

SFCG – Macedonia: *Nashe Maalo* Key Findings from 2004 External Evaluation

“NM is the first TV program for children in Macedonia that promotes intercultural understanding and encourages conflict prevention in a multicultural society.”

Search for Common Ground is an international non-governmental organization that works to transform the way the world deals with conflict: away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions. With programs in or with 14 countries, our “toolbox” includes mediation/facilitation, shuttle diplomacy, training, radio/TV, journalism, sports, drama, and music. *Nashe Maalo* (“Our Neighbourhood”) produced by SFCG-Macedonia, is a television series aimed at promoting inter-cultural understanding among children with a view to conflict transformation. It began running in October 1999, and finished at the end of 2004 for a total of 42 episodes. Each 30-minute show is about the daily life of eight children from Macedonian, Roma, Turkish, and Albanian ethnic groups, who live together in one house or in the same neighbourhood.

EVALUATION SCOPE

Search for Common Ground commissioned this evaluation in the summer of 2004 to contribute to the organisation’s understanding and continuous learning of intended-outcomes media as well as to expand peace-building evaluation methodology. This evaluation focused on assessing the achievement of the intended objectives of *Nashe Maalo* (NM) as well as determining the breadth of viewership. In addition, the evaluation sought to ascertain the contribution of NM to the wider Macedonia situation, despite this not being part of the original project expectations. The objectives of the *Nashe Maalo* programme were:

- 1) Promotion of intercultural understanding
- 2) Conflict prevention through increased cultural awareness
- 3) Promotion of conflict resolution skills

The evaluators also put forth recommendations for future SFCG intended-outcomes television projects.

Independent evaluators Emery Brusset and Ralf Otto of Channel Research submitted the evaluation report in December 2004.

KEY FINDINGS

54% of the children talk in one way or the other about Nashe Maalo with their siblings and over 61% of the children discuss the show with their friends.

Audience Information and Focus Group Results

The viewership survey of 1,202 children shows that SFCGM created a high quality programme that did not leave out any members of the target group. Bearing in mind that the first step to influence people is to reach them, *Nashe Maalo* has fulfilled this task in a difficult environment. Children and adults from different ethnic groups, from different regions in Macedonia and from villages as well as from cities, watched *Nashe Maalo* in high numbers.

- 94% of the children have heard of the show, and more than 91% watch it at least once. Only 5.7 % have not heard of *Nashe Maalo* at all.



Nashe Maalo stars Karmen, an animated building with a voice, who gives advice and suggestions to help kids identify possible solutions to problems they encounter.

Viewers understand the “NM logic”: the more open attitude of “inclusivity” pioneered by the show. They see it as positive and as a possible model for thinking and dealing with conflicts in daily life in Macedonia.

- The high percentage of children (45%) that talk about the show with their parents reflects the level of their interest and facilitates the dissemination of the messages to a much wider population than just the primary target group.
- A significant unintended impact has been on the adult population. NM has become a recognised and appreciated point of reference for adults as well as for children.

Impact on Children in Macedonia

The data describe a widely known show, with a large number of children who are continually exposed to its influence. The programme has been accepted by members of various ethnic communities, and has become a part of children’s everyday life by being watched collectively within the family, discussed, and is a shared moment in the daily life of children in both urban and rural environments.

- The research confirms the assumption made by Search in the design of intended-outcomes that children are naturally open minded on the subject of inter-group relationships, in spite of the fact that many have been exposed to specific negative notions regarding others. Nashe Maalo succeeded in getting new messages to the children and made them discuss the messages with peers and parents.
- It is seen that all children have acquired certain knowledge about conflicts, which they can formulate in their own words, but they have not assimilated the acquired knowledge and they have difficulties in applying the models learned in everyday life.
- Children who watch NM over a longer time period learn more concrete information about other ethnic communities and other languages in their country, going beyond external attire and eating. They find out about conflict resolutions skills and alternative models for behaviour.
- The attitudes presented as desirable for children to have do not manage to influence an actual change of the children’s opinions and become applicable in the everyday life. The research was not able to define what the reason for this was.

Recommendation: The evaluators conclude that the reason NM did not cause concrete changes in behavior and action in children was because NM was not followed up by like-minded programmes. The evaluators recommend that Search work to a much greater extent in the content of production and follow up activities (competitions, outreach, etc.) on the incorporation of NM into everyday inter-ethnic relations. It should become clearer in the subsequent phases that the message of NM is more than fiction.

Contributions to Macedonian Society

The focus of Nashe Maalo was on how children understand and deal with conflict in their daily lives. The evaluation also took the opportunity to look at contributions made by the programme to Macedonian society as a whole. This was done in terms of outcomes (defined as: audience, changes in knowledge attitudes and to a certain extent behaviour) and impact (defined as: Nashe Maalo as a social model, as a source of new interaction, and as the opportunity for future similar initiatives).

These contributions, particularly concerning children, are in some aspects good and in others leave a lot of room for strengthening:

- Nashe Maalo succeeded in creating a highly attractive reference point for children and parents for transferring knowledge about the social “other”, and for strengthening the independent media sector.
- Yet, Nashe Maalo was not able to take root in the society and become sustainable both in terms of enacting changes in behaviour, and in terms of tomorrow’s institutional and resource environments. The research confirms the finding in the *Mapping of Change* component of the evaluation that there is a gap between the show and perceived “reality” in which one must live.
- TV is clearly the right medium in Macedonia to communicate a message such as that of “Nashe Maalo logic” (the more open attitude of “inclusivity” and embracing diversity). However, an excellent children’s TV series can only have limited

“NM was very important as a model for the society generally, beyond the mere audience of children. NM was the first show of its kind (intended for children, as well as in its multi-ethnic approach generally), and so filled a gap and achieved a high degree of visibility.”

influence in a climate marked by segregation and a polarised ethnic environment. However, Nashe Maalo provided a national reference point and created a valid impact model.

- Among those areas in Macedonian society that NM is seen as able to influence are the reinforcement of societal identities and the independence of the media.

Recommendation: Nashe Maalo has created an opportunity for an indigenous message with conflict transformation potential, but needs to continue capitalising on it if it is to have an impact on the conflict. This can be done by (A) preparing a new programme which will continue to follow the Nashe Maalo primary audience (now entering political life) and begin targeting the secondary audience (educated adults) and by (B) creating “spawns of Nashe Maalo” in other cultural fora, to ensure that it becomes more integrated into national references.

Lessons Learned: A Revision of Original Assumptions

The findings lead to a series of lessons learned, which when reviewed in terms of original assumptions, would allow a new programme to capitalise fully on its very real successes. Some of the revised assumptions include:

Assumptions made originally	Revision based on lessons learned
The quality of the programme depends on a comprehensive list of intended outcomes, agreed at the beginning, which serve as a backdrop to the programme.	The list of intended outcomes should be less extensive and more related to changes in society, and regularly updated to highlight controlled changes made to the programme.
More exposure to the programme (i.e. children must be familiar with NM) leads to better impact on society.	Exposure must be accompanied by a follow-up action of a different kind, to engrain NM in reality.
Children exposed to NM will naturally resist more ambient attitudes and will influence the adults.	Children remain highly susceptible to the influence of the world of adults; this programme should be complementary to others aimed at adults.
TV can have an impact on attitudes and behaviour.	TV is best at transmitting knowledge, than at transmitting elements of attitudes and behaviour.

Correct assumptions were made by Search however on a number of counts. The first of these was to render the programme as culturally relevant as possible to Macedonian culture, choosing the production staff and the actors from the country, emphasizing technical realism to a very high degree. The assumptions made about the power of television, about using an indirect narrative structure rather than a didactic lecturing tone, have also proved to be very much on target.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- NM has given Search a strong “brand” in Macedonia which would be lost were it not followed up by future programmes.
- In the early stages avoid making technical quality of the programme the primary focus, and ensure a planning process which includes some form of analysis of the needs of the context (country, problems to be resolved) so that the impact is not lost as a criterion of quality.
- Design programmes which are based on clearly defined intended outcomes of a finite number, articulated in phases over the life of the project, on the basis of the conflict assessment. These outcomes should be underpinned by a few indicators, and if possible, a baseline/initial conditions survey to monitor progress rather than formative research which only allows for the tuning of the content of the message.



The cast of Nashe Maalo performs at a Skopje music festival.



Filming an episode of Nashe Maalo in Skopje, Macedonia

- Work to a much greater extent on the content of the production and follow up with outreach activities on the incorporation of NM into everyday inter-ethnic relations.
- Integrate the end stages of the project more into the national networks of NGOs working in the media and/or multi-ethnic context.
- Include “a theory of change” in the curriculum/intended-outcomes document.

Practical Application of Findings

The evaluation led SFCG to several conclusions beyond the evaluation contents that will inform future programming.

Do more social unit analysis (before and throughout production) in terms of:

- Objects of change (what needs to change)
- Context of change (what is occurring in the environment/society/conflict situation)
- Agents/triggers of change (what is creating change)
- Relationship of the above to viewers and their viewing habits to be sure all necessary segments of population are viewing the programme and having appropriate elements for them on screen and in outreach.

Reverse, or at least equalize, resources spent on outreach and production

- Align production and outreach more equitably
- Align outreach more with the way(s) the target audience experiences the issues being addressed.

Obtain more institutional involvement, especially in outreach, for impact and sustainability.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation combined two small-scale research models. Social surveys concentrated on the changes sought in the population’s knowledge of, attitudes toward, and behaviour concerning conflict resolution. The second component, called “Mapping of Change”, attempts to answer the “*so what?*” question: what wider impact do changes among children have on intercommunal relations and then on the broader conflict? To do this the evaluation mapped the links between the project’s outcomes (intended and unintended) and changes in relations in the country.

Channel Research is a Belgium based independent private consulting company with expertise in evaluations and social impact assessments. Emery Brusset has ten years’ experience in evaluation consultancy, specialising in the design of methodologies for unstable environments. Ralf Otto has experience in evaluations, research and private sector development programmes in Africa, Eastern and South Eastern Europe.

Source: The majority of this document was taken verbatim from the Evaluation of Nashe Maalo, December 2004. For the full evaluation report, please refer to:

www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/evaluations.html