

# Beyond Problems Analysis: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Design and Deliver Environmental, Gender Equity and Private Sector Development Projects



## FINAL PROGRESS REPORT

July 1999 – December 2001

DFID Reference Number AG1798

**iisd** International  
Institute for  
Sustainable  
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durable

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## **Introduction**

This document provides a complete report on the two-and-a-half year partnership between Canada's International Institute for Sustainable Development, MYRADA, a south Indian development agency, and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development. The objective of the project was to field test a new participatory development approach called Appreciative Inquiry in rural India. During the project, over 804 people from 70 different organisations including some from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Burma received training in appreciative inquiry. An estimated 500 community based organisations, representing about 10,000 people, participated in appreciative inquiry workshops. This included self-help affinity groups, self help group federations, teachers associations, watershed development associations, watershed implementation committees, village forest committees, village health committees, children's clubs, local farmers associations, community health groups, and others. Participants also included numerous individuals and families.

These results are considerably in excess of the project's original target of 12 participating organisations. The achievement results from a particularly deep interest by MYRADA in appreciative inquiry and its potential applications. About 320 of MYRADA's staff have taken part in 3-5 days workshops. This represents about 80 percent of their workforce and includes all levels and categories.

In the field, appreciative inquiry is remarkable. The approach generates great enthusiasm and cooperation in developing a group vision built on the collective strengths and aspirations of its members. It also produces strategic plans by which local people can turn their dreams into reality. While the work is still in its formative stages, we feel confident that appreciative inquiry will continue to draw interest from development professionals and community members alike because of the immediately observable effect it has on people. It presents great potential as a tool to promote sustainable development and secure livelihoods at the local level.

This report follows the format of the logical framework analysis of the original proposal (see Annex 1). It begins with project goals and purpose, followed by outputs and outcomes, and finally conclusions.

## **1. Project Goal**

To provide governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in India with a method of designing and delivering programs that build on a local strengths, achievements and vision to advance sustainable development and facilitate sustainable livelihoods.

## **2. Project Purpose**

**2.1 To build capacity in the use of appreciative inquiry within a network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Southern India.**

**2.2 To test the effectiveness of appreciative inquiry as a methodology for assisting community groups design and implement projects for the satisfaction of basic human needs, the promotion gender equality and improvement of local environmental conditions.**

**2.3 To assist community groups enhance their livelihoods by designing and undertaking activities that reinforce their strengths and are consistent with their priorities.**

## **3. Implementing Agencies**

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## **4. Project Outputs**

### **4.1 Formation of a core appreciative inquiry training team**

The formation of a core appreciative inquiry training team was not included in the initial project design, given that the original intent was to experiment with appreciative inquiry within three of MYRADA's 17 projects. However, after the first training session, senior MYRADA staff determined that appreciative inquiry added significant value to the work that they were doing and as such, concluded the approach should be more widely incorporated. Subsequently, a request was

made in December 1999 to scale up the training programs to include all 17 projects as quickly as possible. Such a rapid scaling up required an extensive redesign of the project that was completed in December 1999 and approved by DFID early in 2000.

In order to meet the revised training requirements, a core team of approximately 20 MYRADA staff was formed. At that time, only the IISD project manager had received advanced training in appreciative inquiry. Given the extent of the revised training program, three MYRADA staff received advanced training in appreciative inquiry at the NTL Institute in the United States. Together, these three MYRADA staff, the IISD project manager and the MYRADA training co-ordinator undertook the task of training other members of the core team and instituting procedures by which the application of appreciative inquiry could be refined and documented. In a cascading effect, members of the core training team (themselves capable facilitators and project managers) began to train others, including MYRADA’s network partners, in the approach and lead its application in the field. The core team met regularly to discuss their findings and to collect case studies for inclusion in the fieldguide.

#### **4.2 Twenty eight training sessions completed for 804 people from 70 organisations.**

During the two and a half year project, a total of 28 training sessions were conducted by members of the core team. Participants included MYRADA field-staff, and members of partner organisations with which MYRADA worked including organisations involved in the DFID funded Karnataka Watershed Development Society (KAWAD) project. Although the training sessions were modified to fit individual circumstances, they were typically 4-5 day programs that included 1-2 days of fieldwork with community groups. Details of these training programs are summarised below.

In total, over 804 people from 70 different organisations including some from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Burma received training in appreciative inquiry. An estimated 500 community based organisations, representing about 10,000 people, participated in the training programs. This included village Self-help Affinity Groups, self help group federations, teachers associations, Watershed Development Associations, Watershed Implementation Committees, Village Forest Committees, Village Health Committees, Children’s clubs, local farmers associations, community health groups, and others. Participants also included numerous individuals and families.

**List of training programmes conducted to date** (not including community based organisations who have participated in the exercise).

<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Details + Facilitators</b>
Kamasamudram	4-10 Oct 1999	23	First Basic Workshop ( <b>BW</b> ): Mette Jacobsgaard
Talavadi	5-8 December 1999	29	<b>BW</b> : William D’souza, Saleela Patkar, Amarnath Jadav, Vinutha K, P Vijayakumar
Kamasamudram	14-17 December	26	<b>BW</b> : P Vijayakumar, Saleela Patkar, Smitha Ramanathan, Rohan

*Final Progress Report – AG1798*

	1999		Mallick
Germalam	5-8 January 2000	28	<b>BW:</b> William D'souza, Saleela Patkar, Amarnath Jadav, P Vijayakumar, Rajachary P, Raviprakash
NTL – Washington DC	January 2000	3	Jane Magruder Watkins, Bernard Mohr
Holalkere	21-25 February	29	<b>BW:</b> Graham Ashford, Saleela Patkar, Rajachary P, Raviprakash, P Vijayakumar, Ramegowda, Kumaraswamy
Kadiri	28 February – 3 March	18	<b>BW:</b> Graham Ashford, Saleela Patkar, MK Venkatesh, Ramesh Y
Gulbarga	13-16 March 2000	25	<b>BW:</b> Saleela Patkar, MK Venkatesh, Nimish Shah
Huthur	15-18 March 2000	25	<b>BW:</b> Raviprakash, William D'souza, Rajachary P, Belle Gowda
Dharmapuri	20-23 March 2000	21	<b>BW:</b> P Vijayakumar, Kumaraswamy, Rajachary P William D'souza
Dharmapuri	May 2000	20	<b>BW:</b> Saleela Patkar, Amarnath Jadav, Yenjeerappa
Bangalore	October 2000	15	Appreciative inquiry Review Meeting
Holalkere	November 2000	0	Field visit – Project Team
Huthur	November 2000	20	Core Team Meeting – and developing materials
Bangalore	November 2000	18	<b>BW:</b> Saleela Patkar for Bangalore Office Staff
Madakasira	November 2000	34	<b>BW:</b> Ramegowda, Nageswara Reddy
Holalkere	16-19 January 2001	24	<b>BW:</b> SC Rajashekar, P Vijayakumar, V Srinivasulu
Germalam	25-26 January 2001	4	<b>BW:</b> Training to Arthacharya Foundation: Saleela Patkar, SC Rajashekar, Amarnath Jadav
Kadiri	22-25 May 2001	19	<b>BW:</b> Y Ramesh, Nagendra
Germalam	18-20 July	6	<b>BW:</b> Training to KAWAD Senior staff – SC Rajashekar, Amarnath Jadav, Saleela Patkar
Holalkere	16-20 July 2001	13	<b>BW:</b> CARE- Sri Lanka – S Ambika, Yenjeerappa
Bangalore	24-26 September 2001	27	<b>BW:</b> For Sanghamitra Urban Partners, Saleela Patkar
Dharmapuri	15-18 October 2001	18	<b>BW:</b> KAWAD Partners+MYRADA Shivaram S, Saleela Patkar, Moses
Germalam	October 2001	10	Training to Community Facilitators: Amarnath Jadav, B Basavaraju
Kadiri	29-30 October 2001	15	<b>BW:</b> ICEF Partners – Y Ramesh
Ghataprabha	27 October to 1 November 2001	65	Vision Review for MASS - Saleela Patkar, Lathamala
Huthur	November 2001	25	Vision Building for Chamarajnagar District NGOs Federation – Belle Gowda, Rajachar, Raviprakash
Bangladesh	October - November 2001	17	UNDP SAPAP – KST Project staff: Raviprakash, P Vijaya Kumar
Bangladesh	November – December 2001	26	UNDP SAPAP – KST Project staff and volunteers: Rohan Mallick, Ramesh CS
Holalkere	28-30 November 2001	25	Vision Building for SHG Promoting Institutions Network – Chitradurga – Smita Ramanathan, Yenjeerappa, Ambika S, P Vijayakumar
Bangalore	10-11 December 2001	56	Sharing Workshop – Graham Ashford, MYRADA Core Team
HD Kote	December 18-21 2001	30	<b>BW:</b> Sanghamitra Rural + MYRADA; Raviprakash, William D'souza
HD Kote	December 26-28 2001	26	<b>BW:</b> Community facilitator training. Raviprakash
Chitradurga	December 26-28 2001	64	Strategic planning for agriculture and watershed development.
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>804</b>	

### 4.3 Fieldwork: Applying appreciative inquiry

During the project, IISD, MYRADA and the network partners had an opportunity to apply appreciative inquiry with hundreds of community groups. These included Self-help Affinity Groups<sup>1</sup>, self help group federations<sup>2</sup>, teachers associations, Watershed Development Associations<sup>3</sup>, Watershed Implementation Committees, Village Forest Committees, Village Health Committees, Children's clubs, local farmers associations, community health groups, and others. Participants also had an opportunity to use appreciative inquiry with numerous individuals and families.

Given the diversity of mandates of the different groups, equally diverse activities were initiated by them through the appreciative inquiry process. These included (but were not limited to) projects to promote gender equity, activities to improve the local environment, initiatives to enhance village health and sanitation, actions to improve education and increase enrolment, and activities to create local economic opportunities.

Fieldwork with community groups occurred in two stages. The first stage took place during the training sessions. This fieldwork was preceded by extensive classroom preparation with respect to framing questions, guiding discussions and documenting and sharing results. Such preparation proved immensely useful in ensuring that both the staff and the community members got the most out of the experience. In addition, as participants experimented with new ways to facilitate the fieldwork, the core training team was able to expand its range of tools and techniques and pass these on to future participants in subsequent training sessions.

The second stage of fieldwork was the integration of appreciative inquiry techniques into the various ongoing interactions that the staff had with the community groups. This involved assisting community groups to understand their strengths and build activities to realise their collectively desired future. For partner NGOs, and MYRADA in particular, activities such as these are ongoing and involve vastly more groups than could participate as part of a training exercise. The outcomes of the appreciative inquiry exercise provided new insights into how the partner NGO's could better support the activities of the group. Appreciative inquiry was seen to complement existing training programs such as leadership, bookkeeping, literacy, numeracy, and natural resource management. New group visions require new resources and linkages, for which the partner NGO's can also play a role.

Only through ongoing fieldwork can the usefulness and sustainability of appreciative inquiry be estimated. This will be a long process, beyond the scope

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1 Self-help Groups or Self-help Affinity Groups are small groups of up to 20 poor men or women who undertake thrift and credit activities. The groups are a major component of Myrada's strategy for empowering poor women and men in India. These groups are frequently involved in the promotion of women priorities for local development and self-empowerment.

2 Close network of self-help affinity groups who mainly look at issues that individual SAGs are unable to achieve, i.e., lobbying, common services for SAGs etc.

3 Associations of farmers and other people who live on or own lands in small geographically contiguous areas. The association is usually involved in planning for soil and water conservation/natural resources management activities, agriculture development and non-farm based livelihoods

and timeframe of the existing project. MYRADA and IISD intend to continue to document and share our experiences in the field as resources allow. Periodic updates will be available through IISD and MYRADA's web sites.

#### **4.4 Training video**

The first training program, held at MYRADA's Kamasamudram project, was filmed and 35-minute video on appreciative inquiry was produced. Titled "Appreciative Inquiry: A Beginning", the video captures the first training session, led by Mette Jacobsgaard, an appreciative inquiry specialist from the United Kingdom. By filming the training, IISD and MYRADA hoped to maintain the integrity of the approach while the progressive transfer of skills and associated experimentation occurred.

The video explains the theory of appreciative inquiry, details the steps that must be undertaken to use it successfully, and provides examples of its application with community groups, families, and students. It has proven useful not only as a training tool, but also as an awareness-raising device. MYRADA often shows the video to visitors and other groups who were not involved directly in the appreciative inquiry project, but rather were receiving training from MYRADA on watershed development and self-help group promotion. To their surprise, feedback during these training sessions frequently indicated that the concept of appreciative inquiry was one of the most important things participants felt they had learned, even though it constituted only half an hour out of a week long training session. In several cases, this led to requests for subsequent specific training in appreciative inquiry.

The video is available in both PAL (international) and NTSC (North American) formats.

#### **4.5 Internet site**

To communicate the project's results and aid in the transfer of skills in the use of appreciative inquiry, the project established a multimedia Internet site. This allows people interested in the benefits of using appreciative inquiry to read about the project purpose and activities, to hear local people in India recount their past achievements and plan their future, and to view video footage of the projects that were developed as a result of the appreciative process. Insights into the most effective methods of applying appreciative inquiry to achieve sustainable development are described. The site (<http://www.iisd.org/ai/myrada.htm>) provides details on the theory and application of appreciative inquiry in community development, six-month progress reports, clips from the video, a free downloadable copy of the fieldguide, and links to additional resources on appreciative inquiry. To date, the site has registered over 8000 hits from around the world. The project reports have been collectively downloaded 1046 times. The fieldguide "The Positive Path: Using Appreciative Inquiry in Rural Indian Communities" has been downloaded 2062 times. We consider this to signal an encouraging international interest in the work and its implications.

#### **4.6 Field-guide: “The Positive Path: Using Appreciative Inquiry in Rural Indian Communities”.**

The document synthesises the knowledge gained during the two-and-a-half year project, and provides step by step instructions on how to use appreciative inquiry in the context of community development. The project team originally thought that the fieldguide would take the form of a simple working paper. However, as work progressed the team became confident that project had made a significant contribution to the theory of appreciative inquiry and hence a professionally edited, designed and published the fieldguide was warranted. Savings realised in the training component and travel costs offset the additional cost of professionally producing the fieldguide. In November 2001, 2000 copies of the fieldguide were published. The guide was released during the final workshop in Bangalore in December 2001. The guide can be downloaded in its entirety at the project’s Internet site for free.

#### **4.7 Final workshop: Sharing the results**

As part of the strategy to share appreciative inquiry with a larger group of people, the project concluded with a workshop at Fireflies Ashram near Bangalore on December 10th and 11th, 2001. Participants included IISD, MYRADA and DFID-India staff, partner NGOs, organisational development consultants, government agencies, academics and community groups.

#### **4.8 Internal Project Evaluation**

With the rapid scaling up of the training program came the creation of the core training team, and more extensive training and review sessions. Given the continual reflection that these activities established, the project team did not feel it was necessary to conduct a further internal evaluation. That is, we made every attempt to learn while we were implementing, rather than to only reflect when the project was completed. The strategy that was ultimately implemented included: post-training evaluation surveys and discussions with both the workshop participants and the community groups; discussion of the project activities and their outcomes during core team review sessions; and a final workshop at which a wider range of people who had not been involved in the process were able to pose probing questions to the MYRADA staff, the NGO partners and members of several self-help groups.

The findings of this inward reflection are numerous and significant. They are reflected in *The Positive Path* fieldguide and the analysis section of this report.

#### **4.9 External Project Evaluation**

In order to objectively determine the extent to which the project had achieved its intended impact, an external evaluation was planned and carried out. The terms of reference for the evaluation were reviewed by DFID in May 2001. Subsequently, several evaluators were considered and their qualifications reviewed by DFID. In November 2001, Mary Vattamattom was hired as the external evaluator. Her evaluation involved a review of the project proposal, progress reports and interviews with MYRADA project staff, partner organisations, and seven to eight



community groups including self-help groups, federations and a Grama Sabha. Her report is available as a separate document.

## **5. Analysis of Outcomes**

### **5.1 Outcome 1: Organisational Capacity Building**

*There is an improved capacity within MYRADA and a network of NGOs to use appreciative inquiry with community groups to achieve sustainable development in rural Indian communities.*

#### **5.1.a Capacity building in appreciative inquiry**

As a result of large-scale basic training, the vast majority of MYRADA staff understand the basics of the approach and have participated in a training session. About 320 staff of MYRADA (current strength <400 staff) have participated in a 4-5 day training workshop. An additional 30 people have taken part in a 2-day appreciative inquiry workshop

The training process was experiential, both in the classroom and the field. Virtually, every program involved some interaction with community based organisations (CBOs). By undertaking fieldwork with a variety of CBOs, participants determined how the approach needed to be modified for different circumstances. Since the classroom exercises were themselves geared toward individual and organisational issues, there were opportunities for people to apply the concepts with themselves, their families, teams and project.

As a result, considerable experimentation is occurring to determine the seemingly endless opportunities to use appreciative inquiry. It has also become part of internal organisational processes such as staff appraisals, reviews, and visioning. A large percentage of staff have applied appreciative inquiry in the field at least once. A core group of about 50 people use it regularly. Of these, about twenty people can lead training of trainers workshops. The rest can lead less rigorous training programs and frequently use the approach with community members.

Many other NGOs have taken part in the training programs. The network has evolved over the project as some NGOs struggle to incorporate the approach, while others quickly excel with it. The NGOs involved go considerably beyond what the project originally proposed. This was a result of strong interest from NGOs, good promotion of the approach by MYRADA, and several key opportunities to involve international NGOs working in countries other than India.

The project extended direct support and training to district level networks like SPIN, Chamarajanagar District NGOs Federations, ICEF Network and PRADHAN District Network (both in Anantapur). The objective has been to facilitate vision building and action planning for partner organisations, and to

enable them to do the same for CBOs. Results in this area have been slower to accrue than within MYRADA, likely a result of the considerable resources MYRADA has previously dedicated to training their staff in participatory processes.

The network partners who have successfully applied appreciative inquiry come from newer partnerships and not the ones who were initially proposed in the project. Significantly, they belong to MYRADA's learning partnerships like Arthacharya Foundation, APSA, Goodwill International, Sangraha (Partners of Sanghamitra Urban Programme), while those from SPIN and the Chamarajanagar Networks show promise. The community-based organisations are also keen that the approach is used and have already begun training themselves in the methodology. They envision that all CBOs have visions of their own. Hence it seems that openness to learn and reflect is a crucial factor to enable rapid learning. MYRADA respects the choice of partners to accept or reject a new idea – but has decided to work to make its programmes more effective so that the transformation that took place in its staff can also happen in other organisations.

### **5.1.b Capacity building in MYRADA**

Decentralised management of the programme and freedom to innovate contributed greatly to the rate of adoption of appreciative inquiry by MYRADA staff. Though one person at the Bangalore office officially co-ordinated the appreciative inquiry project, the decision to hold a programme, locate facilitators, and actually conduct the programme was left to the individual projects. As only three programmes were originally budgeted for in the project, each MYRADA project had to cover the majority of the expenses to introduce appreciative inquiry in its area. However, since the projects enjoy great freedom to allocate their training budget and time, most projects needed no convincing to try out appreciative Inquiry. The extension officers teamed up with their colleagues and experimented at the grassroots, while the senior staff tried to apply appreciative inquiry at strategic levels. The personal commitment of the staff and their resourcefulness allowed for a widespread training and application of appreciative inquiry—well beyond what was originally proposed.

MYRADA management considers the approach to have been mainstreamed within the organisation. It is no longer viewed as a pilot or an exception. The staff are actively trying to change ways in which they approach a situation at work based on the principles of appreciative inquiry. They are steering away from problem solving techniques as best they can. Given the prior dominance of the problem solving paradigm at MYRADA, the switch has not been immediate with all. However, most staff are convinced that interventions based on appreciative inquiry are likely to be more effective than those focused on problem solving. As such, considerable effort is being put into redesigning rural appraisal methodologies and approaches to become more appreciative. This is reflected in changes in the language of training modules, project proposals and even daily conversations.

### **5.1.c Compatibility of appreciative inquiry and other participatory processes**

Organisations with experience using participatory processes and problems analysis will quickly become comfortable using appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry and other participatory approaches rest on fairly similar starting points—mutual respect, two way learning, openness, etc. Hence for those who have been ‘schooled’ in participatory approaches, appreciative inquiry comes naturally. For others, though the appreciative inquiry experience will be enlightening, they may find themselves without other knowledge necessary to effectively facilitate appreciative inquiry.

During the fieldwork, the participants’ knowledge of PRA and other participatory techniques allowed them to facilitate the process effectively, even though appreciative inquiry itself was new to them. Several common PRA techniques were modified to suit Appreciative Inquiry. In one instance, a popular mapping technique for designing a watershed development programme was instead used to develop a vision for the watershed area. Venn diagrams, a staple of PRA, are now being used as a tool for developing visions and prioritising them. Micro-planning skills are being used to guide the Design stage. Participatory facilitation skills like moderation (also called Metaplan or VIPP) are also being used during visualisation exercises. Far from looking at appreciative inquiry as a replacement for PRA, those involved in the project see them both as highly complementary.

### **5.1.d Lessons from the field: Organisational skills needed to successfully apply appreciative inquiry**

- Skills in facilitation (and training) – individual interviews, small group processes, large group processes, visualisation, (brainstorming, guided dialog), energisers etc. both for literate and non-literate groups.
- Knowledge and skills in planning methods (LFA/ZOPP, PRA based microplanning, any other), monitoring and evaluation methods
- Organisational Development – knowledge and skills (understanding organisations, features of a good organisation, developing systems for various organisations, etc.)
- In depth knowledge of community development issues and strategies.

## **5.2 Outcome 2: Community work**

*The participating community groups have identified and reinforced factors that contributed to prior achievements in their community and they have developed village level projects to enhance social cohesion, generate income, and regenerate the local environment.*

## **8511 Community level applications of appreciative inquiry**

Through the project, significant vision building activities for community based organisations took place. These exercises most often lasted between two and five days. The methodology was found to be highly replicable even where facilitators have only basic training and facilitation skills.

A wide range of community based organisations have been involved including Self-Help Affinity Groups (SAGs), Federations of SAGs, and local institutions like the Grama Sabha, Children's clubs, watershed associations, school teachers, work groups of MEADOW Rural Enterprises Private Limited. Ultimately, the project was able to involve around 600 community based organisations, about 10 times the figure originally anticipated. We feel this demonstrates the usefulness and robustness of appreciative inquiry. Even those projects which were initially cautious to try appreciative inquiry, have now become convinced of its value and plan to adopt it completely. This will mean that over time, many other CBOs will participate in appreciative exercises. Some at MYRADA have concluded that the biggest constraint is their inability to spend long periods of time with any one group due to the large number of people that they help. As such, emphasis is now being placed on training village level facilitators from the local population who can guide the process. To date, four training programs for community volunteers have been undertaken. One of these was funded directly by the project.

One of the most innovative examples of appreciative inquiry to date has seen the approach used for budget planning at the MYRADA PLAN HD Kote Unit. The project is funded by PLAN International, which requires that the Unit Office establish five year plans for the flow for funds in the villages in which they work. Conventionally the estimation was done through PRA techniques that drew on problem analysis and micro planning. It tended to produce many list of needs, and even lead to many people exaggerating their poverty to increase their benefits. This prompted the HD Kote Project to use appreciative inquiry to not just to assess expenditures, but to ensure that budgeted activities were strategic and supported the five years plans that the villages produced as part of the appreciative inquiry process. Staff felt that it helped them to understand how to intervene to make people's institutions stronger and more sustainable. The pilot was successful and has encouraged many of the communities to take control of their own development, and where necessary to mobilise help from the local government.

Another notable application is the Chitradurga projects of MYRADA (District Approach Programme and KAWAD – CIDOW Project) which piloted the use of appreciative inquiry in large-scale strategic planning for district level natural resource management. While it is too early to assess the usefulness of this methodology, should it produce better results, it will be incorporated into an annual natural resources review process.

Following the final workshop on appreciative inquiry held in December, many participants have called MYRADA to share their experiences trying our appreciative inquiry immediately on returning to their work. This enthusiasm is significant. It is very common that people begin using appreciative inquiry while

the concepts are still fresh in their minds. Ensuring that this enthusiasm is sustained remains the focus of ongoing work.

### **851 Feedback from the field: Focusing on strengths**

Feedback from the field indicates that most community groups have never been asked to review their strengths, nor have they had an opportunity to articulate and draw their visions. As such, local people can readily differentiate between appreciative inquiry and other process that were used before it. Community members can also indicate what skills helped them to develop their visions, for example, mapping for watershed planning gave some participants the confidence to draw visions. In another case, the traditional skill of Rangoli art (chalk designs on the floors) gave women the confidence that they could draw their dreams. Local people who participated also retain an understanding of the process of arriving at visions – storytelling, culling themes, visioning, action planning – wherever the facilitators have made the effort to describe the process.

MYRADA staff often chose not to use the jargon of appreciative inquiry when working with community groups as their objective is to transfer the concepts and not necessarily the terminology. In part this is due to the difficulty translating some of the words or concepts into the local language without losing their meaning. Typically, more capable the group is, the more the staff focus on explaining the process and transferring the skills. Many literate groups are able to comprehend the Sanskrit based terminology and logic. (Appreciative Inquiry is called “Gunagrahya Vicharane” in Kannada programmes; other terminology include “maulya” = values, “uddesha”= purpose, “dooradshti” = vision).

After extensive experimentation, IISD and Myrada have concluded that there is a real sense of ownership in the visions developed through the appreciative inquiry process. Longer inquiries tend to produce more enthusiasm, more detailed visions and more thoroughly developed action plans. Yet, even very short one day sessions can produce remarkable energy and planning. Following up on these short applications to ensure that the groups are putting effort into designing and delivering their action plans remains both a priority and a challenge for MYRADA given the number of groups that they work with.

### **851 Positive futures: Livelihoods revisited**

Appreciative inquiry provides spaces for people and institutions to look into the future – not with dread but with hope and the conviction that they can influence the future. During the course of planning for their visions they are also able to look at various possibilities, including how they can strategically influence the direction of development in their communities. By writing visions and long-term goals the groups see why they need to work on issues like organisational management, financial management, learning and networking. They see specific areas where they need to build their skills. Appreciative inquiry is consistent with livelihood approaches because it provides a way by which the assets and skills used to maintaining village livelihoods can be better understood and built on. Appreciative inquiry recognizes that people are industrious and ingenious. It helps

to establish a vision and action plan by which the family's livelihood can best be promoted.

Appreciative inquiry has been the most replicable, simple and effective approach to identify these strengths that MYRADA has come across. Existing methodologies help us to understand the more tangible aspects of livelihoods like physical and natural resources, skill base and so on. Appreciative inquiry offers new possibilities to learn about the role of 'aspirations' and family/individual/collective 'orientation' in a livelihoods model. During fieldwork MYRADA was able to use appreciative inquiry to assess subtle aspects of livelihoods. However, more work needs to be done to integrate appreciative inquiry with other livelihoods frameworks.

### **85g Supporting gender equity**

By far, the majority of community groups that participated in the project were women's self-help groups. This was due to the existing emphasis that MYRADA placed on assisting poor women to form local level institutions such as Self-Help Affinity Groups. For many of the women who participated in the appreciative inquiry exercises, it was the first time in their lives that they felt valued and appreciated. As well, it was the first time that most had considered new possibilities for the future of their families and themselves. Initiatives to promote the well being of women and children frequently followed from the appreciative inquiry process. These visions tended to encompass goals such as enhancing the role of the woman in family decisions and village activities, promoting the economic independence of women, ensuring equal access to education for both girls and boys, enforcing the minimum legal age for marriage for young girls, eliminating female infanticide, and stopping practices that discriminate against or disempower women and children. Visions and action plans also often addressed issues that indirectly affected the well being of women, such as spousal alcoholism and gambling.

When it is used in mixed settings, appreciative inquiry provides both women and men an equal chance to narrate their stories and develop personal visions. In our experience, women's interests are well represented. There are cases where the women's priority was taken up as the village's priority after long discussions. Participants feel that the approach sets a collaborative tone and that there is greater ease in addressing issues of conflict than when we follow other methods. Further work needs to focus on creating more opportunities for cross-gender discussions, learning and planning.

MYRADA however feels that to create a foundation on which women and men can participate constructively – requires more than their involvement in appreciative inquiry exercises. Women often need to work in exclusive institutions initially to build their confidence.

### **85h Grama Sabha: Building representative democracy**

Though these experiments are very new, the Grama Sabha is an institution that MYRADA wants to work with to build grassroots democracy and governance. A

village of 100 families has been chosen, and 250 people from the village were taken to another venue to build a vision for their village. The challenges for any institution working with the Grama Sabha are as follows:

- Grama Sabhas are not recognised by the constitution as a legal body and other political interests actively discourage empowering the Grama Sabha, as the forum will challenge their ways of working.
- Traditionally the Grama Sabha is an exclusively male body and there are no guidelines for involving women. The ‘man of the house’ represents the family in the Grama Sabha.
- With the formal panchayat system in place the Grama Sabha has lost its significance at least for the Panchayat Raj Institutions – except as a ratifying body. The Grama Sabha is used more often for partisan purposes or with a sense of tokenism.

In the MYRADA experiment the participants consisted of both men and women, young and old and from all castes and religions. Young women indicated that it was the first time that their views about the development of their village were ever considered and accepted. This is a small beginning, but we feel appreciative inquiry – because it is not conflict generating – will be useful in dealing with gender issues in collaborative frameworks.

#### **851 Positive plans: Reaching the dream**

A decade ago, MYRADA encouraged CBOs to maintain ‘Dream Books’ where they wrote down their visions. However, with few tools to facilitate the process, the result was usually a list of needs. Little action planning occurred that would help in achieving these dreams. As one local person explained: “Our groups work in reactive ways – when a problem arises we would work at it. We had not dealt with issues proactively”. After appreciative inquiry the groups learned how to develop action plans around their long-term goals and visions.

Previously the action plans of groups dealt with only those areas where they were sure of financial support from MYRADA, in fact all action plans had to do with programmes and projects that had large monetary implications. One of the watershed management groups found the appreciative inquiry exercise ‘expensive’. In their own words, “What sort of a training was that. You came in, made us tell our own stories, draw up all these things and at the end of it all, we have committed about 7 lakhs of our funds and hardly anything from you!” Now groups plan things like:

- developing parks,
- equal treatment of girl and boy children,
- training up local Grama Panchayat members so that they deliver better,
- taking up reproductive and child health on their own,
- increasing their own savings,
- building up community trainers from among them,
- drought proofing,
- starting scholarships for poor(er) children,

- conducting mass marriages for poor people,
- getting voted the ‘Art Village’,
- clean village,
- forming new groups so that the poor who are left out are also brought into the institutional fold.

While some of these visions may look like typical development programmes, we need to clarify that in several of these areas MYRADA has withdrawn active funding and technical support to villages. Hence the people must raise resources in other ways. Yet there are clear indications that much work on these visions has already been completed.

Also with several action plans produced prior to appreciative inquiry – CBO members had to be goaded and pushed into working on them. Now there is a certain eagerness to go ahead with or without the support of MYRADA. This makes the technique particularly useful where the development agency is withdrawing. We found that after appreciative inquiry the institutions seem renewed and more able to take on responsibility. Hence a large number of SAG federations have been involved. These federations envision that every CBO also has its own dream and action plan.

Another consistent comment from fieldstaff is that CBOs are achieving in about one year what they had envisioned would take them 5 years. This can mean two things – that the MYRADA facilitators did not do a sufficiently good job of the exercise, or that most CBOs are simply not aware of their capabilities. Many such CBOs now claim that they have a better idea of how far they should target in the next round of vision building. We have found it beneficial to assist CBOs to quickly achieve some of their goals, so that early success motivates them to keep track of their visions.

### **851 Capturing government interest**

KAWAD is the only government agency that has been formally trained in Appreciative Inquiry. The approach has been well received by senior KAWAD staff, yet more work needs to be done to ensure that it reaches a broader and more numerous cross section including government departments and NGOs. KAWAD partners were trained in January 2000, although several have not subsequently applied it in their work. Other have left their jobs.

APRLP has received the IISD/MYRADA appreciative inquiry video but has not been formally trained. Several MYRADA staff left to join government agencies like SWA-SHAKTI although they have not been able to apply it in their work (though one person mentioned that it has helped him in his personal life immensely!). Not all of the NGO partners have been able to apply appreciative inquiry in their work.

MYRADA has been able to incorporate appreciative inquiry in its consultancy work in Myanmar, Bangladesh and North East India UNDP and IFAD projects. The strategy has helped to increase participation and optimism among CBO



members, NGOs and government functionaries. Appreciative inquiry figures among the participants' most significant learning.

MYRADA has also incorporated principles of appreciative inquiry in its training manuals, both in-house productions as well as those prepared for Mahalir Thittam (Government of Tamil Nadu). These manuals have been translated to Bangla, Hindi, Kannada, Bahasa Indonesia and Myanmar.

We realise that the acceptance of appreciative inquiry in the government sector will depend on the persons who hold key positions in government run projects. Yet appreciative inquiry is an experiential process that many senior staff of large projects may not feel that they have time for. The same is true even of NGOs. As such, widespread acceptance of appreciative inquiry needs to be preceded by thoughtful experimentation in government projects, and pressure from civil society organisations that are convinced of the need for positive approaches to development.

To introduce the concept, someone open to trying out appreciative inquiry needs to be in place. The person should be able to see where appreciative inquiry fits into the institutional set-up and needs to be willing to start change processes not only in CBOs but also within the organisation itself. (e.g. in Imagine Nagaland – where appreciative inquiry is being used in a very large scale across Nagaland, the initiator is a very committed Chief Secretary to the Government). The necessary conditions for institutionalising appreciative inquiry are:

1. Pressure and awareness-raising (by those who have seen the benefits of Appreciative Inquiry);
2. Successful experience of using it in some context;
3. Buy in at the higher levels; and
4. Commitment to the process and results.

### **85k Case studies: Following the process**

Given the large scale of applications of appreciative inquiry with MYRADA and its partners, few single examples have been followed closely and consistently. MYRADA has documented the process of appreciative inquiry in a few cases e.g. the Sarvashakti SAG Federation of Odeyrapalya, seven federations of SAGs in Holalkere, Punujur Grama Sabha in Holalkere, and a few villages in HD Kote. Other CBOs have recorded the exercises in their own books. While field officers track the progress of different groups through regular contact, more effort needs to be put into documenting these applications and sharing them with head office and other projects and partners.

### **5.3 Outcome 3: Measurement and Indicators**

*Some capacity has been built in measurement and indicator systems that help local people to measure progress toward community goals, evaluate the effectiveness of local initiatives, and modify strategies as local circumstances change.*

### 5.3.a From evaluation to valuation

While the project expected to develop a measurement and indicator system for community groups to monitor and evaluate their progress, this task system has not yet been formalised. Considerable discussion on the topic illuminates two important points. First, there may be some incompatibility between monitoring and evaluation systems that point out weaknesses and appreciative inquiry which seeks to highlight positive achievements. In our limited experience, we have not found that the energy created during an appreciative inquiry is diminished by an evaluation that encompasses both positive and negative attributes. Nonetheless, concern remains that evaluations that dwell excessively on negative aspects of performance will undermine the impact of appreciative inquiry.

As an alternative, several people have recommended moving from “evaluations” to “valuations”. Because of its cyclical nature, appreciative inquiry can be used as the project progresses to reflect on achievements, understand what enabled them, and modify existing visions. Thus it becomes more responsive to evolving circumstances than planning processes that set targets and don’t revisit them except for evaluation purposes. Appreciative inquiry is more analogous to a moving goal post.

### 5.3.b Monitoring community impacts

Though we have not come up with a complete monitoring system for this purpose, effort continues to be directed at understanding areas where appreciative inquiry makes an impact, and developing an appropriate participatory impact monitoring system. We expect that developing this system will take a further year, due to the iterative nature of the process and the time necessary for impacts to reveal themselves at the local level.

The techniques we consider most useful for monitoring and evaluation include existing frameworks and methodologies described in MYRADA’s “Rural Management Systems Series Paper 33: Assessment of Community Based Institutions – A Theoretical Framework and a Participatory Methodology.”<sup>4</sup> This participatory assessment methodology looks at an organisation/group as a whole system and the following areas are discussed:

- Vision, Mission and Values
- Organisational Management Systems
- Financial Management Systems
- Organisational Accountability norms
- Linkages and Networking
- Learning and Evaluation

Exercises to assess these areas are conducted annually and during this process the CBOs must develop plans to strengthen weak aspects of their organisation. The methodology uses simple evaluation methods like ‘ladders’, ranking, rating, etc.

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<sup>4</sup> Rural Management Systems Series Paper 33: Assessment of Community Based Institutions – A Theoretical Framework and a Participatory Methodology can be downloaded from [www.myrada.org](http://www.myrada.org).

Since the CBOs on MYRADA's projects maintain several documents and have robust management systems (meeting regularly, having annual reviews) the impacts can be reviewed systematically. Several groups are already doing so, in others MYRADA needs to strengthen staff facilitation skills to support the CBOs in institutionalising the process.

MYRADA has also developed participatory impact monitoring systems Self-Help Affinity Groups and Watershed Programmes with the support of our donor German Agroaction and the Humboldt University of Berlin for. The System is currently being field tested and institutionalised. Soon a small number of Appreciative Inquiry-specific indicators can be developed to study the impact of appreciative inquiry on CBOs.

#### **5.4 Outcome 4 - Shared knowledge: fieldguide, video, internet, workshop**

*The most effective methods for undertaking an appreciative inquiry in the context of community sustainable development have been identified and shared with other development organizations through a field-guide, a video, an Internet site, and a regional workshop convened in Bangalore, India.*

The most effective appreciative inquiry methods that we have identified to date are synthesised in the IISD/MYRADA document "The Positive Path: Using appreciative inquiry in Rural Indian Communities." That document, clips from the video, and considerable additional information is available on the project's internet site at <http://www.iisd.org/ai/myrada.htm>. The site has received good interest, particularly the fieldguide which has been downloaded over 2000 times. We feel the project's strategy for information allowed for others outside of India to experiment with the approach in their own activities. Indeed, we have received considerable correspondence confirming this point.

#### **6. Follow up activities**

- **Further training in appreciative inquiry** will be provided by MYRADA as resources permit. We expect that this will be relatively easy with:
  - staff of MYRADA,
  - self-help Affinity Groups, Federations and other CBOs on MYRADA's current project areas, and
  - partners with whom MYRADA has strong learning networks and relationships.

It will be more difficult with agencies whom MYRADA does not have a continuous relationship with.

- **Annual sharing workshop** on appreciative inquiry (with core team members) where the experiences can be presented and follow-up actions determined.

- **Assisting organisations to embed appreciative inquiry** within themselves as well as their clients. Only when appreciative inquiry gets embedded into the functioning of an organisation (NGO, Government institution, etc.) can it become an issue that participants feel needs to be followed up.
- **Training in areas that indirectly support the application of appreciative inquiry** like participatory approaches for development, moderation and facilitation skills, documentation skills, basics of Organisational Development (OD), interpersonal relationships, project planning, monitoring and evaluation techniques, all of which have been provided to staff of MYRADA as well as the community based groups in MYRADA project areas in some form or the other. This obviously constitutes a larger project in itself. However, if these capacity building activities are provided through a consortium of funding organisations (e.g. DFID, SDC, Novib etc. get together and work out stronger institutional development programmes in their programmes) and by involving several organisations and institutions, there may be multiple benefits.
- **Deepen the application of appreciative inquiry.** Most applications of appreciative inquiry with community-based organisations has been with small groups (about 20 persons) where the Discovery and Dream stages take place in 1-2 days and Design is either left for the CBOs to do on their own, or is facilitated by staff for about 2 days. Since these groups are not literate – much of the facilitation is by the staff or community facilitators – who also visualise most of the results. The review of visions has so far taken place with the active involvement of staff. This method has been useful and is definitely replicable but the challenge is to institutionalise appreciative inquiry in these groups. This requires far more conceptual input than has been given so far. MYRADA needs to conduct deeper and longer term appreciative inquiry as an experiment to look at the practicability of holding such exercises and to see the differences in the impact on groups. Since there is great comfort with the currently used methodology – the staff are now willing to try a newer approach to Appreciative Inquiry. Facilitators need to strike a balance between the depth and breadth of the appreciative inquiry – based on their overall objectives for conducting such an exercise as well as resources available to them. The facilitators also need to consider the time that the community groups are willing to keep aside for such initiatives.
- **Enlarge the network of groups using appreciative inquiry.** We decided to work with appreciative inquiry long enough to see sustained benefits at various levels before we shared the experiences with other organisations. The strategy has been useful – because what was thought to be initial euphoria – has sustained even after two years. The time has given us an opportunity to see appreciative inquiry come a full circle in some CBOs – these CBOs are now revisiting their visions – after having achieved many. MYRADA has used appreciative inquiry at the organisational level during a unique study of its management systems funded by Novib. Now MYRADA will support organisations in development to institutionalise appreciative inquiry in their organisations and in CBOs with whom they work. In this MYRADA seeks to

work with partners with whom long-term relationships are possible – so that its support will go beyond merely introductory training programmes. It is obvious from the experience of the project that the risk of participating organisations being able to incorporate appreciative inquiry in their work can be rated from medium to high (we assumed in the Project LFA – that it would be low to medium).

- **Strengthening appreciative inquiry within MYRADA.** MYRADA needs to deepen its understanding of appreciative inquiry keeping with the developments in the world. More of our staff need to be trained in applying appreciative inquiry in newer contexts and in innovative ways.
- **Support to CBOs to monitor and evaluate appreciative inquiry process.** Though some broad indicators have been developed to measure the quality of an appreciative inquiry process on the field – the development of a system to institutionalise measurement indicators that help NGOs and CBOs to assess issues of sustainability, gender equity and economic development has yet to be put in place. This in the opinion of staff requires a longer cycle time than provided by the project – since the actual long-term impact of the approach is only becoming visible now.

## 7. Conclusions

The project made significant progress towards its expected impacts—enhanced capacity of governments, development agencies, and non-governmental organisations to design and deliver environmental, gender equity, and private sector development projects that have a high level of community involvement and that are consistent with and supportive of locally defined development priorities. While we cannot yet say that the approach has received widespread acceptance in India, the results to date are extremely encouraging. We believe that where it has been applied, appreciative inquiry has contributed to enhanced social cohesion, income security, environmental security and sustainable livelihoods.

We feel confident in stating that appreciative inquiry, when well facilitated, can be a very motivating and strategic event for all involved. An air of good will and hope tends to accompany the process. At the end, the group has a clear vision of where it wants to be and has detailed goal-oriented action plans to see them there. We find the approach to be complementary to other participatory techniques. As well, we have found appreciative inquiry to be an immensely robust approach; it works in small groups, large groups, with families, individuals, governments and so on. It seems to work equally well as an organisational review tool as it does planning a natural resources project, or invigorating a young self-help group. We believe that there is considerable depth to the use of appreciative inquiry in community development that we have yet to explore. We feel the need to network with others who are using the approach so that new ideas will continue to emerge and be shared. We see a day when appreciative inquiry principles and techniques

are common practice in development work in every part of the world. To speed that end, we recommend that donor agencies continue to fund the refinement and propagation of appreciative inquiry in community development.