

a story from INDONESIA



Australia Indonesia Partnership
Kemitraan Australia Indonesia



Strengthening Democratic Local Governance

How Appreciative Inquiry and the Asset-based Approach brings citizens and governments together through conversations that matter

Background

In 1999, Indonesia became a democracy state once again - a year after the downfall of the Soeharto authoritarian regime in 1998. Its new democratic governance was followed by the decentralization of government to the district level.

By 2000, had become a new hope for the acceleration of people's welfare. Development that met people's basic needs and quality public services became notions that were within reach and more engaging than before.



The first time in Indonesia an international development program has applied Appreciative Inquiry over a large geographical area, involving relatively large multistakeholder groups.

Two years later, in 2002, a collaborative initiative between the Government of Indonesia (GOI) and the Government of Australia (GOA) called the Australia Community Development and Civil Society Strengthening Scheme (ACCESS) was launched. The first phase of the initiative (ACCESS Phase I) was aimed at promoting the poor, women and other marginalized groups to take part in leading development planning, decision making, and implementation in their villages.

Participatory village planning by the poorest in the community, women, and other marginalized community groups has become an important stepping stone for enhancing the quality of development planning and implementation in eight of the poorest districts in Eastern Indonesia (located in the four provinces of: West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, South Sulawesi and Southeast Sulawesi). Furthermore, this initiative was also very much in-line with the GOI's decentralization program aimed

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AI encourages dialogue, not debate. It is non threatening and focuses on building trust by jointly identifying and sharing strengths between government and civil society, as a foundation for building collaborative endeavors.

How ACCESS is using Appreciative Inquiry

ACCESS believes that encouraging communities to focus first on their assets strengthens each individual community member's capacity to act

at promoting more participatory and inclusive development planning processes.

After successfully influencing the participatory village planning paradigm in the districts of ACCESS Phase I, ACCESS began introducing the asset-based approach in participatory village planning and some of its learning events.

The strengths of what was achieved in ACCESS Phase I is the basis for current work being done under ACCESS Phase II that began in 2008. In addition to expanding the geographical coverage of the program's intervention, more importantly this second phase of the program has put ABA at the centre of the work it is carrying out, with Appreciative Inquiry as one of the chosen models.

It must be noted that this is the first time in Indonesia an international development program has applied ABA and AI over a large geographical area, involving relatively large multistakeholder groups, using progressive facilitation methods that promote true engagement and interaction, and resulting in



inclusive outputs that invoke a shared responsibility among participants of the events.

The core purpose for ACCESS is "Citizens and their organisations are empowered to engage with local governments on improving local development impacts in 16 districts in Eastern Indonesia". The program aims to work with district stakeholders to achieve sustainable and replicable behaviour and system changes that will improve local democratic governance.

ACCESS Phase II builds on the successes of ACCESS Phase I and emphasises the importance of building demand for better governance and building the capacity of local communities and civil society organisations.

ACCESS strongly adheres to the principles of gender and social

inclusion, empowerment and asset-based approaches, sustainability, cooperation and collaboration, transparency, accountability and participation as well as continuous learning.

Why is the asset-based approach (ABA) one of the key principles of ACCESS Phase II? ACCESS believes that encouraging communities to focus first on their assets strengthens each individual community member's capacity to act, creates a sense of ownership, and becomes the foundation upon which to act (that is to challenge the structure on who decides how resources are allocated).

ACCESS Phase II believes that significant community development can only take place when local communities direct their efforts, resources, and strengths to build their communities; when citizens and their organizations recognize, value, and embrace the strengths that they have as their capital to to act. These actions will in turn attract other communities to learn, and other agencies and institutions to respond, support, and invest.

This is what ACCESS Phase II is all about. Encouraging, enabling, supporting citizens and groups of citizens to act and engage among themselves and engage with other agencies i.e. government agencies that provide services.

ABA is both essential and beneficial in this context as it takes a different approach from the conventional attempts to promote civil society involvement in development. ABA encourages dialogue, not debate. It is not only non-threatening, but it focuses on building trust by jointly identifying and sharing strengths between government and civil society as a foundation to embark on collaborative endeavors.



While more information on ACCESS Phase II can be obtained from its website (www.access-indo.or.id), below are the three strategic areas that guide the program's interventions:

1. Strengthening engagement between civil society (CS) and government through new and existing mechanisms and processes to build more equitable, transparent and inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue, decision making and learning.
2. Empowering citizens' participation for democratization from the grassroots to village, sub district, district and national levels through capacity building, increased access to information and resources and continual learning to strengthen citizens' abilities, willingness and confidence to act together to pursue their

rights, entitlements and interests.

3. Stimulating scaling up and replication through working across the systemic issues of governance at district level, geographic expansion and linking with other national and international donor programs by sharing resources, disseminating learning and advocacy efforts to influence local and national governments, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other donors.

(DLG) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI).

This initial workshop was designed and facilitated by INSPIRIT INNOVATION CIRCLES (INSPIRIT), a social enterprise dedicated to facilitating change through communication that is humanizing, inspiring, and builds enthusiasm (what INSPIRIT calls 'Vibrant Communication'). INSPIRIT has been using AI in various aspects of its work since 2000, and has been applying asset-based thinking and AI in working with various development actors, from communities to local governments, non governmental organizations and the private sector, in addition to a number of international donors and development projects.

AI in Action

In August 2008, ACCESS Phase II began introducing AI to its staff, local partners and strategic partners in a National Workshop on Democratic Local Governance in Bali. The purpose of this workshop was to create a space for dialogue and discussion on Democratic Local Governance

During ACCESS Phase I, INSPIRIT was instrumental in providing facilitation skills training (using its signature Vibrant Facilitation course, that is strongly based on strength-based approaches) to ACCESS staff and partners, as well as in developing and delivering a leadership training course for women community leaders.

As a strategic partner in the current ACCESS Phase II, in

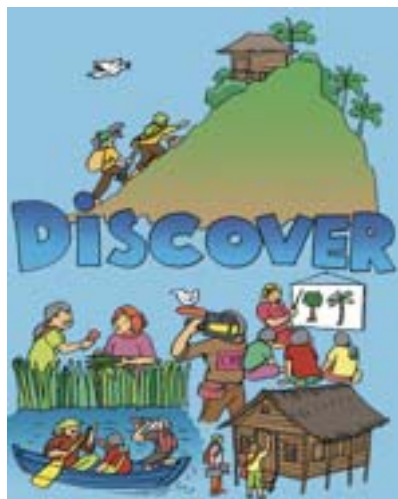
Adopting the basic principles of vibrant communication, the facilitation of each DAS is based on the premise that each individual has value as a human being; that every participant is unique, is gifted, and has a story to tell

addition to designing and facilitating the above mentioned workshop, INSPIRIT worked closely with ACCESS staff in developing two training workshops to prepare ACCESS Phase II staff and local district facilitator teams with the necessary skills and knowledge to facilitate District Appreciative Summits (DAS) in their districts. The training workshops were held in August 2008 and September 2009 respectively, while the DAS in all districts took place in September-October 2008 and October-November 2009.

Facilitator teams consisted of representatives from local communities, local government, and local civil society organizations. They were trained in how to facilitate dialogue about democratic local governance, and how to design and facilitate an AI process for their districts by experiencing the process themselves during the training workshop. By the end of the training workshops, each team had to design and present their own plans for preparing and facilitating a DAS in their district. This design was used as the basis for conducting the DAS in the following months.

District Appreciative Summit

What follows below is a brief description of how the AI cycle has been applied in ACCESS Phase II, particularly in conducting the District Appreciative Summit (DAS).



Appreciative Interviews: A jump start to the Discover and Dream stages of AI

In preparation for the DAS, district appreciative interviews were conducted to gain insight on people's 'proud moments' and strengths (which are explored further during the Discover and Dream phases of the DAS). District facilitators were provided with a simple guide to conduct their interviews, focusing on two main questions: (1) what have you been most proud of during your work on an individual, organizational and community level; and (2) what ideal situation do you want to see by 2015 at an individual level, your organization, and your community.

While interviews could be carried out directly by the facilitators, they were also encouraged to train others to help with the interviews so that they could be conducted with as many people as possible. In most cases, appreciative interviews were conducted between a month and two weeks before the DAS. The purpose of the interviews was to collect inspiring stories and

extraordinary dreams, while spreading positive energy as widely as possible to members of communities and CSOs and district local government.

During the process of conducting appreciative interviews, all interviewers were asked to observe closely the energy of the interviewees during the whole process. To what degree were the eyes of the the interviewee shining while telling her or his story? How passionate were they in communicating their dreams and hopes for the future? This was important in determining which interviewees needed to participate in the appreciative summit, as each organization or village could only be represented by one or two people.

After the appreciative interviews were conducted, district facilitator teams together with ACCESS program field staff selected participants to the DAS based on inspiring stories of change, communication skills and behaviour of the interviewees that reflected belief in the AI philosophy of focusing on strengths. As with all ACCESS activities, particular care was given to ensuring that a balance of 50% women and 50% men was achieved in the participant selection process.

Of the selected participants, volunteers were recruited to form a District Appreciative Team or Multistakeholder Forum. This team consists of selected participants, district facilitators and ACCESS partners. The District Appreciative Team was tasked with making all the necessary preparations and design for conducting the District Appreciative Summit (DAS).

Ultimately, we believe this process will create transformational change that engages the whole system, a community that has the courage to creatively pursue their dream of a district where democratic local governance is a reality, with thriving citizens and a government is transparent, accountable, and prioritizes participatory development

Adopting the basic principles of vibrant communication, the facilitation of each DAS is based on the premise that each individual has value as a human being; that every participant is unique, is gifted, and has a story to tell. To ensure that true human interaction takes place, the role of the facilitator is to create an extraordinary process and space that brings out the participants' enthusiasm, allows them to engage with each other on the basis of trust and openness, and learn together as well as co-create with each other.

Two important prerequisites for the above to happen are: (1) create a learning space that is unique and comfortable so that participants are free to be themselves, and (2) facilitate the process by emphasizing emotional contact, imagination, and reflection using the arts such as poetry, music, pictures, video, dance and drama.

The appreciative interview phase of AI invites participants to begin the process of Discovering and Dreaming on an individual level. This is extremely important in the context of preparing for the DAS, as participants represent a variety of groups - the poor, women, marginalized groups, civil society groups, government, and local parliament; a mosaic of

different experiences, interests and expectations.

Innovating the 4-D Cycle

Once participants have convened to participate in the DAS, it is crucial to begin the summit by dedicating ample time for the participants to get to know each other. This is important to build trust and openness among participants, who are expected to become champions in local democratic governance processes at the district level.

Creating a Conducive Learning Environment

A favourite tool that we have used in facilitating the 'getting to know each other' session of our workshops is the **Personal Mandala**. Participants are asked to create a Personal Mandala that is filled with symbols and drawings that reflect:

- a) a happy childhood experience;
- b) a teenage experience that has had a profound impact on your life;
- c) what inspires your life; and
- d) future dreams do you want to realize.

By design, the Personal Mandala does not use words. The reason for this is to get participants to activate their imagination and begin breaking down barriers of



communication that is often created by the written word. Pictures are very effective in creating open communication, as people begin telling stories about themselves, transferring energy that is often hindered by social barriers.

After completing their Personal Mandala, participants are asked to share their mandalas in groups of up to six people at the most. Small groups are necessary to ensure everyone has a chance to speak and be heard, as well as to listen to others.

Once the sharing has been completed, participants are asked to do a group activity such as finding shared group strengths and sources of inspiration and then share a group project with the other groups in plenary.

For example, each group is tasked with creating a group pose that depicts the group's strengths, and another group pose that reflects the group's sources of inspiration. Each group is then asked to introduce

themselves to the larger group by acting out their poses.

Each group pose is photographed, printed out and posted on the 'learning wall' (the wall of the meeting place that acts as a visual record of the entire process).



This is a fun but powerful way to set a comfortable and friendly atmosphere for the next sessions in the summit.

DISCOVER

Once the introduction session is over, the next step is to get participants to think of a 'proud moment' in their lives over the past five years. We usually ask participants to create a simple Comic Strip - again with pictures - that helps to provide a visualization of their proud moment.

Again in groups, participants share their proud moments and listen to the proud moments of their group members. This process is actually a reiteration of the significant change stories revealed during the appreciative interview phase prior to the DAS and an opportunity for participants to embrace and recognize their accomplishments in a safe and supportive learning environment.

Identifying Strengths

A natural continuation of this process is to have participants identify their personal, relational, and situational strengths based on the proud moments they have chosen to share. Many people are often reluctant to consider their own strengths as having an important role in creating and achieving change, therefore this is important for them to do so in order for them to begin recognizing patterns of how they use their strengths to do work they are proud of.

Group strengths are captured on coloured cards, using pictures and words for every one to see. These cards are then placed on a large piece of paper and become the group's Postive Core Map.

In our processes, we usually ask the groups to create a song using words from their **Postive Core Map**. The process of co-creating a song based on strengths is a powerful exercise, and shows how a group's strengths can be used collectively to accomplish a simple task.

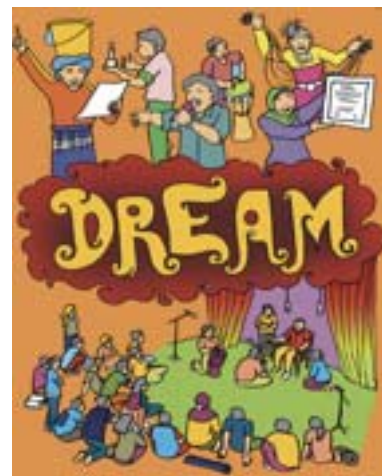
We have found that this process creates trust and enthusiasm that is contagious within each group and to all participants. It is an unfamiliar process for many, but without fail it has succeeded in building positive energy among participants that is crucial for the next phase in the AI process.

DREAM: Building a Mosaic Dream

The second D in the AI process - Dream - utilizes the power of images that is based on the strengths and patterns identified

in the Discover phase.

Participants are asked to literally visualize the future that they want to create together for their community.



We use the method of co-creating a Vision Board, using pictures from old magazines that are provided to them. The number of old magazines has to be the same as or more than the number of participants, so that each participant can look for pictures and words that best capture their dreams of the future they want to create. Using guiding instructions, participants are asked to use their imagination and choose pictures and words that show the future they want to create within the context of Democratic Local Governance. We usually give them a timeframe to aim for, for example between 5-10 years.

The vision board is usually deliberately made quite large - 2m x 2m - as it is meant to capture all the different aspects that participants want to see in the future. Each participant has to contribute to the Mosaic of Dreams, and is free to put up what ever they want at this phase. Once all pictures have been put up, each member is



asked to describe why they chose a particular picture or word to create mutual understanding among group members.

Once the vision board is finished, groups are asked to share their vision board to the other groups by creating a poem that tells a story of their dream. This is another process of building trust and collaboration. Each piece of the vision board contributes to a share dream. Every person - from the community, CSO, government - has something to contribute and aim for.

Group members are asked to create metaphors for their chosen dreams. In doing so, the hope is that participants can begin thinking about what needs to change from their past experiences, and what are the patterns of strengths necessary in order to create the vision of the future they want to attract and achieve. The process of creating a poem helps them give new meaning to their future.

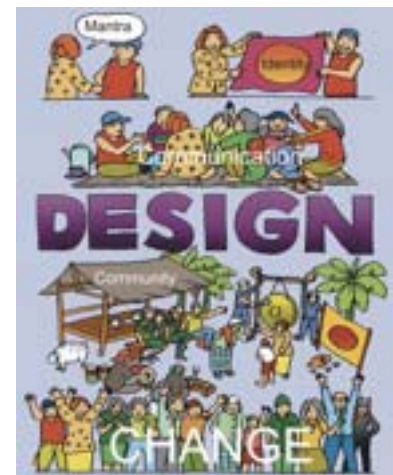
The poem becomes the first step to creating a Provocative Proposition.

In our experience when this process takes place, people begin to understand and see how they have shared dreams regardless of which sector of society they come from. They want the same things for themselves and each other, and they can visualize it much better because they are speaking the same language. It is this mosaic of pictures and narratives that are then attached to the pictures that become the spirit that guide the next actions to take together. Images and narratives of what needs to be achieved over the next five years inherently includes what kinds of behaviour change are that necessary, particularly for women, the poor and other marginalized groups.

DESIGN: Designing an Imagined Future

In the design phase, participants are asked to go back to their

Vision of the Future and select which pictures really call out to them, which elements they feel are most important to them and call them to action.



In groups that are formed based on shared interests of the future they want to create, participants are asked to develop a prototype or ideal representation of the dream they want to achieve. Together, group members are asked to identify the elements of success that are necessary to realize their dream in the form

of Principles, Criteria and Indicators.

These elements are then placed on a 'Hierarchy of Effects' diagram and the group is asked to begin by forming a 'Mantra' (provocative statement) that expresses both their dream and the elements of success necessary to make it a reality. A mantra is a simple and inspiring statement that is no more than six words.

After creating a mantra, the group has to define what initiative they want to develop. This is done by creating a social product or an identity for their initiative. This identity has to be specific and have an inspiring name, similar to giving a name to a product they want to 'sell' to others.

This is not an easy process since most civil society organizations and government institutions are more accustomed to carrying out generic activities under the titles of community development, public service, capacity building and the like.

The purpose of using the social product approach is to instill in the minds and hearts of participants that what they are creating is not merely part of a project but rather an initiative that will excite as many other people as possible in the district to join in and be a part of achieving together as part of a shared dream.

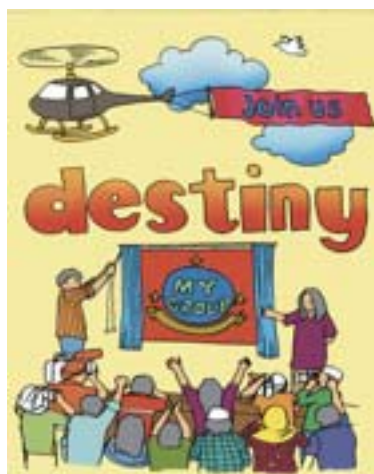
DESTINY: Taking shared responsibility

Once the group has developed a mantra and create a social product, the next phase is to

determine what innovative action is required to spread the news about the social product to as wide an audience as possible. The ultimate goal of these innovative actions or steps is to create a 'tribe' that is passionate about the shared dream they are proposing. One way to support the creation of such a 'tribe' or community is by holding public events and gatherings that are creative and engaging.

Finally, the last stage of the Hierarchy of Effects diagram must show how the group imagines how their 'tribe' will continuously and actively pursue the realization of their shared dream, such as through advocacy efforts, campaigns, citizens education and many other activities.

Ultimately, we believe this process will create transformational change that engages the whole system; a community that has the courage to creatively pursue their dream of a district where democratic local governance is a reality, with thriving citizens and a government is transparent, accountable, and prioritizes participatory development.



What We Learned

Since August 2008, District Appreciative Summits have been held in 16 of the poorest districts of Eastern Indonesia, engaging a total of more than 800 people. Some of the key lessons we have learned are:

The Appreciative Inquiry process enables 'rapid engagement' among participants, building trust and spreading enthusiasm. In a such, the process facilitates communication that is more open and effective.

ABA and AI builds self-confidence among participants to make use of the community assets that already exist in each step of their endeavour to achieve their shared dream.

AI encourages the creation and development of initiatives that are independent and sustainable, and make use of existing assets and strengths without having to rely on outside assistance (donor support) or aid projects.

Collaborative synergies enable all stakeholders to contribute their strengths and resources in accordance with their interests and capacities to achieve their shared imagined future. This process both recognizes and generates increased social capital that in turn gives hope to the generation of increased economic capital needed to accelerate the improvement of people's well-being, while ensuring environmental sustainability. ***

*by Dani W. Munggoro
and Budhita Kismadi*