Community Development That Works

Lessons for local cultural change
now being applied around the world

By Dorothea Jewell

For cultural change to be significant, it must be visible at the local level. Since the end of World War II, there has been a major effort throughout the underdeveloped countries of the world to make changes at the village level. These efforts have carried the broad title of "community development," and have met with mixed success. Typical of the problems encountered has been the tendency for the already better-off peasant to make the best use of new information and technology, and then use money lending and land purchasing to further increase their relative advantage. Government programs have also often spent more on themselves than on those they were supposed to serve.

Yet there have also been many successes, one of the brightest of these being the work of the Institute for Cultural Affairs. ICA began in the U.S. during the l950s based on cooperative efforts by a number of mainstream churches who were more interested in helping people than in making converts. Since then its efforts have spread worldwide, its non-sectarian character has become truly planetary, and its all volunteer staff is mostly non-western and non-Christian. From their work, and the work of others like them, it is clear that much can be done to improve life at the local level, and that even more could be done if changes were made in such important structural areas as the rules of land ownership (see issue #8).

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IN THE EARLY 60s the residents of Fifth City, a Black ghetto on Chicago's West Side, along with staff of The Institute of Cultural Affairs, began to deal with the basic human issues of their community. Out of that experience has grown an adventure in human development which today encompasses the globe. In this article I'll describe how this process works and some of the key learnings we have drawn from this experience.

As it became clear that the locally-based, comprehensive, and integrated approach being developed in Fifth City was effectively releasing responsible local action, we expanded our

efforts to two additional communities in other parts of the world. The socially depressed aboriginal community of Oombulgurri in West Australia and the economically destitute atoll of Majuro in the Marshall Islands helped us discover ways other communities could do more quickly what had taken 10 years in Fifth City. Then in 1975, pilot communities were selected in each time zone around the globe, increasing the total number of socioeconomic demonstration projects to 24, representing a diverse range of socio-economic settings and regional issues.

This project has now expanded to include demonstrations involving clusters of villages in over 13 nations. In Kenya alone, for example, over 1,000 villages are now participating in this program.

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

How does this process work? Upon invitation by the community and a "nod of assent" from governmental structures, each project is launched with a week-long consultation in which local residents and volunteer consultants produce a four-year action plan to meet local needs. Residents and residential ICA staff begin to implement plans immediately following the consultations. Teams of volunteer consultants periodically visit the projects to facilitate rapid program implementation.

From the beginning a fundamental assumption has been that local people are capable of creating their own future if they have adequate methods, skills and self-confidence. The planning process which initiates each project is built upon the involvement of local people and what we call the *contradiction analysis* method. Many local development efforts approach issues by tackling head-on whatever is immediately seen as blocking the achievement of a desired goal. Early experience in the first projects indicated that this kind of goal-oriented problem-solving tends to result in myopia which narrows a community's perspective and often blinds it from seeing beyond symptoms to the root cause of social pain.

Contradiction analysis is a method, developed in Fifth City, which views the situation from a broader perspective and identifies the deep sociological factors blocking the future vision. A plan of strategic action is then built to deal with the underlying contradictions rather than eliminate surface problems. In a Human Development Project the process of contradiction analysis and strategic planning by the residents is an ongoing activity.

One of the first communities to use this process in an intensive planning consultation was Oombulgurri, an aboriginal village in the out-back of West Australia, where in 1973, 50 aboriginal people decided to resettle their abandoned tribal land. Within a year the community had grown to 200 residents who initiated a PAY FOR WORK system to redirect their welfare incomes as a symbol of self-sufficiency. Then in 1975, the people set up a nine-day consultation to build a comprehensive community plan.

Thirty consultants from across Australia and several other countries arrived in small groups as the same light airplane landed and took off all day from the dusty airstrip. The village had never hosted such a large group. The guests represented the public, private and voluntary sectors and possessed a wide range of skills and experience.

During the nine-day consultation, community residents joined by the consultants functioned as a unified research and planning team. Organized into five groups, the participants conducted analysis and field research, spending many hours visiting and talking with those community residents who did not attend. Periodically the groups convened to order the data and discern the emerging consensus. Throughout the week the villagers' experience with the local issues assured practicality and relevance while the consultants' input brought fresh approaches and new insights.

First they charted the OPERATING VISION of what the residents hoped their community might become. Oombulgurri's vision incorporated both social self- dependence and economic self-sufficiency. While they saw the need for economic ventures to adequately support themselves, they also desired practical training in ways to reclaim their culture.

Next they discerned the UNDERLYING CONTRADICTIONS blocking the realization of the vision. Existing systems linking Oombulgurri to the web of resources, services, and expertise available in Australia were ineffective and not only prevented development but produced a debilitating sense of isolation and insignificance. This was the major contradiction. Underdeveloped approaches to local food production and inapplicable ancient cultural forms also blocked the emergence of the new community.

PRACTICAL PROPOSALS and TACTICAL SYSTEMS were built to deal with these and other contradictions. Specific ways were devised to develop business and agriculture to procure equipment, to improve education, health, and transportation, and to reclaim the aboriginal heritage. Finally, they determined the ACTUATING PROGRAMS required and designed a four-year implementation calendar.

This initial nine-day consultation did more than just provide a plan for development. The drama and activity that surrounded it heightened interest and strengthened commitment to development throughout the community. The community planning methods established patterns for ongoing consensus formation that continued on a daily and weekly basis. The results, published in a document, subsequently guided the implementation phase and became a symbol of the community's decision.

Four years later, when they evaluated what they had accomplished, they listed economic advances which included a locally managed profit-making community store; agricultural ventures which made the community self- sufficient in eggs, meat and vegetables and allowed export to a neighboring city; and the revitalization of the traditional aboriginal Wunan system of social care and support in the form of a community fund through which residents invested $84,000 in village programs. The Member of Parliament from the north Province reported that the government had been saved $903,000 over four years. There were three contributing factors: the reduced government subsidies, the private sector's participation in providing goods and services, and the Wunan self-help system.

Social self-reliance was developed by strengthening the community's ability to care for its health, education and well- being. They established a primary school and preschool with a combined attendance of 100. Health and nutrition improved dramatically through the installation of a community kitchen supported by the Wunan and the training of health caretakers. Serious anemia was reduced among school-age children by 98% in two years, and no infant deaths occurred despite a national infant mortality rate of 10% for aborigines. Many Oombulgurri residents travelled outside the village for training events and to do a Walkabout of village meetings in 75 other aboriginal communities.

These economic and social changes were the result of the way that the people of Oombulgurri were able to transpose their ancient cultural practices into meaningful forms for contemporary use. The Wunan was one example. Another was the use of family-related housing groups to care for environmental improvements. The task forces initiated to manage the store, school system, poultry and cattle programs followed the tribal work structures. The planning sessions were enlivened by Corroboree victory celebrations of dancing and singing the stories of great accomplishments. It is doubtful that an outside planner would have created these culturally relevant forms of community care and action. The community itself, in creating its own plan for development, was able to design effective methods of implementation.

The experience of Oombulgurri along with that of the Marshall Islands Human Development Project demonstrated that the principles and presuppositions forged in Fifth City were viable in vastly different settings. Both reinforced the belief that the human factor is the crucial element in world development. This encouraged the establishment of the additional 21 HDPs previously mentioned.

THE LEARNINGS

Experience in the 24 Human Development Projects has shown that locally initiated economic, social, and cultural change does happen when the following 15 "learnings" or guidelines are observed in a community.

Effective Social Development:

Operates Within Clearly Delimited Geography In order to produce visible results and create community identity, it is necessary to focus renewal efforts. For example, Fifth City delimited a 40-block project area and dramatized it by using a stylized map as a logo on signs throughout the community.

Deals With All The Issues The problems within a community are related and must therefore be tackled simultaneously. Fifth City faced issues as varied as unemployment, financing limitations, fear of the streets, poor schools and lack of services – all of which were addressed simultaneously.

Involves All The People By involving all the people of a community, a consensus on future directions can be created. Fifth City created an infant school, after-school activities, youth center, men's and women's clubs, and elders programs.

Addresses The Deep Human Issues By confronting its root issues a community is released to see the possibility of effective action in areas previously considered impossible. In Fifth City the deep human issue was the "victim image" which fostered self-deprecation and crushed people's hopes. A new image pervades Fifth City today. Neighborhood women have become fully licensed preschool teachers. A business association confidently oversees the development of the shopping center and new industry.

Creates Key Community Symbols Communities need social reminders of decisions they have made. Fifth City created an iron figure with outstretched arms as a symbol of the commitment to human development. The singing of community songs and regular publication of the local newspaper reinforced this decision. The Iron Statue Plaza, the Community Center and Fifth City Business Careers – all symbols of the community's efforts – have never been vandalized.

Effective Economic Development:

Regards The Community As An Independent Economic Unit Economic development efforts can be easily dissipated unless the community is seen as a self-contained economic unit. Let's look at the Korean town of Kwangyung Il to see how this works.

Increases The Flow Of Money Into The Community Developing economies require outside monies and credit access to "prime the pump" of economic growth. A seed grant, loan, and government assistance permitted the establishment of a common grain mill in Kwangyung Il. A poultry industry, initiated through outside start-up funds, increased egg sales 500% in five years.

Retains Funds In The Community As Long As Possible Self-sufficiency depends on community residents spending cash locally. Production and local processing of barley, rapeseed, poultry, and livestock supplied local consumers and outside markets. A new repair shop, trading post, bath house, storage sheds, and small stores provided needed commercial services locally. Community profits were invested in the preschool, primary school, health outpost, and training center.

Circulates Funds Rapidly And Continuously The more often money turns over within the community, the better the cash flow and the opportunity to make greater profits for investment. As family income increased, many hired local builders to remodel their homes, replace roofs and install toilets. Preschool tuition paid seven village teachers; farmers used the mill to process grain; tangerine growers rented community warehouse space and trucks. The village treasury used the savings of 2255 families to make 254 loans for agricultural and home improvements.

Functions Within External Economic Realities Even at the local level a balance of trade is necessary with the inclusive realities of the municipal, regional, national, and international economies. Road improvements, increased storage space and the purchase of eight new trucks have facilitated export of Kwangyung Il produce. Vegetables are raised year-round in vinyl houses and sold to hotels in a nearby city.

Effective Cultural Development:

Creates Rapid, Dramatic Signs Of Possibility People experience renewed courage and determination when change occurs rapidly, is highly visible and affects a large number of people. After the consultation in Kapini, Zambia, a four-room preschool was built to serve 180 children, the foundation for the training center laid, all roads graded and a factory opened. These quick victories broke the previous image that "nothing works here."

Calls Forth Corporate Engagement Even the greatest task seems possible when people make their own decisions and work together on something of mutual benefit. In two years, through daily efforts of 34 community workers and weekly workdays, villagers completed 91 projects.

Gives Significance To Time and Space Routine daily life is enlivened by seasonal festivals, celebrative events and designated landmarks. Kapini's quarterly assemblies regularly attract 200-300 residents. Awards are made, important dignitaries speak, new facilities are opened, and feasting, singing, and dancing continue for hours.

Requires A Destinal Story Dramas, legends, tales of local heroes, and revived cultural customs rehearse a community's historical purpose. The *insaka,* a tribal network of village elders' councils, collapsed during Zambia's colonial period. This concept was recovered in Kapini by constructing a circular building, called the Insaka, designated for regular elders meetings. Identification with a long and rich history has given residents a sense of stability and direction.

Demands Intentional Geographic Extension When a community understands its accomplishments are performed on behalf of other communities, responsibility is fostered. In the project's third year, Kapini residents conducted 550 village meetings across the nation, began extension work in a cluster of 12 neighboring villages, and built a plan to launch demonstration projects in each province. Kapini villagers are motivated by having something to share with others.

A COMMUNITY'S JOURNEY – PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

How do these basic elements work together in practice? There is a journey of development which seems common to the experience of many villages. The development of Maliwada, a rural village in the state of Maharashtra, India, is a good example. At the time of its consultation in 1975, Maliwada's 1700 residents experienced a meager subsistence lifestyle caused by extended periods of drought and underdeveloped resources and skills. Four-fifths of the work force was unemployed. Low village income prevented capital development for community improvements.

Maliwada experienced four phases in its economic development. The initiation phase began at the time of the consultation when a contract to build shipping crates was obtained from a nearby auto-parts company. An ancient castle was rebuilt for a training center, and a model house was constructed using donated materials worth $250. These construction efforts led village carpenters and masons to form a Builders Guild. Other guilds established community gardens, literacy classes, and trained health caretakers. With the assistance of a

civil engineer, an agricultural technician, and a $20,000 grant, farmers rebuilt earthen dams and wells and irrigated an experimental high-yield sorghum field.

During this initial phase in a community, excitement bubbles. The consultation and events which launched programs create motivation and begin to deal with the community's felt needs. Community pride grows as neighborhood residents of all ages conduct workdays which visibly change the environment. People begin to believe that their efforts make a difference.

The second phase of Maliwada's development involved the rapid actuation of a number of low-investment, labor- intensive economic ventures involving the entire community. Outside seed money supported the purchase of basic equipment and inventory. During this phase a Bombay company loaned the village a truck and small tractor, and a driver's training program was offered. Villagers established a nutritious food-supplement factory in a newly-built industrial building and opened a brick factory. Small scale and labor intensive, these efforts provided 100 new jobs. Each new venture was initiated as a community industry; a share of the profits and a percentage of each salary was used to support the preschool, health clinic and other village services.

In this second phase, a community will likely experience the intensification of momentum as substantial changes take place. Extensive construction is undertaken; clinics and sanitation systems are established; job skills are refined; initial industries are launched; and community leadership develops new capacities to coordinate and plan. The initial euphoria of new activities gradually dulls as more complex and long-term responsibilities become clear.

Maliwada's third or maturation phase began in the second year of the project. It involved the initiation of long- term enterprises to provide stable, year round employment and projects for local consumption and export. A transition took place as several industries went out of existence. The nutritious food contract was lost, the box contract expired and the loaned equipment was recalled. Those previously employed in the box factory now built new homes, opened a sawmill and developed a specialty order wood products industry. Trained drivers started small transport companies or became bus and truck drivers outside the village.

Frequently, at this time a crisis point is reached when certain expectations remain unfulfilled and change does not seem to happen fast enough. Cliques and special interest

groups often emerge. Anger, suspicion and resentfulness set in; enthusiasm wanes and participation declines. During this crisis period two factors are critical: a regular pattern of eventful programs and a substantial victory which demonstrates that the community's vision is, in fact, being realized. By focusing attention and resources on one "keystone miracle" the community can experience a substantial change in its relationship to the situation. When Maliwada leadership focused on the installation of a permanent drinking water system, the village saw that it was able to deal with the factor which most threatened its future.

In the fourth phase a solid economic base was established with more permanent industries, full employment, extensive local ownership and investment, and expanded markets. By 1981 extensive agricultural developments in sorghum, cotton, sugar cane, and various fruits and vegetables were underway. Farmers started raising goats and sheep. More than 100 new and remodeled housing units were completed and several new public buildings added, including two industry sheds. Loans for crops and equipment were available. Business enterprises included 13 brick factories, a sawmill, three flour mills, a chalk industry, a welding shop, a broom factory, a pen factory and 20 new shops, all small and labor intensive. Most of these improvements were financed by local residents from savings or bank loans.

The Maliwada Village Association was formed with an 11-member board which represented the village's social and economic enterprises and geographic neighborhoods. The board administers the village fund and makes recommendations to the Village Assembly for all programs.

In this fourth stage, a new resolve prevails as the community decides to persevere in the development effort. People acknowledge the great accomplishments and manifest a new depth of commitment. Leadership assumes increasing responsibility for the management, organization and planning of the various programs. The core leadership begins to move beyond the community to share the learnings and methods of human development elsewhere. Early in the project's history the Maliwada Ambassadors Guild held village meetings and planning consultations in communities throughout Maharashtra, inviting others to join in a new village renewal effort, Nava Gram Prayas. In this fourth stage the documentation of accomplishments encouraged residents to consider more extensive structural relationships with the surrounding cluster of villages and an expanded role of social responsibility in other states of the nation.

SYSTEMS OF EXTENSION

Can these successes be effectively spread to other villages? The first replication effort in India put in place 232 village projects across the state of Maharashtra, initiated one at a time with individual planning consultations. However, experience showed that villages, just as people, find it difficult to persist at an effort over an extended period of time when working in isolation. Replication efforts now focus on clusters of villages which plan together, participate cooperatively in training programs, and share the struggles and the victories.

Essential to any replication plan is the Human Development Training Institute (HDTI) which was first conducted in Maliwada. This practical, comprehensive curriculum in human development, is organized into modules which correspond to the program chart below. (The chart is a compilation of areas most frequently indicated by residents of the first 8 global projects as crucial to comprehensive local development.)

PROGRAMMATIC CHART		
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	HUMAN DEVELOPMENT	SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Cooperative Agriculture	Living Environment	Preventive Care
Appropriate Industry	Corporate Patterns	Functional Education
Commercial Services	Identity Systems	Community Welfare

HDTI's in 16 nations since 1976 have graduated thousands (6,000 in India). Many have become local ICA staff while others have returned to their home village with their new skills.

Over the past 10-20 years, the self-help, local initiative movement has come of age. Even in remote villages, people are using their own creativity and local resources to develop solutions to long-standing problems. It has been demonstrated that the key to effective and

appropriate change is to be found within local communities. While technical assistance, methods and encouragement from the outside can be very helpful, even essential in many instances, it is in the local situation that the key to creating the future lies. The decision-making capacity and commitment of the local people are the key to the future.