Capacity Building as Unlocking the Capacity Within: Findings from 15 International Cases

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CAPACITY BUILDING AS UNLOCKING THE EXPERT WITHIN: FINDINGS
FROM 15 INTERNATIONAL CASES

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ABSTRACT

Through an examination of the processes associated with 15 capacity building interventions undertaken in 10 countries from 4 continents, the paper seeks to delineate core conditions and processes associated with interventions that seek to build organizing capacities while honoring the inherent strengths of the local communities and Non-Governmental Organizations.

Based on an analysis of the strategies used in moving the projects from conception to completion, conclusions are presented in five propositions; Capacity building initiatives that truly honor local capacities and indigenous wisdom (a) generate cooperative consciousness by engaging the community in a reflection of what it deeply values about its past followed by a speculation about a desirable, positively valued future, (b) cause a fundamental shift in the direction of an internal locus of responsibility (c) refocus a community’s pride in the resources available to it locally, (d) induce the community to reframe the antecedent condition in affirmative terms, from a problem to be solved to a possibility waiting to be realized, (e) set in motion a centrifugal pattern of conversations that are initiated by an individual or a small group but move outward encompassing more and more people in expanding circles of inquiry and dialogue around possibility.

In the context of the theme, “Change and Development Journeys in a Pluralistic World”, the authors discuss challenges arising from a philosophical incompatibility
between the fundamental “indigenous” stance of capacity building and the “expert-driven” paradigms of western social science research.

**Key Words:** Capacity Building/ development
INTRODUCTION

One of the central challenges in the domain of development work is the search for a theory that advances our ability to engage in the practice of capacity building (CDRA 1995). Strengthening people’s capacity to choose their own values and to empower them to act on the basis of these values is now seen as the central challenge of development (Eade & Williams 1995). Practitioners and theoreticians have become increasingly interested in capacity building approaches that (1) actively involve the community members in the enactment of their own futures and (2) produce sustainable changes that endure well beyond the point when the external intervention ceases (Eade 1997). This rapidly expanding interest has resulted in the delineation of an identifiable literature stream and body of practice directly bearing on capacity building in civil society. Within this broad stream of professional and scholarly interest, Eade (1997) identifies two tributaries of capacity building effort; capacity building in the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and capacity building in civil society. The former has a predominantly organizational emphasis and encompasses initiatives that are intended to “strengthen organizations to perform specified activities (one of which may be to build capacity among primary stakeholders through a process of reflection, leadership, inspiration, adaptation and search for greater coherence between NGO mission, structure and activities” (p 35). The latter has a predominantly societal emphasis, encompasses all the major players in civil society and consists of efforts to “strengthen capacity of primary stakeholders to implement defined activities, foster communication, processes of debate, relationship building, conflict resolution and improved ability of society to deal with its differences..” (p35). This paper examines 15 cases of capacity building
interventions undertaken internationally in both contexts, in nongovernmental organizations as well as in the grass root level communities that are a subset of the broader civil society.

**Awakening from the Expert-driven Drift**

There is increasing evidence in the social change and international development arenas that attests to a gradual paradigmatic shift away from expert driven approaches to development. This repudiation of the development paradigm of the 1980's is eloquently expressed in the writings of such development scholars and activists as Samir Amin, Peggy Antrobus, David Brown, Robert Chambers, Gustavo Esteva, Paulo Freire, Susan Gerooge, Ivan Illich, Devaki Jain, Martin Khor, David Korten, Rajni Kothari, Mahmood Mamdani, Manfred Max-Neef, Wolfgang Sachs, Amartya Sen, Vandana Shiva and Rajesh Tandon. The pendulum has clearly swung toward approaches that are based on active participation, particularly the active involvement of individuals at the community level in the visualization and enactment of their own futures (Brown 1993; Healey and Shaw 1993; Tacconi and Tisdell 1993). The same shift is also evident in the narrower area of project planning and execution, where there is growing concern over and a search for ways in which social change and development projects can be enacted within a paradigm that supports the active pursuit of self reliance by the constituencies being served, resulting in active citizen participation in project planning and execution (Eziakor 1989). Equally influential in shaping the character of civil society capacity building is the vociferous call for intervention technologies that produce sustainable changes of enduring consequence (Adams 1979; Pfeffer 1994; Shrivastava 1995). In addition, there is a growing sense of disenchantment with the applied behavioral sciences for harbouring
quick-fix approaches that are one shot interventions whose impact dissipates rapidly with
time (Srikantia and Bilimoria 1997). These megatrends pose some serious dilemmas to
western educated development professionals who have been involved either in the
providing of training and educational input to indigenous social change professionals or
in the orchestration of capacity building interventions in the communities that they seek
to serve (Gran 1983; Eade 1997). Firstly, this perspective implies that training and
educational input that is disseminated without engaging the recipients in active, self
directed processes of inquiry can foster in the recipients an attitude of dependence toward
the education providers. There is much concern expressed in the literature over the ways
in which technocratically literate professionals, in their mislaced zeal for “helping”
disenfranchised communities, may actually erode the capacity of indigenous populations
for active self determination and inhibit their ability to develop solutions that are
internally consistent with their culturally determined weltanschauungs (Galtung 1980;
Friere 1972). Secondly, the traditional approaches toward disseminating expertise in this
fashion, it is alleged, tend to fixate disenfranchised beneficiaries in disempowered states
of consciousness and do little to elevate their collective self-esteem. Thirdly, the solutions
implicit in such curricula tend to be exported out of context; the frequent absence of any
deeper referents that help anchor the input to the lived experience and history of the
recipient group is a serious shortcoming bedeviling many traditional approaches to
capacity building (Adams 1979). The rejection of the dominant development paradigm is
eloquenty captured in the Annual Report of the Community Development Resource
Association based in South Africa:
“We all know the classic development cliché...give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach him how to fish, feed him for a lifetime. This is a laudable sentiment but it becomes more complex on two counts. The first we have known for sometime- it does not help to teach people to fish when they are denied equal access to the resource base...But the second complexity is more intractable. What if those of us who claim to do the fishing do not know how to fish?” (CDRA 1995).

The repudiation of expert-driven models of development and the concomitant failure of these models to generate any form of commitment from local beneficiaries has been recognized in the development literature for several decades (Gran 1983; Thomas and Brinkerhoff 1987; Korten 1990). Yet, there have been, in fact, only a few models of development and project execution that are genuinely participatory. Through an examination of the processes associated with 15 capacity building interventions undertaken in ten countries, this paper seeks to delineate some of the core conditions and processes associated with interventions that seek to build local capacities while honoring the inherent strengths of the local communities and the local NGOs. This inquiry represents a vital area of research inasmuch as it seeks to illuminate processes that lie at the intersection of two critical themes: (a) the search for capacity building approaches that actively involve the indigenous community members in the enactment of their own futures and (b) by producing for the focal community an experience of “ownership”, lead to sustainable changes that endure well beyond the point when the external intervention ceases. The investigation and understanding of the processes central to these two concerns, in our view, is critical to the potential of the management sciences to make a meaningful contribution to the practice of development.
Toward Sustainable Interventions for Change

There is a considerable body of literature in the applied behavioral sciences arguing for closer attention to be paid to the sustainability of interventions; there is growing concern that many so called ‘capacity building’ interventions developed within the context of a consultancy based western paradigm are one-shot, producing changes that dissipate rapidly when examined within a longitudinal frame of reference. The challenge of sustaining change and transformation has been a recurring theme in several professional settings including training and development, laboratory learning, organizational change (Beer and Walton 1990) and community transformation (Roumasset 1990).

The change management literature, which constitutes the educational foundation for most organizational development professionals in the Western for-profit and non-profit domains, has been emphatic in its focus on continuous improvement and innovation as the key to success in the contemporary global firmament. Interest in the ubiquity of societal and organizational change is reflected in both scholarly and practitioner literature streams (Drucker 1992). Our reading of the change management literature indicates a strong bias in favor of the need for continuous revision in practices and the consistent neglect of how historically valuable practices can be sustained over time. The recent flurry of interest in the learning organization reinforces this concern over increasing the range of potential behaviors available to an organization or to a community, placing the spotlight on the acquisition of new responses rather than on the retention of existing ones. Only recently has the literature on organizational change attempted to focus some attention on the role of continuity (Srivastva and Fry 1992;
Collins and Porras 1994). Therefore, an important issue in civil society and in organization capacity building is a recognition of the need to balance change with continuity (Salipante 1992) so that time honored values, beliefs, knowledge and practices in the indigenous human system are not summarily swept, aside but sustained.

What are the ingredients of capacity building interventions that truly build local capacities of the community? Based on our experience of working closely with almost 50 global social change organizations and our reading of the literature, we postulate here that such interventions demonstrate certain core characteristics; they (1) engage the recipients in deep processes of inquiry that honor their capacity for constructive self determination, (2) seek to create learning contexts in which participants get “turned on” to their own strengths and collectively experience an enhancement of their capacities as true change agents and (3) enable the recipient community to generate creative responses to situations by delving into their own repertoires of experience. With the help of a field study that examines 15 social change projects undertaken in ten countries, this paper attempts to delineate the core characteristics of such capacity building interventions. The 15 projects reviewed in this paper were either based directly on or represented a variant of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987) expanded upon further in this paper. Our investigation of the fifteen field projects included in this study indicated furthermore that an identifiable configuration of social and psychological processes are typically associated with interventions that meet the three aforementioned criteria.
Appreciating the Capacity Building Context

In the domain of social change and international development, a variety of approaches are available for guiding interventions into social systems (Escobar 1995; Carmen 1996; Rowlands 1997; White 1996). A recently developed approach that has been increasingly gaining in visibility among global social change organizations in particular is “Appreciative Inquiry” (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987). Although many potential explanations exist to account for the sudden popularity of the appreciative approach, in our view, the fact that it offers social change and international development professionals a methodology that meets the three criteria mentioned above and promotes the development of local capacities through “generative dialogue”, certainly has added to its attractiveness. As an approach to organizational interventions, the task of an “appreciative inquiry” is to “discover and describe exceptional moments which give life to the system and activate members’ competencies and energies (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987). Based on the notion that “the artful creation of positive imagery on a collective basis may well be the most prolific activity that individuals and organizations can engage in if their aim is to bring to fruition a positive and humanely significant future” (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987, p4), AI may be characterized as an inquiry into the life giving properties of an organization. By asking the members of a community to recount peak moments (an example might be “Please tell me about a time when commitment to the community was at its highest. What was happening?”), appreciative inquiry seeks to generate new knowledge, anchored in the community’s history that can help expand the realm of the possible, articulate a collectively designed future and engage in a process of planning to translate into reality the images of possibility embodied in the peak moment
stories. Put in other words, the execution of the AI approach involves some combination of the following elements: (1) The delineation of peak moments through stories shared by the members of the community, (2) the identification of themes underlying those peak moments, (3) the envisioning and articulation of new possibilities based on the peak moments, (4) the embodiment of these possibilities in so-called “possibility propositions” and (5) engagement of the community in extensive “sense making” and in creating common script through collective dialogue designed to translate these images of possibility into actual reality.

THE STUDY

The fifteen projects that constitute the sample are part of an enduring program in global social change called Global Excellence in Management (GEM) initiated collaboratively by the Department of Organizational Behavior, Case Western Reserve University and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through a grant awarded by the latter organization. Under the auspices of this joint agreement one of the programs offered is an Executive Certificate Program in Global Social Change. In 1996, 1997 and 1998, this certificate program brought together around 75 global social change leaders from five different continents. The program is structured in three phases; Phase I is a two-week workshop held in residence. Phase II requires participants to undertake field projects. Phase III is another week long residential workshop that provides participants with an opportunity to share and expand upon findings from their field projects and to deepen learnings around the organizational dimensions of global social change. The three phase design is intended to make the certificate program a unique experience in executive education, interweaving conceptual
explorations with opportunities for active application of the learning, stimulating participants to become effective and innovative partners in change within their own organizations and in the society at large. This paper examines the 15 field projects undertaken by these global social change leaders who were participants of the 1996 Executive Certificate Program in Global Social Change with the intent of distilling learnings relevant to the theory and practice of community level capacity building. The reason we selected only the participants from the 1996 program and not the ones from the 1997 or 1998 programs is simply that we wanted a sample of capacity building projects that represented completed work that allowed an adequate time frame for longitudinal tracking. Although the methodology used in the 15 projects is predicated on the AI approach, we would argue that the findings of our study also offer useful, and more general, insights into the processes underlying effective capacity building interventions. The participants in the certificate program are middle or senior management executives in international non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) and local U.S. based private voluntary organizations (PVO’s). As the following overview of the projects makes explicit, some of the capacity building projects that the participants undertook were organizationally based while others were embedded in a larger community base.

**Overview of the Field Projects**

Each of the fifteen participants embarked upon an intensive and challenging field project designed to translate their conceptual learning and developmental experiences in the Certificate Program into practical applications. We shall arbitrarily label these projects from 1 through 15 to facilitate easy cross-referencing throughout our discussion. Table 1 presents a brief overview of each of the 15 projects.
METHODOLOGY

Each of the workshop participants who completed a field project on capacity building were invited to submit a write-up highlighting the (a) purpose of the project, (b) a description of the principal interventions that make up the project, (c) the key findings. The authors then read through each of the reports categorizing the information in terms of the template included under table 2 and explained herein. The participants returned to a follow up session in which each of them made a presentation on their field project lasting anywhere from 1-3 hours. The authors took notes at the presentations and asked questions to help reconstruct the details of the interventions and processes involved. To examine the processes underlying the execution of the field projects, we analyzed each of the projects in terms of a longitudinal framework, tracking the multiple paths of project execution. Projects were viewed in terms of the following template to facilitate examination of the processes and themes that become differentially accentuated along the different trajectories of project execution: first, the antecedent context, identified on the basis of an unmet need or more broadly, the set of external conditions that attracted the attention of the program participant resulting in the formulation of a field project with a clearly articulated set of objectives; second, a set of objectives delineating the goals and aspirations that the project sought to realize or the end result envisioned by the program participant as a result of satisfactory project completion; third, the intervention, the set of activities initiated by the program participant in the focal organization or community to bring about a desired change in the existing system and alter the antecedent conditions so as to bring them more in alignment with the objectives envisioned; fourth, the intervening processes, the observable and unobservable social, psychological or ideational processes
set in motion by the introduction of the intervention; fifth, the first order outcomes referring to the more immediate, often temporally proximate consequences of the intervention manifested in terms of "soft criteria", altered psychological states, or modified social processes; and finally, sixth, the second order outcomes, referring here to more temporally distant consequences of the intervention that result in clearly observable alterations in tangible institutional structures, processes and output reflecting so called "hard criteria". This approach of examining an unfolding process through a longitudinally differentiated template made up of distinct categories has been used elsewhere to help isolate themes associated with the multiple stages of an intervention (Case, Srikantia & Parameshwar 1998).

The analysis resulting from exploring the projects from these identifiable longitudinal "viewpoints" is presented in Table 2.

**DISCUSSION**

Based on the analysis of the processes involved in moving these projects from conception toward completion, we identified the following themes implicit in the capacity building processes underlying project execution. For the sake of clarity and organization, we present our conclusion in five summarizing statements. Capacity building that truly honors local capacities and indigenous wisdom demonstrates an identifiable configuration of characteristics and conditions that we seek to elucidate through propositions presented in the following section.

1. **Capacity building involves the development of a cooperative consciousness engendered by integrating two distinct processes; a historical recounting of what is deeply valued by the members of the community (a reflective process) and a**
collective inquiry into the community’s vision of its ideal future (an imaginative process).

This integration or bridging of the positive images of the past and the future result in placing the spotlight of attention on the shared, unifying and continuing aspects of a community’s experience; this inquiry process that involves reflection and then imagination, paves the way for the collective articulation of superordinate goals that dissipate fissiparous tendencies while mobilizing efforts toward the joint enactment of a positively valued future.

A “consciousness of common purpose” is engendered from collectively reflecting on what community members value most about their shared experiences and a possible future. Diverse constituencies with competing, or varied definitions of a situation engage in new conversations that reveal superordinate goals, often resolving what seemed previously like sharply antagonistic agendas. Several of the projects illustrate this shift toward a cooperative consciousness in which the similarities, rather than the differences, in the contrasting aspirations of different groups came to be emphasized.

Project 4, involving members of Russian society, enrolled students and senior citizens into a multigenerational conversation for members of Russian society to initiate a process of national reconstruction through a participatory envisioning process. Members of the Russian parliament, public officials, NGO leaders, journalists, artists and young professionals were asked to outline what would a new Russia look like that they would like to live in and would be proud to have their children be living in. Inspiring and moving excerpts were written by people of all ages in response to this invitation, articulating their hopes, visions and their peak experiences that constitutes the core
inspiration of a people on the threshold of a new possibility. Visual exhibits created by artists languaged the possibility through the medium of their art.

Project 5, involving members of Pendleton County in West Virginia attempted to build linkages, partnerships and relationships among the people, organizations and communities in the county to transcend the historical, divisive forces that have kept the county fragmented. The first phase of the training had inhabitants of the county in homogenous groups and then in larger mixed groups, jointly examine the peak moments in their shared history and then design a list of the dreams and highest hopes for the county. As a part of the same project, a cross generational platform for mutual understanding was created by having the children in the community interview a person in each of the 2500 households involving them all in a dialogue around what they valued most about the Pendleton community in the past and in the present. The children who acted as the interviewers then asked the people who they interviewed to envision an ideal future for the community.

Project 7, involving PVO-Government relations in Nepal, once again brings out the significance of appreciative reflection about the past combined with appreciative imaging around a positively valued future. The success in establishing Government-NGO partnerships in Nepal through a dialogue between the NGO’s and the officials of the Ministry of Forests was guided by the same principle articulated above. Dialogue and cooperation between two constituencies that bring sharply contrasting definitions of the existing reality was achieved by having them refocus their energy on the best moments of the past when cooperation between the two was at its best and their future vision of the partnership, culminating in ten year vision statements about what the partnership might
look like in that time frame. Such refocusing requires the members of the community to leave one stance to experiment with another; looking at what they value about their past creates a thread, virtually a limb, to venture out on in speculating about the future. Viewed in another way, the members of the community leave a stance that is defined in terms of distinction from another and embracing a stance of joy, pride and satisfaction in integrating the phenomenal world of “the other”.

Project 15 also entailed efforts at informally applying appreciative inquiry in altering the character of conversations between city representatives, community members and PVO staff in New York City, enabling these different groups to see commonality in their agendas by engaging in appreciative future speculation.

From the above, the AI process appears to be particularly well suited to reenlisting potentially marginalized groups in a constructive dialogue; the unifying consequences of engaging in future oriented dialogue while standing in positive intentions supported by the peak moments of the past helps create a schema of apperception in which members begin to be attracted to their similarities more than to their differences.

2. Capacity building involves a fundamental shift in the locus of responsibility; communities and individuals reconceptualize their accountability for their circumstances by moving in the direction of enhanced personal responsibility.

The process of collectively recounting peak moments in a community’s history results in an enlarged conception of the community’s capability, elevating the collective self esteem of the community and causing the community to reclaim a sense of agency and an internal locus of control.
The community moves from perceiving itself as merely the passive recipient of the consequences of an external agency’s or sector’s or specific other’s actions, (the external agency being any set of institutional arrangements or circumstances outside their control), to reframing their identity as architects of their own destiny, proactive agents actively seeking to alter existing circumstances. While the exact intervening processes through which this shift is achieved may be hard to specify at our present level of understanding, the stance of consciously valuing and reaffirming the best of what has been appears to elevate the self-esteem and the self-efficacy of community members both individually and collectively, thereby producing a mobilization of the knowledge, skills and competencies formerly lying latent under several layers of disempowering inner dialogue.

Project 2 in which an appreciative inquiry based strategic planning workshop was presented to eleven NGO’s in Ghana illustrates this shift in the locus of responsibility. The precipitating factor for the organization of the workshop was the imminent withdrawal of NGO funding by the Ghana Social Marketing Foundation. The AI process, with its focus on unleashing possibility, was deemed to be an appropriate approach for empowering people even in the face of this setback in funding. As the leaders of the NGO began to examine the peak moments in their organizational history, identifying what had been the central life giving forces in their organizations, they moved beyond their perception of their organizations as "victims" of a withdrawal in funding and began to see their organizations as powerful entities that have operated at very high levels of effectiveness in the past. Reconnecting with the sources of strength and empowerment rooted in their history redefined their sense of agency and generated new conversations of self-efficacy. The program resulted in renewed commitment to the “Community Based
Distribution" of Family Planning Commodities program as the participating NGO's began to recognize the intrinsic worth of the program and the importance of strengthening it by themselves, even in the face of withdrawal of external funding. The energy and enthusiasm generated by the AI process was palpable and participants welcomed the introduction of an inspiring, possibility-based approach to strategic planning, fundamentally different from the traditional problem-centered approach that they were used to. The eleven NGO's thereafter formulated three possibility propositions (strategic agendas), together with an action plan for translating their positive images into operational reality in the back-home context. In terms of capacity building, the exercise breathed a new life into the NGO's by causing a shift in the locus of responsibility for the implementation of the programs; they choose to be no longer passive recipients of funding from the GSMF but active architects capable of delivering the program effectively if they could give up entrenched notions of dependence on GSMF and competition with each other. The program also gave these NGO's a set of concrete tools to boost organizational autonomy and self sufficiency in the challenge of delivering and sustaining viable programs even in the face of environmental uncertainty. For the convening PVO, the project represented a new technology that they could invoke to revitalize sagging, threatened NGO programs around the world that could sink into decline due to a variety of environmental factors.

The shift in the locus of responsibility referred to here is a shift from an external to an internal locus of control. It produces a sense of ownership of the situation. The recounting of peak moments through the appreciative inquiry process enables the community or organization to connect with moments of extreme empowerment in its own history when
it resourcefully responded to an external or internal challenge. The reframing of the antecedent condition from a problem to be dealt with to an opportunity to be realized leads to increased level of community mobilization. Typically, the reframing involves a movement from one platform to another, from standing in the misery of “what could not be” to anchoring oneself in the anticipatory reality of “what can be”. In the context of Project 2, the central challenge was reframed by moving from a focus on the withdrawal of funding (deficit discourse) to a new focus on strengthening the capacity of the NGOs to implement reproductive health programs (positive possibility).

3. Capacity building helps refocus a community’s attention on the resources that are available to it locally and by this process helps the community mobilize local competencies in meeting the challenges of a situation.

The affirmative valuing of each other, and of one’s own history through peak moment stories helps to reconnect the community with its inherent strengths through what is experienced as a fresh, unprecedented appreciation of currently ignored strengths and resources.

The effect here can be likened to popular African folklore, the “Acres of Diamond” story, in which the central character, an African farmer obsessed with finding a diamond mine, travels all over the continent after selling his farm. His efforts bear no fruit and finally, in his frustration, the farmer throws himself into a well. His associates discover later that the farm on which he originally lived was a diamond mine, a minor detail that he missed completely since he did not recognize diamonds in their uncut form. The story helps illustrate the human propensity to unwittingly undervalue or ignore resources that are already present locally in the situation and instead to wander far away,
both physically and psychically, in search of fresh fields and new pastures. Organizations and communities are frequently placed in situations wherein the expertise needed to solve a problem or open up a fresh opportunity exists integrally within the community but is never invoked or consulted.

In Project 6, involving an NGO in the Himalayan region, the members of the Sikkimese communities told stories of what they liked about their communities and what they would like their village to look like in ten years. This process directly resulted in the identification of local resources for community action. In another phase of the same project involving the Himalayan Environment and Literacy promotion the community’s participation in an appreciative inquiry exercise resulted in an inventory of member’s skills and expertise.

In Project 7, involving PVO-Government relations in Nepal, members of the government delegation and the representatives of the PVO organization shared stories about they most valued about each other and what their partnership could look like in ten years. This dialogue opened up the opportunity for harnessing the potential for collaboration between two major organizations that formerly operated in splendid isolation. Such creation of new relationships at the local level is another example of the discovery and mobilization of local resources that can follow from the appreciative valuing of potentially proximate entities whose collaboration represents a powerful, though latent possibility. The partnership has already helped create a Makalu-Barun Conservation project and has helped to strengthen government capacity to plan, implement and monitor activities through local communities and local NGOs.
Appreciative inquiry processes invite a community to inquire systematically into the best of what is indigenously available to it, un concealing its inherent strengths, producing an almost “aha” moment for the community. The resulting spotlight illuminates formerly concealed, hidden or forgotten resources.

4. Capacity building is facilitated through a process of reframing the antecedent condition in affirmative terms, relating to the antecedent condition in a mode of appreciation treats it as a malleable construction amenable to reframing rather than as an objective condition existing independently in the external world as a problem to be solved.

Uniformly, all the projects studied illustrated the translation of a seemingly “problematic” antecedent condition into an affirmatively stated future objective. A few examples serve to make the point more powerfully.

The antecedent condition present in Project 2 involving the 11 NGO’s in Ghana is a withdrawal of GSMF funding. The objectives of the project were redefined in terms of strengthening the capacity of NGO’s in their collective implementation of reproductive health programs.

In the case of Project 3, the antecedent condition is a deficiency in the academic curriculum of mainstream schools. The project objectives are reformulated in terms of developing a long term educational mission for the Bronx community and to create a high quality educational institution.

Similarly in Project 5, the antecedent condition is the divisive forces that have kept the community historically fragmented while the project’s objectives are framed in
terms of building linkages and partnerships among people, organizations and communities in the county.

In virtually all the projects, it is evident from an examination of Table 2 that the antecedent conditions are anchored in a paradigm of deficiency and that the process of capacity building must include the formulation of the future objectives in affirmative terms, in a paradigm of abundance and new possibility, so to speak. The creation of new possibilities through the affirmative reframing of the initial antecedent condition is, we believe, both a cornerstone of the appreciative inquiry process and a major factor that contributes to its success in mobilizing coordinated community-based action in the context of project execution. This assertion is supported by our analysis of the intervening processes and the first order outcomes recounted in many of the projects. In virtually all the projects, there is evidence of energy and action being unleashed by positive imagery and by the reconceptualization of the antecedent condition in a manner that creates the possibility for meaningful change. This manner is not simply re-languaging the condition. It is the discovery of a positive image for the future based on a thoughtful exploration of the best of the past (including current context).

5. Capacity building involves the setting in motion of a centrifugal pattern of change and influence interventions. However initiated by an individual or a group interventions quickly gather a momentum of their own as they move outward, encompassing more and more people in expanding circles of inquiry and dialogue around possibility.

The notion of centrifugal and centripetal patterns is, we believe, a useful distinction to be made in understanding the dynamics of community capacity building.
Centrifugal patterns are demonstrated when an intervention fosters inclusion; it is introduced by an individual or a small coterie but rapidly expands, inviting and engaging more and more people in a process of inquiry and dialogue. This characteristic of the inquiry and dialogue expanding outward in a centrifugal fashion was evident in almost all the projects.

In Project 1, the appreciative inquiry protocol was used to launch an initial set of interviews but was expeditiously disseminated among a much larger body of people as members of the organization participated in and subsequently conducted “listening tours” involving board members, staff and partner organizations.

In Project 3, the people overseeing the process launch the interviews, but it quickly turns into an inquiry-based dialogue creating an evolving image of a high quality educational institution involving broader cross sections of youth, parents and local officials.

Similarly in Project 4, the oral and written interviews initially involve a small group but then expand to include larger populations of artists, school children, and senior citizens in a collective process of inquiry and dialogue about the new, positive images of the future of the Russian nation.

Project 5 focusing on a rural county in West Virginia began with a three phase training program for ten non-profits and quickly escalated to include children interviewing 2500 households in an extensive process of inquiry and dialogue.

Project 9 involving the planning and implementation of a safe water project in a Tanzanian village community started with a week long workshop among a select group of participants and then snowballed into a comprehensive follow-up inquiry and
conversational processes between the participants and the rest of the village community. This process spanned outward including current village leaders, NGO representatives and government officials who were invited to engage with and contribute to the collective inquiry and dialogue.

Project 11 designed to inquire into what gives meaning to the work of the staff and beneficiaries of a multinational NGO was initiated with a handful of interviews; those interviewed in the initial round interviewed others who in turn interviewed a new set of individuals; the process, once again, is best described as a centrifugal process, implying a movement away from the eye of the storm in expanding circles to include larger constituencies.

Conclusion

Capacity building that truly honors local capabilities and indigenous wisdom demonstrates an identifiable configuration of characteristics and conditions. In other words, such capacity building interventions (a) generate cooperative consciousness by engaging the community in a reflection of what it deeply values about the past followed by a speculation about a desirable, positively valued future, (b) cause a fundamental shift of responsibility in the direction of the local entity by elevating the collective self esteem of the community, (c) refocus a community’s attention to its own resources that are available locally, (d) induce the community to reframe the antecedent condition in affirmative terms, from viewing circumstances as problems to be solved to viewing circumstances as possibilities calling to be realized, (e) set in motion a centrifugal pattern of conversations that engage an ever widening collection of people in expanding circles of inquiry and dialogue around possibility.
In the context of the theme of this conference, “Change and Development Journeys in a Pluralistic World” we would like to discuss what was most challenging in tracking change processes. Our research into projects that were conducted in nine countries drawn from four continents is, we believe, a privileged place from which to comment about change processes in pluralistic settings! One of the dilemmas that we encountered in studying the capacity building projects concerns what appears to us to be a deep philosophical and ideological incompatibility between the fundamental stance of capacity building and the paradigm of scientific research. As evidenced in these projects, capacity building is at its very best when individuals, communities and organizations are, in the true spirit of constructive self determination, using or discovering indigenous wisdom to develop their own architectures of competence and possibility. This spirit is, in our view, antithetical to the expert-driven paradigm of scientific research that, even in its less orthodox forms, involves the transplantation of an external set of criteria and frames of reference as instruments for analyzing or evaluating the lived experience of “the other”. This contradiction raises very important questions for what models of research are appropriate for domains such as capacity building which, by definition, entail the repudiation of an externally formulated agenda. We need to turn more toward research methodologies that the respondents themselves invent rather than toward research methodologies that are ratified by Western canons of “good” scientific research and may be perceived by respondent populations to be a insidious, hegemonic infiltration on the part of the “experts” seeking to build and evaluate the capacity of the less privileged novices. Even as we set about interviewing our sample to collect additional information
on the projects completed, we were awakened to the limitations of our methodological frames and our interview protocols.

To illustrate the extent to which the two worlds, namely the world of the social scientist and the world of the indigenous development professional are disconnected, here is an example. We were questioning a project champion from Africa about the capacity building experience that one of his communities was undertaking. During the conversation, we were attempting to evaluate the intervention on several sets of criteria of longitudinal sustainability that we had derived from scholarly articles and found to our dismay that the project was susceptible to technical weaknesses on many counts. Our interviewee did not respond by engaging in a rigorous defense of his community’s project strategy. Rather he told us a simple African story that sought to access deeper social wisdom. The story was about a man, his son and a donkey journeying through a series of African villages. In the story, the trio walk through the first village with the son riding the donkey and the father walking by their side. The villagers come out of their huts and scoff at the trio, complaining that it was unfair for the son to be riding the donkey while his father has to walk all this distance. Wanting to protect his son from the barrage of criticism, the father sits on the donkey and makes his son walk by their side. As they approach the next village, the villagers in this village come out of their huts, condemning the father for being selfish in riding the donkey while his poor son has to walk all this distance. Aghast, the father and son decide to both walk with the donkey, instead of riding the donkey. At the next village, they are greeted by a group of people who laugh at them, marveling at their foolishness in walking, instead of riding the donkey which is meant to be the beast of burden. Disappointed, the father and son decide to both ride the
donkey so that neither of them is ridiculed. They approach the next village only to be encountered by a group that is dismayed at their cruelty for imposing themselves on the donkey, unable to tolerate the cruelty of two human beings riding a poor donkey. Finally, the father and son decide to carry the donkey on their head, instead of riding it, only to be encountered by another group of people from the next village they are passing through who burst into hysterical laughter upon seeing the sight of two human beings carrying a donkey on their head! The moral of the story, our interviewer highlighted, was in the importance of taking action, not being stopped by the countless sources of criticism that are inevitably going to be encountered from one evaluative perspective or another. The story of powerful international development work is one in which the "experts" are likely to find the technical flaws one way or the other and yet committed action is key to sustaining life and alleviating human suffering. The stories and parables that provide inspiration for committed action come from indigenous cultures that perhaps do not have the luxury of endless scholarly debate.

Another implication of our study has led us to question what matters most in capacity building. A large number of Western Non-Governmental Organizations that are seeking to build the capacity of their counterparts in the "developing world" operate with technocratic models of capacity building that delineate the domains of capacity building in terms of such components as financial, technical and human resource capacities. This study appears to suggest that more important than the technology of capacity building are a plethora of conversational processes at the individual, organizational and community level devoted to mutual affirmation, a valuing of shared history, positive imagery, and a sense of pride in the constantly unfolding future of the focal community. The orientation
of most Western NGO's toward measurement, control and "techniques" predisposes them to pay attention to the procedural, technique based dimensions of capacity building and to pay less attention to the interactive, relational aspects that create a powerful social and psychological context for capacity building. Finally, we believe that to make a more sustainable contribution to the practice of capacity building, research must tie together individual, group, organizational and cultural level variables within the same research design. Studies must include the dimension of anticipatory reality (images of the future) that are collectively and sometimes idiosyncratically anchored in the consciousness of the groups and the individuals. The predisposition of social researchers toward confining themselves to a specific level of analysis and to the observable behaviors and changes manifested by a group is likely to conceal the richness of the processes that lead to capacity building. Our research indicates that the processes and mechanisms associated with capacity building are so complex and intertwined with each other, cutting across different levels of analysis that to truly honor the complexity, longitudinal studies that investigate their interaction are needed. Many of the variables of interest are primarily affective, cognitive or ideational in nature and therefore less visible than their counterparts in more traditional areas of research. The future of research on what builds capacity in pluralistic settings will be supported by the development of a research paradigm that is truly home grown in the communities themselves rather than transplanted mechanically from its sourcing point in a Western academic monolith.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1 Overview of Field Projects included in the study</th>
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<td><strong>TARGET COMMUNITY</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. NGO-Partner relationships in the African subsidiary of an international NGO</td>
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<td>2. 11 NGO’s in Ghana engaged in implementing reproductive health programs</td>
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<td>3. The community in Bronx, New York</td>
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<td>4. Segments of Russian society</td>
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<td>5. Rural county of West Virginia</td>
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<td>6. NGO in the Himalayan Region</td>
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<td>7. PVO-Government relations in Nepal</td>
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<td>8. A U.S. based PVO focused on mountain communities</td>
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<td>9. A Tanzanian village community</td>
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<td>10. A partnership in Gambia between a multi-sectoral organization) and a govt. agency.</td>
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<td>11. The overseas staff and beneficiaries of an international religious based NGO</td>
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<td>12. A community of support organizations in India</td>
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<td>13. Partnership between four civil society support organizations in Bangladesh</td>
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<td>14. A group of NGO’s in Russia</td>
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<td>15. Negotiations between city representatives, non-profits and the public</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO/Partner relations</td>
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<td>Withdrawal of GSFM Funding</td>
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<td>NGO's in Ghana</td>
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<td>Academic curriculum of Bronx educational institution</td>
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<td>Members of the Russian Society</td>
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**TABLE 2: Analysis of the 15 field projects in terms of the template constituting the principal categories for data analysis.**
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rural county of West Virginia</th>
<th>Divisive forces that have kept the community historically fragmented</th>
<th>Build linkages and partnerships among people, organizations and communities in the county</th>
<th>3 phase training program focusing on AI, institutional strengthening and the enactment of collaborative projects</th>
<th>List of dreams and highest hopes for the county</th>
<th>Workshops in which participating non-profits focus on institutional strengthening issues of board development, mission and communication</th>
<th>The development of collaborative projects among the four non-profit’s four projects: Pendleton Roundtable, Imagine Pendleton, Supporting county schools, and Cooperative purchasing.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NGO in the Himalayan region</td>
<td>Absence of NGO capacity for implementing new models of protected area management</td>
<td>NGO to implement new models of protected area management in partnership with local communities</td>
<td>AI based participatory rural appraisal -AI based approach to helping NGO identify its mission, values and member skills</td>
<td>people tell stories about what they liked about their communities and what they wanted their village to look like in ten years</td>
<td>-identification of local resources and priorities for community action and management</td>
<td>-articulation of mission, values and an inventory of member skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>PVO-Govt, Relations in Nepal</td>
<td>Absence of PVO-Govt collaboration and the prevalence of a sense of antagonism and suspicion</td>
<td>Strengthening PVO-Govt partnerships</td>
<td>one day appreciative inquiry based meeting between Govt. Officials and TMI</td>
<td>appreciative speculation on what the partnership will look like in ten years</td>
<td>shared vision of the future of the PVO-Govt partnership tapping into potential for synergy in cross sectoral collaboration creation of a conduit for the flow of expertise and skill across domains that operate in isolation</td>
<td>Makalu-Barun conservation project establishment of a -trust fund for effective use of revenues -increased tourism benefits -increased government capacity to plan, implement and monitor activities through local communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Antecedent State</td>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Intervening processes</td>
<td>Outcomes First Order</td>
<td>Outcomes Second Order</td>
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<td>A U.S. based PVO focused on mountain communities</td>
<td>Concern over the absence of an integrated core in four areas of highest concern: financial sustainability, sharing the learning, monitoring and evaluation and partnerships.</td>
<td>To strengthen the institutional core</td>
<td>A. The NGO as a learning organization (AI based workshop) B. Board of Trustees C. Retreat Strategic Planning Meeting for seasonal and full time staff</td>
<td>A. Interviews around participant’s “best learning experiences” B. the board participate in the discovery and dreaming processes of C. get together and discuss mission and vision for community development programs.</td>
<td>A. Inquiry into the organizational culture at the NGO B. dreaming processes unleash thoughts about the future of NGO and the articulation of a new vision of NGO as a global organization. C. articulation of a vision and mission for education, research and community development</td>
<td>A. By law changes, formation of new committees and decision to grow the board to twice its current size to expand diversity in membership. B. An event to explore protected area mgmt in the Appalachians</td>
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<tr>
<td>a Tanzanian village community</td>
<td>Unacceptably high levels of fluoride posing a major health problem</td>
<td>develop a planning process for a safe water project that has the villagers assume ownership of the process</td>
<td>a week long planning skills workshop with continuous dialogue and negotiation follow up meetings between workshop participants and the rest of the village community</td>
<td>appreciative inquiry of the developmental trends in the village in the last 5 years follow up meetings where the village leadership and share their dreams about the water project with the rest of the community</td>
<td>the creation of a forum in which dialogue on the water project happened between village leadership, government officials and NGO reps in a spirit of partnership, integrating local wisdom and technical know-how of external experts.</td>
<td>a plan of action detailing tasks, activities, a division of responsibilities and structure for implementing the water project.</td>
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<td>Partnership between a multisectoral orgn. &amp; a govt. Agency</td>
<td>mutual suspicion and fears associated with mutual monitoring and evaluation of operations</td>
<td>to examine ways in which monitoring and evaluation can be used as a positive force for sustaining capacity building in partnerships</td>
<td>Appreciative inquiry exercise involving members from the two organizations</td>
<td>collective inquiry into the role of monitoring and evaluation in supporting partnerships and in sustaining capacity building</td>
<td>-the expression of a sense of commitment to the synergistic pursuit of superordinate goals shared by the two organizations</td>
<td>establishment of an appreciative inquiry based approach to evaluation</td>
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<td>TABLE 2 (Continued)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The overseas staff and beneficiaries of an international religious based NGO</strong></td>
<td>Concern that the organization was losing touch with its employees and the constituencies that it was seeking to serve</td>
<td>to discover what gives meaning to the NGO staff and beneficiaries in their relationships, to hear the voices of the poor and increase trust.</td>
<td>Collecting verbal and written stories from NGO staff and identifying themes on what are the life giving forces of the organization</td>
<td>-the stories helped build bridges between staff, partners and the constituencies they serve. -expanded possibilities for dialogue and interaction between the groups through the unifying lenses they create</td>
<td>stories were collected that span a wide range of topics including relationships with partner organizations, the core of relationship and community, team building, community with the poor and development of trust</td>
<td>-networks of communication were suddenly created between groups residing in different parts of the globe -the voices of organizational members and beneficiaries dispersed widely were held in the world wide assembly of the NGO -reports of fresh inspiration around work as people recounted their peak moments of community</td>
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<td><strong>Range of support organizations in India</strong></td>
<td>Concern over the absence of confluence in the efforts of support organizations working toward common objectives in splendid isolation, even competition</td>
<td>A workshop involving an integrated application of Future Search methodology and AI inquiry into the factors that promote team building in and between these support organizations</td>
<td>A collective search into the commonalities underlying the futures that the different organizations were implicitly working toward</td>
<td>Conversations spanning 3-4 days that dwelt into the joint and competing interests of the different parties that left the groups with a consciousness of common membership in a bigger cause/project of civil society reconstruction</td>
<td>The creation of structures (eg. Roundtable meetings) and other inter-organizational forums designed to optimise resource allocation in day to day operation and to explore new avenues of collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Partnership of four civil society support organizations in Bangladesh</strong></td>
<td>An absence of coordination among four civil society support organizations leading to redundancies</td>
<td>A workshop involving an integrated application of Future search and AI</td>
<td>A collective exploration of the best moments of coordination between the organization and a search for the common future of civil society in Bangladesh</td>
<td>Stories that celebrated pivotal moments in the organization’s histories and conversations that helped articulate the objectives of members</td>
<td>The development of a consciousness of common intent, mission and vision for the future</td>
<td>The integration and differentiation of the scope of activity, leading to reduction in overlapping activity and increasing synergy</td>
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<tr>
<td>A group of NGO’s in Russia</td>
<td>An overall climate of pessimism in the NGO community</td>
<td>search for the life giving forces of NGO’s in Russia</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry workshop bringing together executive teams from these NGOs</td>
<td>AI protocols that initiated conversations among the participants on what they valued most about their organizations, ways in which they could heighten the collaborative vitality of the organizations and wishes for the future</td>
<td>Increased levels of enthusiasm and the replacement of cynicism with a positive outlook and a valuing of the collective contribution made by the NGOs</td>
<td>Information not available</td>
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| Negotiations between city representatives | Negotiations driven by the narrow agendas of individual parties resulting in frequent deadlocks | application of appreciative inquiry to the facilitation of negotiations between city representatives, community members and PVO members in New York City. | Injection of Appreciative Inquiry questions into the ongoing flow of a conversation, inviting the parties to explore the peak moments of the past and the most optimistic outlook for the future and the underlying vision of common commitments that bind the whole group together | A shift in the tone of the meetings, with an unfreezing of rigidly held positions and a willingness to explore avenues of commonality for resolution of seemingly intractable issues | Information not available |
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