

Developing a youth radio project The SSMK Experience

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Bringing knowledge and life skills to a generation of Nepalese youth



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Bringing knowledge and life skills to a generation of Nepalese youth

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“Implemented since 2003 as a partnership between Equal Access Nepal, Equal Access International and UNICEF, 'Chatting with my best friend' or 'Saathi Sanga Manka Kura' radio program was launched in 2001 by UNICEF Nepal and has been funded by a range of funders including UNICEF and USAID.”

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Foreword



When feeling isolated, confused or depressed, millions of Nepalese youth turn to their ‘Best Friends’, the young charismatic hosts of *Chatting with My Best Friend* “Saathi Sanga Manka Kura”. This youth radio initiative, launched as the brainchild of UNICEF Nepal in 2001 has continued to expand in scale and creative application, under the stewardship of Equal Access since 2004. Originally designed to empower young people with knowledge and life skills to face difficult challenges, with the specific objectives of preventing HIV transmission and intravenous drug use, *Chatting* has far exceeded expectations. It has become an essential lifeline, trusted confidant and inspiring best friend to eight million young Nepalese on issues ranging from dating and sexuality, HIV awareness and prevention, to caste discrimination, exploring new livelihoods and participating in Nepal’s fledgling peace and reconciliation process.

One only need travel with the *Chatting...* team through rural Nepal to see a young girls face alight with sparkling eyes when she instantly recognizes the distinctive voice of Binita, the show’s founding and always inspiring female radio host.

“Are you Binita?”from Chatting... I never thought I would ever meet you!

Thank you for encouraging me - you have helped me change my life.”

Or read a letter from a loyal listener...

“I am very happy to have friends like you... You can’t imagine how much impact your program has in my life. You have provided a base for the poor, helpless and hurt people like me. I will study and do something good for everyone with my self confidence. I will stand on my own feet”.

One of the main achievements of "*Chatting with My Best Friend*," attested to in thousands of letters from loyal listeners is that it has boosted their self-esteem. The peer-to-peer, on-air discussions about the realities and responsibilities of adolescence inspire youth to rise above daily conflicts, stressful circumstances and peer pressure. Teenage listeners, often with no other reliable source of information, learn important life skills, for example negotiating relationships, effective communication, self awareness and how to cope with stress. The show also empowers its young listeners to

make informed decisions about issues as wide ranging as whether to migrate abroad in search of work, pre marital pregnancies, coping with HIV and how to do better with school studies.

Chatting... stretches the medium of radio with innovative mini-dramas and light banter mixed with hard facts; combining it with on the ground youth clubs, print magazines, life skills pamphlets, interactive letter writing, mobile SMS, web outreach and more to impart specific knowledge and essential life skills to millions of young people across the country.

By 2020 the world's youth population will easily reach four billion. Empowering youth -- tomorrow's leaders, parents and teachers -- with self-esteem, the skills to create a better life and a sense of belonging to a supportive network of peers is one of the most powerful contributions that can be made to future generations and to a more compassionate and equitable world.

This publication is the first 'behind the scenes' look at the development of this phenomenally successful and long running youth initiative and is offered as a guide for those wanting to understand more about working with youth in ways that encourage their inherent strength, creativity and self-reliance.

Boasting serious metrics: 6 million weekly listeners, 8 million monthly listeners; reaching 64% of youth age 14-19 and 51% of youth age 14-24; catalyzing 1200 active youth listener groups, an average of 1500 monthly letters and emails; and offering a website, and national and regional publications produced by youth for youth; *Chatting with My Best Friend* demonstrates broad impact in health and social benefits for less than 10 cents per listener per year.

Blessed with stewardship of this program by UNICEF Nepal in 2004, Equal Access is currently replicating this worthy youth initiative in Cambodia, Laos, Niger, Mauritania and Chad, drawing on successful elements from Nepal, while ensuring that each 'replication' is unique to the culture, concerns and aspirations of the youth of each new country.

Combining the inspiring power of media with the intimacy of the human voice, *Chatting...* speaks directly to each young person's fondest hope and deepest fear. And to ensure that no concern goes unanswered, the *Chatting...* staff answers every letter with skillful guidance and a life skills booklet. By encouraging a culture of youth engagement and peer support, this model holds tremendous potential for an empowered global citizenry. As you peruse these pages we encourage you to share your experiences and plans with us. We invite future collaborations in the service of young people everywhere.

In the grateful words of a loyal reader of *Chatting with My Best Friends* print publication, "Manka Kura"

You who try to include all youth

Confident I am in your continuation

Teaching, spreading the light of knowledge in this world

Ronni Goldfarb
President & CEO Equal Access International

Acknowledgement



A ground-breaking radio programme that touches the minds and lives of so many young Nepalis, ‘Chatting with my best friend’ has remained the heart-beat of a growing number of youth since the last seven years. Designed to talk to young people as a peer and on topics that are of most interest to them, it is the most popular radio programme in Nepal apart from the national news on Radio Nepal with a dedicated listenership of 6 million people.

This publication is an attempt to document the processes involved in the inception of this communication initiative for young people, the reason why UNICEF designed such an initiative in the first place, the challenges and the successes that the team has encountered since then, the experiences of the programme and the team in its journey through time, how they built a listener base and how do they interact with their audience, how the programme was institutionalized within Equal Access and how within the wings of Equal Access it grew from being a radio programme to a comprehensive youth programme with outreach activities, central and regional publications and as a national and international training resource.

It has taken almost two years for this document to evolve to its current form with a lot of writing and re-writing and editing. A lot of hard work has gone in making sure that this publication serves the purpose for which it has been developed – to provide an understanding on how a good communication initiative for young people can be developed, what are the major elements that need to be taken care of at the different stages and to share the learning of the team through its journey this far. It is intended for use in Nepal and in other countries, by communication and development practitioners, young people themselves and for academicians and researchers with an interest in communications for individual behavior and social change.

I wish to thank everybody who has been part of this initiative to bring this publication to life, especially the ‘Chatting .. ‘ team, the youth publication team and

all the other contributors. Special thanks go to Jo A. Tacchi from the Queensland University of Technology, Australia and her colleague Tripta B. Chandola, who initially trained Equal Access staff members on the skills of identifying data, coding and analysis of data and presenting the same in the form of audio diaries, features, photo-stories, photo-essays, news-pieces and digital stories. We cannot go without thanking Gemma Quilt, Asia Content Manager for Equal Access, who worked endlessly and untiringly in editing this document and providing her inputs as required. Our special thanks go to UNICEF for supporting ‘Chatting...’ through all these years and for providing creative ideas to the team at all times, and a special mention must be made of Rupa Joshi, Senior Communication Officer, UNICEF, whose support has been exemplary in guiding the team and the programme. I wish to thank Michael Bosse, Director for Programs, Equal Access, who has been behind the youth team at all times, understood their vision and needs and been the driving force in translating the vision of the team into real and tangible products. The idea of this publication was initially his and all of us wish to thank him, not only for the idea, but for all the contributions in between and in seeing the idea through to fruition. Last, but not the least, we thank all the audience and well wishers of ‘Chatting...’ and Equal Access.

Nirmal Rijal
Country Director
Equal Access Nepal

Introduction

*“Sometime back, my own father raped me. I tried to push him away but he forced himself on me. And now I am three months pregnant. I am very disturbed about this and I don’t know what to do. After I discovered that I was pregnant I stopped going to the school. I’ve no one to share my problem, I cannot trust anyone. I’m scared that when people come to know what happened to me, they will blame me. My friends visit me, but I cannot tell them about my problem. I am becoming thinner day by day and my father doesn’t care. I wish I could leave this house but I have nowhere to go. Please help me”,
(Excerpt from a letter written by a 14 year old girl to ‘Saathi Sanga Manka Kura,’ SSMK)*

This letter, highly emotional in nature and dealing with very sensitive issues is example of the thousands received every week by the popular Nepali youth radio program, *Saathi Sanga ManKa Kura (SSMK)* or Chatting with my Best Friend. For millions of Nepali youth this program exists as a lifeline and the young program hosts have become like best friends to whom listeners can turn when they feel isolated, confused or depressed. When the program first aired in 2001, no one dreamed that it could have the impact it did, but soon the youth team of SSMK became household names in Nepal. Now they can rarely talk in public without their distinctive voices being recognized.



“..I have had more than 8 years of working on SSMK, but every day I learn something new from the program, from my team but most of all from the listeners. All across Nepal I get the same positive reaction from people who have been touched by the program and who are so excited to meet me and the team in person. Such expressions of love for us and the program give me a great feeling and show me that SSMK is still reaching out to the youth of Nepal...as I always say, this work for me is not only a job, but also a way for me to serve my community and country, in my own small way”. Binita Shrestha, SSMK team leader and one of the original group of trained youth producers.



Chapter 1

⊕ Background





“Lack of proper information and counseling for young people has been a hindrance to our nation. We at SSMK look at a problem from many angles and only after analyzing all the different perspectives do we suggest the best possible solution or approach for a problem. Providing suggestions does not work immediately, it is not like a sick person taking medicine, bringing about change can not be achieved overnight, it takes time”, Sangita Budhathoki, Script Writer and Female Host.

SSMK is the first – and so far the only – national radio program in Nepal that discusses teenage and adolescence issues without judgment in a frank, honest and informed manner. The program was originally developed by UNICEF under the Life Skills Communication Initiative for Young People in Nepal, with the specific objectives of preventing HIV infection and intravenous drug use. With this in mind, the hour long life skills based youth radio program is designed to equip young people with knowledge and life skills, empowering Nepal’s youth to deal with the difficult issues they face in their daily lives. The peer-to-peer, on-air discussions about the realities and responsibilities of adolescence enable youth to rise above daily conflicts, stressful expectations and peer pressure. Teenage listeners, often with no other reliable information sources learn important life skills, for example negotiating relationships, effective communication, self-awareness and coping with stress. The show also empowers it’s young listener base to make informed decisions about issues as wide ranging as migration, pre marital pregnancies, HIV and AIDS and the fledgling peace process in Nepal.

A range of material describing the program including reports and media coverage is annexed in the Background section.

Excerpt from Script



- Female: So Binayak, what are you thinking about after listening to Arati's story?
- Male: I think what you tried to explain is right. Even though the situation seems very bad, we shouldn't let ourselves get down. We should try our best to convince others who drink about the consequences that their actions can have in life.
- Female: Exactly, and that we should believe in ourselves and have confidence that whatever we are doing is for the good of that person and we can surely bring changes.
- Male: But we shouldn't be over confident that we can convince the person to change. We know that it is hard for anyone to stop this kind of behavior the very next day but if we work together, gradually, then we can change. The thing that we need is patience.

1.1 UNICEF: Laying the foundation for SSMK



“There are certainly many fond memories of those early days, with all of us working together in the small Radio Nepal studio, reading the mountain-full of letters that were sent to the program each week.”

*- Wing Sie Cheng, UNICEF Regional HIV and AIDS Advisor
(Wing Sie Cheng was among the original UNICEF team who helped launch SSMK)*

SSMK was the brainchild of UNICEF's country office in Nepal and the team recognizes the large role UNICEF's well researched 3-step approach played in the program's early success. In the beginning, the program was also recorded within Radio Nepal's facility and was a hands-on collaboration between Radio Nepal, the team of young producers and UNICEF colleagues.

Other people SSMK would like to thank from those early days include: Rajendra Sharma, Radio Nepal Deputy Director, Cai Cai a Life Skills expert and the original SSMK production team including Sushma Shrestha, Toya Ghimire, Bhaskar Gyawali, Bhumika Thapa and Nobodita Subedi

The Steps to SSMK

Step 1) Needs assessment:

The first critical step in the process of creating SSMK was to ensure that any project or program UNICEF launched would serve to meet a real need in the lives of young people in Nepal and would not duplicate work already being done. To this end, a survey was carried out in 1999 by UNICEF Nepal's Country Office to document the HIV and AIDS work being done in Nepal and to identify the gaps that needed to be addressedⁱ. The survey indicated a significant lack of information and communication channels nationally, regionally and locally among adolescents (aged 12-19), who were at a high risk of contracting HIV through the practice of unprotected sex and increasing instances of drug abuse.

Step 2) Audience research

Once the need for a program was identified, it was important to fully understand the audience UNICEF wanted to reach. Therefore, the next step was to develop a profile range of the teenagers in Nepal. To achieve this, UNICEF conducted a survey of the Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice and Skills (KAPS) of 1,400 young people between the ages 12 and 18ⁱⁱ. The survey aimed to understand the teenagers' psychosocial competence, their vulnerability to contaminant HIV, their life styles, behavioral patterns, and their awareness levels about HIV and AIDS. The survey was carried out in seven districts representing all the countries geographical areas and development zones.

The results of the survey demonstrated that the main concerns of an average teenager were centered on professional insecurity, education, family, health, and money. Love, sex, finding the right partner and marriage were also significant. Though 92 percent of teenagers interviewed had some basic information about HIV and AIDS, this did not translate into adopting safe sexual habits. The survey also found that teenagers' interpersonal skills were poorly developed and there was a clear need to address positive self-development through strengthening life skills such as communication, self management, decision making and problem solving abilities. Girls particularly felt that they suffered from discrimination within their own families and local communities and had little or no say in the decisions affecting their lives. Using the findings of the KAPS survey, UNICEF produced a practical life skills handbook (*Life Skills a Guide for Teenagers*, UNICEF Nepal Country Office, Kathmandu 2001) to help a range of beneficiaries gain a better understanding of how life skills can contribute to positive self-development.

ⁱ *Who's doing what on HIV/AIDS in Nepal*, UNICEF, Nepal Country Office, Kathmandu 2000.

ⁱⁱ *A Survey of Teenagers in Nepal for Life Skills Development and HIV/AIDS Prevention*, UNICEF, Nepal Country Office, Kathmandu 2001.



Since the survey clearly showed that radio was by far the most popular mass communication medium among the target age group and research confirmed that nothing similar had been successfully attempted before, UNICEF decided to produce a Life Skills based radio program made for young people, by young people and SSMK was born.



UNICEF wanted to impart Life skills to young people because if we wanted to stop the spread of HIV among Nepalese youth, just providing them information about condom would simply not help. What they needed was the skills by which they could bring their knowledge into action.

- Sharad Ranjit, Program Communication Officer, UNICEF

The 10 UNICEF Life Skills

Self-Awareness

Empathy

Creative Thinking

Critical Thinking

Effective Communication

Ability to manage emotions

Coping with Stress

Decision making

Problem Solving

Step 3) Training

The third pillar in the early development of SSMK was training. Originally, ten young broadcast media professionals between the ages of 19 and 26, including producer, presenters and technicians were chosen to take part in a full-time, six month long training course based around radio production skills and life skills. From these ten, five were chosen to produce and present the program. Both Binita Shrestha and Binayak Aryal (the two remaining members from the original SSMK team) remember vividly how the trainings not only increased their skills as radio producers but also their own confidence:

“When I was chosen as one of the 10 trainees for SSMK I was incredibly shy and would find it difficult to talk to people, especially girls, I did not know. But after 6 months of living and breathing life skills training, I began to realize that I could also apply so many of the skills in my own life and I found myself becoming more confident – by the time the show went to air, I was like a different person, I had no idea life skills would have that effect on me, let alone anyone else!” Binayak Aryal



The Start Up Team
 Binita Shrestha, Binayak Aryal
 Toya Ghimrie, Bahaskar Gayawali
 Sushma Shrestha

1.2 Equal Access: Building on the Program's Success

Although SSMK continues to be supported by UNICEF (**along with support from other donors including USAID**), since September 2004 the production team has been nested within Equal Access Nepal, a development communications NGO that combines media for social change, outreach and training to produce a range of radio and print programs on topics as diverse as early childhood development (*Kheldai Sikdai*), women's empowerment (*Sundai Feridai*) cross border migration (*Desh Padesh*) and conflict transformation (*Naya Nepal*). Under Equal Access' guidance, SSMK has expanded its radio and other activities and now has an active and expanding network of over 1000 listener clubs supported by a newly established youth network, a website www.ssmk.org and regional and national publications. The team also regularly organizes youth mobilization trainings across Nepal, encouraging listeners to play a positive and active role in their communities. All these activities have enabled the SSMK team to engage with their audience on an even deeper level, reaching out to listeners both at home and abroad with unique and relevant programming that speaks directly to their needs.

"..... I had to go through so many financial as well as psychological crises. There were lots of time when I would break down, but these days I can deal with my problems on my own and am able to cope with my emotions ... all the credit goes to SSMK. Dear friends, I want to thank you for being such a true friend and supporting me throughout ..."

- a boy from Nepalgunj, Nepal

Chatting with my best friend audience information

This direct engagement with listeners has proven itself through the show's ability to maintain a consistently high popularity rating and loyal listener base over the years. Today audiences from across Nepal can hear the program via the country's national broadcaster, Radio Nepal, and more than 40 local FM stations (listed below in the background information section). While early attempts to quantify listener numbers were largely anecdotal and based on the volume of letters received, over the last few years a number of independent surveys have been conducted by various groups which show SSMK to have 64% weekly listening penetration among its target audience of Nepali youth. This and other listening figures are shown below:

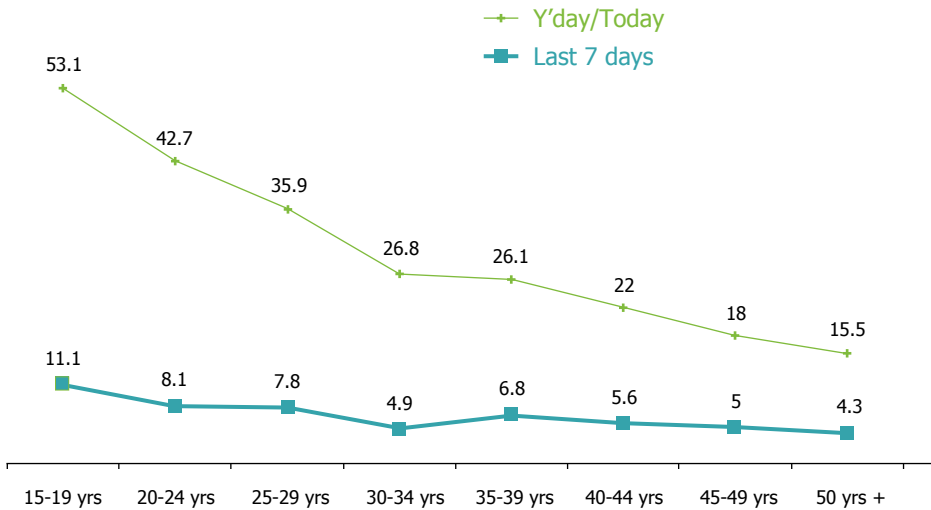
These audience figures and highlights have been established as a result of a series of national independent audience surveys conducted by Equal Access and other external agencies (including BBC/Nielsen and DHS/New Era). The surveys were conducted between 2006-2008 and the data presented for SSMK from these surveys has been consistent over the two years

Chatting with my best friend: Audience Highlights

- Weekly listening audience: 5 million
- Monthly listening audience 8 million
- Weekly listening penetration amongst 15-19 year olds: 64%, 20-24 year olds 51%
- Second most popular radio program nationally (after Radio Nepal news).
- Approximately twice as popular as comparable health programs.

About six in ten men (58 percent) and nearly one out of two women (47 percent) age 15-49 listened to the Sathi Sanga Manka Kura radio program. About 20-30 percent of women and about 30-40 percent of men were exposed to each of the other radio programs. Men were only slightly more likely than women to be exposed to the two programs on the television.

Listenership by Age Group



(Graph taken from the Broadcast Audience Survey, Equal Access/Nielsen, February/March 2007)

Sources: Broadcast Audience Surveys (Equal Access/Nielsen) June/July 2006 and February/March 2007

National Demographic Health Survey (Ministry of Health/New Era) 2006

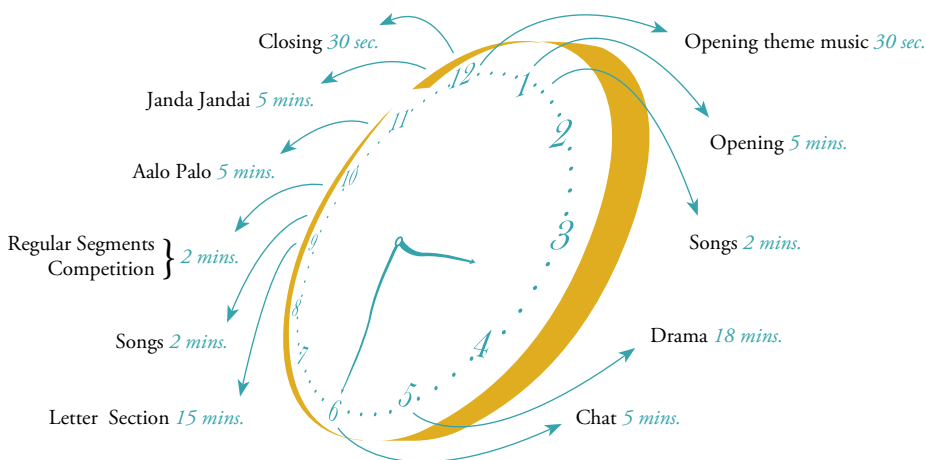
BBC Audience Survey (BBC/Nielsen) late 2007



Chapter 2

⊕ The Radio Program Format





“...first of all the opening style of the host is good. Then the style of reading the letters is also good. And the answers which you all give is very good... you have a good way of dealing with any type of problem, which helps us to solve our own problems. We can get so much knowledge from listening.” (A young boy in a high school in Palpa district in western Nepal, commenting on the SSMK program structure)

Although the content is continuously evolving in order to remain relevant to listeners, since its first broadcast in 2001 the format of the SSMK radio program has changed little. In its present format, the radio program has five main components: presenter chat, drama, letter section Janda Jandai or information section and a new section, Aalo Palo, which is almost entirely comprised of audio gathered by SSMK trained youth Community Reporters. This content is weaved together with songs and interviews to complete the hour-long edutainment show. The format is static

enough that listeners always know what to expect, but also fluid enough to allow the team to include one off or short running additional sections in which the presenters encourage listeners to write in with their feelings and experiences on a particular topic or question. For example, in April 2007, SSMK aired a section ‘HIV and Us’ which ran for one month and encouraged listeners to write in about how HIV had affected them. In the end, over 800 young people had shared their personal thoughts and experiences on HIV with the program.

“I have all the symptoms mentioned for HIV. I got very sad and started to stay alone. When I told my family, they said that how could I be infected with HIV and that was a still a child ... But my villagers also said that since I had to gone to Kathmandu, I might have got it from there ... I’m always occupied by these sorts of thoughts and have also lost a lot of weight. I even don’t feel like going to the hospital for a checkup.”

Similarly, in response to the changing political scenario in Nepal, the program ran another feature where they asked listeners ‘As a young person, do you think you should be involved in the peace process that’s going on in the country? If yes, how do you think you can do it and if no, why?’ Again the show was deluged with letters expressing young people’s thoughts, feelings and frustrations about their role, or lack thereof, in ensuring peace in Nepal. These sections provide a much needed platform for the youth of Nepal to exchange their thoughts on various contemporary issues with each other, allowing young people to share views and ideas across a country that remains divided geographically, politically and socially. From a development point of view, these sections also provide feedback of youth opinion on some of the major issues in Nepal today.

I like the SSMK program very much. I can not explain how good the program is.... We have been receiving knowledge about HIV and STI through this program for such a long time. With the knowledge acquired from this program we are able to make our community aware of HIV and AIDS and how it is transmitted... (A letter sent by a listener from Sankhuwasabha)

2.1 The Ingredients of SSMK

a) Presenter Chat

(Sample of a chat about sexual harassment of girls)



- Binayak : (Very Cheerful) Namaste .. this is me, your own friend Binayak... welcoming you to another new episode of your own radio program - SAATHI SANGA MANKA KURA...
- Binita : (In very normal, low voice) And I am Binita ...How have you been ?? Hope your week was good ...
- Binayak : (Teasing Binita) ... “How have you been ?? “ .. “ Hope your last week was good” ... “But you know, mine was not that good” ...
- Binita : (Gets angry) ...Stop it Binayak...I already told you, I am not in the mood for your teasing today...leave me alone...
- Binayak : (laughs at her) Oh really ?? If you really want to be left alone, then why did you come here? You knew that you would meet me here...
- Binita : I didn't come here to meet you, I came here to talk with our friends ...
- Binayak : But I am your friend too ... (flirting) ... and I can be your spe..cial friend too ...you know...if you want ...
- Binita : (Bitterly) special friend ?? Stop dreaming ... a coward like you can't even stand up for me like a friend ...
- Binayak : What ?? Whom are you calling coward?
- Binita : You ...who else is here ?
- Binayak : (now little angry) ... How dare you say that ?
- Binita : Why not ? Only yesterday you proved to me that you are a coward ...
- Binayak : Oh ... now I get it ... you are still hanging on what happened yesterday ... (involving listeners) ... you know friend, yesterday I went with Binita to New Road... and there she suddenly got mad at me over nothing and left
- Binita : Over nothing? Why don't you tell our friends that you were so scared to protect me from those drunken people ...
- Binayak : Come on, don't start it again ... how can you be sure that they were passing comments on you ... it could have been for anyone ...
- Binita : There was nobody else and you know friends, when those people were saying nasty things about me, our

- BRAVE Binayak just asked me to ignore their comments and move on
- Binayak : So what else I could do there ?? Get into fight with them for such a small thing?
- Binita : See, that's what you are .. a typical guy ...you think, passing nasty comments on girls is just a small thing ... I won't be surprised if I see you doing the same some day..
- Binayak : What ? You are comparing me with those people ?
- Binita : Why not ? You supported them yesterday in a way ... ignoring such things is also a way of encouraging them to do it again and again ... (involving listeners). Friends, don't you think so?

The program aims to establish an intimate relationship between presenters and listeners where the two are like close friends talking to one another, without making value judgments. Each week the show is co-hosted by a young woman and a young man, in their early to mid-twenties. They use simple, often, colloquial, language and engage in friendly, humorous banter with each other. This approach of having young men and women interact helps to break down the gender barriers that often exist between youth in Nepal, encouraging adolescents to communicate effectively and openly with members of the opposite sex. While this male-female approach, coupled with the sensitive topics that the program broaches (including interpersonal relationships, safe sex, HIV and AIDS) has prompted criticism, the team has always felt that as the first program of its kind in Nepal, it is SSMK's role to push boundaries and question existing social norms acting as a vanguard for future youth programming.

Radio Nepal, the country's government broadcaster, was the first to start airing the program and while SSMK and Radio Nepal now enjoy a good relationship it was not always so. Mr. Rajendra Prasad Sharma (Deputy Executive Director, Radio Nepal) remembers that, in the early days there were a lot of objections to the show's chosen topics and style:



“Of course, in the starting phases it was not so easy. Being the one who brought SSMK to Radio Nepal, I had to be answerable to any problem regarding the matter. I remember one incident, after we aired an episode regarding myths of masturbation, its effects and precautions to be taken while masturbating, the next day I was called in front of the executive director's desk, I was accused of approving vulgar content to be aired in the program, I was told that I had allowed the program presenters to talk about sex on the radio. This was seen as promoting indecency in the society by some. To that my defense was that, alright, maybe the one who

complained did not listen to the complete program. He/she must have missed out the context in which it was talked about. If you care enough to look at the whole canvas you will know that the program was so well planned, the words used in the scripts were all decent words and the entire program was very well directed. The program focused on masturbation because it was identified as one of the major problems during adolescence. Experts approved the words used in the scripts and it is made sure that it sounds decent even for all family members to listen to the program”
I told my senior how the programs are all well planned that we have developed a schedule for the whole year i.e. all 52 episodes. Even the dates for re enforcing a certain issue were well scheduled before hand, in Nepal till date there was no program on radio which was planned so meticulously”.

b) Drama

“Sometimes the problems shown in the drama don’t relate to me but it could relate to others like me. I remember one of the SSMK dramas on a blind person where you showed that blind people also have their heart and feelings. After listening to the drama we felt that it reflected the true story and blind people often face those kinds of problems in reality. The drama had a convincing ending; we always expect our lives to be as meaningful as that of the character in the drama. Interestingly I found that a...similar problem was faced by my friend...then I went to him and gave the information about it...and he solved his problem...”

Quote from a young blind student from Damkada high school in Palpa, Western Nepal during an interview with one of the SSMK team members

For most of the listeners the most interesting component of the SSMK program structure are the dramas 20 to 25 minutes long and vividly produced using sounds and music, each week the drama reflects the theme of the program and the everyday realities of young people in Nepal. Although favorite characters reappear in different stories, the drama is not an ongoing serial or soap opera. Instead, it is a collection of stand-alone dramas or on occasion a mini series, which effectively explores the chosen topic of discussion, incorporating life skills information within entertaining and engaging story lines. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that many young listeners are taking up the messages carried through the drama as groups of youths are even coming together to make their own SSMK inspired street dramas, which they perform in their communities ensuring positive behavior change messages are disseminated even further.

FX: Night



- Binod: Sarita, how is sabin doing in his shool ?
- Sarita: He's doing well .. he just finished his exam for this year but he's getting naughtier day by day ...
- Binod: Kids are like that at his age ... but it must be hard on you, bringing him up on your own
- Sarita: It's OK... your Parents really help a lot .. but it must be harder on you ... living away from us, working for long hours, cooking, cleaning all by yourself ... you must have wished there was someone to take care of you.
- Binod : What do you mean someone else ?
- Sarita : There must be so many girls there ... more young, more beautiful ...
- Binod : What are you talking about ?
- Sarita : Tell me if I'm wrong ... Mumbai is such a place ..
- Binod : So what, I'm happy with you, my own wife .
- Sarita : Binod if I ask you something, will you promise to listen to it with an open mind and not get angry with me ?
- Binod : Tell me, I won't get angry.
- Sarita : The place where you work, there must be so many opportunity to meet other girls..... I mean you stay away for so many months..... you must have felt the need to go to those girls.....
- Binod: (cutting in the middle) you are doubting me?
- Sarita: Please I'm not doubting you but I've been hearing a lot about HIV and AIDS through the radio,TV, newspapers..... there were also cases of how men contracted HIV from sex workers and without knowing, transferred it to their wife..... that's why I'm asking you.
- Binod: So, you think I might have visited those girls?
- Sarita: I have complete trust in you but since I'm your wife , don't you think I should ask you about this? If you were in my place, you'd have asked me too, am I right ? (Pause) From my understanding, everything should be clear between husband and wife and if something's bothering one of them, he/she should be able to put that across to the other. no?
- Binod: Yes
- Sarita : OK, for instance, If I had not asked you about this the way I'm doing but instead I was grumpy and behaved angry with you, how would you feel?

- Binod: Sarita... to tell you the truth I like the direct way you approached me and I'll tell you the truth ... I've never had sexual relation with other woman except you ... of course my friends used to pressure me into visiting those women I know about HIV and AIDS but besides that, you and our son always come between I care too much for you to go and visit those women you two are my life .
- Sarita: And you are my life too...

Transitional music.

c) Janda Jandai

Literally translated as “as we leave”, *Janda Jandai* is the final section of the program and is an all encompassing information section, which can cover anything from health to HIV, bird flu to natural disasters. Sometimes fun trivia and sometimes serious information, this section is ideal for the show’s junior producers to learn the crafts of research, script writing and presentation and is also important for giving vital information to listeners.

Janda Jandai music up



- Binayak: Come on now Bini, stop beating around the bush and let's get to the point. Let's talk about your mom in “Janda Jandai” today.
- Binita: What? Are you out of your mind?
- Binayak: No I'm not, just tell me how old she was when she gave birth to you ?
- Binita: ummmm I'm not very sure ... but probably she must have been 24 or 25 ... but what are you trying to prove here Binayak?
- Binayak: Ok ... so friends, can you tell me if Bini's mom gave birth to her at the right age??
- Binita: Stop it Binayak, stop making fun of mom and me ok...where are you going with this?
- Binayak: Hey ! Cool it lady, I'm not making fun ... Its just that we are going to talk about reproductive health in Janda Jandai today. So just checking if you were (overlap by Binita) ...
- Binita: (Kidding)Ok ... I forgive you. (laughs)
- Binayak: (Kidding) Oh thank you great Binita for your kindness.
- Binita : Okay Mister, You said you had information on Reproductive Health.

Binayak: Yeah, do you know that a girl's age should be at least 22 before she gives birth to a baby. Doctors say that a female's reproductive organs are not properly developed before the age of 22 and if she gives birth before that age, it is a risk for both the mother and the child's health.

d) Letter Section



I remember when I sat down with the team to discuss on letters, I was overwhelmed by the amount of trust the team had gained from their listeners. The content of the letters were so heart touching that sometimes after listening to the letter everyone in the room would be speechless, there would be silence in the room for sometime before someone could start speaking again.

- Sharad Ranjit, Program Communication Officer, UNICEF

Letters as a means of audience feedback and interaction have been a part of SSMK right from the start. In the early days SSMK received only a few letters, but as more people began listening to the program and hearing other people's letters' discussed on air, the number quickly increased. In the first two years after SSMK went on air, the program received almost 15,000 letters from listeners all over the country. To date the program has received more than 60,000 letters from the youth of Nepal and every one has been read and replied to by the program team, despite the large volume.

The initial level of listener response - completely unprecedented in Nepal - indicates the extent to which SSMK struck a chord with young people and even after 8 years on the air the program continues to receive an average of 700-1200 letters a month (and more recently a growing number of emails). It is interesting to see how young Nepalis, who very often feel unable to share their feelings amongst friends and family, pour out their most intimate concerns to SSMK. In this, the trust developed between the listeners and the program is essential. The listeners trust SSMK because the confidentiality of every letter writer is maintained; under no circumstance is the identity of the writer ever disclosed on air. As the letters contain very personal information and are often the only time the writer has reached out to anyone about his or her problem, it is essential that everyone who writes get a reply. For this reason a large part of the production team's week is spent reading letters, categorizing them according to the subject matter and ensuring everyone who writes in to the program receives a standard, tailored letter in response along with a set of UNICEF produced life skills booklets. Letters from listeners also provide the raw material for the 'chat' section of the radio program. In each episode, four or five letters are read out and discussed by the co-hosts who suggest possible ways of responding to the listener's problems using life skills. Every effort is made to ensure

that the presenters' responses to the letters dealt with on air are non-judgmental and factually accurate, incorporating life skills advice such as the need for self-acceptance, the importance of setting personal goals, and how to think both critically and creatively in difficult situations. The team also challenges listeners to ask themselves what decisions they would make if they found themselves in similar situations. To ensure this kind of informed and balanced response, the SSMK production team, along with various subject matter and youth experts meet once a week and discuss possible responses to the letters as well as any other relevant linkages, organizations or information that they may need to provide on the show. This weekly letter session is an incredibly important and popular part of the radio program as it creates an interactive relationship between the listeners and the show. Over the years this thorough approach has ensured that SSMK continues to feel interactive and reactive. Certainly, the two-way dialogue created between the team and the listeners via their letters has contributed to the show's hosts feeling like best friends to millions of Nepali youth.

For the production team, receiving so many listeners' letters has been a highly instructive process, full of surprises and ultimately deeply satisfying. Team leader and female-host Binita Shrestha recalls the case of a girl who wrote that a close relative had raped her when she was a child, *"We read out her letter on air, and after that so many other girls wrote in to us because they were suffering from the same problem. They had guilt and shame inside, and they didn't know what to do. They couldn't cope with the pain. After a few months that girl wrote back to us again to say that what we had said on air had really helped her to come to terms with her situation."*

Male host, Binayak Aryal, remembers a letter from a young man whose girlfriend was diagnosed HIV-positive but he was negative, *"He still loved her and wanted to spend his life with her, but he felt confused and didn't know what to do so he wrote to us asking what would be the best solution. We read out his letter and gave him some ideas about what might happen if he stayed with his girlfriend, or if he left her. It was a very touching experience"*

I'm 18 year old bachelor studying in the 11th grade. I've a girlfriend and we love each other so much. Recently when she got her health checked up, we discovered that she is HIV positive. My girlfriend has threatened to commit suicide if I don't marry her. Though I've promised her to marry I am very apprehensive that the society might ill treat me and hate me for being involved with a HIV positive person. So now I don't know if I should let her commit suicide or leave my home and the society"

While most of the letters received are positive, there are also occasional letters complaining about the program and its content. Binita finds the criticism very productive and the team takes it in stride “*Sometimes people write in to say that they disagree with a suggestion we’ve made for dealing with a problem and that we should have said something different. It’s actually very encouraging when they do that, because it shows how much they care about what we say on air*”.

Example Responses to Listener Letters:

Respected presenter sister Binita and brother Binayak,

Namaskar from a distant place through this letter!

I have a boyfriend and both of us like each other very much. It has been 5 years since we first met. We still write letters to one another. The problem is that my family doesn’t want to let me marry him and I am afraid to get married without their consent. Brother Binayak! What should I do to get rid of this problem?

Your sister, who is waiting for your response,

One thing you need to clearly understand while trying to solve this problem is that here you are planning your future. Marriage decision is something which will affect your overall future planning, so you have to make a responsible decision for yourself. Picking up the line from the letter you sent, where you have stated that you are afraid to get married without your parent’s consent, let’s think upon that.. Why do you feel that way? Is it because you are not confident about your choice yourself? Or is it out of love and respect for your parents only?

To help you analyze, let me share some of the feelings of other teenagers who were interviewed for our KAPS survey done a few years back. Among 1400 Nepali teenagers, nearly half of the respondents said that they have to absolutely obey their parents when it comes to deciding whom to marry. The reason they cited were : “I am afraid of upsetting my parents”, “ my parents’ decisions are better than mine”, “if anything goes wrong with my marriage, it will be my parents who should be blamed, not me, and I can return to my parents”. Do you feel the same? Here, of course we understand that relying on parents’ choice is a demonstration of respect, but we think that letting parents decide for you or giving up your own will is also a demonstration of complete dependency upon others. Its like, in a way, you are running away from taking responsibilities for your own actions and choices and allowing your parents to run your life, which is not right. We have to learn to be responsible for what is best for ourselves, for our own self development. When we leave it to our parents to decide, they will decide for you out of love and what they think is best for you. But what they think is best for you may not always be right. So,

when it comes to you and your future, the decision should always be yours. You can have advice or inputs from others while analyzing the whole situation, but the final decision has to be made by yourself. And of course you'll have to learn the creative ways to communicate your decision effectively with others, including your parents.

First thing you can do is effectively communicate with your parents on this matter and tell them everything about the guy you want to marry and that you love each other very much and you can't be happy without each other. Here you might say, I've already communicated with my parents and they don't listen to me ... but you've to understand that, just communicating and effectively communicating is totally different. Effective communication is built on empathy – the ability to sense the need and feeling in another person. Empathy allows us to find a common ground between ourselves and others. On this ground, we are able to make decisions that benefit ourselves without hurting others. Effective communication is also important, because usually we tend to assume others know what you want or how you feel. Then when they do not act as we think they should, we get upset. We expect people to understand us. The truth is, they do not understand us, if we choose to believe that ideas can get across at the unspoken level. So, communication with empathy is a must to get yourself out of this problem. You parents also might have some logic when they say that you cannot marry this guy. So your role is to understand their feelings first and then make them understand why this is the right guy for you. After you give them very thoughtful logic about marrying him then they will definitely listen to you. You can also use some creative ideas to convince them, like ask the guy to come to your home and talk to your parents. You can also ask why your parents don't want you to marry him and then try to work out the drawbacks... Or another creative idea could be persuading someone (close to your parents, but who understands and supports you) to talk to them on this.

A namaste to Binita and Binayak

I have been in love with a low-caste girl for the past 13-14 months. She is very intelligent and independent. We love each other very much and want to live our life together. But the society does not permit us to get married as we are of different castes. I cannot live without her and cannot leave her but I cannot make my mother cry too. My mother has reared me up alone as my father died when I was 5. What shall I do now? Please help.

Parvat, Dhairinge, Nepal

Its good to know that you are an open minded person and do not care about the caste discrimination in our society. But when it comes to marriage decision, we feel that you still need to do some thinking, to be sure that you've made the right decision for yourself. It's nothing to do with caste of the girl, but you need to be sure that you've chosen the right person for you in terms of understanding each other, love and bonding, the future planning ahead. We feel this is important to be clear

about, because you are thinking about a big step ahead and there's no point if you'll have to regret your decision later.

In our society, inter-caste relationship is seen as a taboo, even in today's world. So, there might be the consequences that your parents will never understand or accept your relationship with her, even if you get married to each other - So are you ready for that? Are you prepared to face the pressure from our traditional society and fight back? If you think your love can resist all these pressures, then next step to do is talk to your partner. If she is also ready for the ups and downs that might occur, then you can think about further steps. Always understand that, marrying someone is not a small step to take, it will affect your life profoundly. So, what we suggest is that both of you should think really seriously about it and only decide about what you want to do.

Now if both of you are ready then the next step is to communicate your decision to your parents. The difference between communicating with parents before and after analyzing the situations possible consequences is that this analyzing process will make you mentally prepared and more confident to communicate. You should also empathize with them because they were brought up in such an environment that they think the way they do. They have been taught that way, so we don't see their fault as well. The traditional norms and values won't go away overnight. So, you guys will have to make them understand why you have made this decision, why do you think she/he is the right person for you, and how it ensures your long term happiness. Maybe they will listen to you. Most of the times we ourselves build the boundaries and assume that our parents won't listen to us at all. But maybe if we are really honest with them, and explain to them how much something means to us, that we are responsible enough to make the right decision and on what basis we made that decision, then maybe they will understand and agree with us.

We can also think creatively. We can ask help from our other relatives or friends of your parents who can talk to them, who does understand you. You can also show them examples of couples who had inter-caste marriage but are living happily. Its all about having determination and perseverance. Remember friend; where there is a will, there is a way. Also, if you tell them now, when you are not mature enough and not financially strong then they won't listen to you. But, if you continue your studies and focus on your career and later on when you stand on your own feet then it will be easy for you to convince them. So, right now focus more on your studies and career and later on it will be helpful in your love life.

Even after that if they don't listen to you, then that's your decision to make. If you think that you are financially, emotionally and spiritually strong then you guys can marry and live separately. So, friend that's your decision to make. But before making any kind of decision think very carefully and seriously and think about the consequences you may have to bear after the decision you make. So, think carefully and decide for yourself but don't be an emotional fool, Think practically as well.



Chapter 3

⊕ Content and Production



3.1 Planning the Program

SSMK Program Line up

During an informal meeting, one SSMK listener asked the show's host, Binita, "So, which issue are you covering in your coming program?" Binita remembers taking a moment to think about the already planned line up for the upcoming episode when the listener commented, "that's okay if you don't know, you must not have thought about it yet." Amazed by this response, she asked why the young girl thought SSMK would not have decided on the upcoming episode. The girl replied, "Well, you must be picking the topic arbitrarily just before or while on the show, like any other live show."

SSMK may seem to be a "live" show to the listener, but behind the microphone, life is very different. The theme or issue raised in each SSMK program episode is not chosen on a random basis. The program's line up is developed based on research and the yearly calendar. For example, raising women's issues on Women's Day, or addressing children's rights issues on Children's Day. The latest trends are also analyzed and help the producers identify current issues that need to be addressed in the upcoming schedule. SSMK deals with sensitive youth issues like relationships, career, menstruation, sexual harassment, drug abuse and sexually transmitted diseases. The range and sensitive nature of these issues, along with the challenge of remaining relevant to a loyal but ever-changing audience means that the SSMK team has to plan each and every episode with meticulous attention.



“We, as producers, cannot talk just about anything on air. We need to have a proper plan about the issue as well as what to say about it, in what tone, at what point of time. Before going on air, the program is well researched and rehearsed. Every minute detail of the program is thought about well in advance”. Kaustuv Pokhrel, one of the show’s producers and male co host explains.

In Nepal’s changing political climate, it is very difficult to plan the program schedule for an entire year. For this reason, the team is more likely to develop a tentative six-month plan, while leaving room for change and modification as needed. For example, there was an instance regarding a program based on coping with failure following the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exams. SSMK planned to air the program as soon as the SLC results were out, but the date results came out was not fixed. Some sources said that the results would be out the following week, so the program was prepared for airing, but the results were not declared. SSMK aired a back up program that week. The following week passed and again the results were not out, so again another program had to be prepared, packed and aired in-between. Finally, three weeks later, the program went on air.

With so much expectation from listeners and so many varied youth issues to deal with, planning has always been a challenging job for SSMK but producer and female host Sangita Budhathoki, believes they have it right:



“We get hundreds of letters in a month from the listeners with feedback that the program has been helpful to them. This positive feedback makes us feel that SSMK has been very successful in addressing the young people’s concerns and this success is only possible with proper planning on what issues to raise and when to raise them”.

3.2 Rebellious Radio – Handling Controversial Topics

Not everyone is such an avid fan of the radio program and its sensitive topics and themes have caused negative as well. Some critics have even blamed SSMK for ‘unwanted’ social incidences in their area, as one field researcher described in his daily diary *“Ashok Shrestha had a very different reaction to this program... he described in bitter tones the experience of a 16-17 year old girl who eloped with a boy and got married. According to Mr Shrestha this unfortunate event was encouraged by programs such as the SSMK radio program....”*

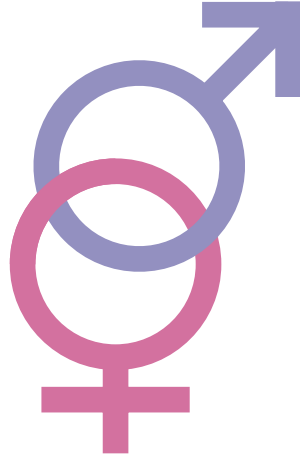
Though at different ends of the scale, two topics that tend to cause the most controversy on air are sex and the ongoing/post conflict situation in the country; here the program’s producers explain how they handle these diverse but equally sensitive issues:

Sex (by Sangjita Budhathoki)

Sex is something that seems to be on everyone's top ten lists of things to think about. This is especially true for teenagers, and the letters sent by listener's to SSMK demonstrate that Nepalese teenagers are no exception. In the month of May 2006, SSMK received 102 letters on the topic of sex.

"I am already 15 years old. Since the day my friend told me about physical relation with his girlfriend, I can not concentrate on anything but only keep dreaming about having sex. So I am very desperate to have sex with anyone. Please tell me what to do?"

"Dear friend, I am studying in ninth standard. My boyfriend keeps asking me to have sex. I am afraid I'll get pregnant if I agree. I have heard that using condoms or pills will prevent me from getting pregnant. Please tell me what should I do?"

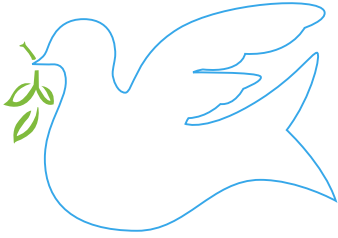


These are typical of the letters received by SSMK. Being judgmental and advising listeners not to have sex is very easy but we know giving advise like an elder won't be effective with these young people. It is not just a question of advising people WHAT to do, it is important to explain WHY, very clearly.

The SSMK program tries to deal with such sensitive issues by providing good and comprehensive health information. This includes information on biological development during adolescence, the risk of getting pregnant, the complication of teen pregnancy, the risk of contracting diseases and other related issues.

Besides providing health information, the program tries to help young listeners in analyzing the consequences of engaging in sex at an early age. Without making judgments about what is good or bad for young people, SSMK tries to equip the young listeners with skills in decision making so that they themselves can decide whether and when to engage in sex.

Often the example of fire is given in the program. Sex is like a fire. If it's in the right place at the right time, it will warm and beautify your life but play with fire outside the fireplace or in the wrong season and it can burn you down.



Although talking about peace and politics on air has become easier since the April uprisings of 2006, for many years the show had to be very careful not to talk directly about the conflict, while at the same time acknowledging the effect it was having on so many young people in the country. Sometimes, without wanting it to, the subject would come directly to SSMK and the team would find itself involved in a very difficult and unwanted ‘self-censorship’ role. One example occurred when I was taking part in a live studio discussion at a local FM centre;

the caller was an army guy, originally from Kaski district and now living in the army barrack in Tansen, he had concerns about the present situation in the country and asked how young people could be motivated to resolve this conflict situation and if we (SSMK team) could design some programs on conflict management and peace building. It was strange to get such a direct question from an army man, especially when we were talking live from a local FM station. I had to be really cautious while answering him and instead of answering his question directly, I only said that we all know the value of peace in the country, so whether we are SSMK or just ordinary people on the street, we have to be hopeful for the future and shouldn’t give up and support peace, in our own small ways as violence cannot be the answer.

In the present climate, when it comes to conflict related topics, rather than talking about who did what and whether it was right or wrong, the program tries to deal with the impact of it instead. For example, due to conflict many schools have shut down and young people don’t know what to do. Or because of frequent ‘Nepal Bandahs’ (strikes) the lives and studies of young people are being impacted. So in these situations we talk about how we need to be hopeful for the future and not give up our studies. Instead we can use creative ideas, like studying in groups or asking for help from someone educated in the village. The program also talks about the responsibility of a young person in ensuring the future of the country, including the importance of being engaged and involved in the peace process and the positive role youth can play in building a new Nepal.

3.3 Technical Production – Creating sound!

Only after carefully planning the episodes, researching the topics, scripting, incorporating life skills, discussing, checking, re writing and finalizing the script, is the program ready for recording.

The recording studio is on the top floor of the Equal Access office building. It is small but it is good for radio program production as a lot of time was spent ensuring soundproofing and good sound quality. For recording the studio has 3 Shure microphones (SM 58), a MACKIE 1402-VLZ pro 14 channels sound mixer, Philips headphones and a fast and powerfully assembled DAW computer.

After recording it is the job of producer and co-host Binayak Aryal to weave his magic and bring the dramas and other segments alive using sounds, music, and audio effects. Binayak is renowned throughout Nepal for his sound engineering and mixing skills, and in SSMK he uses a range of software to create his trademark dramas: “SSMK has

its own Digital Work Station (DWS). While we have several different sound software packages in the DWS, Adobe Audition 1.5 and Cool Edit Pro are the main programs we use for editing and mixing. I work in Cool Edit Pro for the editing due to its real time editing facility, which makes the editing process quicker and easier. After the editing, mixing should be done, for that I usually work in Adobe Audition 1.5”.

Once all the different program elements have been recorded, edited and mixed separately they are compiled and finally mixed down to ensure sound continuity and overall program quality. At this point the program is burned on to CD for Radio Nepal (the Government broadcaster) and uploaded on to Equal Access’ satellite network where over 45 FM stations across the country can download and broadcast it regionally. Please refer to Annexes for a full list of FMs currently re-broadcasting the program.



Control room of studio ▲
Recording place of studio ▼





Chapter 4

⊕ More Than Radio
- Letters, Listener Clubs and Literature



While radio will always be the focus of SSMK's programming, in order to sustain the program's relevance and to keep up with an ever developing and demanding listener base the team has expanded to include more sophisticated research, support and outreach activities.

4.1 Letter Handling

In the sections above, we discussed letters in terms of programming input and their use in the letter section. However, beyond the few letters that are used in the program, thousands of other letters SSMK receives, serve as a vital tool for evaluation of the effectiveness of the program. They are both a litmus test of SSMK's relevance and a powerful feedback mechanism on the issues the young people of Nepal are concerned about.

Classifying \ Categorizing the Letters:

All the letters are opened with great care and both the letter and the envelope are stapled together so that even if the writer does not mention his or her address in the letter, their location can be found through the envelope. The letters are then entered into a comprehensive database by location, age, gender and (where appropriate) academic qualification of the writer. This information will allow the database team to recognize and understand, trends among the letter writers while keeping the writer's name confidential.

After reading the letters, the junior producers highlight the key issue or problem in the letters, allowing the data entry operators to find and enter this part into the database. The letters are then categorized according to content. There are 10 main categories including health, love, marriage, personal, program, sex, social, listener club activities, conflict issues and miscellaneous. Under these main categories the database has a number of sub-topics which try to cover almost all classes of problems

in that particular field. For example, the sub-topics under health are:

- Disability
- General health problems
- Information on HIV and AIDS
- Mental health problems/Psychological problems
- People living with HIV and AIDS

At the time of writing there were 54 different categories (see full list below). However, this list is by no means finalized and is often updated as new trends are recognized. For example, since the April uprisings in Nepal and the increase in momentum towards peace and democracy, the team has added the new category of conflict issues, which includes the sub categories of 'Questions and Enquiries on the Changing Political Scenario' and 'Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration'.

Table-wise Categories (SSMK Letters) Database

Love

1. How to propose/ What if rejected?
2. How to say no when someone proposes
3. Handling rejection/How to forget someone you love
4. Whom to choose
5. Letters not answered
6. General love problems
7. Problems between lovers

Personal

8. Low Self Esteem
9. Career/Study
10. Dealing with peers
11. Drugs/Substance Use
12. Vocational Training
13. Physical Appearance

Marriage

14. Marriage Decision
15. Extra Marital Affairs
16. Problems between husband and wife
17. Inter Caste Relationships
18. Pregnancy(After marriage)

Health

19. General health problems
20. Information on HIV/AIDS
21. People with HIV/AIDS
22. Disabled people
23. Mental health problems/Psychological problems

Program

24. About booklets
25. About the program
26. Response to booklet

Social

27. Family problems
28. Social Problems
29. Conflict Issues
30. Legal Issues

Sex

31. Sexual Harassment
32. Pregnancy(Before marriage)
33. Raped Cases
34. Safe Sex
35. Masturbation/Nightfall
36. Menstruation
37. Contraceptives
38. Same sex issues
39. STD
40. Information on Sex
41. Confusion Between STI and other diseases related to SRH

Misc

42. Miscellaneous
43. Habits
44. Superstition
45. Low Economic Condition
46. Voice of Youth

Listeners' Club Activities

47. Issues Related To HIV/AIDS (Issues on H/A)
48. Reconciliation and reconstruction activities (RR Activities)
49. Social Issue-Sanitation
50. Social Issue-Health
51. Social Issue-ECD Activities
52. Social Issue-E & LS Activities

Conflict Issues

53. RRR (Rehabilitation and reintegration of returnee soldiers & migrants)
54. Q & E on CPS (Queries and experiences on changing political scenario)

Letters Dispatch Process:

All letters received, whether they are selected for broadcast or not, are responded to. Replies are matched individually with the specific problem highlighted, and a template letter (one for each of the main categories listed above) is sent along with a set of UNICEF life skills booklets and SSMK stickers. The lifeskills booklets use drawings and “photo comics” as a way of communicating effectively with young people, many of whom have weak literacy skills.



Due to the large volume of letters sent to the program, there is often a time lapse between receiving the letters and sending out the replies. For this reason letters that require a prompt response for example those that deal with problems regarding pregnancies, sexual health and other health related issues are kept separate and replied to immediately.

Example of the template response which are sent back to letter writers

Category : Dealing with Peers

We were quite surprised to get your letter. Surprised in the sense that so many of us are going through similar problems in life. Let's see for a second the kinds of problems people our age face. Some of us are in difficulty when somebody who we just thought of as a pen pal proposes to be our lover! Some of us fall in love with the same girl, who our best friend is in love with too, whereas some of us feel that we don't get along with anybody among the entire group of friends. Some of us feel that our friends are always rude and condescending towards us. Some of us face the difficulty of having our money or things that our friends borrowed returned to us. Some of us get mad at our friends but can't do anything about the situation, thus, end up suffering ourselves. While some of us don't know how to propose to somebody we really like!

Can you see that almost all of us have some kind of a problem? While there are problems, there are definitely solutions too! If you focus on your problem and objectively look for a solution, you can definitely solve it without a doubt.

The first thing to do is for you to ask yourself some important questions. What makes you happy? What are your needs, aspirations and desires out of life? Is it that you really don't want to see your pen pal as somebody closer? Do you feel like you don't know her well enough? Are you not ready for that kind of a commitment yet?

Can you choose between your best friend and your love, if you had to choose one? Who would you rather be with?

Why do your friends feel like not including you in the group? Do you not talk to them properly? Do you, on the surface appear as pompous or aloof? Is there something that you can do to change their perception of you?

Is the friend who borrowed money from you likely to return it to you once her situation improves, or has she simply written off paying you back? Have you talked to her about it in that way?

Was the reason you feel mad at your friends because of an argument you got into with them? If that was the case, has any side begun a process of reconciliation? Can you be the one who says that you feel all these emotions over the silly fight?

Was the reason you have failed in the test because of your carelessness or lack of committed study time? Were there too many other problems around the house that diverted your mind from studies?

In the case of not knowing how to propose, are you sure you really know the person well enough? Is it that you would like to get to know him better? What steps can you see yourself taking to ensure that you get to know her better?

The answers to your problem can only be the best if they come from within

your own self. Only when you critically think about the situation you are in can you come up with the true and full reality of your condition. Always make sure that you focus on your wants, needs, desires and happiness while thinking about your problem. Most likely, the solution of the problem will also have your happiness in the center if you put yourself in the center of the analysis. No matter what the problem is its solution will have a definitive pattern.

Recognition of the problem is the first part. You are already on your way to solving it by realizing that you have a problem. The next step is to analyze the problem and share it with people that understand you and are willing to listen to you. It may be difficult for you to share your problems, but remember friend, you have to effectively communicate your problems with those around you.

It always helps to put yourself in the place of other people while thinking about your problem. Have you thought, for example, from the perspective of your pen pal that ended up proposing to you? Thinking as him, did you lead him on? Did you in any one of your letters say something that he could have interpreted as you hinting your feelings for him? Did you ignore the symptoms of him liking you and kept on playing with his feelings? Thinking like this will get you to the source of the problem.

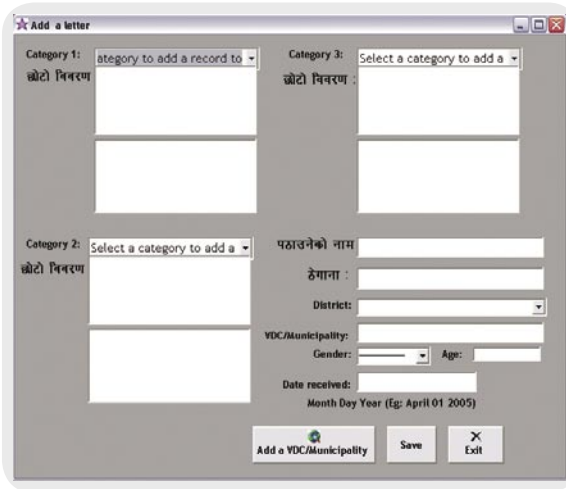
If you can use empathy and effective communication while knowing what you want already, you will get closer to solving your problem. This will also help resolve the issues in your relationship, for example, it will help you have a more meaningful interpersonal skills with everybody around you.

In short, not only will you solve your current problem with effectiveness, but with the use of life skills, your problem solving ability will increase in the long run and so will your long term happiness.

Data Entry procedure:

Once the letters have been read, highlighted and responded to they are then given to the database team so that they can be entered into the SSMK letters database under their respective category. The SSMK letters database consists of two different components: the data storage and the data entry interface. The data storage is done in MS SQL Server so that many users can concurrently access the database, files are automatically backed up and data manipulation can be done easily.

The data entry officers are very careful with this operation knowing the sensitivity of each letter. A small mistake in the entry can lead to the data being incorrectly interpreted and analyzed, so the letters are entered in a specially designed data base where details including the sender's municipality and gender are entered along with more in-depth information about the problem or issue of the letter and the main themes addressed. After entering all the letters into the database, trained in house analysts are able to extract key information about trends and program impact.



Interface used by Data-entry Operators to enter data into database.

EXAMPLE DATABASE ANALYSIS

Analysis of letters – May 2006

Letters database update

Total Letters : 8230

Jan 2006 :

Feb 2006 :

2005 :

2004 :

No. of letters by gender

Male : 4538 (64.82%)

Female : 2462 (35.18%)

No. of letters by Development Region

Eastern : 1562 (22.31%)

Central : 1487 (21.24%)

Western : 2345 (33.5%)

Mid-Western : 976 (13.94%)

Far-Western : 630 (9%)

3 Categories in which the maximum no. of letters were received

(1) Career/Study – 699 (approx. 10%)

(2) About the program – 605 (8.64%)

(3) Vocational Training – 356 (3.65%)

This shows that building a career is a prime concern amongst the youngsters.

Sample - Letters Database Update for the Month of January

Total letters received: 1034

No. of letters in response to a call for letters on “From Me to My Country” Mero Desh Ko Lagi Mero Tarfa Bata” (a segment asking listeners to write in about what they thought they could do for their country)

No. of Letters regarding Listener Clubs Registration : 408

No. of letters for Letters for other categories: 626

No. of letters by category:

S.No.	Category	Number
1.	How to propose/What if rejected?	25
2.	How to say no when someone proposes	16
3.	Handling rejection/How to forget someone you love	24
4.	Whom to choose	6
5.	Letters not answered	5
6.	General love problems	32
7.	Problems between lovers	41
8.	Low Self Esteem	11
9.	Career/Study	82
10.	Dealing with peers	14
11.	Drugs/Substance Use	8
12.	Vocational Training	29
13.	Physical Appearance	23
14.	Marriage Decision	13
15.	Extra Marital Affairs	11
16.	Problems between husband and wife	11
17.	General health problems	27
18.	People with HIV/AIDS	2
19.	About booklets	74
20.	About the program	84
21.	Response to booklet	10
22.	Social Problems	22
23.	Legal Issues	6
24.	Masturbation/Nightfall	8
25.	Menstruation	10
26.	Miscellaneous	27
27.	Superstition	5
28.	Low Economic Condition	7

As the table shows the three categories in which the maximum number of letters received were

- (1) About the program 84
- (2) Career/Study 82
- (3) About booklets 74

This appears to be the general trend of the number of letters that we usually receive. Leaving aside ‘About the Program’, the fact that we receive the maximum number of letters in the career/study category shows building up a career is a prime concern among the youth (*this trend continued and resulted in a spin off program, called Kam ka Kura, which specifically addresses job and training opportunities in Nepal*).

The most common problem concerns not being able to continue with studies because of financial problems and the unavailability of facilities nearby. A few listeners have written that they would like to change subjects, but have been forced by parents to continue their studies in a subject outside of their interest, and are therefore not doing well. Others write that they are losing interest in studies and are distracted by other things such as attraction towards the opposite sex, being in relationships, etc. And many feel compelled to migrate to other countries due to the lack of opportunities here.

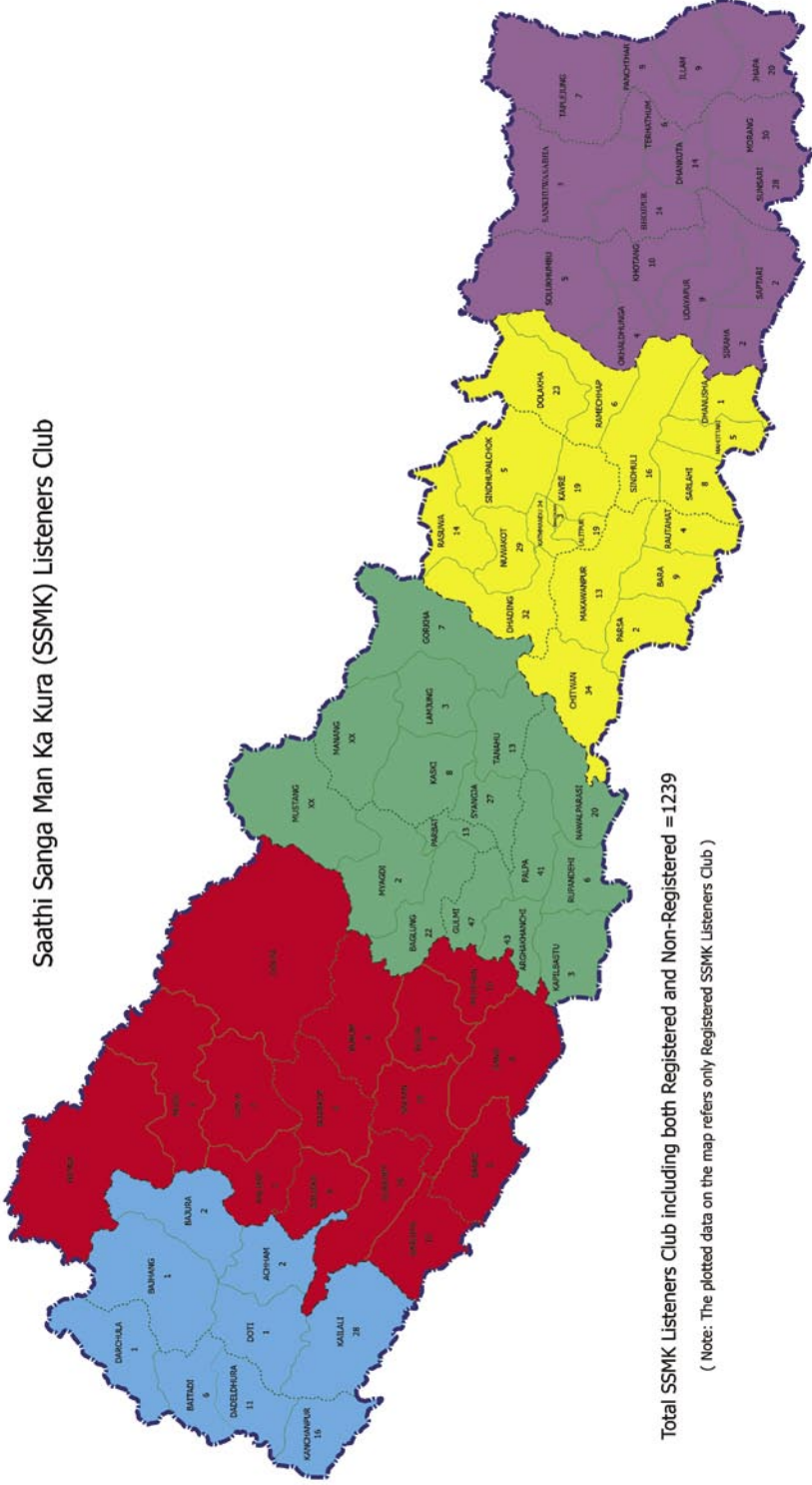
The fact that we receive so many letters about the lifeskills booklets, where people ask for them and provide response to the ones that they have already received, shows that the basic aim of the program in imparting life skills to the youth is being fulfilled. UNICEF is also pleased as they know that each of the carefully produced booklets ends up in the hands of a young person who will value and apply that information.

The distribution of the letters received by zone is as follows (actual Nepal population figures are provided for comparison):

Eastern – 14%	(Total 52,86,890)
Central – 26%	(Total 79,88,612)
Western – 52%	(Total 45,71,013)
Mid-Western – 6%	(Total 27,07,244)
Far-Western – 2%	(Total 21,83,175)

4.2 Listener clubs

Saathi Sanga Man Ka Kura (SSMK) Listeners Club



Total SSMK Listeners Club including both Registered and Non-Registered = 1239
(Note: The plotted data on the map refers only Registered SSMK Listeners Club)

“.....after short informal discussion on various topics, I started the main topic, I asked them if they regularly listened to SSMK as a club? All of them replied with a resounding “YES” and started sharing their own experience and attitude about it individually. They have different kinds of reaction, some felt uneasy to listen at home in the presence of their sisters, parents, and brothers, (others) were scolded by their parents for spending too much time with the radio instead of at work.....”(Field researcher)

The idea behind the listeners club

Shortly after SSMK first went on air, the team started to receive letters from listeners who explained that although they were grateful for the open and frank discussions covered by the program, they often found it difficult to listen at home because of objections from elders to the show’s content and direct language. Some listeners, particularly girls, even described situations where their parents or teachers would switch off the radio when SSMK started, claiming that it discussed ‘dirty’ and ‘inappropriate’ topics (interestingly, recent field research has highlighted that parents are now using the program as a way to communicate with their children on difficult and sensitive subjects, highlighting a change in attitudes among elders and an acceptance of SSMK content as necessary rather than crude). In answer to these letters, UNICEF commissioned the team to conduct a focus group discussion study of teenagers, parents and community leaders in five districts in different parts of the country.³ The study reinforced what the show’s hosts had suspected, namely that because the program talked about ‘embarrassing issues’, many young people said they would be more comfortable listening to it in the company of their friends, rather than at home, where their parents and grandparents were likely to hear it. Other unexpected information that the study revealed included the fact that young people from poor families were keen for listeners’ clubs to start, giving their parents a good reason to excuse them from working in the fields or doing domestic chores. Girls welcomed the idea of a club because they thought this would help to convince their parents that they would be safe by attending a semi-official activity, especially if it was held in a village meeting place. The study also found that existing youth clubs were not helping adolescents to deal effectively with their personal problems and almost all the boys and girls interviewed felt there was a need to establish SSMK’ listener groups.

Following this study, the program presenters advocated on air for listeners to form clubs of their own where they could meet and listen to the program together. The idea met with an immediate and positive response and soon the first letter came from a group of SSMK listeners informing the program that that they had already opened Kailawati SSMK Listeners Club in Belkot of Nuwakot district in central Nepal. Within eight months over 500 listeners’ clubs had been formed in 61 of the

country's 75 districts - a remarkable response. Some clubs were youth groups that were already in existence and simply added listening to SSMK to their activities, while others were newly formed by groups dedicated to listening to the program. Currently there are over 1000 active listener clubs across all the districts of Nepal with the numbers continuing to grow month by month.

...Milan Banjara the chairperson of the club told me that he even started writing and playing in drama because of the influence of this SSMK program. Another, Navaraj Dahal has started writing poems after listening to the program. Ashok Shrestha can now talk freely with his friends and this has become possible because of regular listening to SSMK in his local club.” (A field note by a local SSMK researcher on the impact of the program on individuals and groups)

Make up of Clubs

Most clubs consist of 8-20 teenagers, of both sexes, who meet on weekend afternoons to listen to the radio program together. Some clubs are still quite informal but others are highly organized. The Srijanshil Radio Listeners Club in Bharatpur in Chitwan district, central Nepal, for example, wrote to the program to report that they had agreed upon the following objectives:

- To gather and listen to 'Saathi Sanga Manka Kura' radio program together.
- To put our problems to the group and discuss them through critical thinking.
- To encourage other people to listen to the program.
- To discuss in the committee how to start creative programs that encourage the youth.
- To arrange for a person in our group to write a summary of the program and to send it to your program unit every week.
- To have meetings on every last Saturday of the month to talk about the matters discussed on 'SSMK' in that month.

While the initial aim for forming clubs is to listen to SSMK and use the information and skills imparted by the program for their personal development, as the above objectives show many groups go beyond this. For example, alongside listening, clubs often collect funds to cover their running costs, including stationery and postage, or buying a radio. Many clubs have also embarked on social activities from street theatre to interaction meetings to help raise awareness around different SSMK inspired issues including HIV and AIDS and its prevention, gender discrimination,

caste discrimination, health and more recently, peace building. In Palpa district, a listeners' club formed a partnership with the local health centre and organized a three-day workshop to educate adolescents about sexual and reproductive health. To fund this initiative the members went from door to door collecting donations in the form of cash, food, blankets - anything people could spare. The same group also obtained funds from the District Development Committee to start their own newsletter. Clubs in other districts have also reported collaboration with health centers (for example, for condom distribution), local political parties (to arrange interaction meetings around peace process issues) and schools and village development committees who provide clubs with a meeting place or venue for holding discussion or training events.

SSMK's first Listener's Club

In the second month of 2058 BS, Madhav Raj Tiwari, a 9th grade student, was told about a weekly program, SSMK, by his parents. This program, they emphasized, would be very useful to Madhav. So the young Madhav started listening and was soon telling his friends, classmates and relatives about this great new program.

Following different episodes, intense and heated discussions would take place amongst Madhav and his friends about the issues addressed. In one such discussion, the group decided to formalize their meetings to not only continue their lively discussions on a more regular basis but also to generate interest and awareness among the local youth about the larger issues raised by the program. On July 21 2001, *Kailawati Saathi Sanga Manka Kura Radio Srota Club* was formed, the first formal SSMK listener club, with Madhav Raj Tiwari as the president. *Kailawati Saathi Sanga Manka Kura Radio Srota Club* is still going strong today and Madhav was recently elected as the president of the Central Committee of SSMK Listener Clubs National Network.

Name of the club	: Kailawati Saathi Sanga Manka Kura radio srota club
Address	: Belkot-7, Amaare, Tallobari, Deudi, Nuwakot.
Date of formation	: July 2001
Founder members	: Madhav Raj Tiwari (president) Bhum Raj Tiwari (vice-president) Ujjwol Prasad Tiwari (Treasurer) Late Resham Bahadur Tamang (Secretary) Gokarna Raj Tiwari (Associate Secretary) Anjana Thapa (Member) Sarala Pandey (Member) Tara Tiwari (Member) Swaraswoti Pandey (Member) Dinesh Pd. Tiwari (Member) Kamala Tripathi (Member)
Initial work committee	: 11 member committee
Current work committee	: 30 members (with voting rights) 20 general members
Current total member	: 50 members

Recently SSMK took the opportunity to interview Madhav Raj Tiwari (MRT) about the clubs aspirations, activities, achievements and obstacles over the last few years:

SSMK: What is the general background of the members of the club?

MRT: When we started, the members fell between the age group of 13 to 23 years and that is more or less the make up of the club members even now. The members come from different schools, different backgrounds and localities and we consciously and consistently try to maintain gender balance amongst the members. Girls form a significant membership group of the club.

SSMK: How did the club run in the initial days?

MRT: During the initial days, we did not have any resources. For the first five months we collected Rs. 10 monthly from the members. This sum was invested in buying the stationery. As the membership started growing and the club became more popular, we started receiving funding and donations from friends and supporters. Along with raising funds, we initiated several locally based activities. These included cultural events, discussions and disseminating information that we had learned from the program. People started appreciating our efforts and involvement and several individuals, groups and organizations showed interest in our endeavors and supported our club. As we were in the initial phase, this support was very encouraging and motivated us to continue our efforts.

SSMK: What is the main aim of the club?

MRT: We do not have one aim of the club. We want to reach out to the young people and address the issues most relevant to them. A youngster faces many challenges and situations while growing up. In our conservative social set up, it becomes even more difficult for them to address these issues. The club, using the life skills developed by SSMK, aims to resolve some of these issues and extend much needed support group to the youngsters.

We also want to establish our club as an example to all young people. We want to build young leaders for our society.

SSMK: Have you faced any difficulties while running the club? And how did you overcome these?

MRT: As the program deals with issues of sexuality, personality development and inter-personal relationships, it did not surprise us that initially we were criticized. In some ways, we were ready for it. In fact, one of the reasons for setting up the club was to raise these specific issues that could not be discussed openly within our conservative social set up. We were accused of being too open and disrupting the traditional beliefs systems of the society.

With time, as people started to see the results of our discussions and endeavors they considerably opened up. Even now we have to deal with these issues but the opposition and criticisms are not that intense.

In the setting up phase, some of the members were reprimanded for being involved in a radio club that involves listening to the radio as one of the main activities and discusses issues that are considered a taboo in the society.

As we started to expand and our funding sources became diverse, we were accused of being a façade to get money/funding from UNICEF for our personal benefits.

We had to face many obstacles while conducting various club activities in various places.

We cannot say we have overcome all the problems. Most of these problems are recurrent and cannot be dealt with in a few years time. After all, they lie at the very foundation of our social set up. However, employing the life skills has been very productive and useful to deal with these issues. We learned that effective communication was at the core of resolving these and many other issues that we faced.

Also, if anybody criticizes us we do not react in an aggressive way but empathize with that person and try to make them understand. We engage the person or the group in a dialogue instead of forming judgments or opinions.

We believe that if there is anything to be done, it should start from us, and not wait for someone else to do it. In that sense, our work speaks for us!

SSMK: How is your club perceived by the local society now?

Though initially we had to face various obstacles, now the locals, teachers, students, political workers, volunteers and people from different organizations see us in a positive way. They are willing to help in every way they can and ask us if there is anything they can do for us. We are also requested by individuals, groups and organizations to conduct various activities that will help in community development. So overall it can be said that they have a positive attitude about us.

Example activities undertaken by the club

- Quiz contest.
- Essay writing competition, poem reciting competition, speech and debate competitions in different schools of the area.
- Wall calendar.
- Cleanliness programs.
- HIV and AIDS awareness drive.
- Libraries for children.
- Set up support and discussion groups.
- Disseminating life skill booklets to youngsters in the area.
- Listening and generating discussions around the issues covered in the program SSMK.

4.3 Networking Listener Clubs and Publications

“...we waited for 15 minutes more to let all the other participants arrive. When we started, there were 22 members Mahendra, with the help of his friends from ‘Asthabhuja SSMK listeners’ club’ in Palpa had managed to collect funds by themselves to publish a newsletter, SAATHI and he wanted to release it in that workshop. ... It was such a good feeling when I met those young people working together, as a team, with the determination that they could make a difference in their own small way” (local field reporter)

Although these listeners’ clubs were initially formed spontaneously, as the number of clubs increased the SSMK team began an effort to establish more formal systems for recording and networking the clubs and improving horizontal and vertical communication channels. Up until that point, the program’s producers were only able to communicate with the listener clubs through direct correspondence and announcements on radio. However by forming an organized, motivated and nationwide network at the grassroots level, SSMK is now able to draw on this strong resource of active youth, training and mobilizing the young people for different causes. For example, promoting HIV prevention and awareness raising messages over certain festival periods when many immigrants return to their villages and the risk of partner to partner HIV spread is increased.

The first step in the networking process was to develop a database, similar to the letters database, which as Devendra Shreshta SSMK producer and outreach manager explained, was to “...keep detailed records of the listener clubs, including location, number of members, club objectives and club activities”. This systematic information-gathering tool enabled the SSMK team to analyze the spread of clubs across the country, the ethnic and gender breakdown of these clubs and see easily which were the most active. However, as Devendra clarifies, for many clubs this was not enough “...during Focus Group Discussion sessions with listener clubs, members would frequently raise an interest in networking clubs at the regional level. Many Listener Club members suggested having a separate SSMK listener club bulletin as a communication tool between SSMK clubs from all over the Nepal”.

In May 2005, in response to their listeners’ requests, SSMK called a meeting, between 14 representatives from listener clubs from all of the five development regions of Nepal. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the idea of networking all the clubs and producing a Listener Club-driven publication or bulletin at the local level. This first meeting formed the working committee to oversee the networking process, then successive meetings formed management and publication committees to facilitate the publication of the bulletin. Although it was a slow process, finally in September 2005 the first SSMK bulletin, written and produced by Listener

Clubs for other Listener clubs, was produced and distributed. Alongside the five regional bulletins, the publications committee and Equal Access publications team also launched a quarterly central magazine under the name “Man Ka Kura. This nationwide magazine covers various issues pertaining to Nepali youth including politics, education, health, employment along with an advice column and various competitions.

Well Wishes

*Well wishes to you, Manka Kura
You, who try to include all youths
Confident I am in your continuation
Teaching, spreading the light of knowledge in this world
Still a child, you are Manka Kura
Keep on trying to win young people's heart
May all your wishes and dreams be realized
Your readers will definitely be by your side*

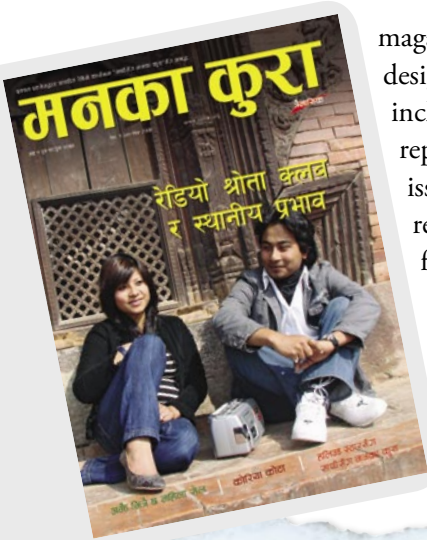
*Poem from a reader of Manka Kura magazine
from Loguwa-1, Dhankuta, Eastern Nepal*

Regional Bulletins

Now, five eight-page regional bulletins are published every month from the five development regions of the country. These bulletins mainly cover local news and events, providing voices and articles from the grassroots level. Editors of the bulletins send the final content to the SSMK Publications team at the Equal Access Kathmandu office, where they are designed and printed. The published bulletins are then distributed to all five regions of the country where readers can read about the stories not only from their own region, but also from other regions. A lot of SSMK listener's club activities are also published in the bulletins making it a platform to exchange social activity ideas.

SSMK Publications not only serve as a platform for emerging writers and journalists, it shapes them into better ones. Aside from providing an opportunity to get their articles published, the SSMK Publications team also tries to mold them into professional writers and journalists through a skills building program which includes training on reporting, graphic design, and publishing.





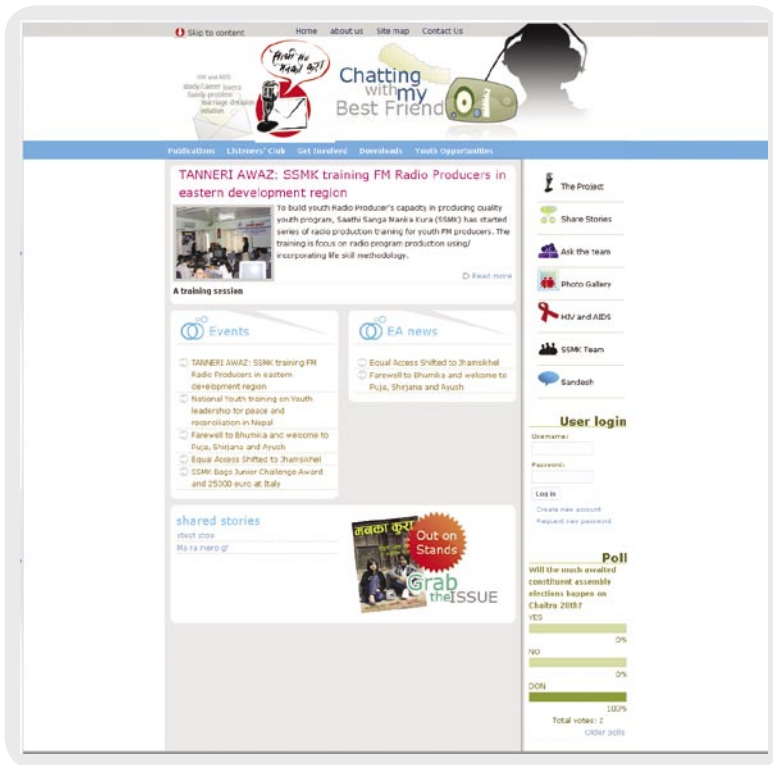
Now past its first year of publication, the quarterly magazine has come a long way both in content and design. The content has become more diverse and inclusive, and the designs more creative. Many reporters have stuck with the magazine since its first issue and are delighted at how far they've come in regard to their writing. While flipping through the fifth issue, Sagar Neupane, a Manka Kura reporter, said, "I can't believe I wrote this article. If I were to write it again, I'd have written it ten times better." This is just what the SSMK Publications aim to do— provide much needed information to the youth of Nepal while creating better writers and journalists.

"Overall, Manka Kura is good magazine and I feel it caters to all kind of readers because it covers a wide range of topics and issues. Contemporary politics, interviews of student political leaders, science, quiz competitions and your view are some of the noteworthy sections. I was able to read your fifth issue for which I'd like to thank the Manka Kura team, and I'd like to submit my own view for the section 'Your View' on the topic 'How can we get rid of the prevailing caste-based discrimination from our society?' Lastly, I'd like to wish you all the best. Hope you will continue to raise youth related contemporary issues and may the magazine reach every village of Nepal. "

Raj Joshi, R.R. Campus, B.A. Second Year, Kathmandu

4.4 web site

"Malaysia is very different from what I had expected it to be, when I left Nepal. I am really missing my family, my friends and my favorite radio program Saathi Sanga Maan Ka Kura. I really wish that I could listen to SSMK here, as I know this is not possible I am writing this email to the program". Email was sent by a 21 year old Nepali male, living in Malaysia.



Due to a variety of social and economic reasons, including the recent conflict in Nepal, a large number of youth migrate to other countries. Among them are many SSMK fans, who like the listener above, emailed the team to share their concerns that they were no longer able to listen to the program. SSMK prides itself on being reactive to listeners and the team all feel the responsibility to try and address any concerns that our listeners raise, even after they have migrated abroad. In this case, after much discussion, SSMK decided to launch a website www.ssmk.org to reach out to expatriated listeners around the world. The website, which allows audiences to download and listen to the broadcasted programs, has not only benefited Nepalis living abroad but has also received a positive response from urban and semi urban audiences in Nepal with access to the internet.

After launching the SSMK website, analysis of the website traffic shows that SSMK.org is being visited by viewers from Nepal, the United States, Canada, Hong Kong, United Arab Emirates, Australia, Maldives, Iran, Germany, Pakistan, Sweden, Finland, Japan, Malaysia and the European Union and more. The SSMK website has really helped its audience by disseminating information about SSMK and its team, listener club activities, publications (which are downloadable via the site), SSMK events, contests and listener polls. From the program and publication download section, listeners from abroad and within the country can easily access

their favorite program and associated publication material. Moreover, through the websites Sandesh (or message) section, listeners have begun sharing issues from their communities and activities that they are conducting through their clubs. This is creating an even greater atmosphere of sharing by bridging listeners from rural Nepal to the Middle East or America. A sandesh from a 23 year Male, from..... about the website is

To: Sanup Dai

Message: Namaste Sanup Dai,

How are you? I am writing you this message from Sandesh Section through SSMK Website. Everything is well and fine here. Hope everything is well there. Give my regards to all your family members.

Now you can also view this section for my sandesh and you can also post your message here and I can view them.

All the best and Happy New Year 2064



Chapter 5

⊕ Looking to the Future



With a listener base of over six million weekly listeners, a successful website, a national award (SSMK won the Global Junior Youth Challenge Award in 2007) and nationwide print publications it seems SSMK is doing everything...so what next?

Binita Shrestha, SSMK team leader explains what the program has in store for the future:



“Being receptive to the needs of our audiences and the ever changing political and social scenario in Nepal is at the heart of SSMK’s success. For that reason we try never to be complacent about the show’s popularity and always try to think of new ways to engage even more young people”.

True to their mission, the SSMK team is now embarking on a new initiative to engage with those Nepalese young people who do not speak Nepali as a first language. An estimated 42% of the population of Nepal does not speak Nepali as a first language. Despite their numbers, those speaking minority languages are often excluded from access to critical information, such as health messages that are frequently in Nepali, leaving them to feel ignored by the state. Minority language groups are often distrustful of the media as it does not represent their views or speak their language. SSMK is hoping to change this by working to increase the capacity of local FM producers, helping them to present SSMK programs in Nepal’s minority languages. With UNICEF’s support, the SSMK team has already conducted one round of trainings with over 50 FM stations and nascent local versions of SSMK are now being broadcast in two minority languages – Maithali and Tharu. While this initiative is still in the very early stages, team leader Binita has high hopes for the impact local language versions could have:



“minority language radio has the power to give Nepal’s ethnic groups a feeling of identity and social cohesiveness providing access to critical information in a language and a voice they understand. Currently there is very little quality, developmental programming on the radio in minority languages but with this initiative hopefully SSMK will be able to reach out to a segment of Nepali youth who have been largely ignored till now.”

Outside Nepal, there have been a number of efforts to duplicate the success of SSMK in other countries, including Cambodia, Laos and the Solomon islands. The hope is that lessons learned and successes gained in Nepal can benefit youth in other countries and the team is always happy for the project to reach beyond the Nepalese borders (see background information for more on the replication efforts).

Conclusion

Nepali society is a closed one. Its hierarchical tradition, often assuming that teenagers are not intelligent enough to make good choices, deprives young people of the chance to learn how to choose and decide on a course of action that may affect their lives. Studies have shown that effective communication is lacking in parent to child relationships resulting in very little information around issues such as HIV/AIDS, STIs, Condoms, and life choices being passed on to youth. In some more conservative families, talking about sexual reproductive health, HIV and AIDS or physical changes that occur in adolescence is banned. This has created a vacuum in information flow on these vital and sensitive issues and resulted in an increased vulnerability among young people who are lacking in knowledge and key life skills.

SSMK is not only focused on disseminating information but also making people participate actively in the program and their communities. SSMK provides a platform for young people to open up and encourages them to move forward to learn from others as well. People share their experiences and others can learn from these. Before SSMK, people felt too shy to talk about issues such as condoms, but increasingly the show’s producers meet young people who not only talk openly about contraception but can also educate their peers on why condom use is important linking it to information on HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. In this way, SSMK has been able to reduce certain myths and social stigmas and create an atmosphere of open dialogue.

The total team (all under the age of 30) is comprised of four producers, two junior producers, one database officer, two data entry operators, two publication employees and an outreach team of 3. Looking at SSMK from a distance, some may question the 14 strong youth team as excessive manpower for one weekly radio program, but look closely and it can be seen that SSMK reaches millions of youth every week through radio, publications, outreach activities and the web. It is this reach and impact with life skills based, peer led education that has made SSMK a household name in Nepal.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Positive Stories and Letters

SSMK has brought a lot of changes in many young people's life and it is obvious that it has also affected my life.

This incident happened aboutummm...it was in the year 2061 B.S. month Falgun, when I was in my 12th standard. When I was doing my 12th standard there was a marriage proposal from an Australia returned guy. My family wanted me to marry the guy, so they put a lot of pressure on me for the marriage. My family kept on pressuring me saying where else would I find a guy like him who is foreign returned and he would also take you along .

I listen to SSMK regularly, and during those days as I was listening to the program, there was an episode on sexual health and things to be aware of while taking marriage decisions. The program talked about the risk of HIV/AIDS when you are to marry someone whom you don't know very well, whose past is not well known to you. You had said in the program that there could be foreign return people who come back to their country for marriage these people can not be trusted blindly, you also advised to go for a blood test before getting married to be on the safe side. Anybody can be HIV positive but everybody can be careful to prevent it.

My family, though they were educated they were not ready to listen to me when I said that I did not want to get married and they persuaded me for marriage. I tried my best to convince them but I was not able to, lastly I said okay I will marry the guy but only after we have our blood tested hoping maybe there is a slight chance of the guy to back off [so that he would avoid the test]. The guy agreed to have his blood tested.

The blood test result showed that the guy was HIV positive, I was shocked, till then I was not expecting anything because I never thought that the guy would turn out to be HIV positive. I was lucky; I was saved from being an HIV positive person [and the guy was able to learn of his status and seek help]. If anybody is to be thanked for this, it should be SSMK, I would like to thank the entire SSMK team that I got a new life. Thank you SSMK.

I want to tell all the young people that anybody of you can be in my position, but marriage is something which you do once in life so you must take a wise decision. You must think about it a thousand times before saying yes. HIV/AIDS is spreading rapidly so it is better to perform a blood test by both the guy and a girl before getting married.

(Excerpt from an interview of a 18 years old girl from western region of Nepal)

Life Skills

Life Skills are a set of skills that enable us to translate our knowledge, attitude and values into actual abilities in our daily life.

There is no definitive list of life skills, but these are the 10 generic life skills which are generally considered important and are being practiced all over the world to tackle varieties of psycho social problems.

All of the life skills are inter dependent and none of them stand alone.

- **Self-awareness** includes our recognition of ourselves, of our character, of our strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. It includes our priorities in life, things that make you happy, things that make you unhappy etc. Developing self-awareness can help us to recognize when we are stressed or feel under pressure.
- **Empathy** is an ability to imagine what life is for another person, even in a situation that we may not be familiar with. Empathy can help us to understand and accept other, who may be very different from ourselves, improving our social interactions.

When we understand ourselves as well as others, we are in a better position to communicate our needs and desires. We are better equipped to present our thoughts and tackle delicate ideas without offending others and at the same time elicit support from others and win their understanding.

- **Creative thinking** helps us respond adaptively and flexibly in our every day life situations. It is about looking beyond our direct experiences, exploring the available alternatives and the various consequences of our actions or non-actions.
- **Critical thinking:** enables us to analyze the information and experiences objectively, and assess the factors that influence the way we think and act. This is an important step in to dealing constructively with problems in our lives.
- **Effective communication** entails the timely exchange of our thoughts and feelings. In particular, it is the courage to seek help or advice when we face difficult decisions or issues that others may consider embarrassing.
- **Interpersonal relationship:** Helps in relating to others in a positive and encouraging way.
- **Ability to manage emotions** involves recognizing emotions in ourselves and others being aware of how emotions influence behavior, and being able to respond to emotions appropriately. Intense emotion, like anger or sorrow can have negative effects on our health if we do not react appropriately.
- **Coping with Stress** is about recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how this affects us, and acting in ways that help to control our levels of stress. This may mean that we take action to reduce the sources of

stress, for example, by making changes to our physical environment or lifestyle. Or it may mean learning how to relax, so that tensions created by unavoidable stress do not give rise to health problems.

- **Decision making skill** is about learning to make the right decision for ourselves. This process involves the assessment of different options and their possible outcomes, rather than simply yielding to our own desires or pressure from others.
- **Problem Solving skills** empower us not only to confront our problems, but in fact can help us to turn the problems into opportunities for our growth.

Program Synopsis Saathi Sanga Manka Kura

Episode no - 263

Episode Title- Mayalu Pati (a loving husband)

Theme- Bringing about behavioral change for prevention of HIV transmission.

The program's chat script

Kaustuv, the male host starts the show by reciting a poem for the listeners. Binita, the female host then welcomes the listeners and expresses her view that feelings are better than poems. She likes to keep things simple. Kaustuv defends his choice of expression and the two have a small quarrel as always.

Kaustuv now changes his tact becoming nice and slightly flirtatious. Binita is surprised to hear such sweet things about her from a person who is usually looking for a reason to start an argument with her. Kaustuv then dedicates a romantic song to her.

After the song, Binita suspicious of Kaustuv asks why he is being so nice - does he want a favor from her? Kaustuv again strongly defends himself and asks why she must assume that he has an ulterior motive? Kaustuv then explains to Binita and the listeners that he was practicing being a nice guy because he is going to say no to a girl's proposal (to start a relationship). He hopes not to seem rude or cruel, and that is why he was testing his ideas with Binita. When Binita hears he was proposed to by a girl, she makes fun of him and suggests, that he just say no if he doesn't like her. Kaustuv explains that he does like the girl, she is one of his good friends and he doesn't want to ruin their friendship.

This is the broader theme of the program i.e. finding creative ways to communicate and being able to say No in a good and effective way when required.

The two hosts discuss the matter with Binita noting that it can be difficult to say No to someone we care about, like our close friends and family while trying to be nice but in the end, failing to say no may do more to spoil the relationship as it will likely lead to further misunderstandings. The two discuss ways of saying No, particularly when in their culture where they were taught never to say No, making it hard able to express oneself properly. After discussing the matter Binita tells Kaustuv about a character in the drama they are about to hear who was in a similar situation.

The Drama

The drama starts with a happy and happening wedding scene, where the bride is being teased by her friends. The bride Maya (the central character) explains that it was a marriage that her parents arranged for her, and as she also liked the guy she decided to marry. Before the bride leaves for the groom's place her friends ask her to consider not having kids right away and advise her to use contraceptives on her wedding night.

In the second scene, the groom is all set to go abroad. With all his stuff packed, he leaves his new wife and his family, hoping to earn enough money so that his family here will not need to work hard just to earn their living. This is the scenario in most of the rural parts of Nepal, where most young men feel they have to migrate to work in other countries to support their family members financially.

While he is gone, Maya learns about HIV and AIDS through a friend who is a health worker. She is aware of women who are HIV positive and were infected by their husbands who live and worked abroad. Though she quite frequently talks to her husband over the phone she still is not able to bring up the matter. For days she worries about being infected and wonders if her husband is involved in risky behavior abroad.

Maya, with the help of her friend, gathers information about HIV and forms a group of women in the village. Maya and her friend advise all the other women and girls, especially women whose husbands are working abroad, on HIV and AIDS, modes of transmission, HIV testing, pre and post VCT counseling and ways of prevention. They plan to start a campaign where all the men and women returning home for Dashain (the biggest festival of the Nepalese, where all people come home to celebrate with friends and family) will be informed about HIV and AIDS and advised to go for an HIV test. Though this could not be made mandatory, they would ask that all the migrant returnees, to take the test, prove themselves and set an example for others living in the village. If they could do this it could start a trend, minimizing the risk of HIV transmission.

In the end, Maya, with the help of some elderly village women, were able to convince her husband to take an HIV test when he returned. Her husband was supportive, saying he would do what he could to make the campaign a success.

After drama Chat

Binita and Kaustuv both appreciate the efforts shown by the character Maya in the drama and how she used creative ways to convince her husband. Data shows that so many women who are unaware of the risks contract HIV from their migrating husbands. The use of life skills is also encouraged for being aware and using that awareness to protect ourselves and others living in the community.

Announcement of SSMK listener's Club networking.

Letter Section

The first letter was sent from a married girl from Palpa, who was a regular listener of SSMK, and likes it very much. The letter explained that, after seven years marriage her husband wants her to kneel and put her head to his feet to show her respect, otherwise he would not consider her his wife (to put ones head on the elders feet to show respect is an old Nepali tradition). The writer says they had never practiced this tradition before, and she was not taught this growing up. What should she do?

The two hosts start the discussion saying that depends upon the individual's way of thinking and in this case, is a matter to be discussed between husband and wife. If the two love each other and care for one other, then they can show respect in any form and kneeling can also be a way. However it's wrong to demand, 'if you respect me or you love me you have to express that by kneeling to touch your forehead to my feet'. Kneeling for an elder is a Nepali tradition and there is no harm in doing so, but if there is no respect then just pretending and bending, will not be of any use.

The hosts emphasize having good effective communication between the husband and wife and sorting out the matter like the character did in the drama. Sharing her feelings honestly and understanding why her husband wants her to do this may help them come to a solution. Steps in effective communication are explained :

Critical Analysis → Self Analysis → Empathy Building → Creative Thinking

The letter writer was told that this is a husband and wife's issue and no outsider could give them a solution. This matter is up to you and your husband to talk through effectively and decide what can be done.

A new section Youth - Transforming Conflict to Peace was introduced. Here the audience was asked to write in to the program about efforts they are making to minimize conflict in their locality. Hosts tell the listeners that a winner will be chosen from among the letters received and they will be given an SSMK hamper and token of appreciation.

Janda Jandai Information section

In this section, information about 'Post exposure prophylaxis' was given. It was explained that sometimes we may unknowingly involve ourselves in risky behaviors, and in these circumstances there are medicines, which in some cases can minimize the risk of HIV.

This was further explained by Dr. Sushil Shakya who has been working in the field of HIV and AIDS for a long time and has plenty of information on the matter.

After this information section the program was concluded providing the audience the postal and e-mail address to write to SSMK with their comments, suggestions and problems.

SSMK Example Complete Drama Script:

Episode Title: Me, my husband and HIV

Scene 1: Malati's house

FX: Doorbell



Malati: Where has Sahila (the maid) gone ? I always have to get the door Oh Sarita? What's up?

Sarita: I was about to go and pick my son up from school ... I dropped in to say Hi! ... Don't you have to go and get your children?

Malati: Sahila picks them up ... he's so punctual ... 3:30 and he's there

Sarita: Good for you !.... and what were you doing before I came?

Malati: What else. Watching soaps on TV as usual... the moment the children go to school, I have nothing else to do. Sahila does the housework, my husband as you know leaves for work early in the morning and comes back at 11/12 at night.

Sarita: So, how's your husband's business doing?

Malati: Must be doing well ... he moves heaven and earth for that shop

Sarita: And that's all for you.

Malati: I know ... and what about your Binod. Any news from Bombay?

Sarita: Whatever he's doing is for us ... he doesn't enjoy being away from us.

Malati: But still ... at least he has to come back to Nepal in 2/4 months. Otherwise .. poor you, alone with your in-laws .. thank god your son takes away much of your loneliness ... (Pause) do you mind that I say these things to you?

Sarita : You know I don't ... and you are right to

Malati: And men ... It's hard to trust them

Sarita: Why do you say that Malati?

Malati: I don't know if I should tell you this ... even though I don't believe it, I'll tell you anyway

Sarita : What happened? tell me

Malati: You know and everyone knows, my husband is busy in his shop the whole day but few days ago, someone was telling me that my husband spends time with girls from Cabin restaurant.

Sarita : This is bull shit

Malati: Exactly... I don't believe it so I yelled back at him
 Sarita: You did right ... everyone knows how your husband loves you ... He's a gentleman.
 Malati: Besides being a good husband, he's also a good Father.
 Sarita: Yeah... but who's that person who told you all this nonsense? Is he trust worthy?
 Malati: Well, he is a distant cousin of mine usually he's someone I have no reason not to trust
 Sarita: But whom do you trust most, him or your husband?
 Malati: Of course my husband .. We have been married for so many years ... and if you can't trust your own husband, who else can you trust?
 Sarita: Well then everything's settled (Pause) Oh! I totally forgot it's time to go and pick up my son, so intent we were in chatting
 Malati: Have something to drink and go ... Sahila! come here!

Transitional Music

Scene 2: Sarita's house

FX: Quite room environment



Mother: Will you Listen Binod's Father ! I'm getting worried about Binod ... no letters no calls
 Father : How Can you expect him to write to you all the time ... he's working in another country .
 Mother : Last year, if not anything else, he used to write at least one letter each month ... but this year , not even a telephone call
 Father: I've heard someone mention that his company has opened another branch in another city. Maybe that busies him?
 Mother: But I've this feeling ... maybe he is ill...
 Father: Enough... if you're worrying like this, imagine how our daughter in law must be feeling?
 Mother: I am also concern for her
 Father: May be Binod has had some communication with her, go and asked her... (Pause) Daughter in law ! Sarita
 Sarita : You called father.. do you want to have dinner now?
 Father: Oh! the food's ready? O.K, but before that, I need to talk to you about Binod, please sit down
 Mother: Sarita, it's been 4 months since Binod left and still no news... did he say something to you before he left?

Sarita : Nothing at all mother
 Father: He said nothing about when he's coming back, whether he'll be back for Dashain or not ... nothing? What about whatever's happening with his company?
 Sarita: Nothing
 Mother: You are such a simpleton shouldn't you ask about these important things?
 Sarita : I have nothing to do with his work, that's why I don't ask
 Mother : For god sake, you are his wife. You should know what he does and things like that, don't you think so?
 Sarita : I should know, I know but he doesn't volunteer information.. I don't ask ... if there's something important, he'd probably tell me
 Mother: But to which address?
 Father: I have his company's head office address. I'll write to that
 Mother: I'm so surprised Sarita ... you have been married to him for 5 years and he's been working in India that long... of course he comes here once in 6/7 months but shouldn't you be writing to him too?
 Sarita: When I was in school I used to write to my friends but after I got married, I stopped writing... now I'm out of practice.
 Father: Don't worry, I'll write the letter after we have dinner... Do you have something to tell him too?
 Sarita: No ... but will you please ask him to send some clothes for Sabin?
 Father: O.K, I'll write it.
 Mother : Sarita, Lets have dinner now. Otherwise Sabin'll go to sleep without eating.

Transitional music

Scene 3: Malati's house

FX: Doorbell

Sarita : Hey Malati, What happened? You look so low
 Malati: (sad voice) Come inside
 Sarita: Is Sahila not home today? You opened the door
 Malati: I've sent him for groceries
 Sarita: oh ... but why did you sound so frantic in the phone ?.. That's why I came running
 Malati: (Stands sobbing)
 Sarita: You are crying, what happened?



- Malati: (Cries harder)
- Sarita: What happened? You had a fight? How will I know if you won't tell?
- Malati: Whatever I told you that day, it came true
- Sarita: About What?
- Malati: About my husband ... It's true... he's having affairs with those kinds of girls
- Sarita: What are you telling me Malati? ... It's hard to believe your husband looks like a good person.
- Malati: That's not enough Malati... Looking good is not enough
- Sarita : Did you hear from someone else too?
- Malati: Sarita, not only that cousin of mine, other people were also telling me... I started to feel uneasy but still I trusted him so I kept quite. But when I saw with my own eyes...
- Sarita: Where?
- Malati: A few days ago, I took the kids and went to stay at my parents.. but when I got there, some distant relative had died. so I couldn't stay there.... as we were returning in a taxi, I saw him with this women outside the restaurant in Prithivi chock
- Sarita: She may be someone he knows well... maybe a business associate... having dinner together
- Malati: Business associate ? Huh! Both were so drunk and they were grabbing each other ... I saw them taking a taxi He didn't come home that night ... that greedy sinner
- Sarita: If you say you saw them ... then ...but why did he do that?
- Malati: After he came home, we had a big row... it's been years since he has behaved this way... after I had my first baby. Since then, he and his friends have been going out with groups of girls, girls from cabin restaurant.... I don't even want to think about all this ... but my happy life is finished.
- Sarita: If this has been going on for such a long time, how come you didn't sense anything?
- Malati: Innocent, Stupid me... I though if he says he'll be working I have no reason to cross him. He has two kids, he's a respected figure in the society, and i never had reasons to doubt him
- Sarita: I understand but ... what'll you do next?
- Malati: I'm so confused right now ...he has accepted his mistakes and is asking for forgiveness... either to keep on fighting with him or leave him ... I don't know what to do ... I had

no one to talk to about this, so I called you

Sarita: You did right by calling me... if something were to happen to me, I'd call you too.

Malati: If I say something don't mind ok... maybe you should be careful with Binod too ... he's living in a place like Bombay ... these men are not trustworthy at all, not at all

Sarita: But he's not like that ... I have 100% faith in him

Malati: Having faith is not enough you really have to be careful

FX: Door bell

Malati: Must be Sahila, wait a second

Transitional Music

Scene 4: Sarita's house

FX: Cooking in the kitchen

Mother: Sarita !Sarita! Come quickly, Binod on the phone

Sarita: Really !

FX: Footsteps rushing

Father: Yeah.... everyone is fine here, don't worry about us... Why didn't you write to us for so many months? O!... ok.... yes we heard your company's other branch station ok (pause) It's been two months since we received your money order ... what, you already sent them/ ... yeah, you check there and I'll check here



Sabin: Grandfather ! let me talk to my father too

Father : Yes, you check it there

Sabin: Hello ? Father ? I'm Sabin ... I'm fine here, how are you ? ... I've heard that there are long trains, how long father ?

Mother: Here, give me the phone. You don't talk about nonsense things on a long distance call... hello? son? God bless you, I'm fine ... O! O! Sarita's was so worried.. I've heard Cholera is spreading over there ...no? Then I heard it wrong ,.... is it too hot there? Are you eating well? I worry about you son... you want to hang up ? don't you want to talk to Sarita ? she's been waiting here for so longyou'll call later ?ok... take care son

FK: phone click

Mother: He said he'd call later

Sarita: Doesn't matter. Whether you talk or me, It's the same.

Traditional Music

Scene 5: Sarita's room

Ex: Night effect



Sarita:

(Monologue)

Why did he do that? Calling after so many months and not even asking how I'm doing ? Said he'll call later ... Later means when?... Doesn't he even miss me a bit? What's the use of staying away from home and working if he can't spend a little more on phone calls.

Ex: (exhales)

Men ... They all are same Why did he ignore me in such a way? What if he's having something with another girl.... no! God! This can't happen (clears her throat) but you can't trust a man 100%. Look what happened with Malati... Who would have thought about that ... Poor Malati, she's now stranded in high water ... what If something like that happened to me ... no, Binod won't do this to me.

FX: Gets up and drinks water

But you never know ... he spends so much time there ... I'll ask him ... we never talk about anything except the family and the child ... what if he gets angry? how will he feel if I ask him about this issue out of blue? (exhales) Whom shall I talk to about this.... I need help..

Transitional Music

Scene: 6 (Malati's home)

FX: Radio playing in the background (in a low volume)

Sarita: Malati, How are you? It's been so long since we've talked, so I called you, but Sahila said you went to see a doctor .. I thought you must be sick, but you look OK .. what happened?

Malati: Nothing happened

Sarita: Then why did you go to see a doctor? Is something wrong

Malati: Nothing's wrong I was not feeling that good, that's why

Sarita: so, how are you now

Malati: (Pause) I'm OK now

Sarita: But you don't look like your OK .. I can see it in your eyes, tell me what's wrong \

Malati: (starts to sob) I don't know where to start,.... my life has taken a huge turn (cries)

Sarita: Tell me please ... is it about your husband ?



Malati: Yes, it's about him ... but my life has turned to hell too if I tell you , will you stay away from me?

Sarita: Malati, how long have we known each other ? Do I have any secrets from you? ... tell me

Malati: You know about my husbands affair right?

Sarita: Another new girl?

Malati: Everything is fishied ...he was feeling very very sick two weeks ago ... We went to the doctor.(starts crying) the doctor suggested he have a blood test ... he's HIV positive.

Sarita: O God ! This can't be true .

Malati: It's true Saritanot only that (cries more) he has given me HIV too.

Sarita : (Disbelief) Malti ??

FX: Both cry

Sarita: This can't be true ...how do you know you are positive too ?

Malati: The doctor asked me to have my blood tested too... it came out positive .

Sarita: But I still can't beleive it.....Why do you have to pay for your husband's mistake ? God can't be that cruel.

Malati: No matter how kind hearted you are, how well you think of others if your own man cheates on you , you are finished.

Sarita: How can he possibly do that ? He loved you so much, how could he have affairs? Even if he has affairs, how can he be so careless to get HIV from them?

Malati : There's a saying 'sinners go blind '....that's what happened... I can understand that he did't think about me while having relationships with them, but how can he not think about his own kids? I am so ashamed.....I can't face anyone at all

Sarita: Don't lose courge like that you have to be strong for yourself and support your husband too

Malati: I don't give damn about him....he can go to hell.

Sarita: It won't work like that... you have to stick together. If not for yourselves, then for your children... save more for their future.

Malati: That's the only reason I'm staying with him.... Sarita life has been so unfair to me who can I tell anyone..... what shall I tell my kids.....how'll they understand... .(exhales) life sucks..... but please Sarita, be careful about

Binod too....

Sarita: Yes, I've been thinking about this, but I was questioning whether I should ask him or not but after listening to you , I have no choice

Malati: Who knows better then me, you can't trust blindly, even your own husband.....be careful and aware, otherwise..... alas, I was so unlucky.....if something happens to me, will you please take care of my children as your own (sobs) ?

Sarita: Don't worryif you think positive, positive things happen.....

*Transotional Music,
Scene 7: Sarita's house
FX: Sabin studying*



Sarita: Sabin! come and do your homework

Sabin: Wait a sec mother

Sarita: If you don't finish your homework you'll get punishment from your teacher tommorrow. come here !

Mother: Sarita! When you were away eartier Binod called, he said he'll be here in 3 or 4 days

Sarita: Oh! that's good .

Mother: Why Sarita ? you don't sound happy to hear it

Sarita: No mother, I'am happy

Mother: You don't have to hide things from meyour are not only my daughter to me It's been a few days since you've looked happy at all.....if you want to share, please, am I not like a mother to you ?

Sarita: I've had something on my mind for the last couple of days.... I have no one else but you to tell ...but if I tell you , will you not think I'm going insane ?

Mother: I won't, tell me

Sarita: You know Malati very well , don't you ?

Mother: The one whose husband has a hardware store ?

Sarita: Yes the same

Mother: What happened to her ?

Sarita: Mother (feeling akward) my friend is HIV positive

Mother: HIV? you get HIV if you have multiple sex partner's don't you ?

Sarita: But mother, you can get HIV in other ways too.

Mother: Holy god ! I had never imagined Malati to be that kind of

womensuch beautiful kids, wonderful husband , how can she do this to them ?

Sarita: Will you please listen to the whole story.....Malati got infected with HIV because of her husband....

Short Music: (Which will sound as if she's telling the whole truth)

Mother: Poor Malati.... Now I see. Maybe she should reveal to the whole world how her husbands behaviour.... (exhales) whatever happens, society always blames the woman ...(Pause) but I think you have something else in your mind too?

Sarita: After what happened to Malti, several thoughts are crowding my mind... Mother, Binod stays away for so long I don't mean to doubt him, but still...

Mother: I understand your concern Sarita... usually no mother in law takes side with her daughter in law agenst her own son, but really, I understand your dilemma.

Sarita: O Mother!

Mother: So, What have you thought

Sarita: I have no choice but to ask him

Mother: Hmm... in issues like this, it's better you two talk, but if Binod misunderstands you, I'll stand by your side

Sarita: Yes mother

Mother: And listen, while talking to Binod about this , don't talk to him as if you doubt him, or yell at him.... things might go wrong this way

Sarita: Thanks mother

Transational Music

Scene 8: Sarita's house

FX: People talking (Happy mood)

Father: So, how long did you have to travel on train Binod ?

Binod: About 18 hours Father

Sabin: When are you going back Father?

Mother: Look at this child ... your father isn't home for 5 minutes and you are asking when he's going back?

Father: (Laughing) Kids !! They say whatever's on their mind.. Binod's mother ! where is our daughter in law ? What's she doing in the kitchen for so long?

Binod: Maybe she's feeling shy....

Mother: You should be the one who's ashamed ... it's been so long



since you were gone. If not for us, you should at least have thought about your wife.

Sarita: Here's tea, please.

Mother: Tell him Sarita, was I wrong ?

Sarita: (smiling) The dinner's ready.... you must be hungry after this long journey

Father: You've cooked meat right? o.k, lets go !

Music

FX: Night

Binod: Sarita, how is sabin doing in his school ?

Sarita: He's doing well .. he just finished his exam for this year but he's getting naughtier day by day ...

Binod: Kids are like that at this age ... but it must be hard on you, bringing them up on your own

Sarita: It's OK... your Parents really help a lot .. but it must be even more difficult for you ... living away from us, working for long hours, cooking, cleaning by all by yourself ... you must have wished there was someone to take care of you.

Binod : What do you mean, no one else ?

Sarita : There must be so many girls there ... more young, more beautiful ...

Binod : What are you talking about ?

Sarita : Tell me if I'm wrong ... Bombay is such a place ..

Binod : So what, I'm happy with my own wife .

Sarita : Binod, if I ask you something, will you promise to listen to it with an open mind and not get angry with me ?

Binod : Tell me, I won't get angry.

Sarita : The place where you work, there must be so many opportunities to meet other girls..... I mean you stay away for so many months..... you must have felt the need to go to those girls.....

Binod: (cutting in the middle) are you doubting me?

Sarita: Please I'm not doubting you but I've been hearing a lot about HIV/AIDS through the radio, TV, newspapers..... there were stories of how men contracted HIV from these commercial sex workers and without knowing, transferred these virus to their wives..... that's why I'm asking you.

Binod: So; you think I might have visited those girls?

Sarita: I have complete trust in you but since I'm your wife,

don't you think I should ask you about this? If you were in my place, you'd have asked me too, am I right ? (Pause)
From my understanding, everything should be clear between husband and wife and if something's bothering one of them, they should be able to talk to the other. no?

Binod: Yes

Sarita : OK, for instance, If I had not asked you about this the way I'm doing but instead acted grumpy and behaved nasty with you, how would you feel ?

Binod: Sarita.... to tell you the truth, I like the direct way you approached me and I'll tell you the truth ... I've never had sexual relations with anyone but you ... of course my friends used to pressure me into visiting those women I know about HIV/AIDS but besides that too ... You and our son always come first I care too much for you to go and visit those women you two are my life .

Sarita: And you are my life too...

Transitional music.

◀◀ *The End* ▶▶

A Day in the Life of the SSMK Team

Early morning - 8 am

Day - Tuesday

Written by Binita Shreshta

Who's who ?

- Binita Shrestha** - Team leader and female host of SSMK
- Devendra lal Shrestha (Sushil)** - Senior producer, mainly works on the scripts and over sees publication & networking of listener's clubs (since writing this Devendra has been promoted to managing the outreach team)
- Sangita Budhathoki** - Senior producer, female host - mainly works on the scripts
- Binayak Aryal** - Senior producer, Male host and technical producer in the team
- Kaustuv mani Pokhrel** - Producer, Male host, In charge of 'letter handling'.
- Rabindra Gurung** - Junior Producer, responsible for letter handling - categorizing, filing and responding to received letters (since writing this Rabin has been promoted to producer of a new youth livelihoods radio program Kamka Kura. He has been replaced by Sabin Singh)
- Rashmi KC** - Junior Producer, responsible for collecting vox pops and smaller interviews also for letter handling - (categorizing, filing and responding to received letters)

8 am is the official time for SSMK team to arrive at the office. Kaustuv is usually 10 minutes late, although he's working hard these days to be only 5 minutes late.

By 8.15, everyone has arrived and started work. Binita has a deadline to finalize a chat script, because it has to be recorded before the end of the day. It couldn't be finalized the day before because she was waiting for the feedback from the team. It is the trend within SSMK that every program script (including chat and drama) is revised by everyone before they are recorded or broadcast. Every team member's ideas and views are equally incorporated. Though it's a very time consuming process for a weekly, hour-long radio program, it is strength of the program that a single person's perception is not enough, and every word goes through a rigorous checking process.

Devendra is working on a very innovative idea – adapting an old story written originally by a renowned Nepalese dramatist, the late Bal Krishna Sama, into a radio drama format. This story is about handling interpersonal relationships between a young daughter in law and her mother in law and how the young girl uses life skills and the support of her husband to maintain a good relationship with her mother in law. Through this drama, SSMK will be reinforcing life skills, including ‘effective communication’, ‘empathy’ and ‘creative thinking’. The team has to be very creative when planning for new topics. With such a long running show, it’s a big challenge for the team to think of new ways to reinforce the same skills again and again. Sushil’s idea of adapting a once popular but long forgotten drama from Nepal’s past, and rewriting it into an SSMK radio drama shows his innovation and creativity.

Kaustuv is assigning tasks and deadlines among the letter handling group (two junior producers and himself), so that all three can complete reading & categorizing the last month’s letters within this week. For next week they have to work on dispatching the responses to all those who wrote in to the program over the last month. He’s very careful with this, because he realizes that letter handling is a vital component of the production. Even one wrongly categorized letter can have an impact on the evaluation process, and the letter writer would also get the wrong response.

Binayak is the main technical person and male host within the SSMK team. When he has a long beard, everyone knows that he has is on deadline and is not to be disturbed unless it is very, very urgent. The team is used to seeing him unshaven, but today he is clean-shaven and, as he is not under any pressure is in the mood for discussions, meetings and gossiping. Everyone’s chasing him away.

Sangita has an idea for a new drama, but before starting to write she wants to discuss it with other team members. It’s the usual trend; still it is often quite a challenge to bring everyone around one table as they are busy with their own responsibilities. Today, Sangita is also concerned about whether the discussion on an upcoming episode will be held or not because all the team members seem to be busy and no one is showing any interest in having the discussion. She asks Rabindra, “Hey aren’t we going to discuss the upcoming episode?” He laughs and replies as naturally as he can, “Why are you asking, it’s not time yet.” “Ah...I have to prepare a drama on the issue within a short time”, Sangita replies. This is a very common interaction among the team because scripting the drama and chat sections are very sensitive and can take a long time to ensure the scripts are engaging and still incorporate life skills in a very sensitive and insightful way.

SSMK believes in discussion and interaction because it leads to a good outcome. Sometimes the team calls an expert on a relevant issue to join them and discuss the issue in more depth, checking facts and ensuring the content is well-built and well researched. As well as discussing amongst each other and experts, the group also consults many resources including information from related organizations, reports,

case studies, internet materials, etc. But today it's Tuesday, the day of SSMK's weekly letter session, where the team discuss certain letters and how they might be incorporated in the program. So before any more research or script discussions can happen the team finds a quiet, comfortable place to sit and start the regular letter session.

SSMK Weekly Letter Session:



Background:

Letters received from listeners are read and categorized into different headings according to the problems identified. In each letter session, a few of these letters are selected for discussion before being used in the letter section of the radio program, which allows listeners to hear other people's problems and learn how life skills can help. Problems that are contemporary, reflect the issues of many young people and which can be solved easily using life skills are selected for discussion.

These letter sessions are not only attended by SSMK producers, but also local youth representatives, experts on various subject matter (invited according to topic and nature of letters selected that day) and EA colleagues. Today, apart from the team, Srijana Sharma is present, Srijana is a regular cartoon column writer for Save the Children, US, and is based in Kathmandu. She attends this session regularly because these letters have also proved to be a very important resource for her cartoon stories, targeted at young people.

Today's letter session:

3 letters are selected for today's discussion. The first is on physical appearance, the second involves a problem between lovers and the third deals with HIV/AIDS. Rashmi volunteers to read the first letter. It was from a 19 years old girl from Gulmi. She writes that her breasts have developed more than they should, and because of this she feels very shy to speak to any boys and tries to avoid crowds and public places. She left school after class 7. A guy from her village who studies B.Sc. in a nearby city has confessed his feeling for her, claiming he liked her shyness and her ability to do household jobs, but she finds it hard to talk to him due to her shyness and thinks her lack of education will eventually matter to him. Also, she is worried as he is from an upper caste.

Everybody agreed that the development of breasts during adolescence and the post adolescence period is normal but can cause anxiety as different girls develop at different rates. SSMK's team leader Binita said that in such a situation, acceptance of reality and learning to cope with physical and psychological change is a must. So in this case being self-conscious about physical appearance and letting this cause low self-esteem is the main problem. Agreeing with this, Srijana Sharma added that her self-consciousness has in fact drawn more attention from others. So taking physical changes easily and coping with them can actually help distract attention away from them. While the discussion was going on, the issue of losing weight also came up as weight could be reason behind her excessively developed breasts. Discussion continued that giving advice on losing weight could give another meaning and have a negative impact, so the group agreed it would be better not to mention weight at all. On the part of the letter that mentioned her relationship worries the group agreed that if there's good communication and understanding there is no reason why the relationship cannot work, education is not the important part and she should not focus on this. Binayak said that she needs to be self aware about her feelings first. She needs to analyze the situation about him liking her qualities and think if she could be happy with him. She has heard everything through friends so far, so it is very important that she speak to the boy and learn about his perspective on the relationship as well as something about the boy himself. It could be done by meeting him, having effective communication and getting to know each other better. Everybody also agreed that she should think about her feelings and not be obliged just because he's studying for his B.Sc. and is from a so-called upper caste. She has to analyze future consequences if both of them decided to start a relationship; including any lack of understanding between them or social problems that could arise later. If everything works well, then study is a secondary thing. And it's never too late to start studying again.

Second letter

The second letter, read by Devendra, was from a girl from Palpa. She had a pen pal that wanted to take their friendship to the next level and make it a love relationship. She was forced to accept because of his pressure. Her family knew about this relationship and so they arranged for her to marry a guy from the Indian army. But she refused. She asked her pen pal boyfriend to meet her because they had never met before. After meeting she only got two more letters from him. Later she learned that he was involved with another girl. She fears she might have to face such failures again.

Her letter really gave a jolt to the conception that to fall in love two people should meet first. After discussion it was agreed that people can fall in love by writing to each other only, but the risks of failure or betrayal involved in such a relationship is higher. There are many cases where people have been betrayed or lied to. Knowing another's feelings and intentions is hard in such cases because it is easier to weave lies if you are a good writer. So, it's better to meet, understand each other better and then start the relationship. Binita said that marriage is a big decision that shouldn't be done in haste, so it's better to minimize the risk.

Everybody agreed that the consequences should be analyzed and the persons involved should be self-aware. Ending a relationship is as important as starting one, it is important to end a relationship constructively. Everybody also agreed that she shouldn't feel vulnerable because of this relationship and how it ended.

While dealing with this letter, Sangita brought up the urban version of this case, pointing out that urban youths are increasingly finding themselves victims due to the internet.

3rd letter:

The third letter was read by Binayak. It was from a boy of Dhading who was HIV positive, but only he knew his HIV status. He had not disclosed it to anyone. His family members were pressurizing him to go abroad for foreign employment. He didn't want that because in order to apply for foreign employment he would have to get his blood tested for HIV and he was scared that his family members would find out. He was not even sure whether or not he has to disclose his status to his family. So he had written to SSMK for advice.

Kaustuv said first, that it's not clear from the letter how this guy knows he is HIV positive. Had he gone through proper testing or had he just assumed so based on various physical symptoms or risky behavior like many other listeners do? So, it was mutually agreed within the group that we should suggest that he go for another test to confirm his status. Sangita added that this would be beneficial for the letter writer, because from there he would not only be able to confirm his status, but also be able to get pre and post test counseling about HIV if he goes to a VCT center.

The counseling will help him not only to understand but also cope better with his own situation.

About his confusion over disclosing his status to his family, Binita suggested that it would be good if this boy could analyze for himself the consequences of disclosing or not disclosing, then maybe it will be easier for him to decide what to do. From discussion it came out that the benefits of disclosing may be relief of any guilt about hiding his situation. Second, he would be able to seek help (treatment, counseling) openly, which would make the process easier, and he might also get emotional support and care from his family. Binayak raised the concern – what if the family members would not understand or accept him? Yes, the group agreed, there is that possibility also, and that’s why this boy has to analyze all the pros and cons himself before making any decision. But if he discloses himself, he would also be able to join the various organizations formed by HIV positive people. From there he could get the hope and support to live with the virus and also fight discrimination. “But why can’t this boy choose the middle way?”, said Sushil “I mean, while we are talking about disclosing or not disclosing, we don’t always have to either tell everyone or not tell anyone ... this boy also has the option of disclosing only in certain places ... like in the treatment center from where he’ll get the treatment and counseling – or within the various organizations related to HIV from which he can get support.” – Everyone agreed that this is also an option for the boy, which he can consider. Binayak added, “and if he wants to disclose his HIV status to his family members, what’s the right way to do that?” I know ... “ Binita said.. “ I just had an interaction with a VCT counselor ... and he shared a few ways that this letter writer can use if he decides to disclose within his family ... the technique is to desensitize the family members about HIV .. like starting informal discussions with family members about the issue, taking home magazines, books with articles, information on HIV etc ... and they would have all the information about it, then telling them about his HIV status.”

After the letter session, it was lunchtime. For the SSMK team, there is rarely any spare time for lunch, instead they order food at the office, and share it with everyone. During the afternoon everyone continues with his or her tasks. Sangita finally gets feedback on her drama idea, Binita finishes her script just in time and Rabindra and Rashmi manage to get through only 40 letters, as there was much more work and other meetings to attend to.

By 5pm everyone is ready to go home, rest and prepare for another busy day in the office.

SSMK Broadcasting FM Stations – Last Updated June 07

FM Station Name	MHz	Location	District	Day	Time
Bageshwori FM	94.6	Nepalgunj	Banke	Sun	4-5 pm
Bulbule FM	103.4	Birendranagar	Surkhet	Wed	5-6 pm
Dhawlagiri FM	98.6	Baglung	Baglung	Sat	4 to 5pm
Ghodaghodi FM	100.4	Attariya	Kailali	Thu	5:15 -6:15pm
Hetauda FM	96.6	Hetauda	Makwanpur	Tue	5-6 pm
Himchuli FM	92.2	Pokhara	Kaski	Sat	6-7 pm
Hits FM	91.2	Naya Baneshwor	Kathmandu	Sat	5-6 pm
Kalika FM	95.2		Chitwan	Mon	5 to 6 pm
Kanchanjunga FM	92.6	Birtamod	Jhapa	Sat	4 to 5 pm
Kantipur FM	96.1	Pulchowk	Lalitpur	Sun	5-6 pm
Karnali FM	105.2	Jumla	Jumla	Mon	5-6 pm
Machhapuchhre FM	91	Pokhara	Kaski	Sun	7 to 8pm
Muktinath FM	90.8	Tansen	Palpa	Sun	2-3 pm
Narayani FM	103.8	Birgunj	Parsa	Mon	10-11 am
Pratidhwani FM	97	Daman	Makwanpur	Mon	5-6 pm
Radio Bheri Aawaj	95.6	Karkando	Banke	Fri	5:15 to 6:15pm
Radio Birgunj	99	Birgunj	Parsa	Sun	11am to 12pm
Radio Lumbini	96.8	Manigram	Rupandehi	Tue	10-11 pm
Radio MadanPokhara	106.9	MadanPokhara	Palpa	Sat	10 to 11am
Radio Palung FM	107.2	Palung	Makwanpur	Mon	5-6 pm
Rupandehi FM	102	Bhairhawa	Rupandehi	Wed	8-9 pm
Saipal Radio/FM	100.6	Chainpur	Bajhang	Sun	6 to 7 pm
SaptaKoshi FM	90	Itahari	Sunsari	Mon	11-12 pm
Shreenagar FM	93.2	Tansen	Palpa	Sun	6 to 7pm
Solu FM	102.2	Salleri	Solukhumbu	Sun	6 to 7pm
Suklafanta FM	94.4	Mahendranagar	Kanchanpur	Sat	12-1 pm
Swargadwari FM	102.8	Ghorahi	Dang	Fri	10-11 am
Synergy FM	91.6	Bharatpur	Chitwan	Thu	3-4 pm
Tinau FM	98.2	Butwal	Rupandehi	Sun	5 to 6 pm
Vijay FM	101.6	Gaidakot	Nawalparasi	Fri	8 to 9 pm
Radio Nepal		Singh Darbar	Kathmandu	Sat	3:30-4:30 pm

List of the Categories

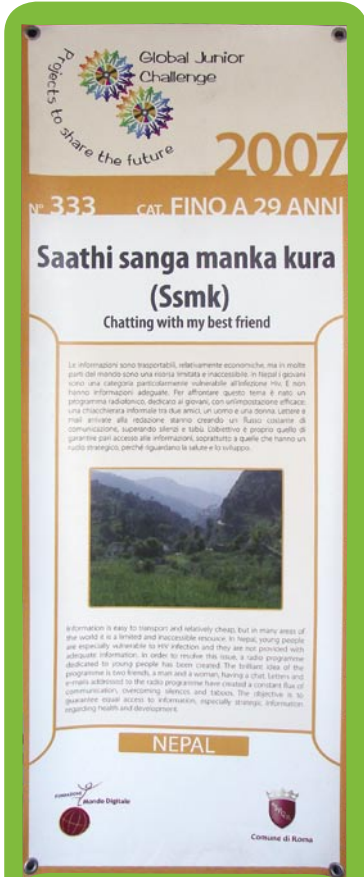
1. About booklets
2. About program
3. Career / Study.
4. Conflict
 - 4.1 Rehabilitation and reintegration of returnee soldiers & migrants
 - 4.2 Queries and experiences on changing political scenario
5. Contraceptives.
6. Dealing with peers.
7. Disabled person
8. Drug/Substance abuse.
9. Essay competition
10. Extra marital affairs.



11. Family problem.
12. General health problems.
13. General love problem (eng)
14. Habits.
15. Information on HIV/AIDS.
16. Information on sex
17. Inter caste relationships - Friendship/ Love / Marriage.
18. Legal issues

19. Listener's club Activities
 - 19.1 Issues Related To HIV/AIDS (Issues on H/A)
 - 19.2 Reconciliation and reconstruction activities
 - 19.3 Social Issues including Sanitation, Health, Early Childhood development, Education and life skills
20. Listener's Club Registration
21. Long distance relationship
22. Love - Handling rejection / How to forget someone you loved?
23. Love - How to propose ? What if rejected ?
24. Love - How to say no when someone proposes ?
25. Love - letters not answered.
26. Love - Whom to choose ?
27. Low economic condition.
28. Low self esteem.
29. Marriage decisions.
30. Masturbation/ Nightfall.
31. Menstruation.
32. Mental health/ Psychological problems
33. Miscellaneous
34. People living with HIV/AIDS.
35. Physical appearance
36. Pregnancy.
37. Problem between lovers.
38. Problems between husband and wife.
39. Rape cases.
40. Response to booklet
41. Safe sex.
42. Same sex issue
43. Sexual harassment.
44. Social problems.
45. STD
46. Superstition.
47. Vocational training

Saathi Sanga Manka Kura awarded the “GLOBAL JUNIOR CHALLENGE AWARD”



Over 600 projects from 80 countries participated in the “Global Junior Challenge Award”: Only 102 of them reached the final round.

The Fondazione Mondo Digitale (Digital World Foundation) a non-profit organization founded by the Municipality of Rome and six major ICT companies, organizes every two years the “Global Junior Challenge Award”. This event brings together best practice in the use of new technologies for education and training of young people from all over the world. The categories were defined by the age of the target groups, up to 10, 15, 18 and up to 29 years. Additionally there were awarded educational projects promoted and/or supported by local public sector organizations, school based multi-media animation projects and individual projects.

The “Global Junior Challenge Award” counted on 14 jury members from different countries.

The 2007 event took place from the 3rd until the 5th of October and provided a space for the presentation of the finalist’s projects, seminars, conferences and cultural events at night. Hundreds of people among them children, young people, teachers, journalists and from the public audience visited the stands of the finalists in the Istituto Tecnico Industriale Galileo Galilei di Roma (Technical Industry Institute Galileo Galilei of Rome), a school well known and recognized for its multicultural character.

The award ceremony of this 4th edition of the “Global Junior Challenge Award” took place in the beautiful Julio Cesar hall in the Campidoglio palace, the emblematic building of the city of Rome. Among the audience of the ceremony was the Vice mayor of Rome, Miss Mariapia Garavaglia, in representation of the city of Rome and its mayor Walter Veltroni.

Equal Access Nepal participated in this edition of the award with its Chatting with my Best friend “Saathi Sanga manka Kura” project, which intends to equip young people with knowledge and life skills: Project has been utilizing satellite technology and other ICT’s tools to reach out and incorporate communities’ voice. Project Saathi Sanga manka Kura was awarded in the category of projects targeting on people up to the age of 29 and received the award and grand prize of 25000 Euro.

The representatives of the awarded projects of the “Global Junior Challenge Award” were received in the Quirinale Palace by the president of Italy, Giorgio Napolitano, who personally expressed his congratulations to each organization. In two years, this event expects to animate even more projects and organizations working on the use of ICTs with sense and with social responsibility, to concourse for the “Global Junior Challenge Award”.

Replication of Chatting... beyond Nepal

Following the success of Chatting... in Nepal there have been a number of efforts to replicate the program supported by Equal Access and/or UNICEF:

- Training provided to local stations in Nepal and in the Solomon Islands to build capacity of local groups to produce their own media programs modeled on the Chatting approach.
- A series of trainings and support for an ongoing youth radio program produced in two large high schools in Southern Lao PDR and broadcast by the Lao national broadcaster.
- A complete replication of a national youth media program built on the Chatting model in Cambodia: We Can Do It. This program is supported by the US Department of State and UNICEF.

Cambodia Replication: We Can Do It Excerpt from launch report.

We Can Do it – youth radio program: The youth program launched in November 2007 during the annual water festival - the perfect setting for launching the exciting activities of the program. The team designed, produced, pre-tested, and broadcasts weekly episodes of the program. Working with a network of youth community reporters and an enormous response received through a listener call line, the team is using mini-dramas, stories, interviews, profiles and contests to engage



A traditional Chhyam troupe led the promotions of the We Can Do It program, helping reach thousands of people in different parts of Phnom Penh during the Water Festival

young people and provide key information and decision making and life skills. The team also held 4 content advisory group meetings to provide advice on the content and themes of the project and help process feedback from listeners and pre-testing. An extensive qualitative and quantitative baseline assessment was also conducted and used as a basis for production planning. Although the period between project launch and start of broadcasts (five months) was shorter than the pre-broadcast

period in Nepal, this time still allowed extensive program planning, research and team building and training.

Episodes 1-6 began a 52 episode series of mini-drama and magazine segments educating young people on a targeted set of issues, especially local government and civil society structures, life and decision making skills, and health issues .

During the project period, the team visited Kampong Speu, Banteay Mean Chey, Prey Veng and Svay Rieng provinces, pre-testing and promoting the program and capturing the stories of young people to be included in the program. Initial episodes were very well received and the program is already gaining quick popularity and is regularly promoted by village and commune chiefs. Equal Access has initiated several partnerships key to the program, especially UNICEF and CMM Records.

Promotion of 'We Can Do It' program among high school students in a province of Laos.



Team: Led by Content Coordinator Ms. At Sotheavy, who has over four years of experience writing and producing for social issue radio programs for the BBC and two years for Equal Access. The We Can Do It team includes Ms. Chhy Ratha and four dedicated community reporters based in three provinces. The team is recruiting an additional male writer and host for the program. Ms. Binita Shrestha, from Equal Access' Nepal office, has spent 3 months working closely with the team to help establish a program using radio and content techniques that have been successful in many countries around the world, especially the Equal Access youth program in Nepal, the most popular non-news program in the country. Ms. Shrestha has written and produced youth radio programs for over 7 years, and has implemented UNICEF sponsored trainings of young people in several countries around the region.