

Module 2 Unit 2

This is an **OPTIONAL READING: DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS.**

UNICEF (2008). Chatting with my best friend: Nepal's first radio programme created for and by youth (web page). Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/cbsc/index_44205.html. [2 p.]

Chatting with My Best Friend

Nepal's first radio programme created for and by youth



© UNICEF Nepal/2007

Nearly 6 million young Nepalese tune in to the youth-based radio programme 'Saathi Sanga Manka Kura' weekly for guidance on many topics, including HIV/AIDS prevention.

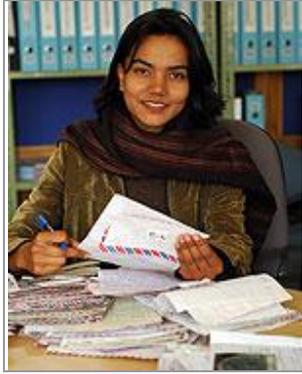
Every Saturday afternoon, over six million young people in Nepal — 20 per cent of the country's population and a whopping 50 per cent of its target audience — tune their radio dials to [Saathi Sanga Manka Kura \(SSMK\) or Chatting with my Best Friend](#).

Developed in response to a surge in HIV infections among youth in high risk groups in Nepal (from 2 per cent in 1995 to nearly 50 per cent in 1998 among injecting drug users) and to surveys showing relatively low levels of knowledge about AIDS among young people (especially females), the radio programme engages listeners in discussions with its charismatic hosts — the "best friends" — about how to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS. Young people are also given tips to negotiate relationships, continue their education and explore career opportunities. **"In Nepal it is hard to talk openly about sex and love," said one Nepali youth in a letter to the show. "But in Saathi Sanga Manka Kura there are no taboos."** Episodes are presented in an entertaining manner, through lively discussions and short, hard-hitting dramas, interspersed with popular music — and aim to break the silence surrounding the physiological and emotional changes accompanying puberty and adolescence.

"In Nepal it is hard to talk openly about sex and love," said one Nepali youth in a letter to the show. "But in Saathi Sanga Manka Kura there are no taboos. Here young Nepalis learn how to take care of themselves and each other." The show receives some 1,200 to 1,400 letters per month; every one of them is answered, and four or five are carefully selected to address in each broadcast.

A thorough understanding of the audience has been a key to the success of SSMK and it came by way of two years of research, planning and training carried out by UNICEF Nepal. The process started with the 1999 launch of a **Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice and Skills (KAPS) survey** of a representative sample of 1,400 Nepali teenagers throughout the country. Findings indicated that Nepali youth had little or no access to reliable life skills information and there were few people with whom they could speak openly about their feelings and problems.

The show is researched, presented and run by a team of Nepali producers between the ages of 21 and 28 years and aims to be non-judgmental — seeking less to "solve the problems" of Nepalese youth and more to motivate them to analyze their own situations and choose the right solution for themselves.



© UNICEF/NEP00959/ Bogati

The team of young producers from the award-winning 'Saathi Sanga Manka Koora' radio programme of Equal Access Nepal.

Unlike television (which is expensive and limited in reach in this mountainous nation) and print (which requires literacy), radio has been an appropriate choice as a communication vehicle: it is convenient, trusted and low-cost. Broadcast over Radio Nepal, the Equal Access Satellite Channel and over 30 FM radio stations throughout the country, SSMK is able to reach rural areas, an important factor given that earlier efforts reached youth only in urban areas, particularly the capital, Kathmandu.

Another innovation is that SSMK's on air programming is accompanied and reinforced by a growing grassroots network of over 1,000 self-organized "**listening clubs**" scattered throughout the country. The clubs, which emerged ten months after the show first went on the air, discuss the issues raised in the programme and initiate activities to build awareness and life skills. In Palpa district, for example, the listeners' club formed a partnership with the local health centre, and organized a three-day workshop to educate adolescents about sexual and reproductive health. Another listeners' club partnered with a local school to organize discussions on gender and caste discrimination.

To ensure the show's long-term sustainability, a partnership was formed with Equal Access Nepal, a local NGO, two years after the SSMK's inception. Since its launch, SSMK has doubled in length to one hour weekly, spawned a spin-off show focusing on careers, and spurred other media initiatives, including a quarterly magazine and a monthly regional youth magazine. Inspired by SSMK's success in Nepal, similar projects have been launched in Cambodia and Laos.

Even as Nepal undergoes a substantial political transition, SSMK has become a trusted voice of hope for youth in a critical time, and a model of good practice for the field of communication for development.