



Capacity Building Toolkit 1

VOLUNTEER AS LEARNER

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VOLUNTEER AS LEARNER

KSA MATRIX AND LEARNING PLAN

LEARNER ROLE	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	ATTITUDES
Knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) you need for this role	Adult learning model; community systems; assets and deficits approaches to community development; host country development plan; Peace Corps programming; thorough understanding of Peace Corps Project/technical assignment	Community entry and engagement skills, e.g., observation, interviewing, and listening; information gathering, synthesis, and analysis skills; introducing oneself to community	Respect for local knowledge; curiosity about others; willingness to consider others' opinions, values, methods
Your initiatives to learn more	What knowledge you still need and where to find it: — — — — —	Skills you need to gain or improve and how you might work on further skill development: — — — — —	Things that will help you change any attitudes that will hinder your role: — — — — —

WHAT IS A LEARNER?

This Toolkit series is designed to help you define and map out your role as a capacity builder in your community. One of the first tasks is to build your *own* capacity and that starts with taking charge of your learning process. Your host community is a place for discovery—a place for observing, experiencing, reflecting, drawing conclusions, and applying lessons learned. Even what you “think you know” about your technical field needs to be reevaluated in the light of your new cultural environment.

The learner role is especially important during your first six months or so at site, but it is equally important to pursue continual learning activities throughout your service so that you keep building on your experiences with Counterparts, colleagues, and community members.

The models, ideas, and suggested activities included in this Toolkit series are offered as opportunities for self-directed learning. Self-directed does not imply solitary learning experience, but rather that the learner takes responsibility for mastering new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. During your Volunteer service, we ask you to embrace several key learning responsibilities.



RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LEARNER

- Maintaining an open state of mind, open to different ideas and ways of doing things (a mind is like a parachute—only useful if it is open)
- Thoughtfully reading and reviewing Pre-Service and In-Service training materials
- Actively participating in suggested activities, including reflecting on your learning and sharing your perceptions and insights with other Trainees and Volunteers
- Engaging with people in your community to learn about your technical area in the local context
- Integrating cultural and language learning to understand the technical subject matter in a local context
- Provocatively seeking additional information to fully understand the issues and topics
- Setting learning goals for yourself and working consistently to accomplish them

REMINDER: Technical expertise is only useful if you learn to adapt and apply what you know to fit the local culture and environment, and then share that expertise in the local language.



You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers.

You can tell whether he is wise by his questions.

— Naguib Mahfouz (Nobel Prize Winner)





Capacity Building Toolkit 1

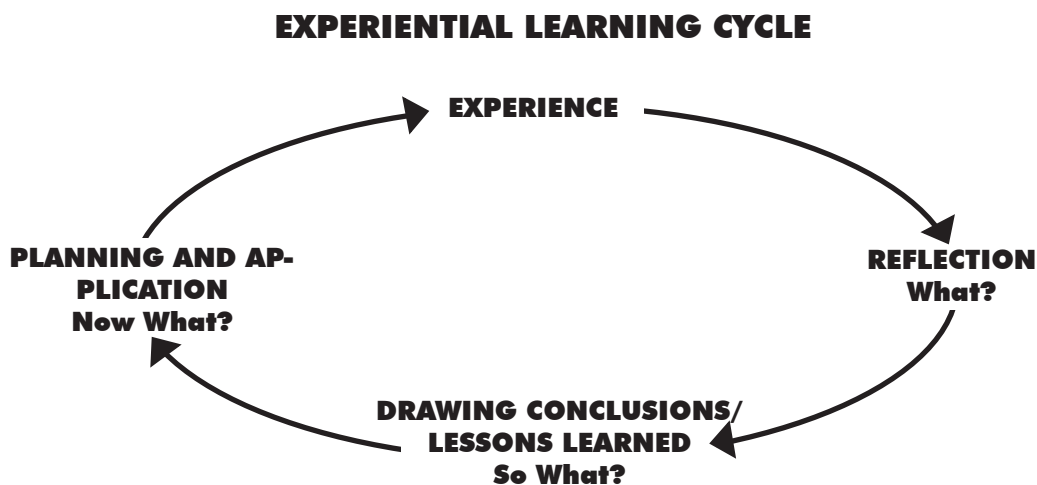
MODELS, CONCEPTS, AND CASES

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AND THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE

For adults, the *process* of learning is a process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes so that we can solve problems and make changes in our lives as we move toward fulfilling our needs and our goals. This learning process can be conceived as a four-step cycle.

1. We experience something.
2. We review the experience critically.
3. We draw a conclusion and/or infer useful insights (lessons learned).
4. We apply or try out our new insights or hypotheses in a new situation (which leads to another experience and so on).

This natural process is called “experiential learning” and we use it all the time although we may not be completely conscious of the four steps. In many structured, adult learning situations, such as pre-service training, we try to design most of the activities to follow the experiential learning cycle. Here’s what the cycle looks like in a training context:



EXPERIENCE: The “experience” that activates the experiential learning cycle may be an event from your past, an activity you conduct in the host community (observing a women’s group meeting, visiting the local market, playing a game with local children, and so on), or a case study you read and analyze with your PST group. In this step, you *do* something or remember something you *did* in the past. It usually involves uncovering new information that requires a response from you.

EXAMPLE:

You “shadow” three different local entrepreneurs who have established successful cottage industries in the host community. You spend the day with them, observing, asking occasional questions, and to the extent possible you join in to help them with some of their tasks.

EXAMPLE:

At the end of each of the shadowing exercises, you write down your thoughts and feelings about what you experienced. What surprised you about their business set-up, management, and production? What was similar or different about these people’s business world and your previous experiences in the United States? How were decisions made and implemented? How did the entrepreneurs handle their family responsibilities in relation to their business requirements? When you see your fellow Trainees, trainers, or Counterparts, you discuss or “process” your observations with them — that is, you compare notes about your experience.

REFLECTION is a way of exploring and sorting out what happened during the experience stage. What new information do you now have and what does it mean? What feelings has it provoked in you? How might you relate the experience to things you already know? If you are participating in a group activity, how is your learning experience similar to or different from that of others?

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED:

After reflecting on the experience, we arrive at the critical stage of determining what lessons can be learned or what principles can be drawn from the experience. This is the “so what” stage. How does all of this fit together? What are the major themes or insights you can infer from your experience? This stage is especially important for Peace Corps Volunteers because you are trying to integrate learning in a new cultural environment with the knowledge and skills you already have.

EXAMPLE:

Based on your observations and those of your colleagues, you draw some conclusions about what it means to run a local cottage industry. What are the key insights you believe you have gained? What can you conclude about how people meet their family and business roles? What aspects of the business day were typical for all three cases (hours worked, types of activities, and so on)? Can you generalize about what people consider to be their main challenges as small business owners? What were the business owners’ strategies for dealing with a less-than-perfect micro-business environment? And so forth....



PLANNING AND APPLICATION

is the stage where you relate the learning to your world and actually start using the information. It's called the "now what" stage. What will you do differently now that you have learned these lessons? How will this new insight help you improve your technical ability, your interactions with the community, or your collaboration with your Counterparts? As you apply what you have learned, you generate new experiences and the "experiential learning cycle" starts all over again!

EXAMPLE:

Based on your conclusions, what are some ways you could begin building a consulting relationship with local small business owners? Given that all three of the people you shadowed identified particular challenges, how would you find out more information about these issues and begin helping the business owners address them?

All four of these stages are important for a rich and complete learning experience. Sometimes, we jump too quickly from experience to experience and shortchange the other three steps in the learning cycle. It is important to be as conscious as possible of your own experiential learning processes and take the time to really reflect, draw conclusions, and apply lessons learned before moving to the next experience.

The Psychology of Sitting

...people in Western civilization no longer have time for each other, they have no time together, they do not share the experience of time. This explains why Westerners are incapable of understanding the psychology of sitting. In villages all over the world, sitting is an important social activity. Sitting is not a 'waste of time' nor is it a manifestation of laziness. Sitting is having time together, time to cultivate social relations.

— Andreas Fuglesang





LEARNING AND USING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Indigenous knowledge is the knowledge that people in a given community have developed over time, and continue to develop. It is:

- based on experience;
- often tested over centuries of use;
- adapted to local culture and environment; and
- dynamic and changing (albeit sometimes slowly).

Indigenous knowledge is not confined to tribal groups or the original inhabitants of an area. It is not even confined to rural people. Rather, any community possesses indigenous knowledge—rural and urban, settled and nomadic, original inhabitants and migrants.

Indigenous knowledge is often contrasted with “scientific,” “Western,” “international,” or “modern” knowledge—the knowledge developed by universities, research institutions, and private firms using a formal scientific approach. In reality, there is often a great deal of overlap between indigenous and Western knowledge, and it can be very difficult to distinguish between the two. In many parts of the world, indigenous knowledge has developed and intertwined around the management of introduced crops. Coffee in Latin America and corn in Africa are two examples.



Because indigenous knowledge changes over time, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether a technology or practice is really indigenous, or adopted over time, or a blend of local and introduced components. For a development project, however, it does not matter whether a practice is really indigenous or already mixed up with introduced knowledge. What *is* important is that instead of looking only for technologies and solutions from outside the community, we first look at what is in the community. We then either use whatever knowledge is found to be effective or combine the best of both.



TYPES OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Information

- Trees and plants that grow well together and when to plant
- Vegetarian foods that are “complementary proteins” when eaten at the same meal (For example, corn and beans provide much more protein when eaten together rather than separately.)

Practices and Technologies

- Seed selection and storage methods
- Bone-setting methods
- Disease treatments
- Seasonal grazing patterns
- Barter and lending practices

Beliefs

Beliefs can play a fundamental role in people’s livelihood and in maintaining their health and the environment.

- Holy forests are protected for religious reasons. They also may maintain a vital watershed.
- Religious festivals can be an important source of food for people who otherwise have little to eat.

Tools

- Equipment for planting and harvest
- Cooking pots and implements

Materials

- Housing construction materials
- Materials for basketry and other craft industries

Experimentation

- Farmers’ integration of new tree species into existing farming systems
- Healers’ tests of new plant medicines

Biological Resources

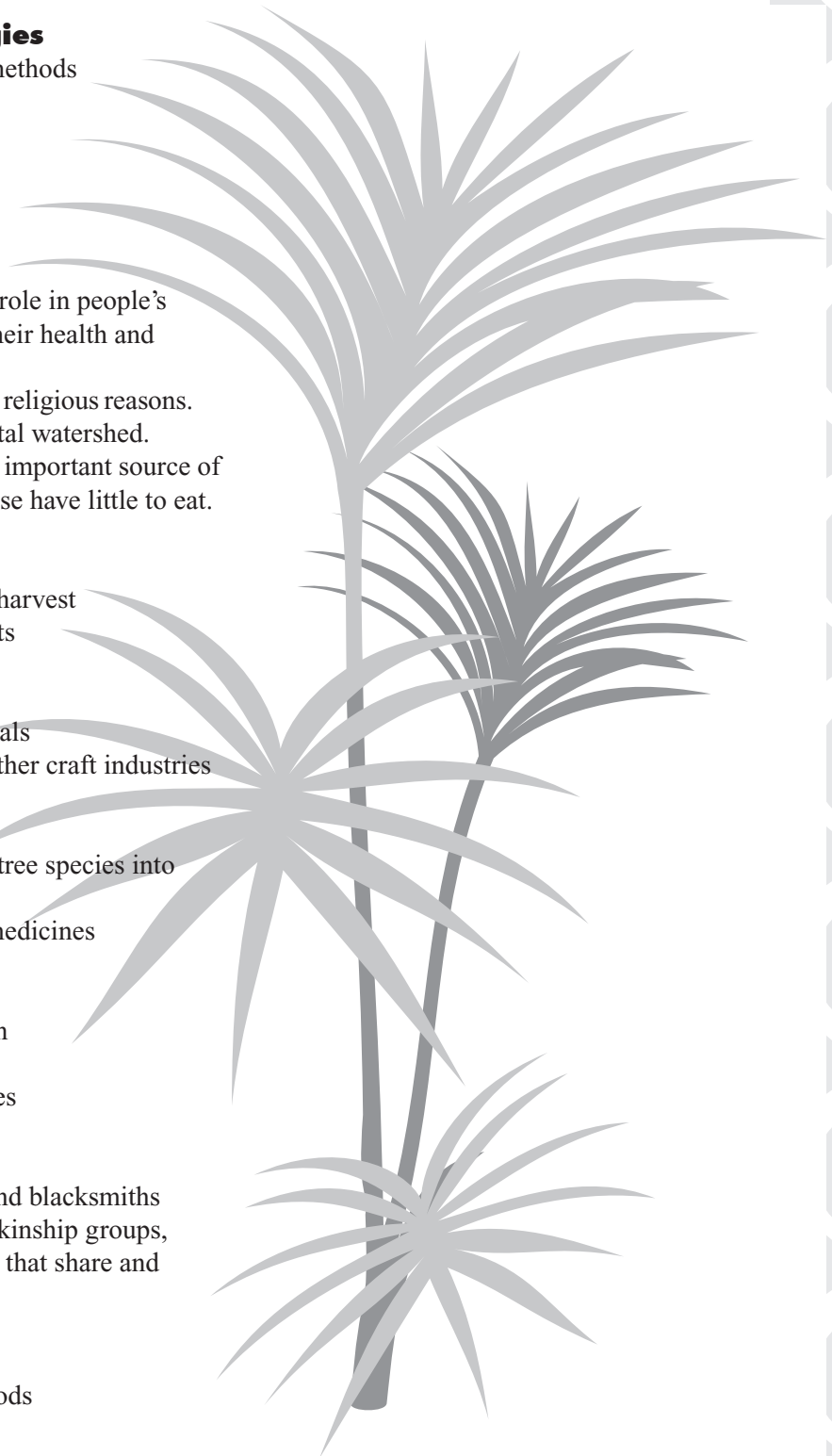
- Animal breeds and migration
- Local crop and tree species
- Availability of pasture grasses

Human Resources

- Specialists such as healers and blacksmiths
- Local organizations such as kinship groups, councils of elders, or groups that share and exchange labor

Education

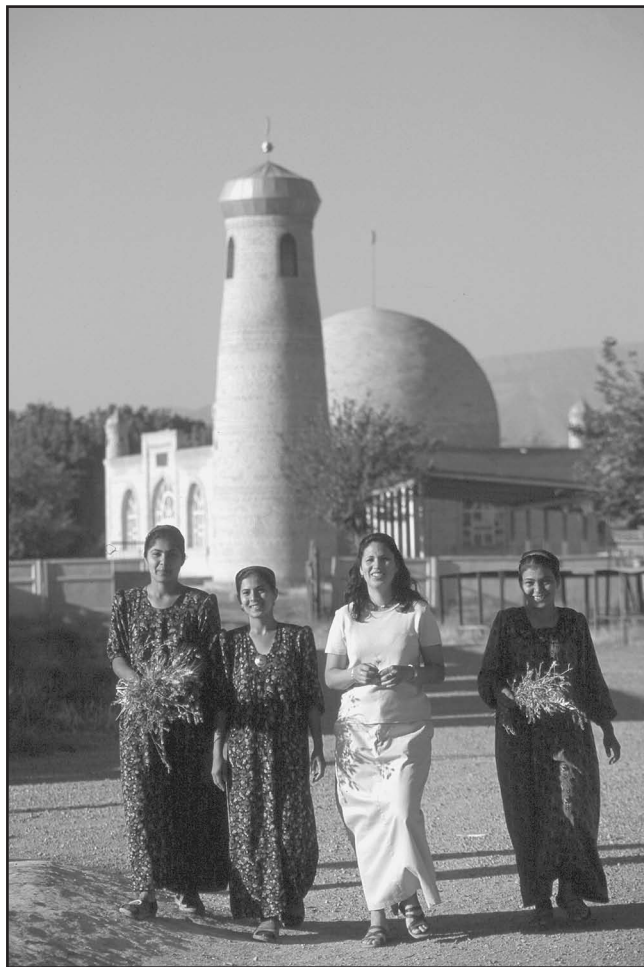
- Traditional instruction methods
- Apprenticeships
- Learning through observation



Communication

- Stories and messages carved on palm leaves, gourds, or stones
- Folk media
- Stories, poetry, songs, dance (performed)
- Traditional information exchange methods

[Adapted by permission from *Recording and Using Indigenous Knowledge: A Manual*, pp. 7-9. The International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), Silang, Cavite, Philippines. 1996.]





PROBLEM-BASED AND ASSET-BASED APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

PROBLEM- AND ASSET-BASED APPROACHES AS A CONTINUUM

Historically, much of the field experience in community participation stems from work by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who used “problem-posing” methods to raise awareness of social problems and injustice to incite action by marginalized or disadvantaged groups. The process is rooted in problem analysis, reflection, and action, and is based on the belief that community members need to be encouraged to think critically about problems of daily life in order to make decisions about and gain maximum control over their lives. Through a unique method of asking questions and working in groups, problem posing empowers people to take concrete steps toward improving the quality of their lives.



Asset-based approaches (also known as “strength-based”) identify and emphasize the positive aspects of a community’s work on an issue or existing behaviors that promote health and well-being. Asset-based approaches grew out of the observation that in some settings, problem- and need-focused approaches can depress or overwhelm groups to the point that they become immobilized or pessimistic about the possibility of positive change. Asset-based approaches seek to increase self-efficacy by emphasizing and building upon what individuals and groups have accomplished and de-emphasizing blame for existing problems. Here, the emphasis is on identifying and enhancing existing assets, while promoting networking among groups and community members. As a result, community members feel more hopeful and motivated about their ability to address real needs.

Problem- and strength-based approaches are not exclusive of each other. They are on a continuum. While conducting an assets-based resource inventory, information regarding “problems” or “deficits” may surface. While conducting a problem analysis, people may talk of “opportunities.” All of this information is important to know and use in designing community development activities. In deciding when to use either or both of these approaches, one important consideration is this: how you begin the dialogue influences the energy level and empowerment of the participants. In other words, **your first questions are critical.**

In the subsections below, we describe the problem-posing and asset-based approaches in greater detail. For further information, see the Resources section of this Toolkit.



THE PROBLEM-POSING APPROACH (BASED ON PAOLO FREIRE'S METHODS)

In this approach, development workers begin by asking people to look at situations around them and identify problems they are having. This discussion is participatory and may include pictures of both good and bad situations in the community to stimulate a dialogue with community members. The primary question to begin with is “What problems are you having?” or “What problems do you see in this picture?” The answers are used to work with community members to diagnose causes for the problem and identify solutions. Through this participatory dialogue, community members develop a critical awareness of the world around them and feel empowered to act on the conditions that affect their lives.

Problem posing is like a mini-learning cycle in itself, empowering people by moving them from a description of the situation to action. The problem is posed in the form of a “code.” This code can be a dialogue, paragraph, word, photo, or drawing. For example, a teacher could show a drawing depicting a group of students standing together and another student standing apart from the group. The group of students are laughing and pointing at the lone student. (This situation can stimulate a discussion around why people are ostracized from others, including tribal differences, income, disabilities, HIV, and so on). The learning group then discusses five sets of questions, using the following format:

1. Describe the situation.
2. Identify the problem.
3. Relate the problem to your experience.
4. Identify the underlying causes of the problem.
5. Identify constraints and opportunities for action.

A problem or code should have the following features:

- **Be recognizable to community members.** The problem should be grounded in the community’s experience, not the Volunteer’s. (See the PACA tools in *Toolkit 2: Volunteer as Change Agent* for ways to identify problems or codes.)
- **Present several solutions.** To stimulate discussion, the problem should have several possible solutions. Community members should feel free to share their ideas. Treat this as a brainstorming session in which judgment is suspended and all contributions are encouraged and considered.
- **Avoid providing solutions.** A Volunteer in a problem-posing discussion is viewed as a co-learner in a “culture circle.” A culture circle is “a live and creative dialogue in which everyone knows some things and in which all seek to know more” (Freire). Problem posing presents open-ended problems that can be dealt with creatively and critically, giving the affected people a say in the process.
- **Avoid overwhelming people.** The problem should not be so emotionally charged that it prevents people from talking about it, but should be one that they can address. Ask host country colleagues, friends, Peace Corps trainers, APCDs, and fellow Volunteers for advice.



- ***Be sensitive to local culture and beliefs.*** Describing situations, not blaming, is the focus of this process. It is not a Volunteer’s role to preach and moralize. Check with your Counterpart, supervisor, community elders, town officials, and friends to confirm that the problems presented are valid and acceptable. These resources can also give advice on how to address the problems in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner.

When the problems or codes are carefully chosen and the dialogue is managed well, local culture is validated and community members’ knowledge and assets are identified. The results of these dialogues are small actions that move a community toward addressing its identified needs.

For more information about Paulo Freire’s approach, read ***Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*** Paulo Freire. Translated by Robert R. Barr. Continuum Publishing, New York. 1994.

[Text on problem posing approach adapted from Introductory section of ***Community Content-Based Instruction Manual.*** Peace Corps, Washington, DC. 2002. (ICE TO112)]



*“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities,
but in the expert’s mind there are few.”*

— Shunru Suzuki



THE ASSET APPROACH

THE FIRST QUESTION IS CRITICAL —

Change happens the moment a question is asked and that change is directly related to the question.

Questions can produce personal power, vitality, strength, health, and courage when the question takes participants into a positive space.

Questions can produce weakness, powerlessness, and depression when the question takes the participants into a negative space.

The primary focus of asset-based development is not on “problems” that need to be “solved.” Rather, the emphasis lies in examining existing community assets and resources, enhancing existing activity settings, and encouraging cooperative activities. Based on the assumption that every community has groups of people who come together for productive purposes, the asset approach seeks to utilize these existing “activity settings” to produce a product or products to enhance development. In this approach, the process of working together and developing a sense of shared values and goals is just as important as the product produced. By working together over time, community members form strong bonds that will help to support them in future development efforts. The asset development approach emphasizes community-based planning in which community members are involved in all phases of work and, indeed, define the very nature of the work to be done. Community facilitators, including Volunteers, have as much to learn from working on the project as do members of the community.

The following principles guide asset-based development work:

1. Participate in and cooperatively enhance community activity settings.

Most community concerns and aspirations are found within family, neighborhood, and community-activity settings. To understand a particular community, try to observe and make sense of the patterns of current activities and how resources are used, shared, imported, and/or exported relative to these activities. (Imagine flying like a bird, slowly circling over and around the community—watch how people move about in routine ways, combining and recombining into groups for various purposes.) According to *Building on Assets in Community Development: A Guide to Working with Community Groups*, these active, purposeful groupings are called “activity settings” and are basic units for understanding all aspects of community life. “Activity settings can be described in terms of the who, what, when, where, and whys of everyday life... Every group is linked to others by common purposes and the use of resources.” To understand activity settings, explore the following elements:

- People involved (individuals or groups)
- Themes of opportunity and/or concern expressed by people in these settings
- Various viewpoints related to the purposes of the activity
- Historical context (as it relates to the present situation)



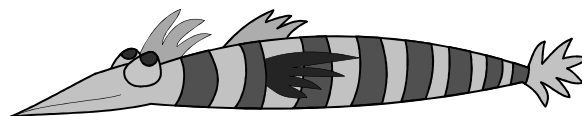
- Ecological and/or environmental factors related to the setting
- Process of decision making (present and desired)

In your role as a Volunteer, it is important not only that you identify and describe your community's activity setting but that you also participate in them. These groups are your natural entry into the community.

2. Examine existing community assets. Traditionally, change agents have gone into the community, found problems, determined causes, and tried to fix them through development projects. This deficit approach is not necessarily “bad” but it does tend to shift the direction and power in the development relationship to those who have the capabilities and resources in question, usually to things and people outside the neighborhood or community. In an assets approach, the community identifies and examines what it has in terms of all human, ecological, material, and economic resources. (Note that assets are within the activity settings.) Begin with **Individuals**, identifying their skills, knowledge, and capacities, and looking for ways to link individuals in collaborative activities. Next, examine the **Citizen Associations**: for example, churches, youth groups, women's groups, farmers' or fishermen's cooperatives, and schools. Next, identify **Institutions** present in the community: for example, local, regional, and international NGOs, banks, hospitals, and governmental agencies. Help the community make linkages within categories or across categories, beginning within the community and proceeding outward. Design projects that involve different kinds of people—intergenerational programs, for example—because they draw from a more diverse resource and social base. Avoid developing projects based on desires that call for totally new activity settings and resources. Facilitate dialogue with community members about what an improved activity setting might look like (for example, what activities, with what resources, producing what?).

3. Design or enhance the existing activity settings consistent with values, beliefs, and rules of the host culture. Development projects (whether agricultural, small business, health, environmental, or other) need to fit the cultural space in which they are planned. Projects developed around what outsiders find valuable, good, and appropriate may be outside the life context of the community. Before designing a project with the community, discuss and try to understand what values underlie the purposes for the project. As you begin to plan with the community, pay particular attention to these four cultural features:

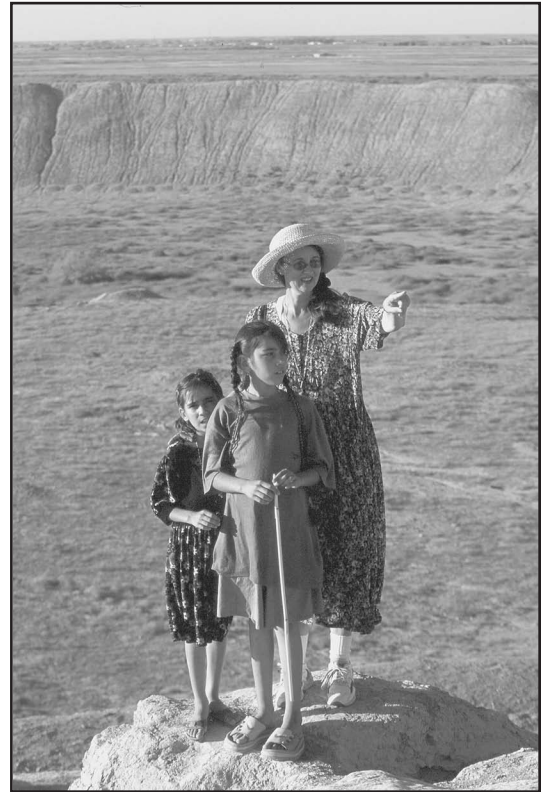
- **Social organization** (family hierarchies; roles of people based on position, clan status, age, gender, ethnic group; system of obligation; traditional forms of decision making).
- **Conventions of conversation** (direct and indirect channels of communication).
- **Thinking style** (use of symbols from language and objects from the environment; how people traditionally frame their perspectives and understanding about a particular development goal or activity).
- **Sources of motivation within a given working group context** (using traditional values as a source of motivation for community action).



4. Encourage joint activity; practice inclusion and collaboration; build relationships. Individuals and groups working cooperatively can have a better result than those working in isolation. Concrete, mutually beneficial relationship building lies at the center of the asset-based development process.

5. Engage in reciprocal relationships of “assisting” and “being assisted”; turn spectators into participants; learn from leaders; turn over leadership roles to those with promise. Any given group is composed of individuals with different skills, strengths, and weaknesses. As long as the group is driven by a common productive goal, each person will contribute skills and assist others, while receiving assistance in areas where others have more expertise. By serving as both “teacher” and “learner,” community members increase their productivity and feel motivated to persevere because of the assistance and support from others.

6. Engage in quality process—how it is done is as important as what is done. Development work should always center on activity leading to a product that is important to the community (for example, a small health clinic, a clean water supply, a soccer field, a community woodlot, or a computer center at the local school). However, although the product is the perceived purpose of the activity, it can only be produced through cooperative activity. The process of working together facilitates the development of the skills, harmony, and partnerships necessary to coordinate the resources for community development. A product without a good collaborative development process will fall into disuse and the work will have been of little importance. Both a quality process and product are necessary for successful development. (See *Toolkit 4, Volunteer as Co-Facilitator* for more insights about group process.)



There are several variations on the asset approach to development. For more information and references, see the Resources section at the end of this Toolkit; also read “Appreciative Inquiry as an Organizational/Community Change Process” in *Toolkit 2, Volunteer as Change Agent*.

[Text on asset-based approach adapted from *Building on Assets in Community Development: A Guide to Working with Community Groups*. Peace Corps/Micronesia Project and Training Plan, 1994]





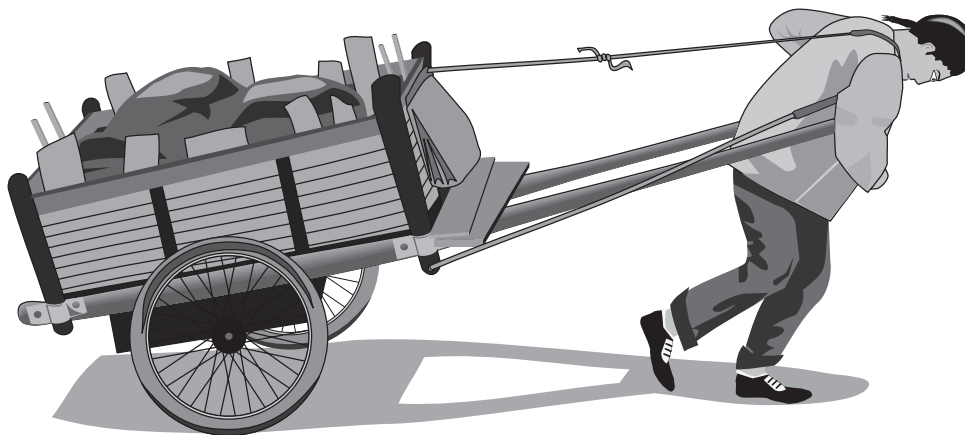
COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

WHAT IS COMMUNITY CAPACITY?

Community capacity is the combined influence of a community's commitment, resources, and skills that can be deployed to build on community strengths and address community problems and opportunities.

- **Commitment** refers to the community-wide will to act based on a shared awareness of problems, opportunities, and workable solutions. It refers also to heightened support in key sectors of the community to address opportunities, solve problems, and strengthen community responses.
- **Resources** refers to human, natural, technological, and financial assets and the means to deploy them intelligently and fairly. It also includes having the information or guidelines that will ensure the best use of these resources.
- **Skills** includes all the talents and expertise of individuals and organizations that can be marshaled to address problems, seize opportunities, and add strength to existing and emerging institutions.

Communities and the groups and institutions within them vary tremendously in capacity. Capacity is gained in degrees, sometimes slowly, other times rapidly.



HOW IS COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILT?

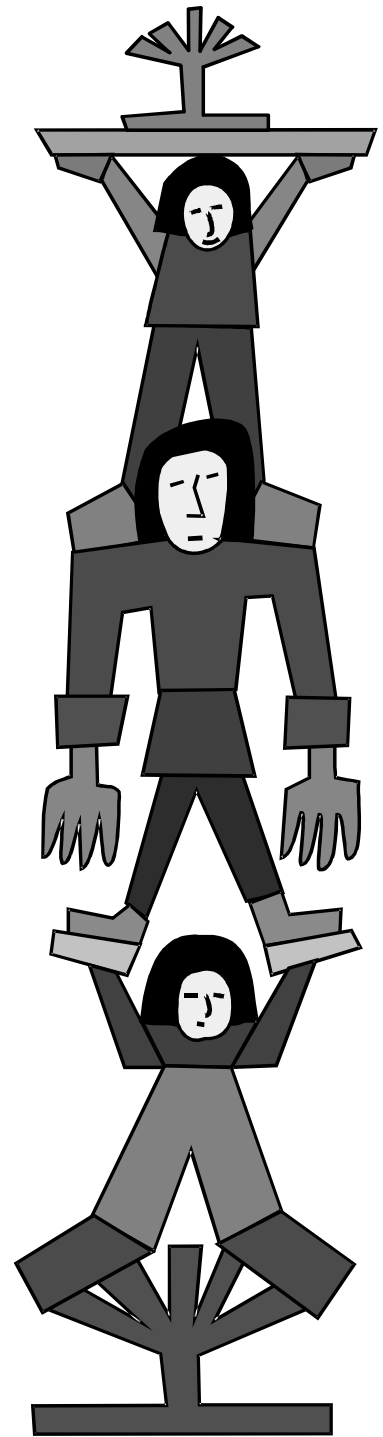
The three essential ingredients of community capacity—commitment, resources, and skills—do not “just happen.” Rather they are developed through effort and will, initiative and leadership.

For example, effort, will, initiative, and leadership are needed to:

- Involve and educate community members, help shape opinion, and galvanize commitment to act.
- Attract and collect resources, compile information, and shape ways for deploying these resources to “catalyze” change in how problems are addressed and opportunities are seized.
- Organize people and work, develop skills, and coordinate or manage a sustained effort that builds up the positive qualities of community life that enable a community to address problems and recognize and act on its opportunities.

The challenge for a community, group, or institution struggling to gain more capacity is to develop its own commitment, resources, and skills. **The challenge for those outside that particular group—but wishing to help—is to create opportunities appropriate for that group that can help it grow in capacity.**

[Adapted by permission from *Measuring Community Capacity Building*, pp. 1-4, Version 3/95, Aspen Institute/Rural Economic Policy Program. Adapted by permission of Rainbow Research, Inc., Minneapolis, MN.]





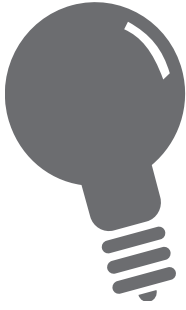
STORIES FROM THE FIELD:

JAMAICA

A young business major was assigned to the rural fishing community of Treasure Beach as an Environmental Business Advisor. He soon recognized the importance of developing rapport with the citizens before he could work effectively with them. To begin the process, he immersed himself into the community “runnings.. He related his experience as follows:

To get myself integrated into the community, I played football with some local youth. I played dominoes in the local bars and fished two to three times a week with local fishermen. I introduced myself to local business people and attended the South Coast Resort Board Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA) meetings twice a week. I interviewed local community people to learn what they wanted, and I went to schools. All these activities allowed me to get acquainted with the community before I began working on projects.





IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES FOR PRACTICING YOUR ROLE AS A LEARNER

COMMUNITY WALKS

PURPOSE

Through community walks, you are introduced to the community. People see you and become used to you. Additionally, as people lead you, they will show you what they deem important for themselves.

ACTIVITY

In conjunction with your PST trainers, Counterpart, or other initial contacts in the community, assemble a small group of community members to lead you on “guided tours” of the community. Explain that you would like to learn about the community. Let your questions flow based on what you see, taste, feel, hear, and smell, and pursue a line of questioning that follows what is pointed out to you. Think of some questions associated with your technical sector. For example, a natural resource development Volunteer might want to focus on how natural resources are being used. Here are several questions for such an inquiry:

- What is that?
- How is it used?
- Who uses it?
- Who built it?
- How many types of soils are on your land? What are they called?

Or a health/nutrition Volunteer might want to look at medicinal plants and how families and community health workers use them. In this case, the questions might include:

- What is that?
- How is it used?
- Who uses it? Do they prepare and take it themselves or does someone else administer it?



- What happens physically when someone uses (eats, drinks, applies) the treatment?
- How long have people been using this particular remedy?

POSSIBLE DESTINATIONS

Markets, stores, water sources, community forests, agricultural areas, health centers, cemeteries, garbage dumps, ports, bus or train stations, municipal parks, churches, and so on.



- ▶ Be sensitive to the time constraints and workloads of people.
- ▶ Mentally note what generates discussion, even if you do not understand what is being said. Pick out words that you hear often.
- ▶ Be aware that you will get different (often complementary or conflicting) information from different people depending upon their roles, personalities, and positions in the community. You may want to try to set up walks with a few different groups of various genders, ages, or ethnic makeup. If appropriate, ask your Counterpart, trainer, or host family to help you set up these walks.
- ▶ Be aware that what you see may vary according to the time of the day, season of the year, or festival. Repeat walks to the same places and note the differences.



[Adapted from *Learning Local Environmental Knowledge: A Volunteer's Guide to Community Entry*. Peace Corps, Washington, DC. 2002. (Manual: ICE T0126, Workbook: ICE M0071)]



THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

PURPOSE

Asking questions, or informally interviewing people, is the form of communication most basic to getting to know people. Good questions can help you create a human bond, establish trust, and begin a partnership with those with whom you will work.

ACTIVITY

The art of asking questions involves selecting the kind of question structure that fits with the kind of information you are seeking. Look at different types of question structures listed below:



QUESTION STRUCTURES

Closed questions: (yes or no)

- Do you like to eat goat?
- Do you use the health clinic?

Either/or questions:

- Do most children eat _____ or _____ in the morning before school?
- Is the clinic free or is there a fee?

Open questions (what, how, when, where, and sometimes why*):

- What are some foods you like to eat?
- When might you take your children to the health clinic?
- * *The word “why” is often interpreted as blame, rather than curiosity, so use it with a careful tone.*

Personal question forms:

- Do *you* throw your trash in the river?
- How many children do *you* have?

Generalized question forms:

- Do *people* throw trash in the river?
 - How many children do *most families* have?
-

Practice the art of asking questions by doing the following exercises:

1

Informally interview a colleague, a trainer, or a Counterpart but ask **only closed** or **either/or questions**. Do this for about two to three minutes and then stop and discuss the type and quality of data you have learned about the other person. Then continue the conversation, but this time, ask **only open questions** (what, how, when, where, why). Stop after about three minutes or so, and again analyze the type and quality of the data you have gathered from your interviewee. (This is a fun exercise to do in language class.) Often, it is helpful to begin a conversation with a few easy, closed questions and then proceed to the open-ended questions to explore ideas, knowledge, and opinions. Sometimes, an open-ended question may be vague and difficult to answer, in which case you may want to move back to a more closed question.

2

Ask your language facilitator to demonstrate and explain how she or he would approach someone in the community and initiate a conversation or informal interview. How would she or he establish rapport with the other person? Within the cultural context, what might be some non-threatening questions to use at the beginning of the interview? How would she or he read the nonverbal language of the other person?

Cultural Note

Many Americans begin conversations by asking “What do you do?” Culturally for most Americans, what they do is how they are known, rather than what family they are from. This probably evolved out of a combination of the mobility of most Americans—their family would be unknown—and a conscious effort by many to value someone’s achievements as opposed to who they are—individualism rather than social status or group.

Once you have explored these characteristics of questions, select a topic of interest to you and an interviewee. Draft a set of questions about the topic and check them with your language trainer or Counterpart. Conduct the informal interview. If possible, take along another Trainee or a colleague to sit with you during the conversation and give you feedback afterwards on your style and skills.

[Adapted from *PACA: Participatory Analysis for Community Action*. Peace Corps, Washington, DC. 1996. (ICE M0053)]





LEARNING ABOUT THE HISTORY OF YOUR HOST COUNTRY

PURPOSE

To understand the significant people, places, processes, and events that have shaped the host country in which you are now living.

ACTIVITY

With the help of your trainer(s), divide the history of the host country into several important periods. Divide your training group into smaller teams or pairs and assign each a major historical period to research and report on.

Using a variety of sources (trainers, family members, other community members, local teachers, and so on), gather key facts and interesting perspectives on your assigned historical period and how it has impacted the subsequent years of development. Try to investigate how the events, people, and places of your particular period relate to your technical assignment area.

Organize the information into an informative presentation to make to other Trainees and trainers. Highlight several new vocabulary words that you consider important to your growing lexicon.

[Adapted from a Peace Corps/Slovakia lesson plan.]





WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE: EXPLORING COMMUNITY ACTIVITY SETTINGS

[This activity is based on the asset approach to community development.]

PURPOSE

Community life and individual life are organized around activity. By observing and listening to people in their activity settings, you identify the issues about which people have the strongest feelings and you gain insights about the patterns of activities.

ACTIVITY

Initial questions to think about: What sorts of things do *you* do with others during the day? What are the main activities you do with your host family and/or friends? What do you most like to do in your spare time? By answering these questions you are describing your own activity settings.

Working by yourself or with a friend or trainer, go out into the community and observe several different activity settings. Examples of settings might include: playing soccer after school, braiding hair on a front porch, planting/harvesting crops with family members, preparing meals, hanging out with friends on the street corner, and more. At each setting, use the following questions to help you observe and gather information:

- Who are the people involved and what are their distinct roles? (individuals or groups)
- What are the “conventions of conversation”? (direct or indirect; differences in style according to status or gender)
- What are the themes of concern or opportunity expressed by people in the setting? (What are people happy about? Proud of? Hopeful for? Worried about? Sad about?)
- What are the various viewpoints related to the purpose of the activity?
- What ecological or environmental factors relate to the setting?
- What is the process of decision making? (What is the structure for involving people? How do people feel both about the decisions that are made that affect their lives and the way the decisions are made?)





Afterwards, share your observations about your activity settings with other Trainees, trainers, or colleagues. Ask each other questions to explore each activity setting as thoroughly as possible. For example:

- What themes of concern or opportunity emerged? (What themes seem to contain or provoke emotional interest? Emotion is linked to motivation and often people are prepared to act on issues they feel strongly about.)
- What opinions were expressed and by whom? What words do people use most frequently to express their opinions about a particular theme?
- How does this information help you understand the larger community?
- How does this information relate to your technical sector and Peace Corps Project?
- How could you use the information to help you understand your future role as a Volunteer?

Ask the language facilitators for clarifications and comments on your observations. Try to draw some conclusions based on your collective experiences and reflections.

Once you have spent some time with people in their activity settings, you will be able to note **generative themes**—that is, the issues that are so important to the community (or subgroups in the community) that they will generate enough energy to stimulate initiative in the members.

[NOTE: This activity may be completely integrated with language training.]



COMMUNITY MAPPING

PURPOSE

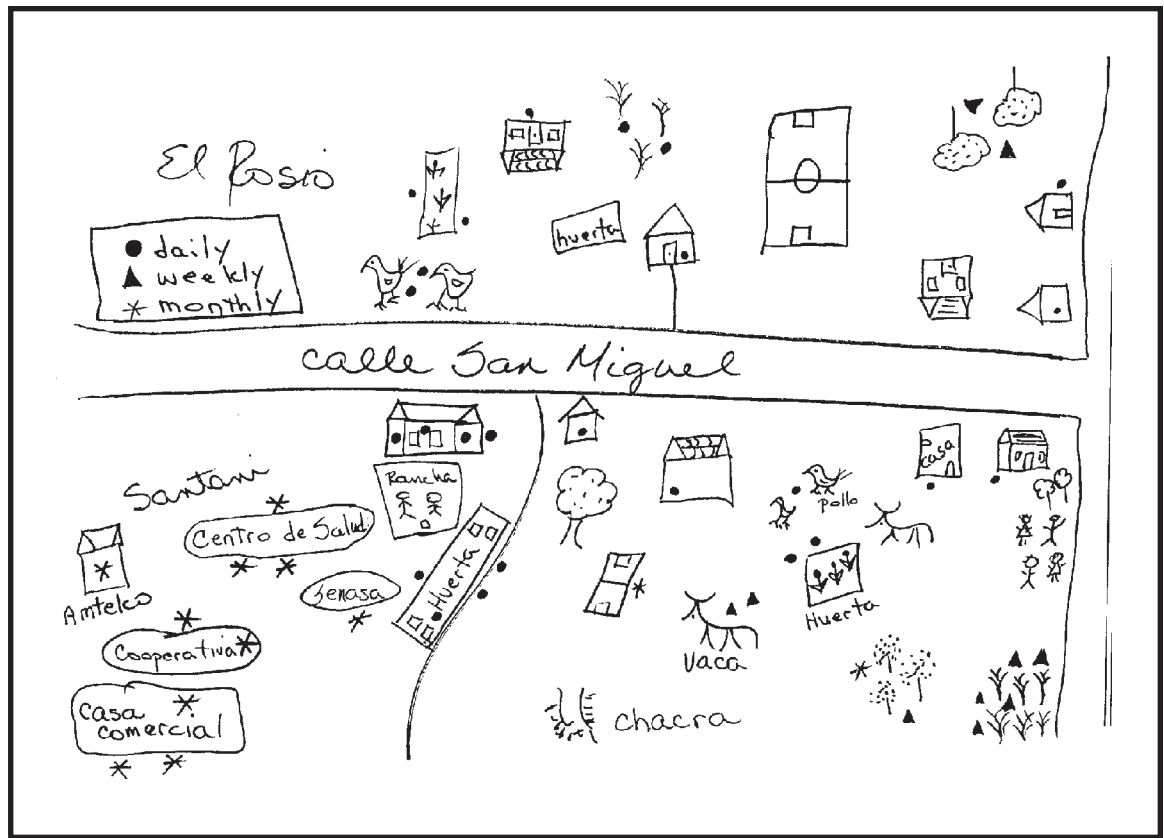
To gain insight into how people in your community view their immediate world in terms of resources and relationships, and to learn how they see themselves within a larger context.

ACTIVITY

Community mapping is a learning tool for both you and the community members who participate in creating and discussing the map. The more participatory the activity, the more insight everyone stands to gain. A community map may show perceptions about topography, land use, ecosystems, and socioeconomic data such as the distribution of and access to resources. There are a number of ways to practice mapping exercises. Here are a few mapping exercises to consider, depending on where you are in your term of service and your level of language proficiency:

- EXERCISE A:** When you are in PST, practice community mapping on yourself—that is, get together with others in your training group and do a map of your training community. Consider dividing the training group by gender to create two maps, and then analyze the similarities and differences that emerge. You can do this sort of map within the first two to three weeks of training.
- EXERCISE B:** As your language skills grow, try doing a map of the host community with a group of local children. Give them some instructions and let them create. It doesn't matter if the map isn't perfect; the goal is to have interaction with the children and learn about their perspectives on the community.
- EXERCISE C:** Another type of mapping exercise you may want to try in the first few days at your site is one in which *you* sketch out a resource map based on your own perceptions and the information you have gathered to date about your community. Create the map gradually by taking walks around the community and exploring one area well at a time. Make mental notes about the resources and structures that exist in the selected area and then return home and draw the map from memory. Continue doing this weekly or biweekly until you feel very familiar with the physical layout and characteristics of your community. Look at your maps and think about the different systems that may be operating. Once you think you have a “good” map, show it to several community members (men, women, and youth) and ask them to point out mistakes or suggest changes.
- EXERCISE D:** If you are working with a particular interest group in the community, build a relief map that focuses on the topic or work environment. Examples of interest groups might include students studying geography, a women's handcraft cooperative, or a coffee growers association.





Later on, when you are situated in your community and beginning to co-facilitate participatory assessment activities, conduct a mapping exercise that includes a gender-analysis focus like the one described in the Peace Corps *PACA manual* (ICE M0053). Once you are ready to facilitate this level of participatory activity, study *Toolkit 2: The Volunteer as Change Agent* for more ideas and guidelines.

Caution: Whatever mapping exercise you decide to try, remember that community members may misinterpret your motives for wanting to create the map. Make sure you are clear on the purposes of making the map—to help you learn about the community and to help them identify and take into account their developmental assets and deficits.

See the Peace Corps *PACA manual* (ICE M0053) for examples, instructions, and other additional information about mapping.



SHADOWING/DIALOGUE WITH COMMUNITY “COACHES”

PURPOSE

To begin to conceptualize how various people interact in relation to or within your technical sector environment and on what resources various livelihoods depend.

ACTIVITY

Identify a trainer, Counterpart, colleague, or friend who can advise on culturally appropriate ways to identify “coaches” to accompany or shadow. Ask your trainer or Counterpart to help you identify people in the community who are known for the work they perform and/or who use local resources relating to your technical sector. Some possible examples of coaches:

TECHNICAL SECTOR	POSSIBLE COMMUNITY COACHES
Education	Teachers of different levels/subjects, directors, local religious teachers, mothers
Natural Resource Mgt./Agriculture	Farmers, herders, honey collectors, dairy producers, blacksmiths, park service workers, basket weavers, hunters
Health/Nutrition/Water Sanitation	Traditional healers, midwives, community health workers, social workers, nurses, doctors, farmers, mothers, family garden keepers
Business/NGO Development	Market sellers, local store owners, bank/credit lenders, cooperative directive members, chamber of commerce representatives, journalists, social services reps, women’s organization members, local politicians, NGO leaders
Youth Development	Primary and secondary students, technical school students, youth who work in the market or in other informal jobs, religious leaders, sports coaches/leaders

Ask your Counterpart or trainer to introduce you to those people and spend one day each with four or five different people in the community. Observe which resources they use and make mental notes. As opportunities present themselves, turn your observation into action and perform the same activity as your coach. Try to get a sense of where people spend their time, with whom they interact, the rhythm of their day, and the physical areas of importance. Be prepared with several questions that will promote good conversation.



Write about your experiences at the end of the day. Think about how many hours a day different people spend on activities like collecting water, cleaning, farming, collecting firewood, or relaxing. As you begin to understand different schedules and tasks, compare and contrast them. Make observations regarding the different roles and responsibilities in the community with respect to your technical context and how these roles may be complementary and/or conflicting. Draft any tentative conclusions about who has access to or control over resources. Additionally, note how knowledge varies among gender, social class, and/or ethnic group regarding the technical areas of focus (the surrounding natural resource base, the provision of family health care, small business management, and so on).



If you are in PST, discuss your observations and reflections with your trainers and colleagues. In language class, use pantomime, pictures, and demonstration to extend your oral language skills and share as much information and perspective as possible.



[Adapted from *Learning Local Environmental Knowledge: A Volunteer's Guide to Community Entry*. Peace Corps, Washington, DC. 2002. (Manual: ICE T0126, Workbook: ICE M0071)]





GAINING LOCAL TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

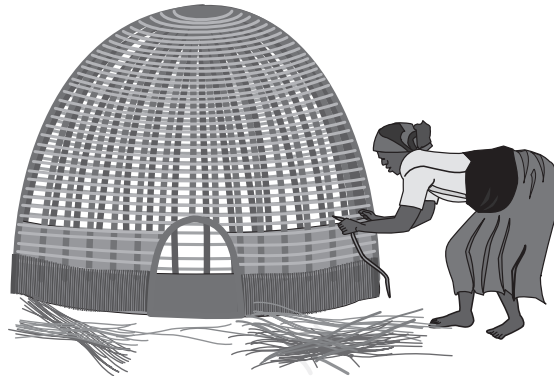
PURPOSE

To learn about area-specific technical knowledge and with whom it resides.

ACTIVITY A:

If you are in PST, this is an activity you and your colleagues can conduct with the help of local students and teachers and/or members of your host family. If you are already living at your site, you and your Counterpart can invite a community group (students, youth group, women's group, others) to help you carry out the activity.

The idea is for you and others participating with you to informally interview community members to learn how they have traditionally valued and/or used their resources and practices relating to the technical area. Interview the older people in community households and ask them to reflect on how their work and lives are different from those of their parents and grandparents. Afterwards, you and the other participants create some way to visually and/or orally represent what you have learned and present your findings to the group. You may want to consult trainers, teachers, or your Counterpart to develop a list of possible topics from which you can choose. Some possible topics for learning activities are:



- How farming, health services, education services, or credit opportunities have changed the community in the last 30 years
- Lending, teaching, healing, or farming practices of our ancestors
- Changes in the landscape, land ownership, or population in the last 30 years
- How changes influence farming, schooling, health services, or business development today

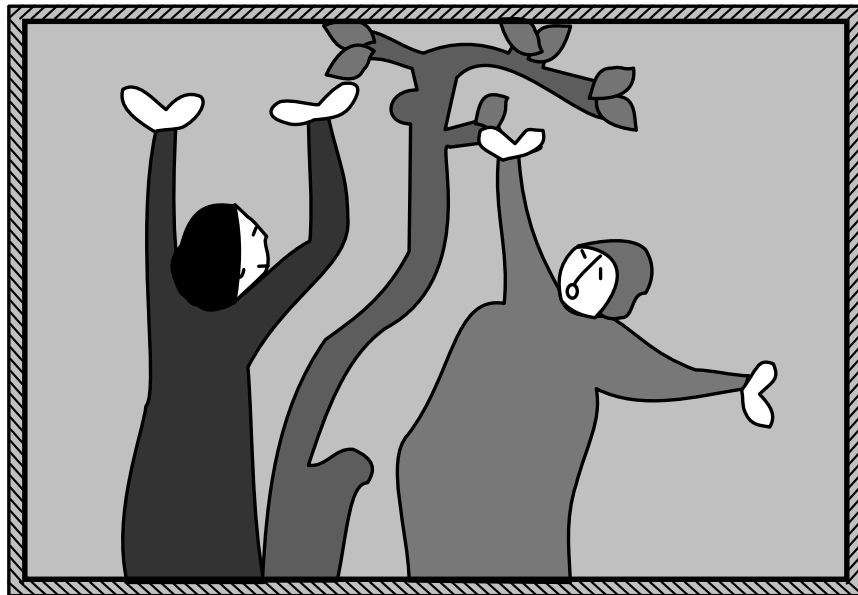


- ▶ If you want to work with a local teacher and students, make sure you establish a relationship with them before seeking to influence curricula.
- ▶ Encourage participants to interview both men and women.

ACTIVITY B:

With help from your technical trainers or Counterparts, find and interview community experts (men and women). These will be the people who are considered innovators or experimenters, and those considered to be especially proficient in some aspect of the livelihoods that support the community. Try to find out from other community members why these people are considered experts, and then interview the experts themselves. Pose questions in the context of the profession. For example, interviewers might ask an expert farmer:

- How would you characterize a good farmer? (or teacher, health worker, entrepreneur)
- What are some valuable farming techniques? (or teaching methods, health treatments, marketing strategies)
- What helps you the most with farming? (or teaching, providing health services, doing business)
- What and how have you learned from others about farming? (teaching, health, business)
- What do you value the most about the life of farming? (or a teacher, health worker, entrepreneur)
- What does religion advise about farming? (or teaching, health practice, entrepreneurship)



[Adapted from *Learning Local Environmental Knowledge: A Volunteer's Guide to Community Entry*. Peace Corps, Washington, DC. 2002. (Manual: ICE T0126, Workbook: ICE M0071)]





ATTENDING A LOCAL MEETING AND INTRODUCING YOURSELF TO THE COMMUNITY

PURPOSE

To learn how people interact and make decisions at meetings; to explain to the host community who you are and what your community role will be during your stay.

ACTIVITY

With the help of your trainer, host family, or Counterpart, identify a local community group that meets periodically to share information and address issues. If possible, try to find a group that has some interest or purpose related to your technical assignment area (for example, a Mothers' Club for health or nutrition, a Lion's Club or Chamber of Commerce for small business development, an NGO coalition, a farmers' cooperative, a youth club).

Respectfully ask the group leader if you may attend the next gathering as an observer. Ask the leader what the agenda will include and explain that you would like to have a couple of minutes to introduce yourself to the group. If the idea of attending a meeting makes you nervous, invite a friend to go with you. (The more relaxed you are, the more you will learn.)

In preparation, sketch out what you want to say to introduce yourself. There is no magic recipe for a personal introduction, but here are a few pieces of information people may find interesting:

- Your name and what it means in your North American culture and/or ancestry
- Where you are from and an interesting fact or two about your family
- A brief statement about what the Peace Corps is and an even briefer statement about why you decided to join
- What you hope to be doing as a community member and contributor during your stay (that is, either in your training community or in your site)
- One or two things you really enjoy so far about the community and its people



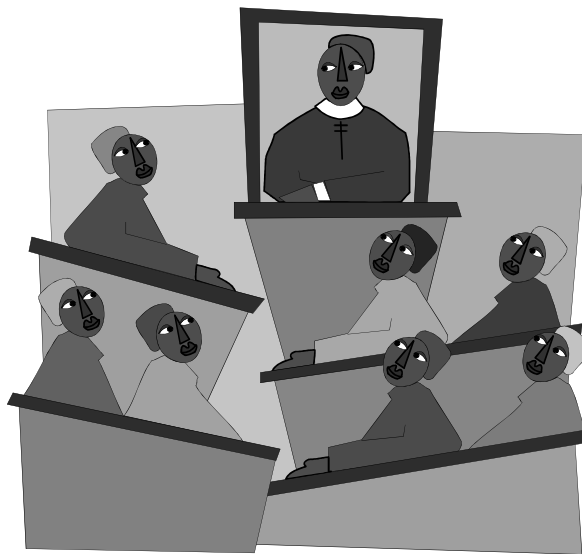
Write out your introduction and, as needed, ask your trainer, colleague, or Counterpart to help you translate and practice it. Get that person's advice on any cultural protocols to be aware of.

Also as part of your preparation, identify several meeting characteristics you want to observe. For example:

- How many people attended the meeting? Who were they? (age, gender, ethnicity, and other factors)
- How long did the meeting last? Did it start on time? Did people stay for the duration?
- What items, issues, or concerns did the group address?
- How did people interact with one another? What roles did people take on during the course of the session? How structured was the format?
- Were any decisions made during the actual meeting? Through what process?

Once you have attended the meeting (and impressed the group with your linguistic and cultural savvy), discuss your observations with your colleagues and trainers: What surprised you about the meeting format? How would you characterize the leadership in the group? How much “business” did the group get done? How similar or different was it to a meeting of a similar group in your United States community?

(See *Toolkit 4: Volunteer as Co-Facilitator* for more information and skill building on leading and managing meetings.)





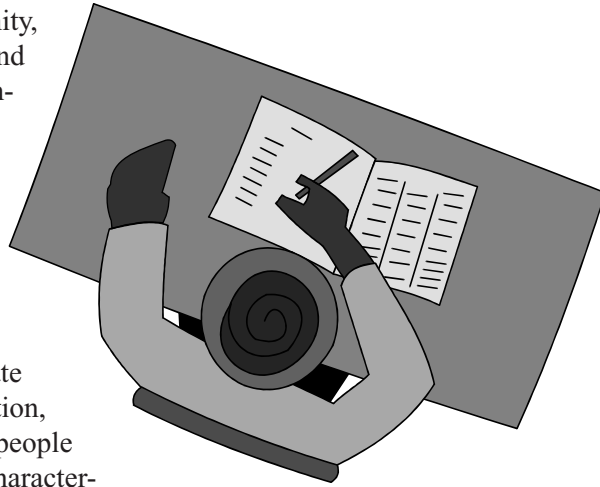
KEEPING A JOURNAL

PURPOSE

To monitor your learning; to discover assumptions (your own and other people's); to internalize new information.

ACTIVITY

As you experience your new culture, community, and the Peace Corps, capture your thoughts and feelings in a journal. Use words, drawings, symbols, objects—whatever means you wish—to reflect on your learning. Here are a few trigger questions to consider: What has impressed you the most about the people in your community? In what ways are perceptions and practices here similar to those in the United States and in what ways are they different? What are some differences in the way you relate with your technical environment (health, education, natural resources, and so on) compared to how people in the community relate to it? What are some characteristics of the technical environment that seem to shape the daily lives of community members? What are your immediate impressions regarding gender roles and the technical environment in the community? How does what you know about your technical area differ from or compare with local knowledge?



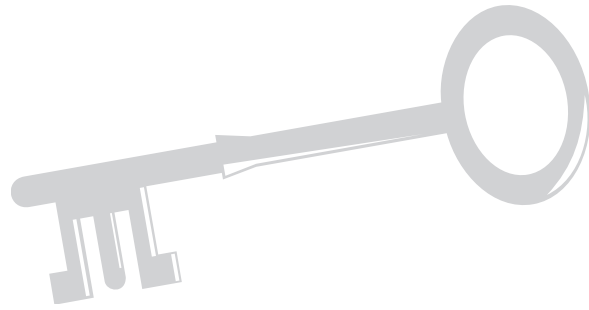
Periodically, go back and read what you have entered in your journal. Take note of points that are unclear, conflicting, or especially interesting, and of where you might be mistaken, have doubts, etc. Describe ways in which your preconceived notions regarding people and the technical environment have been challenged and changed.



► Focus on what the community has to offer, rather than on what it lacks.

[Adapted from *Learning Local Environmental Knowledge: A Volunteer's Guide to Community Entry*. Peace Corps, Washington, DC. 2002. (Manual: ICE T0126, Workbook: ICE M0071)]





KEY RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION AND INSIGHT

Building Communities From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets. John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. (ACTA Publications, Chicago, IL). 1993.

Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey. Michael Winer and Karen Ray. (Wilder Foundation, St. Paul, MN). 1994.

Community Building: What Makes It Work? A Review of Factors Influencing Successful Community Building. Paul Mattessich and Barbara Monsey. (Wilder Foundation, St. Paul, MN). 1997.

Idea Book Series: HIV/AIDS: Integrating Prevention and Care into your Sector, p. 31. (Peace Corps, Washington, DC). 2000. [ICE M0081]

Learning Local Environmental Knowledge: A Volunteer's Guide to Community Entry. (Peace Corps, Washington, DC). 2002. [Manual: ICE T0126, Volunteer Workbook: ICE M0071]

Natural Connections: Perspectives on Community Based Conservation. David Western and R. Michael Wright, Eds. (Island Press, Washington, DC). 1994.

PACA: Participatory Analysis for Community Action. (Peace Corps, Washington, DC). 1996. [ICE M0053]

Promoting Powerful People. (Peace Corps, Washington, DC). 2000. [ICE T0104]

Recording and Using Indigenous Knowledge: A Manual. (The International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, IIRR, New York, NY). 1996.



NOTES

