



AI Practitioner

The Impact of Appreciative Inquiry on International Development

Guest Editors: **Mette Jacobsgaard and Irene Nørlund**

Inside:

AI - A Global Phenomenon

Social Capital and MYRADA in India

Embedded (E)Valuation

AI and Health in Kyrgyzstan

A Positive Revolution in International Development

From Seed to Forest in Liberia

Dreams to Delivery in Ghana

Friends of the Street Children in Zambia

Strengths of the Street Children in Uganda

The Makalu Model in Nepal

Hearing and Valuing All Voices in South Africa

Letters from the Rainbow Planet in Sierra Leone

**AI Research Notes
New research from India**

**AI Resources
International Development**

International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

Inside:

- 4** Introduction by Mette Jacobsgaard and Irene Nørlund
AI in development from the pioneering work of the USAID-sponsored GEM projects of the 1990s to current projects in Africa and Asia
- 9** Appreciative Inquiry – A Global Phenomenon by Jane Magruder Watkins
From a conversation at a conference in 1984, AI has spread to all corners of the world; this article describes how it began
- 12** A Positive Revolution in International Development by Ada Jo Mann
The GEM Initiative has become a living laboratory for sowing seeds of AI around the globe
- 16** Social Capital and MYRADA's Pioneering Approach: The Power of Women in Community-Based Organisations in Southern India
by Anita Singh, Mr Bellegowda, Mr Rajachary, Rangegowda Ramesh, Saleela Patkar and Thiyagarajan Babu
MYRADA brings AI and social capital together, empowering the women and their villages
- 24** AI in Community Action for Health in Kyrgyzstan by Tobias Schueth
AI and the countrywide Community Action for Health program
- 31** From Seed to Forest: A Positive Revolution in International Development by Ada Jo Mann, Jen Silbert and Diane Carazas
USAID uses AI to design a program to save Liberia's forests
- 39** Dreams to Delivery: An Appreciation of the Appreciative by Father Patrick Shanahan
'Every street child has the right to be a street child'
- 42** AI Application in Friends of the Street Children by Christopher Mulenga
Founded by concerned citizens who felt duty bound to respond to the influx of street children on Zambian streets, the organisation has helped hundreds of street children through to secondary education

International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

Inside continued:

- 45** Building on the Strengths of the Street Children in Kampala, Uganda
by Cathy Ward
A chance meeting leads to an initiative which has become a charity
- 53** The Makalu Model: Forerunner of the Appreciative Planning and Action (APA) Model by Malcolm J. Odell, Jr
By expanding the 4D model, the author developed the APA model for work with communities in developing countries
- 57** Letters from the Rainbow Planet by Malcolm J. Odell, Jr
Using the 7Ds to help rebuild villages in Sierra Leone after the civil war
- 65** Hearing and Valuing All Voices: A Community-Based Development Programme in South Africa by Privilege Maguchu Chidzewe
A newcomer to AI describes his responses to his first experiences and the changes the training is bringing to his organisation
- 68** Embedded (E)Valuation by Mette Jacobsgaard and Irene Nørlund
Going beyond traditional data collection, analysis and judgement of merit and worth by generating shared meaning amongst the parties involved
-
- 72** **AI Research Notes**
by Jan Reed and Lena Holmberg
New research from India on how appreciative capacity can help managers
- 76** **AI Resources**
by Jackie Stavros and Dawn Dole
A compendium of resources for AI and international development
-
- 82** **About the November 2011 Issue**
Guest Editors: Bernard J. Mohr, Sallie Lee and Cherie Torres
Appreciative Governance: The Principles and Practice
- 83** **IAPG Contacts and AI Practitioner Subscription Information**





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The Impact of Appreciative Inquiry on International Development

ABSTRACT

The expert role of the Western donors clashes with the belief that the peoples of the developing world should have a say in how they move forward. Appreciative Inquiry can bridge some of those conflicts, especially when the experts change their role to become facilitators.

In our work with development aid to Third World countries over the many years we have had experience of working with conflicting paradigms. On one hand, there is an underlying paradigm that the Third World is a problem to be solved and Western donors have the knowledge, capacity and money to do so; on the other is the paradigm of public participation, in which the peoples of the Third World need to take ownership of their own development and more actively participate in the projects and programmes that are supposed to aid them. The expert role of the Western donors clashes with the belief that the peoples of the developing world should have a say in how they move forward.

We believe that Appreciative Inquiry can bridge some of those conflicts, especially when the 'experts' change their role to become facilitators. In this issue we have invited a number of AI practitioners, seasoned as well as a few relatively new to the approach, to share their experiences.

The practice of AI in development emanated from the pioneering work of the USAID-sponsored GEM (Global Excellence in Management) project in the early 1990s. A group of scholars and practitioners, mostly Americans, tried, tested and developed the practice through the project which worked particularly in the not-for-profit sector globally. The much used and quoted 4D model was developed by this project.

Charles Elliott wrote *Locating the Energy for Change* in 1999¹, in which some of the first cases of AI practice in development were documented in a published form. Since then, AI has taken off in a big way, not least because of the respectful way in which the approach brings on board all voices and emphasises what does and can work in a developing world that is still for some portrayed as problematic.

¹ See page 77 for a review of the book.

The five AI principles are:

- Constructionist
- Simultaneity
- Anticipatory
- Poetic
- Positive

Our own experience has time and again proved how AI can ideally accommodate empowerment and the participation of beneficiary communities.

We were curious about other practitioners' experience with applying AI in the projects and programmes that they have worked with, so we asked a number of them to tell us their stories, especially with the following focus:

- How the use of AI influenced target group participation and ownership in the project or programme or in the specific intervention
- What the effects and impact were
- Surprises for them and the groups, and finally
- Lessons learned and reflections on how AI could be carried forward in international development practice

What lessons were learned?

This issue of *AI Practitioner* focuses on the experiences of AI in developing countries. The questions raised for the authors involved with AI approaches have generated a number of stories from the history of the development of AI as a concept and approach, and how it has been integrated in development efforts in different parts of the world (particularly in Asia and Africa), in different time phases and at many different levels – from grassroots levels to governmental.

The contributions strongly demonstrate that AI puts people first. It is participatory and creates ownership for the users involved in the programmes. The question is, what does AI do that many ordinary development methodologies are not capable of achieving? Why is it that the AI approach has proved effective in the cases described in this issue of *AI Practitioner*?

The five principles

The five principles, as outlined by Ada Jo Mann, Jen Silbert and Diana Carazas in 'From Seeds to Forest', form the AI philosophy:

- The constructionist principle (knowledge and destiny are interwoven)
- The principle of simultaneity (inquiry is intervention – inquiry and change are not separate)
- The anticipatory principle (our images of the future guide out current behaviour – positive image creates positive action)
- The poetic principle (human organisations and systems are open boxes – what we chose to focus on will grow)
- The positive principle (organisations move in the direction of the questions they ask).²

AI has in many respects been ahead of its time in the development cooperation context. AI supports grassroots participation, empowerment, development processes. The approach draws on post-modern and qualitative methods, trusting the construction of ideas between people. This may be the reason

² Jane M. Watkins and David Cooperrider formulated a coherent AI approach in 'Appreciative Inquiry: A Transformative Paradigm.' *OD Practitioner* 32 (1) 2000, even if the history goes back to the mid-1980s.



AI has an inherent tendency to create networks.

why AI is gaining importance among organisations working with community development and issues like street children. In evaluation as well, there are many methods that are using qualitative approaches such as AI, as discussed in Mette's article on 'Embedded (E)Valuation.'

The articles in this issue show that experienced AI facilitators and scholars have been channels carrying the approach from one country to another, and from one field to another. It could be said that AI has an inherent tendency to create networks, due to the broad inclusion of people and stakeholders in the projects; the positive results have inspired others to try it.

There is great variety in both level and knowledge of development and experience of AI. There is, furthermore, great variety in terms of the scenarios.

Common denominators

First, the grassroots stakeholders are involved in the projects and processes which are based on positive stories about the times when they have been most alive, fulfilled and excited.

Second, AI needs an experienced facilitator at the beginning, even if the process can be taken over and continued by the organisations. The spirit can be continued and maintained, as in projects like in India's MYRADA.

Third, AI works both at grassroots level, as well as higher levels in organisations. In some cases the initiative comes from the central level and moves down, as in Kyrgyzstan and Liberia.

Fourth, AI can be used as a process for evaluation and learning, as in Malcolm J. Odell's piece from Sierra Leone.

We begin this issue – with the beginning. In the two first articles, Jane Watkins and Ada Jo Mann describe how the practice of AI was developed, tried and tested in the early years through development projects and more specifically in the NGO world. The story began in 1984 when David Cooperrider and Jane Watkins met.

Planting seeds that grow

Ada Jo outlines the fundamental AI principles and the 4D model. USAID should be credited as being instrumental and giving financial support to the early development of AI in 1990 in connection with the Global Excellence in Management (GEM) initiative. An initiative headed by Ada Jo and a few colleagues, it was the beginning of larger scale use of AI in development cooperation. The project now underway in Liberia ('From Seeds to Forest' by USAID to support the forestry sector was facilitated by Ada Jo to strengthen the partnership across the forestry sector). In this case AI was started as a process at national level before it was carried out into the localities through consultative teams.

The MYRADA project in South India, presented by A. Singh et al., is a fantastic story of how it has been possible to integrate AI and social capital in a fairly large-scale community development project in three provinces. The AI process was introduced in community based projects in the late 1990s. Social capital had already linked organisations at the same levels based on trust and mutual



'Generating inner energy' in Kyrgyzstan

support, and it was 'bridging' to outside organisations. AI added an important dimension for the women in the CBOs (self-help affinity groups) to plan for the future. It continues to be part of an integrated process in visioning and planning, right up to 2014!

Tobias Schueth writes about the Community Action for Health in Kyrgyzstan. He has been the representative for the Red Cross there since 2001, and became engaged in the government's National Health Reform program which functioned with voluntary Village Health Committees, which act as local NGOs. After having been trained in AI he started to slowly pilot AI together with staff and local health committees. The results were very positive in generating the 'inner source of energy' as one of the participants mentioned. More than 1000 villages went through the process.

Malcolm J. Odell comes with a different story in the article 'Letters from the Rainbow Planet'. A Peace Corps volunteer many years ago, involved with AI for ten years, he took on the task of helping a large-scale, EU-funded programme linking relief, rehabilitation and development in Sierra Leone. Malcolm drew on experience with AI in community work in Nepal, where he developed the innovative Malaku model, which he has since used in Sierra Leone to help the community create a presentation that, in the end, satisfied EU officials. When he returned a year later, the positive, appreciative approach was still ongoing, and many new projects were underway. The APA processes had worked!

Privilege Maguchu Chidzewe writes in his short piece about the community empowerment for development programme in South Africa. After a recent training course, he has been inspired to use an AI approach. He writes about changing the traditional top-down planning in his organisation to a strengths-based, participatory approach developed from the 4D model.

AI and street children

In this issue we have included no fewer than four cases of AI with projects that support street children. One reason is that some of the early 'experiments' with AI in development were made in projects supporting street children. Second, AI seemed an obvious choice to those of us who were invited to work in these volatile and challenging environments. Third, as always, there is coincidence.

As Father Patrick Shanahan describes in his article, 'Dream to Delivery', he was looking for and dreaming about something different, an approach that would honour the tremendous efforts that he and his colleagues have made in an extremely volatile environment of street children. He has been instrumental in changing the way street children are viewed in Africa. He has done so through the lens of AI. Although there may still be a long way to go, Father Patrick relentlessly pursues his dreams and belief that street children are individuals who deserve respect in their own right. A way to not only show respect but also to empower street children is by asking them to tell their stories with a focus on what works for them.

Chance would have it that Patrick, Mette, Charles and Jane were at Cambridge at the same time. AI was tested to the limit: the underlying principles of AI were taken and moved into an arena that was new to the trainers. They let social construction do the work. It was a great success; Mette went back several times to further embed the AI approach with organisations in Ghana. Father Patrick



Street children in Zambia

was instrumental in moving ahead with AI in other organisations working with street children as presented in Christopher Mulenga's article from Zambia, 'Friends of the Street Children'. Christopher took to AI as soon as he heard about it. He immediately and instinctively knew that AI would be the way forward in work that is not only tremendously challenging but also very rewarding when successful. He relates the impact that it has had not only on the organisation but also on the lives of the street children.

Others, inspired by this work, took up the intent as illustrated by Cathy Ward's article from Uganda. Although the work in Uganda differs in approach, both to development and to AI, it was inspired by the belief that street children are a mystery to be embraced rather than a problem to be solved.

The work with street children started with evaluation, as is discussed in the last article on embedded (e)valuation. This sets out a description of embedded (e)valuation and its significance for these projects.

AI supplements other approaches

What stands out in the contributions to this issue is that AI is not only participatory but also inclusive and empowering. Furthermore, it does not negate other approaches rather it supplements human capital very nicely. AI compliments other participatory approaches.

We hope that this issue will inspire many more development practitioners to take up AI, qualify as practitioners and, especially, experiment with AI as a new way of doing what they already do.

Mette Jacobsgaard and Irene Nørlund

Guest Editors, August 2011

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About the November 2011 Issue

Appreciative Governance: The Principles and Practice

Governance is the set of activities that guide the functioning of a human system, enabling members to set direction or purpose, to make decisions assuring the fulfilment of their purpose, and to set the standards of relationship, behavior and accountability. We know new governance models are needed. Thinking differently about governance is the first step; a set of principles and a process for the design and implementation of new governance systems are also required.

Everywhere we turn we see evidence of a need for new governance structures: the inability of the global financial system to self regulate; the malfunctioning of the Deepwater Horizon 'network' responsible for taking corrective action when an explosion occurs on the oil rig. From the Wall Street crash and great depression of 1929 to the massive bankruptcies (and criminal conduct) of Enron, MCI/Worldcom, and many other corporate scandals, including the 'great recession' of 2008, the issue of organizational conduct has grown in importance for all of us.

Issues of conduct have not been limited to commercial organizations. Major not-for-profit organisations (NPOs) such as the Roman Catholic Church, the United Way, the American Red Cross, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the American Cancer Society, and Toys for Tots are among the many NPOs which have had senior executives imprisoned and/or fined for various forms of malfeasance. This issue of AIP shares the results to date of an on-going inquiry into the principles and practices of Appreciative Governance. The articles reflect our effort to answer key questions such as:

1. What if Governance is happening everyday in every corner of the system (vs only in the boardroom) and what if it is concerned with a lot more than compliance, strategy, corporate reporting and selection and compensation of executive management.
2. How would the design of governance and control systems (traditionally almost exclusively the purview of accountants, lawyers and economists responding to negative situations) change?
3. How would a participatively-developed set of governance structures and systems (based on principles for strengths-based organizations) generate sustainable value?



[Back to Table of Contents](#)

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Purpose of AI Practitioner

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