Change and resistance to change – community development in a rural caste community in South India

Communities and Change: Research partnerships and collaborations in Education and Social Work
The University of Sydney
22-23 October 2007

Paper outline
1. What is ‘healthy districts’?
2. Alanganeri Panchayat
3. Healthy Districts Project
4. The community development process – Appreciative Inquiry
5. Lessons learned so far
6. Where to from here?
**What is ‘healthy districts’?**

Part of WHO Healthy Settings approach to promoting health and well being

“A Healthy Districts is one that is continually creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources which enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and in developing to their maximum potential.” (Hancock 1988)

A Healthy Districts project is one that facilitates, enables, assists people to improve the conditions of the rural district in which they live.

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**What is ‘health’?**

*The People’s Charter for Health, endorsed at the first People’s Health Assembly, states:*

“Health is a social, economic and political issue and above all a fundamental human right. Inequality, poverty, exploitation, violence and injustice are at the root of ill-health and the deaths of poor and marginalised people. Health for all means that powerful interests have to be challenged, that globalisation has to be opposed, and that political and economic priorities have to be drastically changed.”

(People’s Health Assembly, 2000)
Changing health status

Intervening in the chain of the social production of health

Decreasing **social stratification** itself, by reducing “inequalities in power, prestige, income and wealth linked to different socioeconomic positions

Decreasing the **specific exposure** to health-damaging factors suffered by people in disadvantaged positions

Lessening the **vulnerability** of disadvantaged people to the health-damaging conditions they face

Intervening through **healthcare** to reduce the unequal consequences of ill-health and prevent further socio-economic degradation among disadvantaged people who become ill

**Alanganeri Panchayat**

Alanganeri Panchayat, site of Healthy Districts Project
Alanganeri Panchayat

One main village, 8 hamlets, field huts and two dalit (outcaste) colonies
414 households (73 in main village)
Highest caste: MBC (“most backward castes”) – 90%; 10% dalits
Most underdeveloped of the 39 Panchayats in this area; lowest health status

Healthy Districts Project (HDP) aims

To develop and evaluate health and development interventions (strengths based community development) in local rural South Indian communities. These interventions involve:

(1) the development of a partnership (as a major means of community; participation) between community members and researchers;

(2) within which issues of importance to the communities are jointly identified;

(3) strategies to address the issues agreed upon; and

(4) the outcomes of these strategies measured/evaluated in terms of extent of achievement of relevant goals.
HDP aims
To strengthen the capacity of local communities to promote and maintain health through:

(1) the establishment of community structures, such as women’s self help groups, health committees, youth groups, and any other structures appropriate to issues identified; and

(2) which are substantially led, organised and maintained by local community members;

(3) who together hold appropriate and sufficient skills (e.g. meeting skills, advocacy skills, organisational skills…) to ensure the structures are durable over time.

HDP Process

Appreciative Inquiry

inspiring achievement
What is AI?

It is a change strategy

It identifies the strengths and resources within people, groups and their communities

It draws on these strengths to effect positive changes

It is a strategy which is implemented cooperatively with the community, with the full participation of the community members

It must be one part of a larger development process

Appreciating the strengths in people and their communities, and asking questions, listening to stories, drawing out themes which identify these strengths gives people hope and motivation to realistically anticipate a better future and to better meet everyday challenges in their lives.
The Strengths Approach

"Is a philosophy for working with people for change
An approach dependent on positive attitudes about people’s dignity, capacities, rights, uniqueness and commonalities
Emphasises people’s ability to be their own agents of change by creating conditions that enable them to engage in and direct processes of change
Creates conditions that enable people to identify, value and mobilise their strengths and capacities in the change process
Provides and mobilises resources that complement people’s existing strengths rather than compensating for perceived deficits
Acknowledges and addresses power imbalances
Seeks to identify and address personal, cultural and structural constraints to people’s growth and self determination
Acknowledges and addresses power dynamics, cultures and structures in organisations that are incongruent with socially-just practices."  
McCashen 2005 p V

Assumptions Underlying AI

- In every society, organisation or group, something works
- What we focus on becomes our reality
- Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward with them parts of the past (the known)
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past
- It is important to value differences and use them as positive resources
- The language we use creates our reality
The 4-D Appreciative Inquiry Cycle

**Discovery Stage**

“The Discovery Stage of AI is a defining feature of the methodology. Good Discovery exercises create an opportunity for sharing stories that recognise individual merit and mutual strengths. This builds the bonds that are necessary for individuals to invest their efforts in collective action for extended periods.”

“The opening questions of the inquiry can generate remarkable energy and valuable information. The questions that we ask set the stage for what we ‘find’, and what we discover (the data) becomes the stories out of which the future is conceived, conversed about and constructed. As such, selecting the focus of the inquiry and generating appropriate questions takes on particular significance.”
Effective Discovery should contribute to two complementary outcomes:

**Insights about**

1. Capacity – an internal group focus
2. Community development – achievements in the community

They told us how they liked their village, it was a nice place to live, with fresh air, fresh water every day; they had fresh vegetables, fresh fruits, how it was healthy to live here, no pollution, they had good coconut and papaya trees; there was a very good atmosphere in the village, everyone knew each other, they were all somehow related, very calm, no disturbance, no fighting, there was a good community spirit.
They told us about women’s situation in India; women were kept down while men had full freedom. However, they said, things are changing”. They said, their SHG would create awareness for women that they have rights. They had the Magili Kurus where women could go to report violence and ill treatment, and action could be taken against men. But women were reluctant to come forward because of a prestige problem. The husband is considered as a ‘god’, women cannot easily remarry and many women do not want to make their problems public”

They said that as they moved out from houses to be educated, they had been able to experience and discover the outside world; they could now talk to banks and at school meetings; they had greater confidence in facing the world; they felt happy and really comfortable now; they felt they could much better manage all aspects of the family – money, problem solving, taking on greater responsibility.
They said “we had water problems, no easy access to water in the village”, women had to carry water from a well about one kilometre away and this was difficult for them; but this problem had been solved, the SHG had done a lot; the members of the SHG got together and met with the Panchayat leader; there were difficulties and opposition but they worked together and crossed the hurdles; the leader heard them out, listened and the problem was solved eventually; they were not hasty; they were polite and calm. They had water taps in the village now.

Strengths and resources

Patience
Building good relationships with those in power
Ability to make changes in the village
Confidence
Ability to take on great responsibility
Skilled managers
Skilled decision makers
Independent
Strong together in the SHG
Strength to sacrifice for children
Enduring hardship
Awareness of positive aspects of their environment and the village
Feelings of happiness within their environment, the village
Awareness of sense of living ‘healthy’ through fresh food
Good community spirit and harmony
Awareness of women’s situation in India
Awareness of member’s rights as women in India, in the world
Awareness of changes in Indian society
Awareness of pressure from society’s taboos
Awareness of importance and impact of education
Desire to learn
Desire to be leaders of their own changes
Very determined

After having asked the group about their thoughts and if they agreed about these strengths, one of them said

“We were not aware of these until you told us, but now we can see how we can come up in life”.

The women nodded and smiled, in agreement.
Dream Stage

Building on strengths to better the group and the community

- What can the group be in five years?
- What can the community be in five years?
- What will be the greatest achievements?
- What role will the group members play in the development of their village?

The group’s vision is likely to encompass

- Social relationships
- Economic relationships
- Cultural traditions
- The environment – natural and human made
- Governance structures
- Employment and income generation opportunities
- Social infrastructure
The group's vision of the future will represent a compelling possibility because it will be built on the community resources – its strengths as they have emerged from the analysis of past achievements.

Two important types of visions emerge from the Dream Stage:

1. Visions of the internal functioning of the group; and

2. Visions of a long-term mission of the group in the development of the community/village

Dreams

they said they wanted a road, transport to the main road was a problem; they had gone to the Panchayat president but landowners were not willing to give some part of their fields for the building of the road. They needed this road to allow school buses to come and to give them options about which schools they sent their children to; children could go to better schools and have better future. This would be easier for everything and everyone.

One woman said, “with the road many changes will occur”.

they said they wanted their children speaking fluent English.
To build a house next to the main road
A road between the village and the main road
A water tank
A hospital
A village shopping centre
A higher secondary school
Maintaining the village’s natural beauty
Start own school (one member)
Comfortable houses

Well furnished houses
More comfortable village (road, water tank, shops…)
Computer
University
Improving children’s education
Employment for people who had got education
A village Tailoring unit – generating income collectively drawing on their present skills, which included bag making, tailoring, garments making. They dreamed of building to an export quality.
Fluent English for their children
Most **important**?  
Take the **shortest time**?  
Take the **longest time**?  
**Easiest**?  
**Most difficult**?

Tailoring Unit/garment factory
The design stage is intended to bring together the participants in a dialogue about creating their desired future; how to build social systems that might redefine approaches to leadership, governance, participation and capacity building.

As strategies are discussed, participants discuss how to protect the qualities of community life they value and incorporate the relationships they want to achieve.

Dreams turn into action by establishing roles and responsibilities, developing strategies, forging relationships with organisations and mobilising resources to achieve goals.

Detailed planning begins at three levels:

1. Action planning on short term objectives established in the Dream Stage;

2. Discussion of long term strategies to achieve more challenging goals; and

3. Consideration of structural changes that will reinforce existing strengths, core values and life-giving forces and create opportunities for ongoing learning.
When asked how many villagers would be interested in tailoring training, they said “there was a list of women interested but it would be necessary to discuss with them again”. Asking how many women present at the meeting would be interested, ten raised their hands.

50 women registered and joined

The women said “they needed further training, a tailoring unit, and tailoring machines”. We discussed about the location of the unit and they said “it had to be discussed with the Panchayat president, who would have first to approach the MLA and then see with the government if they could have some support to either get government land, or private land partly paid by the Tamil Nadu government”.
And then they said they “did not have much experience in business and did not know how to know what there was a demand for on the market; they needed to learn to understand this”. We said we knew about a successful tailoring unit in the area and asked who would be interested to visit this place, “we surely want to go, all of us” was the reply.
Delivery Stage

Empowering, learning, adjusting, improvising

In this stage group members
- Mobilise resources
- Form new relationships
- Acquire new skills
- Implement action plans

Collective vision directs collective action
Follow-up: Keeping the cycle going

AI is a cycle, so a new round of discovery, dreaming, designing and delivery can happen at any time – quick inquiries into particular things or changes to the big vision and action plans.

It can also mean more in-depth inquiries where structural changes need to occur.

Tamil Tendril Tailoring Unit
Successful Outcomes and Achievements

The local participants successfully established Tamil Tendril

The members were engaged in dealing with issues of training, bank accounts, learning organisational skills, dealing with men’s authority, challenging caste differences

The members negotiated to get tailoring machines, public land, building materials, an interim rental property

Potential supports and resources were negotiated with similar successful tailoring and weaving ventures

More inclusive of the diverse groups in Alanganeri
More inclusive of the diverse groups in Alanganeri?

- Caste and power relations creating exclusion
- Equal representation of all communities, capacity building and full participation at the community level
But…

AI is always within a broader development strategy

AI needs to be seen within the context of a larger development strategy, which should include the following factors for successful development outcomes:

- Vision
- Values
- Strategy
- Capability
- Motivation
- Feedback

All leading to and contributing to positive development outcomes. The absence of these factors will weaken efforts at sustainable development outcomes.

AI does not create resources, establish new institutional relationships or build technical skills. Other strategies must be used to do this. AI can be effective in establishing an inspiring group vision, articulating values, creating a sense of ownership, generating new ideas and action for sustainable change and providing a useful feedback tool. All stakeholders need to be involved in the process.
The **failed** outcome

- Traditional relations of power and hierarchy persist and remain dominant over any change or challenge

**Longer term outcomes**

Sustainability of Tamil Tendril compromised
Expansion of activities beyond Tamil Tendril not possible
Resources denied for people’s local development
Hopes and expectations unrealised; old power relations remain intact (to some extent)

**Puzzles remain:** how to deal with structures and relations that continue to violate people’s rights to development and participation
Where to from here?

- Continuing commitment to human rights
- Continuing commitment to reflective practice and ongoing search for effectiveness
- Strengthening of alliances with minority communities in South India

Where to from here?

- Seeking new relationships – interrogating value base, widening to multilateral partnerships
- Having a explicit agenda to develop strategies that effectively take account of traditional power differentials, particularly caste and gender
- Building new multilateral partnership on the basis of
  - An International perspective
  - A human rights perspective
Thank you

inspiring achievement