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Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

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**Participatory
Learning and
Networks
Revisited**

**Keller • Azomo • Lim • Wise • Varghese • Handley
Chaudhary • Lhomi • Desemone • Wills**

The Seven Disciplines of Orality



Courtesy of Dr. Chuck Madinger who leads Global Impact Mission and serves on the International Orality Network's Leadership Team facilitating the Research Task Force.

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Cover Photo

Participatory Learning in a rodeo! The rider and the horse learns about each other, and the audience (the networks) while entertained is also learning and passing on the learning.

Your statutes have been my songs
in the house of my sojourning.

Psalm 119:54 ESV

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom
that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God
acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,
for our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:28—29 ESV

Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

Orality Journal is the journal of the International Orality Network. It is published online semi-annually and aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issues of orality, discoveries of innovations in orality, and praxis of effectiveness across multiple domains in society. This online journal is international and interdisciplinary, serving the interests of the orality movement through research articles, documentation, book reviews, and academic news. Occasionally, print editions will be provisioned. Submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement is welcomed.

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Editor's Note

Samuel E. Chiang

Participatory Learning and Networks

Less than two decades ago in small shops in large coastal cities of China, there were banks of computers set up for people to experience the arrival of computing power. By day it looked business-like; by night it was the domain of youths playing video games. I vividly recall how they would shout out across to each other upon the discovery of new strategies to advance to the next level, all with a focus of how to take down a foreign government or power.

Even today in MMOG (Massively Multiplayer Online Game) the players are tethered to a device connected to a gaming platform, which is, enabled by a network (internet), and together the players interact meaningfully with people across the world. They actually learn from each other, and in turn achieve an individual best, and more often a common agenda, collaboratively. At times one is the master, at other times one is the apprentice, all the while the learning is crafted into the individual through ultra high-definition images presented in a coherent imaginary storyline.

All this sounds very intuitive. It is oral, visual, collaborative, and purposeful. Embedded are assumptions and theories which drive the process, including but not limited to: 1. Adults learn better when knowledge is constructed through participation; 2. Adults are able to pass on “sticky” knowledge through their vast networks; 3. Knowledge gets passed on through personal relationships (networks) when it retains its “stickiness” in the form of how people normally receive, process, remember, and pass on information.

The practitioners who contributed articles to this volume are all experts in their own domain. They have gone through both the school of hard-knocks and the school of discoveries. While the case studies speak of how “orality—learning—participation” works in the field, the theories along with the nomenclature are both grounded and well established.

In assembling this volume, William Coppedge and myself encountered several sensitivities concerning case studies, field of service, and names.

Thus, where necessary we have used pseudonyms, or left out names entirely. The cases are all true. In this volume, we also attempted something new: we have endeavored to capture several threaded discussions from within a forum context. Theory and praxis often intersect in a community of practice supported through a public forum, and so we worked with one of the writers to distill material contributed within one of those forum contexts and craft it into an article. In this sense, we have tried to capture what was timely and casted it as what can become timeless.

Finally, in this issue there was so much good information—along with detailed discussions and concrete examples—that the submissions were much longer than the allotted space. Thus, while editing has been necessary, we have tried to ensure as smooth a reading as possible.

We continue in the exploration of how orality works within communities, both in the oral and digital generations. We desire to discover how vital information permeates networks as well as how participatory learning enables the delivery of that information and makes “it stick” in the individual and the community. We are certain you will find this issue interesting, and we invite your feedback.

On the journey together,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Samuel E. Chiang', written in a cursive style.

Samuel E. Chiang
From Knoxville, Tennessee, USA

Deciding and Planning Together: Engaging Oral-preference Communicators Using a Participatory Approach

Susan Keller

Photos by Susan Keller

Susan Keller is a consultant to faith-based NGOs, serving in Asia since 2006. She trains and mentors people who facilitate participatory discussions—within teams, churches and partnerships, with communities in rural settings, and during conferences. She was first trained in participatory methods in 2007. She also served in Africa for 13 years.

About 18 lay leaders and pastors from several local congregations in a town in the southern Philippines sat in a circle sharing stories about how using the Kinamayo language (rather than Cebuano, the regional language, or Filipino, the national language) was helping people in their community come to faith or grow in faith. Their rapt attention indicated that many were hearing for the first time about ways Kinamayo was being used within the various ministries of the different congregations.

another person shared. Again, a phrase or two were written to document the good thing happening in that congregation or ministry. After sharing what was already happening, the group began discussing their hopes. What could be done in our congregations, community, or individually which would help people come to faith or grow in faith through using Kinamayo? Each idea shared was summarized on a piece of paper and laid under the heading “Hopes.”

After the first person shared, two or three key points were written in large letters, each on a separate strip of paper and placed in the center of the group under the heading “Good Things.” Then,



The discussion participants were all Kinamayo speakers, but most were multilingual, speaking Cebuano as a second language, and Filipino as a third language. Several also spoke some English. The discussion facilitators, Chari Viloría and Mila Mata, were trilingual in Cebuano, Filipino, and English.

The most confident writers among the participants had the role of writing a summary of each person's ideas on paper. They wrote in whatever language or combination of languages they wanted to. The person sitting beside each of these "scribes" helped place the papers on the floor so all could see them and refer back to them as needed. Although 80% or more of the participants were literate in Cebuano or Filipino, the majority of the group was clearly oral-preference communicators. Those who had few or no literacy skills also eagerly joined in the discussion. Each watched where the paper with the words he had spoken was laid.

One participant read out all the Hopes which had been written. A few additional hopes were added. Participants then arranged the Hopes to show which could be

done soon and which would take time. As they arranged them, they thought of a few more Hopes. One paper was this: "Write Kinamayo newspapers, Sunday school materials, and Bible." Newspapers would not take long. Sunday school materials would take longer. The Bible would take the longest of all.

They decided to write three separate papers instead. Participants then began to discuss which three or four of the hopes were the most important ones for helping people in their community come to faith or grow in faith. An older woman stood up, knelt beside the diagram, pointed at a paper, and began to explain why she thought that was the most important Hope. As she talked, others in the group motioned for her to point to the paper next to the one she was indicating. She smiled, moved her hand, and continued to explain why that idea was so important. The group placed a plastic token on that paper to show that it was indeed one of the most important hopes.

What had happened? Here was a woman with low or perhaps no literacy skills, who, through the participatory process in which

she had been involved for over an hour, knew that her input was valuable and desired. She relied on her keen observation skills, good memory, and strong community relationships as she engaged. Yes, she was off by one paper as she pointed to and shared her insights about the Hope she felt was important, but the safe environment that was created resulted in her freely communicating her ideas.

The discussion did not end there. After marking several important Hopes, the group then talked about which Hopes they wanted to begin to work on. What could the group gathered in that place make plans for and begin to implement? The group selected three Hopes, divided themselves among those Hopes, and began to make plans—*what steps will help to assure that this particular Hope becomes a reality?* Again, the preference for oral communication was obvious.

The volume rose, the groups worked diligently. They eagerly shared with the whole group their initial plans, written in bullet points. The groups clearly owned the plans they had made: the participants' own names were listed as the ones responsible

for the implementation of the plans. Discussion participants had also identified others in their community whom they would invite to be part of the implementation—people whom they knew had interest or skills or resources to turn the Hope into reality. The facilitators' names were not mentioned in the plans. Through the whole process, people with varying levels of oral and literate preference worked together, affirming one another's ideas and abilities.

Similar things happened in each of the 17 groups with which Viloría, Mata, and Fabiosa facilitated participatory discussions (Hasselbring et.al 2011). Similar things happen regularly when a participatory approach is used: oral-preference communicators become actively involved in decision-making and planning for kingdom work.

What Is a Participatory Approach?

The Participatory Methods website says:

Participatory methods (PMs) include a range of activities with a common thread: enabling ordinary people to play an active and influential part in decisions which affect their lives. This

means that people are not just listened to, but also heard; and that their voices shape outcomes.

Researchers, community members, activists and donors all use PMs. Because respect for local knowledge and experience is paramount, the result is interventions that reflect local realities, often leading to better supported and longer lasting social change.¹

Another way of understanding a participatory approach is considering its three components: **a participatory mindset, participatory techniques, and participatory tools.** These are briefly introduced here and then explored in more depth in the sections below.

A person with a **participatory mindset** views other people as they really are: created in the image of God, and yet both a sinner and scarred by the sins of others. Someone with a participatory mindset focuses on doing with others, rather than doing things *to* or *for* others. A person with a participatory mindset believes that God has been at work in and through the people in that place before she got involved and believes that God will continue

to work in and through them in the future. As a result, she does not believe that she is ultimately responsible for change to happen among them, but trusts God to work in his timing.

Participatory techniques are a wide variety of ways of doing things which help people participate maximally, listen well to one another, and move toward consensus. These include asking open questions, allowing silence so people can formulate their thoughts, writing ideas in large letters (or drawings) on strips of paper, placing the papers into a diagram on the floor (or a table or wall), inviting the group to categorize, prioritize in other ways by moving the papers to make a diagram which is meaningful to them, using moveable tokens or markers as they analyze their ideas, and more.

A **participatory tool** is a step-by-step process which has had a history of use; each tool is usually well documented. Each helps a group to address a certain type of issue: describing their situation, analyzing deeper issues, deciding what to do, developing plans, or evaluating something which has already been done. Participatory tools can be adapted to fit other contexts. In

the introduction, a variety of the Appreciative Inquiry² tool was used. Hundreds of participatory tools have been developed.

When using a participatory approach, the person facilitating a discussion must have a participatory mindset. The facilitator uses participatory techniques appropriate to the dynamics of a specific event. If appropriate, a participatory tool is selected and used to help the group move toward its desired outcome.

The Origins of the Use of a Participatory Approach

The idea of using a participatory approach started to grow in the mid-1900s in diverse fields. In education, Paul Freire (1970) and others urged that adults should decide what they want to learn and how they will use what they learn. They also emphasized that learners already have a large amount of experience and wisdom which should be affirmed and valued.

In community development, Robert Chambers (1984) and others desired to see greater participation of local community members in development programs related to health, agriculture, sanitation, and

education. In business, those involved in planning and evaluation realized that people at all levels and in all departments have key insights which can help a company to improve.

In the social sciences, researchers have realized the value of involving those being researched in setting research goals, determining the methods to use, and analyzing the results. Over the years, a variety of models for using a participatory approach have developed.

Amidst various approaches used by different groups, two aspects of participation are helpful to maintain. The first is from *When Helping Hurts*³ and places the emphasis on the relationship between outsiders and the local people. Many who promote the use of an oral approach are outsiders to the communities, congregations, or ministries which they seek to influence.

As you read the continuum of participation, think about a ministry with which you are familiar. Identify where that ministry lies along the continuum. Consider also where you, or better yet, where God, might desire that ministry to be on the continuum.

Participation Continuum by Corbett and Fikkert		
Mode of Participation	Type of Involvement of Local People	Relationship of Outsiders to Local People
Coercion	Local people submit to predetermined plans developed by outsiders.	Doing TO
Compliance	Local people are assigned to tasks, often with incentives, by outsiders; the outsiders decide the agenda and direct the process.	Doing FOR
Consultation	Local people's opinions are asked; outsiders analyze and decide on a course of action.	Doing FOR
Cooperation	Local people work together with outsiders to determine priorities; responsibility remains with outsiders for directing the process.	Doing WITH
Co-leading	Local people and outsiders share their knowledge to create appropriate goals and plans, to execute those plans, and to evaluate the results.	Doing WITH
Community Initiated	Local people set their own agenda and mobilize to carry it out without outside initiators and facilitators	Responding TO

The second continuum, found in *Methods for Community Participation*⁴ focuses more on the role of the community. While external institutions are mentioned occasionally, this continuum shows that even churches, communities, and ministries which have no outside involvement may not be participatory. Again, it is helpful to identify the location on the continuum of several organizations or ministries with which you are familiar.

Kumar	
Definition	Type of Participation
People participate by being told what is going to happen or what has already happened.	Passive Participation
People participate by answering questions by extractive researchers.	Participation in Information Giving
People participate by being consulted. External people listen to views and define the problems and solutions.	Participation by Consultation
People participate by providing resources (labour) in return for material incentives.	Participation for Material Incentives
People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined externally initiated objectives.	Functional participation
People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans, and formation of strengthening local institutions.	Interactive participation
People participate by taking initiative independent of external institutions to change systems.	Self-mobilization

Two points of clarification may be helpful. First, what is appropriate for God to do is very different than what is appropriate for outside people to do. God does and should do things to and for his people. We were not able to create ourselves. We are not able to save ourselves.

Second, not everything should be done at the highest level of participation. In emergency situations, we all want a competent person to tell us “what is going on” and we are willing to “submit to predetermined plans.” However, the frequent mention by even the most authoritative leaders and pastors is that they desire congregational members or those under their leadership to take initiative or be more actively involved. This indicates that many opportunities exist for moving toward greater participation within the Body of Christ.

We will now explore the three aspects of a participatory approach in greater depth.

Participatory Mindset

My first significant exposure to a participatory mindset was during my second year of secondary school. Mr. Pepin was teaching us about non-Western thought. I was shocked that Mr. Pepin would ask deep, open questions of some of the “poorer” students in our class. I thought, “She doesn’t know the answer to that! Ask her an easy question!” I was amazed at the profound, insightful answers which that student gave!

I realized that I had misjudged other students.

Mr. Pepin did not consider anyone in the class to be stupid. He knew that God had given each student the ability to think. Students responded to his affirmation of who they were by thinking and sharing their insights. God used Mr. Pepin to help me to acknowledge the God-given abilities of my fellow students.

In his book *Walking with the Poor*⁵, Bryant Myers⁶ dedicates an entire chapter to exploring how God views people, what he has done for them, and what that means about how we as believers should relate to one another and to those who are not yet in God’s kingdom. I can only briefly summarize his thoughts here.

God created the world perfect and desired that each human would have good, healthy, and peaceful relations with God, other humans, the rest of creation, and oneself (Myers 2011, 61). Two diagrams show the broken human relationships which are a consequence of the fall and the relationships which God desires people to have with himself and each other.

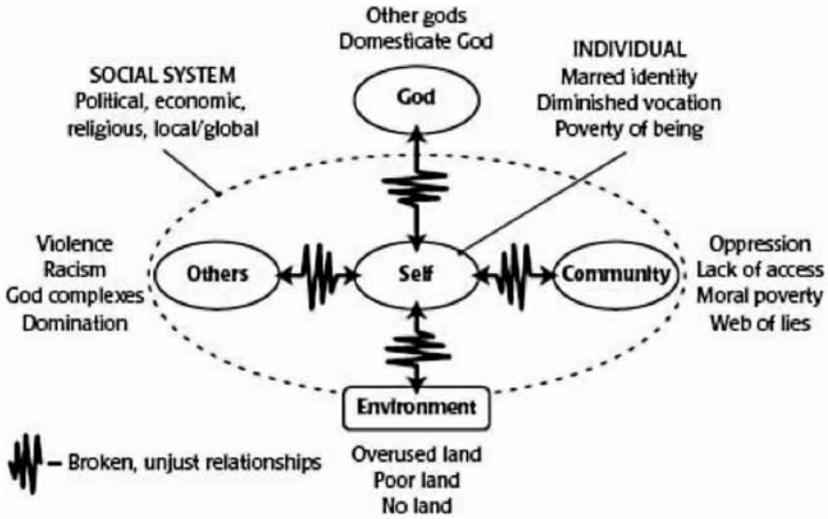


Figure 1: Myers diagram of a relational understanding of poverty (2011, 64).

Myers makes a distinction between people who are part of our community (family, friends, and neighbors) and those who we see as “other” (people of another social status, ethnic group, caste, religion, or political party). Relationships are damaged with both categories of people. Myers’ second diagram shows the peaceful and just relationships which God desires us to have with God, creation, and other people.

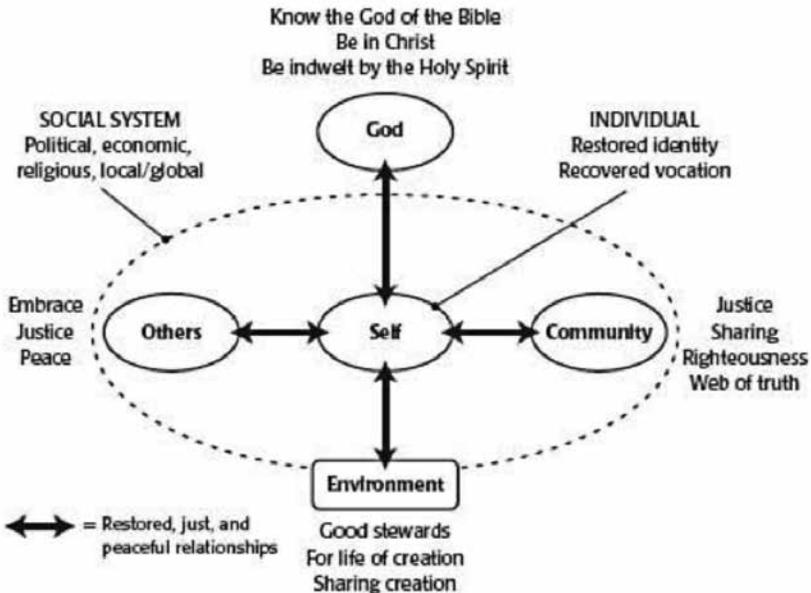


Figure 2: Myers diagram of restored relationships (2011, 181).

According to Myers, broken relationships have resulted in people lacking or being poor in many ways: broken relationships result in a lack of resources, health, knowledge, relationships, peace, goodness, freedom... The list goes on (2011, 114). In reality, each of us is poor in multiple ways. We are not perfect; our sin toward others and others' sin toward us results in each of us lacking—even those of us who are redeemed “know in part.”

Myers also explores how the fall damaged people's sense of identity and their sense of vocation. Two opposite things happened to people's identities. Some people develop a hopeless or “poor” identity (I can't..., I don't have..., I'm not...), while others develop a prideful “non-poor” identity (I can..., I have..., I am...). According to Myers,

The net result of the fall... is that...people learn to play god in the lives of the poor and the marginalized... [The results are patterns of domination and oppression that mar the image and the potential productivity of the poor, while alienating the non-poor from their true identity as well. (2011, 67)

Think about this idea of the poor and non-poor and how that fits into whether and how people will participate. Put one person with a non-poor identity together with others and that person begins doing to and for everyone else—whether they desire it or not. Put a person with a poor identity with others and the person expects others to help him or her and do for him or her things that he or she might well be able to do for him or herself.

The solution is the work of Jesus in the lives of the poor and the non-poor alike. In neither case will high levels of participation occur.

Myers says that two things the poor need are to believe “that they are made in the image of God and are God's children” and “that they have gifts to contribute...[as] productive stewards of creation” (2011, 178). The non-poor also need two things: “laying down their god-complexes and believing that they are made in God's image and are not, themselves, gods” and “believing that their gifts are for sharing, not control...[as] they...lead as servants, not masters” (2011, 178).

The solution for both the poor and the non-poor is the same—restored relationships with God, self, and others through the

death and resurrection of Jesus and restored understandings of their identity and calling. That restoration does not result in perfect people, congregations, or communities, but rather people which have these values:

Loyalty to all in our community
All men, women and children matter
Compassion for those who are in need
Repentance which takes personal responsibility for wrong
Forgiveness to all who injure us
Sharing with all who are in need
Equality for all men and women
Justice for all, even the weakest
Peacemaking within the community and world

Figure 3: Values moving toward the kingdom (taken from EFICOR in Myers 2011, 296)

The above is a brief introduction to a participatory mindset in which each participatory approach facilitator must continually be growing. None of us master it perfectly. We now move on to consider in more depth the various participatory techniques.

Participatory Techniques

Participatory techniques are many, varied, and flexible. In this section, I describe ten different techniques, as well as giving variations and the situations in which each variation may be more appropriate. The techniques can be thought about in two ways—the physical action which is done, or the benefit of doing those things. The physical action is most visible. The benefit is most important. The benefits are closely tied to the participatory mindset. Each physical action has several benefits or reasons. Thus, we start with a list of the reasons or benefits for using participatory techniques.

- a) **Value** what each person has said
- b) **Remember** what has been said
- c) **Understand** others well
- d) **Encourage** those who have been **least heard**
- e) Communicate **confidence in them**, their abilities, and gifts
- f) **Allow** for **changes** as the discussion progresses
- g) Discussion **participants decide** and plan for their own group (not the outsiders who may be facilitating)
- h) Create an environment in which it is **safe to fail**
- i) **Involve everyone** in viewing, moving, sharing, and deciding
- j) **Building consensus** among the participants

k) **No limits** are set by the facilitators (or as few as possible)

Each physical technique is presented with several of the benefits listed in italics. The technique is then described in more detail.

#1. Participants document ideas on strips of paper (*value, remember, understand, allow change*)

In meetings in the West, a secretary usually takes notes for everyone; however, no one sees the notes until the next meeting.

In addition, it is common during meetings for someone to say, “A little while ago, Mary said something so clearly—what was it that she said?” But the group finds the idea has slipped away.

In a participatory discussion the whole group is responsible to assure that key points are documented as the meeting progresses. The documentation is flexible in form, with each idea being written on a separate strip of paper. Any concerns about how something is documented can be accounted for

by removing a strip and writing a corrected or improved version on another strip.

The documentation becomes “We have said” rather than “Ram said” or “Dinaledi said.” In many cultures, attributing words to a person may cause shame or may raise a person to a level that is inappropriate. Having ideas documented anonymously on paper makes it easier to discuss the ideas without the status of the person who said it influencing the response to the idea.



When documenting using words on paper, the words serve as a reminder to what was said. They are not verbatim notes. Thus, although words are often used, they are helpful for oral-preference communicators. Sometimes, the person who speaks will only say a short phrase. More often, the person will share several sentences. The facilitator would then ask the group, “How can what Abdul said be summarized?” or “What were the main points that Suresh shared?” This allows the group to think about what

was said and find an agreed upon way to document the ideas.

In some situations, drawings or icons are used to represent the ideas on the strips of paper rather than words. This makes the process even more favorable to oral-preference communicators. Because diagrams or icons are less standardized than words, it becomes even more important for the group to decide together how to symbolize the ideas that are shared. The drawings need not have great detail. Just as the words serve as reminders of larger ideas, so the drawing or icon is a reminder for a larger concept.

#2. Large enough to see (*value, understand, participants decide*)

The materials used need to be large enough for everyone to see and read/identify what is on each paper with minimum-to-no need to move. The number of participants, as well as their age (vision abilities) and the lighting influence the size of paper used and how large the writing is.

#3. Sitting in a circle (*involve everyone, understand, value, encourage least heard*)



Ideally, participants sit in a circle or a semi-circle during the discussion so they can all see each other easily. They may sit on chairs, or if culturally appropriate, on the floor. Sitting in a circle (rather than in three straight lines) enables everyone to see everyone else. The visual contact helps people understand what others are saying. It allows the facilitator to easily see everyone's face and read from the face whether each participant is being understood and is feeling valued.

Sitting in a circle usually assures that everyone is the same distance from the diagram. Being near the diagram encourages everyone to participate. Sitting in a circle helps the least-heard people to feel part of the group and may encourage them to share their thoughts.

#4. Accept all ideas (*value, encourage least heard, participants decide*)

During every discussion, there are one or more times when “all ideas are accepted.” This is sometimes called brainstorming or greenlighting. Questions can include “What are all of the good things that

are happening in your group?” or “What are all the things that are helping you to reach your goal?” or “What are all the tasks which are required for your church to carry out its mission?” Everyone in the group shares his or her idea. Every single idea is documented. Even ideas which seem to be “off track” are accepted at face value and written down. This prevents people from feeling ashamed about what they said. It also helps people to think more creatively, or to share ideas which are a bit unusual, but which may hold the key to helping the group move ahead.

As the group sees that all ideas are accepted, people gain courage to share some of their deeper thoughts, which they may have feared others would judge or criticize. Sometimes, a member of the group will ask a question of clarification. When this happens, the facilitator turns the question back to the group. Occasionally, some people in the group want to talk about one thing and others want to discuss another matter.



If the group decides to shift the focus of the discussion, it is up to them. It may be that one person had decided the meeting topic, but the open sharing of ideas allowed the preference of the group to be heard.

In many situations, the oral-preference communicators in a group feel that they are not as valuable as others. The free sharing of ideas often results in more open and honest sharing by all who are present.

#5. Read out what has been written (*value, remember, understand, involve everyone, allow change*)

Most discussions have several parts. At the end of each part of a discussion, the ideas that have been documented for that part of the discussion are read out. The group is encouraged to listen to determine whether all ideas have been documented, and whether any additional ideas should be added. One participant reads out all of the words, or all of the diagrams which have been

contributed. Participants may also ask for clarification about what has been written, or may recommend a rewording.

When some in the group have lower or no literacy skills, the person reading points to each paper as it is read. This allows all members of the group to see where papers are placed which refer to the ideas about which they are most interested or passionate.

#6. Sharing in small groups

(encourage the least heard, value, understand)

A common participatory technique is to have the group get into smaller groups of three to five people in order to share their ideas. Sometimes, the groups are self-selected. Other times, the groups are assigned with all of the young women in one group, the older men in another, and so on.

Working part of the time in small groups is helpful if the whole group numbers more than 12, because it can be difficult for every person to get a chance to share. In small groups, each person is likely to

talk at least once. Sometimes, each small group documents on papers the ideas they discussed and only share the written form with the whole group. Other times, the small groups report back to the big group before writing, and the ideas are documented on papers at that point.

If the group has more than 25 participants, a second way of working in groups may be used. Multiple facilitators may lead smaller groups through the whole



participatory tool, with each group discussing the same topic. After each group finishes the tool, they move around the room to look at the work other groups

did. These groups may also be self-selected or assigned, as is appropriate for the discussion topic. Depending on the nature and purpose of the discussion, the next steps would vary. In some cases, three key ideas from each group are collected. In others, a committee processes all the ideas of all the groups. In still others, each participant is encouraged to take notes on what he or she will do differently as a result of the discussion.

#7. Categorizing or prioritizing the ideas (*building consensus, value, understand*)



After brainstorming in either small groups or together, another step is for the group to process all of the ideas in some way. The group may identify those ideas which are most central, or most important. The group may put the ideas in order from easiest to hardest, or from those which they can do themselves to those which would require outside help. The group may categorize the ideas and determine headings for the different categories.

During this process of categorizing or prioritizing, the group may think of additional ideas that they had not considered previously. It is also common for the group to realize that they may need to be more specific in the wording they use. Sometimes, the group realizes that some individuals thought a

paper meant one thing, and others thought it meant something else. As a result, they may discard the one paper and write two separate papers instead.

Also during this process the group may realize that some papers are duplicates of others, or that a paper can be discarded because of a misunderstanding about the original question. By this point in the discussion, the group is working together in such a collaborative way that no one feels embarrassment when a paper is removed.

#8. Using locally available materials (*allow change, participants decide, safe to fail*)

As the group categorizes and prioritizes, strings may be used to show which items are in one category and which are in another. Tokens/markers can be used to mark papers. Examples of this include: showing which are the five most important ideas, showing the relative amount or strength of each item (using different numbers of tokens), or showing which items are in each category by using a different token for each category.

Different types of tokens are used in different contexts. Community development workers use stones,

sticks, leaves, or seeds of various types—materials selected by the participants themselves within their environment, often during the discussion itself. Those who facilitate planning discussions in businesses often use post-it notes or stickers.

A middle ground can be using free resources which can be found in communities, but which are re-usable. Tokens made of discarded plastic can be easily stored, transported, and reused. Such tokens can be made from colored plastic (detergent bottles, soda bottles, engine oil bottles, plastic folders, or packing strips). These can be cut into tokens about one to two centimeters in size and of different shapes.

The items used as tokens need to be clearly distinguishable to the participants and ideally should also be distinguishable to facilitators. While community members may clearly distinguish pumpkin seeds from squash seeds, the facilitators may not be able to distinguish them. Likewise, the facilitators may be able to distinguish blue rectangles from green rectangles, but in some cultures, green and blue are a single

color with a single name. Some discussions may require the use of four to six different colors or types of tokens.

#9. Create a diagram or visualize the discussion (*remember, build consensus, participants decide*)

As the participants document their ideas and categorize or prioritize their ideas using local materials, they create a visual diagram representing what they are discussing. Each participatory tool provides some guidance as to how the ideas are visualized, but



the participants are the ones who ultimately decide how to arrange the diagram to show what they think, believe, or have decided. At the end of the discussion, the diagram is made permanent by doing one or more of the following: taping the pieces of paper together, gluing the papers onto a large sheet of paper, drawing the diagram on a large sheet of paper, or taking a high resolution photo of the diagram.

#10. Only participants touch and move the papers (*value, confidence in them, participants decide*)

As group participants write ideas, categorize them, and place tokens on them, the facilitator does not touch the



papers or other materials, except to initially hand them to group participants. The facilitator may invite them to make a heading for the categories they have made, but the group can decide how to arrange the categories. If someone in the group feels that what is written on one paper duplicates what is written on another, the group decides whether what is on the two papers is identical or not. They then decide what to do about it (some groups decide to remove one, others stack them, still others may place them side by side or tape them together). The facilitator never removes a paper from the group's diagram.

#11. Using the ground as the work area (*encourage least heard, involve everyone, no limits*)

During participatory discussions, the ground is often the work area. A table or a wall can also be used.

Advantages of using the ground include that the diagram can usually be expanded in any direction if there are more ideas. New participants can join the group easily.

In many cultures, it is the people who are least heard who are most comfortable doing things on the ground, while those who are most heard may be hesitant to do things on the ground. Using the ground often gives the least heard more courage. They will be the ones most willing to move the papers, and in the process they may gain confidence in expressing their ideas (even if others disagree with them).



#12. Give the participants time
(*participants decide, involve everyone*)

Often, a group (or the leaders of a group) allocates relatively small amounts of time for discussion and decision-making. This may be because the leaders feel that they are very close to reaching a decision and developing a plan. They may want the larger group to give approval. However, when the discussion is opened to a broader group of stakeholders, new insights, risks, and opportunities may be identified. Everyone realizes that more time is needed. Facilitators should take time before the event to understand the situation well, and recommend to the leaders the amount of time a discussion might take. Good facilitators always leave a margin in their schedule so that if the whole group decides to extend the meeting the facilitator can be adjust to the group's need.

#13. Ask open questions
(*understand, encourage least heard, value*)

The goal of a participatory discussion is that the participants will think and talk with one another in order to move toward their goals. Asking a yes/no question rarely promotes the desired type

of dialogue, but a well designed open question encourages thinking and sharing. Many open questions begin with who, what, where, when, or why. Some requests (e.g., "Please, share in small groups about good things you have seen happening as a result of people listening the Bible on their cellphones") can also be considered to be open questions.

#14. Allow silence so people can formulate their thoughts
(*encourage the least heard, involve everyone*)

After a facilitator asks a question, he or she stops. He or she allows time for the participants to think. Sometimes, the facilitator will say, "We are going to take several minutes to silently reflect on this next question. If you want to, you can write some of your ideas or draw a picture about this." Different people process ideas at different speeds. Many people think best when there is silence. If they are trying to listen to the ideas of the fast thinkers, they never have time to formulate their own thoughts. Often, the people in the group who are least heard are also the last ones to be told about new ideas. Allowing silence also helps the group to have the time needed to process ideas before they are discussed.

#15. Leave the diagrams they make with the participants (*participants decide, safe to fail*)

At the end of a participatory discussion, the group will have made one or more diagrams representing the things which they have discussed. There is often a diagram for each tool which was facilitated. These diagrams are the work of the group and are left with them. The diagram might be taped together, glued onto a large sheet of paper, or sketched by one of the participants. If the facilitator feels it is appropriate, he or she may request to take a photograph of the diagram so that he or she has a copy of what the participants did. It is up to the participants to decide how to preserve the diagram and where to display or store it.

#16. Decide how to share the results with others (*participants decide, involve everyone*)

Near the end of a discussion, the facilitator may ask the group two questions: “Who else might want to know about what you discussed today?” and “With whom would you like to share the results of this discussion?” The results of a participatory discussion belong to the participants. They are theirs to share with others as they decide.

Participatory Tools

A participatory tool is a set of steps which provides structure to a conversation. Most tools have some or all of the following steps:

- State, select, or refine the topic
- Brainstorm lots of ideas related to the topic
- Categorize, prioritize, or organize the ideas in some way
- Decide to act on certain ideas
- Develop action plans for those ideas
- Decide how to share the results with others

Some of these general steps may be repeated multiple times in a single tool. For example, in the tool Appreciative Inquiry, brainstorming is done both about the current situation and about the hoped-for future situation. In the SWOT Analysis tool, the steps of brainstorming, categorizing, and prioritizing are done four times: once each for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Each tool may focus on describing the current situation, analyzing the situation, deciding what to do, planning how to do it, or evaluating something that has been done. Some tools focus on several of these at once. The word cloud in Figure 4 shows the diversity of uses of 40 participatory tools.

include, but are not limited to: misunderstanding, addressing the wrong issue, teaching at the wrong level (either too high or too low), offense, rejection, and expulsion.

Using a participatory approach is about what Myers calls “learning our way to a better future” (2011, 287). When using a participatory approach, the facilitator learns with the community, and walks with the community as they decide, plan, implement, and evaluate. The roles of the facilitator and the participants in a participatory process are very different than the typical roles of leader and team, or committee chair and committee. They are also very different than the typical roles of teacher⁷ and learner. They are not the role of mentor and mentee.

The main role of the facilitator is to guide the process of the discussion. Discussion participants are the ones who bring the content to the discussion and make decisions. Some aspects of guiding the process of the discussion include:

- Sets a good order for the discussion topics
- Creates a safe environment for the group to share
- Invites each person to contribute information, perceptions or reactions related to the topic

- Helps the group members listen to each other well
- Gracefully handles tense moments, affirming that working as a group is challenging
- Remains neutral—providing for all ideas and perspectives to be adequately heard
- Adjusts the process to fit the needs and desires of the group, or the complexity of the topic
- Discerns when to move the group towards convergence of their ideas so they can reach appropriate decisions
- Encourages the group to decide on specific actionable steps

The facilitator does not know what the outcome of the meeting will be before it starts. If he or she is confident of the outcome, he or she may be manipulating the group rather than facilitating. In addition, the facilitator does not need to know very much about the topic being discussed. The facilitator does not contribute content to the discussion. It is often best if the person facilitating a discussion is not the supervisor, mentor, chairman, teacher, or other in an authority role.

If the person who will facilitate knows that he or she has important content to contribute to the discussion, several options should be considered. It might be better to:

- Change the event to a teaching event rather than a facilitated discussion
- Find a different facilitator so that the original facilitator can be a discussion participant
- Find a second/assistant facilitator who can temporarily switch roles with the facilitator at appropriate points in the discussion
- Rotate the facilitation

A frequent question with using a participatory approach is whether the facilitator should be an insider or an outsider to the topic, the process, and the group which is discussing the issue. Often, it is best for the facilitator to be as much of an insider as possible. Figure 5 shows the advantages and disadvantages for both internal and external facilitators.

	Internal	External
Advantages	Already accepted and trusted Understands cultural norms and cues Knows how to communicate respectfully Can communicate in the local language Lower cost	May be more neutral May be more objective May be more respected due to status The group, knowing he or she is an outsider, may describe the situation more fully (which may help other participants)
Disadvantages	May want to influence the conversation. May show favoritism May be seen as on one side of an issue. It may seem strange to the group that an insider is not sharing his or her ideas May be fewer (no) internal facilitators available	May want to influence the conversation May make cultural mistakes May misunderstand cultural cues May cost more May not be able to communicate directly May impose outside norms

Figure 5: Internal or external facilitators compared

Many of the advantages and disadvantages can be addressed through the careful selection and training of facilitators and through careful preparation for the event.

Participatory Approach and the Tendencies of Oral and Lettered Cultures

Having introduced a participatory approach, we now consider how it connects to some of the tendencies of Oral and Lettered Cultures, shared by Charles Madinger (2013,17) and adapted from William Parker. The figure below, taken from Madinger's 2013 article, highlights some preferences of people from oral cultures. Many of these connect well with using a participatory approach.

LETTERED CULTURES		ORAL CULTURES
Literary	COMMUNICATION	Oral
Institutional	LIFESTYLE	Communal
Individualism	TIME AND SPACE	Individualized Groups
Deferred	GRATIFICATION	Immediate
Linear	LIFE PERSPECTIVE	Circular
Individually Oriented	LEARNING PATTERNS	Group Oriented
Word is not the "thing"	LEXICON	Word is the "thing"
Figure 1. Tendencies ⁶ of Oral and Lettered Cultures. Adapted from Parker (1980, 45-48).		

Communication is primarily oral when a participatory approach is used. Discussion participants think and talk together. Some literary forms may be used by the facilitator and the participants, but their role is a reminder, not the center.

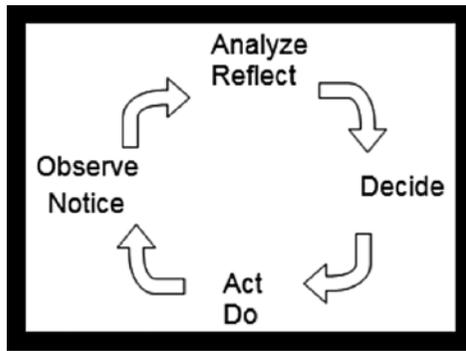
A **communal lifestyle** fits a participatory approach extremely well. The facilitator believes that the group can make more progress on their goals together than by each working separately. Many participatory techniques are such

that levels of power are equalized. The facilitator strives to have as minimal of a role as possible in the discussion, allowing the community to own the content, and at times, the process. However, a participatory approach can also be used within more institutionalized settings. It can be used within churches and other organizations, as well as within more hierarchical (less communal) cultures.

Regarding the use of time and space, a participatory approach

definitely values the group use of time and space. The use of time and space is flexible, not rigid. The discussion takes as much time as the group needs for it to take. The diagram fills the area that the group decides it should fill. Some groups make gigantic diagrams while others make relatively small ones. It is up to them.

A participatory approach uses a **circular** or **cyclical life perspective**, as evidenced by



the action-reflection cycle. A group which has been engaged in some activity takes time to *observe* and *notice* what has been happening. They then dig deeper, *analyzing* and *reflecting* on why those things happened the way they did. At each step, a two-hour discussion might take place, with time between each step for further reflection. Next, the group *decides* what needs to be done. That decision could be a minor adjustment to the activity which is already being implement. Or it might be a more major adjustment. The decision may even be one about taking a major change in direction based

on the discussions which occurred during the previous steps.

A key point is that the group is not going around in circles. Rather, each iteration of the cycle strengthens what the group knows, deepens their understanding, and improves their decisions. In some cases, each

iteration may result in more people being involved, or the goals being expanded. The literate approach to the life cycle

is linear—it can imply that one only gets a single chance to do something right. The cyclical approach has a focus on growth, forgiveness, and continual improvement.

A participatory approach also provides **immediate gratification**, while at the same time encouraging the group to plan for the future. The length of one cycle in the action-reflection cycle is usually quite short. The idea is that it is often better to discuss a little, plan a little, implement a little, observe a little, adjust the plans, etc., rather than spend much time planning and perhaps postpone any implementation.

A participatory approach can also be used for larger plans with longer term goals; however, such planning would usually take place after success with several smaller objectives. Within a larger plan, ongoing monitoring with flexibility to adjust the plan would be a key feature.

Learning patterns are definitely **group-oriented** when using a participatory approach. The focus in a facilitated discussion is not on learning, but on making progress on group goals through making decisions and implementing them. However, any time a group works together, learning takes place. Throughout a participatory process, the group is thinking and talking together. If all in the group already knew the same things, they would not need to think and talk together. Each person comes to the discussion knowing the situation well from his or her perspective. Each one has things to share with the others in the group and things to learn from them. As the group analyzes and decides, they are not so much learning from each other as they are learning together. As

“This has been so helpful for us” shared the youth leader after he and other congregational leaders had participated in a discussion about the good things happening in their congregation. “This was so encouraging! Could I use this with the youth in my congregation?” The immediate benefits of a participatory discussion resulted in this youth leader wanting to use it in other contexts.

they decide what to do and try something new, they are also learning together whether that approach will work, or whether they need to make further adjustments.

Using a Participatory Approach with Oral-preference Communicators

While the use of a participatory approach works well with oral-preference communicators, adjustments to several techniques can make them even more appropriate when oral communication is the only choice for many group members.

When documenting the group’s ideas, participants can use no written words. They might draw something to represent each idea. Alternatively, participants might use a unique physical object to represent each idea. For example, if the group is discussing which people who would benefit from oral storying, they could choose one object to represent each category of people they name. They might also use a unique physical object to represent the tasks that need to be done to keep the Sunday School program operating.

The facilitator can mention that a lot of ideas have been mentioned, then ask what would help them remember the ideas. The group could choose what technique to use to help them remember their ideas and plans.

It may be that frequent repetition of ideas could be beneficial. The group may prefer repeating in unison, having one person repeat the all of the ideas, or having each person be responsible for remembering one idea. The arts can be used to help the group remember what has been discussed. The group might create a song about the five most important things. Another group may want to create a drama about the things that have been helping and hindering them.

Only small adjustments are needed to make a participatory approach even more appealing to oral-preference communicators.

Cautions in Using a Participatory Approach

A participatory approach does not miraculously solve problems. It can make things worse if used poorly. It should be used wisely and with adequate training and preparation. Some specific areas of caution follow.

#1. Facilitating well is difficult. Humble introverts often facilitate better and more naturally than confident extroverts. Why is this? Humble introverts find it easier to listen well, believe that others have important things to share, and, by their very nature, they communicate respect. Extroverts may find it more difficult to allow silence, and to not insert their own content into the discussion.

#2. Facilitating well requires the development of a participatory mindset and good facilitation skills. Some people felt they had a participatory mindset before they attended a workshop—they believed God was working in the community and they wanted the community, as led by God, to take the lead. However, by the end of the workshop, these same people said the most helpful part of the workshop was how they grew in their participatory mindset and in their commitment to do things with others.

#3. Reading a book is not enough to become a good participatory approach facilitator. People with higher levels of education often say, “Just give me a book and I will learn it.” A very small percentage of people who are natural facilitators may be able to pick up a book and become a good facilitator. Most

of us need to observe others and be mentored by someone who will help us see the areas where growth is needed. Contact information for some participatory approach training programs are given in Figure 6.

Name of Training or Organization	Contact Information	Focus
Community Health Evangelism TOT training	www.chenetwork.org/	Facilitating discussions about health pointing toward evangelism
Participatory Methods for Engaging Communities workshops	PMEC@kastanet.org	Facilitating discussions about Scripture engagement and language development
ICA-Associates Canada	http://ica-associates.ca/	General facilitation training

Figure 6: Facilitation training opportunities

#4. Facilitated discussions benefit from good planning. The facilitator does well to dialogue about the discussion with those who have requested the discussion, or with those who will participate in the discussion. Topics to cover include: the purpose of the discussion, the characteristics of the participants, and key events that have preceded or prompted this discussion. Using a Planning Guide for a Facilitation Event can help assure that key issues related to the discussion have been adequately addressed.

#5. One of the greatest temptations that face facilitators is to influence the content. The facilitator's role is to guide the process so that all voices

are heard, the group thinks deeply about issues, the group move towards consensus, and the group decides and plans. The participants are responsible for the content of the discussion, and especially the conclusions. When a group senses that the facilitator is trying to influence or persuade or manipulate the content or decision, trust decreases, participation drops, and relationships quickly become strained.

#6. Sometimes, the leaders of a group invite a facilitator to use a participatory approach, but the leaders do not intend to let the participants decide the group's future. This is a very dangerous situation. As a group of people engage in

a participatory discussion, mutual understanding grows, enthusiasm builds, and vision develops. If the leadership then decides to do something radically different, the members of the group may feel that all of their efforts and discussions were useless. They may also feel angry, or stop trusting either the leaders, or the facilitator. A good facilitator spends adequate time dialoguing with those who issued the invitation in order to

A facilitator was hired by a U.S. mission organization to facilitate a multi-day discussion with the home-based staff and over one-third of the field-based staff. As the event progressed, field staff felt they were being heard and the five top organizational seemed to resonate with all in the room. On the last day, the joy and enthusiasm was obvious. Some spoke of sharing the outcomes with the others where they served overseas. Then, a participant asked the director whether it was okay to share what had been discussed. "Please wait," was the response. Two weeks later, when he shared about the organization's direction, it differed greatly from what had been discussed and planned by the whole group. Many felt it would have been better to not have had such a discussion.

assure that the leaders understand what a participatory approach is, and that they are willing to let the group reach a decision and make plans.

Learning More

Although books are no substitute for adequate training, the books in Figure 7 and the websites in Figure 8 are helpful resources.

Title	Focus
Walking with the Poor	Participatory mindset, transformational development
Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed	Participatory mindset, social change
<i>Methods for Community Participation</i>	Basic set of participatory tools
<i>80 tools for participatory development</i>	Basic set of participatory tools
<i>Visualisation in Participatory Programmes</i>	Basic tools, facilitation process
Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making	Facilitation process
Participatory Workshops	Practical ideas
The Art of Focused Conversation	One very flexible tool
The Workshop Book	One very flexible tool
Open Space Technology	Single tool for big events
The World Café	Single tool for big events
The Search Conference	Multi-day process for organizational change

Figure 7: Books about facilitating participatory discussions

Recommended Websites	
Site	Focus
participatorymethods.org	Community development, academic
pm-wiki.net	Practical tools, scripture engagement, language development
www.chenetwork.org	Health and evangelism

Figure 8: Webpages about facilitating participatory discussions

Closing Thought

Using a participatory approach to decide with local stakeholders what types of oral activities best meet the needs of a congregation, village, or an entire ethnic group can result in the activities better meeting the local needs. The use of a participatory approach in planning how to carry out activities allows the local people to contextualize the activities at an early stage. It also results in identifying and using local resources rather than

depending more than necessary on outside resources.

Using a participatory approach to monitor and evaluate activities can result in the ownership of the most appropriate activities being taken by the local church at the earliest possible date. Using a participatory approach affirms the gifts that God has given to his people to be salt and light in their own community.

¹Accessed March 2, 2015, from www.participatorymethods.org/page/about-participatory-methods

²A good resource on Appreciative Inquiry is available from the International Institute for Sustainable Development at www.iisd.org/ai/myrada.htm

³Corbett, Steve and B. Fikkert. 2014. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

⁴Kumar, Somesh. 2002. *Methods for Community Participation: A Complete Guide for Practitioners*. New Delhi, Vistaar, 24.

⁵Myers, Bryant. 2011. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

⁶Myers draws on the work of many others. Much of what I attribute to him, he attributes to scholars such as Lesslie Newbigin, Paul Hiebert, Robert Chambers, John Friedmann, Isaac Prilleltensky, Jayakumar Christian, Ravi Jayakaran, Wayne Bragg, David Korten, Geoffrey Nelson, Amartya Sen, and others.

⁷Articles in the *Orality Journal* frequently refer to oral-preference learners. I have chosen in this article to consistently use oral-preference communicators to emphasize that a facilitated discussion is not primarily about learning. Nor is it about one-way communication toward the oral-preference communicators.

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Discovering Together and Increasing Responsibility

John Azomo

John Azomo has served on a Vernacular Media Services team in Nigeria since 2007. He now leads the team as they make vernacular scriptures available in the media that best serves the language communities of Nigeria. They also train the communities in using vernacular scriptures to achieve desired goals. He is a member of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and has been a Sunday School teacher since 1988. He was first trained in facilitating participatory discussions in 2012.

After receiving training to facilitate participatory discussions, I have facilitated several discussions not only for my work, but also in my congregation. In 1991, I was very involved in teaching Sunday School at an interdenominational church in the police training school. The average attendance was about 150. My former student, Samuel (now in his mid-20s), is the youth leader of the congregation and teaches in the Sunday School. They hold their Sunday School before the worship service with two classes—one for younger children and one for children who attend primary school.

A few months ago the church was planning a one-week program, and Samuel invited me to teach on Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” Instead of teaching them, I wanted

to facilitate a discussion. I had about a month to prepare and invited two trained facilitators to help me.

About 50 people participated in the discussion. Participants included the pastor, leaders of various groups, parents, and children. Most of the church members are wives of police officers and the church building at the police barracks was quite large.

We sat in a large semi-circle and utilized a tool that uses an analogy of a man taking crops to the market with a cart. In the tool, we told this brief story using drawings to illustrate it:

One day, a man wanted to take crops from his village into town so he could sell them. He hitched his donkey to his cart, loaded his cart, and began to go to town. On the way, he found many large stones in the road. Some of the stones he removed from the road. He

took his sledge hammer and broke some of the stones and used that to fill in the holes in the road. Then, he came to a hill. He borrowed a second donkey and hitched it to the cart so the two donkeys could pull the cart with more force. Finally, the man reached town with his cart and sold his crops.

I shared that just as the man had a goal of reaching the market, we have a goal of raising our children well. I then asked the group, "What is preventing us from training up our children?" Three people were chosen to write the ideas expressed. As the group discussed, some pointed to their friends, telling them to respond. After listing things that were preventing them in training up their children, they repeated the process with the question, "What is helping us to train up our children?" Those were listed as well.

After the group listed both sets of answers, someone read them aloud a number of times. Then, we said, "Out of these things, which do you think are the things that most prevent us from training up our children in the way they should go?" There was lots of discussion and they mentioned the issue of not having enough time and not having training in teaching children.

The parents said they were not teaching their children at home as they needed to. Some said they did not know how to train their children who were very young. Many said they would keep working on it. The discussion took about an hour.

In Nigeria, sometimes women do not get very involved during a discussion with men. The youth and the men know how to read and write, but many of the women do not. And yet most parenting is left to the women and the children are their responsibility. During our meeting, it was significant that the women were also part of the discussion. They participated freely and spoke openly.

Since the discussion, the Sunday School teacher has mentioned that more parents have indicated an interest in teaching Sunday School. Since teachers are few, parents have now volunteered to teach the students.

It is common for people to come to church and just listen. Sometimes, the teaching seems boring and so people do not attend any day except Sunday. By using the tool, I engaged with this group in a way that helped them begin to see the value in what was being addressed.

By discussing together, many became more responsible and took leadership for areas that needed improvement.



A Participatory Approach to Song-crafting

Anonymous

The author has served in Bible translation and literacy projects for over 35 years with a faith-based NGO. She was trained in facilitating participatory discussions in 2013 and has since facilitated discussions with colleagues, song writers, translation workers, and family members.

Twenty-four women, representing eight languages, from very rural communities gathered earlier this year for a double-training event in a small town in South Asia. It was their third time to meet and craft Bible stories in their languages. This time, the training included song-crafting because the women wanted to make songs to go with the Bible stories they have been learning.

The training was given in the majority language of the region, but the women crafted stories into their own local languages. These women are nearly all first-generation followers of Christ, and all have family members and neighbors who adhere to the majority religion of their land. They are all involved in local evangelical churches and were selected in part for their leadership roles in their churches. Most can read, but not all can write.

The first week of the workshop was focused on learning and

crafting new Bible stories, but the women also spent time studying and discussing what the Bible says about singing and songs. The second week of the workshop was a focus on song-crafting, preceded by participatory activities and facilitation of one participatory tool. The focus of this short article is the participatory aspect of the training.

Categories

Other colleagues with experience in ethnomusicology have suggested it can be helpful for people to first consider how we categorize things in general before discussing categories of songs. So the first step we took involved a mixed collection of markers (felt-tipped pens) dumped on the floor. A volunteer demonstrated how she would categorize them, while the participants watched. They took turns describing the categories she created, and she verified or explained her reasons for the groups she made. Then, the markers were stirred into a random mix, and

a second person demonstrated how she would organize them into different categories. So everyone saw that the same items could be categorized differently, depending on the perspective of the categorizer.

That evening, the women worked in their language teams to write or draw with colored markers on slips of paper all the kinds of flowers and birds they could think of in their communities. The purpose of this exercise was that:

- 1) It gave the women a chance to share from their knowledge of their world.
- 2) It provided an initial categorizing experience.
- 3) It let them see that there are many ways to organize the same items.
- 4) It was fun; they really enjoyed the activity.

The next day, the language teams brought their many slips of paper and arranged them on the floor in separate areas for the others to enjoy (or to compare and feel jealous about or superior about, as the case might be).

Then, each team was invited to group the pieces of paper

in whatever kinds of groups/categories they wanted to make. The most common categories were “flowers for religious events,” “flowers for decoration,” “flowers for medicine,” and “flowers for food.”

For birds, the common categories were “birds that eat dead things,” “birds that fly at night,” “birds that sing,” and “birds that are pretty.” Everyone walked around and looked at each others' words or drawings. Each team had their turn to explain their categories. Everyone observed that each language community chose some similar and some different ways of categorizing their flowers and birds.

After the language teams had organized their birds and flowers by categories and explained them to the other groups, they were asked to think about the circle of life: from babyhood to old age. They discussed, from their experience and knowledge, the characteristics of songs for babies, children, youth, adults, and old people. Their follow-up homework that evening was to prepare a poster showing the seasons of the year according to their language communities.

Participatory Song-crafting

The focus on categories and considering how people may categorize things differently in their communities was a preparation for song-crafting. The song-crafting component of the workshop had two goals:

1. Learn and apply the steps for three kinds of songs (translated songs, story songs, and Bible verse songs)
2. Become more aware of their own musical knowledge and ability, and draw on that to support their crafting of songs in their languages

For the former, the steps were taught and modeled in the majority language, and the participants worked in mixed groups (not according to their home languages) to make songs in the majority language. Then, after learning the steps and practicing them together, the women worked in their own language teams and crafted songs in their languages together. In the next four days, 53 songs were crafted in a total of eight languages.

Becoming aware of their own musical knowledge and ability, a participatory tool called Domains and Kinds of Music Use was used.

This tool was developed several years ago by colleagues and ethnomusicologists working in another NGO. They had shared their tool at a Participatory Methods community of practice gathering. For use in this workshop, we added two more steps, in part because the participants brought cultural knowledge about music from eight language communities, rather than one.

In this participatory tool the women sat in a large circle and were asked to think of song styles, or kinds of songs (this was a similar exercise to discussing categories and naming groups of things the week before with flowers and birds of their communities). Two women volunteered to be scribes and write the song styles on slips of paper.

The entire group could only come up with a few names of kinds of songs. Recordings of samples of two well-known song styles were played. Participants recognized and named those styles immediately. Still, they only came up with two more song styles. So the large group was divided into two groups to “help them think better” (with two scribes per group), and in two groups they suddenly became competitive to see whose group could come up with the most

song styles. In about 15 minutes one group had 25 song styles and the other 17 song styles.

Various women put all the slips on the floor. When the two sets were compared, they found only a few of the names overlapped—these the women chose to lay in an overlapping way to indicate one style (they did not want to put one slip on top of the other even though they were the same).

The next step was to sort the slips of paper into three columns by how often they hear the music/song styles: every day, every month, and every year. Then, for each column they sorted them into two groups: local music style or foreign/outside music style. Each of the first three categories indicating “how often” had two columns underneath.

Finally, they did two more things:

1. Each language team used a different colored marker to put a spot on every slip of paper which represented a kind of music they have in their community.
2. As a whole group, they placed pink markers on each slip of paper whose music style did not include dancing (the assumption was that only a few would not include dancing and that was

proven to be the case—very few pink markers were needed).

Afterwards, in a time of reflection, discussion, and observations, the women said they learned the following:

1. When we make new songs, we can think of which category we can use.
2. This was the first time we realized that not all the songs are sung every day.
3. We learned about the music situations in other language communities.
4. We became aware of music styles that others have that we don't (e.g., a planting song from one community.)

Conclusion

The women expressed various times how much they appreciated the song-crafting experience and the work of thinking about their categories for birds, flowers, and songs. They told the facilitator: "You are giving us brain exercises!"

From the facilitator's viewpoint, the participatory activities and tool served as an important first step in the process leading into actual song-crafting. When crafting songs, the participants could readily think about the

categories and kinds of song styles, depending on their topic and audience.

This information was fresh in their minds and they had been affirmed as people who knew about music in their communities. The women crafted several lullabies and songs for children, as well as action songs and story songs to go with their Bible stories. They also translated songs from the majority language which are non-local styles, but well known in their communities.

At the end of the workshop, we asked the women an open question and scribed their answers in order to encourage them to think about how they would use what they had done. “What will you do with your songs?” we asked. They responded:

- Share them with others (i.e. husbands, fathers, brothers, children, neighbors)
- One woman said she was already singing her new songs to her husband while riding home on the motorbike together
- Sing them while working in the field
- Sing them in the church
- Teach them to children in Sunday School, especially the songs with actions
- Teach them in their small groups with the Bible stories

It is clear to me, as the facilitator, that the participatory approach and tool used in this capacity building event was just what was needed to get the women engaged and confident. It opened the way to clearly connect the actual making of songs with their own life experience and love of music.

When they seemed stuck and unable to think of song styles at the beginning of the participatory tool, it was after lunch and everyone was full and sleepy. I found it funny that my idea to break them into two groups brought out their competitive nature, even though I divided them randomly, not by language teams. It worked much better than I expected.

Additionally, although I do not speak the majority language since I have only recently begun to serve here, and had to work through interpreters, the participatory approach helped the participants engage quickly and have a voice in discussions and decisions. However, I felt deep frustration at not being able to readily understand what was written on the slips of paper being arranged and rearranged on the floor. I dealt with this by having someone read the phrases or words aloud for everyone, and on the side someone told me the English

equivalent. This was perhaps helpful for the other women in the circle who are not skilled readers as well.

I came away from this training event more motivated than ever

to learn to speak the majority language of this area. I felt I missed out on so much because I could not understand what was being said in the discussions, and my interpreter could not possibly tell me everything.



The Ten Seed Technique with Village Leaders in Southeast Asia

Lim Su Min and Pam Wise

Lim Su Min has been involved in community development education (CHE/CDE) since he retired from consultant medical practice (OBGYN) 15 years ago. His wife Sing Yu (retired medical practitioner) is his partner in “crime”, accompanying him on most of his short term trips, leaving at home their five grandchildren.

Pamela Wise is a Registered Nurse who for the past eight years has served with Trans World Radio (TWR) in South East Asia as a Wholistic Health Initiatives Consultant. She has worked with media based teams to develop a wholistic field work strategy for engaging with listeners, churches and communities.

The use of a participatory tool called Ten Seeds Technique has helped people in several rural communities talk about the problem of alcoholism in their community, listen to one another, and see how much their finances have revolved around alcohol. By visualizing things as the group held discussions, the input of all subgroups was captured, and the people with oral preferences for communication were actively involved. The result was social, health, and economic benefits.

One unnamed Christian organization in Southeast Asia (which we will refer to as COSA) is staffed fully by citizens of the country. Their five departments develop radio programs in the national language, each for a specific target audience. Three departments focus on the needs

of specific age or gender segments of the population and two focus on communicating kingdom messages.

Each department encourages people to form listener groups so the programs will have greater impact in the community. Listeners send feedback by mail, phone call, text messages, and notes sent along the coach routes. Teams from each department also visit listener groups and pastoral contacts in different villages about three to four times a year. Some of the villages are just an hour or two by road away from the COSA headquarters and the visit can be accomplished as a day trip. Other locations require an eight-hour coach ride and are encompassed by a several-day road trip.

Upon their initial outreach, the loving members of the COSA team

found the living conditions in some villages to be heartbreaking. They long to see an impact on the daily lives of the village members, and the team members desire to assist these poor friends, but financial resources were not available. They also did not know how they could encourage these communities that seemed to lack their own financial resources.

Around this time a secular health care agency, unrelated to COSA, had requested help with developing a moral education program from a consortium of international community development consultants who were trained in Community Health Evangelism (CHE, www.chenetwork.org/). These consultants had developed a moral education training, which incorporated a number of the participatory modules and methods from CHE. As the external health care agency and the consultants made plans to roll out for the five-day moral education training, it became clear that involving an organization from within the country would help to ensure that on-the-ground follow up would occur over the long term.

As COSA staff became familiar with the principles of CHE, they saw it as an answer to their dreams. The participatory methodologies

used in CHE provided them with a way to help their friends in the listener groups. They realized that it would be a long-term process, but they were inspired to begin to build relationships with district, sub-district, and village leaders in order to help them understand their value in God's eyes and their potential to exercise control over their own development.

Looking at the network of influence of the secular health care agency, and the network of influence of COSA, the partnership saw a confluence in a district that was about a six-hour drive or seven hours on public transportation from the capital. The partnership looked into the feasibility of a pilot project for holistic community development in that district.

The staff of the two organizations, together with the consultants, traveled to the district several times to understand the situation and to develop a vision together with the local people for what was possible. In the process, relationships deepened between the village leadership and staff of the two organizations. Eventually, community leaders invited the organizations to provide a workshop for leaders of two villages. Attendees included the village council leaders,

a women's committee, and some of the youth health volunteers from both villages.¹ About half of the participants were the village council leaders. A quarter or less were from the women's committee and another fourth were health volunteers.

Background of the District and the Villages

Each district is divided into about a dozen sub-districts and each sub-district has about a dozen villages. About 1,000 people live in the sub-district in which the two target villages are located. This district, like others in the country, has an established council and a women's committee, and representatives from each of the sub-districts serve on the council and the committee. In spite of this good representation, the region remains very poor. The government's annual budget for this sub-district is U.S. \$2000. This government money does not go very far. In addition, many organizations have come and gone with money for various initiatives, yet little progress has been seen over the years. At this time the literacy rates in this area were just over 70% for men and just over 60% for women.

Both of the organizations heard many in the community explain that the main problem they face is

“lack of money.” The leaders felt that if they could just get more assistance from the government or from non-governmental organizations, the community problems would be solved.

The health care agency had good relationships with the leadership in the district due to both their family planning clinic and their wide and effective network of peer education for family life issues. COSA had soft skills to share and good relationships with those who had listened to the radio programs, but they had no political clout with the sub-district leadership. The collaboration of the secular health care agency and the Christian organization was an interesting marriage, with each bringing specific strengths.

In preparation for the workshop, several informal discussions were held with small groups of community leaders to understand the main issues in these two villages. Recurrent themes included robbery, domestic violence, and alcohol. In fact, these were among the issues that the national government was using to measure the most crime-free communities. The government was linking progress in these areas to an annual award.

The prototype for a discussion about alcohol was developed by COSA staff and the community development consultants in the safety of COSA headquarters. The staff then practiced facilitating the discussion with some church communities in a town not far from the target district. This gave the team confidence as they led the leaders from these two villages in a discussion about alcohol during the workshop.

A key part of the discussion about alcohol was the use of a decision-making tool called the Ten Seeds Technique (TST). The TST was developed and promoted by Dr. Ravi Jayakaran as a simple tool for participatory community engagement. This technique helps the community to engage in meaningful conversations and helps the community through capacity building. It can also be used to help a group understand how they use their household finances.

The goal was not just for village leaders to participate in a discussion about alcohol, but for them to gain confidence in facilitating discussions like this using the TST within their own villages.

Steps of the Ten Seeds Technique

The Ten Seeds Technique uses a set of ten seeds multiple times. Each time the seeds are used, they represent something different. Here is the process used in the discussion with village leaders:

On a poster-sized piece of paper on the ground, draw a picture of a bottle of alcohol on one side and on the other a picture of a cancelled bottle of alcohol.

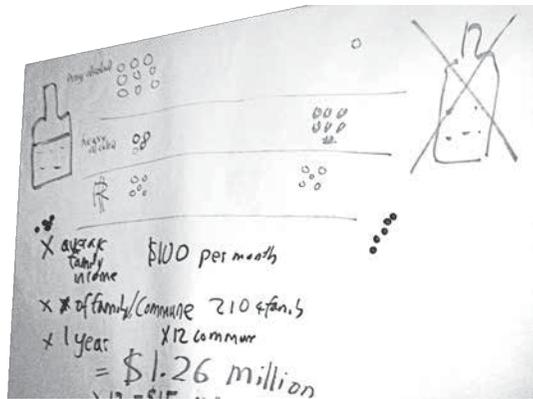


Figure 1: Chart created when using the Ten Seeds Technique to document community opinion about money spent on alcohol consumption in a village.

In the middle of the paper, place ten colored seeds. Say: “These ten seeds represent everyone in this community. Divide for me into two piles. In one pile are those who consume alcohol (point to picture of a bottle of alcohol). The other pile is those who don’t consume alcohol (point to a picture

of a cancelled bottle of alcohol).”

Participants may ask, “Alcohol means ‘every day’ or ‘even once’?”

Respond, “Even once.”

Invite one participant to move the seeds.

Participants may then have a good, but heated discussion.

Many people move the seeds back and forth. Finally, a consensus is reached.

The facilitator chooses a participant to draw the seeds in each group.

Participants now have an idea of how widespread is alcohol consumption.

The same exercise is repeated (with all participating).

The facilitator says, “These ten seeds represent all the **women** in this community. Divide for me into two piles. One pile is those who consume alcohol (point to picture of a bottle of alcohol) The other pile is

those who don’t consume alcohol (point to picture of a cancelled bottle of alcohol).”

Participants may have an even more heated (but good) discussion.

Many people come to move the seeds back and forth. Finally, a consensus is reached.

The facilitator chooses a participant to draw the seeds in each group.

Participants now have an idea of how widespread is alcohol consumption among women.

The same exercise is repeated (with all participating) concerning the men in the community and the teenagers (ages 13-19) in the community.

Now the facilitator asks a different question:

“These ten seeds represent one family’s daily income. Divide for me into two piles. One pile is money spent on alcohol (point to picture of a bottle of alcohol). The other

pile is the balance of money not used on alcohol (point to a picture of a cancelled bottle of alcohol).”

This discussion evokes a lot of discussion and shouting, but the discussion is good.

Many people come to move the seeds back and forth. Finally, a consensus is reached.

The facilitator chooses a participant to draw the seeds in each group.

Participants now have an idea of what proportion of money goes towards alcohol consumption in this community.

Ask the group what is the typical daily income of one family. Multiply the proportion of money spent on alcohol by the daily income, multiply that by the number of families in the village, and multiply that sum by 365 days in a year. That gives the amount per village per year. That amount can be multiplied by the number of villages to determine the spending in the sub-district.

Follow this up with a discussion about what the people might be

able to do if they used that money for other things.

This discussion about alcohol was first facilitated by the COSA staff with the workshop participants discussing. Then, the COSA staff and the leaders led the TST discussion on alcoholism following the same steps with other groups of people in the district. Sometimes, the group was a mixed group. At other times, the group in the discussion was men only, women only, or youth only.

Both the whole groups and the focused groups provide valuable insights to the community and for the community. As the village leaders (men, women, and youth) listened to the people discussing the problem of alcohol, their understanding of the complexity of the situation grew.

The community development consultants were often present as observers and to serve as a resource or coach to the teams who facilitated the discussions. The consultants did not understand the national language, but could understand the dynamics of each discussion. They also were given oral summaries by the COSA staff.

Summary of What Was Said in the Discussions

Below is a summary of what the women, men, and youth said during TST discussions.

The Women's Story

The women, who have very little voice in this culture, very enthusiastically began the process. They placed nine of their seeds under the alcohol and only one for other household needs. As they did so, they shared with the whole group about the situation of women in their villages.

As they shared about why they placed the seeds as they did, the women shared these perceptions:

- In this culture, it is the responsibility of the women to keep peace in the family and ensure that the members of their household are cared for.
- They are able to grow their own rice and vegetables and even to sell some in the market to make a little extra cash.
- With the addition of some chickens, pigs, and fish, and the ability to sell some of their own handicrafts, they can at least provide the basic needs for their children.
- The women work long hours as they farm and care for the children, but they feel they have little hope in sight.

According to the women, each husband spends most of his afternoons and evenings away with friends and often comes home drunk, demanding, and even violent. At these times, he demands that his wife give him all the money she has. The women know that they must do so as it is the responsibility of the wife to keep peace and protect the children. It is therefore impossible for women to save money to pay for necessities such as school supplies and fees. Many children in the village drop out of school and go to the city to work in garment factories or restaurants in order to send money back to the village.

The women are well aware that 70% (seven seeds) of the available money for their household is spent on alcohol consumption by their husband and teenagers and even, on occasion, by themselves.

The Men's Story

After the women had shared, the men responded very defensively, but made their point with their seeds. When the men explained why they had placed their seeds as they did, they said something like this:

- Very little work is available for men.
- Often, men feel that it is the responsibility of the women to

maintain the home and gardens and to provide for the needs of the family.

- From time to time, men are able to make some money to support the family, but much of the time the men are not gainfully employed and spend time just sitting together socializing and playing games.
- It is a very painful reality for men to experience this unemployment.
- The one pleasure in life is to drink rice wine and beer with their friends.

The men give what money they can to their wives for family needs, but they know that most of their own cash actually goes to alcohol. Because their wives seem to be able to come up with enough money to get by, they are not too concerned. They know that the alcohol does affect their family, as often they go home at night angry and are at times violent. When they are drunk, they are able to get money from their wives, which they spend on alcohol.

The men are pretty convinced that about 30% of the money available for their household is spent on alcohol, so they tossed three seeds on the picture of alcohol.

The Youth's Story

The youth had a different perspective, which they rather ashamedly (but honestly) demonstrated with their seeds. As the youth explained how they were placing seeds, they shared the following:

- Their schooling has been limited because they often quit studying at an early age to try to be of some assistance to their very poor family.
- There are relatively few teenagers and young adults left in the village as many have gone into the city to work in garment factories or restaurants to send money back to the village.
- The youth are able to make a small amount of money by helping out in the market or other odd jobs, but see very little hope for their future.

There is very little joy in their lives and not a lot to do for fun, but they are able to forget about these things when they and their friends get together and drink beer, which they do on a regular basis. They do genuinely want to help their family, but also know full well that 80% (eight seeds) of the money they get is spent on alcohol.

Observations of the Process

When we reached the point of the discussion about how the money flowed, it was a big eye opener for the participants. For most people in the village, this was the first time they had a tool they could use to not only see where their money was going, but also the first time they had been given an opportunity to voice and discuss their frustrations openly.

Much loud and lively discussion followed in each event. The group in several cases eventually agreed on a 50/50 split. When the calculations were done, the group was completely shocked to discover that although they thought they had access to no money, in fact their sub-district was spending more than 1.25 million U.S. dollars per year on alcohol.

People of both genders engaged actively in the discussions regardless of their literacy level. People of both genders listened to each other and grew in understanding. Everyone quickly understood how to use the stones and felt comfortable moving them to make their point. Using a drawing and stones made discussing alcohol have less of an accusatory or blaming nature. No one was saying, "You are drinking too much"; rather, they were

together describing a situation all were concerned about. The focus was on the drawing on the paper and understanding the overall problem.

Long Term Results

After the COSA staff were trained and had grown in their capacity to continue to follow up, the community development consultants had a lesser role. In using a participatory approach, the consultants knew that change would take time, but that helping the community talk together and reach a consensus about their problems was a significant first step.

Some encouraging results were reported to the consultants just a few months later: COSA staff at their headquarters had received a phone call from a very excited sub-district leader, insisting that they come as soon as possible to visit the village. The staff was hesitant because travel to the sub-district requires a seven-hour ride in a packed public minivan, on a dangerous, pockmarked and dusty roads, but the community pleaded for them to come.

When they arrived, the sub-district leaders reported to COSA staff that they had worked together and identified that their most urgent

need was to rebuild their access road to the main highway. They had developed a plan to save the money that they would normally have spent on alcohol to use to rebuild the road. In addition, two of the villages (the ones that had been the focus in the first training) had already worked together to repair their section of the road. A third village had seen what those two villages had done and even though they had not had earlier contact with COSA, were anxious to show off their road as well.

Well-meaning outsiders had built roads to these villages in the past, but not knowing the real situation in the area, the roads had simply washed away with the annual floods. This time, the villagers knew enough to raise the road above the flood levels. Because

they built the road themselves, they can repair any damage that may be done by the rains or traffic. These village leaders and all in these communities now own the responsibility for their village and their roads. They also have more confidence in their decision-making skills and have tools to use to plan for their futures.

This discussion process has also benefitted COSA. They now engage with this district without the pressure of feeling that they are unable to meet the overwhelming financial needs of the listener groups. There are still only a few believers in the villages, but many people in each village are listening to the COSA programs and are eager to engage with the teams when they make their monthly visits to the district.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/-nUnguhTLxI>

¹Because the focus of this article is on the benefits of the Ten Seeds Technique, many of the details are not mentioned about other training or methodologies which were used in the process. Alcoholism, while a key area of focus, was not the only focus. Several workshops occurred, each of which had between 12 and 30 participants.



Growing in Awareness about Oral Communicators

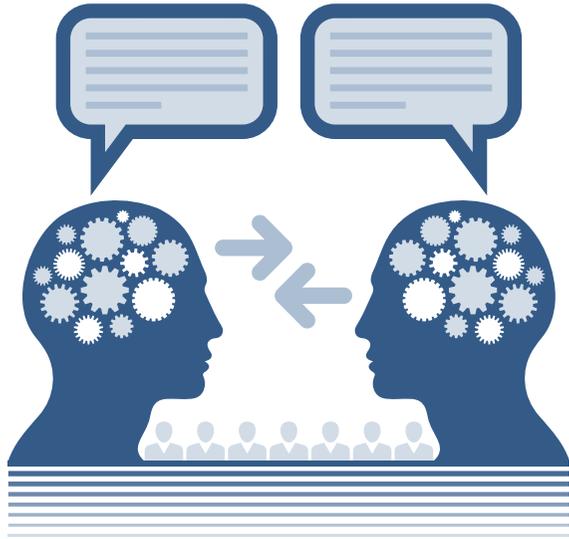
B. P. Varghese

B. P. Varghese, a Regional Manager with Indigenous Bible Translation Organization, has a Masters in Rural Development. He did language survey for six years. Then, with his wife, he spent seven years setting up a team for Cedar translation program. Varghese has taught Sociolinguistics, Discourse Grammar and Project Management in the training program for translators.

This particular facilitation was going to happen as part of a normal visit for myself and the director of my organization to the Othang project. I was to visit that project after two years, and it happened to be right after the Participatory Methods Community of Practice Gathering (CoP), which I had attended in Bangalore,

India. I have been using participatory methods since 2008, and was glad to attend that event. There was a presentation and discussion during the event about facilitating a discussion with oral communicators, so that was the first time I started thinking about this particular process.

Before the CoP, I was thinking of doing some kind of participatory



discussion during the visit to the Othang project, but I was not sure about how I was going to lead it. The oral approach presentation from the Participatory CoP changed my thinking about understanding my audience. I clearly knew that this was an oral group, but the presentation really helped me in understanding how to approach the group with whom I would be facilitating the discussion.

The discussions that happened at the CoP about oral learners were very practical. I realized that before this I had not thought about many communities as oral learners; however, as we talked about the details of who an oral learner was, I had a revelation about many of the groups with whom we were working.

One thing which really helped me was this question:

“What happens when we do a facilitation with oral learners?” Lee, the facilitator of the oral approach presentation at CoP, invited us to list the many things which happen when we do a facilitation among oral learners. Having this list in mind really helped me. These things were in my mind as I prepared for the facilitation and as I was doing the facilitation.

What Oral Participants May Do When They Communicate Well

Share Ideas
 Ask questions
 Speak clearly in simple terms
 Tell a story
 Show good recall
 Repeat things
 Demonstrate good listening
 Use cultural art forms
 Talk expressively
 Use gestures
 Have simultaneous discussions
 Demonstrate ideas
 Have ground realities
 Nod /use words of agreement
 Use facial expressions
 Have creative thinking
 Assure that sub-groups (women, older folks) understand
 Interpret ideas, not just words
 Wait
 Share experiences
 Watch what others do—learn by observing
 Ask what others experience—cross-checking
 Give attention
 Follow cultural rules for order in which to speak
 Reach consensus

Figure 1: List of things oral-preference communicators may do during facilitated discussions.¹

Things that can cause an oral-preference participant to communicate poorly	Things a facilitator can do to help non-literate participants participate well
Poorly facilitated discussion	Ask “What will help the group remember?” Use creative facilitation Show a sense of humor Show respect Understand community background Include a co-facilitator if age is an issue
Being asked to write or being asked to read	Ask participants to repeat Have participants make a song or drama about what is said Have participants make skits about discussion. Ask participants to make a rhyme about what they shared Use graphics, not words Don’t use paper at all
Too abstract	Use simple, concrete, clear explanations
Disruptive noise	Identify and use a quiet location
Oral participants may feel inferior	Have participants discuss in small groups
Lack of information	
Language Barrier between participants, facilitator and/or interpreter	
Low confidence	
Information overload	
Caste Hierarchy	
Passive Mood	
Some may not speak because of cultural expectations	
Not interested in topic	
Interruptions	

Figure 2: A listing of things that might hinder oral-preference communicators from engaging well in discussions; ideas about what facilitators can do to address some of these.

Background on the Othang People Group

I met with around 13-15 people, mostly church pastors and church elders, and community leaders. Maybe five of them were literate in English. Their language is only beginning to be written; none were literate in other languages. There is little interest in literacy in the three larger languages.

During my previous visit a few years back, I met with the community leader and the translation team. The translation team was just forming, so I had only met two of the members in the translation team earlier. They are now a committee and meet together occasionally to review scripture and discuss the language work in that area.

This people group are 100% Christian, mostly from a single denomination which is resistant to translation into local languages. About 80% of them live in a neighboring country and 20% here. My colleague, Deborah², lives in the area and interacts regularly. I am Deborah's supervisor, and visit her and the team there about once a year.

They had drafted the Jesus Film, but because both the production and release had been delayed, the group felt very discouraged. They

had also translated the Gospel of Luke, which was available as an audio recording.

The situation was quite difficult since two governments, several organizations, and their denomination all had considerable power over next steps. One thing we knew that they did have was freedom to create and tell Bible stories in their own languages.

Planning the Discussion for an Oral-preference Group

When we were planning for this particular facilitation, it occurred to me that even their translation is done orally. Their first book, the Gospel of Luke, was done orally. They don't have a printed copy of it. Most of their communication happens orally, and there are not many literate people in the community. For this particular community, scripture will be effective when it is given in an oral form.

The Gospel of Luke is completely in oral form. But they have started asking for a written form, so we are adjusting, fitting our strategy to give a written form as well. Fifteen ethnic groups around them all have a copy of the Bible, each in their own languages. For a Christian community, it is a

mark of prestige to have a book in their language. When you have a scripture, you are identified, even with the government; you have that identification that you are a community.

So as we began to step forward with plans for a Bible translation in this community, we realized the importance of their reason for wanting it. Their desire to be identified as a community with the prestige that scripture brings them is legitimate, but many in the community are not really concerned yet about scriptures being used as a transformative tool in their lives. So we wanted to introduce the concept again of scripture being used to change our lives.

I began to plan how to address this issue in a way that would be meaningful to an oral community. Deborah and I communicated for a while about it, along with Paul, the project leader, who is one of the translators from the community. Paul then invited those that attended the discussion.

As I thought about the things I learned in the CoP meeting about oral learners, I decided to bring up this topic through using the recorded oral stories we have from the Gospel of Luke in

their language. We prepared for the facilitation environment by remembering “what happens in a room with oral learners.”

For example, there is often parallel discussion going on. I could experience that when I went there. I would be talking, and there was parallel discussion happening. Whereas in the past I would probably just stand there and let a group finish their discussion before continuing, I learned to plan to let them continue their parallel discussions while I spoke. I just went ahead, making sure that at least one person in the group understood what I was trying to do. Those who understood continued to explain things to others, and in this way, multiple things were going on at the same time, but everything was advancing. My mindset changed within me, and as a facilitator to an oral community, I knew I should not be worried about the parallel discussion.

During the Participatory Discussion

On the day of the facilitation, several culturally-expected things happened. It is customary for the senior leader in the community to give a formal welcome, so this happened first. In this region, the culturally-accepted welcome is the giving of a shawl. So they

welcomed both the director and I during this event and gave us shawls. After the welcome, Paul gave a status report of what has been happening in Bible translation for these last two years. We then had a time of prayer for the project.

Next, it was appropriate for the director to also address the group. So he gave a formal speech for a few minutes, encouraging the community to move forward and reminding them that just a few years prior the work had not yet been started. He reminded them that because of their involvement, something was now happening.

Then, we moved into our time of discussion. Deborah and I co-facilitated. Our basic plan was to go through the Parable of the Sower with the group. First, we played the audio portion of the Gospel of Luke with this story, and then we asked how they felt about the portion and included a few content questions. Again, we played the recording and asked them to retell the parable, so some people tried retelling it. We went around in the circle asking for different instances in the parable. Finally, we asked one person to retell it to the whole group.

Next, we divided the group into four. We used the Parable of the Sower,

with four types of ground that the seed falls on, as a model. We asked, "Who is willing? We need four people to draw pictures." Someone volunteered and those sitting around that person became a group. Each group received chart paper and markers, and together they came up with a picture: one group did a rocky place, one group did a roadside, etc. Initially, they had some hesitation about drawing it, but once they took up the responsibility, they easily drew it. The group assigned the "good ground" drew a picture of a field which was full of a good crop. In another group's picture, there was the thorny ground, and thorny bush.

While they continued drawing their pictures, we asked them, "What effect was there on the seed when it fell into each of the four places?" Each group explained their thoughts. During this whole time there was talking from us and within the groups.

We wrapped up by discussing the importance of scripture falling onto the right ground. We proposed this question: "How can we make sure that God's word, which is being translated, is getting into the lives of people to change them?" The groups started discussing

the question and we urged them to share God's word among themselves and in their church.

Everyone was quite positive about this particular approach on sharing stories from the Bible to different people. The discussion part of the meeting lasted almost two hours.

The next day, we shared another story with the translation team. It was the story from Luke where Jesus is coming to Martha's house, and Martha is busy preparing food for Jesus while Mary is peacefully sitting at Jesus' feet. We used drawing, but had some discussion as well. This was part of their normal devotion every day. We wanted to see how they felt about a storying approach and the scripture engagement initiative. That also went well.

The translators had a desire to share God's word, in their story format, to different groups of people. So; that was a positive thing. When they started discussing how they could do this, they began saying, "We don't know how to do that. Tell us some guidelines of how we can do that in our community."

We shared about a training program through which we could equip them. They said they would find some people to share stories. Finding the

right people for God's work is always a challenge, but they said, "We will try and find some people for that." Their follow-up plan was to invite people from the community who could be facilitators for storytelling.

What I Have Learned

Looking back at the list of what oral communicators may do, we saw at least eight things occur:

- Telling a story
- Repeating things
- Having simultaneous discussions
- Nodding/using words of agreement
- Using facial expressions
- Waiting
- Watching what others do/ learning by observing
- Following cultural rules for order in which to speak

We also tried several things to help oral preference communicators engage more:

- Use creative facilitation
- Show respect
- Understand the community background
- Ask participants to repeat
- Use graphics, not words
- Use simple, concrete, clear explanations
- Discuss in small groups whenever possible

I learned to understand and accept that this is an oral group. Perhaps in the past I have thought about an oral group as being a second-class group. I am accepting and understanding that this is an equal group with non-oral learners. They have their own ways of communicating and their own

ways of expressing. As a facilitator, respecting that helped me. Also, whenever there were some delays which seemed unnatural to a non-oral group, we just waited. Most of the discussion happened in their language. As facilitators, we learned to wait and let them have the discussion.

¹The items in these two figures were brainstormed at the Participatory Methods CoP Gathering in February 2015

²All names used in this article are pseudonyms.



Lions and Eagles and Estuaries: Oh My!

Joseph W. Handley, Jr.

Photos by Joseph W. Handley, Jr.

Joseph W. Handley, Jr. is president of Asian Access. He is a contributing blogger for the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism's EvangelVision blog. He also serves on the International Orality Network leadership team and the board of PacificLink. Joe is pursuing a PhD in Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. He strives to develop leaders who multiply churches that transform nations. To learn more, see www.asianaccess.org/handley

Nants ingonyama bagithi Baba

[Here comes a lion, Father]

Sithi uhm ingonyama

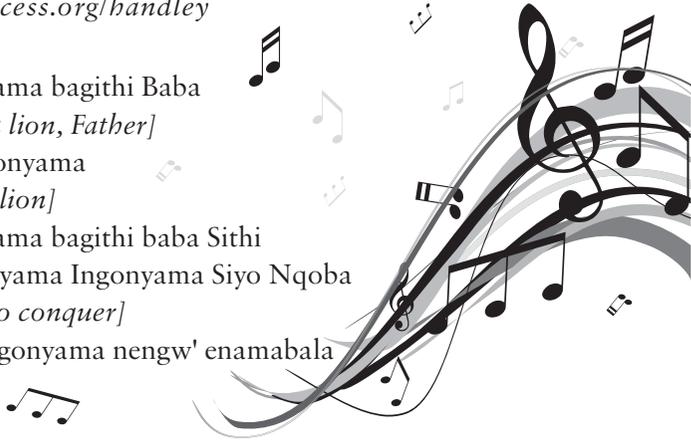
[Oh yes, it's a lion]

Nants ingonyama bagithi baba Sithi

uhhmm ingonyama Ingonyama Siyo Nqoba

[We're going to conquer]

Ingonyama Ingonyama nengw' enamabala



These lyrics (along with loud, blasting music) blared across the auditorium. We immediately recognized the song—the opening lyrics to the movie *The Lion King*! We laughed together as our guide for the next two days led us through singing this song as loud as we possibly could.

Beginning the Journey

Our journey had begun a few years prior. We had invited Peter Chao of Singapore-based Eagles Communications and META Consulting to share at a national pastors' congress in Japan. We had asked Peter to share lessons from his teachings on the Estuary. Japanese church leadership was working through a leadership renewal process, and we felt that

Peter's wisdom would be especially helpful for our leaders.

Framing his story with Chinese proverbs, Peter described the dynamics of the estuary, where salt water and fresh water collide. While one of the more dangerous environments on the planet, estuaries are also one of the most life-giving environments—a perfect metaphor for leadership renewal and transition.

Engaging the Eagles' Leadership-Development Approach

Peter's presentation led us to ask Eagles to take our Asian Access National Directors through a leadership development process to help us focus on leading as a team. This is where The Lion King song came in!

Peter and his partner, Michael Tan, brought two younger staff from Eagles to lead our team through the two-day experience. They handled the process superbly, using multi-sensory means to communicate to our National Directors, who are largely oral-preference learners. These two young leaders from Eagle had us (a group of mostly middle-aged pastors) standing on our chairs, singing and shouting at the top of our lungs. It was hilarious! They then proceeded



to augment their brief speaking segments with video clips, active games, and team simulations.

One game broke us into teams. Some team members were blindfolded; others could only talk, but not move. The talkers had to coach the blindfolded into drawing figures on a poster to illustrate the lessons we were learning about team leadership. In debriefing these experiences, we learned what challenges our limitations present to us, and how we could best work together to solve our team goals.

In another game, we were timed to see how quickly we could switch from one side of the room to the other with the use of stepping stones. All we could do was jump over one another from one stone to the next. On the first run, everyone was able to speak and do hand motions. Toward



the end, only one guide was able to speak and only one other guide was allowed to use hand motions. It was really challenging.

As we went through the time trials, we slowly but surely learned quicker routes and how to better communicate with one another as we went along.

Adult Education Pedagogy: A Multifaceted Learning Experience

Eagles' presentation exemplified adult education pedagogy, a learning technique that utilizes multiple means of learning experiences within the orality arena. Rather than relying on long lectures and a whiteboard,

Eagles employed a full range of multisensory-engaging experiences to help our team effectively apply teamwork-building skills.



Eagles employed a blend of brief lectures, video clips, songs, dance, games, art, and group simulations

to cement the conceptual ideas into a cohesive whole. Our team left that week with a stronger data set for how to lead within a teamwork context.

Multifaceted Learning: The Road to the Future

The majority of our world are oral-preference learners, best approached through a combination of multiple,

multifaceted learning methodologies. As we seek to develop disciple-making leaders throughout the world, we will do well to learn from groups like Eagles Communications and META Consulting.





To learn more, visit: www.eagles.org.sg/ or <http://meta.com.sg/>



From the Field 1: Discussions with Community Stakeholders in Nepal about Language Development

Prithvi Chaudhary and Shangbu Lhomi

Prithvi Chaudhary serves with Transformation Nepal. He is the Field Supervisor of the Rana Tharu Adult Transitional Literacy project, working among Rana Tharu communities of Nepal.

Shangbu Lhomi is the Project Leader of the Himalayan Indigenous Society, an organization in Nepal which focuses on Tibetan ethnic groups to create an equitable and peaceful society among the ethnic Tibetan groups.

We facilitated discussions with stakeholders about language development in four different language areas. For each language, we held a meeting in each's own language area. We invited participants by working through some of our contacts in the language and asked those contacts to invite stakeholders who would be able to take responsibility for further planning and action. About 20-30 people participated in each meeting.

The participants were mixed; they included teachers, politicians, locals, NGO workers, social workers, and media. Three of the groups had people from several districts attending the meeting. In those meetings, each person only knew about five people. To help the participants feel comfortable, we

had an introduction session during which we asked them to state their names and a favorite food.

It was a two-day event. In addition to the participatory discussions, we had other topics and used a number of tools including Appreciative Inquiry to understand their hopes and *Stakeholder Analysis* to understand more about local stakeholders. We also included sessions during which we informed them about language development and the components of a literacy program.

We planned how we would facilitate the discussions. One of us was the main facilitator for a tool: asking questions, drawing people into the topics, and encouraging them; the other one would hand out materials.

For the participatory activities, we used paper strips and asked participants to write down everything that was shared in the group. It was very new for them. During the Appreciative Inquiry discussion, the participants felt honored to share good things. They did not know about all of the things that were happening in their language. One person would share something and others were happy to hear what was happening in their community and language.

In these discussions, the focus was on developing their language. Many expressed hope. Some of these languages already had literacy classes and in those an alphabet had already been developed. People in all four language areas expressed a desire to preserve and develop their language.

Some had ideas about community-based literacy from their experiences with literacy in the national language. They have seen literacy campaigns for Nepali launched many times. But developing or having literacy in their own languages was a new idea. They did not know how or where to start. Some felt it was not possible to start literacy in their mother tongues. But as we went

through the process many went from “We need this...” to “We can do this...”

We found that some communities were aware of their cultural or ethnic identity. Some of leaders talked a lot about their mother tongue and their culture. However, the implementation process was the missing part. They thought their job was to give speeches and get people excited.

The groups were composed of a variety of peoples. When the meeting was held in a rural area, everyone was ready to write. However, one group felt some hesitation to write and put things on the floor because of their status: they were educated. They thought it was too simple and they did not want to lower themselves in this way. Another response we experienced was when we asked them to write down their hopes for their communities and languages. Some asked, “What will happen?” or “Do you promise to do this?”

We explained that we were just encouraging them to dream and that it did not mean we would do it for them. Some said, “These are just hopes” and did not take it too seriously. Others would write

things which seemed impossible. The facilitator needs to be aware of how to handle each situation.

In one of the language groups, about half of the people were not literate. To help the less literate ones to participate fully, we asked the literate ones to write. The illiterate ones would say their answers and their points were written. Before putting a paper on the floor, the person would read it, saying, "This is what you said."

When we talked about the good things happening in their languages and communities, at first answers didn't come. Then, one said something, then another said something, then some answers came about the good things. It was the questions that motivated them to share their answers. In that group, most of the participants knew each other. They made a good plan and were able to agree because they were from just five villages in one district.

From the Field 2: Reflections on Using a Participatory Approach

Benefits of Thinking about Good Things and Good People

When we facilitate using participatory tools, we are asking people to answer this question: "What have you in your village done so far?" At first, they think we just want to hear about their problems. Their mind is already looking for a problem or a need and they are trying to guess at what we want to hear. So they just name one or two things. They believe that if they share how many good things have happened, good things that improved their lives, then more

development and help will not come to their village.

When they talk about good things, they don't just tell about physical things or projects, they talk about people as well. They say, "We have this person who did development things in our village." They are proud of him or her and may name a teacher or a simple person. Later, they realize that he or she is a resource person.

One person was a teacher in a village who tried to do some development things, but there were

many politicians in the village who were always quarrelling. This man tried to do many good things, but some of the villagers were against him because of the political parties. People were back-biting about him, but he continued doing good things and eventually had a high post in an indigenous organization.

In the Lhomi community, people thought they needed a good leader. But after listing many good things happening and several people doing good things, they soon said, “We can do these things also.” They felt both happiness and pride.

How the Group Process Works

Sometimes, when we ask a group to think about good things, they believe we only want to hear about the really big things. But when smaller ideas come, the discussion changes. It happened in a discussion in my home area, where we only had one weekly newspaper. When someone mentioned we had a newspaper, people started mentioning other smaller things as well. Another time, someone said the name of an old person who had many stories in our language. Then, others said, “We have a lawyer—and politicians, and policemen.”

This is good for facilitators since it means they do not need to ask many other questions. The momentum starts and keeps going through the group.

Being Careful about Expectations

My preparation for the discussions must be done very well. I must not expect participants to say what is in my mind. I have visited many people in many communities and because of that knowledge, I may have some ideas that I will want them to express, but those ideas might not come. Sometimes, my expectations may not be fulfilled. They may say different good things and different goals than I expect.

Appreciative Inquiry Helps the Community and the Facilitator to Be Positive

When I led the Appreciative Inquiry tool, participants listed many happy things and soon my own mind started to think in a positive way. What are the good things in our community? Sometimes, that speaks to me as well. I ask myself, “What are the good things in me? What are the good things in our community?” Asking these questions leads people to think in a positive way about their

community; it does the same for us, as it helps us to think in joyful ways. When we have a long list of good things, we celebrate it with a big clap. I say, “Look! So many good things! Let’s enjoy it!” Then, everyone claps. Appreciating the good things helps all of us to be positive.

What Helps the Community to Give Honest and Open Answers?

When you facilitate a discussion, it is very important that you build a relationship with the participants. The first time they answer a question, they just answer something. It may be right, or it may be made up. If I facilitate with a group that I do not know well, many times I don’t know which answer is honest or which is made up. They don’t want to offend people. They always want to be good to the outside people. This is true in most cases; however, in remote areas, people are honest. In either case, we must build a relationship.

Humility is also very important. If you look very big, like an important man, or if you let people expect everything from you, then they will not look at the good things they have done. They

will always look at the problems. They will say, “Oh, this person has money, so we have to say this and this...” Knowing the community is very important.

When you spend time asking participants a few questions and encouraging them to share their thoughts, then pop! They pour out their thoughts. That pop happens because of your relationship, how you present yourself, how you build trust.

Getting People Back on Track

At first, participants find it difficult to answer. When one or two people begin, something clicks and people start sharing things either related to the topic or not. One time, we asked for good things about the language. Many answers came about language, but many were also outside the language topic—a school had been built, a drainage system had been developed, etc. They wrote down everything and later we explained, “We are trying to know about your language.” They would then put everything related to language to one side and everything else on the other side.

As a final reminder, facilitators must always remember to use the community’s own language.

From the Field 3: Reflections on a Village Facilitation about a Community's Real Needs

A Nepali man who had lived in the U.S. for 25 years was back in Nepal. He had started an organization in the U.S. to raise funds for Nepal and had also started a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Nepal. He had brought a group of Americans with him to Nepal. He wanted to have a discussion with people in a village about a school building which needed repairs. Some of the villagers knew that he was interested in giving them money to repair the school.

The day we went to the village, he asked me, "How can we dialogue with the villagers? How can we convince them?" He did not know about using a participatory approach. In the Lhomi area, the people have a certain way of talking. I talk, and then you talk, and in the middle another one talks. There is lots of noise and it is very difficult to keep track of what has been said or decided.

I already had in mind that I would use the Appreciative Inquiry tool so that the villagers

could talk about the good things that have been happening and then share their hopes for their village with this man. I thought about how I would translate some words from the tool: words like *happy* and *hope* into the Lhomi language.

There was a larger group of villagers—more than 100—who ranged from 17 to 60 years of age. When speaking, I used both Nepali and Lhomi. About 70% of them were literate in Nepali. I did not know quite how to facilitate. I decided it would be good to do parts of the Appreciative Inquiry in small groups. With so many people, it was impossible to use the paper on the ground, so I used the whiteboard.

We started out asking them, "What has your community already done?" The community realized so many things that they had done! They had never thought about it before—it seemed people were always looking for the problem. Outsiders typically ask, "What is the problem?" And they say, "Oh, we need this and

this. There are water problems and environment problems and health problems.”

This was the first time they looked back at their community from a different viewpoint. They found that lots of development had happened: sanitation, health, a toilet program, pure drinking water, etc. They said, “Oh, we have this building here also. We want this building rebuilt.” They felt a good kind of pride. As a facilitator, starting this way helped me to engage with the people more on the topic. The people identified local resources—they considered both what we needed and what we had.

After listing many good things, I asked them to divide into three groups to talk about their hopes for their village. There was one group for women, one for men under 40, and another for those over 40. After writing down their hopes, the groups prioritized their lists. They then came back to the big group and shared: the over 40 group, the below 40 group and the women’s group. When they shared, I wrote on the whiteboard in Nepali and in English because of the American group present. Then, those in the village prioritized the five major

points because the donor wanted to support five major things.

The women’s participation was especially interesting. When there is a big group, the women will simply say, “Whatever [the men] say is okay.” So when we invited the women to make a group, their priority shifted. The others put the school as their first priority because they knew the meeting was organized because the donor wanted to fund the school. For the women, their number one priority was a machine that helps to thresh millet. The women were also the ones who wanted a daycare center. Wherever the women go for work, they need to carry their children: to the field, to other villages, etc. The elder children also must carry and watch their younger brothers and sisters. This makes it difficult for them to go to school. So the women want to start a daycare center.

So the top priorities of the villagers were rebuilding the school, purchasing a threshing machine, and starting a daycare center.

The villagers also spent time planning. They identified problems with the building: the windows were broken, the

foundation was not good. The villagers agreed to provide all the labor, as well as providing the rock and the wood. The villagers were happy to use all the materials from the old school that is still useable such as rocks, wood, and a tin roof for the new building.

We also called another meeting for all the mothers. They discussed the requirements of the daycare center teacher and the helper. Then, they selected one teacher and one helper.

The donor from the U.S. agreed with the decisions and the plans.

From the Field 4: Reflections on What Helps Us and Hinders Us from Applying God's Word

We had a large meeting of people here who are involved in encouraging Christians in Nepal to use scripture that is available in their own languages. We talked about many things, but we had two sessions in which we used participatory methods in small groups. There were about ten groups with more than ten people in each group.

The first time we had small groups, they were mixed. Some people did not know each other very well. The level of the participants also influenced the discussion. Many of the participants were from the national level, but some were village pastors. Even though all

were believers, our worldview includes a hierarchical system.

The first time we were in small groups we focused on how applying the word of God in our daily life helps us to glorify God and live transformed lives. I facilitated one small group time during which we discussed helpful and hindering things about applying God's word in our lives. Discussing things together was new for the participants. Some even thought that discussing things together was wrong and that we needed to revert to giving lectures from a pulpit.

If the high-level person answered a question, others said, "Oh yes, he is right!" or "Oh, yes, that answer

includes everything!” So I asked, “So, what are the hindering things?” and the man said, “Galatians chapter five verses nineteen to twenty. Those are the things that hinder you.” Then, I tried to encourage them to think more deeply and list smaller practical things instead of broad sweeping things. The high-level man again suggested first and everyone felt obligated to agree.

I was not fully satisfied with the result in our small group because some participants were very quiet. Others did not know each other very well. They were from different communities and organizations and I tried to encourage them, but I also felt a little intimidated by the high-level people. I showed respect and tried to move on.

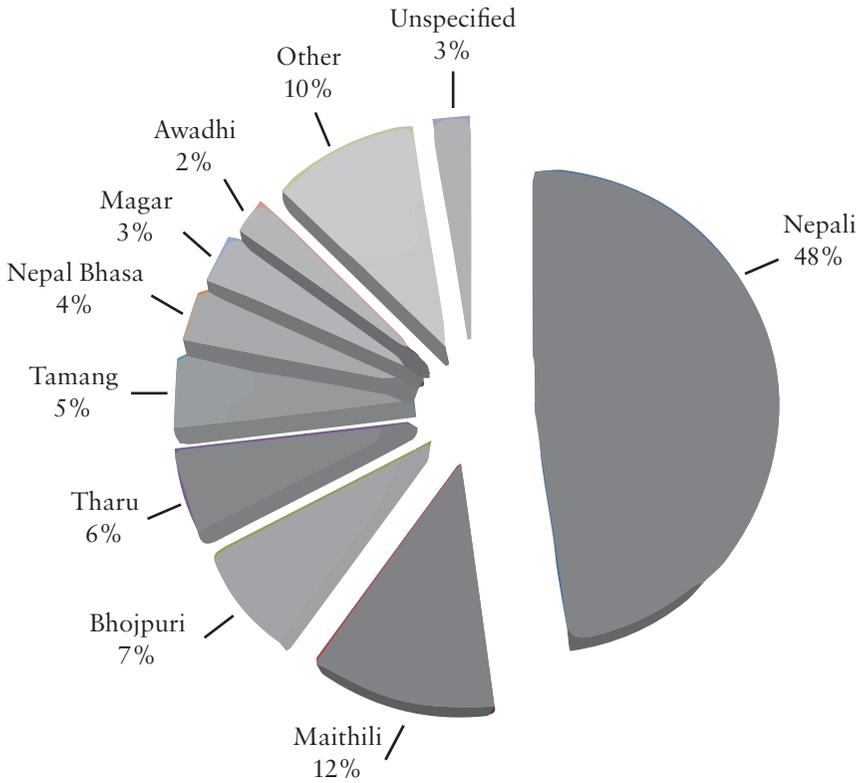
After the small groups finished, we looked at diagrams made by other small groups. This was very effective. People felt affirmed to see the same answer they had. This also led to new ideas. When they walked around and looked at other diagrams, they said, “Oh, yes, this is the same as ours!” And when they saw different things, they said, “This one is also right. We have not written it, but it does help.”

After the discussion, each person wrote down two personal action items on paper. I saw that the people became very serious when they started writing down their own ideas. We let them pray and they became very quiet. They also spent time praying for each other.

The second time we got into groups we had people from three different, but related language teams in our group. In my group, we talked about the good things happening to help the people in each of these ethnic groups to engage well with God’s word. One language group mentioned many things: churches in villages, people sharing good news to their village, scripture portions, and storying things. Another language group mentioned how they study the Bible in their fellowship group. When the groups thought about hopes for the future, they mentioned that they wanted the whole Bible. One group said they wanted to make gospel tracts.

This was an effective way to engage members in the church. It helped them discover what was hindering them from applying God’s word. They realized that they can’t just listen; they need to participate and have discussions.

Languages Spoken in Nepal



From Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons



SWAMP-IN: A Case Study of Ministry Transformation through Participatory Discussion

Delores Desemone and Debra Wills

Delores Desemone realizes she is first and foremost a daughter of our heavenly Father. She is richly blessed in being a daughter, sister, wife, mother, and friend. Her family includes her husband, five adult children, and five grandchildren. Outreach and building relationships that will withstand the truth of Jesus is her focus.

Debra Wills is the Executive Director of SWAMP-IN, called by God to serve on the mission field on the Cheyenne River for the past 12 years. She is a wife and mother of three sons. Her interests include writing, reading, and movies.

The Lakota people, commonly known as the Sioux, believe that community is a way of life. Although their history with outsiders was fraught with difficulty and mistreatment, their definition of community still encompasses insiders and outsiders who do not live on the reservation land.¹

As the founder of a ministry that seeks to serve the Lakota people of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe (CRST) (the federally-recognized name of the tribal reservation), this definition really spoke to us, because as believers we valued community, and knew that if we were going to be effective servants to this people group, it would be best to emulate Christ, entering their context and seeking

community by *listening*. Their tribal values compel the Lakota to extend trust and to extend their story, and it is these values that we sought to honor as we planned a one-day participatory discussion with a representative from the CRST in 2013.

Through the use of several participatory tools, representatives from our ministry and church met with one of our Lakota friends named Wiyaka for an honest evaluation of our work on the reservation. This participatory approach was a perfect fit for our discussion, as the Lakota are an oral-preference community, and these visual means for discussion would allow everyone present to give input and to learn from one another.

We were moved to see how the participatory tools and activities even brought up topics that no one was necessarily “planning” to discuss, or even knew might be an issue on anyone’s heart. That’s the nature of this sort of participatory work—it helps things unfold that you cannot plan out in advance. Through God’s design and grace, this day of activities changed the structure of our ministry at its core, got our church leaders involved in the work on the reservation, and strengthened our communication with the CRST beyond what we could have anticipated.

Background and Beginnings

The Cheyenne River Reservation is about the size of the state of Connecticut, so it’s a very large reservation. Our involvement with the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation actually began in 2003 with an Eagle project that my eldest son did for the Boy Scouts to work with the Cheyenne River Youth Project on the reservation. We got up there, and it was love at first sight. In October 2003, “Saints with a Mission Purpose – Indian Nations,” or SWAMP-IN, was formed, and we started to develop our first team that went in 2004.

Our initial goal was just to respect the Lakota. That was something

that was laid out early on by one of the Lakota elders, but really to be a reflection of Christ to the people who lived on the Cheyenne River. So we made a policy that if they asked us to do something, we would do it by their direction; until they were comfortable to ask us how we would do it, we would just operate that way. So the first few years that’s how it actually worked; we followed their direction, and when God presented opportunities to share our faith, we were able to do so.

But at that time, it was just about learning to trust each other. The Lakota are not very trusting of outsiders. God had ordained us to respect the culture and the people who live there, because we are guests in their community.

The program now consists of summer trips up to the reservation by three to four teams, with a total of around 60-70 people going each year, along with year-round contact with the Lakota for any special needs.

What Led to the Discussion

Three things seemed to set this participatory meeting in motion. First, in 2013, a workshop designed to teach people to facilitate conversations in a participatory manner was held. When asked to consider a real-life context, several

of us were familiar with SWAMP-IN and began to talk about it.

Second, there was a practical need to divide and share the ministry load as well as a desire expand the vision. While I had been shouldering the bulk of the load, it was neither healthy nor sustainable. Furthermore, we not only wanted our church leadership to be actively engaged with SWAMP-IN, but we were beginning to sense God wanted a full-time worker on the reservation. A participatory discussion regarding SWAMP-IN was proposed and we sensed God was doing something.

Third, the most providential thing that occurred to put this meeting in motion was Wiyaka coming into town. His presence meant that we could have an interactive conversation about our ministry, but with real insight about the Cheyenne Reservation community and our work there from both the outsider and the insiders' perspective.

Background about Wiyaka

Wiyaka is a Lakota man in his thirties. He has lived on the reservation all of his life, and he is raising his daughter there now. His name means “feather” in Lakota. He is what is called a Lakota

traditionalist, which means that he practices the ways of his people, going back centuries, so he is not a Christian, nor does he profess any Christian faith.

Wiyaka is an interesting fellow and his experience with Christians was limited until we met him. He was actually very frightened of Christians as a child because some of the children in his family were taken by missionaries to be educated. Wiyaka would hide because he was afraid they would take him and he'd never get to come home. Our first real contact with him came in 2008 through the youth project. He was the wellness coordinator and worked with the teens with basketball and weightlifting and different sports activities. Over the course of the next few years, however, we did get to know him, although our relationship was on and off.

Planning the Discussion

In December 2012, Wiyaka shared his plans to spend two weeks in Missouri with people from Zion before our teams went back to the reservation in South Dakota in the summer of 2013.

In January 2013, five of us from Zion—Don Hugo, Jim Brackman, Pastor Reitz, Delores Desemone,

and I—attended a workshop to learn how to facilitate participatory discussions. Delores and I had been hoping to attend one of these workshops for several years. We felt that the methods being used would help us in not only the SWAMP-IN ministry, but with other ministries in which we were involved. We specifically thought that it would be good for us to have a facilitated discussion when Wiyaka came down in the spring. We realized, however, that it would be best to have an outside facilitator.

We began to make plans before Wiyaka's visit for a participatory discussion about how the SWAMP-IN ministry might be restructured to spread the responsibilities among more people. I was preparing to leave for a five-day visit to the reservation during which I would engage with some of the key contact people to get their input about the SWAMP-IN ministry.

Before we set a date, I asked Wiyaka if he was comfortable being a part of the participatory discussion. He asked me a lot of questions—he wanted to

know what it entailed and what his position would be in regards to it. I said he would be representing not only his tribal community, but also the youth project. He was a little uncomfortable with representing the youth project, because he was no longer in employment there, but we did approach the youth project and they were made aware of what was going on. Our initial goals included answering these questions:

- What are we doing now, and what should we be doing?
- What are the repeatable parts of SWAMP-IN?
- What is the overarching goal?
- What are Zion's needs, and what are SWAMP-IN's needs?
- Input from team members: what did they like most, and what would they change?
- Looking at the current structure, where could improvements be made?

Don, Jim, and I organized a date for our discussion, brainstormed a list of 12 people to invite to attend, and decided to ask our friend to facilitate. I called her and she immediately agreed to assist. She

Timeline
 2003 SWAMP-IN formed
 2008 first meet Wiyaka
 2009 Wiyaka's first visit to Zion
 Dec 2012 Wiyaka expresses interest in a visit
 Jan 2013 Participatory training
 Mar 2013 planning meeting for discussion
 Apr 2013 discussion
 Aug 2013 Visit by Youth Center Director to attend Celebration

used a participatory facilitation event-planning guide to help us all think about why we were having this discussion and what we wanted to do. Not only did she create a “planning guide” with key ideas in it to share with the planning team, but she also gave me some input on questions I planned to ask the youth project workers during my visit with them. Specifically, she helped me make the questions more open.

During my visit to CRST, I asked the following questions of a leader at the youth center, and of three Christian Lakota men with whom we had interacted over the past years:

- What role do you see the youth project and SWAMP-IN in right now?
- What do you like most about the relationship?
- What would you like to see change?
- What would you like that relationship to look like in the future?

While I ended up adapting some of the questions, this discussion provided further input from those on the ground with at CRST.

The woman we asked to facilitate had been our friend for years. We had asked her for input for the past ten years, so she was already quite

familiar with many of the dynamics both within Zion and between our teams and the leaders at the youth center. A few days before the event, she met for about an hour with Don, Jim, and me. She had planned out possible discussion progression:

- Introductions of facilitators
- Opening devotional on Mark 10:46-52 (20 min)
- Opening Focus Questions
 - o Why are we doing this?
 - o What do we plan to talk about today?
- **Concerns poster** – to list any concerns mentioned throughout the day
- **To Do area** – to keep track of things we want to do
- **Participatory Activity: What are the overarching goals of Zion’s ministry among the people of CRST?** (15 min)
 - o Brainstorm write
 - o Prioritize main goals, supporting goals - choose
 1. Take a photo.
- From your discussions and observations, **what do the people of CRST feel are their main needs or desires** related to the Zion – SWAMP-IN ministry? (Debbie and Wiyaka do not share initially)
 - o Brainstorm and write
 - o Read notes from Debbie. Revise as needed.

- o Listen to Wiyaka. Revise
- o What do we think are their top four needs/desires? (perhaps indicate needs of different subgroups.)
Write duplicate of top four needs. Take a photo.
- What are the **needs/desires** of all the people of **Zion** regarding the SWAMP-IN ministry among the people of CRST? What have you heard from them?
 - o Brainstorm and write (possibly organize by subgroups of people at Zion)
 - o Listen to Wiyaka's reflections on how he feels about the needs which are expressed.
 - o What do we think are their top four needs/desires?
Write duplicate of top four needs. Take a photo.
- **What are the things that others have been doing** as people from Zion minister among the people of CRST?
 - o Brainstorm write
 - o Categorize by who does what - Overlapping Circles Tool. Write symbol for doer on each.
 - o Indicate those in which people invest **MUCH time/energy**. Take a photo.
 - o Focus first on CRST needs then repeat for Zion needs.
 - o Mark/Indicate - which have **direct relation** to CRST needs (Zion needs)?
- o **Supportive relationship** to CRST needs (Zion needs)?
- o Mark/indicate any which may **work contrary** to or **bring confusion** to the overarching goal.
- o **What else needs to be done** do to address CRST needs (Zion needs)? Write on different color paper.
- o What things should a different person do? Put sticky tab mark.
- Pause and review. Go back through each diagram AND the concerns poster. Summarize while keeping in mind: What have we learned? What to focus on now?
- Scribe on big paper: What have we learned?
- Based on all of this, **what are the key things we should focus on now?** Write on strips. Include strips from the "To Do Area")
 - o Check whether all are truly priorities.
 - o Sort according to time frame: do **within next week**, do **by first trip 2013**, do **by end of summer 2013**, do **by Feb 2014**.
 - o Assign each to a person/group.
 - o If needed, what does this mean for the structure of SWAMP-IN?
- Conclusion
- Prayer. Sing together.

During the planning meeting, we talked through the possible process, and made some adjustments. The facilitator asked questions about each of the participants as she wanted to ensure everyone would feel as comfortable as possible to contribute. Furthermore, she also asked that I make a one-page handout of the answers to the questions that I had asked when I was at CRST the previous month. The plan was to give this to all the discussion participants, so they knew what some of those at CRST said they wanted to happen in the partnership.

The 12 people we wanted to participate included Wiyaka and myself, Delores and her husband, Bob (who has both been involved with SWAMP-IN from the start), and Jim Brackman, who had been on several trips and had a leadership interest in this since he had recently retired. The one I was most excited about was Pastor Reitz—he was Zion’s outreach pastor, and over all of our evangelism and outreach from church. However, he didn’t know much about SWAMP-IN and so we wanted him to be included to get more of a picture of what was going on and how we needed his nurturing and encouraging. We knew that meeting Wiyaka and having him represent the rest of

his people that SWAMP-IN was serving might have an impact on Pastor Reitz.

We also invited Don Hugo, the church administrator, which was good because he’s never been to the reservation, but he brings in organizational skills, and a connection to the inner workings of the church within the staff. There were also two other church members who we invited—two of our young adults who have been with SWAMP-IN for a while, named Hannah and Reid. They were college-aged, and we wanted the added dynamic of having some of our younger members participate. We held the participatory meeting the day before Wiyaka left Missouri to return to South Dakota.

Besides what our facilitator did to prepare, and what we accomplished in the planning meetings, Delores and I committed to pray for the event. Mostly, we prayed that God would work through it, and we prayed that our church staff would see that SWAMP-IN was not something that we threw together over a weekend and just left for summer trips, but that there was planning and organization that went on throughout the year to keep the connection with the reservation and to form teams.

Beyond our desire to see more involvement and ownership of the ministry from our church leadership, we prayed that this meeting would lay the groundwork for more involvement on the reservation in the future. Specifically, we really felt the Lord speaking about one day having a full-time worker, either an individual or a family, who would live with the Lakota on the reservation, and whom our yearly visiting teams would be supporting. We prayed these meetings would also help the church understand this bigger picture, and help them to engage in praying with us about it too.

During the Discussion

We started off with a participatory devotion based on the story of blind Bartimaeus from Mark 10:46-52. After an interactive discussion around specific questions, we closed our time of devotion by reflecting silently on the question, “What is God teaching me?”

The next activity was to list the overarching goals of the partnership between Zion and CRST. We identified ten things, writing one per paper. The facilitator then asked us to identify the one that was most important. The whole group chose ‘show compassion.’ The papers were lying in a straight column,

but Wiyaka, after explaining how important circles are to the Lakota, rearranged them with “show compassion” in the center.

As Delores later described it, the experience of the participatory discussion was “dreamy.” Our facilitator had really prepared well, and did a great job facilitating. All the things that we had wanted expressed were getting addressed, and everybody was participating. Although some knew everything happening on the reservation, a few others did not. Don and Pastor Reitz were saying, “We didn’t know all this was going on.” It was moving and important to hear from Wiyaka how SWAMP-IN’s visits were seen in a good light. WE couldn’t have asked for anything more—it came together extraordinarily well.

During the preparation, our facilitator expressed concern for Wiyaka—that he would actively engage, and feel comfortable enough to be an integral part of the discussion. Any worries that Wiyaka might not feel at home or might not confidently speak his mind quickly evaporated. Everyone jumped in with his or her own voice. We saw Pastor Reitz, Don, and others saying, “Well, Wiyaka, what do you think?”

As the participatory discussion went along, our facilitator no longer had to specifically engage Wiyaka, as he began to willingly offer suggestions. When we had different things written out, he would just move them, saying, “This belongs here” or “No, that isn’t,” and he was actually engaging without being prompted. This one of the high points—watching him feel comfortable, and knowing that we weren’t going to judge him or be critical of what he was doing. We wanted him to know that we really wanted his input. We were grouping things at one point, and Wiyaka said, “That looks good, but I think maybe it belongs more over here,” so he was being respectful to us just as we were trying to be with him.

The next step was for us to list out what we felt were the key needs and desires of the people of CRST related to the Zion team visits. As the participants shared, one mentioned that the people at CRST wanted to get out of poverty. Our facilitator sensed through body language that Wiyaka had something to say, but he didn’t quite know how to bring it up. She addressed him, and he opened up about how he didn’t like the label of being considered “impoverished.” He questioned “how somebody off the reservation

who doesn’t know anything about us could label us because we don’t have, because we don’t meet a certain income level, we don’t have certain amenities, that that somehow makes us *poor*.”

He really drove home the fact that he didn’t live off of government subsidies like some others on the reservation, that he never went hungry, and that he always had a place to stay. Growing up, he had two parents in his home, but he grew up without running water, indoor plumbing, or electricity, but he didn’t feel poor. It bothered him that he had been labeled. This was a real eye-opener for us.

He felt he had everything he needed and he wanted us to know that. We sat and listened to him, and it made us look at the reservation and the poverty issue differently and realize that it’s not as cut-and-dried as statistics make it. It was a powerful moment.

Everyone heard and gained new understanding about what Wiyaka and the people at CRST desire from the visits from Zion, and the other churches that send teams. Many more papers were added, and even a few, including “Building relationships in Christ,” were added from the pre-planning talk

that Debbie had with other CRST leadership, which they indicated was a high-priority desire. Wiyaka then identified five others that he felt were central to what the people at CRST desire: “trust,” “don’t let the past determine the future,” “not judging,” “strength in and through sharing,” and “Zion listens.”

We also listed out the key needs and desires of the people at Zion related to the team trips to CRST. We identified four of those as key. The next step was to list all the things that anyone at Zion or at CRST had been doing related to the team visits. What a list! More than 50 things were listed. We marked on each paper who were the main people involved in each task or procedure. We quickly realized that too many of

those activities were dependent on one person—me.

We took a picture of that diagram, because the next step was to consider how the things we are doing relate to the top needs and desires of the CRST. We put the five desires down the right side, and as column headings we put: Direct Relationship, Supportive Relationship, and Work Contrary or Bring Confusion. We distributed our current activities onto the table, showing where each activity had influence. We then thought together about additional things we might do, especially to address some of the desires which were not being met. We came up with nine additional things we might do. This table shows how many activities were in each category.

Work Contrary or Bring Confusion	Supportive Relationship	Direct Relationship	New Activities	Needs and Desires of CRST
1	7	6	1	Trust
	2	2	1	Don’t let past determine future
1		1	0	Not judging
		2	0	Strength in/through Sharing
	1	3	3	Zion listens
		1	4	Building relationships in Christ

We repeated that process with the four needs from Zion and added three additional things we might do. We realized that many of the additional things we might do to address desires from CRST would also address needs from Zion. We then decided what we at Zion should do within one month, before teams would begin going to CRST that summer, at the end of the summer, and within one year. We assigned people to be responsible for each activity.

Benefits and Results of the Participatory Discussion

#1. Brainstorming this as a *group* helped us gain structure. For Pastor Reitz and Don Hugo, this visual, participatory method of discussing needs made two things very apparent. The first was that SWAMP-IN had been making an impact on the reservation. Even though we only go a few weeks out of a year, there had been an impact. The second was that in order for this ministry to grow and bless those who it aims to serve, we needed more administrative help so that in the future we could identify needs and actually address those needs in a timely fashion with the gifts of many passionate people instead

of just one person trying to do it all. Because of these talks, there was a structural shift as we began putting together an advisory team. I am now the Executive Director of SWAMP-IN, and we now also have an Advisory Board that takes care of many of the functions I used to do.

#2. After these talks, the summer teams also became much more effective; we saw more productivity after we were able to implement everything we had worked on at the participatory event. I am certain that we could not have formed the effective structure we now have without the participatory event.

#3. It took dialoguing, and laying everything out *visibly*. The participatory discussion showed us a way to work more effectively with the communities on the reservation. Moving forward, we find ourselves using the participatory mindset and principles as we communicate with the youth project in order to better understand what they expect from us and what we expect from them. It has made all the difference in strengthening our relationship and communication with those on the reservation.

#4. Beyond organization and efficiency, another big area where we saw far-reaching effects was in our pastor and church-member involvement. Because our church leadership had heard firsthand from Wiyaka what our presence on the reservation was doing, and could now understand the opportunity for impact, they began to dream and pray with us for God's will in the future of the ministry. It got Zion's pastors involved in laying the groundwork not only with the organization that handles Native American ministries in our denomination, but also with other reservations in the South Dakota district. So it helped Zion connect better with them, and it opened up the dialogue for some hopes that SWAMP-IN will one day have a full-time worker live on the reservation and serve in a more full-time capacity. (Interestingly, we experienced some advancement in this area, and we have been amazed to see the doors that the Lord has opened for these dreams since our participatory discussion about the needs of the ministry and reservation.)

#5. Last, we have seen a residual effect of the participatory discussion on Wiyaka. In subtle ways, it feels that he walked away from that discussion with a participatory

mindset, and potentially with more clarity and creativity about helping his own community on the reservation. He was a team member with one of our summer teams in 2013, and that was very much noticed by his community.

Wiyaka came to speak to one of the other groups that we were preparing to bring up from a university here in Missouri. Much of what he shared was his involvement in SWAMP-IN. Wiyaka continues to mentor others, although he does not have an official role with the youth project, and he has connected with another young man named Kody, who professes a faith in Jesus. These two guys actually know each other quite well.

We feel confident that Wiyaka will continue to be involved with SWAMP-IN in some capacity, but it is a real blessing to see him deeply involved with his own community now year-round. He started a program of his own to build chicken coops on the reservation, so people could benefit from the reusable resource, and so he could help give the communities a sense of independence.

He began brainstorming his own ideas and ways that he could become more self-sufficient on his

reservation, and this has grown to include organic gardens and planting fruits that the people on the reservation use for making jellies and juices. These fruits are a part of their natural culture, going back centuries, but he now learned how to transplant them in groves,

and closer to those who pick them. This involvement is a different approach for him and he is actually looking at solutions to the larger problems on the reservation from within himself and those around him, and that interdependence is a really beautiful development to see.



Conclusion

Within oral preference communities, the use of participatory methods often begets a further use of participatory methods. In our case, we saw this gift “keep giving” many times, as Delores, Jim, and I first received participatory training, and then saw a perfect opportunity to use these means to help open the SWAMP-IN conversation, and then the cycle continued.

We could have had a non-visual, non-inclusive discussion, but I do not think we would have come to the same conclusions, and we would have missed out on the participation from Wiyaka. The participatory nature of the discussion made us all rethink how we work together and what all of us

can actually accomplish at CRST together. It empowered each of us to take the next step. We have learned along the way how deeply God desires to surprise us and bless our small efforts.

When I began to visit the reservation because of my son’s Eagle Scout project, I had no idea all this would happen. Even when we went back the following year, we had no idea it was going to turn into so much. It was the same when we stepped out in faith with this participatory discussion. It has all been a beautiful God-thing. Every time I think he’s done surprising us, he makes a new surprise known, teaching us along the way what heavenly community is about, and how we can invite others into it.

¹“Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.” Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. Accessed May 21, 2015, from www.sioux.org/index.php/main/inner/sioux/lakota_community.





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“Net” Worth of Fishers of Men

“Net” Worth of Fishers of Men

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GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANS

POTENTIAL vs ACTUAL CHRISTIAN GIVING

Actual Giving



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John Wesley



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NETS WITH HOLES

Money Lost to Ecclesiastical Crime

\$3 million lost

2007 Radio Maria Costa Rica

\$3.65 million lost

2011 Uniting Church of Australia

\$12 million lost

2014 Yoido Full Gospel Church South Korea

\$190 million lost

2010 Universal Brokerage Services USA

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