



“The program which you are implementing is bringing a massive change in our village. The parents who had old concepts started going to the health post directly instead of to the Shaman (traditional doctor), and they are giving more attention to the well-planned family.”

—Prem Prakash Neupane, radio listener



Two Nepali health workers compare notes after listening to the radio program.

Distance Education Works

Improves Quality of Care by Stimulating Client Demand and Provider Skills

Two enter-educate serial radio soap operas were broadcast in Nepal in 1996. Each of the serials consisted of 52 episodes. One, *Cut Your Coat According to Your Cloth*, was written to encourage the general public to appreciate the importance of a “well-planned family” and to seek contraceptive services from their health workers. The other, *Service Brings Rewards*, was designed as a distance education series to improve the technical knowledge and the counseling skills of rural health workers with regard to contraceptive services. While *Service Brings Rewards* addressed the supply side of health services, *Cut Your Coat According to Your Cloth* was designed to increase demand.

Both serials had substantial impact. At two rural clinics in Dang, client visits more than doubled during the campaign periods (see Figure 1 below). Almost half of the villagers queried (45%) listened to *Cut Your Coat According to Your Cloth* and almost three quarters (72%) of the health workers listened to *Service Brings Rewards*. Skills improved and were highest when both the health workers and their clients had listened to one or both programs—demonstrating the synergistic impact of the two coordinated programs.

The Distance Education Program uses an innovative format, combining drama and interactive question and answer segments. Each of

the 52 episodes contains two drama segments and two interactive segments. The program host asks the listeners to give immediate oral responses to questions about what they have learned from the scene of the drama that they have just heard.

Interactivity is also included during the 5-minute “listener forum” segment at the end of each program. Listeners are invited to send in letters with questions and comments about the programs, which are read during this segment. Listeners also are encouraged to discuss program content with their colleagues and check program content with their support print materials.

RESPONDING TO NEEDS

Service Brings Rewards was created in response to two needs: 1) face-to-face training is nearly impossible for the vast majority of Nepal's rural health workers, because of the difficulties of the terrain and shortage of funds for training, and 2) many Nepali people had expressed their dislike of going to health workers for family planning services. They feared being given incorrect, inaccurate or at best insufficient information, and being treated in a less than friendly manner.

Figure 1. Flow of clients to two rural sentinel health posts in Dang, Nepal 1994-1996.



MOH/PCS Monitoring Study, 1997, Service Statistics

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radio was an obvious medium through which to help overcome the first need. Drama was an exciting choice to meet the second need. Events and situations in the drama provided listening health workers with a clear and personal understanding of their clients' needs, and role-model characters demonstrated effective client-provider interactions. For example, in one scene from the drama, the health

young girls who are trying to learn more about "taboo" subject. She is able to assure them that it is their right to know about their reproductive capacities and she counsels them gently and wisely (see Box 1).

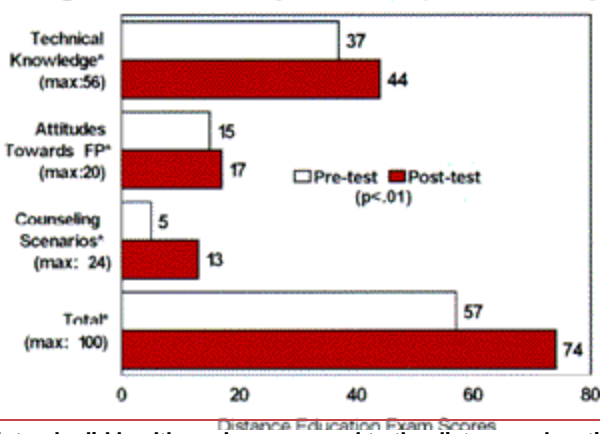
INNOVATIVE DESIGN

A major contribution to the success of both of the Nepal serials was their meticulous design. A design team was established consisting of content specialists, media specialists, ministry and audience representatives, researchers and funding agency representatives. The team worked together in a week-long design workshop to create a design document. The writers used these design documents to introduce the key messages into the story naturally, gradually and subtly. The messages agreed upon during the design workshop were influenced by, and in turn influenced, the new National Family Planning Counseling Training Program which included print materials, workshops, and a series of advocacy orientation meetings for regional and district level policy makers.

To succeed, distance education programs must be systematically designed, interactive, motivational, and suited to the needs, current knowledge, and learning style of the audience, and be supported by media.

Service Brings Rewards concentrated on providing health workers with specific information and skills, which research had shown they needed. The main aim of the series was to show health workers how to instruct and counsel their clients, so the information was presented in the simple methods and language that health workers should use, rather than in highly technical language. Health workers were provided with support print materials, while radio spots and jingles reinforced the messages of both serials.

Figure 2. Average pre- and post-test scores by categories of skills: Nepal Distance Education Project.



Not only did health workers exposed to the distance education program significantly increase their test scores (see above) but also their overall scores (10.1) exceeded those of workers trained in person (9.6) or not trained at all (5.9).

Cut Your Coat According to Your Cloth encouraged community members to take a more positive view of health workers and seek useful guidance from them on modern family planning methods. The other aim of the serial was to help overcome reticence about visiting health workers and belief in rumors. One character, the flute-playing Firfire, used local proverbs, such as "Don't cry about the crow stealing your ear, until you have checked both your ears," to persuade people to learn the facts about contraceptives rather than being swayed by rumors. The wide range of characters in this serial, from the argumentative village leaders to the foolish servant who believed in ghosts, provided reference points for many listeners, who recognized their own villages in the fictional village of Salghari.

POSITIVE IMPACT

Impact is measured by (1) focus group discussions; (2) pre/post tests with health workers; (3) analysis of nationally representative surveys; (4) a panel design study; (5) three waves of clinic-based observation; and (6) exit interviews with clients. The Radio Communication Project in Nepal succeeds by strategically integrating distance education and entertainment-education to address both the supply and demand sides of health services. The project demonstrates that the use of enter-educate serial drama can effectively motivate social change and teach specific counseling skills.

Health Communication: Lessons from Family Planning and Reproductive Health by Phyllis Tilson Piotrow, D. Lawrence Kincaid, Jose G. Rimón II, and Ward Rinehart, distills what JHU/PCS and its partners have learned about the design, implementation, and evaluation of effective health communication campaigns.



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BOX 1.

Too Embarrassed to Ask

[Excerpt from *Service Brings Rewards*]

SAR: Look, Kamala... [the health worker] is coming this way. I'm too shy to ask her about this sort of thing. I don't even like to talk about it at all.

LAX: But, Saraswati, I WANT to know. We should know these sorts of things.

KAL: Ooh, look, Laxmi, she's coming right over here. If you want to ask, ask her now. There's nobody around. What can go wrong if you ask her?

KAM: (COMING IN) What's up sisters? What are you giggling and laughing about? Or, am I not allowed to listen?

SAR: It's nothing, sister Kamala. We're just talking to ourselves. (GIGGLING)

LAX: No, no, Kamala, sister, it's not like that. Actually we WANT to ask you some thing. But we're too shy to ask you...

KAM: (GENTLY) You're just like someone asking for churned yoghurt but not offering your cup. You want to know, but you don't want to ask. So, what is it?

LAX: (SHYLY) We...we wanted to know about... (QUICKLY) the changes in a girl's body as she grows up.

[The health worker answers their questions later in the episode.]

"I feel like being at the top of Mt. Everest when I listen to your radio program. This program has been immensely valuable to me—like gold."

—Tara Sagar, radio listener, Gothgaon District, Nepal

COMMUNICATION Impact!

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