

Challenges, issues and contradictions in a participatory impact assessment project in Nepal

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Outline of presentation

Overview of Assessing Communication for Social Change (AC4SC) project

Communication for Social Change (CFSC) approach: strengths and limitations

Potential of ethnographic action research (EAR) for capturing impacts

Strengthening programs and M&E systems in Equal Access Nepal (EAN)



Outline of presentation (cont.)

Developing and implementing the methodology

Challenges, issues and contradictions that emerged

Strategies to address these challenges and issues

Some learnings and critical reflections



The Assessing Communication for Social Change project: partners and funders



Overview of AC4SC

- Aims to design and trial a participatory methodology for evaluating the impacts of two popular CFSC radio programs made by EAN, and related outreach activities
- Methodology aims to produce realistic indicators of social change
- Focus is on community change rather than individual change
- Builds on previous research in South and South East Asia



Strengths of the Communication for Social Change approach

- Aims to generate mutual understanding, agreement, and collective action on issues
- Activities include street theatre, radio drama and workshops which promote dialogue, community participation and empowerment



CFSC approach: limitations and issues

- Broad applicability of CFSC model is problematic due to the distinctive nature of objectives and indicators derived from community research
- Unclear how data from participatory M&E can inform national CFSC initiatives
- Approach must be adapted to extrapolate findings to the national content through representative case study sites



Potential of ethnographic action research for capturing impacts

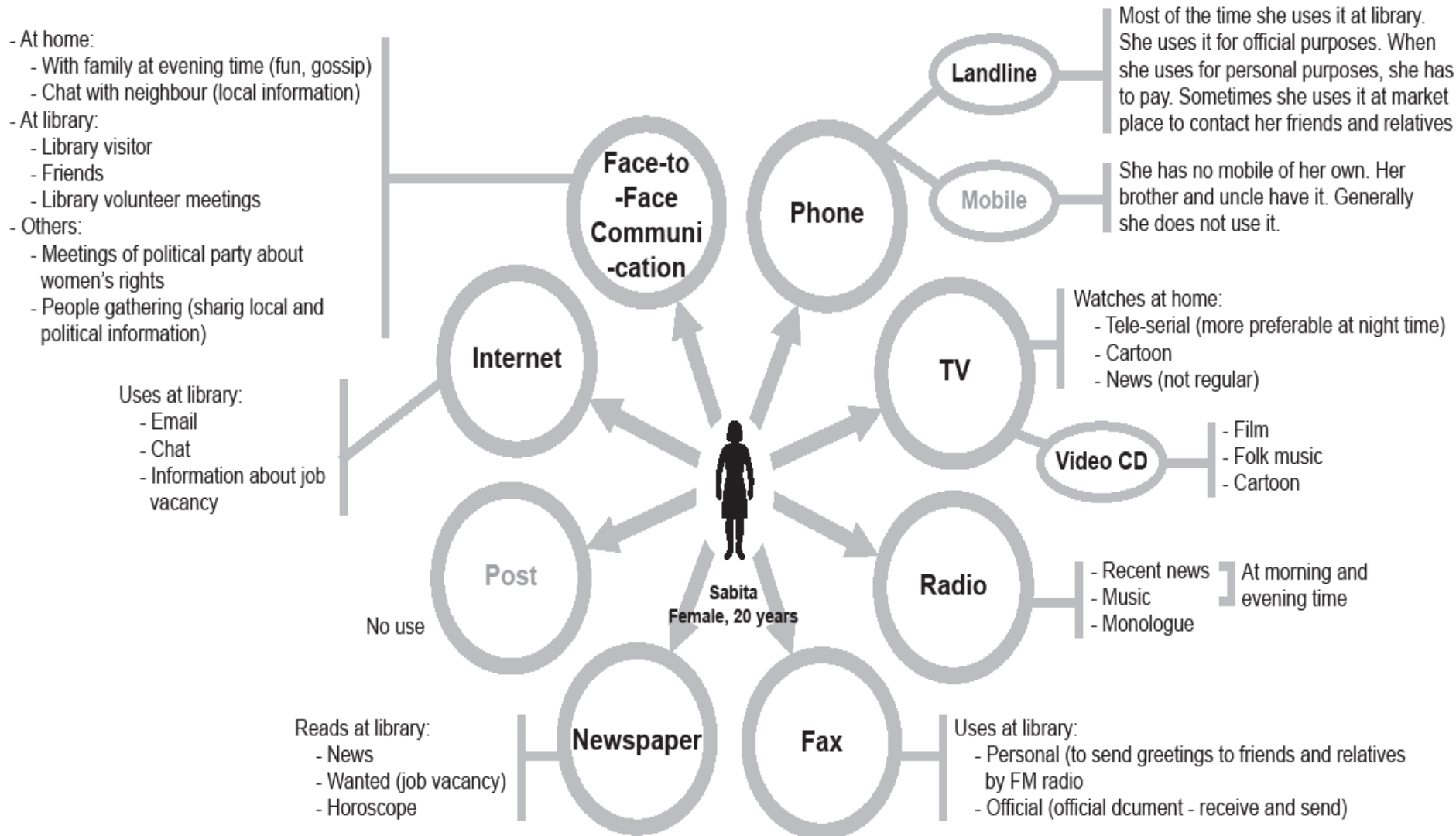
- Developed to capture subtle impacts of communication initiatives
- Uses methods such as participant observation and in depth interviews, and immersion in research sites
- Research fed back into initiatives, using action research
- Adopts a holistic approach; sees initiatives as part of the larger 'communicative ecology'



Communicative Ecology of Sabita

Place: Jhuwani Community Library Date: 25th Feb 2007 Time: 1.00pm to 2.00pm

Library Voluteer, Female, Age: 20



Strengthening programs and M&E systems in Equal Access Nepal

- EAN aimed to improve its programs and M&E practices, and to challenge donor-driven M&E, based on pressures to 'prove' impacts
- Collected and analysed feedback such as listener letters but had not undertaken a rigorous impact assessment of its programs



Radio programs we are focussing the impact assessment on

Saathi Sanga Man Ka Khura (SSMK) (Chatting with my best friend) - youth-oriented; mixes drama, information and listeners feedback

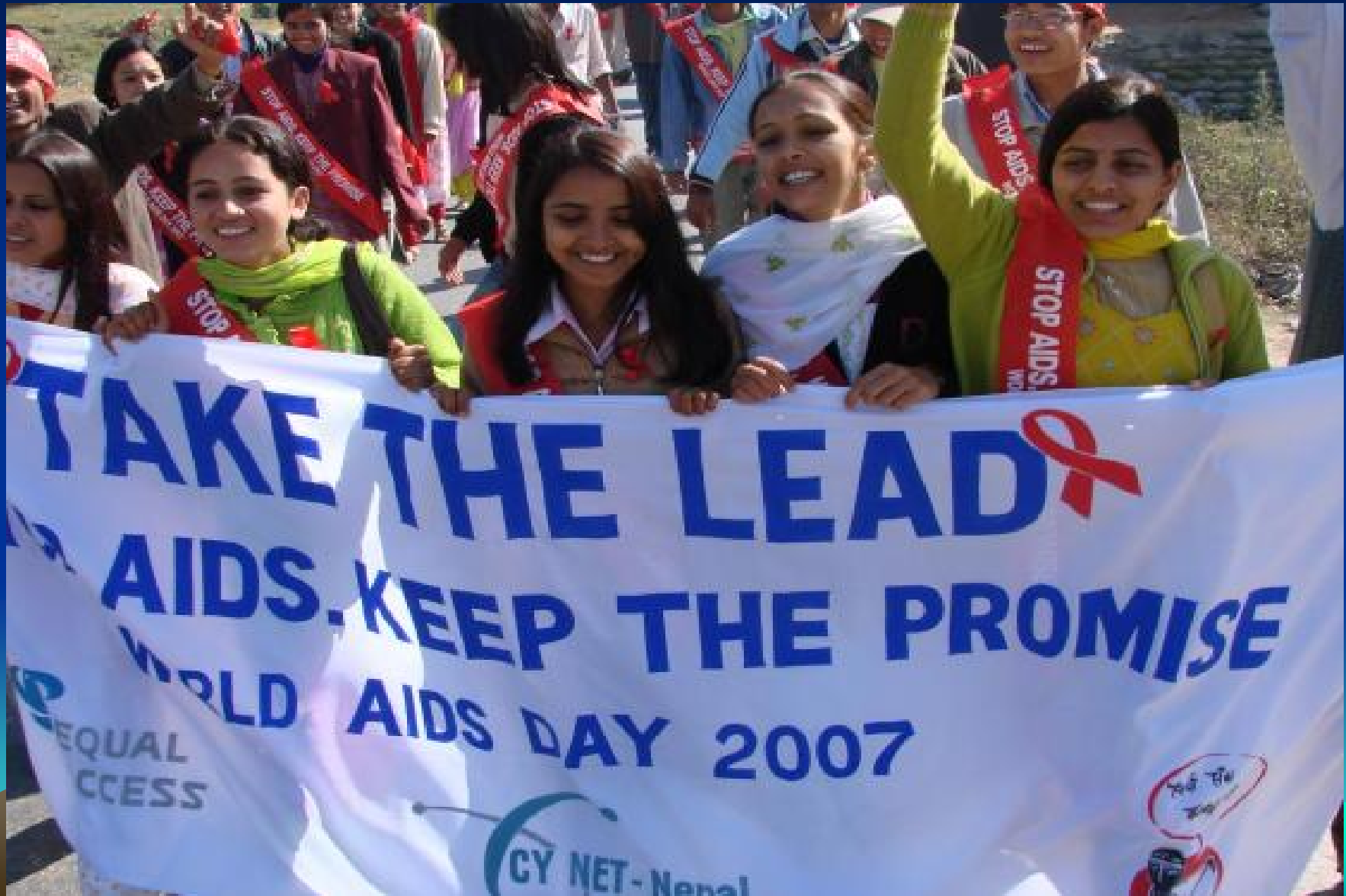
Naya Nepal (New Nepal) - aimed at peace-building and reconciliation



Naya Nepal reporter interviewing Dalit villagers in Sunsari region, south-eastern Nepal



SSMK listener club members at World AIDS Day rally



Some challenges and issues

- Lack of capacity in PM&E and in analysis and management of qualitative data
- Features of Nepal:
 - mountain terrain
 - extreme poverty
 - cultural and linguistic diversity
 - poor transport and communication infrastructure
 - political instability



Maoist demonstration in Bharatphur, Central Terai, during field visit, September 2007



Steps in developing and implementing the impact assessment methodology

- Critically reviewed M&E capacities, systems and practices
- Literature review; developed steps to conduct the impact assessment and develop participatory indicators
- Identified program objectives and stakeholders
- Developed strategies to improve M&E systems
- Build capacities in EAR, PM&E, setting indicators, analysing data etc.



EAN staff engaged in a 'speed dating' training exercise, September 2007



Steps in developing and implementing the methodology (cont.)

- Developed theory of social change matrices
- Identified and did scoping research in case study sites
- Developed an 'EAR Lite' manual and toolkit for community researchers
- Identified and trained community researchers



Extract from SSMK matrix on objective: Impart life skills to youth to enable choice and decision making

Level	Activities	Short-term change	Mid-term change	Long-term change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Listeners •Listener group 	Radio program	Get information	Being aware and initiating dialogue as well as practice	Behavioral change and try to initiate activity for social change
Community	Radio program	Get information	Initiate dialogue & participate in activities	Join groups, form a network and initiate activities
Partners and local organisations	Field visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Updates (programs) •Explore opportunity for working together 	Establish network to work together	Work together to meet the same goals

Challenges, issues and contradictions

- Implementing a more engaged research process
- Initial lack of in-depth and program-related data from community researchers
- Resistance due to complexity of the approach
- Contradiction between ideal of setting participatory indicators and reality of pre-defined objectives and indicators and donor's M&E requirements
- Lack of human resources and time



Challenges, issues and contradictions (cont.)

- Lack of connection between M&E team and SSMK and Naya Nepal teams
- Need to develop a research culture
- Managing and analysing large amounts of qualitative and quantitative data
- Language-related issues
- Hierarchical relationships and culture



Strategies to address the challenges and issues

- Reducing complexity by developing a more streamlined, less technical and more immediate approach, in terms of outcomes
- Improving interaction between M&E and content teams
- Creating and analysing theory of social change matrices
- Developing an ideal M&E model
- Ongoing meta-evaluation and regular critical review of project activities



Review of community researcher activities in Palpa region, June 2008



Some learnings and critical reflections

The 'prove:improve' dichotomy: contradiction between need to present findings that 'prove' impact while also seeking to improve programs through community-based research

Contradiction between requirements for pre-determined program objectives and indicators and the project's aim of developing participatory indicators



Learnings and critical reflections (cont.)

Challenge of grounding M&E at community level and feeding those learnings into EAN's ideas about social change, informed by global, regional and national debates

Redefining 'participatory impact assessment':

- multi-perspective
- themed
- holistic
- flexible



Learnings and critical reflections (cont.)

M&E has the greatest untapped potential for adding value to EAN's programs

However, the M&E team needs a stronger role in setting the agenda regarding program content

Both the M&E and content teams also need to take a more critical approach



Thank you!

Questions?
Comments?

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<http://www.equalaccess.org>

