



An Entertainment-Education Radio Initiative

Meena Ki Duniya



THE
PRODUCTION
PROCESS



Foreword

Being the change you want to see in this world is not always about achieving the unachievable. Sometimes, it's as simple as listening to a radio series and taking the message home. For thousands of children in Uttar Pradesh, India, *Meena Ki Duniya* (Meena's World) has opened the door to change.

An innovative entertainment-education radio series, *Meena Ki Duniya* harnesses the power of mass communication and interpersonal communication to foster dialogue and discussion. Children in the 11-14 age group studying in grades 6-8 listen to the broadcast during school hours. Teachers are specially trained to facilitate discussions in the classroom in order to explore issues presented in the broadcast as well as reinforce messages post broadcast. Children further diffuse the new learnings and messages, by taking it home to their families and communities.

Meena, the main protagonist from the radio series is a guide and role model for young girls as well as boys, helping them deal with various life situations and promoting positive social attitudes and practices. The radio series has covered a range of issues including child rights, child-protection, child-friendly schools, gender, health, hygiene and education.

Research has shown that the programme is popular among children. It plays a crucial role in influencing children's awareness and knowledge as well as promoting behavioural changes by generating dialogue around key issues.

The programme was launched as a pilot in two districts of Uttar Pradesh in March 2010. Since then, it's been broadcast across the state during the academic sessions and also expanded to schools in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

We are delighted to share the experiences and lessons learnt from producing this unique radio series for children. This book provides insights into the production and creative process as well as the role of research and the overall impact of the series.

We would like to thank the teachers and students of Uttar Pradesh and everyone who helped create and produce *Meena Ki Duniya* including Naysán Sahba, Atul Kumar, Vinoba Gautam, Rachana Sharma, Sangeeta Anand, Devendra Tak, Paramita Dasgupta and Alka Malhotra. We would especially like to thank our government partners, the officials of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA), State Institute of Education & Training (SIET), State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) and All India Radio (AIR) in Uttar Pradesh as well as our international donor the IKEA Foundation (IF).

We hope the success of *Meena Ki Duniya* can inspire many such entertainment-education series for children, so that empowered with knowledge and inspired to take action, children can lead the way to positive sustainable social and behavioural change.



Paolo Mefalopulos
Chief, Communication for Development
UNICEF, India



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1. Overview



“I want my school to be like Meena’s school.”

Anshu Gautam
Student of class VIII,
Sarojini Nagar Block, Lucknow
Uttar Pradesh

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In her world, the boy child is often sent to school and given a larger share of food. The girl child however stays at home, tends to cattle, does household chores, fetches water, brings fodder, helps in cooking, etc. Meena’s creativity helps to come up with solutions while motivating other children and persuading the community to think about changing the situation of children. Gradually, she wins over the family opinion and induces dialogue, even in the village community.

In the 1990s, UNICEF launched the Meena Communication Initiative (MCI), aimed at changing perceptions and behaviours that hamper the survival, protection and development of girls in South Asia. The MCI used stories in various media – print, audio and video - to induce interpersonal communication and dialogue on gender issues. At the centre of the initiative is Meena, a 9-year-old spirited girl, who has a brother named Raju, and a pet parrot called Mithu. Her world comprises of an array of other interesting characters including a grandmother, parents, friends and neighbours.

In 2010, fifteen years after the launch of the MCI, UNICEF developed a new series *Meena Ki Duniya* (Meena’s World) in Hindi. The Meena radio programme comprises of 160 stand-alone episodes. The programme aims at promoting child rights, life skills, gender and social inclusion, children’s and especially girls’ education, and child-friendly schools, using an entertainment-education approach.



A teacher in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh tunes into Meena Ki Duniya broadcast

The objective of *Meena Ki Duniya* is to enhance knowledge, induce dialogue and lead social and behaviour change around the issues covered.

PURPOSE AND ORGANISATION OF THIS BOOK

This book describes the different processes, from the inception to the completion of the 160th episode of the *Meena Ki Duniya* radio programme, while chronicling the experience of producing it. The book is intended for development communicators and other development and communication professionals interested in radio as a medium to entertain and educate, and to convey critical social messages. It takes the reader on a journey, sharing processes that were followed and challenges that were faced, as well as the lessons learnt and modifications made along the way.

Chapter 2 gives the background of the project outlining what entertainment-education is; the history and key elements of MCI; and purpose of Meena Radio.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the process that was undertaken to produce the series. It begins with UNICEF's request

for proposals and the bid selection process, describing the project team and structure, with steps that were followed to ensure quality.

Section 3.1 discusses the role of research, including formative research to understand the project and the audience, as well as baseline and pre-test research in informing the ongoing production. **Sections 3.2 and 3.3** delve into Meena's world on radio and how the creative team was capacitated to develop the educational content in a participatory manner.

Section 3.4 discusses in more detail, the approaches and experiences in balancing messages with creative, during scripting and production. **Sections 3.5 and 3.6** discuss the feedback provided during pre-testing and key lessons learned.

For over a year, for many writers, educators, researchers, programme planners, voice artists, editors, producers, and others who worked on this project, creating Meena's World on radio became an important part of their world. The creative and writing team often asked themselves the question, "What would Meena do?" as they developed the story and allowed Meena to become an integral part of their lives. This book is intended to share some of the interesting and relevant parts of their journey.

2. Background



“In school we learn from text books. But *Meena Ki Duniya* makes us aware about everything related to school, home, education and society.”

School Girls, Class VIII
Lalitpur, Uttar Pradesh

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Meenaa *Ki Duniya* is the Hindi-language radio programme that is the subject of this book. Yet, Meena’s world is actually much older and wider than the radio programme. Meena herself is a lovable character who has been conceived and created by the team at UNICEF. She is an intelligent, smart, and enthusiastic young girl and her experiences form the basis for the stories, which are narrated in an entertaining and humorous fashion. Each of these stories reflect the lives of children in rural India, striking a chord with boys and girls alike.

Children connect with Meena, and her stories enable children to enhance their self-esteem and self-worth. The stories also describe how life skills are essential to enable children to grow to their full potential. The radio programme utilises an entertainment-education approach to promote children’s education, health, and life skills. This chapter provides background information on entertainment-education and on the MCI, as well as an introduction to the Meena Radio programme, setting the stage for production processes in the subsequent chapters.

ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION AS A VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Entertainment-Education or E-E, is a strategy that combines both entertainment and education to bring about social and behavioural change.¹

Based on several theories of behaviour change, E-E uses drama, music, and/or other communication formats that engage emotions to educate, promote health, or persuade people to improve their behaviours and ultimately their well-being.² According to Singhal and Rogers, E-E can influence social change by influencing individual, community, and society behaviours. By influencing the audience's environment, it also helps to create the conditions necessary for social change. In order to address the stages of behaviour change with audiences, E-E usually involves characters who model positive, negative,

and transitional behaviours. The creative aspects are woven around well-designed behaviourally-based educational objectives. When done well, E-E is entertaining and popular in style, doesn't look like it is educating, and involves and fosters a relationship of trust between the audience and the protagonist (or messenger).

Formative and summative research is integral to E-E. Existing summative research indicates that E-E can have a positive effect on knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and broader-level social change.

MEENA COMMUNICATION INITIATIVE (MCI)³

The MCI developed into a major human rights intervention campaign in South Asia since its commencement in 1991 with support from

A Meena muppet show supported by UNICEF is held in Pallabi, Dhaka, Bangladesh.



1. Singhal A., and Rogers E. (2004). *The Status of Entertainment-Education Worldwide*. In A. Singhal, M. J. Cody, E.M. Rogers, & M. Sabido (eds.) *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice* (pp. 3-20). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
2. de Fossard E., and Lande R. (2008). *Entertainment-Education for Better Health*. (2008). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins School of Public Health Center for Communication Programmes. Available from: <http://info.k4health.org/info-reports/E-E/E-E.pdf>
3. The section on MCI was extracted from: Chesterton P. (2004). *Evaluation of the Meena Communication Initiative*. Kathmandu: UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia. Available from: http://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CB8QFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.unicef.org%2Fevaldatabase%2Ffiles%2FFROSA_2004_800_Meena_Comm_Initiative.pdf&ei=R97GTcynL8-urAeNqc3NBA&usg=AFQjCNGfzR757JO9B1gVE9izXY9ABz5qhg

UNICEF offices in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal. It involves the use of a multi-media E-E approach to communicate children's rights to its South Asian audiences, primarily to bring about a transformation in the heavily disadvantaged situation of girls.

The ultimate goal of all UNICEF-supported interventions is the realisation of the rights of children and women, as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In working towards this goal, UNICEF's offices in South Asia played a leading advocacy role since 1986, in highlighting the importance of addressing the needs of the girl child. Allied to this, the 1990s were declared the Decade of the Girl Child by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in order to address discrimination against girls in the region and to promote their potential to participate in development.

In South Asian countries, and especially in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, the girl child faces differential treatment in all aspects of her life. Deep-rooted traditional beliefs and practices threaten the protection as well as survival of girls in many instances.

The overall goal of the MCI therefore has been to promote the Rights of the Child and support their implementation and realisation, with special focus on the girl child in South Asia. MCI focused on the girl child, specifically to improve her status and develop her potential by influencing and supporting social and behavioural change in the region.

The MCI objectives have been identified in terms of researching, producing and disseminating regional communication packages on the Rights of the Child in order to:

- ▶ Create awareness and advocate for reduction of existing disparities in the status and treatment of girls.
- ▶ Support social mobilisation processes designed to realise the potential of girls and to foster their participation in development.

- ▶ Produce a dynamic role model for girls which will assist in their acquisition of psycho-social life skills which are essential for empowerment.
- ▶ Provide a model for improved gender relationships, beginning at an early age.
- ▶ Communicate information regarding the survival, protection and development of children, including specific messages on education, health, gender equity and freedom from exploitation and abuse.
- ▶ Sustain all the above objectives and emerge as an independent, self-financed entity or "Meena Centre" in the future, by creating stronger and meaningful partnerships with corporate donors/private sector, NGOs and broadcast media.

To achieve these aims and objectives, the MCI uses a multi-media E-E approach. The approach was designed to be provocative as well as informative, in order *"to generate discussion and participation, motivating the audience through entertaining stories that are based on careful research into traditional and modern values and ... addressing life skills and enabling environment factors which are crucial for behaviour development programming"*.

MCI IN INDIA

In India, the MCI has attained nationwide recognition, and has become an integral communication tool within national education and communication programmes. Research also indicates that Meena is a popular role model for girls. The Meena Communication Strategy in India seeks to use Meena for girls' education in a planned and sustained manner. The strategy seeks to change behaviours and norms around girls' education and rights among specific audiences, including mothers and caregivers, *panchayats*, teachers, and children. The national and state campaigns involve mass media, print, and community activities.

In Uttar Pradesh, the first state where *Meena Ki Duniya* was aired, the State Education

Department established more than 35,000 girls' groups called "Meena Manch" (Meena Platform) in upper primary schools. Members of these groups mobilise families to ensure age-appropriate enrolment, attendance, and completion of primary education (upto Class 5) of children, especially girls. In many schools, "Meena Cabinets" have also been formed, with two children representing each class. After the broadcast of *Meena Ki Duniya*, these groups mobilise social action, fostered by the radio show.

MEENA RADIO

The *Meena Ki Duniya* radio programme is an innovation of the MCI, designed to engage rural school children, their educators, parents and community leaders on critical issues. The radio programme was envisioned by UNICEF, in collaboration with the Uttar Pradesh State Department of Education, as a 160-episode project – to cover an entire academic year – thus making it the largest content bank of any one audio-visual material for the MCI to date. Since the programme has been found effective (demonstrated by evidence from the effectiveness studies and a baseline-midline comparison), it is being replicated in other states in India.



Enthusiastic children answer questions post Meena Radio broadcast

Millennium Development Goals:
MDG 2 - Achieve universal primary education;
MDG 3 - Promote gender equality and empower women

MDG 7 - Halve the number of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation
MDG 4 - Reduce child mortality and,
MDG 5 - Improve maternal health.

Meena Radio used a specially designed radio series to achieve these objectives. The radio series was used to engage children and trigger a teacher-aided discussion in the class room. The series is broadcast on All India Radio during the school day. Each episode of Meena Radio has three critical components, namely, the story, the song and the activity. Each of these components is designed to engage children and to effectively communicate messages. It also set the stage for teachers to facilitate discussion around messages in the episodes. By ensuring that teachers have guidance on leading post-programme discussions, Meena Radio works both as a stand-alone programme and also as a social and behavioural change communication approach, that engages students and inspires teachers to discuss and reinforce messages.

A key objective of the Meena radio programme is to influence a change in knowledge, attitude and the intention to practice behaviours that are crucial for the survival, growth, protection and wellbeing of children.

Priority issues covered include health, child development, nutrition, protection, education as well as hygiene and sanitation. All stories are woven around the main character and protagonist, the 9-year old girl called Meena. Her world was conceptualised to reflect the realities of a young girl in a rural context, facing a number of social inequalities, including gender discrimination. The radio programme uses relatable stories to communicate multiple inequalities and challenges faced by girls. The stories and plot highlight and suggest ways to overcome some of these challenges and ways to initiate change.

Another important objective of the radio series has been to address existing social norms that

prevent complete enrolment, retention and completion of upper primary education for the girl child. The programme, stories and songs help inculcate and improve life skills in problem solving, negotiation, and pro-social behaviour. Through the stories and interaction among the teacher and students in Meena's World, the concept of child-friendly schools and life skill-based education are modelled and endorsed.

The use of E-E is important, for it captures the imagination of children and provides a platform to weave in the messages organically, and not obviously, into the stories. Through engaging plot lines, and by embedding songs and games in the format of the programme, each episode aims to capture the child's attention and imagination. Many of the messages are repeated in different episodes to ensure retention. In fact, repetition was intrinsic to script development. All messages are repeated at least twice for reiteration which is important for children to remember take away messages of different episodes.

The format of the show (songs, games and an engaging plot lines) was a deliberate one, designed specially to retain attention. A blend of entertainment and education induces teachers and children to engage in a discussion and recall dialogues on issues Meena faces in the episode and which they themselves face in their own communities.

Cross-cutting themes covered include:

- ▶ Gender equity - Rights of the girl child



Schools procured radio sets to listen to Meena Radio broadcast

- ▶ Social inclusion
- ▶ Child friendly schools - modelling good teaching, congenial and friendly ambience
- ▶ Child Protection

Behavioural issues covered include:

- ▶ **Hygiene:** Washing hands with soap before eating and after defecation
- ▶ **Sanitation:** Schools and homes with well used and maintained latrines
- ▶ **Education for all:** Ensuring enrolment, retention and completion of school for all girls
- ▶ **Nutrition**
- ▶ **Immunization and health:** All children to complete routine immunization

Life skills based education was the overarching methodology and all stories demonstrate ways of problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, communication, negotiation, coping with emotions and stress, self-assessment, conflict resolution and management, and relationship skills such as empathy.

Sesame Workshop India, a known name in children's programming, was selected by UNICEF to produce Meena Radio episodes (details of selection process shared in the next chapter). The approach to the production of Meena Radio was based on expanding the MCI audiovisual content to a radio format. It was also envisioned that Meena Radio would act as platform for action for initiatives like *Meena Manch* and Meena Cabinet. While the essence of Meena would always be drawn from UNICEF's guidelines, in order to adapt to an audio medium, Sesame Workshop India recommended creative changes to portray some of the characters in Meena's world.

This approach was based on research from similar initiatives that have been successful in influencing dialogue, education and even behaviour change. The next chapter describes, in detail, the conception and creation of a project team and processes for the production of Meena Radio.

IN THE CLASSROOM: PRE-BROADCAST PREPARATION & POST BROADCAST DISCUSSIONS



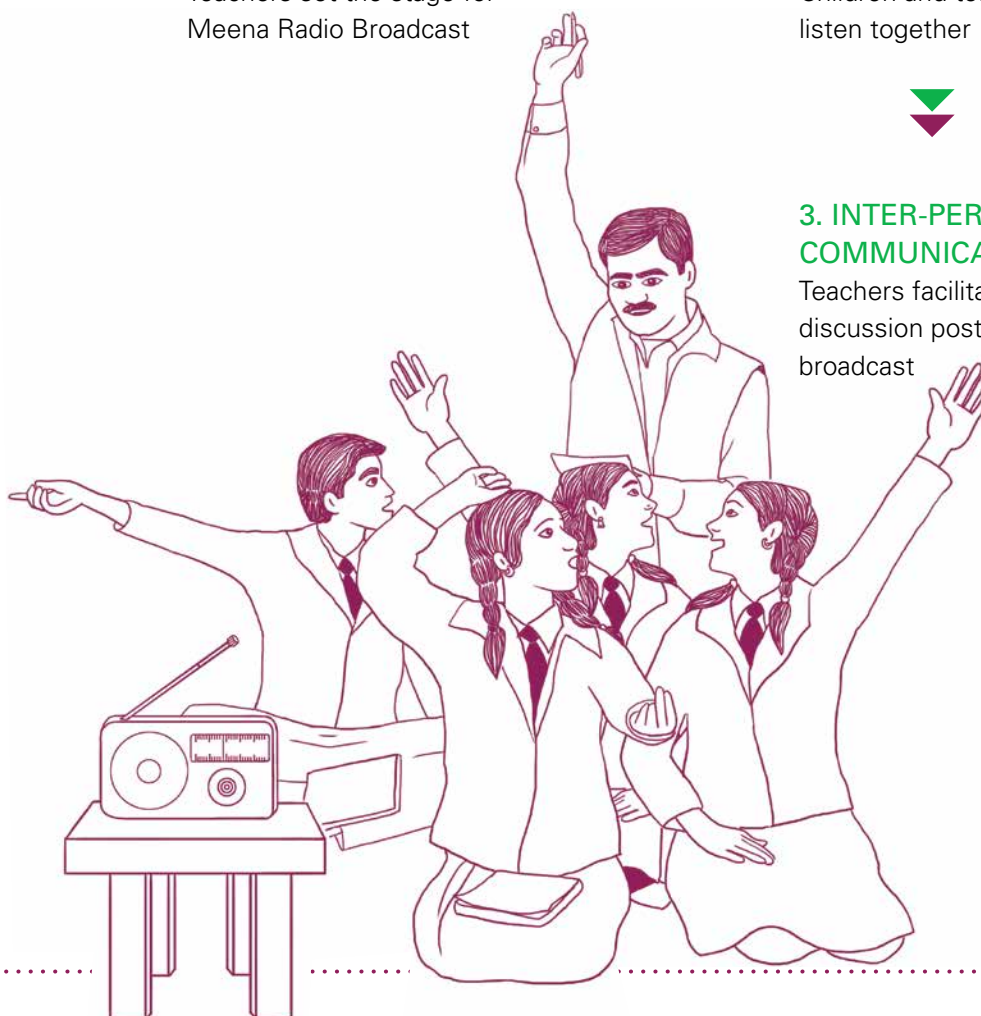
1. PREPARE THE CHILDREN

Teachers set the stage for Meena Radio Broadcast



2. STORY, SONG, ACTIVITY

Children and teachers listen together



3. INTER-PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Teachers facilitate discussion post the broadcast



3. Process Overview

“Meena Ki Duniya is fun and entertaining. We enjoy it thoroughly.”

School Boys, Class VIII
Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh

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an engaging entertainment-education format that could be linked to classroom and other discussions and actions.” For pilot exercise, the primary audience was children aged 9-14 years. This was later revised to 11-14 years, based on findings of the pre-test of the first few episodes.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: REQUIREMENTS AND SELECTION

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The bidding agencies were asked to present a concept note that highlighted how the series would achieve the proposed objectives of:

- ▶ Causing change in pro-social behaviour and practices
- ▶ Improving life skills

Once the decision to expand MCI and Meena’s world on radio through *Meena Ki Duniya* were taken, UNICEF developed and circulated a Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify an agency that could research, write, develop and produce 30 pilot episodes. The RFP defined the duration of the programme and the fact that it was to be in a magazine format, based on UNICEF’s understanding and available research on programming for children. According to the RFP, the “*Meena Radio programme would serve as a flagship intervention of MCI, allowing for messaging in*

- ▶ Promoting girl child's enrolment and retention in schools
- ▶ Modelling child-friendly schools

UNICEF evaluated the proposals based on the project approach (including creative concept and sample script on washing hands), production proposal (including core team members, production organogram, and directory of third-party services and goods providers), corporate profile of the bidding agency and the financial proposal/price.

UNICEF evaluated the responses to the RFP by seven, international and Indian, agencies. After the presentations by shortlisted agencies, UNICEF selected Sesame Workshop India (SWI) as the most appropriate agency for the project. The reviewing committee concluded that *"The agency profile was strong, with very relevant experience in handling serialised productions for children in the pre-school age group (such as their popular TV show 'Galli Galli Sim Sim'). The creative concept was well-articulated and interactive. Further, the agency proposed 1) Creative concept, in line with children's preferences and the Meena characters – a concept that had given thought to exploiting the radio medium, 2) Good research base – adequate time to conceptual and formative research 3) Strong team – with dedicated staff for conceptualisation, production and research elements and 4) Concept 'Letters to Meena', which lent itself to an interaction with the audiences – children from rural schools."*

SESAME WORKSHOP INDIA

Sesame Workshop is a US-based non-profit educational organisation, which aims to make a meaningful difference in the lives of children around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary *Sesame Street*. Currently, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 140 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programmes

and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programmes like *Dragon Tales*, *Sagwa*, *The Chinese Siamese Cat*, *Pinky Dinky Doo* and ground-breaking multimedia productions developed in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. Beyond television, the Workshop produces content for multiple media platforms on a wide range of issues, including literacy, health and military deployment. Their initiatives meet specific needs to help young children and families develop critical skills, acquire healthy habits and build emotional strength to prepare them for lifelong learning.

Sesame Workshop India (SWI) leads *Galli Galli Sim Sim*, an educational initiative that harnesses the power of multimedia to help children prepare better for school and life. SWI's *Galli Galli Sim Sim* television show provides access to engaging educational experiences while SWI implements an educational outreach project, supported by Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, which reaches children in the urban slums of India.

SWI brought specific processes to the Meena production adapted from the organisation's global model for producing evidence-based E-E media. These processes verified the creative and educational aspects and the interface between the two during the development of each episode. UNICEF guided the entire process, while SWI managed the development – from script to submission of final episode - ensuring a continuum of participation and oversight through a complex, multi-step process.

Key Elements of Meena Radio Production

The elements were adapted from the Sesame Workshop Model and they included:

- ▶ Seamless process integrating content, creative and research
- ▶ Stringent and concrete quality parameters
- ▶ Streamlined, rigorous, proven and successful production processes
- ▶ Intensive script review
- ▶ Proven research methods

MEENA KI DUNIYA TEAM AND PROCESS

The production process that SWI proposed and eventually followed, with some minor adjustments, included several steps along with coordination with a team of experts and programme managers from UNICEF, creative consultants, a radio production partner and the pretest research agency hired by UNICEF.

PROJECT TEAM

SWI brought together three essential skill sets to the production process:

- 1) Experience in production of E-E content
- 2) Internationally proven processes and experience of working with children
- 3) Creative and research team, which could work simultaneously using its experience in the advertising and film industry.

SWI took the role of programme management and education research and engaged a team of independent consultants who provided creative direction and writing. UNICEF had conceptualized a model that comprised of the following core team. SWI managed and coordinated the same teams and added to the process their global experience and processes for developing content for children. The teams comprised:

- ▶ **Creative team:** The Creative Director and his team developed the creative content of the radio programme. The team brainstormed on the stories, provided creative briefs to the lyricist and was the gatekeeper who ensured all segments remained entertaining from a child's perspective.
- ▶ **Principal Writer and writing team:** The role of the Principal Writer was to review all stories and scripts and to produce episodes to ensure language consistency and adherence to Meena's character brand-book and brand guidelines. S/he was responsible for keeping a check on proper characterisation and ensuring

that the incorporated sound effects were relevant to a children's radio programme. The team of writers developed stories and scripts.

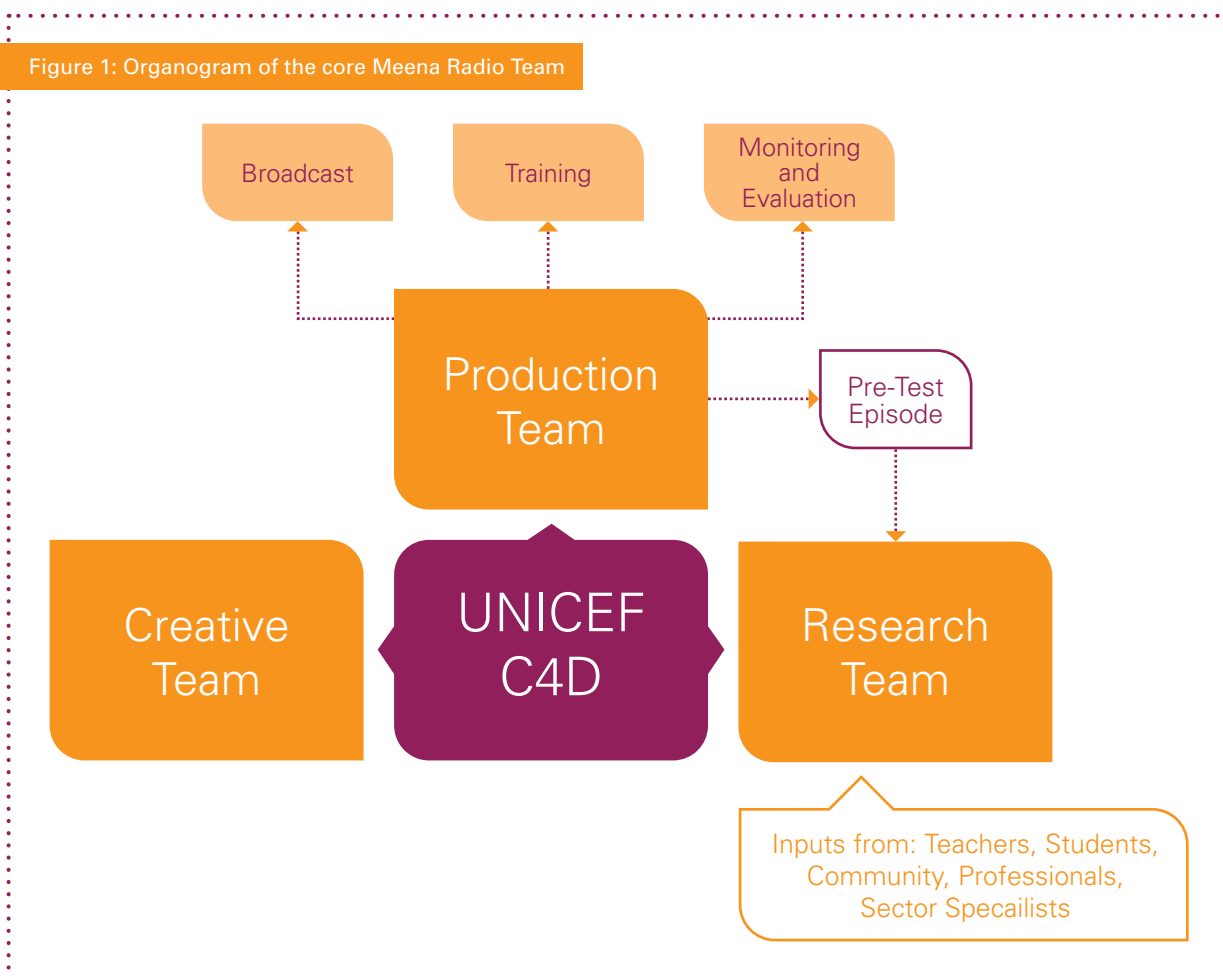
- ▶ **Education, research and outreach team:** This team ensured that education and entertainment found equal space on the Meena Radio programme. Led by the Director, they managed content workshops, provided critical inputs during ideation sessions, identified key messaging from research and pre-test data, and served as a critical resource for writers.
- ▶ **Programme Manager:** The Programme Manager worked closely with the team, linking the writing, reviewing and production aspects of *Meena Ki Duniya* to facilitate a seamless workflow. Working as a core contact for UNICEF, the programme team supervised the entire process and associated operational requirements for the Meena Radio programme.
- ▶ **Supervising Producer:** The role of the Supervising Producer was to ensure the highest audio quality in the radio programme through use of appropriate artists and equipment. Constant value addition in songs, background score, voice modulation and soundscapes were critical inputs provided by the Supervising Producer at the time of recording.

UNICEF also commissioned an external research firm to carry out the pre-testing of select episodes. Each of the first 30 episodes was pre-tested. Thereafter, five episodes were pre-tested in every batch of 30 episodes, independently by a research agency. Apart from those mentioned in the organogram above, the additional people involved in the production came from the radio production house.

MEENA KI DUNIYA PROCESS

The broad steps of the process of producing *Meena Ki Duniya* are illustrated in Figure 1. Subsequent chapters elucidate detailed steps, process accounts and lessons learned during production. SWI initiated the project with

Figure 1: Organogram of the core Meena Radio Team



formative research, including a secondary review of materials and research on MCI, key issues and goals addressed by UNICEF, and a research study conducted in the field. The aim was to understand the intended audience’s media (specifically radio) usage, stages of behaviour change and associated motivators and barriers related to the topics, likely to be part of the programme (as suggested by UNICEF).

The purpose of the formative research was to inform the team about children’s and parents’ perceptions of Meena interventions and potential key benefits of and barriers to behaviour change. These in turn informed the development of the programme.

Following the formative research, UNICEF convened a group of key stakeholders at the first content workshop. They included, teachers, educationists, officials from the education

department, select students and technical experts. Together they generated a content map of the educational objectives and takeaways for the first 30 episodes at this participatory workshop. The radio expert, research director, creative director and writers subsequently convened an Ideation Session, where they developed stories for the programme, based on the content map.

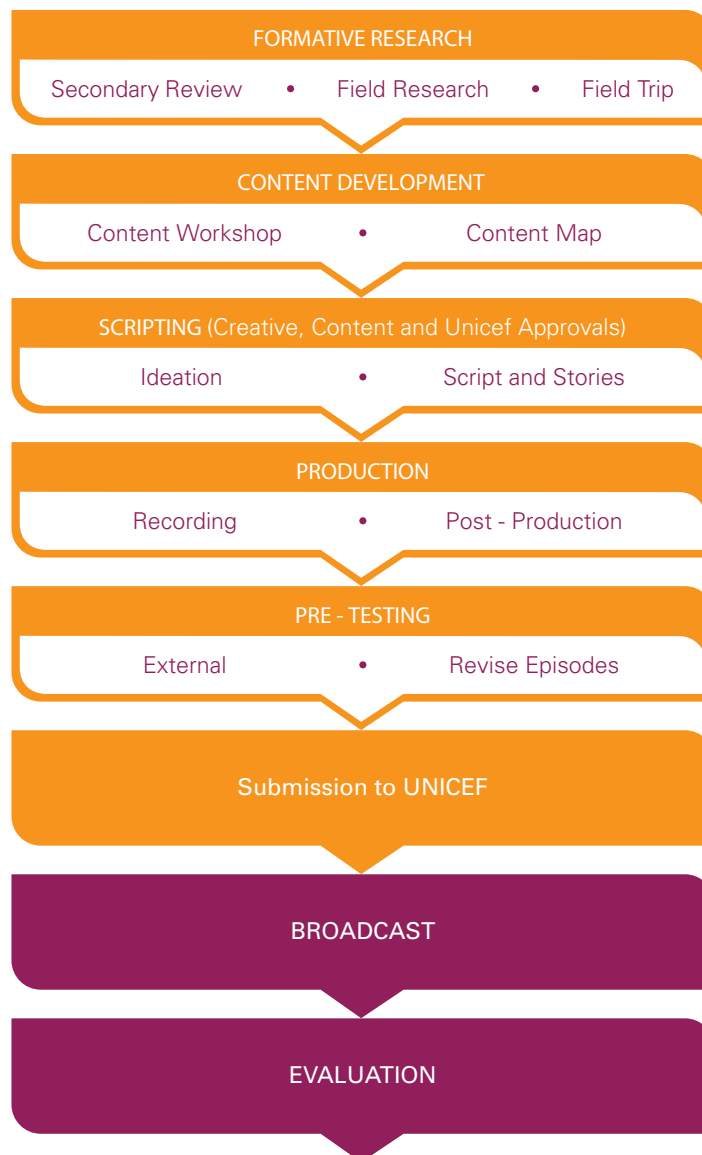
The stories, followed by scripts, underwent review and approval by the education team at SWI, by the creative director and finally by UNICEF, until they were found ready for production. The radio production house Hill Road Media, produced the episodes and sent them back to SWI for review and eventual submission to UNICEF. This was followed by UNICEF sending four episodes for pre-testing (periodically) and ensuring that the results are made available and understood by the project team, to enable revisions for future episodes.

This process continued and was streamlined and strengthened over time. Content workshops were held four times – first for the initial 30 episodes (as described above) and later for episodes 31-60, 61-110 and 111-160.

In this chapter there are over six separate sub-sections in which, the process steps and associated challenges, adjustments and lessons

learned, with examples of situations encountered during the production of *Meena Ki Duniya* are documented. Though many of the team members had worked on E-E projects in the past, the process of making *Meena Ki Duniya* deepened their understanding of producing media with social messages for young people. Some of their memorable experiences have also been shared here along with synopsis of certain episodes.

Figure 2: Production Process*



*Process detailed in the following chapter

3.1 Role of Research



“I love Meena’s character and always want to emulate her.”

Archana Kumari,
Student of class VIII
Chhajlet, Moradabad,
Uttar Pradesh

A strong foundation of research informed every step of the Meena Radio programme’s production process. Research was conducted from conception to completion of each episode. The most obvious way that research played a role in Meena Radio was by providing background information for developing the content and messages. In addition, the formative research informed the creative rendering, language and references in the episodes.

This chapter provides an overview of the dimensions of the formative research that was conducted, as well as examples of how the research helped refine the Meena Radio programme. Broadly, the formative research can be divided into background research (conducted/consulted prior to beginning work on the programme) and ongoing research¹.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Prior to beginning work on *Meena Ki Duniya*, research was conducted to understand what issues were to be addressed and how these would be handled with a radio programme. The process involved a desk review of secondary data and a formative research study in rural Uttar Pradesh (U.P), where the radio programme was launched initially.

Desk Review of secondary data:

Background reading on MCI, UNICEF’s areas of focus and health status, media access, and social issues in UP were researched, consulted and studied prior to production of *Meena Ki Duniya*. The background reading included a review of both the creative aspects of producing Meena – primarily the Meena brand book and existing communication materials – as well as a background on the purpose, goals, previous assessments and current on-ground activities of MCI in India.

1. Note: This chapter focuses on formative research as it was part of the production and does not discuss summative research, which is usually carried out to assess the impact of an intervention/communication.

UNICEF made the MCI research materials available to the research team – to facilitate better understanding of how to re-construct aspects of existing characters and translate Meena’s world to a radio format. This helped the team ensure continuity of issues that were to be addressed and identify ways to translate these to a radio programme. For SWI, this background research was crucial to the development of the programme. For example, by internalising the Meena brand book, the team understood what all characters were available, what were essential in all stories and how the new characters introduced to the radio programme had to fit in the existing cast.

Understanding the purpose, goals, previous assessments and current on-ground activities of MCI also helped the team understand the power and role of Meena characters in many areas, including U.P. It educated them team on access to media as well as health and social issues prevalent in the areas where the Meena Radio programme would air. Understanding what on-ground activities were associated with the MCI highlighted which advocacy messages could be incorporated into the episodes. For example, the team learned about Meena Manches and Meena Cabinets – groups of students that were formed in schools to help improve the situation for students, particularly girls. These groups were portrayed in the radio episodes to reflect and reinforce ongoing MCI activities.

The desk research also included a study of online sources and reports - state profile from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-III), reports from government sources – to understand the health status, social issues, life, and media access and utilization among children and families in U.P. In addition, a field based formative research study was commissioned in U.P. to understand the context, specific characteristics and perceptions of the audiences.

Formative Research Study

In the month prior to beginning work on Meena Radio pre-production, a qualitative formative study was commissioned by SWI to understand

the social norms, topical knowledge, attitudes, practices, media use, and general likes and dislikes of children and parents from tribal and non-tribal populations in three districts of rural U.P.

The study revealed that there are distinct differences between girls and boys, tribal and non-tribal students that needed to be addressed in the episodes. For example, while the study found that children understood and spoke in a mix of Hindi and Bundeli (local tribal dialect) languages, Meena Radio episodes were developed and broadcast in simple Hindi alone.

Even though children understood and spoke different dialects at home, simple Hindi was selected as the language for the production of the episodes. This was done despite findings from formative study because Hindi was the official language that was used in schools.

Another example is that the formative found that girls in rural areas were considered to be soft-spoken and had more social restrictions as compared to boys. To initiate a change in this mind set, Meena’s character was portrayed as self-confident and self-assured, so that both boys and girls saw characteristics in Meena that they could aspire for.

High prevalence of *Gutka* (chewing tobacco) among school going children was noted. Since this was widespread, it was identified as an important issue for Meena Radio to cover.

In addition, the study highlighted barriers and motivators for behaviour change that could be considered in crafting storylines for Meena Radio episodes. For example, a common refrain from parents was their difficult economic situation and decisions being based primarily on their financial status. Therefore, financial matters were considered while crafting stories for the radio episodes. For example, in an episode on the importance of having a toilet at home, the children in the story save money in their own *gullak* (piggy bank) to collect money for constructing the toilet. Meena radio stories

provided a step-wise “How-to” for the issues touched upon by providing simple, cost effective and easy-to-do solutions.

Findings from field visits conducted in March 2009 by UNICEF also influenced the production of Meena Radio. The field visit identified awareness on issues such as child marriage, dowry and hygiene as being critical for students.

ONGOING RESEARCH

During the pre-production stage, additional research was consulted and conducted to inform the messaging, stories, scripts and production. Prior to the development of draft content maps² for batches of episodes, UNICEF content experts were consulted. Findings from the baseline, effectiveness studies and the pre-test studies were used to refine topics, content maps and individual episodes during the production phase.

UNICEF content experts

In order to better understand the current programmatic priorities, barriers and motivators to behaviour change related to the issues to be covered in the radio programme, the project’s Research Director met with specific content experts at UNICEF. Their expertise in the areas of child protection, hygiene and sanitation, education, health services, nutrition and communication provided a necessary perspective to the writing process.

Baseline and Effectiveness Studies

UNICEF commissioned a baseline study with 1,536 children and 256 teachers in eight districts of U.P prior to the launch of the programme. The baseline study provided the production team with useful information about in-school realities and children’s perceptions about issues which the programme planned to cover. This helped the team refine content maps and storylines of the

episodes. For example, the baseline research indicated that 60% teachers in upper primary schools were male. Until this data was received, female teachers were portrayed in most of the Meena Radio episodes. Subsequently, characters of male teachers were introduced in the episodes to make Meena’s radio world more relatable to its audiences which comprised mainly of children and teachers. Similarly, the baseline study revealed that very few children could come up with the theme of child rights apart from education. As a result, several episodes focusing on additional rights of the child and their descriptions were incorporated in the subsequent content map and episodes.



A researcher interviews a school girl in Andhra Pradesh for the effectiveness study

Two effectiveness studies commissioned by UNICEF also provided insights into children’s and teachers’ use and perceptions of Meena Radio during the on-air broadcast in schools. The study involved interviews, focus group discussions and observations in 126 upper primary schools. Though much of the results from the effectiveness studies had implications for the structural elements of the intervention, the results did highlight the high level of engagement, recall and relatability of the radio programme and its characters and messages.

Some findings from the second round of the effectiveness study showed that stories that focused on health and hygiene were most liked

2. A content map is a table containing topical areas and episode objectives and takeaways. Chapter 3.3 describes in more detail the content map and other aspects of content development for the Meena Radio programme.

by students and they could easily recall some of the messages from these stories. The studies also showed that students were discussing stories with their peers and family members. About 70% students listening to the radio programme observed changes amongst their peers (regularity in school attendance and better personal hygiene.)

The effectiveness studies provided both the research and writing team with deeper understanding of what worked, what did not and what needed to be enhanced/alterd for better recall of stories. As many as 25 most recalled stories were listed after the 1st round of the effectiveness study and reasons for liking or disliking them were identified. An analysis of the stories helped the writers and researchers get a better understanding of why some of the themes were effective while others failed to evince much interest. Interestingly, the study also found that the three most disliked stories were part of the 25 most liked and recalled stories. The revelation was that stories that had the most emotional relevance to the children were better liked and recalled by them.

Pre-test Studies

All of the first 30 pilot episodes were pretested by UNICEF through an independent research agency. The following components were systematically pretested:

- (i) Characters' voices
- (ii) Format of the series, including pace of the episode
- (iii) Messaging

Characters' voices: The pre-test focused on the likeability, credibility, clarity and gross negatives, if any in the voices selected for the different characters.

Format: Appropriateness, comprehensibility, entertainment value, attractiveness, engagement level, relatability, credibility, efficacy to engage in discussion, repetition of messaging, gross negatives, comfortable pace, and language comprehension by audience etc.

Messaging: Message recall, attention span, message comprehension, credibility, influence to induce discussion, knowledge gain, intention to act or adopt new behaviours, motivation, gross negatives, etc.

Subsequently, four out of every batch of 20 episodes were pretested. Some of the scripts – if found to be around sensitive issues – were also pretested. There were occasions when UNICEF found it important to have the script pre-tested before production. This was particularly crucial for episodes which related to adolescence and coping with changes in body. The pre-test findings were very interesting, and based on these findings, UNICEF decided not to produce those episodes. The pre-test studies conducted by the independent research agency provided very important and crucial insights to inform the production of *Meena Ki Duniya*.



Meena Radio broadcast in session in a government school in Andhra Pradesh

One of the earliest pre-test findings that impacted the most frequently heard part of *Meena Ki Duniya* was the response to the title track. In the first round, children who heard it enjoyed the music but could only remember one section that repeated a sound – “*Ku-ku-ku-ku*”. As a result, the production team slowed down the pace of the track. The revised version went for another round of pre-testing, which yielded higher recall and comprehension of the lines. Another critical pre-test finding that had implications on the entire production was the finding that the initial episodes appealed to an audience of ages 11-14 years, which

narrowed down the ages from the original range of 9-14 years.

During production, SWI and UNICEF periodically identified and sent groups of four episodes out of each batch of 20 produced episodes for pre-testing. The pre-test was organized through focus groups of boys and girls in different regions of U.P. Generally, the pre-tests were positive and occasionally there was feedback that was used to modify a specific episode. The pre-test findings revealed what the teachers and students liked in the story, and what they didn't, which characters they recalled. The pre-test gave the production team specific feedback on words that were not understood. It also gave an opportunity to understand how effective the messages were in the episode and what part of the story was liked and disliked. For example, in one episode called *School Chalo* (Let's Go to School), the children who heard the pre-tested episode felt the child in the story sounded and seemed too young for a 7-year-old so his age was changed to 6 years. In addition, in the same story, there was an incidental part in which a village leader was to purchase drain covers but because of the main plot line that aspect was not carried through, and so the children asked about whether he ultimately got the drain covers. Therefore, it was ensured that the drain cover storyline was resolved in the episode.

More importantly, the pre-test findings served as reminders for production of future episodes, especially the need to balance entertainment and education carefully. Episodes with heavy messaging and less fun and lower activity levels were the ones in which the messaging was least recalled or understood. The pre-test findings reinforced the value and interest of the song and game segments of the episodes.

Additional Research

During the writing of *Meena Ki Duniya* episodes, ongoing research was conducted on a case-by-case basis for individual stories and scripts. When the research team was unsure of the specific mechanisms for disease transmission, for example, these topics were researched

so that they could be accurately represented in the episode storylines and dialogues. In addition, though no new research was conducted in the area of child development for the production of *Meena Ki Duniya*, it is important to note that the research team already had a background and understanding in what is developmentally appropriate for children in the pre-teen years. This knowledge was valuable in assessing the appropriateness of both the content and entertainment value of the episodes.

Taken together, the research informing the production of *Meena Ki Duniya* was both extensive and integrated. Formative research played a key role in determining what content was addressed, how the topics were handled, and how entertainment and education was ensured in the episodes. Research also helped the team know if it was on the right track and whether it was more likely that the *Meena Ki Duniya* programme ultimately would make an impact in the lives of children, teachers and families.

Implementation Framework

2009	Dec	Formative research Pilot development
	Mar	Pilot implementation Meena Radio launched
2010	Aug	Baseline study
	Dec	1 st Round of effectiveness study
2011	Apr	1 st Year broadcast over
	Aug	2 nd Year broadcast begins 9 districts + all KGBVs
	Oct	2 nd Round effectiveness study
2012	Apr	2 nd Year broadcast over
	May	Endline study
	Aug	3 rd Year broadcast, SSA funded

RELEVANT EPISODES

Gullak Bharo (Save with a piggy bank)



Ritu and *Shravan's* father asks them what they want from the market – they ask for toys. But he gets each of them a piggy bank saying that if they start saving in small amounts one day they can buy expensive things. *Meena* who is playing with them tells them that she saves money by eating at home instead of buying treats. After a month, when they break open their banks, they have lots of money. They want to go to the market but their father says that he must take their grandfather for open defecation. *Meena* hears this and is surprised that they don't have a toilet at home. When they finally go to the market, the children buy a bank for their father asking him to start saving to build a toilet at home. The father who thought they could not afford a toilet, is happy with their idea and promises that they will have a toilet soon.

School Chalo (Let's go to school)



Meena is telling *Jamaal* the story of *Aladdin* when they are interrupted as his father wants him to help with work on the farm. *Meena* wants to give him the story book so that he can finish the story on his own – but *Jamaal* says he can't read and his father does not allow him to attend school. One day when *Jamaal's* father is putting drain covers, *Meena* and her father come to talk to him. *Meena's* father tells *Jamaal's* father that he must offer similar care to his son as he does to the drains, so that his son can grow properly. When *Jamaal's* father learns that schooling is free till age 14, he agrees to send *Jamaal* to school too.

3.2 Content & Messaging



“I heard on Meena Radio that child marriage is illegal. I convinced my parents to delay my marriage.”

Aarti Rawat
Student of class VII,
Kasturba Gandhi School,
Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

This chapter provides an overview of the process of content development for the Meena Radio programme. The process was iterative and collaborative, involving SWI’s team and UNICEF experts and stakeholders. The E-E format of the programme provided age-appropriate opportunities for children to learn through entertaining stories, songs and games.

EDUCATIONAL MESSAGING

The overall vision for the programme was to address three broad goals, namely, Child Rights, Gender Equity and Child-Friendly Schools. As part of the E-E approach, each episode of the Meena Radio programme had educational objectives and takeaways. The educational objective referred to the knowledge, attitude, perception or behaviour, for example: “Always use soap when washing hands”. Takeaways were specific messages which the audience could recall after hearing the episode; these stemmed from objectives which were measurable. For example, one takeaway or specific message for the episode on washing hands with soap after defecation was “*Children will know that human excreta contains germs and germs can be passed from hands to mouth*”.

The content development process involved participation of different stakeholders for generating episodic issues, identifying objectives and takeaways – thus finalising the content map.

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT FOR PILOT PHASE

Content Workshop

The first 30 episodes were considered as a pilot phase where processes were set up to integrate research, content and creative development that helped streamline a rigorous production process. Stakeholders were brought together for a *Meena Ki Duniya* content development workshop

conducted in Lucknow. The purpose of the first content workshop was to set the context, share information related to MCI and Meena Radio and discuss content of the radio series – particularly objectives and takeaways of the first 30 episodes.

The workshop brought together a range of stakeholders, including representatives from UNICEF in New Delhi and Lucknow, government officials from U.P, a representative from the State Institute for Educational Technology (SIET), children and *Meena Manch* members, teachers and district coordinators. SWI's content, research and production team members also participated in the workshop. A participatory process was followed to brainstorm and prioritise topic areas within the three broad UNICEF goals of Child Rights, Gender Equity and Child-Friendly Schools.

Child Rights comprised of three sub goals – Survival, Development and Protection.

For example, within the Survival sub-goal, some of the priority topical areas that emerged included, importance of consuming balanced meals, washing hands with soap before eating, and partaking equal quantity of food for both boys and girls. Small groups were formed to discuss and generate specific objectives and takeaways for these topical areas. This participatory approach enabled all stakeholders to arrive at a common road map, or what was called the content map.

Content Map

Following the content workshop, a content map for the first 30 episodes was drafted. This document outlined goals, sub-goals, objectives and takeaways

Figure 3: Example of a Content Map

EP#	78
NAME	Kya Jodi hai (What a pair!)
GOAL	Child - Friendly Schools
SUB-GOAL	Teaching - Learning processes
OBJECTIVE	Believe that schools should provide an environment that enables children of differing cognitive abilities to learn (inclusion).
TAKEAWAYS	1) All children can learn. 2) Teachers can adapt teaching methods to match children's ability (such as pairing children, providing more time, using hands-on materials, providing encouragement/praise).
NOTES	1) Awareness of the teacher. 2) Age Grade System - Teacher is under pressure to complete the curriculum. Motivators: 1) Teachers 2) Head Master 3) NPRC Context/Examples: 1) An Education Inspector checks how much the students follow and not how many chapters have been completed - An instance, if a kid is weak in Mathematics he has exemplary musical ability. 2) Emphasis on Learning and Teaching.

In this example of a Content Map: Goal and Sub-Goals are the overarching outcomes of Meena Radio. These, along with the Objective (which refers to the Output of the episode) are determined by the Research team. The Takeaways are what the listeners understand and retain. The Notes are additional information from consultations with teachers and experts that the writers can use as fodder to develop the storyline.

for each episode. The notes from the content workshop were revisited and the content map was created based on UNICEF's priority areas. The content map included an additional column for any relevant supporting information for the writers.

For example, for the objective on five steps of hand washing, the additional notes column included information on available materials developed by UNICEF for the Global Handwashing Day campaign. Similarly, for the objective that adolescents will understand the importance of eating food containing calcium, supporting information for writers was a note that a barrier to getting calcium was the fact that children often dislike milk and don't drink it. This was important to address in the storyline. A content map of 30 pilot episodes was submitted to UNICEF for review by technical experts and approval before the writers began the writing and scripting process.

Creative Workshop

Once the content map was finalised, it was shared with writers and the Creative Director of the Meena Radio programme during a creative workshop. The creative workshop gave writers an opportunity to understand the objective and key takeaways of each episode determined by the research team, and develop them into stories that worked for children. The creative workshop helped define the creative hook for each story and the overall story arc. The workshop explored techniques and challenges of creating a story that would have a balance between creativity and messaging, particularly finding the right time in the story for the message to come in. It looked at where the story arcs for the episodes were (point when the audience is captivated by the story), using these instances to infuse the message.

The workshop looked at the process of writing scripts to ensure that the language was simple and easily understood by children, and characters introduced at the right moment in the storyline. One important attribute considered for the story writing was curiosity among children. Research

shows that children are very curious by nature. Therefore, stories for them needed to ensure that every scene provided answers while keeping them curious about what would happen next. Discussion at the creative workshop helped writers to ensure that the stories they wrote were effective and impactful for children. Similarly, inclusion of games and riddles in the storyline were also used as fodder for writers to enhance the messaging.

The participants were given support materials on *Meena Ki Duniya* and the creative process was discussed along with a briefing on the content map. Relevant examples and useful information was also shared. The kind of music that would work for E-E radio programme and the kind of special effects needed, were also discussed.

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT FOR REMAINING 130 EPISODES

Episode 31-60: Additional objectives and takeaways that were generated from the first content workshop were incorporated while creating the content map for the next batch of episodes. The Director of Research for the project, met with content experts in Delhi and Lucknow to understand the priority areas and to gather contextual information related to the topics to be covered. The notes from these meetings were used to create the content map for the next 30 episodes.

Episode 61-160: Two more content workshops were conducted in Lucknow to develop the content map for the remaining episodes. Content experts and other stakeholders helped the team arrive at the list of topical areas and objectives to be emphasised and reinforced for the final batch of episodes for the Meena Radio programme. UNICEF members, Meena writers and production team members participated in these two workshops and worked together to chart out messages and takeaways.

Based on the experience of the first content workshop (Pilot Phase), the process was streamlined and draft objectives charted out prior to the next two workshops. This resulted in effective time management during both workshops helping generate contextual information related to the topic areas. At the workshops, the process was refined to include additional columns in the content map for incorporating information about “barriers” and “motivators” for each objective; mainly to help writers pen down relevant scripts by including contextual examples and references. For example, for the episode “*Pongaram Hai Na*”, which was on the importance of keeping infants away from the room where something is being cooked, the writers used additional information from the content map to write dialogues and provide examples of culturally appropriate and relatable ways to keep infants away from the cooking space (for example, facing “*chulha*” or stove towards the window to keep smoke out and have infants where their mother can see them).

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS AND VISITS

Guidelines Document

Two creative workshops were conducted in New Delhi to orient writers and the creative team on writing for Meena Radio. A guidelines document was developed to provide guidance, with information that was to be kept in mind while writing scripts for the programme. This included age and cultural appropriateness, use of language and guidelines for radio-appropriate content.

Writers’ visit to Lalitpur

To familiarise the creative team with the context and life of people in villages, UNICEF supported a familiarisation visit of the team to Lalitpur district in U.P. The visit helped the team obtain insights about life of village-folk, their daily routine, physical environment and challenges, laying

down the foundation for writing meaningful and relevant scripts.

Overall, the content for Meena Radio reflected key priority areas regarding child rights, supported by contextual information while being informed through continuous research. A participatory process was followed to create content with inputs from stakeholders, experts, UNICEF and government representatives, the creative team and audience itself. This ensured that the final product was entertaining and relevant to children and adults, educational in substance and aligned with MCI priority areas.



Each Meena Radio episode comprises of a story, song and game

RELEVANT EPISODE

Pongaram Hai Na (Ponagram is there, no!)



One day while *Meena* is visiting her friend *Bela* to return her book, the ever-helpful *Pongaram*, who is *Bela's* father, volunteers to drop *Meena* home on his cycle since she was injured from a fall in a hole outside their door. On the way, they see smoke coming from a house and decide to inspect if anything is wrong. But it's only a kitchen stove! They, however, find that an infant is coughing due to being placed near the fire while cooking is in progress. They advise the family that infants should not be kept near smoking stoves as it can lead to breathing problems. After this little adventure, *Pongaram* safely drops *Meena* to her home.

3.3 Orientation into Meena's World



"I now attend school regularly. Meena Radio makes learning fun."

**Santosh Kumar
Student of class VII
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh**

The characters and their depiction in *Meena Ki Duniya* play a critical role in creating engaging content designed to make an impact on the target audience. It was necessary to sharpen some attributes of the characters, including Meena, while taking them from an audio-visual format (films) to an only audio format (radio). Meena's world had to emerge as a vivid, memorable, highly entertaining audio experience led by characters who address specific issues. This chapter details how the *Meena Ki Duniya* team was capacitated to bring Meena's world to life on radio, as well as the guidelines that were developed for producing the series on radio.

ENHANCING UNDERSTANDING

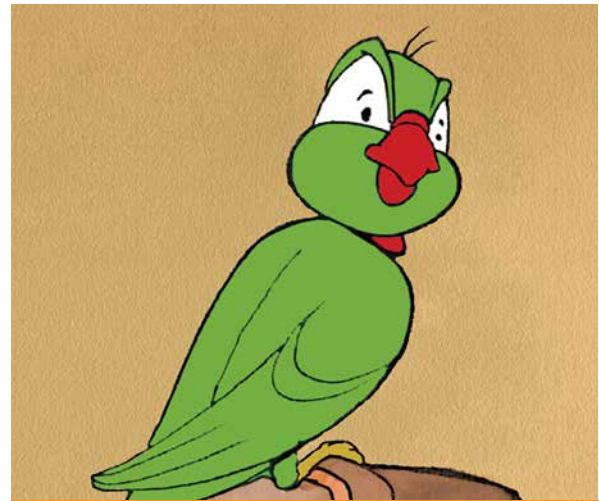
SWI brought together a diverse team of creative thinkers and writers, radio producers and content developers. Yet, they were all to develop and produce one radio programme, inspired by characters already in existence in an audio-visual medium. A cohesive understanding about *Meena Ki Duniya*, as envisaged on radio and its integration as an edutainment programme for children, meant enhanced understanding and capacity building at various levels. Below are details of some of the activities that were undertaken before and during the production phases to enhance this understanding:

Meena Orientation Workshop

An orientation on Meena's world, the background, was held on 11 December, 2009. Key voice artistes, the episode director, supervising producer, writers and creative, content and programme team members attended the workshop. This workshop introduced participants to MCI, the plan for roll-out of *Meena Ki Duniya*, and expectations from the creative, content and production teams. From this orientation workshop emerged several guidelines for *Meena Ki Duniya*, such as:

- ▶ **Message sources:** In a story, it is imperative to include key protagonists, the authority figure (teacher *behenji*, nurse *behenji*, *sarpanchji*, Meena's parents, AWW) that would be the main source of the message. Meena would not be the one to deliver, speak about the key takeaway from the story. Having Meena deliver the message would make her less relatable to the audiences as children often do not know the correct thing to do.

- ▶ **Taking message to action:** Each episode must provide the audience (children listening to the programme) a take-home action, e.g., after hearing the episode *Pongaram Hai Na* the children said "*Chachi, bhabhi aur gaon mein jo log apne bachchey ko jis jagah khana bana rahi hai ussi jagah me bachchey ko rakhtey hai. Unko bataungee chotey bachchey ko rasoi ghar ke bahar rakhna chachiye*"³ (Aunts, sister-in-laws, elders in the village usually keep the children close to them all the time, even while cooking. I will now tell them that small children must be kept outside the kitchen). The idea is that the episode leaves an idea among children – an actionable idea that they can follow even in their schools, villages.



Mithu, Meena's pet parrot and alter ego



Meena's affectionate mother

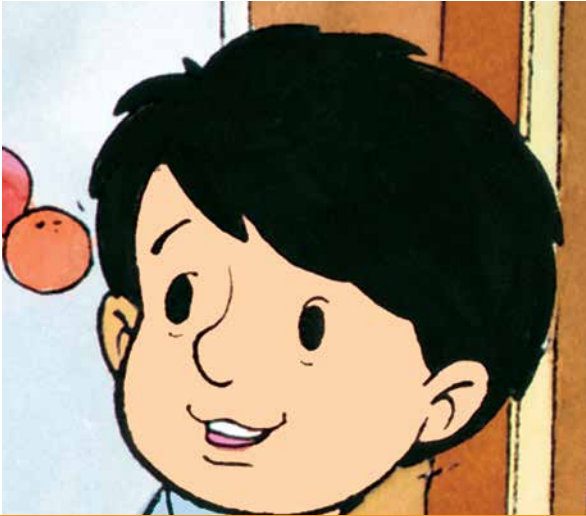


Meena is loved by boys and girls alike



Meena's caring Father

3. Pre-test of Meena Radio Episodes in UP, Report by CMS, February 2011.



Meena's naughty brother Raju



Meena's grandmother, the storyteller



The supportive school teacher



Dedicated Village doctor

▶ **Characterisation:** Meena is a playful, loving and spirited young girl. She constantly learns new things and implements them. She loves climbing trees and is always accompanied by Mithu. Several episodes were created around Meena's ability to overcome situations through these attributes. For example, in the episode *Shart* (bet), Meena is able to win her brother's binoculars back by climbing a tree faster than her friends. Meena's character was based on the Meena brand book.

These guidelines helped the team in understanding and further strengthening the characters and stories.

Enhancing understanding during content workshops

The content workshops, detailed in Section 3.2, provided the content, creative and production teams with an opportunity to interact with field implementers and subject matter experts. For example, during the content workshop held in March 2010, a presentation helped in understanding the core audience (children in the age group of 11-14 years) and the rural school context, in which the children listen to the radio programme. The episodes were to be broadcast during school hours when children would gather in a classroom to hear the episodes together. This would be followed by an interaction or discussion facilitated by school

teachers. This information helped the creative team in ensuring and increasing interactivity in the episodes, especially in the game segment. Since the children came together to hear the episodes, the game segments could be created in a manner that listeners were able to guess answers before characters in the episode revealed them. This approach increased children's participation and classroom interaction.

Understanding field reality based on a visit to Lalitpur in Uttar Pradesh

The ongoing interaction with UNICEF, pre-test reports and content workshops provided the team with guidelines and understanding about MCI, along with expectations from the radio programme. SWI continued to provide information, papers and updates to the creative team. However, the team had limited exposure to the rural context in India. To overcome this, a visit was planned to Lalitpur, one of the key broadcast areas about eight months into the project (by May 2010). The team comprised of content and creative team members, who met teachers and opinion leaders, and interacted with children and parents to understand the context that defined Meena and her world.

Though the visit did not impact the overall creative process, it did help in making scripts and stories more real and relatable.. The team made efforts to ensure that the premise and examples used in the stories should be relatable in any village in any part of the country.

The overall orientation to *Meena Ki Duniya* was an ever-evolving process. Constant feedback from within SWI and from UNICEF increased the team's knowledge and understanding about issues; and focused workshops, discussions and the visit to the field helped formulate episodes in a better manner. The participation of the entire team - from content research, creative writing to production and programme management during these capacity building activities ensured that messaging and the creative component remained a systematised yet flexible process.

RELEVANT EPISODE

Shart (The Bet)



Deepu cajoles *Raju* into taking a bet where he wins *Raju's* binoculars – which were a present from *Meena*. When *Meena* finds *Raju* crying, she takes him to meet *Deepu*. *Deepu* asks *Meena* to place a bet if she wants to get the binoculars back – they will both climb trees to see who comes first. *Deepu* is confident he will win as he thinks that boys are more athletic than girls but *Meena* beats him and wins her brother's binoculars back. *Deepu* returns all the toys he has won through bets and agrees with *Meena* that girls too can and must play sports.

3.4 Writing & Production: Balancing Messaging and Creative



In any E-E programme, balancing the creative aspects with relevant messaging is the biggest challenge. Both extremes - where stories are highly entertaining but messaging appears forced and where stories are message-heavy but low on entertainment - have to be avoided. The ideal mix is an entertaining story that has a clear message, embedded within the story.

Each episode of *Meena Ki Duniya* had three sections - a story/skit, a song and game and each section had a well-defined role, namely:

- ▶ **Story/skit:** An entertaining story (beginning, middle and end) with messaging integrated within
- ▶ **Song:** Generic, to reiterate and reinforce the overall message
- ▶ **Game:** A section for fun - to engage children, set them thinking; tease their brains through puzzles and games. This had no link to the main story or message.

This Section discusses the challenges and solutions for balancing creativity and messaging encountered while producing *Meena Ki Duniya*.

THE STORY/SKIT

Eight to nine minutes were allocated to the story/skit in the 15-minute episode of *Meena Ki Duniya*. As in any story, the first couple of minutes could either hook the listeners or drive them away. Since the story had to engage the audience - in this case children - the drama element of the story was paramount. The drama and intrigue had to be introduced from the first couple of minutes of the story. The following were some of the key processes that helped balance message and creativity, while working to retain the listeners:

Weaving the message into the story

The educational framework defined the main theme and message, which was the focus of each episode. During the course of the

“Listening to Meena Radio students now talk confidently and openly discuss issues with their elders.”

Santvana Shukla
District Coordinator Girls’
Education, Lucknow
Uttar Pradesh

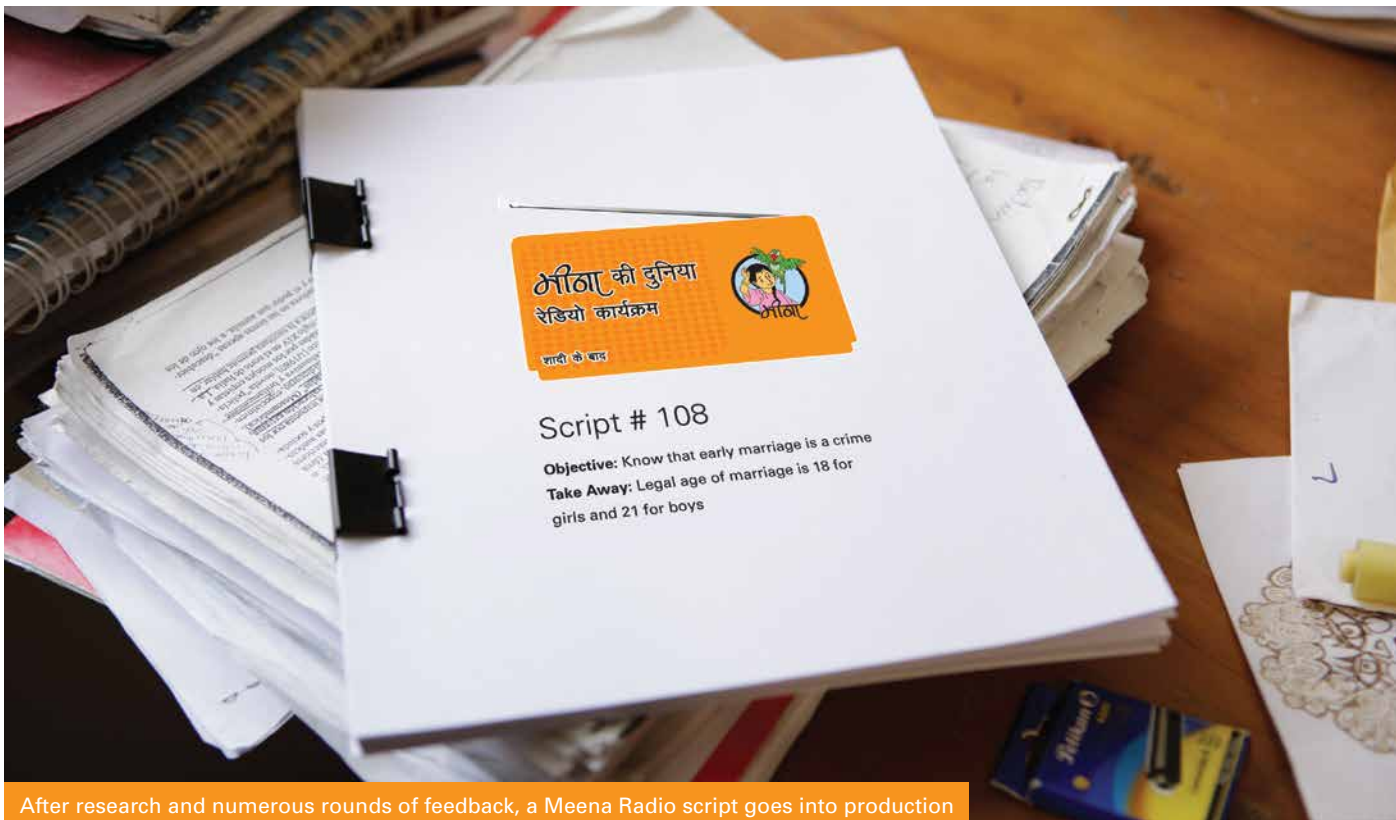
production, themes got divided into the following two categories:

- ▶ **Message as main plot:** These were stories on the themes of child-friendly schools that focused on teaching/learning materials, regular attendance, learning from peers, inclusion, etc. The stories were mostly written with the message within/as the main plot and required minimum review by the education team. For example, the episodes *Naye Dost (New friends)*, *Toofani Shaam (Stormy night)* and *Sunehri Ko Bachao (Save sunehri)* had the message as the central theme of the story. These stories allowed more creative thinking and writing process.
- ▶ **Message as sub-plot in the story:** Stories written on the theme of sanitation, hygiene and nutrition required a more in-depth understanding of the issues to provide appropriate solutions. Some of the stories underwent several iterations to make them listener-friendly, relevant to the situation and relatable. For example, though episodes *Kyon*

Na Aisa Karein (Let's do it this way!), *Maa Ki Chudiyen (Mother's bangles)* and *Gullak Bharo (Fill the piggy bank)* were sub-plots within the main story, they also covered solutions-related issues. The internal review team (research unit within SWI) made sure that the solutions were represented correctly and consistently.

The review team, through a constant feedback mechanism, ensured that the message was integrated correctly and appropriately into the story. In addition, the research team reviewed use of correct language, settings and characters.

Characterization/Settings: The reviewer checked for appropriateness in rural settings and character settings. In the script, *Tasveer Banao* or Draw a picture, the main character was changed to establish authenticity and relevance of messaging. While in the original story the message was provided by a general character (*Chanda Kaki*). After feedback an *Anganwadi* worker was introduced as the source of the message



After research and numerous rounds of feedback, a Meena Radio script goes into production

Character portrayal: The reviewer checked to ensure that the stories did not contain negative modelling by adults or children. *Meena Ki Duniya* is built on characters that showcase correct and positive behaviour. Reference to incorrect behaviour and negative modeling is very limited and at best to short dialogues only (wherever necessary).

What makes a Good Story: With the above educational parameters in place, it was important to define creative aspects of a good story. One golden rule followed while writing for *Meena Ki Duniya* set the essence for the entire production. A good story must have a core idea, which is not linked to the message and this must comprise the following:

▶ **Using the core idea as the plot:** Here the primary motivation of the protagonist (What does s/he want? Will s/he get it?) was used to draw out the story. For example, in the episode *Janamdin ka Tohfa (The Birthday Present)*, the premise of the story is whether Meena gets to buy a gift for her brother in time for his birthday. In the episode *Shadi ka Dupatta (The Wedding Stole)*, the story revolves around Sumi's desire to finish embroidering a *dupatta* (stole) in time for a wedding.

▶ **Using a character as the core idea:** Here, a unique, distinctive and captivating character is built as the central theme of the story. Through exaggerated voice modulations and characteristics that a child can relate to and visualise, this character sets the mood for the story. For example, in the episode *Kumbhakaran*, Pongaram is introduced as a character with a booming voice, of large built, who loves food. The fall of this mighty character due to his bad eating habits was an instant hit with children. In the episode *Mooch ki Baat (Matter of a Moustache)*, Meena's uncle nurses the desire to have the best moustache in the community and his need to do everything in a correct manner.

▶ **Using emotion/genre as the core idea:** Using emotions for story telling remains one

of the oldest methods of entertainment. Be it comedy, romance, drama or adventure, each has the ability of portraying multiple facets of human behaviour. In *Meena Ki Duniya*, several emotions/genres were used to present a story. For example, the episode *Ghane Jungle Mein (In Dense Forests)*, Meena and her friends look for a lost Mithu in a nearby jungle. The thrill of walking into a dark mysterious jungle, while looking for clues to find Mithu, formed a wonderful mix for listeners.

▶ **Using tension in a specific relationships as the core idea:** People and their reactions, relationships and ensuing tensions have always made interesting stories. This is especially true for *Meena Ki Duniya*, where listeners may be undergoing some of the experiences in the story and are therefore able to relate to those situations. For example, in the episode *Chalk ki Ladai (Chalk Fight)*, Sumi becomes unresponsive and irresponsible due to some incidents at school. This affects Sumi's interaction with her mother, who then tries to find the reasons behind Sumi's behaviour.

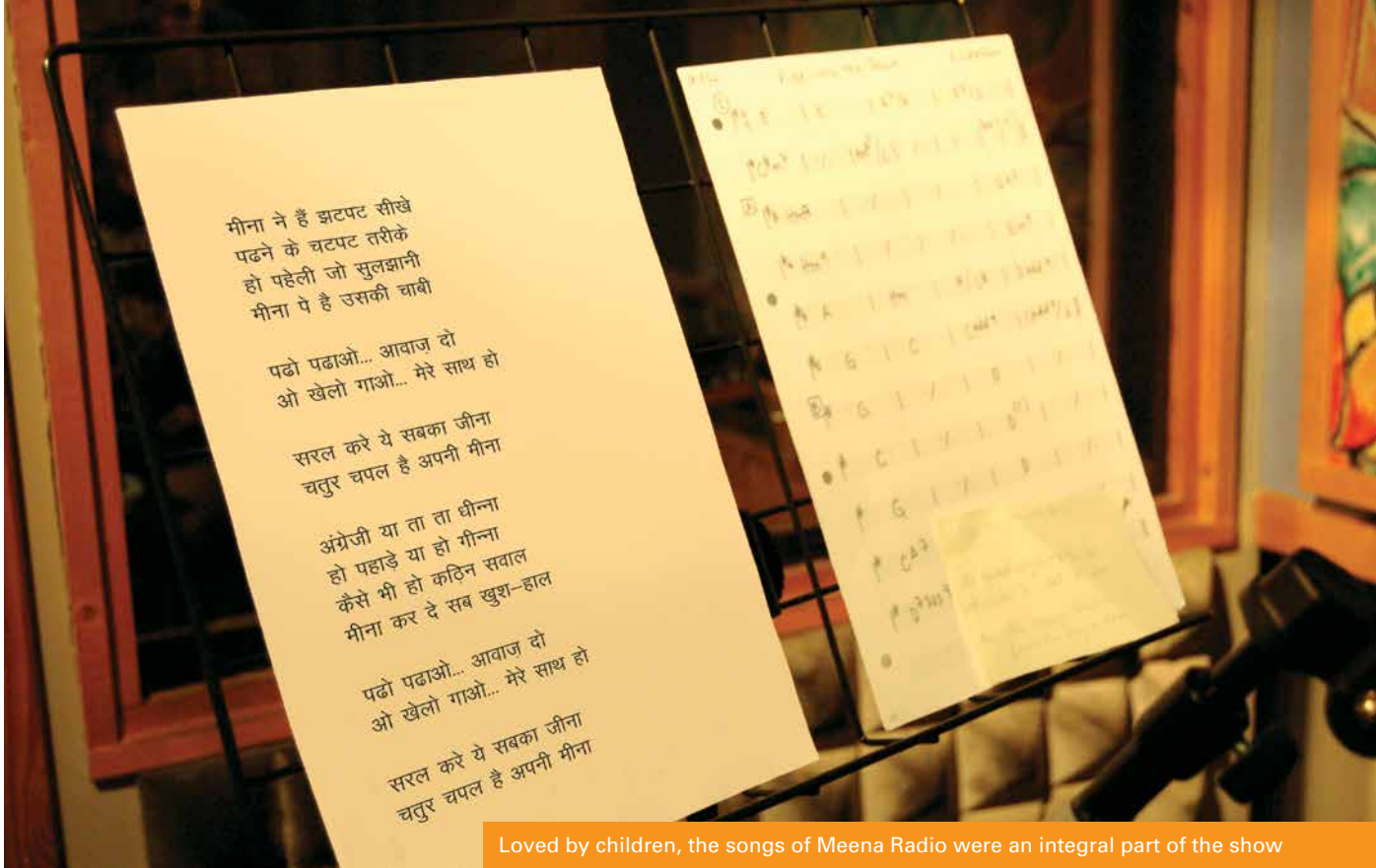
▶ **Using a concept as a core idea:** Finding a core idea that can make a good story, is often a challenging aspect for children's writing. The idea has to be simple, yet intriguing enough to keep the listener hooked till the end. In *Meena Ki Duniya*, the episode *Poori Baat (The Complete Conversation)* did just that. The episode intends to show how important it is to complete studies but is based on a protagonist who goes around doing incomplete activities.

For each of the above, the research and creative teams ensured that the story remained entertaining and educative for the listener.

THE SONG

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A song is fun - being rhythmic and set to a tune - it be hummed again and again. A good song has immense repeat and recall value. This was the



Loved by children, the songs of Meena Radio were an integral part of the show

reason why songs in *Meena Ki Duniya* were woven into the narrative. Songs are easy to remember for young listeners and reiterate the message in a fun and hummable manner. In the pilot phase of *Meena Ki Duniya* (Episode 1-30), each episode had new songs linked directly to the message. In the second phase (31-160), 45 new songs were written. Thus a bank of 75 songs was used over 160 episodes. The idea was that repeating songs over episodes will further reinforce messages.

Title song

The title song focused on Meena, her world, and what she embodies, namely, education, playfulness and aspirations. The title song was developed to include elements of folk and was yet contemporary enough to be relevant, with easy and simple lyrics for children to retain and repeat. It also created a mood of play and excitement, by making it hummable and catchy, with a tempo that made it upbeat and fun.

Other songs

The key objective of including songs in the episodes was to reiterate the takeaway message of a particular theme touched upon in the episode. Initially, for the first 30 episodes, songs were specific to the episode and the message of the episode. For example, if the episode was about washing hands, the song

would reflect steps of how to wash hands. However, after the first 30 episodes and as a result of the pre-test of episodes, the nature of the songs changed. The learning was that songs could not be preachy (or instructive) and that they needed to be more generic thematically. Therefore, in episodes where handwashing was emphasised, songs reiterated the need/results of handwashing, rather than what to do and what not to do. This also allowed songs to be repeated, and hence become more memorable.

Basic principles of writing lyrics for songs in the series

- ▶ A single sentence brief that is simple
- ▶ Simple words used in everyday language and no difficult words to enhance vocabulary
- ▶ Rhyme and rhythm
- ▶ Use of sound effects that could enhance the song and the message
- ▶ Contemporary feel to the songs so that they were relevant and relatable
- ▶ Short sentences, one thought to a sentence
- ▶ The chorus needs to reflect the main message (basic thought)

For each song, a brief was provided by the research and creative head. The brief was rarely directly related to the message but was related

to the overall theme that could be emphasised. For example, the brief for a song on corporal punishment was:

- ▶ Explain (not punish)
- ▶ Motivate (don't hurt)
- ▶ Many are the ways to teach (hitting is not one of them)
- ▶ Children are like delicate flowers
- ▶ Even the naughtiest of children require the gentlest of touch
- ▶ Reward the good
- ▶ Might is not right

The lyricist wrote a song about naughty childhood and how it defined a child. This song was used in the episodes *Kabaddi Kabaddi* and *Darr ka Raaz* (Secret of fear). The brief for a song on using other teaching/learning materials in school was:

- ▶ Better understanding comes with play not only with books
- ▶ Learning lies outside of books
- ▶ *Humein do* (give us the materials to learn from)
- ▶ What the school teaches, the home cannot
- ▶ What the school teaches, life cannot
- ▶ Everything has something to say
- ▶ You can learn from anything/everything
- ▶ Every experience teaches something

The lyricist wrote a song about what all we can learn from things around us. This was used in the episodes *Jadui Chamatkar* (A Magical Miracle)

and *Wapas Kaise Jodein* (How to put it back together?). Through a brief and lyrics approval process, *Meena Ki Duniya* had over 75 songs covering varied themes in the production.

THE GAME

The last segment of *Meena Ki Duniya* was the game. It had been created to enhance participation and engagement by the listener. This segment did not contain any link to the message in the story or skit. The idea was to provide the listener a space where they could interact and respond without having to go back to the story. The information provided through these games was aimed at enhancing general knowledge and understanding of various subjects.

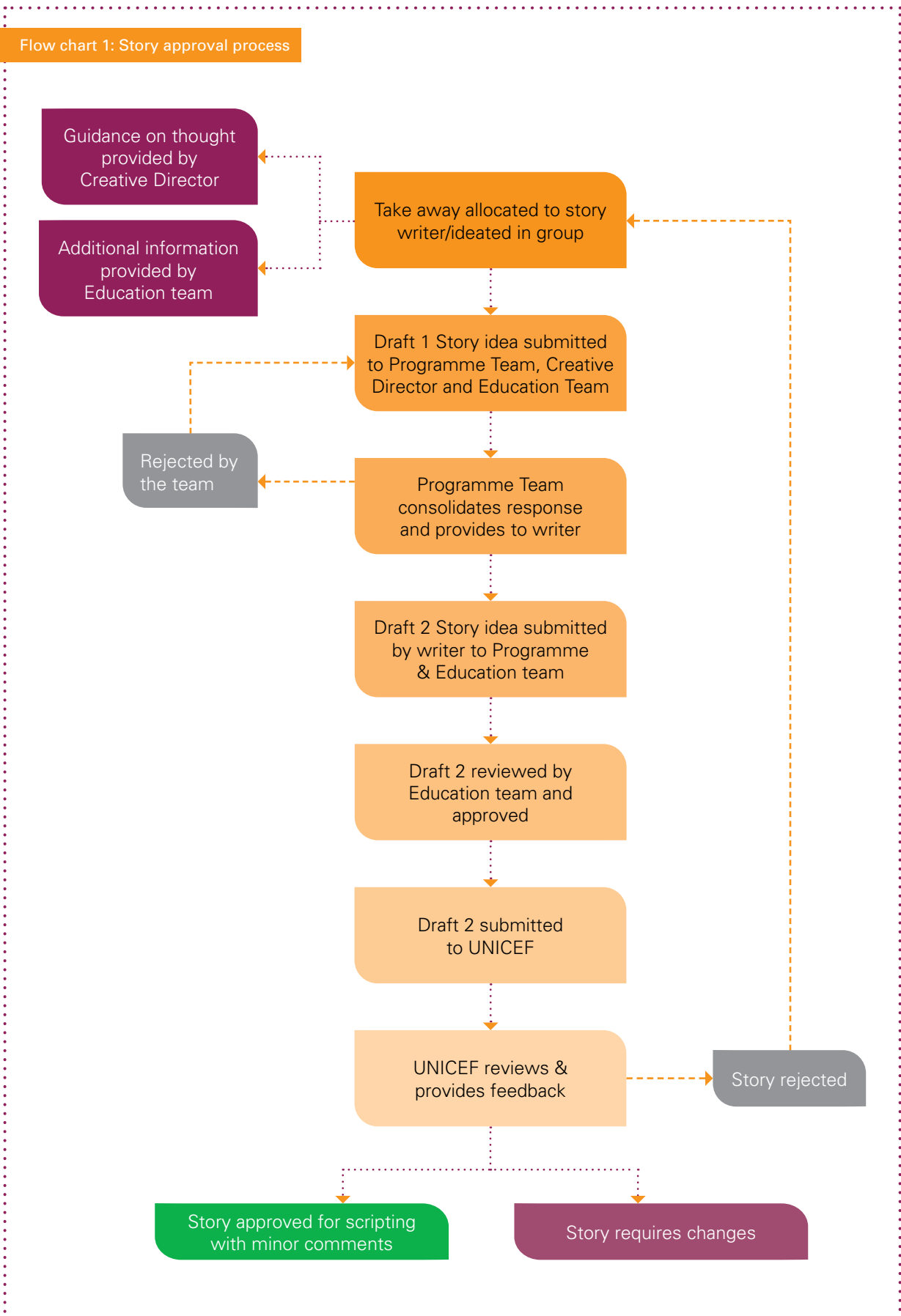
Each segment had an important role to play in the episode. The skit and song kept the listener informed and entertained; the game provided value addition to existing knowledge. *Meena Ki Duniya*, as a complete production, maintained a balance in message and creativity, thereby educating and entertaining its audience.

The complete review process is illustrated below:
Flow chart 1: Story approval process
Flow chart 2: Script approval process

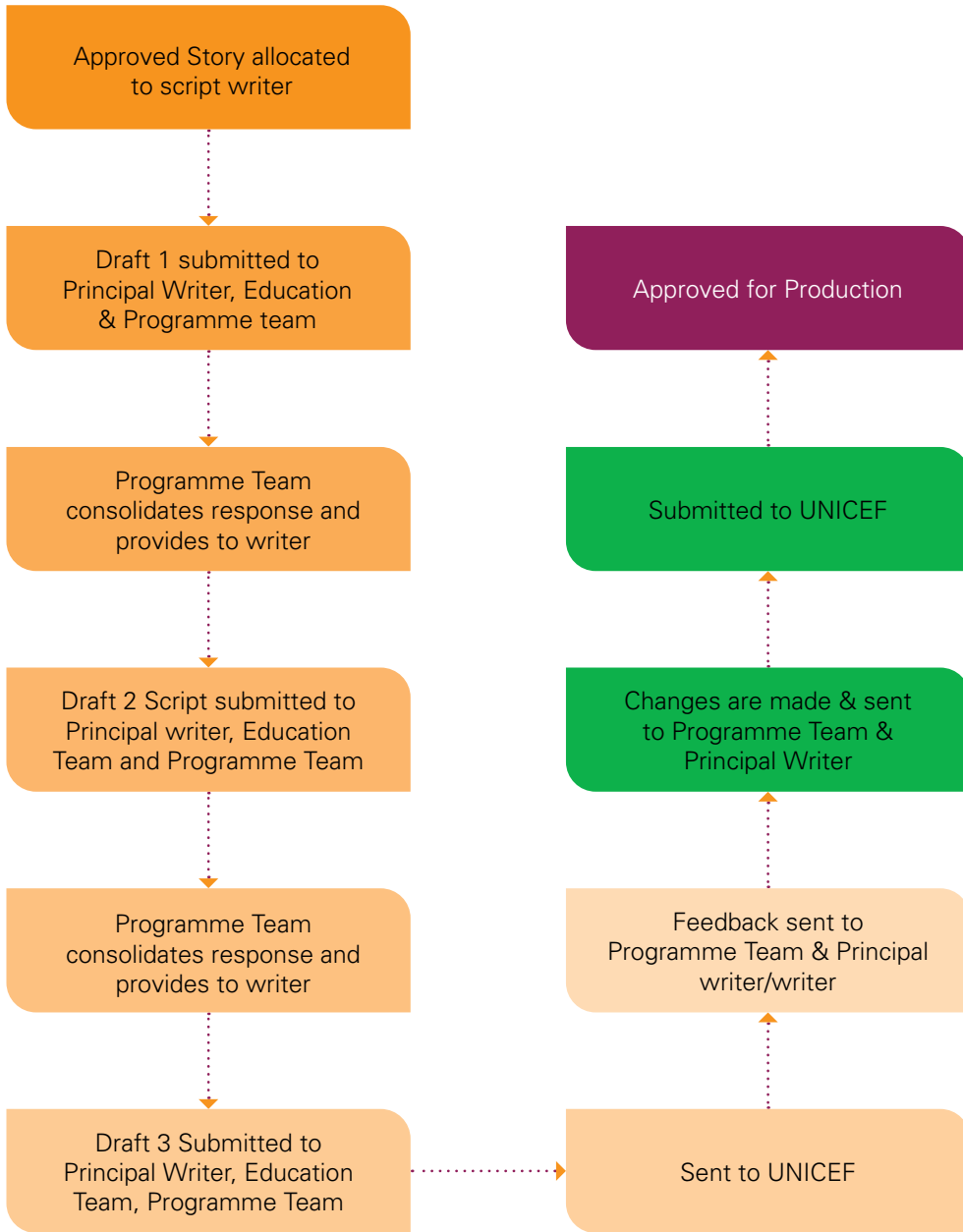


A teacher in Venkatapur, Andhra Pradesh conducts post broadcast discussion to help reinforce messages

Flow chart 1: Story approval process



Flow chart 2: Script approval process



RELEVANT EPISODES

Naye Dost (New Friends)



Krishna is a new friend of *Meena* who tells her one day that he does not want to go to school. He says that his school mates tease him in school since he uses crutches to walk because he had polio. *Meena* assures him that soon the boys will stop teasing him. He is convinced and accompanies *Meena* to school where they meet *Deepu* who cracks a joke about *Krishna*. *Meena* tells *Deepu* that it is better to look at people's strengths rather than their weaknesses. While playing cricket, the boys notice *Krishna* reading poetry beautifully which moves all of them. All of them agree that *Krishna* should be allowed to play with them and, in turn, they will ask him to read to them.

Toofani Shaam (Stormy night)



A play has been organised and the costumes for the play which were kept in a classroom were found to be torn. On enquiring from *Munshiji* who was sitting outside, it is learnt that a goat had strayed into the classroom and could have been the culprit. But when asked why he didn't stop the goat, he rudely replied that

it was none of his business. While, some people agreed to stitch and repair the costumes, *Behenji* asks *Meena* and *Sumi* to remind villagers to come to see the play the following day. They go to invite *Munshiji* too, who is rude at first. This is followed by a storm that lasts for a long time. *Munshiji's* house begins to get flooded. A tree falls and blocks the door to the house. They hear sounds of people removing the tree and are finally rescued. *Munshiji* finds that it was the school staff and children who had stepped forward to help. He offers to join the dance troupe as he now understands that schools are a community resource.

Sunehri Ko Bachao (Save Sunehri)



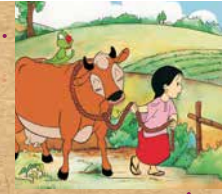
Finding that *Sunehri* has fallen into a dry well, *Meena* rushes to call *Behenji* who sends *Raju* to the village to fetch some men along with a rope. Meanwhile, *Meena* suggests that they drop mud on one side of the well so that it is easier to get *Sunehri* to climb out of the well. As all the friends who are gathered there, pour mud into the well, *Sunehri* is indeed able to climb on the mud and get out safely. *Behenji* congratulates *Meena* for her creative and practical thinking and all the children for their team work.

Kyon Na Aisa Karein? (Why don't we do it this way?)



Mithu has stolen a necklace from *Shannu chachi's* house and it is now stuck on a tree. *Meena* and *Rano* throw stones at it and it finally falls to the ground. Since *Rano* has helped her, *Meena* tells her that she would be willing to help her if she needs any assistance. *Rano* tells *Meena* that she is having a tough time learning the chapter on nutrition. *Meena* tells her that if she tries to remember her school work with play things then it might be easier. Both of them discuss the lesson in connection with sports and *Rano* is able to remember it.

Maa Ki Chudiyān (Mother's bangles)



Meena and *Sunil* spot *Monu's* cow in the *Sarpanch's* field and pull it out before it destroys the crop. They find *Monu* playing marbles. He says that he is practicing so that he can win the prize in a shooting game at the fair. The prize is a set of bangles which he wants to give his mother on her birthday. *Sunil* advises him to learn shooting from *Dipu*. Because he is scared of *Dipu*, *Meena* takes him to his house. But *Dipu* is eating his food including a spinach dish. *Monu* says that he should leave the vegetable but *Dipu* says that eating green vegetables is a must. When they go to practise shooting by aiming stones at mangoes on a tree, *Dipu* finds that *Monu's* eyesight is weak as he cannot spot all the mangoes. At the fair, *Dipu* shoots for *Monu* and wins the prize after which *Monu* agrees to get his eyes tested and eat proper food.

3.5 Using Sound Effects: Adapting for Radio



Since radio is not a visual medium it is important to put effort into creative messaging to ensure the attention of listeners. Prior to commencing with the production for *Meena Ki Duniya*, the team realised that the radio programme had to be better and more creative than television because there would be no visual images to support the storytelling. The idea was to package the stories in an imaginative way and play with words and sound effects, to create a theatre in the minds of the listeners. This chapter identifies and highlights the specific inputs required to make radio programmes for children more entertaining.



Adding sound effects to stimulate the listeners audio visual imagination

“We love the songs and riddles on Meena Radio. It helps us learn new things.”

School Girls, Class VII
Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh

USING SOUND TO ENHANCE EFFECT

In *Meena Ki Duniya*, sounds provide stories with depth, substance and meaning. Sounds that have potential of stimulating the audience’s visual imagination were therefore created. Special effects were also used for settings, to convey actions, solve certain narrative problems and define character traits.

Using vocal contrast to establish characters

Voice modulation and presentation reveal a lot about the character. To provide vocal contrast,

voices that differed enough to be easily identified and differentiated by the listener were chosen. Physical and social attributes of the character were also defined to further sharpen their attributes. For example, when the character of *Pongaram* was introduced in the episode *Kumbhakaran*, the attributes provided by the writer included, a large man with a moustache and pot belly, who loves to wrestle and eat. He also has a loud booming voice. This description helped establish the voice attributes of *Pongaram* in *Kumbhakaran* and subsequent episodes.

CATEGORIES OF SOUND EFFECTS USED

A number of sound effects are used to match the mood and setting, They enhance the visual and hearing experience and add depth to the overall narrative. Some of the effects that were used in the series include:

- ▶ **Literal effects:** These are primarily sounds that have been associated in our minds with specific events and tell us clearly what is happening. For example, in the episode *Jaadu ki Bansuri* (Magical Flute) the script required bad weather. Therefore, sound effects were created for thunder, lightning and a heavy downpour.
- ▶ **Non-literal effects:** Sounds that have been used to indicate an event, without actually being like the sound itself. These are events or things that don't really have a characteristic sound. For example, in *Paani ki Kahani* (Story of Water), special sounds were created for a leaking tap and the tap being repaired.
- ▶ **Ambience effects:** These could be sound effects that have been used in the background to identify location, setting and time. For example, in the episode *Ghane Jungle Mein* (In Dense Forests), the script required sounds to create a sense of being in a jungle. The effects created included those of swaying trees, wind and of walking on dry leaves.

- ▶ **Discrete (spot) effects:** These include effects that have been recorded live by the voice artists themselves in the recording studio, to help convey a message in the actor's voice. For example, in the episode *Pongaram Hai Na* (*Pongaram is there*), the script required *Pongaram* to talk as if his mouth was stuffed with food. The artiste used appropriate voice modulation to give the desired effect.
- ▶ **Crowd effects:** These effects include sounds of people in a crowd. These need not be specific voices or distinguishable words. For example, in *Jagmag Vardi* (*Shining Uniform*), the episode required representation of a crowd in a fort area. Through sound, an effect was created to give the impression of a crowd, without it overpowering the dialogues of the key characters.

USING MUSIC TO ENHANCE SITUATIONS

Music has been used sparingly in *Meena Ki Duniya*. It has mostly been used as the base of the story *Taal se Taal Mila* (*Match the Rhythm*), *Bansuri Bajao* (Play the Flute) and others, as a tool to break monotony or for establishing characters and situations. Music is critical for establishing emotions too – the effects of being happy or unhappy, or of feeling fear or joy. The following are some of the key types of music used during the production of *Meena Ki Duniya*:

Thematic music: This is used for opening and closing the programme. In *Meena Ki Duniya*, after the title track is played, there are drums that lead in to the beginning of the skit and the same theme is used at closing when Meena provides address details.

Underscore music: This is used to break the monotony of dialogue delivery and has to match the mood of the script.

Situation music: This is used to highlight a situation. For example, a bright early morning is

accompanied by a pleasing note on the flute, along with sound of chirping birds.

Transition music: This is used for various transitions made in *Meena Ki Duniya*. The transitions are used to highlight the shift in game and song.

The special effects, sound, background score and title track all play an important role in any audio-based programme. The same has been the case with *Meena Ki Duniya*, where they have been used to involve listeners in the drama. The sound effects have made *Meena Ki Duniya* a wonderful E-E programme on radio.

RELEVANT EPISODES

Kumbhakaran



Pongaram is introduced as a character with a booming voice, of large built, who loves food just like the mythological character *Kumbhakaran*. *Bela*, while discussing with *Meena* and *Raju* informs that in the *Ram Lila* her father *Pongaram* is enacting the role of *Kumbhakarn*. After watching the performance they are returning home with *Pongaram* when they see a street seller selling savouries. *Meena* warns him that they have learnt from their teacher not to eat food that looks dirty or which has flies around it. But *Pongaram* does not heed her advice and even eats the food without washing his hands. He bets with *Meena* that if within a week he falls sick he won't get *Bela* married before she is 18 years and if he wins then he will take *Mithu*. On the stage during the last day of rehearsal of *Ram Lila*, *Pongaram* suddenly feels dizzy and falls down. He confesses that he has become weak due to diarrhoea. *Meena* is proven right and *Bela's* marriage will now be only after she is 18.

Jaadu Ki Bansuri (Magical flute)



Meena has taken *Rani*, her younger sister, when she visits her friend *Chameli* to borrow a book. In her house, the child starts to cry and so *Meena* feeds her a banana. When *Rani* continues to cry, *Chameli* plays the *bansuri* (flute) and *Rani* is happy. The next day *Meena* asks *Chameli* to accompany her to meet *Veeru chacha* and bring her *Bansuri*. While they are walking and *Chameli* is playing the flute, *Dipu* joins them and claps. *Dipu* tells them that *Lalaji's* cattle in his carriage has gone berserk after seeing a snake. *Meena* begins to play the flute and the cattle calms down. *Lalaji* is impressed. When they reach *Veeru chacha's* house, another infant is crying, but this time playing the flute does not help. The infant's grandmother is feeding her watery food and *Meena* informs her that since *Behenji* had told them to feed children over 6 months thicker food, she feeds *Rani* crushed bananas etc to provide proper nutrition. And sure enough when the child is fed properly, there is no more crying!

Paani Ki Kahani (Story of water)



As their school needs to get ready for an inspection by the Collector, *Meena* and her friends volunteer to clean it. Their teacher asks them to do a practise a few days earlier so that she can spot anything that would still require to be done. *Dipu* has the task of cleaning the bathroom but when *Meena* visits it she finds that a tap is leaking. She puts a bucket below the tap to collect the water. When the teacher is doing her inspection she is happy to see that they are conserving every drop of water and then she suggests that *Dipu* go and find a mechanic who can repair the tap. She then she visits the kitchen and garden and when she finds that some children are carrying a bucket of water to throw away after washing the vegetables in it, she asks them to use this water for the plants rather than waste it. Finally, when the Collector inspects the school, it is pointed out that not only is the school the cleanest in the area but its conservation approach is also laudable.

Ghane Jungle Mein (In dense forest)



The episode is about *Meena* and her friends looking for a lost *Mithu* in a nearby jungle. A small boy called *Dhruv* is among them and he has a very enquiring nature. He continuously asks questions which does not bother *Meena* as she keeps answering him. Eventually, they are able to find *Mithu* trapped on a tree but they have lost their way in the jungle. But because of *Dhruv*'s enquiring nature, he is able to identify cycle tracks that belong to *Meena*'s cycle which she had left outside the forest. They follow the tracks and get out of the forest. *Meena* encourages *Dhruv* to continue asking questions because even her brother *Raju* is doing the same and *Meena* too tends to question and seek answers to a lot of things going on around her.

3.6 Pre-Testing: Checking-in from the Audience



“Meena taught us the importance of hygiene. We now wash our hands and trim our nails regularly.”

School Boys, Class VIII
Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh

Regular evaluation of feedback from the audience is critical for the success of any programme. In *Meena Ki Duniya*, this feedback was integrated through a pre-test of select episodes. The pre-test requirements (method, frequency, parameters, sample size, etc.) were discussed and decided by UNICEF and an independent research agency CMS Communications. This Section discusses how the pre-test findings were integrated into *Meena Ki Duniya*.

SETTING THE PARAMETRES FOR THE PRE-TEST

The objectives of the pre-test, as defined by UNICEF and CMS are described below:

Voices of characters: The voices of the characters were pre-tested for their likeability, credibility and clarity.



A girl in Andhra Pradesh recalls messages and her favourite episodes from Meena Radio to the researcher

Format of the series (including pace), following were evaluated:

- ▶ Whether the audience found the format appropriate, attractive and entertaining
- ▶ Whether the format and segments were easily comprehensible and engaging
- ▶ Whether the audience found the voices to be credible and having comfortable pace
- ▶ Whether the audience could comprehend the language used

Messaging

- ▶ See whether the messages were comprehended and recalled by the audience; and thereafter to measure the audience's attention span
- ▶ Understand credibility of messages among the audience
- ▶ Gauge messages that are new for the audience
- ▶ Evaluate whether messages trigger discussion, induce action or intent to adopt new behaviour(s) and motivate the audience.

The pre-test was designed to identify gross negatives (if any) and areas of improvements before the final production for broadcast⁴.

LEARNING FROM THE PRE-TEST

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The first batch of 30 episodes was considered as a pilot. All the 30 episodes created as part of the pilot were pre-tested. The pre-test of the first five episodes on the above-mentioned parameters provided important insights that impacted production of further episodes. Key findings, which impacted the *Meena Ki Duniya*, as a series:

Title track: Children enjoyed the title track, especially words or sounds that gave a slightly folk-feel to the song. However, the pace was an issue. In that, the lyrics were not clear and the music ran too fast. As a result of these findings, the pace of the title track was slowed down and so were episodic songs.

Transitioning to the song: A creative medium was required to transition listeners from the skit to the song. At the end of each skit, Meena and Mithu would narrate a poem, which was then taken to the *Jadui Kuan (Magical Well)*, which used to churn out a song. During

the pre-test, most of the children were not able to recall the role of this *Jadui Kuan*. As a result, the *Jadui Kuan* as a medium for transition was dropped from subsequent episodes. Instead, narrator lines were added to provide the link between the skit, poem and song.

A similar pre-test was carried out for episodes 6-10 and specific feedback was incorporated. From thereon, four episodes per batch of 20 episodes were selected for pre-test in the implementation area. Few more examples that helped define *Meena Ki Duniya* as a popular E-E programme for young children were:

Closing a story: In episode 38, *Main Bhool Gayi (I forgot)*, there were many parallel sub-tracks. The story, however, revolved around one specific sub-track, leaving the others as creative references to build the story line. It was during the pre-test that the children asked about the other sub-tracks and how those stories ended. One of the key lessons learnt is that children like stories that have a closure, even in the sub-tracks. In the final episode, few dialogues were added to end the sub-track with a logical conclusion. Similar changes were made in the episode *School Chalo (Let's go to School)*.

Sensitivity to feelings of children as an audience: In episode 41, *Bade Khush Nazar Aa Rahe Ho (You Look Very Happy)*, the importance of expressing emotions and feelings was emphasised. Children's sensitive nature was also brought out. One very critical feedback that emerged from this episode was that children disliked any situation where a child was being mocked or ridiculed. Though *Meena Ki Duniya* is built on positive role modelling, dialogues were further modified, following this feedback. Care was taken to ensure that none of the dialogues depicted a child character being mocked. This feedback was incorporated in all episodes of the series.

4. Report by CMS Communication on first five episodes for *Meena Ki Duniya*

Talk less, act more: Episode 106: *Darr Ko Karo Choo (Banish Fear)*; This is one of the few episodes in which the characters come together and talk about things or instances that they fear. As per the pre-test, the audience felt that there was too much conversation and too little action. It is important to recognise that media for children needs to be based on action or ideas that can be converted into action. Episodes like *Sunheri Ko Bachao (Save Sunheri)*, *Akhbar Se kya Seekha (What did you learn from Akhbar)*, *Ghane Jungle Mein (Dense Forest)* and most others are about children taking creative actions for a problem and are clearly the more preferred stories. The feedback was shared with the creative team and the suggestions were incorporated in episodes thereon.

Children's own likes and dislikes: As per the pre-test report of *Billu Ko Gussa Kyun Ata Hai (What makes Billu angry?)* post feedback the name was changed to *School Jaisa Koi Nahi (There's no place like school)*, children love and enjoy episodes that were about their own likes, dislikes, experiences and actions. However, episodes in which messages were directed toward adults did not resonate as well. It is important to note that the response to the programme has been tremendously encouraging and with each pre-test and feedback, *Meena Ki Duniya* improved – both in terms of its script as also production quality. Children, parents and teachers applauded the show, which was captured in the pre-test reports, revealing the following –

- ▶ Children love most of the characters and their characterisation. They could relate to almost all characters and their situations. After listening to the episode *Pongaram Hai Na*, children from Mirzapur reported that there are some people in their village resembling *Pongaram Chacha* who only eat or sleep and do very little work.
- ▶ *Meena Ki Duniya* encouraged children to ask questions and seek answers from their families. After listening to the episode *Dedh Dhai Aur Sadhe Teen (One-half,*

two-half and three-half), some children said they would check with their mothers whether they had received the required immunization on time.

- ▶ Puzzles emerged as a source of new information, appreciated both by children and parents. For example, from the episode *Dabi Awaz (Muffled Voice)*, the children learnt about the founding father of India's Constitution and that *Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel* was known as the Iron Man of India. Similar examples have been reported across all pre-tests.
- ▶ Children and adults learnt about roles and responsibilities of their local leaders through *Meena Ki Duniya*. The programme encouraged children to know about their rights and to have them fulfilled wherever possible. After listening to the episode *Daud (Run)*, girls from Allahabad mentioned they would register a complaint if they found inadequate drinking water supply in their schools

The production process followed for *Meena Ki Duniya* allowed for changes, modifications and corrections based on the audience's feedback. Pre-testing has not only enhanced the quality of the final product but brought it closer to the young audience for whom it was meant.

RELEVANT EPISODES

Main Bhool Gayi (I forgot)



Mili's mother sends her to Lalaji's shop to buy some provisions. Mili says that she does not need to note down what is required and that she can remember everything. On the way, she continues to review the list of items when she finds Meena sitting on a mango tree. Meena invites her to pluck the ripe mangoes but Mili says that she has to go to the shop. Meena decides to join her. While they are walking together, they spot Samir who is playing with a dog but has lost his way. They decide to escort him to his house. Finally, when they reach the shop, Mili forgets what her mother had told her and she buys open salt instead of packaged salt. When she reaches home, her mother is upset since she says that packaged salt contains iodine. Meena too adds that Behenji had told them that iodized salt is good for the brain. Mili's mother says that earlier Samir's mother would not buy iodized salt but now she does. Meena and Mili have to go back to the shop to buy the packaged salt.

Bade Khush Nazar Aa Rahe Ho (You Look Happy)



Murli's friends have been teasing him in school and when Behenji comes to know she asks the guilty children to apologise to him. Behenji asks Meena to visit Murli's house. When she goes there she discovers that Murli's father has been ill and that Murli is doing all the household chores. The next day Behenji decides to play a game in class in which all the children have to write down on a paper their big concern and put it in a common bin after which each note is read out by some other child. After the game Meena suggests that they play one more in which they write down whatever they are thinking about at present. When Murli's turn comes he tells the class that his father has not been keeping well and that's why he is quite troubled. This prompts Murli and Meena to meet with the Sarpanch with a request that other men in the village help out with Mili's father's chores till he recovers and Murli's problem is resolved.

Darr ko Karo Choo (Banish Fear)



Meena has gathered some friends at her house. There is sound of thunder and *Sumi* gets scared. *Dipu* tells her that thunder is normal before rain. When he admits that he is scared of snakes, *Bela* reminds him that snakes don't bite unless they are being troubled. *Bela*, in turn, tells everyone that she is scared of deep water and that's why she wants to learn to swim. *Meena's* mother asks *Sumi* what she will do to overcome her fear and *Sumi* says that she will sing loudly and *Dipu* says that he will carry a stick to ward off snakes. Then *Meena* is asked about her fear and she answers that when she and *Raju* were small they were scared of the dark. *Meena's* mother asks her how she got rid of that fear. *Meena* tells everyone that one day it was dark in the house and some dripping sound was scaring her and when her father switched on the light they found a leaking tap and since that day she remembers this episode to overcome her fears. *Meena's* mother also relates the time when she was scared when one night *Rani* was lying listless and was not responding even ▶

▶ to her touch. She was neither drinking milk nor crying and her body was cold. At that time she decided that her fear would only go when she consulted the doctor. And that was a good thing because when they met the doctor, they learnt that *Rani* was seriously ill. Following this initial diagnosis, she was admitted to the hospital. She tells everyone about the important signs of an infant's health. Meanwhile there has been much thunder outside but *Sumi* says she is not frightened anymore as she has found the discussions to be useful and engrossing.

4. Conclusion



“The different events in *Meena Ki Duniya* are realistic, like it is in my own village.”

Students of Kasturba Gandhi School, Class VIII
Mall District, Uttar Pradesh

This book has detailed the process and experience of transforming characters from the MCI into a vibrant radio programme which has touched upon essential health, hygiene, and educational needs of children in India. The success of Meena Radio has been the relevance of the messages communicated through each of the episodes with a balance of entertainment and education. As described in detail in the previous chapters, each step of the production process ensured that relevant and effective messaging remained at the core of the programme. This was ensured through the rigorous research

and management processes that were put in place at the conception stage and which were further refined as the programme was rolled-out. The content workshops, finalisation of the content map for episodes, creative workshops to develop the story and scripts and the pre-testing of episodes for feedback were part of this exercise. These processes were critical for the programme to resonate with both primary and secondary targets.

Meena’s stories have become many of the young girls’ own stories in places like U.P., where gender discrimination is rampant, and where education for girls is not seen as priority. Feedback from Meena’s audience has shown the impact of Meena’s stories on the lives of many

children, who have used Meena’s example for themselves to become change agents in their families and communities. The feedback has also demonstrated the effectiveness of merging entertainment with education as a tool for communication. The balance between Meena’s vibrant, enthusiastic and entertaining character with her struggles for bringing change within her family and community has been essential for the success of the programme. And, this success has been reflected through the letters and testimonies of young girls and boys who have listened to Meena Radio.

Meena Radio has been proven to be an effective social and behavioral change communication initiative. Research from the implementation in Uttar Pradesh has shown that:

- ▶ 100% of children who listen to Meena Radio recalled at least one message spontaneously;
- ▶ 96% of students who listened to Meena Radio reported new information gained;
- ▶ On an average 7.6 messages were recalled with 127 different varieties of messages recalled, out of which messages on WASH,

nutrition, health, protection, gender, and life skills were prominent.

Today, Meena Radio continues to be part of many children’s daily lives across the country. In Andhra Pradesh, *Meena Ki Duniya* was recreated into Telegu with the aim of reaching over 20,000 schools. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh 30,000 schools have begun incorporating *Meena Ki Duniya* as part of their curriculum and there are plans for schools across Maharashtra to do the same.

There are many opportunities for developing initiatives that reach children through the E-E format, and to use existing and innovative media as a tool for communication. In doing so, it becomes imperative that effective, relevant and contextual messaging coupled with elements of entertainment become integrated within such initiatives. This production book captures the process, experience and lessons learned during the development and production of Meena Radio, which can be replicated and built upon by agencies and organisations to use similar innovative communication tools.



Girls in Kasturba Gandhi School in Uttar Pradesh listen to Meena Radio in rapt attention

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