

Session Plan Nine

Participatory Tools and Techniques

(Appreciative Planning and Action: APA)

1. Objectives

- To introduce concepts and principles of Appreciative Planning and Action (APA)
- To illustrate that, in a conducive environment and with proper encouragement and awareness, rural communities are capable of identifying solutions to their welfare themselves.
- To show that by focussing on successes, which the rural communities have had in the past, a feeling of empowerment can be generated
- To show that by making commitments and taking action as part of the planning process, communities can be mobilised to achieve their objectives.
- Through example, to show that empowering rural communities can be a powerful tool for developing a collective vision and mobilising them towards achieving it.

2. Session Outline

- Appreciative Planning and Action (APA)
- Basic elements of APA
- APA as an empowering tool
- Reports from the field
- Some basic principles for APA practitioners
- APA process worth exploring further

3. Session Time: 1600 - 1730 Hrs

4. Assumptions

- Traditionally, programmes are initiated, planned, and decided upon at the central level, without consulting rural communities, and sent to local development promoters for implementation.
- Rural communities are incapable of managing their resources rationally, hence they are unable to look after their welfare.
- Rural communities are powerless and consequently they have low self-esteem.

5. Session Outline Topics

6. Appreciative Planning and Action (APA)

Background to APA

Appreciating Planning and Action (APA) has been developed and piloted by 'The Mountain Institute (TMI)' in Nepal, Sikkim, Tibet, and the USA as an innovative approach to grass-roots' village planning and mobilisation. This technique shows considerable promise as a mechanism for helping empower groups and communities to take positive action for their own development. Drawing on a relatively new organizational development framework, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), developed by the Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University, USA; APA is built on searching for the positive, for successes, for what works, as opposed to the traditional problem-oriented focus of many other planning aid development strategies.

Appreciative Planning and Action: APA provides a framework that helps empower groups and communities to take positive action for their own development. It is built on principles of searching for positive events, for successes, for what works, and for what gives energy to individuals and groups. It then seeks to empower local communities to take action by creating a vision of an even better future, making commitments, and taking the first step. It also draws directly on Participatory Rural Appraisal and other group dynamic disciplines.

Basic Elements of APA

- One Goal
 - Seeking the root causes of success
- Two Laws
 - What you seek is what you find.
 - Where you believe you are going is where you will end up.
- Three Principles
 - If you look for problems, you find more problems.
 - If you look for successes, you find more successes.

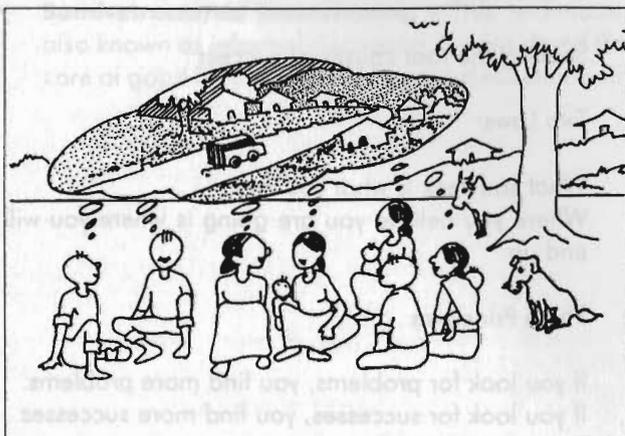
- If you have faith in your dreams, you can achieve miracles.
- Four Ds
 - Discovery- asking positive questions, seeking what works, what empowers
 - Dream- envisioning of what could be, where we want to go
 - Design- making an action plan based on what we can do for ourselves, making personal commitments
 - Delivery- start taking action now

Through Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME), this Four-D process leads directly back to the Discovery steps by reviewing with participants what has worked best, what might work even better, and what we can do to follow up on our actions.

The 'Four D' Process



- Discovery – Asking positive questions, seeking what works, what empowers, what gives life to the community or organization, when has a community felt particularly excited, energised. (e.g.: Community Forest Users' Groups 'discovered' that they were becoming an important force for local development, undertaking to support schools, service clubs, and



families facing adversity; starting saving and credit programmes, and even paying medical bills for a man mauled by a bear).

- Dream - Visioning of what could be, where we want to go, (e.g.: Village people share their dreams of the future, discussing the different paths they might take and choosing one they can agree upon. Local people in one small scruffy market centre at the confluence for two beautiful rivers dreamed of a vibrant market drawing both traders and tourists ; they set to work immediately to achieve that dream with a 'clean-up' campaign that same afternoon).



- Design – Making an action plan based on what we can do for ourselves. Making personal commitments (e.g.: Villagers made a one-year plan for toilets in every home and personal commitments to each build one themselves; when the APA training team was leaving the village they found families at work already taking action to fulfill their commitment).



- Delivery - Start taking action now! (e.g.: Communities committed 10 - 30 minutes time after APA meetings to repair roads, build toilets, protect a sacred spring, revive an ancient dance, raise money for the roof for an allo centre, clean up their villages, market places,

and shrines. They immediately recognised the power and pride derived from even small commitments followed by action, now!

Re-Discovery: Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME)

The 4-D process leads directly back to the Discovery step through reviewing with participants what has worked best, what was learned, how this affects our dream, and what new actions we can take to move forward and follow up on what we have started. Like any sound village or organizational development process, APA initiatives require ongoing and regular follow-up: monthly for the first 6 mon., then every 6 mon. thereafter until communities and/or organizations are functioning on a sustainable basis (± 2 years).

The 4-D Process and Standard Project Planning Cycles

The 4-D Process is fully compatible with most standard project cycles which are based on a parallel 4-step process of problem identification and analysis, choice of alternatives, development of plan, implementation of plan (followed by a return to the first step as part of a monitoring/evaluation process). This new generation PRA approach thus can be introduced harmoniously into existing systems, giving new meaning and power to those systems rather than undermining or invalidating them.

7. APA as an Empowering Tool

- Practical exercises in Nepal's villages has shown that APA does the following.
 - Empowers - helps groups celebrate, embrace, and learn from their successes instead of focussing on their problems.
 - Mobilises- provides groups with simple and concrete actions they can start immediately.
 - Energises- provides a future-focus that encourages groups to create a vision, to select steps that help move them towards fulfilling their vision, and to take the first steps towards achieving it.
- APA Mission
 - To empower communities and individuals to take pride in what and who they are and what they have achieved; to dream of what might be; to plan for what can be; and to feel the energy that comes from making commitments and completing the first step.
 - To be simple enough that anyone can do it; profound enough to change people's lives.

The purpose is for local communities to develop a greater stake in biodiversity protection through the use of traditional and new technologies and management capabilities for improved community development, biodiversity protection, and natural resource

management. In Nepal, through this approach, 12 VDCs, 100 settlements, and 32,000 rural people are presently benefitting.

- Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

AI introduces positive energy into what might otherwise be a relatively dry and sometimes negative process of reviewing progress and problems and mapping out plans to deal with obstacles in the year ahead.

8. Reports from the Field: APA in Action (Nepal Experiences)

A field programme was launched in Nepal in villages between the Arun Valley and Sagarmatha. These involved applying the APA approach to community development, culture conservation, income generation, ecotourism, natural resource management, and people-wildlife conflicts. The process started by splicing some AI concepts on to the PRA process of village consultations. In developing the process, three critical ingredients were considered. They were: appreciation, planning, and action.

Empowerment

In real life situations, one rarely sees examples of empowerment that go beyond the anecdotal level. Empowerment, by definition, must involve people feeling a sense of power, not just participation. Yet, after decades of efforts by various developing agencies, many villages and villagers lack education, experience acute poverty, and feel powerless to improve their lives.

APA appears to offer an alternative to the low self-esteem and dependency which pervade many rural communities. It goes beyond the 'power of positive thinking' by giving specific tools and techniques for generating and keeping up the positive thinking and encouraging self-reliance and local initiative. APA seems to have the potential necessary to sustain a significant proportion of energy it generates. APA also gives rural people a tool to turn to when the inevitable problems arise.

APA Exercises: Scenes from the Field

Scene One

Sisuwa market (Nepal) which comes alive once a week. Local staff and representatives from villages including those who are illiterate, near literate, and a few who have completed 10th grade.

Discovery: "I really get this! I can do this.... and it really make a difference to my work and besides, it's fun!" This response came from first one, then another, participant, and clearly emerged as a consensus. This occurred after a week's training and village exercises. The APA training also built the capacity of the people to use the APA tools

without any external help. Following this, a group of villagers gathered at this little market, and trainees were asked to make the use of their APA lessons. The APA exercise was carried out.

Less than one hour later, an elderly villager said the group had finished their meeting at which a plan for developing a market for years ahead was agreed on and that the group had also decided to start cleaning up the place right away. In minutes, brooms were busy, piles of trash mounted, and fires were started to burn the refuse. Within 30 minutes, the place looked better than it had in years.

Scene Two

The small village of Bala (Nepal), APA exercises with three groups: cultural conservation, community development, and income generation.

Cultural conservation group: A local cultural dance linked with the environment. The group promised to stage a wider presentation at the local fairs in the area during 'Visit Nepal 1998'.

Community Development – Outlined self-help plans to finish construction of the club house they were building for weaving, roofing for their adult study centre, plus a fund-raising plan to support this.

Income generation - They pledged a new poultry project, vegetable kitchen gardening, and also agreed to contribute self-help labour to the construction of a new trail in the area.

In the follow-up the next month, it was found that villagers had met and begun to implement their plans with concrete action.

Scene Three

Chheskam village (Nepal), a subsistence village where many households faced up to three months food shortages annually, due to poor communication links, and lack of access to markets. Commitments at the end of the meeting: to start immediately repairing an old local trail, to provide another important circle route and bring trekkers into the area, plus plans to start a self-help trail linking up with other popular hiking and climbing areas. First, major steps were taken a few months later, with an international clean-up expedition to Mera Peak and development of an ecotourism plan with local lodge-owners.

Navagaun, a Sherpa village (Nepal), during an APA meeting, discussing wildlife, tourism, and the richness of their culture, the village turned to what they could do now to start implementing the action plan they had developed. A sacred water source was being polluted by livestock which was a threat to both local health and their

serpent deity. Villagers decided to protect the source with large stones and to provide a way for livestock to pass without polluting the spring. After the meeting, the group rushed off to start work immediately.

Scene Four

Chepuwa village (Nepal), an APA meeting took place in the morning hours. In the afternoon, villagers were seen busy carrying out activities as planned at the APA meeting. At a number of households, people were busy making pit latrines.

9. Sub-Group Exercise (25 minutes)

- Form into groups of five members
- Brainstorming on APA issues
- Listing of perceptions of APA.
- Presentation by each group

10. Some Basic Principles for APA Practitioners

- Put the last first — put the first last
- empower those usually left out, including those who are illiterate and
- APA must involve women and other disadvantaged groups.
- Hand over the stick
- average people should be at the front and
- all sketches/maps should be left for the local people to do.
- They are the experts, we are here to learn
- facilitators use APA not to teach but to learn.
- "Ready - Fire - Aim" or "Plunge and Reflect"
- learn by doing, take action and see how it works, never stop learning, never stop improving the process.
- First thing first.
- focus on the main purpose.
- Whoever are there are the right people, wherever we are is the right place, whatever time it is, is the right time.
- Take time
- don't rush. APA should be relaxed and informal.
- Turn problems into opportunities
- recognise and embrace problems by seeking positive ways.

- Enjoy

a successful APA programme should contribute to 'joy in work'

11. The APA Process is Worth Exploring Further

- It is empowering.

APA seems to generate power, energy, enthusiasm, and positive action, on the spot; it seems a powerful antidote to the low esteem in which many villagers hold themselves.

- It is positive.
- APA looks for the root cause of success, not the root cause of failure.
- It builds on the catalogue of successes and reminds people of what they have achieved.
- It is quick.
- Demonstration training sessions, including theory, methodology, and a full practice session, have been completed in 1 - 2 hours.

- It is easy.

- Scouts and village leaders with little or no formal education have run these sessions on their own after as little as one day of training.

- It is replicable.

- APA is relatively easy to practice in almost any setting and can be implemented in the field without elaborate preparation.

- It is flexible.

- Experiences show that its flexible nature has enabled it to be equally responsive for community development, ecotourism, community forestry, cultural conservation, income generation, market-place development, people-wildlife conflicts, team building for staff, and organizational development.

12. Aids Required - Drum - 1 Flute - 1

13. Discussion / Questions / Answers (30 minutes)

14. Further Reading Materials.