

PRESS RELEASE, September 2015

**MANDAKINI KI AAWAZ INDIA'S FIRST COMMUNITY RADIO STATION IN
DISASTER-SENSITIVE RUDRAPRAYAG, TURNS ONE**

On September 21, 2014, *Mandakini Ki Aawaz* 90.8FM went on the air, becoming the first Community Radio station in India to broadcast LIVE from the get go. Nearly a year later, *Mandakini* -as the station is fondly referred to by the community-, is the connective tissue that binds together over 299 villages (and counting) in the hilly and remote Mandakini River Valley region of Rudraprayag District, Uttarakhand. On September 21, 2015, *Mandakini* will be celebrating her First Birthday, and we, at People's P.ow.e.r Collective ('PPC'), a Bangalore-based Trust, and the Community-based Organisation, Mandakini Ki Aawaz ('MKA'), will be celebrating this milestone, and the special journey we have collectively made so far.

Community Radio is not only radio for the people, but also radio of the people, and by the people. Keeping this goal in mind, PPC spent three years in field research, studying Community Radio models across the country, and two years in close partnership with MKA, creating our own innovative model of Community Radio, which places open participation, 'learning by doing', holistic capacity sharing over time, and democratisation of the airwaves, at its very heart.

Working alongside team MKA, and their wider community for 23 months from June 2013 to March 2015, we at PPC developed strong bonds across the community, learning first-hand about their values, culture, needs and dreams. Armed with this knowledge and fresh insight, we were able to train and equip the core team at MKA, and jointly create practical and impactful radio programming, best suited to their community. Rajendra Negi, an avid listener, and resident of Gaon Bhiri recounts the impact *Mandakini* has had on his life, saying: "I advertised my juice business via community radio *Mandakini*. After the ad, I received so many calls placing orders; this never happened earlier. In fact, when I went to one village to sell my juice, the demand was more than I could supply! I'm considering making more juice next season."

Like Rajendra, our time with MKA has also been rewarding; working together through the floods of 2013 brought us closer to our community, while deepening our resolve to build a disaster-resilient radio station, and eventually a disaster-resilient community. With the commitment and support of the highly acclaimed & respected sustainable architect, Didi Contractor and her dedicated team of young and inspired architects, we have constructed, (to the best of our knowledge), India's first disaster-resilient community radio station; this stunning earth & stone building – has been home to Community Radio *Mandakini*, ever since.

PPC's firm belief in Community Radio's potential to empower, led us to train as many members of the community as were willing to participate, equipping them with radio and life-essential hard and soft skills. Men and women from various social strata came through *Mandakini's* station doors -- to leave, we hope, more equal than before. Team MKA is now a full-time team of 6: 3 women and 3 men, all of whom have spent countless hours across the training period in field work, programme-making and narrowcasting. For the past 12 months, this team has been broadcasting LIVE, supported every so often by volunteers from the wider community (including 50 other trained persons) who are either, guest presenters, 'Grameen reporters' or those from villages near and far, who simply volunteer their time on request.

PPC's residential training model that began in June 2013 ended in March 2015. We are currently in the middle of an on-going, remote mentoring phase returning periodically to troubleshoot, and now, to celebrate this wonderful milestone together. Today, MKA broadcasts LIVE, 6 hours a day, Monday through Saturday, and 9 hours on Sundays, inviting cross-community participation at every turn, be it via light-hearted programmes like the *Riddle of the Day*, or by engaging the community on more serious topics of local concern. CR *Mandakini* has, in fact, become the first port of call for community members, in various times of need. Poonam Rawat, a resident of Gaon Bhanaj, and Head of Communication at *Mandakini Ki Aawaz*, says with quiet pride: "At *Mandakini*, we make critical

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weather announcements every hour, based on information received from the Dehradun Met. Department. When a listener called in to ask if the weather forecast would hold, while he plastered the walls of his home, I was so glad to be able to help; I realised then that the community has grown to think of *Mandakini* as a trusted, helpful friend and advisor.”

Encouraging, and building confident, forward-thinking, sustainable communities is, to us at PPC, the soul and value of Community Radio. Witnessing the emergence of a self-assured, connected community, as a result of MKA’s efforts this past year and the year before, has been PPC’s and MKA’s reward. As Shivanand Nautiyal, a resident of Gaon Badeth, and a member of the MKA team, tells us: “Community Radio is bringing fresh awareness to our isolated community. Today, our women and children enthusiastically participate in programmes like *The Question of the Day*; they are able to share their thoughts on the radio, using simple words that we use in daily conversation. This gives me such joy, and makes me want to work harder.”

Attesting the same, Manvendra Singh Negi, the Station Head at MKA, notes that while “women’s participation was earlier low, today, it is increasing at a great pace.” He adds that *Mandakini Ki Aawaz*’s audience, both young and old, begin their day listening to station. “In the coming year, CR MKA will work, alongside our community, to deliver meaningful and positive content, to enable social and financial sustainability in our community.”

Saritha Thomas, PPC’s Managing Trustee, relates with pride: “Seeing Team MKA steer their ship past the 12-month mark has been just great. We were asked recently if our handover in March 2015 to MKA had been tough; it was then that my team and I realised that there was no handover! The transition was seamless. We at PPC will cherish this, together with the many wonderful experiences of community living over these past 2 years in the village of Prithviraj Nagar, Garhwal. MKA will always be part of the PPC family, and our upcoming plans for CR in the state of Uttarakhand and beyond, will continue to involve this empowered radio station. A large-hearted community of individual and philanthropic givers has thus far generously supported PPC in its efforts; the Sir Ratan Tata Trust is our current institutional donor. We are truly grateful for all the support we have received.”

The image of the once shy housewife, Uma Negi (now *Mandakini*’s Head of Content) confidently wooing many present at the CR Desi Radio & BBC Radio Studios in London, with her self-assuredness and newly-learned radio skills, during PPC’s Community Radio International Exchange Programme, earlier this year, will forever remain with us: a symbol of the change that Community Radio can inspire.

Mandakini Ki Aawaz’s birthday celebrations will spread across September 21st and 22nd 2015. While Day 1 will feature a ‘Kavi Sammelan’, Day 2 will bring together all the top local musicians who have found their voice, and shared their talent via their own CR MKA 90.8FM, this past year. Both events will be broadcast LIVE from the station premises. Our excitement is on par with that of the members of the local community, many of whom have told team MKA that they will be hiring a jeep on both days, to bring representatives from their villages to partake in the celebrations, while the others enjoy the LIVE broadcast from the comfort of their homes. We hope you will join us in celebrating this milestone for *Mandakini Ki Aawaz* 90.8FM, People’s P.ow.e.r Collective, our community of 150,000 people in this Mandakini river valley area and Community Radio in India.

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We’ll be happy to share photos and audio, on request. Many thanks.