infallible weapon in implementing the issue at the grassroots level. I am very excited that someone has our back. This gives a boost to my self-confidence and to our efforts."

Dinabandhu Das (Principal, Project 2 School Chainpur, Jamtara)



I WANT TO STUDY MORE

“I could not even concentrate on studies. At the break of every dawn, I used to get busy with household chores like cleaning the house, washing dishes, cooking and taking care of animals. Somehow, I could study for 2-3 hours at night. Due to the school closure, I could not talk or meet with any of my friends. Due to not having any kind of interaction about studies with anyone, my interest in studies was also gradually decreasing. At the same time, there was a fear whether the school will open or not and that my studies may not see continuity, owing to these COVID-19 precariousness. Then one day, I heard my parents talking that if the school does not open for a few more days, they will look for a boy and get me married. Hearing this, I started getting more scared, because I did not want to get married this early and wanted to study further.

Those days, an UMANG representative used to come and discuss with us, but I was afraid that what if in the meantime, my parents' plans are realised. I did not have my own phone, so although the online classes were going on, I was not able to join them properly. I did not know why an unknown fear was always haunting me. One day, some elderly people came to meet my parents. My mother introduced me to them too. I don't know what happened, but I felt scared, what if they are from the boy's family! I still remember, it was a Sunday, Papa and Mummy were sitting in the courtyard, I was just returning from the UMANG session. I thought that if I remained silent even then, it might be too late. I went to my parents and told them, "I don't want to get married right now. Papa, I have to study more. Do you want that all the hard work that I did, went to school for so many years, all this should be in vain? Papa, you know, I always get good marks in class. Marriage can happen later too, can't it?" I do not know from where I had got that courage. After listening to me, Papa did not say anything and left, and mother started scolding me, "You never used to speak like this in front of Papa!" A fear remained in my mind. I used to ask UMANG didi again and again, is there any news of school opening?

I started feeling sad, thinking that if the school does not open then my hope to study till B.A. will not be realised. How will I complete my studies, and if the school is delayed further, how will I stop my marriage? I used to ask everyone when the schools would open.

During this time, UMANG session was the only place where I could speak my mind to UMANG didi and other people there. Then, one day, finally the news of the school opening came and my dreams took flight again. I still remember, I ran home that day and told my mother, "I won't get married right now Ma, school is about to open, I have to study more and make something of my life." Seeing my happiness that day, my mother also started laughing. Schools reopened, and I went to school every day as usual, I started talking to friends, studying, playing, dreaming and most importantly, now I am very happy. I have started taking interest in studies again, if there is any problem, I ask my teacher immediately and now my mother also does not always ask me to do household chores. And there is no talk of my marriage in the house. And yes, let me tell you a secret? On the first day, my father himself came to drop me at the school, on his bicycle. Yes, now the school is closed again, but my habit of dreaming continues and my courage to fight for my studies. After all, only by fighting the waves, one can reach the shore. I am ready! ,,



Sangeeta Marandi
Age: 15, Class: 9
Village: Pakudia (Nala)

Story of Sushila

“I am Sushila Kumari, my father's name is Shri Ramvilas Harijan. We live in village Diggi, Block Mahagama. I'm 20 years old. I cleared my matriculation and intermediate examination from inter level school in Ranchi. Earlier, my father used to do a private job in Ranchi and my entire family used to stay in Ranchi. Everything was going well, until the pandemic started spreading its feet. Lockdown was imposed in the entire state. Due to which, we had to face a lot of difficulties. Father lost his job and our family's the situation became very bad. There was no other source of income. Due to which, our entire family had to migrate to the village. Father opened a shop in the village with his savings. Our family started managing to make the two ends meet, but my studies were stopped. After the completion of my intermediate studies, I was supposed to enroll in B.A., but my father expressed his inability to support my studies further. And in the meantime, the discussion of my marriage started.

I was under a lot of stress. I had a dream to study further and become a nurse or a teacher, but now it looked difficult. That's when I started attending the ongoing UMANG sessions in my village, where I got a lot of information from UMANG didi. When I got acquainted with her, I told about my problems to Didi. I also took Didi to my house and introduced her to my parents. Didi talked about the importance of dreams, aspirations etc., while giving information about child marriage/early marriage as well as the importance of continuing studies to fulfill one's dreams. My father also gave his consent to let me continue my studies. Post this, I started giving tuition to the children in the village myself. After some time, with the money saved from tuition and with the help of my father, I enrolled in and completed my B.A.. Despite a gap of two years, I am continuing my studies. During all this time, I never lost my courage. UMANG has made an invaluable contribution in keeping up my spirits. ,,

A new beginning by PCI

School not only provides the foundation of education, which is very important for making the future of the children, but also provides protection from social evils like child marriage, child labor, child trafficking. PCI under UMANG program has the objective to reduce the incidence of child marriage by ensuring that girls complete at least 10 years of schooling.

The members of the women's group have played an active role in realizing this objective by re-enrolling 25 girls of Nala block of Jamtara and 24 of Sadar block of Godda in schools.

The Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) cadre, Mrs. Kakoli Das, who works actively in Murgabani village of Nala block, says, “As soon as we started enlisting adolescent girls in our village under UMANG, I learnt that there were about 12 girls in my village who had dropped out of school. I, along with representatives of the Murgabani Aajeevika Mahila Sangathan, counseled the girls and their parents to get them re-admitted into the school. We also assured

full social and economic support to them. After this we also interacted with the teachers in the school and got all these 12 girls re-enrolled. I am happy that I can inspire girls to do something in life."

Village organizations, with the support of local stakeholders such as panchayat members, teachers, anganwadi workers, etc., use peer influence and pressure to persuade parents to opt for education for girls rather than early marriage. The enrollment of fifty adolescent girls in school is just the beginning. More than 500 dropout girls have been identified so far and they will be motivated to continue their education so that they do not become victims of child marriage.



Commendable initiative by the youth and men to empower adolescent girls

Although various efforts have resulted in some success, the life of majority of the adolescent girls in rural areas is still very challenging. The agency of adolescent girls is limited on major issues like education, marriage and employment. The main reason for this is patriarchal and traditional thinking in their communities. Under the UMANG program, to change this thinking and bring about positive change, initiatives are being taken by men and youth by reflecting on their roles, on necessary changes in their thinking and behavior, and adolescent empowerment.

About 16000 youth and men in 216 villages of Godda and Jamtara districts have joined this initiative by forming about 683 groups of 15-20 members each. In the last about 6 months, these 683 groups organized discussions in their respective villages and one-day workshop with youth and men at Panchayat level. Apart from this, to encourage girls, making the playground available and levelling the playground for them, organizing training in sports like football, organizing sports tournaments, picture competition on social issues, on occasions of August 15th, January 26th and October 2nd are some efforts worth appreciation. On important occasions like flag hoisting, giving an opportunity to them to speak can be said to be a meaningful initiative. The positive impact of this initiative of youth and men has started showing results

to some extent. Adolescent girls who used to hesitate to play sports such as football, are now playing regular football in their villages by forming groups of adolescent girls. They are also participating in district level competitions. Some girls are exploring employment opportunities by enrolling in these trainings.

During the workshops and meetings, youth and men took a pledge to create a conducive environment for the education of adolescent girls, to empower adolescent girls, not to marry underage girls and prevent child marriages, which are encouraging results of the program.



The participation of men and youth in empowerment of adolescent girls (Banners used in meetings with men and youth)



A simple, colorful illustration of a boy and a girl holding hands and jumping. The boy on the left has a large white head, a small black tuft of hair, and a wide smile. He is wearing a red shirt and blue shorts. The girl on the right has brown, curly hair, a red bow, and a wide smile. She is wearing a purple shirt and blue shorts. They are both wearing red shoes. The background is a solid light blue.

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