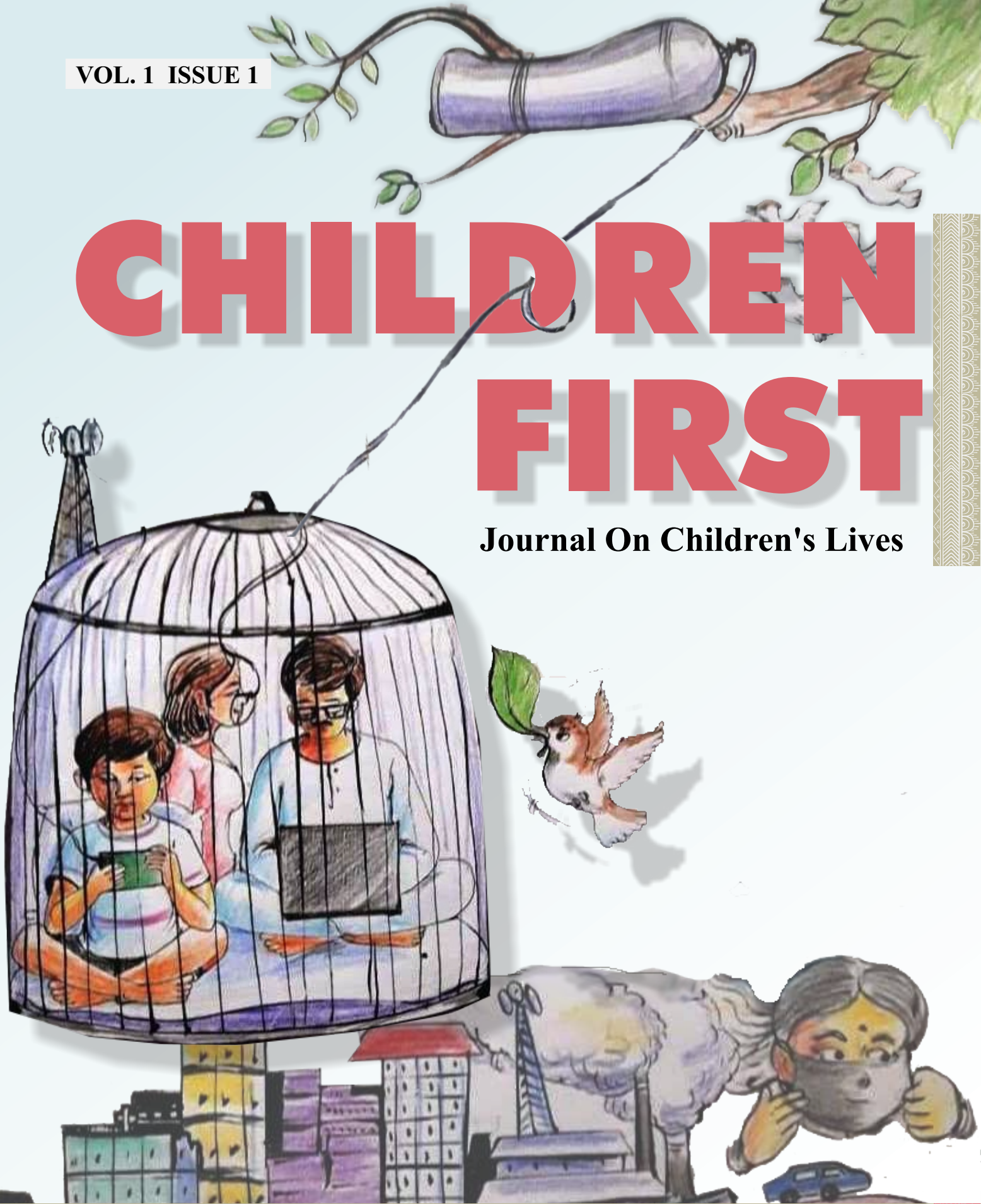


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# CHILDREN FIRST

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Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic  
on Lives of Children

Aryanraj, 10 years

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# Karona Apni Suraksha

**Nishant Baghel, Prerna Makkar, Siddhesh Mhatre, Devyani Pershad**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of children and communities everywhere. In India, with the shutdown of anganwadis and schools since last year, the education, nutrition and health of children have been adversely affected, with those from the poor communities being the worst affected. Due to the pandemic, Pratham's long standing model of addressing education gaps through in-person and hybrid learning approaches got disrupted and it pivoted to a completely online model for communication with communities.

This paper presents the recent online health communication campaign by Pratham, called *Karona Apni Suraksha*, which was an intense 6-week campaign launched in May 2021 in the midst of the second wave of the pandemic in India. *Karona Apni Suraksha* was the second such campaign since last year and was preceded by an online education communication campaign called *Karona Thodi Masti, Thodi Padhai* during the first wave of the pandemic in India. These campaigns reached communities across 21 states where Pratham had deep and trusting existing relationships.

## II. RATIONALE

Unlike the initial days of the pandemic in 2020, much more was known about COVID-19 prevention and management

when the second wave hit the country in 2021. However, there were several challenges like misinformation, false news, rumours and myths about the disease and vaccines that existed during this time. These were being spread at an alarming rate, exacerbating stress and angst amongst the communities and potentially undoing the positive measures undertaken to combat the problem. Pratham decided to use its extensive experience and networks in communities to help in this situation through an intensive health communication campaign called *Karona Apni Suraksha*.

## III. CAMPAIGN

The objective of *Karona Apni Suraksha* campaign was to ensure delivery of essential, verified and accurate information related to COVID-19 to communities where Pratham works. These are typically low-tech and under-resourced communities where availability of such crucial information is scarce. Pratham specifically created and curated a repository of resources for this campaign - internally or in partnership with other organizations specialising in health-related content - such as videos, audios, posters, PDFs, SMS and WhatsApp messages that were most relevant, easy-to-understand and easy-to-use for these families and communities.

Multiple delivery channels such as SMS,

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WhatsApp, Zoom and YouTube were used to reach these communities 3-5 times a week. Further, a two-way communication channel was established with families, children, youth and other stakeholders in the community such as sarpanches, anganwadi workers, teachers and ASHAs. This two-way communication happened at least once in two weeks through clarification or

feedback calls by Pratham central and state teams or through interactive sessions where participants could submit or ask questions to health experts on platforms such as Zoom and YouTube. The weekly plan of this campaign is presented in the table (Table 1) and sample content and messages are highlighted in the box (Box 1) below.

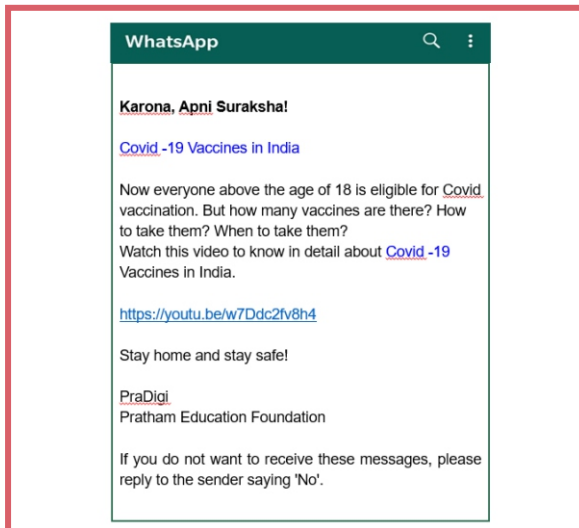
Week	Themes	Topics
Week 1	Introduction & Prevention	Introduction Hand washing Mask making
Week 2	Prevention & Home Management	Social distancing Returning home Cleaning vegetables and fruits
Week 3	Home Care	Myth buster Taking care of sick at home Cleaning surfaces at home
Week 4	Testing at Home	Myth buster Correct use of pulse oximeter How to check temperature
Week 5	Vaccination	Myth buster How does vaccination work Vaccination in India
Week 6	Vaccination	Myth buster How to register for vaccination Side effects of vaccination

Table 1: Weekly plan for the campaign

The image displays sample communication from the campaign. It includes three WhatsApp chat screenshots and one SMS message. The WhatsApp messages are from a contact named 'Karona, Apni Suraksha!' and 'Pradiqi' (Pratham Education Foundation). The messages provide information about COVID-19 prevention, mask making, and temperature checking. The SMS message is in Hindi and provides information about temperature checking and vaccination.

Box 1.1: Sample WhatsApp and SMS communication





**Box 1.2:** Sample WhatsApp and SMS communication

As part of this campaign, activities to engage children were also designed with a view to educate them about themes related to COVID-19 so that the children could become champions to address these issues within their own communities. Some stories of children as champions in their families and communities are highlighted in the box (Box 2) below.

**Story 1: Prithviraj, standard 6, student from Jaitapur village in Maharashtra**

Prithviraj (Standard 6 student) is from Jaitapur village in Aurangabad, Maharashtra. Since the second wave of COVID-19 turned out to be rapidly spreading and devastating, it became very important for everyone to know how to keep themselves safe from the infection. Prithviraj's father was also worried about his family's health and everyone was quite scared of the situation.

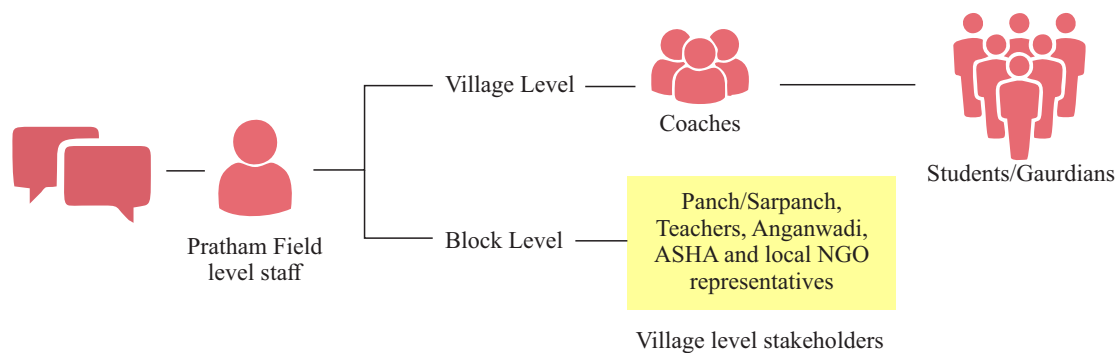
When Pratham started sharing health and safety-related messages as a part of its communication campaign *Karona Apni Suraksha*, they felt a sense of relief. Ever since Prithviraj started receiving these messages on his father's mobile phone, he has become a COVID-19 champion of his family.

He makes sure that everyone washes their hands properly before eating anything, he keeps on reminding his father, mother and sisters to maintain social distancing and to wear a mask whenever they step out, he has also taken the responsibility of cleaning fruits and vegetables which they get from outside with the help of saltwater and cleans surfaces at home from time to time. He not just follows these measures himself but also encourages his friends to do the same in their families so that everyone could stay safe and healthy. His parents are very happy seeing him being so responsible and protective about his family.

**Story 2: Bhagyashree, standard 5, student from Burka village in Assam**

Bhagyashree Deka (Standard 5 student) is a girl from Burka village in Kamrup, Assam. Her father is a daily wage labourer and her mother is a homemaker. She also has two younger brothers. Since the second wave of COVID-19 has hit the communities, there were a lot of COVID-19 cases nearby and it was very important to follow precautionary measures to stay safe. But Bhagyashree's house was far from the market area due to which they could not purchase enough masks as per their need. They were over-using the masks they had, which was risky. When Bhagyashree learned about making masks at home by following very simple steps with the help of a video shared by Pratham on her father's mobile phone as a part of its communication campaign *Karona Apni Suraksha*, she jumped with joy. She prepared masks for everyone in her family which they could wash and reuse. Since this was a big problem for everyone in their neighbourhood, Bhagyashree and her mother started sharing this method with other people as well. Her friend Shimpi does not have a smartphone at home, so Bhagyashree also taught her the technique of preparing masks at home.

**Box 2:** Stories of children as COVID-19 champions



**Figure 1:** Structure of reaching children and their guardians in villages

These children and their guardians were reached out in a most effective way through the existing network of Pratham field staff, volunteers and key stakeholders at the village level as presented in the figure (Figure 1) below. This communication model of rapidly and cost-effectively reaching the last mile contributed in equipping families and communities to better cope with the second wave and potential future waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, more than 26,000 communities in 21 states were reached through this campaign directly by Pratham and many more by the nearly 1,000 partner organizations that disseminated this content through their own networks. These partner organisations included other nonprofits, schools, universities and District Institutes for Education and Training (DIETs). The campaign at its peak reached over 600,000 contacts directly by Pratham and many more people indirectly. The content was delivered in 11 Indian languages and English.

In addition to the delivery of content and virtual interactions with the community, a fun and innovative way to test their COVID-19 related knowledge was also undertaken through the Karona Apni Suraksha quizzes. In two rounds, these quizzes were taken by nearly 1.2 million participants across communities with a large proportion of these at over 50% being children and adolescents under 18 years of age.

#### IV. LEARNINGS

The feedback and learning exercise undertaken by Pratham with a large sample of recipients had both quantitative and qualitative aspects to understand the following:

- Did the recipient read the message?
- Is the recipient able to recall the message and explain it in her/his own words?
- Is the recipient sharing or discussing the information in the message with another family member or with anyone else in the community?
- Did the recipient or another family member attempt the activity given in the video? (for e.g., mask making, using an oximeter, using a thermometer)
- Did the recipient find the content (a) very useful, (b) somewhat useful or (c) not useful? Why?

**In this intense health communication campaign, the key learnings were as follows:**

##### 1. Leverage

- An efficient and effective campaign was designed rapidly by leveraging internal resources and external collaborations.

- Existing relationships and the trust built during pre-COVID-19 times were leveraged effectively to deliver content digitally that had high uptake by communities.
- A network of village volunteers and other stakeholders were leveraged to deploy the campaign rapidly and in the most cost-effective manner.

## **2. Effectiveness**

- SMS and WhatsApp messages had similar uptake, with nearly 2/3rd of the recipients reading these messages.
- For messages where video content was additionally useful, more WhatsApp users at nearly 4/5th found the content useful compared to SMS users at nearly 2/3rd.
- Open discussion platforms like Zoom were found to be a very effective way of tackling misinformation around COVID-19 amongst village stakeholders.

## **3. Engagement**

- Most community members who read the message could explain it in their own words, at nearly 9/10th.
- A large proportion of recipients shared these messages with their family members and other people in the community, at nearly 4/5th for WhatsApp messages and nearly 3/5th for SMS.
- The higher the frequency of two-way communication through calling recipients, the higher was their engagement with the content.

Further, a more structured survey has been undertaken by Pratham to gauge the knowledge, awareness, perceptions and practices of community members in relation to COVID-19. The phone-based *Karona Apni Suraksha* survey has been administered to over 16,000 respondents across 21 states in India.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Pratham recently concluded a large and successful COVID-19 related health communication campaign called *Karona Apni Suraksha* which built on its existing reach and relationships in over 26,000 communities across 21 states in India. This rapidly designed and cost-effective digitally delivered campaign proved to be an effective way of bridging the information gap in these low-tech and under-resourced communities in the midst of the second wave of the pandemic in the country. This essential, verified and accurate information is open-source and was additionally used by other organizations to share within their networks.

In this campaign, children and adolescents were actively engaged through messaging, activities and quizzes with the aim of improving their knowledge of COVID-19 so that they become practitioners and confident champions of COVID-19-appropriate behaviour in their own communities. The pandemic has kept children away from schools for more than 15 months which has adversely affected their learning and social interactions. In this scenario, Pratham has been using digital means of learning and communication with children and their communities in an attempt to make a positive difference in their lives during these difficult times.

