

# Remediating modernity: Youth, role models and behaviour change in ‘new Nepal’

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## **Abstract**

Communication for development (C4D) theorising, program design and practice, to a significant extent, remain driven by notions that communication inspires liberal-minded role models or ‘change agents’ operating at the local level. These individuals are typically described in terms of their willingness to pursue social change. In looking at the links between national pro-social change broadcasting and local practices of remediation and interpretation, this paper assesses the work of a large international NGO working to promote life skills, health awareness and civic responsibility amongst young people in Nepal. Such work charges young people to be agents of their own social change through the development of localised C4D initiatives that link with national media outputs and agendas. Inevitably, there is a degree of slippage in both meaning and message as local remediation of broader development issues occurs. Analysis reveals remediation of such issues to be a tangled practice in which key messages are reworked, made more conservative, and localised or mis-communicated.

**Keywords:** communication, development, social, change, youth, remediation, Nepal

## **Introduction**

According to Anthony Giddens (1991) the modern ‘self’ is a reflexive self, one that engages various life skills to promote a critical appraisal of thoughts, relationships and actions. The key question of ‘how shall I live?’ has to be answered in ‘day-to-day decisions about how to behave’, for which, life skills become a critical resource (1991, p. 14). Radio has been at the forefront of circulating ideas about what it means to be modern and ‘developed’, with a modern notion of ‘self’ being associated with self-fashioning, individuality and ultimately, behaviour change (Hilmes 1997; Lerner 1958; Rogers 1962; Singhal and Rogers 1999; Spitulnik 2002). Radio-focused behaviour change communication (BCC) initiatives tend to focus heavily on message delivery, where the relevance, frequency and consistency of messages are critical to their change potential (Bandura 1977; Dutta-Bergman 2005; Galavotti et al. 2001; Inagaki 2007; Sabido 2004; Waisbord 2001). Often such initiatives are mediated at the national level and have a campaign logic, but struggle to link effectively to local media or local modes of interpersonal communication.

Concern for local communities to take ‘ownership’ over and participate in communication processes witnessed the emergence of more participatory approaches to communication,

development and change in the late 1990s, the most notable of which are the Communication for Social Change (CFSC) Framework (1999) and the UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS) Communication Framework (1999). Both identify the difficulties of promoting individual behaviour change without recourse to the collective nature of society or the constraints that culture may place on individual and collective action for social change (Figueroa et al. 2002; Gray-Felder and Deane 1999; Parks et al. 2005; Tufte 2003). Increasingly, communication for development (C4D) and communication for social change initiatives are seeking to bridge the gulf between centralised message-centric approaches and the broad diversity of local communication practices and localised dialogues (Thomas 2014; Wilkins 2014). One such initiative is that of Equal Access Nepal (EAN), who have been active in recent years promoting life skills enhancement for young people and in supporting their active role in contributing to social and political change during a period that has been characterised by the Maoist insurgency, instability, conflict and violence (Hutt 2004; Whelpton 2005; Wilmore 2008).

The EAN approach includes the production of a national magazine-style radio program called *Sāthi Saṅga man kā Kura* (SSMK)—which translates as ‘Chatting with My Best Friend’—, and the provision of support for local program making and listeners’ clubs that are charged by EAN with promoting community activities throughout Nepal. The logic behind this approach is to increase discussion of key development issues, political changes and youth capabilities within local communities to better stimulate action for social change (Equal Access 2011a). The distribution of the SSMK radio program through local radio stations, support for local productions and the outreach activities of listeners’ clubs is fundamental to EAN’s methodology. Building local ownership of communicative processes is a key component of the Communication for Social Change (CFSC) model, which EAN endorses (Thomas 2014). However, this specific communication approach can also generate a distinct set of challenges. The need for local actors such as listeners’ clubs to remediate specific themes and issues derived from national broadcasts and printed support materials for local consumption introduces an essential lack of control over the treatment of development and/or socio-political issues, key messages and the portrayal of specific role models. In turn, this creates a potential slippage in meaning between EAN’s national level broadcasting and its local remediation and reinterpretation by groups such as listeners’ clubs.

EAN’s multi-faceted and multi-sited approach has a ‘first/last mile’ of connection and communication logic and is understood by program staff to have the potential to usefully

‘extend the reach and impact of health, education and other development programs’ (Equal Access 2011a, p. 1) beyond what it is practically capable of achieving via national radio channels alone (Chapman, Slaymaker and Young 2003). This, it is argued, is fundamental to achieving social change because ‘development is uneven and incomplete unless the [wider] population has access to information vital for their well-being’ (Equal Access 2011a, p. 1). By encouraging and supporting local radio productions and listener club activities EAN aims to create opportunities for people to take control of communicative processes, discuss issues of local relevance and work on their solutions. Like the aforementioned CFSC and UNAIDS models, the approach seeks to support a dialogue-based process through which, ‘people themselves define who they are, what they need and how to get what they need in order to improve their own lives’ (Parks et al. 2005, p. 3). Ultimately, this leads to some fundamental questions of relevance to EAN’s approach and to the analytical breadth of this paper. What level of control can EAN exert over the messages communicated at the local level? How does the content of locally produced radio programs and listeners’ club activities differ from that of nationally produced programs? What slippage of meaning occurs in the process of remediation? Finally, do the young people imagined in program design play the modernising roles expected of them at the local level?

### **Notes from the field: Methodology**

In addressing this range of critical questions this paper draws on over 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in Nepal between 2007 and 2010 within two distinct locations: Kathmandu, and Banaspati village in the inner-Tarai district of Makwanpur, (an area located between the hilly central districts of Nepal and the flat plains that border India). The fieldwork approach was multi-sited in nature, this reflecting the need to follow EAN’s radio content from production in Kathmandu to reception and remediation by listener club members in Banaspati Village, Makwanpur (see Hannerz 2003a; Marcus 1995).

There is a salient difference between the capital city of Kathmandu and regional places within Nepal that significantly influences the ways in which people conceptualise both themselves and others. This difference affects both culture and economy; it drives infrastructure or lack thereof, as well as employment and education opportunities. Kathmandu is the economic and political heart of Nepal. It is densely populated, fiercely busy, and intensely cosmopolitan. The EAN national office is located in the Patan area of Kathmandu, a location that has become home to innumerable development agencies, expatriates and western-style bakeries, cafes, and gyms that cater to foreign tastes. This

urbane and modern setting is home to EANs producers, technicians and ‘on-air’ talent, all of whom, to varying degrees, reflect the modern youth archetype that EAN seeks to portray.

At the local end of the EAN communication challenge lies Banaspati village, which is home to one of EAN’s listeners’ clubs. Banaspati was established in 1993 for people made landless by a devastating flood. Its inhabitants live in various areas of the village according to their caste. Brahmins and Chhetris (high caste) are located together and away from Tamangs (who are considered to be low caste). Banaspati is, in every respect, a divided village. It is also marked by poverty, which is apparent in poor schooling, a lack of sealed roads and vehicles, a remittance-dependent local economy, and the high proportion of girls who are trafficked (into the sex industry, to marriage or domestic work) across the border to India.

The multi-sited nature of the research necessitated an approach that encompassed a wide range of methodologies, including participant observation, in-depth individual semi-structured interviewing, focus group discussions and textual analysis of documentation and radio scripts. Given the anthropological nature of the research, a great deal of time was spent as a participating observer ‘deeply hanging out’ with various participants over extended periods of time (Bernard 1994; Clifford 1997). The methods employed were essential to providing a holistic and highly contextualised examination of the scope of EAN communication activities, from national broadcasting to highly localised remediations of program content by listener clubs. Ulf Hannerz notes that ‘from a local viewpoint, one can only get an incomplete picture of some types of activities’, and this is very much the case for EAN’s complex communication for development agenda (2003, p. 20).

### **Chatting with my best friend**

A main plank of EAN’s outputs is *Sāthi Saṅga man kā Kura* (Chatting with my best friend)—commonly referred to as SSMK—a lively magazine format radio program hosted by young Nepalis for young Nepalis. SSMK, which began in 2001, uses chat between hosts, drama segments, interviews with experts, listener vox-pops, and listener participation via listeners’ letters to discuss key youth and wider social and political issues. SSMK aims to provide listeners with the knowledge and tools (life skills) necessary to effect changes in their own and others’ lives.

EAN and its SSMK radio program seeks to encourage young Nepalis to become more active in the creation of the socio-political project of ‘new Nepal’. Young people are portrayed in EAN productions, including SSMK, as having a key role to play in the creation of a ‘new Nepal’, one that is rising from the ashes of a long period of civil unrest and the

demise of the royalty by being suitably modern individuals (Liechty 2002). From EAN's perspective the 'modern individual' uses life skills to guide everyday actions that ultimately display the modern self. Life skills are demonstrated in the radio program by 'role models' who act as change agents fostering imitation of life skills and ultimately behaviour change (Bandura 1977; Rogers 1962). The use of such characters is common to BCC initiatives and especially to those that utilise aspects of drama, which includes SSMK (Singhal et al. 2004; Skuse et al. 2011).

A key objective of SSMK is to equip young listeners with ten core life skills that have been developed and widely popularised by UNICEF (2012). These include the promotion of self-awareness, effective communication, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, positive thinking, coping with emotions, problem solving, decision making and managing stress. These life skills comprise key aspects of an internationally accepted United Nations sanctioned model of life education (i.e. outside of traditional classroom learning) that seeks to build 'abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life' (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2006, p. 2). In the area of health, life skills are conceptualised as:

A group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Life skills may be directed toward personal actions or actions toward others, as well as toward actions to change the surrounding environment to make it conducive to health. (World Health Organization 2003, p. 3)

The promotion of life skills through SSMK is designed to help young listeners deal with issues such as love and study problems, romantic rejection, ill-health and other concerns such as civic responsibilities. Life skills programs identify the individual as the locus of behaviour change and as such, can be considered as an integral 'part of a wide-scale international discourse that has saturated the development world, in which behavioural change must come from inside oneself rather than from any [external] political or social transformation' (cf. Karp 2002; Kunreuther 2010, p. 343). Personal life, Laura Kunreuther notes, is viewed as a key site for individual and social transformation in Nepal and links powerfully to wider South Asian development narratives of self-help (2010). Viewing the self as a site of transformation is implicit in the theory of change underlying the program logic of EAN. This was a view that

was commonly held by research participants who saw wider social change as starting ‘from an individual to the community and then to the society’ (authors’ interview with 25 year-old male, 3 August 2010), or that ‘if people change personally this change will bring social change’ (authors’ interview with 19 year-old female, 30 August 2010). By undertaking to transform the individual, SSMK aims to positively affect the values, norms and mores of young people looking to promote change.

The idea that change occurs at the individual level is consistent with modernisation theory in which development is linked to an individual’s inner-qualities: ‘Only insofar as individual persons can change their places in the world, their position in society, their own self-image, does social change occur. Social change in this sense is the sum of mobilities acquired by individual persons.’ (Lerner 1963, p. 331 quoted in Sparks 2007, p. 24)

Becoming a modern, self-fashioned individual, by using life skills as a resource to change oneself, is perceived within the EAN program logic as a means to effecting self-reliance, self-efficacy and social change. From a donor perspective such qualities link to soft power public diplomacy and the search for stability and progress in fragile states such as Nepal (Skuse 2012). Thus, despite the explicit focus on life skills within SSMK, the formation of neo-liberal pro-democratic and civic-minded subjects may be considered soft power outcomes because, given the subtext of the long-running Maoist conflict within contemporary Nepal, inculcating such qualities must also be perceived as an inherently political endeavour (Kunreuther 2010).

### **Youth and social change in ‘new Nepal’**

While the nexus between the promotion of life skills, social change, public diplomacy and modernisation in Nepal is inherently dynamic, to a significant degree this dynamism is conflict driven. Nepal has undergone, and continues to undergo significant social, political and economic upheaval as a result of civil conflict, the rapid monetisation of the economy, processes of development and increasing access to education (Ahearn 2004; Liechty 2003; Whelpton 2005). These often gendered changes have contributed to rapidly changing and complex socio-economic conditions and expectations that play a role in the delay of life cycle events that have tended to previously characterise adulthood such as marriage, raising children or employment (Liechty 2009). The shifting of roles and expectations resulting from such a fluid period of instability has created new spaces for modern Nepali youth to explore their identities and place in the world like never before.

Nation building is a significant responsibility in which contemporary Nepali youth are attributed roles by political leaders, organised groups and development organisations (Snelliger 2009; Majupuria, T.C. and Majupuria, I. 1985). The nation-building project is enshrined in the ubiquitous term ‘new Nepal’, which is used to refer to an imagined Nepal that is characterised by features and values of development, democracy and self-reliance. However, ‘new Nepal’ does not have a universal meaning and there is little or no agreement in Nepal over what a new Nepal should be or look like, given the number of competing political narratives.

Despite this, the notion that the young Federal Republic of Nepal should look to its youth to cement change is strong. Such sentiment is echoed by SSMK producers and young Nepalis themselves, including listener club members, local radio program producers, reporters and regionally located EAN staff. Among research participants, playing a role in nation building was discussed in terms of young individuals having a consciousness about the needs of their communities and responding to those needs by undertaking and participating in activities to alleviate social problems. A local radio program producer notes: ‘There are young people who just study to get a good job and get married and enrich their own and their families lives, but youths have a responsibility to do something socially conscious for their communities’ (authors’ interview with 23 year-old male, 5 August 2008).

The sense of responsibility for nation building amongst youth, especially more liberal-minded urban youth, is palpable. One former Banaspati listener club member who had secured a job in a local development organisation identified her motives for joining a listener group as her desire to be ‘active’ and ‘make changes’ within her local community. This sentiment was mirrored by current listener club members, such as one young woman who spoke proudly about how active her club was, and stated that their activities were driven by the desire to improve community welfare. While the link between ‘active’ youth and the emerging, but inherently complex, nation that is ‘new Nepal’ is significant, it is too simplistic to assume that national development narratives or the appropriation of life skills result in coherent development or social change agendas or communication at the local level. With this in mind, the remainder of this paper examines the practice of remediation at the local level in order to assess the effectiveness of EAN’s strategy of youth mobilisation via listener clubs.

## **The practice of remediation: Listening and acting**

EAN encourages dissemination of their program content by supporting locally organised listener clubs to extend messaging to their local communities via a range of diverse activities, performances and discussions. This is driven by the idea that localisation of content makes messaging more accessible and relevant for local communities (Gray-Felder and Deane 1999; UNAIDS 1999). Such localisation has predominantly been understood as an outcome of globalisation in which ‘the intensification of global interconnectedness’ through the wide availability of information and communication technologies sparks local processes of appropriation and adaptation, whereby a commodity, culture or idea is made meaningful in a different cultural context (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, p. 2; cf. Appadurai 1996; Miller 1987). The localisation that we are referring to here however, occurs in a purposeful way within the national boundaries of Nepal and is concerned with the rendering of radio broadcasts into other localised media forms. Bolter and Grusin (1999) have referred to the representation or reworking of one medium or its content in another as ‘remediation’.

The concept of remediation can usefully be applied to the activities undertaken by listener groups who purposefully repackage SSMK radio content into alternative change-oriented forms of communication. Such remediation resonates with the discourses that are associated with ‘new Nepal’ and the active role of youth, as well as with modernisation notions of change agents, who are deemed to ‘spread the good word’ of social change. In examining how listener clubs remediate EAN’s national level media content, our concern is to shed light on message slippage, local interpretations of development and social change and, more broadly, on the interaction between more individualistic and participatory C4D approaches characterised respectively by modernist/BCC and social change models (Gray-Felder and Deane 1999; Wilmore 2006).

Encouraging remediation does not fit with the practice of BCC (the approach used by EAN), in which control over messaging is retained by the organisation implementing the initiative. Equal Access staff acknowledged this unusual practice during a meeting in which one person stated that: ‘We don’t have tight control over the message and this runs contrary to BCC orthodoxy’ (authors’ interview with 35 year-old male August 20 2009). The lack of control implicit in remediation caused some doubts about the value of this approach that was expressed by an EAN staff member in the same meeting: ‘We do not have any control over the remediation part - whatever they do, good or bad, is up to them’ (authors’ interview with 35 year-old male, August 20 2009). The divergence from usual BCC practice raises questions

about what happens to the content when it is remediated by listener clubs into different mediums. How does it change? Is the quality and relevance of messages changed? How does socio-cultural context influence the remediation process? In order to address these questions a closer look at the EAN listener clubs is required.

In Nepal, the practice of listening to radio in groups can be traced to the historical distribution of radio sets from the early 1960s onwards to community listening centres (Parajulee 2007). Listener clubs and groups have a long association with radio and within communication for development practice such groups, which have been used extensively, often as part of agricultural extension practices (Coleman et al. 1968; Kivlin et al. 1968; Mathur and Neurath 1959). In the context of EAN's work, their first SSMK listener clubs evolved from gatherings of young people who came together to listen to the SSMK radio program. When SSMK began broadcasting in the early 2000s the format was innovative and the content was often confronting as it dealt with a wide range of young people's issues, including previously taboo topics such as masturbation and pre-marital sex that were not openly discussed and were certainly not broadcast on radio. Listening to such content within the family home proved extremely challenging for young people and resulted in the spontaneous formation of listener clubs to circumvent parental protest over content. When reports of the establishment of informal SSMK listener clubs reached the EAN production team in Kathmandu they began to work directly with the clubs, supporting them with information packs and, as the initiative grew, with formal registration and small grants to undertake activities. There are over 1,000 SSMK listener clubs in Nepal and EAN has adopted the SSMK listener club model in a number of its other radio-driven initiatives.

Listener clubs are composed of young community members, often friends, who are expected by EAN to regularly listen to SSMK, discuss its content amongst themselves and other friends and family, and occasionally conduct awareness-raising activities which are understood by EAN to catalyse behavioural and social change at the local level (Equal Access 2011b; Quilt and Shrestha 2008; SSMK 2010; UNICEF 2003, 2008). Listener clubs drive a more participatory form of communication at the local level, and, more broadly, on a national scale. In many respects the work of the listener clubs fits well with the CFSC model that EAN aims to adopt (Lennie et al. 2008). The CFSC model emphasises horizontal and participatory communication that is grounded in local realities and stresses that social change comes about through community dialogue and collective action to resolve shared problems (Figueroa et al. 2002; Gray-Felder and Deane 1999). Complex practices of remediation lie at

the heart of this participatory exercise and are demonstrated in a comparison between a nationally broadcast SSMK radio drama and its local remediation as a street drama performed by an SSMK listeners' club based in Banaspati village. This comparison demonstrates the subtle changes that occur in key messages in the process of remediation.

The drama segment of the SSMK program constitutes a significant proportion of the SSMK radio program and is used by the hosts as a means to set and expand on a weekly theme, discuss the issues that are raised in greater detail during chat between the hosts, and highlight behaviour that is deemed to be correct or 'appropriate'. In one radio drama that dealt with violence against women (VAW) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) a husband (Rajan) has transmitted HIV to his wife (Makhmali). It is made clear in the drama that Rajan contracted HIV from sex workers while working abroad. Makhmali's husband and mother-in-law blame her for having initially contracted HIV. This, they incorrectly argue, is a result of her having had extra-marital affairs with a number of men in the village. The implication that Makhmali has carried on extra-marital affairs brings dishonour on her family home, which is intensified by the fact that she openly seeks treatment at a local clinic that treats sexually transmitted infections. Makhmali's attendance at the clinic is presumed by her family to increase public knowledge of her extra-marital affairs, thereby escalating her family's dishonour (see Bennett 1983; Cameron 1998). Makhmali endures regular verbal and physical abuse perpetrated against her by her husband and mother-in-law but asserts herself and does not meekly accept the blame attributed to her, as illustrated in the following excerpt where Makhmali addresses her husband and mother-in-law:

[Talking to her husband] It's your domestic violence that's become too much to bear. To act like a gentleman while spreading lies about your wife, that's too much! [Becoming aggressive] in order to hide your own guilt you accuse me! You should feel ashamed of what you have done. You broke the trust between us and had an illicit affair with some woman and look what I got from your dirty deed [crying hard] ... [speaking loudly] why do you hide that fact from everyone? Why should I bear the punishment of the sin you committed? ... [Talking to her mother-in-law] I came to your family to make a home, to make your son mine and make you my mother, but your son had an illicit affair and got HIV from her. That has brought disgrace to this family and also brought my character into question.

Family honour is largely vested in the practices of women, in particular their sexual fidelity (Bennett 1983; Cameron 1998). If a woman engages in socially unacceptable sexual acts—for example sex before marriage or extra-marital affairs—or is presumed to have engaged in

such acts inferred from transgressions of social norms (such as being in the company of unrelated men), then she *and* her family attract dishonour. HIV, which is so closely associated with sex, carries with it considerable dishonour. Despite being dishonoured, the drama shows Makhmali carefully negotiating her relationships with her family members, being assertive at times and gentle at others, in a bid to improve her circumstances. Makhmali's efforts to improve communication bring about change in her family when her mother-in-law acknowledges that her son is at fault: [Crying] 'I knew Makhmali was innocent. When you [Rajan] were abroad working someone told me what you were doing, but I remained silent. I couldn't stand to think of people gossiping about you. That's why I started accusing her [Makhmali] of transmitting HIV to you'.

Crying and sobbing, Rajan admits that it is his fault and Makhmali implores him to love her like he used to and stop beating her because it 'won't solve the pain that you are going through'. The drama segment ends with an agreement between the couple to seek medical treatment for HIV, and Makhmali's mother-in-law lovingly telling her that she will do her hair the way she used to. The drama addresses a number of key issues of relevance to contemporary Nepal. Labour migration is leading to a spike in HIV infection as migrants return to re-establish their lives. Levels of violence against women are significant and traditional gender norms often mean that women are unfairly blamed for issues that affect the wider household. The drama shows that women can defend themselves against dishonour by utilising constructive dialogue, with effective communication and problem solving being the life skills promoted within this particular segment.

A listener club remediation of SSMK's VAW and HIV content demonstrates the slippage that can occur to its central messaging when it is rendered into different media. The *Janahit Yūba Samuha* (Youth Group for People's Welfare, hereafter referred to as 'Janahit') is one of the listeners' clubs that is associated with and supported by EAN through formal affiliation with SSMK. Picking up on the themes of HIV and VAW represented in the SSMK drama, the Janahit listeners' club created a street drama that they performed in a crowded and busy area. The listener club members intended to demonstrate to audience members the link between VAW and HIV, akin to the SSMK drama described above. The drama presented a fictitious story of a husband (Aite) who abuses and rejects his wife (Rashmi) because they have not had children. The story presented by the listener club members also occurs in the family home in a village and involves the wife's mother-in-law, who inevitably takes the side of her son. The drama performed by the listener club members presents familiar tropes of family shame,

violence, and tensions often experienced by daughter-in-laws in Nepal. The key difference in the story presented by the listener club members in their drama however, is that it is socio-cultural pressure to have children that sparks domestic violence and leads to the expulsion of Rashmi from the family home and her subsequent trafficking to a brothel in India, where she contracts HIV. Her husband Aite, in a desperately unhappy state, begins injecting drugs and also contracts HIV.

The way that Rashmi manages and responds to the situation in her family home and subsequent situations is vastly different from the way that Makhmali (represented in the national-level SSMK drama) addresses the problem. Rashmi does not argue or fight back. When she is expelled from the family home Rashmi cries and turns away and says ‘where shall I go now?’ With nowhere to go, Rashmi meets up with another woman she knows who, unbeknownst to Rashmi, sells her to a brothel in India. Rashmi stands quietly to one side as the woman she knows barter with the brothel proprietor for the sale of Rashmi. There is no problem solving dialogue on display and Rashmi is cast as a passive victim.

After her expulsion from the brothel due to her contracting HIV, Rashmi returns to her husband’s village hopeless and homeless. Some of the local village women take Rashmi to a discussion and information session that is being run by a female development worker visiting the village from a women’s organisation. Some local village men also bring Rashmi’s husband Aite along to the program. The development worker character (Dudu) talks about the link between VAW and HIV and highlights the case of Rashmi and Aite. Dudu states that it is important for Rashmi and Aite to support one another and reconcile. The drama ends with Rashmi and Aite reunited and the villagers holding hands and pumping fists, pledging to fight VAW and HIV.

Where Makhmali is assertive and outspoken, Rashmi is largely silent throughout the street drama. Where Makhmali negotiated her relationships to bring about positive change in her home, Rashmi had this done for her by an external female development worker. Rashmi is a vastly different character than Makhmali and is cast as a passive victim of her circumstances. More fundamental miscommunications about the nature of HIV also occur when SSMK program content is remediated. Anecdotal reports suggest that some listener clubs have promoted the idea that HIV can be contracted from a shave where a HIV positive person was shaved with the same blade. In the Janahit street drama such overt misconceptions are not presented, however the development worker character explains to villagers who are positioned as ignorant and obnoxious (cf. Pigg 1996) that HIV ‘destroys the immune system

... we cannot fight the disease. The virus multiplies and finally if we suffer from two or more than two diseases [which are not specified] then we call it AIDS'. This confusing explanation links to well-known co-infections that accompany AIDS such as tuberculosis, but also sends the damaging message that 'we cannot fight the disease'. Though antiretroviral therapy is not universally available in Nepal, such treatment is nonetheless available.

### **On being modern: A conclusion**

The two dramas discussed above centre on the domestic violence endured by two women in their village homes. Both dramas highlight a link between violence and HIV and both end with reconciled families. However, the journey that the women take to get to family reconciliation is vastly different. It highlights two very different lead female characters and, ultimately, a slippage in messaging between the national level SSMK drama and the listener club's remediation. The SSMK initiative aims to create social change by facilitating internal change (Fujikura 2001) in the form of the practiced skills and capabilities that make up life skills. Kunreuther has argued that life skills, as part of the broader discourse of capabilities, are central to the creation of a neoliberal subjectivity that 'requires practiced skills and, quite often, state [or in this case an International Non-Government Organisation] intervention to achieve its effects' (2010, p. 337). It has been argued that C4D and the related practices associated with communication for social change, as an intervention led by INGOs, works on the subjectivities of third world people to predispose them to democratic change and the emergence of market economies (Skuse 2012). SSMK, as a constituent part of a wide range of EAN initiatives, fashion the program hosts and drama characters as role models for young Nepalis to learn from, look up to and imitate (Galavotti et al. 2001).

Life skills are clearly demonstrated by the Makhmali character, who displays communication, problem solving and relationship negotiation capabilities that ultimately lead to a change in her circumstances. Makhmali is a role model constructed by SSMK's Kathmandu-based production team to clearly exhibit the application of life skills and the benefit of applying life skills. The Makhmali character delivers on EAN's aims, which is to put young people in charge of their own social change. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from the 'chat' component of an SSMK script:

If you're to succeed and make your life better, you must look for the opportunities. If we look at the present trend, most of our friends are found sitting idle thinking that the doors of possibility are closed and nothing can be achieved. If we think [about] ...

which actions lead us to success and improve our skills accordingly, we can easily grab opportunity. (SSMK episode 259 ‘Chasing Dreams’, broadcast May 5 2006)

The message is clear, if you are to succeed in changing your life, you yourself must change it. Changing oneself and one’s circumstances in order to effect social change is a fundamental assumption that underlies EAN’s outputs, as it does most C4D-orientated programming and modernisation theorising. The messaging relies on the notion of the autonomous and active ‘change agent’ who is capable of controlling her own destiny and changing her life. Such autonomy and the application of active life skills are clearly not maintained in the listener club street drama version described above. The listener club’s drama demonstrates that a key message element of SSMK—the character who uses life skills to effect change in their own lives—is lost in remediation. Rather, the listener club drama reflects a belief fostered by the dominant role that development aid plays in Nepal, namely that social change is delivered by development organisations and agents and is not in any sense an internal transformation. Making development organisations responsible for social change also diverts expectations placed on individuals that may not fit with social expectations and roles. For example, the intervention of the female development worker character in the listener club’s street drama removed the need for Rashmi to subvert dominant gender constructions that conceive of women as subordinate to men. In this sense, it firmly positions women as passive, dependent and incapable of self-expression and determination. It suggests that young women’s resistance to starting a family can lead to violence and expulsion and all of the attendant risks that accompany it. The drama in no way sanctions the male character Aite for the domestic violence and in this sense is quite normative.

Ultimately, EAN’s style of C4D, which includes the marrying of BCC (in which the sanctity of the message is of the utmost importance) with the participatory form of communication promoted by the CFSC (in which local social change is premised on communities being in charge of their own communicative processes) poses an important question: how can development organisations create the type of social change that they have been funded to achieve while moving away from centrally-controlled messaging and towards participatory communication and development? Differences evident in the SSMK and listener club street drama to a degree reflect the different skills, experiences and abilities of the producers, as well as the degree to which conservatism exerts its forces over such creative endeavours. Young people who live in Kathmandu often live radically different lives to those in regional and rural areas of Nepal (Liechty 2003). Accordingly, the youth role models and

messages represented in the national SSMK radio program are mediated by the urban based radio program producers and presenters who draw on their own lived experience of being predominantly middle-class, well-educated, and cosmopolitan young people who are socially distant from their predominantly regionally and rurally-located listeners. Contextual differences clearly contribute to an argument for supporting participatory communication via remediation. However, slippages that occur to messaging prompt the question of whether remediation is worth it. Does it matter if the messaging is different as long as there are more public discussions about VAW and HIV? While the localised drama ignores the life skills promoted by the SSMK program, it nonetheless addresses the issues of VAW and HIV, albeit in a more gender normative, muted and passive way. This helps to assure that the listener club members do not create controversy and maintain the ability to undertake such endeavours in future. From this perspective, their relative conservatism should be expected. This also results in an interesting position, namely that it is potentially conservatism, rather than radicalism, that may be at the vanguard of social change at the local level.

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