

Community Building

The main tool that we use for building community – be it in social community or rural development or in an organisation - is Appreciative Inquiry. It is based around enquiry – finding the right questions to ask. Our learning around community building comes from our experiences both working with villagers in Nepal to build and develop rural communities and from building and developing organisational capacity around the world. After all, organisations are communities of individuals who are working to (hopefully) a shared goal. The way that communities work is the same whether they are rural or otherwise.

The *Oxford Dictionary* describes a community as a: “Group of people living in one place or having same religion, ethnic origin, profession, etc.” What our community in this workshop has “the same”, therefore, is a desire to learn how to build and enable communities. So we can learn together and share our thinking. What we share is an approach and a paradigm of abundance and possibility. We look for strengths to build upon rather than weakness to try to ‘fix’.

When we build and enable communities using Appreciative Inquiry we think quite carefully about the question we might ask. This is one of the most important parts of the process. In a village we might ask people to tell us about a time that they worked well together, that they achieved something together that they could not have achieved on their own. We ask them about what their ‘prouds’ were: moments when they were proud to belong to that village. What did others do to support them? How did it feel? What else was going on? We recall a powerful sense of belonging, of receiving warmth and love, of seeing life in a positive rather than negative light. This stage is called ‘Discovery’.

Often we do this with a piece of A4 paper and give everyone a pen to draw a picture. When we work with a group that includes illiterate villagers, we ensure that no one uses writing – we ask everyone to draw pictures so that no one is made to feel bad. We could also ask people to do this in pairs or in groups – it rather depends on the circumstances and you need to be sensitive to that.

Next, we ask what else we could do with those wonderful, positive resources. What could we build in the future for our children and grandchildren? How could we think big, basing this ‘blue-sky’ thinking on what we know works well? How can we build upon the strengths that we have already identified? This is called ‘Dreaming’.

We share our dream(s) in the larger group. In our experience, as we’ve said, you need to be sensitive to the local culture. For instance, in Nepal we separate the group into men, women and children allowing each group to work on its own. If we did not do this, only the men would speak. Each group then presents to everyone. Again, we are sensitive and ask the women and

children to speak before the men. We then ask all of them (still working in their smaller groups) to think about what they have seen from everyone and to build upon the ideas they've seen.

From this we move on to what we COULD make happen and 'Design'. People in the groups look at the 'big' dream we have all had together and decide which of the things in the dream are things that they can make happen **now**, and which need to happen later or not at all. How do we make them happen? What resources or organisation do we need? Who do we think we need to talk to? What kind of help do we need?

And finally individuals or groups commit to action – what they will do to make the dreams reality. We call this Delivery. Individuals stand up and tell the group what they will do. It is VERY important at this stage to ask the question, "What WILL you do?" No should's, might's, could's; this is about commitment to action. It doesn't matter what language you speak either – it is imperative that the question is asked such that commitment arises from it.

We finish the session by asking what we could all do right now. It might be cleaning up a schoolyard, or carrying rocks to a central point so that a wall can be built or repairing something. Whatever it is, people quickly see that if we all work on it, whatever the job is, it is done quickly. We make sure that we ask for feedback so that everyone gets this (there will always be a few who don't).

Finally we have a bit of dancing and we bring drums to celebrate what we've dreamed and achieved.

By itself, a session like this is not likely to achieve as much as a process that is iterative. In Phakhel, over a period of 18 months we had 4 sessions like this. We worked with whomever was available and wanted to provide input, we worked in the time they gave us (usually 2-3 hours) and we saved the drawings on flip-charts in the school (we met in the schoolyard) so that we could bring them out and re-visit them.

The follow-up sessions were a similar 7 D cycle, the difference being that the 'Discovery' stage was discovering what we had achieved and celebrating that. If you had done something, you could announce it, but it was not a place for excuses about why something hadn't happened. If you had nothing positive to add about what you had achieved, you did not get the opportunity to speak. This was quite interesting from some of the elites of the village, who were used to talking a lot and not doing much!

Then the 'Dream' was re-visited and we checked off those things that had been achieved, looked again at what next steps should be, noted whether there were things to add and continued around the cycle.

The best part of all was when we returned to the village for a meeting and were met by some villagers who told us that we didn't need to have another

meeting just now, because they knew how to do it by themselves now; they didn't need us to run it anymore. That was a 'proud' for us!

We hope that you find these insights useful and do let us know how you get on. We are happy to help if you get stuck (always an opportunity for us to learn), and delighted to hear about your success.

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