Mobilising communities for sexual and reproductive health promotion.

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Campbell, C, Cornish, F (accepted) How can community health programmes build enabling environments for transformative communication? Experiences from India and South Africa. *AIDS and Behaviour*.

1. Introduction
Contrasting case studies: both used peer education as starting point for community mobilisation – through involving highly marginalised women in HIV/AIDS management.

**Entabeni**: rural South Africa – home nursing skills

**Sonagachi**: Kolkata, India – HIV prevention and condom distribution
• HEALTH ENABLING SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS:

i.e. social contexts that enable and support the possibility of health-enhancing attitudes and behaviour change

**3 dimensions of context**

- Symbolic
- Material
- Relational
Symbolic:
Meanings, ideologies, worldviews through which people understand selves, others, activities they are engaged in

Honneth’s theory of recognition:
Person or group’s worth, dignity, concrete achievements, legal rights
Material:

Resource-based agency

Concrete opportunities for people to act in ways that reflect agency
Relational:

Democratic and accountable leadership

Bonding and bridging social capital
Spivak (1988): ‘strategic alliances’
2. Case studies
2.1 Sonagachi Project
Sonagachi Project
2.2 The Entabeni Project
Project: Three Strategies

1. Strengthen existing volunteer team through skills building
2. Strengthen local support structures for volunteers
3. Build partnerships with outside agencies in public and NGO sectors
Building volunteer skills?
Mobilising local support for volunteers?
Building bridges between volunteers and external partners?
3. Entabeni vs Sonagachi?

Sonagachi managed to facilitate
-symbolic
-material
-relational
changes that supported effective community mobilisation in ways that Entabeni did not
3.1 Creating **symbolic** contexts for transformative communication?
What **symbolic** factors facilitated programme success?

Entabeni – stigmatisation of

- AIDS (immoral, shameful)
- caring (just ‘women’s work’)
- volunteering
Sonagachi: managed to frame HIV as an occupational health issue

Sex workers seen as successful and legitimate workers who needed to unite to secure their rights
Very different political contexts – West Bengal vs traditional rural South Africa
• Symbolic power of External Change Agents
Funders’ willingness to see empowerment as a fundable outcome
Entabeni funders did not see empowerment of poor as ‘a deliverable of value to the US government’
Sonagachi: managed to ‘sell’ empowerment as a legitimate thing to fund
-worked hard to build its public image, this filtered thro to funders
Growing influence on national and international AIDS policy
3.2 Material contexts for transformative communication?

Resource-based agency
Son: peer educators get small payment
Entabeni: no luck in securing stipends
Experiential-based agency (small wins)
Son: successful peer ed experience used as first steps to promoting wider experiences of empowerment
Ent: no opportunities for women to export their new experiences of agency from peer ed to other contexts
Income generation

Son: co-operative bank
• Ent: less success here – because there was no economic gain associated with involvement, project failed to resonate with peoples’ economic aspirations
3.3 Relational contexts for transformative communication?
Leadership and decision-making

Son: gradual involvement of women in organisational decision-making and leadership
Ent: strong resistance to any aspect of female empowerment
Son: careful management of power relations
Bridging social capital: building outside support for project activities

Ent: success with small NGOs - immediately responsive - individuals - shoestring budgets
Ent: Despite monumental efforts, project failed to establish long-term partnerships with local government bodies, including health, welfare and municipality.
Son: build excellent productive links with relevant groups – pimps and madams; media, politicians, funders etc – all of whom saw they had something to gain from project involvement
4. Conclusion
• How can social development projects best create social environments that enable transformative communication?
1. **Improvisation vs blueprint**

Son: long-term, improvisational approach, evolved in organic way, built on small achievements

Ent: followed a pre-determined project proposal (albeit rooted in 12 months of research and consultation)
2. Providing incentives for potential allies

Son – shrewd incentivising, and gradualist approach

Captured personal, political and economic interests of relevant groups in quite a shrewd, almost calculating way – leading to meaningful support for the project and the women

The challenge of creating conditions where
• the poor have voice, and
• where relevant social groups are willing to listen, may often involve real-politik rather than mutually respective dialogue