

INNER WORK *for* SOCIAL CHANGE

A collection of six case studies on the role of reflection in social impact initiatives



Fetzer Institute



SYNERGOS
Building trust works

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The case studies in this collection are abridged. Each of the full case studies has been published separately, along with a conceptual paper on inner work.

Forewords

Foreword from the Fetzer Institute

The case studies in this volume explore the role of personal “inner work” in increasing the effectiveness of multi-sector collaborations working on complex social problems. This “inner work” encompasses the broad range of reflective practices that can enable individuals and groups to gain a deeper understanding of, and a greater ability to deal with, the powerful ways in which participants’ interior worlds affect, for better or for worse, their capacity for effective collaboration.



As in most fields of professional endeavor, the development field has paid relatively little attention to this inner dimension of development work. Instead, the accepted paradigm is largely external and instrumental, emphasizing technical expertise, systems thinking, and professional interaction defined by formal institutional roles and boundaries.

The case studies in this volume examine projects that have made a serious effort to supplement this standard approach by integrating a strong focus on inner work. They provide concrete illustrations of how inner work practices can help participants deal with their own trauma, fear, and stress, connect with a deeper sense of purpose, and foster greater empathy, resiliency, courage, and openness to fundamental change. They also provide concrete illustrations of how these practices can help bridge differences and build trust across divides of race, gender, hierarchy, and organizational and sector boundaries.

For example, one case examines the role of inner work in Namibia’s African Public Health Leadership Initiative, a five-year effort (2008-2012) to strengthen

the leadership and systems of Namibia's Ministry of Health and Social Services. Facing a national HIV infection rate of nearly 20% and a related crisis in child and maternal mortality, the Health Ministry was handicapped by a siloed and hierarchical bureaucracy, a culture that disempowered women, and old wounds and divisions left over from the struggle for independence.

Supported by Synergos and the Presencing Institute, the team leading the Initiative infused the effort with a range of inner work practices, including an 18 month series of 3-5 day retreats for key leaders, and exercises through which these leaders could also directly experience the challenges facing patients seeking care. One participant offered this evocative description of the resulting transformation:

[The process] lets us sit down on the same floor around the same fire, and lets us hold hands and talk about stories and see what happened... The approach is to put everyone at the same level... We realize we are just human beings, the same. The ranks are there... So what? We can still communicate and work together as human beings.

Another case examines the Bhavishya Alliance, a seven year effort (2006-2012) that brought together government, NGO, and corporate stakeholders to combat child malnutrition in the Indian state of Maharashtra. When the project began, the child stunting rate in Maharashtra was 39%; by the time the project concluded, that rate had fallen to 24%. The Alliance was only part of a broader effort, and the case study explicitly states that there is no basis on which to assess the Alliance's contribution to this overall improvement.

Nonetheless, the dramatic progress certainly invites our close attention to the Alliance's experiment with inner work. A key government leader described the major challenge facing the Alliance:

How to get mutually suspicious bodies together – the government, private sector, and NGOs. Probably everywhere in the world, the sectors are deeply suspicious of the motives of each other and disparaging about

the capabilities of the other sectors. Getting them to sit together itself was a great challenge.

The case study describes how, through a range of inner work practices, leaders and participants in the Alliance overcame these barriers in ways that contributed powerfully to the effectiveness of the Alliance's work.

The case studies are also admirably candid in discussing the difficulty of integrating and sustaining a strong inner work focus into organizational culture and multi-stakeholder collaborations.

While these case studies raise as many questions as they answer, they tell us more than enough to compel the question of why the development field have paid so little attention to the critical interior dimension of its work. Hopefully, these case studies will inspire both scholars and practitioners to dig deeper.



Bob Boisture
President and CEO,
The Fetzer Institute

Foreword from Synergos

While our world has become a better place in many ways, COVID-19 has exposed the ways in which we simultaneously have been failing ourselves, our communities, and our planet. The most current and urgent example is the stubborn persistence of systemic racism at every level of society in the United States and throughout our world. Other intractable challenges that continue to threaten the flourishing of humanity include insufficient action for climate change, persistent inequality, and inequity in many parts of the world.

Moving forward requires recognizing that society is characterized by the strength of its smallest link. By doing so we can transform how people across sectors come together, learn, create shared vision, and take collective action to bring about social change, based on trust.

At Synergos, we call the ability to build trust bridging leadership.

Bridging leadership represents a paradigm shift in our approach to leadership: a movement away from less-inclusive forms of decision-making that have dominated much of human history. Bridging leaders are not always in positions of high visibility, influence or authority. Instead, they devote themselves to developing a different kind of power — the power of connection and convening. They are leaders who see things through a different lens, with openness and honesty at every level, and bringing a wisdom that is so necessary in our world.

It is the type of leadership this moment requires.

Becoming bridging leaders requires us to develop new abilities, including mental resilience, emotional intelligence, and the skill to collaborate, even with those with whom we may not agree. It requires that we need to unlearn some old habits and beliefs. And for me personally also spiritual growth.

This research project explores the role of inner work in developing this form of leadership. We define inner work as deliberate and ongoing reflective practice that increases awareness of self, others, and the system in which complex social problems arise.

Drawing upon six initiatives that used a collaborative approach to address a complex challenge, I believe we have advanced our understanding of the practice of bridging leadership and why inner work is critical to social impact. Most importantly, the project has shown that intentional practices for internal reflection lead to growth and the ability to build trust.

I hope you too will learn from these experience and analysis, and share your own experiences in using collaborative, trust-based approaches to social change.

I thank all the people, communities and organizations in the six initiatives who shared their wisdom with us, our project team including colleagues in the Synergos and Fetzer networks, and Synergos' founder Peggy Dulany, who has pioneered our thinking and action to foster bridging leadership in building a better world. A world built on trust.



Henri van Eeghen

CEO, Synergos



Framing inner work for social change

Pandemics, systemic racism, food insecurity, environmental degradation, high infant and maternal mortality rates, violence in its various forms, and other failures of social justice – these are but a few of the complex problems that undermine the wellbeing of individuals and societies globally.

Complex problems are hard to solve. Their causes and effects are interdependent, entwined in many-layered ecosystems. Root causes and final effects may be far apart in space and time. They may span generations (think of child malnutrition, systemic racism or income poverty) or continents (think of the COVID 19 pandemic). Experts, politicians, civil society, and affected communities may have very different perspectives on the causes of a problem and its possible solution. Each of these groups may act in ways that undermine efforts to resolve the problem or halt its spread. A problem may also be generatively complex; its apparent solutions may spawn the problem in new forms or new places.

Even though hard to solve, such wicked problems are not intractable. What is called for is a rethinking of the problem, and of the roles and relationships of all the parties needed for its possible solution. This kind of change is hard, too. It means letting go of cherished identities and arrangements, and finding new ways of collaborating with others whose views and practices may be at odds. It depends on co-creating a new kind of social reality by reshaping relationships and systemic patterns.

Inner work, bridging leadership and multi-sectoral collaboration have a crucial role in enabling these transformations. This is the idea that underpins the Knowledge Project on Inner Work for Social Change.

The Knowledge Project on Inner Work for Social Change

Synergos, in partnership with the Fetzer Institute, launched the Knowledge Project on Inner Work for Social Change to advance a global conversation around the centrality of inner work for more effective social action towards a better world.

Within the project, *Inner Work* is broadly understood as any form of deliberate and ongoing reflective practice that increases awareness of self, others, and the

systems in which complex social problems arise. More specifically, it is any reflective practice that enables individuals or group to connect to a deeper sense of purpose, strengthen relationships, and become more effective agents of social change. Inner work lies at the heart of *Bridging Leadership*, which is the capacity and will to build trust and tap the fullest contributions of diverse stakeholders, helping them to come together across divides to work in concert for the common good.

To explore and illuminate the critical role of inner work in effective social action, Synergos commissioned case studies of six initiatives that used a collaborative approach to address a complex challenge. The six case studies form the core of the Knowledge Project. A cross-case analysis draws out the main themes and lessons from the case studies as a basis for contributing to a global conversation about inner work as a vital component of social action towards a better world.



Participants engage in a journaling exercise at a Synergos-facilitated retreat in South Africa.

The case studies

The connection between our inner selves and our work in the world is both intricate and delicate. Together, the case studies explore this connection between the world within and the world without, between reflection and action, between leadership and co-creation. Each case study portrays an effort to address a systemic and complex social problem: child malnutrition in the Indian state of Maharashtra; infant and maternal mortality and troubled public health systems in Namibia and the Philippines; dysfunctional schools and an underperforming education system in South Africa and in the state of Pará in Brazil; and a fragmented, stagnating agro-economy in Ethiopia.



Members of the Bhavishya alliance unpack for their first day of retreat in the Himalayas.

All are set in democracies of the global south and all, excepting Ethiopia, are post-colonial states. Most are set in places with a history of inequality, exploitation and social injustice, places where the divides of gender, race, ethnicity, class, caste, and language may tear the fabric of trust that undergirds any genuine collaborative venture.

Different though the case studies are in geographical and social setting, in subject matter and in scope, they are all cases of a collaborative approach to addressing complex social problems. *The object of the case study suite is the role of inner work in enabling and sustaining collaborative action for social change. It is this object that serves as a lens for cross-case analysis.*

Inner work, as a form of reflective practice, was a feature of five of the six initiatives. Where inner work was integral to the project design (whether so named or not), the case studies offer lessons about the nature of inner work, and about the inner-outer relationships of bridging leaders in multi-stakeholder partnerships. Even where inner work was not integral to the project, as in the Pact for Education for Pará in Brazil, the case studies offer insights into how trust (or its absence), individual mind sets, and the play of power among diverse groups helped or hindered collaborative efforts.

Taken together, the case studies portray the connection between our inner selves and our work in the world, and show how the connections play out through the multi-layered ecology of human action and interaction. They depict some of the processes that encourage and support people to trust their own agency – individually and collectively. Stories and examples reveal the connective tissue between inner and outer work – between reflection and action – and how each can enrich, steady and direct the other; how each brings to the other a deeper awareness of how one is in the world; and how an absence of reflection may impair collaborative action.

Why now?

The case studies are retrospective and exploratory. They are not predictive; nor do they make any direct causal claims about the social impact of inner work. Several case studies focus on initiatives that were completed some time ago – one almost a decade ago; others portray initiatives that have moved to a new phase or are scaling

up. All the cases have been documented previously; several appear in earlier case studies that also feature in published articles and books.

So why this new set of case studies? What fresh perspectives does it offer?

Whereas earlier case studies focused on bridging leadership and collaboration, this set highlights inner work. It examines the presence and role of inner work in resolving systemic problems. The case studies offer rich descriptions of context, not as an extra but as integral to an understanding of the systems in which complex problems arise and thrive.

There's a fresh perspective, too, that comes from the lapse of time. This offers a vantage point for viewing whether and how intended changes have been sustained or abandoned, whether the problems addressed have been resolved or have spawned in new ways. The time lapse alerts us to the challenges of change within systems – its snail-pace, its vulnerability to political upheaval and ever-shifting leadership, and to the stranglehold of bureaucracies and fierce habit.

The lapse of time reminds us that even a well-conceived collaborative approach, pursued with energy and commitment may not offer a solution once and for all. Part of what makes a problem complex is that it's not amenable to any 'done and dusted' solution even when the solution is co-created and emerges through a thorough understanding of the ecosystem in which the problem arises. This is why ongoing reflective practice is so crucial to social action. While it may be easy intellectually to understand the systemic nature of a problem and the external barriers to its solution, we need to see our own place and relationships within a social system, and our own internal barriers to change. It is also why building a strong culture of bridging leadership may be more important than simply offering once-off training for individual leaders.

Learning from the case studies

The notion of trust permeates the case studies – as much through its absence as through its presence, in its making as well as its breaking. Matters of trust lie at the core of the problems that spurred the initiatives that the case studies portray. The case studies point to the importance of building trustworthiness in tandem with

building trust. Without trusting relationships, authentic collaboration is not possible. Building trust is especially important among groups with a collective memory of mistrust. It is unwise to entrust the things we most care about to people, structures or systems that are not worthy of trust. The case studies offer examples of how inner work, coupled with responsible action, may enable more trusting and trustworthy relationships. They offer, too, examples of how individuals grew in knowledge of themselves in relation to their world and to others, enabling the emergence of a common cause.

From the case studies we learn that inner work, as a form of reflective practice, is both a precondition and a sustaining condition for whole-hearted collaboration. The Namibian case study, for example, posits that self-reflection and trust building are prerequisites for individuals to benefit from leadership development opportunities. Well-established reflective practices – such as those associated with Theory U – can open hearts, activate minds and energize action in a team or multi-stakeholder group. The case studies from India, the Philippines, Namibia and Ethiopia present illuminating examples of how such practices may facilitate more trust, more compassion, more agency, and more solidarity.

Examples from Namibia and India also show that awakening the imagination through metaphors, creative play, drama or the visual arts are powerful ways of sparking or marking personal change and empowerment. Denise, a nurse who co-ordinated a regional development unit in the health leadership program in Namibia, offers a vivid metaphor of how her participation in the program had changed her: "I was a butterfly because I was emerging. Later I was an eagle, I could fly. I never went back into the box."

Although the South African initiative followed a different approach, structured around four reflective yet profoundly disquieting questions, it, too, built trust, commitment to a common goal, and collective, responsible agency. The case study offers a striking example of how inner work arouses and demands the courage that empowers a collective to move from a safe space of building trust to the brave space of action towards their collective purpose. Courage is a recurring theme, too, in the case studies from India and Namibia.

Two case studies point to indigenous knowledge systems that enrich our conception of relational awareness. The Filipino concept *loób* is central to the health leadership program in the Philippines. *Loób* is the core of personhood as relational will, a will directed towards other people or spiritual entities. In this sense, *loób* only has meaning in tandem with *kapwa* (loosely translated as “shared identity” or “self-in-the-other”); together they are embedded in a web of connectivity. *Making a personal commitment to address a wicked problem, such as health inequity, requires an open mind, heart, and will.* This means connecting to one’s *loób*—one’s inner principles of affection, disposition, feelings, attitudes, thought, and responsibility. The connection may resonate spiritually; for some program participants, a sense of a sacred obligation motivated them to a higher accountability.

In the South African case study, the notion of *ubuntu* illuminates the role of retreats in forging collective agency to overcome poor quality education. At the retreats for each participating school, reflective questions helped school stakeholders to reconnect to the values of *ubuntu* (“you are a person through other people, or I am, because we are”). For most black South Africans, *Ubuntu* is the ontological basis for their relationships with their ancestors, their communities, and themselves. *Ubuntu* frames a leader as someone whose purpose is to serve the community, who can maintain community cohesion, and build teams to work for the common good.

Together, the case studies show, time and again, how inner work sparked personal change which, in turn, changed the way leaders lead. Each case has one or more inspiring stories of how personal change resulted in new ways of relating and leading. In the Brazilian case, personal change came through the experience of collaboration, rather than through the reflective practices we call inner work. In the other cases, inner work exercises sparked a more lucid self-awareness, personal resilience, and more attentive, non-judgmental listening. Examples abound of how agency developed as participants came to own the problems – within their health, nutrition, education or agricultural systems – and to co-create innovations to address them. People came to see themselves as part of the solution, not detached from it, no longer just identifying a problem in the workplace or larger system but owning it as a shared problem and rallying to solve it.

What, if anything, do the case studies reveal about the risks of neglecting inner work? Reading between the lines, the Brazilian case study may suggest that where a sense of ownership and co-ownership are absent, change happens superficially and is subject to the vicissitudes of power, politics and competing interests. At the same time, power dynamics may themselves be an impediment to genuine reflective practice.

Recurring themes across the cases highlight the role of inner work in change leadership and social action. The connection between inner work and actual social impact is more elusive, although the case studies from South Africa and The Philippines both place personal change as the start of the pathway to organizational or systems change with tangible impacts. An academic partner in the Philippines’ health leadership program offers a metaphor for inner work’s vitality in leading for change: “If an egg is broken by an outside force, life ends. If an egg is broken by an inside force, life begins.” More than knowing what to do and how to do it, the leader’s character, being, and values become integral to their leadership.

Part of the task of inner work lies in the formation of character, in cultivating leaders who have the courage to act from an authentic, ethical sense of purpose, who will be true to their word and their purpose, who will not abuse their power for unwarranted personal gain or to cause hurt or harm to people or the common good. A message for our times, perhaps?

Shirley Pendlebury

Jumping into the waves of the river: The Pact for Education in Pará, Brazil

Banzeiro is an expression widely used in the Brazilian state of Pará. It describes the small waves in a river provoked by the passage of large vessels. Children who live in riverside areas have a habit of floating on the ripples created each time a boat passes. *Embanzeirar* is a variation of the word, meaning to surpass the limits. By analogy, education should help people to *embanzeirar*—to ride the wave to new heights, overcoming the limits imposed on them by their social, economic, and cultural conditions.

Imagine a family living in a community on the edge of a river in a remote area of Pará. The family is eligible for the *bolsa família*, a small monthly grant to families whose income places them below the poverty line. But the grant is conditional: to receive it, the family must have their children vaccinated, take them for health checks, and keep them in school.

The family's children are of school-going age and their parent's dream, of course, is to send them to school. But the school is far away and the children who enroll will face many difficulties. Girls, especially, may experience sexual harassment on the way to school. The teachers are poorly trained, the school buildings dilapidated, and the classrooms ill-equipped. The children often go hungry because there is not enough food at home or at school.

Because the family's income is meagre and uncertain, the children may take occasional work to bring in much-needed cash. This impedes their learning and, at some point, they might drop out of school—unless the prospect of losing the *bolsa família* is incentive enough to keep them enrolled.

This scenario reflects a common reality for many families, not only in rural areas like Pará, but across Brazil. Education is one of the only forms of hope for many impoverished communities—hope that the next generation will have a better future. Failing education systems prevent young people from being able to *embanzeirar*, or transcend the limits of their social and economic circumstances.

This case study outlines how multi-sectoral partnerships addressed this problem in an effort to improve the public education system through the Pact for Education in Pará.



Project landscape

The name Pará is of indigenous origins and refers to the regions many rivers. Pará, Brazil's second largest state, has more than 20,000 kilometers of rivers. About 70 of the state's municipalities border water courses, including lakes and canals. Citizens depend on these waterways—which transport people and goods—for their livelihoods and as a central part of daily life.

Rich biodiversity and mineral resources have made Pará a place of failed utopian dreams, and a site of exploitation and violent conflict. Several waves of economic exploitation shaped societal structures in the region. Crop husbandry and cattle



Photo: Renato Guimaraes

From left to right: Nazareno Lobato, Rubens de Aquino Oliveira, Walter Bernardo Cardoso da Cruz and Wania Cantañede

farming were the initial economic activities, followed in the 19th and early 20th centuries by the exploitation of latex. It was here, in the 1920s, that Henry Ford launched his utopian project, building Fordlandia, a city geared toward the industrial production of latex. The latex boom depended on the rubber tappers, men who were subjected to regimes of semi-slavery, in which they were permanently indebted to the contractors, setting the stage for many societal fractures.

Pará's economy changed from 1964 to 1988, with Brazil's military dictatorship, which promoted occupation of the Amazon and extraction of its mineral resources, chiefly iron and gold. During this period, the exploitation of wood also intensified, as did violence against local populations and indigenous communities. The loss of forest opened space for cattle ranching and, more recently, for expanding the agricultural frontier from central region of Brazil to increase soybean cultivation.

In this context of violence and rapid industrialization, the education system of Pará was performing poorly. In 2012, the average time spent at school was only 5.9 years, below the national average of 7.2 years. Worse still, only 30 percent of young people finished high school. The other 70 percent were almost certainly destined for underemployment, unemployment, or marginal activities.¹ In the first decade of the 2000s, Pará had some of the country's overall worst education outcomes—its frail education system was a serious and urgent problem.

Poor educational quality and high drop-outs rates not only destroyed young people's dreams of escaping the cycle of poverty, but also hindered economic development. Pará lacked the skilled labor required to meet growing demand. Though the area was booming, paraense did not have the skills needed to take advantage of the opportunities in front of them. This obstacle to economic expansion also posed a threat to the new generations, who would never benefit from the region's economic growth without a fundamental shift in the education system.

The Pact for Education in Pará

The sense of urgency around Pará's poor educational performance helped create the conditions for partnerships to emerge. In 2011, Synergos began conversations exploring how to address the enormous challenge of improving Pará's education system. These talks were triggered by an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) loan to the state's government for education development, and were informed by Synergos' emphasis on Bridging Leadership.

Bridging Leadership² is a leadership style focused on promoting collaboration and multi-stakeholder processes to address complex social challenges, like education. By bridging diverse, often conflicting perspectives, bridging leaders help forge a common agenda for finding and implementing solutions.

Shaped by this approach, the conversations led to the launch, in 2012, of a multi-sector partnership between key actors in the state's education eco-system, which came to be known as the Pact for Education in Pará. Rooted in Bridging Leadership, the Pact took a new approach—harnessing the power of partnerships to help Pará's education system make a qualitative leap.

Project design

Complex problems arise in systems with multiple sectors, actors, and stakeholders. Synergos understood that improving education in Pará required systemic understanding and vision, and an approach that stimulated and valued collaboration between different sectors. With this in mind, the Pact was designed to bring various sector stakeholders together to forge a common purpose, including governmental actors from within and beyond the education department, social actors from the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multilateral organizations, teachers, parents, and students.

In facilitating the design and implementation of the Pact, Synergos used an approach that recognized the importance of personal transformation, associated with systemic thinking and trust-building. A key element was to identify and strengthen bridging leaders, capable of building trust and bridging divides across diverse groups. Typically,

Synergos uses processes of Inner Work to kindle a sense of individual purpose and enable individual leaders and groups to recognize and overcome their own obstacles to building the trusting, and trustworthy, relationships needed for collaboration. In this case, however, Inner Work was not a feature in the Pact's formation.

For the partnership approach to work in addressing the education problem in Pará, there were three crucial conditions. Partners had to recognize the urgency of the problem and believe in the possibility of transforming current realities; they had to be willing to work in partnership; and funding was needed to enable them to implement commonly agreed programs and establish a basic level of trust.

Synergos acted as the backbone organization. In consultation with the state government, a Synergos team developed a common agenda and processes for mobilizing and motivating partners. The team also established decentralized governance processes, and facilitated engaging forms of communication and organizational learning.³ This was a complex arrangement, consistent with the

Figure 1: The Pact's seven key expected results

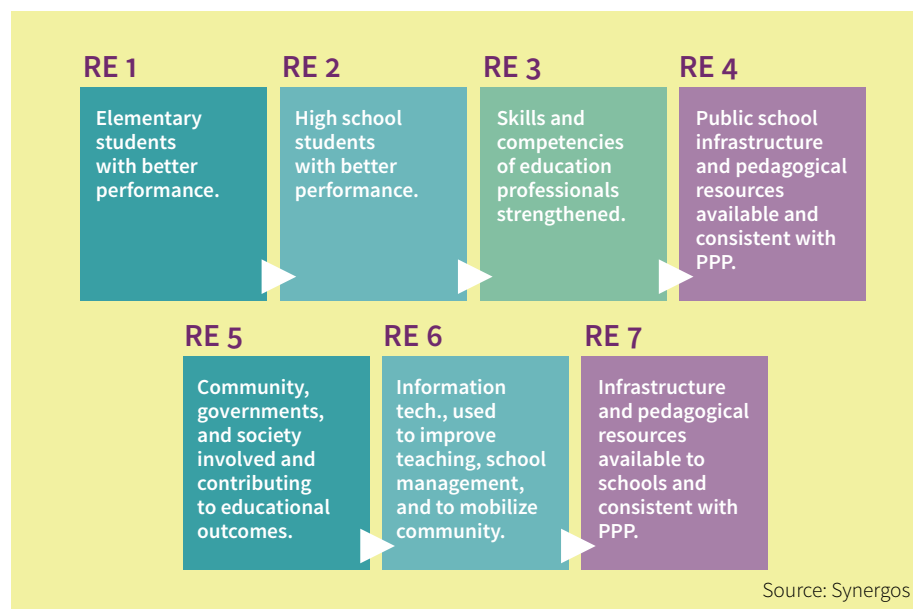


Figure 2: The 40 municipalities of the Pact for Education in Pará



complexity of the challenge. It required changes to traditional, engrained ways of thinking and being. For the government, this meant bringing non-traditional actors to the planning table and understanding the potential—and challenges—of collaborating with companies, universities, and civil society.

Implementation

The state government worked with a group of corporations, foundations, and NGOs—united under the Partner Organizations Group—to design and launch the Pact. The group only defined one major goal for the project: to generate a 30 percent increase in Pará’s position in Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) ranking, by 2017.⁴ Performance indicators were identified for the Pact’s activities. Indicators included: student performance, teacher competence, school infrastructure, the use of information technology for teaching and school management, and multi-sectoral involvement in improving education outcomes.

Though the Pact only had one goal, there were several obstacles to be overcome to implement the project. First, various actors, from various spheres, had to be mobilized – from the state government to teachers, parents, and students in schools. Maintaining communications between so many actors was also presented challenges. So, too, did the geography of Pará, with enormous distances and poor transportation in several places. Changes in public administration, disputed electoral processes, and teachers’ strikes all added to the difficulties. No fewer than five secretaries of education were replaced during the period in which the Pact was active.

In the face of these challenges, the Partner Organizations Group made a strategic decision to work with municipalities that were willing to commit to the Pact’s premises and act systemically to achieve its goal.

Of the 144 municipalities in Pará, in 2015, 18 became Pact pilot municipalities. The following year, 22 new cities joined, bringing the total number of pilot municipalities to 40. Pilot municipalities received close support from the Synergos team, and partner organizations helped to mobilize their peers—bringing in new partners who

were more clearly aligned with local demands. Ultimately, these cities became proof of concept for the Pact, showing its concrete effects on improving education.

The first phase of the Pact for Education, between 2012 and 2015, demonstrated the effectiveness of multi-sector partnerships. During this period, Pará increased its IDEB rating at all levels, obtaining the nation's second-highest growth rate at the high school level. It also increased educational attainment levels from 8.5 years to 9.1 years of schooling, and increased the percentage of young high school graduates from 35 percent to 40.2 percent.⁵

These results seemed to show that 'when you all gather around a dream' – when education professionals, students, family members, entrepreneurs and other social actors integrate their efforts towards a common goal—'that dream becomes achievable'.⁶

Regrettably, the good results were not sustained. In 2017, IDEB ratings showed poor results for all of Brazil and Pará fell short of meeting the Pact's targets and did not successfully increase its position in index by 30 percent. Despite these shortcomings, on average, the 40 pilot municipalities still achieved better results than cities that were not part of the Pact. This suggested that it was possible to achieve the Pact's goal, if the principles of multi-sector partnerships were implemented more effectively. One pilot municipality, Ulianópolis, stands out as an exemplary success story of the Pact.

The case of Ulianópolis

In 2017, out of 144 cities in the state of Pará, Ulianópolis showed some of the best results. For the early years of schooling (grades one through five), Ulianópolis achieved an IDEB rating of 6.0, exceeding the Pact's 5.5 target for the region. Notably, this goal was expected by 2021, and was surpassed four years earlier than expected, in 2017. For the final years of compulsory education (grades six through nine), the city achieved a rating of 4.8, which is solid progress toward the 5.1 target established for 2021.⁷ Because of these exceptional ratings, the city has been invited to share its experiences with other municipalities, serving as a reference point for success and change.

After the formal end of the Pact in 2018, a new version of the Pact was launched in Ulianópolis: In April 2019, the Entrepreneurial Educator Project was born.

What accounts for the success of multi-sector partnerships in education in Ulianópolis? The openness of the Ulianópolis municipal administration—especially the Education Department—to building multi-sector partnerships was directly responsible. So, too, was the visible commitment of the city's Secretary of Education.

The city's history and economic development may also help explain why the municipality was eager to implement a collaborative initiative. Ulianópolis is a relatively new city—pioneers who settled in the region began to arrive in the 1960s, attracted by access to land and the potential of forest exploitation. In the 1970s, the opening of the Belem-Brasília Highway, connecting the region to larger metropolitan areas, increased the pace of settlement and economic development.

Today, Ulianópolis has a population of around 58,000 people. About 46 percent of the population lives on less \$153 per month.⁸ Ulianópolis is a poor city, where the growth of mechanized agroindustry has changed the kinds of jobs available to residents while also increasing the level of skill required to obtain and keep those jobs. This imposes a pressure on the educational system, one taken seriously by Municipal Secretary of Education, Aurelino Gomes.

Aurelino believes that education cannot be solved solely by the schools. In his view, any solution is multifaceted and should involve multiple actors:

For me, it is clear that this view is true. When I started working in this area, many years ago, education was very bad in Ulianópolis. The proof that I made the right decision is to see how much we have improved over those years.

Change had been already happening in Ulianópolis, but was strengthened when the city entered into the Pact for Education. The Synergos team supported the staff of the Municipal Secretary of Education and assisted in building the first collaborative bridges, especially with local businessmen and religious leaders. The Pact's Municipal

Committee was a key element for organizing collaborative work, and establishing goals and possibilities for engagement.

Aldenice Alves Lopes, Director of the Alexandre Bergamin Municipal School, explains how the Pact created important effects:

In many schools, people—fathers and mothers—have a great deal of difficulty talking to teachers, to the management. We changed that! My room, for example, is right at the entrance of the school and is always with the doors open. We are always willing to talk to the community. In this sense, the Pact was fundamental. This partnership must not be broken. Let more partners come to talk and work with us. Because we have obtained magnificent results. Within the school, we perceive this difference in our student's learning and in the motivation of the school staff. Not only with the teachers, but also with the whole team.⁹

Local respondents for this case study highlighted that they were attracted to the Pact for its vision of collaboration that went beyond the mere donation of money. Collaboration was taking place on a deeper basis, from a common understanding of the benefits of quality education for the whole municipality, including entrepreneurs.

Marcos Zancaner, CEO of the biofuel company Pagrisa, reflects on his journey with the Pact, learning how to get involved with education, even as a businessman:

I thought the concept of the Pact was correct. Although, I did not understand where the businessmen would enter into the education process, since the entrepreneur is more focused on producing than teaching, right? I even started to read and learn more about education, to learn how school management is assessed. At first, we found it a very great challenge, this interaction of private initiative with public initiative. There were doubts whether the speed of work would be compatible with what we were accustomed to. But soon we understood that there was a space for collaboration, to give students a vision of the future.¹⁰

Although Ulianópolis does not have a big river, it is an example of harnessing the possibility of a high-quality education system to *embanzeirar* the waves and climb to new heights.

Reflections on the Pact's challenges and legacy

Perceptions about the Pact's effectiveness are multiple. Looking at the process as a whole, in the first phase from conceptualization and initial implementation, between 2012 and 2015, the Pact advanced clearly towards its goal. Stakeholders were actively engaged in the Pact for a variety of reasons, including the novelty of the process, the desire to get involved and learn, and the leadership of Synergos, as an encouraging, convening body.

In 2016, by joint agreement, the office of the Secretary of Education for Pará took over as the Pact's backbone organization. Initially, it was envisioned that the program would be integrated and adopted into government policy. Unfortunately, with this transition, the challenges of fostering multi-sector partnerships became more evident.

The state government was grappling with policy and management difficulties, several private partners withdrew from the Pact, and the Office of the Pará Secretary of Education lacked the capacity required to take responsibility for the Pact.¹¹ Interviews for this case study also suggest that the state government had no interest in transforming the Pact from a government program into a state policy. As a result, the initiative became subject to political moods and instabilities.

Political groups opposed to the standing government of Pará were preparing for the pending elections in 2018. Political jockeying distracted government's attention from the Pact. Slowly but surely, the Pact's cohesion weakened until, finally, following the 2018 elections and a change in political power in Pará, the Pact in its original form came to an end.

What might we learn from the Pact's challenges and eventual closure after so successful a beginning? And what are its strongest legacies?

An important lesson is that complex, multi-sectoral interventions need time to consolidate, especially when they aim to be integrated into a state-wide government policy. João Meirelles, Executive Director at the Peabiru Institute and a participant in the Pact's initial phase, puts it this way:

First, I think the Pact needed more time to consolidate. There is no miracle, particularly in education. And then this business of approaching a whole state is also very difficult. Even more because in the structure of government we see that nothing has advanced. The State Secretary of Education would need to be transformed. I think the program failed to do what I call 'social acupuncture'. We did not really go into the government structure.¹²

Another clear lesson is that complex change initiatives of this kind depend crucially on committed government leaders. This kind of commitment was evident at municipal level in the success of Ulianópolis, as much as it was wanting at the state level. For Ida Pietricovsk Oliveira, a communication specialist from UNICEF to the Amazon region, the commitment of government leaders make a critical difference between mere words and effective social action in complex change initiatives:

The Pact for Education in the speech was impressive, but the practice did not significantly alter the data that we have today on education in Pará. There was an expectation that the State Secretary of Education would be restructured and this has not happened. Success stories, such as Ulianópolis, show the importance of the commitment of the administrator, the local manager. The people perceive that the results are significant where there is a real commitment of the government.¹³

Whatever the Pact's difficulties and disappointments, it has left a strong legacy of learning among key actors, who gained practical knowledge of how to work with multi-sector partnerships and deepened their understanding of how collaboration strengthens projects and actions for change.



Synergos photo

For some, the experience of collaboration also kindled a different sense of personal responsibility and purpose. So although the formation and implementation of the Pact did not draw on Synergos's methodologies for Inner Work, involvement in the Pact was a transformative experience for some of the key actors.

Olenita Barreto, responsible for institutional relations at Vivo, a telecommunications company, was one of the Pact's key initial partners. She reflects on her experience of participating in the Pact enlarged her sense of responsibility and her understanding of schooling as a public good:

The participation in the Pact, especially in its initial phase, helped me to strengthen my perception of my responsibility and of the company towards the local community, with the local school. Even if I didn't study

*there, if my children did not study there, but this school is here by my side. The school is the cradle of a person who will like to read, to be interested in many things, to grow. And everyone wins with this.*¹⁴

For others, the experience helped to deepen their self-knowledge or brought about a greater awareness of the collective good. Cristian Lilian Vilhena, a teacher and manager of educational resources at Ananindeua, a Pact pilot municipality, reflects on how participation in the Pact helped her to realize her particular strengths:

*For me, participating in the Pact was important, as a person and as a professional, for putting into practice my role in things that I did not know were inside me...I recognized my identity as an articulator, as a strategist, after participating in the Pact.*¹⁵

For Ana Hage, participation in the Pact shifted her expanded her awareness. Until she joined the Pact, she focused on her own individual responsibilities and concerns:

I worked a lot on what was mine, in my world, on my objectives. Even when I was principal of an elementary school, I only thought about it, and nothing else.

Participation in the Pact expanded her consciousness of collective concerns and purposes:

I think the big change from this experience with the Pact was to pay attention to the collective.

Along with this change came a deep appreciation of the partnership.¹⁶

What have we learned?

Three main areas of learning emerge from the collaborative venture to improve education in Pará through the Pact:

Personal change through collaboration

The experience of collaborating around a common cause can transform people. It may deepen their sense of purpose and change their agency and understanding—

of themselves, of their relationships, of their place in a larger system. But, the transforming power of collaboration may need reflection, and an open heart and mind, to activate it. Interviews for this case study revealed that because of the Pact, some participants reached a deeper level of self-understanding, recognizing their strengths and turning this insight into action. Others came to a wider sense of responsibility, saw connections not noticed before, or became aware of the collective good.



Photo: Renato Guimaraes
School Director Aldenice Alves Lopes shows the positive results of Alexandre Bergamin School in the IDEB ranking.

Government commitment and capacity

Without strong commitment from influential government officials and without champions who are also bridging leaders, collaborative ventures struggle to yield and sustain change. Instead, efforts may become sporadic or flounder, after achieving small pockets of change. If an initiative depends on structural change within government departments, this may be hard to achieve. Political change may also bring changes in policy, removal of project champions, and changes in sympathy for the cause.



The official launch of the Pact for Education in the state of Pará.

Time and motivation

Working in partnership is challenging. When partners have little experience collaborating, when they see partnerships as commercial transactions, or when they are suspicious of other sectors, it takes time to build the trusting and trustworthy relationships that underpin collaboration. Partners who join a collaborative venture for the wrong reasons may withdraw when the going gets tough or the expected rewards do not materialize. The intrinsic motivation of wanting to improve a system and believing that this is possible if people act together is what helps hold a collaborative effort together through times of challenge and conflict.

Conclusion

The Pact has left a legacy of understanding and collaboration in Ulianópolis. This suggests that reflective, multi-sector partnerships can effectively improve external processes while also fostering internal changes with participants. By harnessing Bridging Leadership to highlight the importance of collaboration, the Pact changed how participants approached the problems facing the education system in Pará. The case of Ulianópolis is a tangible example of this approach's power.

Renato Guimaraes

Notes

¹ Synergos, Pact for Education in Pará - Report and Evaluation (New York: The Synergos Institute, 2018), 6.

² Synergos: Pact for Education in Pará, 6.

³ Synergos, "Pact for Education in Pará", 6.

⁴ The Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) is an indicator to measure the level of quality of education. The IDEB considers two important components of education quality: (a) school flow (promotion, grade retention, school evasion); and (b) student performance in annual national assessments. The combination of these two factors results in a grade ranging from zero to 10. The index is calculated at three stages of education: 5th and 9th grades in elementary school and 3rd grade in high school. IDEB results are released every two years.

⁵ Synergos, "Pact for Education in Pará", 128.

⁶ Synergos, "Pact for Education in Pará", 112.

⁷ Secretary of Education of Ulianópolis, Estudo de Caso – Ulianópolis (Ulianópolis: 2019).

⁸ IBGE - Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, Panorama of the city of Ulianópolis, accessed May 27th, 2019. <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/pa/ulianopolis/panorama>.

⁹ Aldenice Alves Lopes, interview to author (Ulianópolis, February 25, 2019).

¹⁰ Marcos Zancaner, interview (Ulianópolis: February 25, 2019).

¹¹ Synergos, "Pact for Education in Pará", 146.

¹² João Meirelles, interview (Belém: February 19, 2019).

¹³ Ida Pietricovsk Oliveira, interview (Belém: February 27, 2019).

¹⁴ Olenita Barreto, interview (Belém: February 22, 2019).

¹⁵ Cristian Lilian Vilhena, interview (Ananindeua: February 27, 2019).

¹⁶ Ana Claudia Hage, 2019.

A blink of transformation: Building trust in Ethiopia's malt barley value chain

Girma Kebede and his family live in Tuqa, a village in a barley production region in the highlands of Ethiopia's state of Oromia. Life has not always been easy for Girma. For years, he grew subsistence crops and eked out a living for his family, like many other smallholders in Ethiopia. Starting in 2013, things began to change for Girma. In addition to working as a farmer, he became a business person who multiplies improved malt barley seed to sell to other farmers, while also supplying malt barley to the Assela Malt Factory and to the Heineken and BGI breweries.

Girma tells his story:

Where there are challenges, there are also opportunities. In everyday life, we will be faced with challenges—such as lack of enough food, enough cash, and so on. But we should also understand that taking on such challenges is a part of a life process ...of developing as a person. Learning from the agricultural extension experts I started my business with a loan from Wassa Micro Finance. I decided to practice a new kind of farming, to produce improved seeds of malt barley and to commercialize. I bought a share from Assela Malt Factory for 100,000 birr¹, and have a working capital of 500,000 birr. I am now a rich farmer, feed my family well, and have cash to run my farm business. I've also constructed a modern house in the nearby town of Boqoji.... The challenge has now become an opportunity for me.²

What has enabled Girma to turn challenges into opportunities? His personal drive, no doubt. Girma also mentions micro financing and support from agricultural extension services. Yet there is a bigger story to be told—about how trust-building, bridging leadership, collaboration, and cluster commercialization are helping to transform Ethiopia's agro-economy and open the path to better livelihoods for small farmers.

Project landscape

Agriculture is the backbone of Ethiopia's economy, and the government recognizes that agricultural development is vital for poverty reduction, food security, and economic growth. For centuries, Ethiopia was principally an agrarian society. Peasant farmers made their livelihoods through traditional methods of tilling and herding for food production. Until recent times, little had been done to integrate smallholders into the mainstream economy or to improve their productivity.

Consider malt barley, the crop at the heart of Girma's story.

Barley is a cool-season crop, well adapted to high altitudes. While barley has long been grown for home consumption, malt barley production took off in the 1970s. With demand driven by beer consumption, malt barley needs to be distributed through the market—it is used entirely in malt factories and breweries. In recent decades, Ethiopia's growing cities have brought growing demand for beer, opening markets for the crop. But still, a large part of the malt barley from the fields, and malt from the malt factories, has had to be imported

In Ethiopia, barley production is concentrated in the Arsi-Bale zones of the Oromia Regional State. Productivity in this region is higher than the national average, at 4 metric tons per hectare. Though malt barley production has risen, a large portion of Ethiopia's malt barley still has to be imported.

The country's first malting plant opened in Addis Ababa in 1974, followed by the Assela Malt Factory in 1984, under government ownership. Under Ethiopia's socialist regime in the 1980s, the factory got most of its barley from state farms and producer cooperatives. Small-holder farmers had little opportunity to produce and market malt barley. With the end of socialism in the 1990s, the government began to promote production by small farmers.

A turning point came in 1994 with the Ethiopia launched the Agricultural Development-Led Initiative, which gave farming a central place in the country's economy. The initiative sought to advance the economy and deal with poverty and food insecurity by increasing the productivity of small farmers through research-generated technologies; increasing the supply of industrial and export crops; and rehabilitating Ethiopia's natural resource base. For this and subsequent strategies to work, Ethiopia needed an integrated system linking key actors in the agro-economy. But, as many studies show, the agricultural sector remained fragmented. Poor linkages, weak leadership, and a lack of motivation hindered agricultural transformation.

Ethiopia's two Growth and Transformation Plans (2011-2015 and 2015-2020) presented a bold, integrated vision, with agricultural commercialisation as the main driver of economic growth. To assure effective implementation and help to integrate the system, the government established the Agricultural Transformation Agency in 2010.

For Ethiopia's agricultural sector to become a thriving market economy, strong value chains are needed, with high levels of trust between value chain actors. With this in mind, Synergos began working closely with the Agricultural Transformation Agency and other government agencies and actors along the value chain. Synergos had a clear goal: to foster more trusting, open, and effective relationships, ultimately enabling collaborative efforts to strengthen value chains and improve the livelihoods of small farmers.

The project

In 2011, Synergos co-designed a project to help the government realize its plans for agricultural transformation. With initial funding from the Gates Foundation, the project aimed to build capacity in the institutions most relevant to agriculture, focusing on the role of leadership and collaboration among key stakeholders in the agro-economy across Ethiopia's four biggest regional states.

The project aimed to:

- Strengthen collaboration and alignment among partner institutions.
- Shift mindsets to systems thinking and collaborative problem solving
- Introduce a cluster approach to induce agricultural commercialization and enhance specialization and market integration.
- Create market alliances to strengthen value chains and encourage mechanized farming.

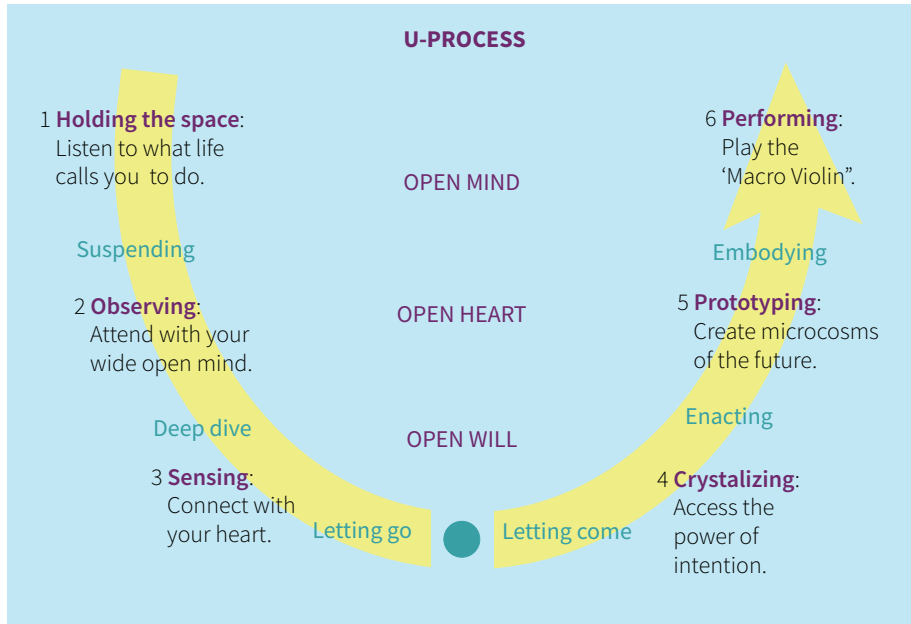
The first phase of the project (2011 to 2014) concentrated on building capacity and synergies within the Agricultural Transformation Agency; the second phase (2015 to 2017) brought in other key institutions in the sector, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, and the Federal Cooperative Agency.

The project design included processes to enable leaders to recognize and surmount the inner obstacles that hindered their performance and their willingness to collaborate with others, within and across sectors. From their experience India and elsewhere, Synergos believed that these Inner Work methodologies helped to create an enabling environment for trust and collaboration.

Learning journeys can be a powerful tool for opening hearts and minds, enabling leaders to see with fresh eyes and better sense the complexity of the systems in which they work. Early in the project, Synergos arranged a learning journey to the Rift Valley area for 49 staff members of the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA). Agency staff spent 48 hours in a home stay with smallholder families, many of whom were still engaged in subsistence farming. Prior to the journey and with the help of a community-based organisation, Synergos spent several days meeting with the families, explaining the larger project objectives, and getting their input and feedback on the project.

The home stays opened the eyes of agency staff to the challenges of poverty facing smallholders and their families. In a reflective session after the learning journey, participants shared moments of truth and moments of inspiration from their home

Figure 1: Theory U-process



stay experiences. Most of them had never before spoken to a farmer or been inside a farmer’s house. The learning journey helped them understand the purpose of the ATA and why its work was so crucial. They also came to recognize that farmers are knowledgeable about their farming needs.

Although the ATA was created to support the Ministry of Agriculture in catalyzing action for agricultural transformation, many misunderstandings around roles and responsibilities created tension between different departments in the Ministry and with the ATA. At their request, Synergos organized a series of workshops for collaborative learning, to build trust and alignment so as to achieve a common sense of purpose and enable the co-creation of solutions. Workshop participants included senior leadership in the ATA, the Ministry, and the Federal Cooperative Agency, as well as staff working on specific issues (such as agricultural research and extension).

Following the Theory-U process developed by the Presencing Institute (Figure 1), the workshop facilitators guided participants—individually and collectively— to reflect on their own personal leadership journeys, to recognize what was blocking them from being innovative, and to identify leverage points to initiate change and envisage a desired future.

Listening, candid conversation, and dialogue walks with colleagues helped participants to see themselves and others from new angles, to recognize which of their long-held assumptions needed to subside to let new ways of thinking and doing emerge. By modeling with toy blocks and other craft materials, participants built representations of the current situation and explored new possibilities. Difficult and candid conversations (about people’s doubts and fears, about their distrust and judgments of one another, about their lack of belief in new possibilities) yielded an agreement to work more closely.

In case study interviews, leaders who participated in the Theory U process testified to how it transformed their leadership practices. They came to understand that listening to one another and working together for a common goal is imperative, that an individual or an institution alone—no matter how much effort they exert —cannot give a complete solution to developmental problems.

For His Excellency Usman Suru of the Federal Cooperative Agency, the process was transformative:

I found that I was completely wrong as a manager. I assumed my idea is always right and used to give only direction to subordinate staff members, but have never been successful, and my organization was at risk of failure. From the workshop I learnt that “mine is always right” is wrong. Now I am always giving stakeholders opportunities to express their ideas and opinions. Now I am completely different. I am open-minded for changes that are making real differences in my organization.

Following the workshops at national level, the work of collective learning, trust building, and collaboration then moved to regional level, where Synergos organized similar workshops and activities to enable stakeholders to create a joint vision for alignment and to better understand the challenges they faced.

A different but related strand of the project focussed on building agricultural cluster commercialization. Broadly understood, clusters are geographic groupings of connected businesses and related organizations—from government officials and research institutions working together toward the same goal to farmers sharing machinery and land. The idea originated in a request from the prime minister at the time, who wanted a way of integrating efforts in geographically targeted areas of development, strengthening value chains for selected agricultural commodities. The idea matured through a developmental dialogue between the Agricultural Transformation Agency and Synergos, who co-convened a series of workshops to create a shared understanding of cluster commercialisation.

Specifically, workshops and training sessions aimed to enhance leadership capacity and develop structures for a cluster approach. Key actors from the malt barley value chain participated in an inception workshop in 2015, including representatives from farmers' cooperatives and cooperative unions, breweries, micro-finance institutions, traders, and government institutions—many breaking patterns and re-thinking ways of working for the first time. Together they established the Malt Barley Transformation Cluster. In parallel, value chain alliances were formed for each agricultural commodity—to improve market functioning, speed up transactions for inputs and products, and coordinate the efforts of value chain actors.

At the same time, Secretariats for Agricultural Cluster Commercialization coordinated the transformation agenda. To this end, Synergos gave financial and technical support for establishing regional secretariats (now devolved to Agricultural Transformation Agency branch offices), and brought in international consultants to assist with high-level planning and development.

Outcomes

The project, which encouraged trust-building and collaboration towards a common purpose, helped trigger crucial changes in the agro-economy—for small farmers and other actors in the malt barley value chain, but also more widely across Ethiopia's agricultural sector.

Participation in the Theory-U process helped leaders move away from old ways of thinking, activating their agency and opening their hearts and minds to co-create real possibilities for systemic change. Some senior leaders experienced a profound personal transformation.

The testimony of His Excellency Usman Suru, a General Director of the Federal Cooperative Agency, reveals how an inner work approach shifted his thinking and enabled him to become a bridging leader:



I was just appointed as Commissioner of the Federal Cooperative Agency when the project was launched. I attended training on the Theory-U approach for leadership, for about 2.5 days. The training was so inspiring; it was all about the mind set of leaders to listen to people to establish common understanding for common vision and toward common goals.

I opened my eyes to see the situation of my organization both from internal and external relations. By then, I was frustrated as my organization, the Federal Cooperative Agency was literally about to collapse. The ... agency had historic leadership and management problems. It had nine directorates, which were totally independent, lacked common vision and had absolutely no common understanding.

After the training, I decided to first focus to identify and solve the internal problem. The top leaders, the management staff and senior experts (about 32 individuals) conducted the problem identification in 2016. Through the internal assessment, we learned that about only 15 percent of the staff had positive perceptions of their organization and that internal alignment among the Federal Cooperative Agency directors was absent. This problem further caused the Agency to have poor alignment and harmonized working relationship with the Regional Cooperative Agency, Agricultural Transformation Agency, and Ministry of Agriculture. In conclusion, the root cause of the problem of the Federal Cooperative Agency was primarily the top managers and the directors, partly associated with corruption and personal conflicts.

Based on the result of the first assessment to identify the cause of the problems, remedial measures were taken with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Besides shifting leadership styles through these personal learning journeys, the project nurtured a sense of agency, helping create a common vision, a strong culture of collaboration, and more trusting relationships within and between key

organisations. Speaking of the Federal Cooperative Agency, His Excellency Usman Suru reflects: “The capacity building by Synergos has contributed the biggest share to the agency’s success! Finally, we proved the Theory-U is a modern witchdoctor that redeemed our agency!”

Synergies across the agricultural sector are now much stronger. Dr. Adugna Wakjira was a Deputy Manager of Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research when he was introduced to the Theory-U process and practices of Inner Work. He remembers how weak synergies were undermining transformation efforts: the many institutions working to improve the agricultural sector “lacked a culture of working together for a common goal.”

The cluster approach has done much to build trust among value chain actors and create more effective market linkages. While inner work may help to create a more enabling environment for trust, there are other important mechanisms for building trust and trustworthy practices for the common good. Stakeholder platforms and contracts are two of these trust-enabling mechanisms, helping a value chain to become a chain of trust.

Generally, stakeholder platforms, like the Agricultural Cluster Councils and Value Chain Alliances, help to enhance collaboration and a shared understanding of Ethiopia’s transformation agenda. The Agricultural Transformation Agency, Ministry of Agriculture, the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, Federal Cooperative Agency and Bureau of Trade, as well as donor agencies like the World Bank, are all parties to the alliances. Having a common platform has improved joint problem identification and problem solving. Information sharing and participatory decision making increasingly became part of leadership practice.

The Malt Barley Value Chain Alliance identifies and prioritizes problems, solicits solutions and provides advisory services to value chain actors, strengthening their relationships and sense of common purpose. It also conducts market surveys annually to establish floor prices for selected commodities. The floor price is meant to safeguard farmers against loss and motivate production; it serves as a reference point for further negotiation. Generally, contractual arrangements among various

value chain actors help build trust. Not only do they secure a fair price to small framers for their products, they also help them gain access to improved seed and fertiliser. At the same time, contracts guarantee supplies for the malt factory and the brewers. With these guaranteed mutual benefits, contracts build more trusting relationships along the value chain.

Farmers' organizations are important value chain actors. Cooperative Unions, especially, have been decisive in strengthening relations between farmers and other actors in the value chain.

In May 2018, ownership of the Assela Malt Factory was transferred from the government to the Oromia Agricultural Cooperative Union Federation. The contracts are much firmer since many unions are now factory shareholders. Girma, the farmer in the opening story, owns a share through his union.

Also in 2018, the factory entered into contract farming with 17 unions and two cooperatives, agreeing to harvest 56,100 tons of malt barley. This extends to specific price-guaranteed contracts with individual smallholders. The factory provided a total of 64 million birr in interest-free loans to farmers, supporting inputs of seed and fertilizer as well as mechanized farming. It also provides capacity building and other support, guaranteeing the quality of the product. Additionally, it supplies trucks to transport barley from the cooperatives and unions to the factory.

Thanks in part to this trust, there are also contracts between the Assela factory and beer breweries; breweries are also expanding direct contracts with farmers. Breweries are eager to increase the local supply of malt barley, while also securing its quality and reliability. Nearly all the breweries have thus been motivated to move toward contract farming, usually facilitated by the cooperative unions. Their long-term aim—still distant—is to enable local farmers to meet 100 percent of the country's total demand.

Diageo was the first brewer to turn to contract farming in Ethiopia, and Heineken followed. Diageo works primarily through cooperatives; its scheme includes 6,000 small farmers, via 31 primary cooperatives and five cooperative unions. Heineken,

which focuses on relationships with larger, lead farmers, initially included 3,000 farmers in its scheme; the number has since risen to 10,000.

A major result of the brewery contracts has been the introduction of better varieties of seed. In 2016, Heineken introduced Arsi-Bale farmers to two new varieties called Traveler and Grace. Traveler is especially productive: farmers are now obtaining an average yield of 4.5 tons per hectare using this seed, and its productivity can reach as high as 7 tons of high-quality malt barley. It has become the favoured variety among local farmers. This is a successful collaboration between brewer and farmers, but it reaches beyond them: Heineken credits Traveler's success to research and seed multiplication enterprises, specifically Oromia Seed Enterprise, Holeta Research Centre, and Ethiopia Seed Enterprise.

Spurred by stronger relationships and deeper connections between stakeholders, farmers' organizations now do much more than provide fertilizer and seeds to small farmers; they have expanded into providing storage, shipping the crops to the malt factory, mechanization, among many other services. In turn, these services have deepened farmers' trust in their organizations, sparking growths in membership.



Synergos photo

The Lencha Cooperative is an example of successful expansion. Cooperative chairman Mr. Hussien Abdi is a farmer, with little formal education. He says that, in 2013, 75 farmers established the cooperative with 7,500 birr of capital. At first, growth was slow, with capital reaching only 60,000 birr by 2017. Now, the cooperative has expanded to 450,000 birr with 350 farmer members. Hussien reflects on his own farming and productivity following these improvements:

I am over 65 years. I am not old, and even if I get old, farmers never retire. I have a big farm, about 10 hectares. For a long time, I've been curiously looking for new technologies. I dominantly produce wheat and barley, and also beans, linseed, and other crops. I started using improved seeds of wheat and barley more than 10 years ago. But my farming over the last three years is much different. I am well connected to the Heineken Company and I have a new variety of malt barley called Traveler, which is highly productive.

The extension experts of the Galema Union and those of the Bureaus of Agriculture are advising me. I produce 20 to 30 metric tons of malt barley every year and sell to our Cooperative Association for over 300,000 birr every year. The Cooperative Association sells much of it to the Assela Malt Factory and some to Heineken.

I never dreamed I could earn this much money! I have a dream now for my community—buy a tractor or combine harvester, and supply the service to the community. The demand for this farm machinery is sky-rocketing.

This story, like Girma's, illustrates how a collaborative cluster approach is contributing to agricultural transformation and paving the way for malt barley farmers to improve their productivity and incomes.

Conclusion

Ethiopia's malt barley value chain in Ethiopia offers great growth potential. Such an effort requires broad vision and cooperation among many actors. It is here that the Synergos support was the most valuable—providing guidance to help build bridges, motivate leaders, shift mindsets, and bolster collaboration. Inner work and collaborative thinking through the Theory-U process enabled the emergence of several bridging leaders within Ethiopia's government agencies, while promoting a sense of common purpose among these leaders. These practices have successfully increased synergies between sectoral actors, including practical procedures for cooperation and accountability. This broadened vision also strengthened the cluster approach to agro-industrial development by improving relationships among value chain actors. Notably, farmers and their organizations increased their ability to contribute to the economy and provide for their families.

In terms of inner work and bridging leadership, results among grassroots-level experts and government agencies have not matched those among higher-level leaders. Inner work as a core element of bridging leadership has not extended down to all levels of the system. Still, the benefits of collaboration through a cluster approach are evident. The cluster approach—supporting the emergence of leaders who can bridge differences and bring people together, acting in concert under a common purpose—clearly supported Ethiopia's agricultural transformation.

Beyene Tadesse

Notes

¹Exchange rate: 1 USD = 29.2460 birr, on August 21, 2019.

²Extract from an interview for this case study.

The courage to lead: A journey in tackling undernutrition in Maharashtra, India

In September 2001, the deaths of 14 young children from the nomadic Bhil tribal community in the state India's Maharashtra state grabbed government and media attention. The deaths, due to undernutrition, occurred in Bhadali, a village 70 km from the historic city of Aurangabad. Despite the government's significant investments in child nutrition services, the tragedy was yet another reminder of the continuing shame of undernutrition among India's poorest families.

Maharashtra's Aurangabad division is a drought-prone pocket of deep poverty, with a recurring history of caste-based conflict. In 2001, Venkatesan Ramani was the area's divisional commissioner. Following the news of the children's deaths, he and his colleagues launched emergency measures to support the affected families, but Ramani was determined to find a way to end the bigger problem at hand—severe undernutrition. Why were basic services not reaching pockets of the population just a short distance away from a major city? Why were services from India's flagship nutrition program, the Integrated Child Development Services, not working for those who most needed them? To answer these questions, Ramani convened some of the best thinkers—including government officials and experts from organisations such as UNICEF – to work on the problem. Known as the Marathwada Initiative, over the next two years, this group led a body of pioneering work, paving the way for a wider discussion on child nutrition.

Child undernutrition is not a problem exclusive to India. The world witnesses unnecessary child deaths every day, generation after generation, yet people become inured to this reality. Dutch-born Tex Gunning, President of Unilever Bestfoods Asia, was not prepared to accept this as normal. He was determined to place children's nutritional needs at the heart of Unilever's business mission. In partnership with Generon Consulting, Gunning led Unilever's commitment to improving the nutrition and wellbeing of Asia's children. They began this work in India, a complex environment where the problem manifested at the largest scale. Gunning was convinced that the paradigm that divided the world into the social, private, and

government sectors created artificial barriers—causing unnecessary deaths. He believed that only combined forces of all three sectors, working together at all levels, could solve this multifaceted issue of undernutrition.

Similar thinking had been emerging elsewhere. After almost a decade of supporting a movement of community foundations around the world, Synergos and its founder, Peggy Dulany, had come to realize the value of 'bridging organizations'. Rooted in grassroots communities, bridging organizations reached out to other segments of society, playing a critical role in cultivating the trust necessary for collaboration. Leaders who gravitated toward bridging organizations themselves demonstrated an ability to convene diverse groups. But it became clear to Synergos that internal obstacles often prevented leaders from realizing their potential as 'bridging leaders'.



The pace and complexity of development challenges left little room for them to reflect, nurture themselves, or work on overcoming these obstacles. Synergos committed itself to supporting bridging leaders around the world to overcome their inner obstacles to fulfilling their purpose, bridge divides, and collaborate with others to address complex problems. Generon Consulting was a helpful companion in this journey.

Eager to apply these learnings to a complex problem, Synergos joined Unilever and UNICEF in an effort to combat child undernutrition in India. The state of Maharashtra presented a promising site for this work. It had a newly approved state nutrition mission and a committed team with strong leadership from Ramani, who had been appointed as Director General of the Maharashtra Rajmata Jijau Mother-Child Health and Nutrition Mission. If a multi-stakeholder partnership was successful in Maharashtra—with its diverse population of over 110 million people and its fair share of socio-economic and political challenges—it could yield important lessons for solving intractable problems elsewhere.

With this, the seed was sown for the Bhavishya Alliance, which operated in Maharashtra from 2006 to 2012, supporting and complementing state-run nutrition services.

Introduction

Between 2006 and 2012, the stunting rate among children under two years of age in Maharashtra reportedly declined by 15 percentage points (from 39 percent to 24 percent)—one of the fastest declines of stunting seen anywhere at any time.¹

What contributed to this success? In addition to the enabling environment in Maharashtra, collaboration and leadership for multi-sectoral action played an influential role.

It is in this context that we tell the story of the Bhavishya Alliance, which built on the success of the Marathwada Initiative and operated alongside the statewide nutrition mission from 2006-2012. The Bhavishya Alliance brought together government, corporate, and civil society actors with the purpose of accelerating the end of child

undernutrition in the state, using a new approach to collaboration and social change – an approach with Inner Work at its heart.

A complex problem and its context

Child undernutrition is not just a technical or biological challenge. It is a complex social problem with numerous manifestations and interrelated causes. The factors that influence a child's nutritional status may have lifelong consequences, and even span generations: human factors such as knowledge deficits or illiteracy; social issues, such as child marriage, gender, caste, and other forms of social inequality and apathy; economic issues such as poverty, unemployment, and itinerant work; and political factors such as poorly functioning government agencies.

The size and diversity of India's population, geography, and social organization add to the complexity. In Maharashtra, undernourished children may be from remote tribal communities, from informal urban settlements or construction sites in Mumbai, or from mainstream rural villages. These children are spread across an area of 307,713 square kilometers. A single solution to addressing undernutrition—designed for homogeneity—cannot succeed.

A new approach was needed. Recently, there has been growing recognition around the world of the need to invest in understanding how change occurs and how transformative change might be kindled around such a complex issue. One framework² distinguishes between first-order change (processes to improve the performance of an existing system); second-order change (addressing system shortcomings); and third-order change (fundamentally rethinking how an issue is conceptualized, including the roles and relationships of all parties in addressing it). Third-order changes are most effective at addressing complex problems because they address underlying systemic issues. This kind of change is hard. It requires letting go of cherished arrangements, roles, rules, and hierarchies. It calls for the transformation of individuals, relationships, and systemic patterns.³ This framework may help us understand the role that inner work may play in addressing a complex problem like undernutrition.

The Anganwadi in the memories of a young child in rural India

If you were born and raised in rural India, chances are your earliest memories of life and play would be from an anganwadi—a child care center run by the government’s Integrated Child Development Services program. Anganwadi means courtyard shelter, and like courtyards in so many traditional Indian homes, the anganwadi may have been the heart of your small village, and the anganwadi worker who ran the center, your first teacher outside your home.

When you were just a baby, local auxiliary nurse midwives or accredited social health activist aunties from the health department may have encouraged your mother to take you to an anganwadi for vaccinations and health check-ups, or to get advice on feeding, to collect supplementary food, or meet other mothers with new babies. When you turned three, you may have been sent there every day to play and learn with other preschoolers from your village. Once you got used to it, perhaps you looked forward to going there, wondering what you would get to eat for your hot meal or dry snack that day. You would think about the games you would play, and hope that your best friend would come too. You remember the mud-plastered walls filled with pictures, charts, and some of the drawings you and your friends made, the toys, and the nap mats hanging in a corner—many of them made by neighbors and your parents’ friends. On days you were ill or couldn’t go, your parents may have gone to the anganwadi to pick up a take-home snack for you.

You may remember some of the first songs, poems, dances, and games that your anganwadi aunty and helper aunty taught you—songs about the animals and plants in your village, or how to wash your hands. Sometimes if you and your friends were good, your anganwadi aunty may have taken you out to collect twigs and stones, and you all would sit under a shady tree playing counting games. On special occasions, or when aunty was expecting visitors you would watch her make a Rangoli.⁴ You may even have made your own first Rangoli at the anganwadi entrance, and for days after watched everyone carefully step around it.

As a young child, the anganwadi was the center of life in the village. You looked forward to people visiting the anganwadi. Sometimes, they would be neighbors bringing coconuts or fruit from their trees, or your mother’s group of friends preparing the meal for the day. The aunty from the health department would sometimes stop by and take medicines out of the locked box for a sick child or mother in your village. Every year there was a big celebration at the anganwadi for your village health and nutrition day, and you and your friends would practice a special song for all of the guests. You may remember the time a group of older children from the village came by and helped paint the walls of the anganwadi—they painted your favorite

story characters on the walls. Sometimes, if your parents left you at the anganwadi for the afternoon, you and your friends would silently eavesdrop on the meeting that the teenage girls had in the compound.

Every month, another aunty—the mukhiya sevika, or anganwadi worker supervisor—would come by to work with the anganwadi aunty. Together, they would pore over the big registers and talk about how you and your friends were growing. They would measure your arm circumference and weigh you. You may have been curious about the charts and tables. Sometimes, when your mother came to pick you up, the anganwadi aunty would show her these charts and they would talk about your weight and measurements.

You may longingly think back to these happy days—your first school, your first friends, and many other happy and memorable firsts.

Were you lucky enough to have memories such as these? If you came from a Dalit (low caste) family, or lived in the poorest areas of your district, like Bhadali village, would your neighborhood anganwadi have been as inviting? Would your parents have been encouraged to send you there? Could they afford to take you? If you were from a tribal family, would they have wanted you to go? Were there times when you came to the anganwadi excited for your morning snack just to be disappointed because they had run out of food, or the food stock was infested? Was there water at the center to wash your hands before you ate? Was there a bathroom and were you taught to use it?

Of the 1.36 million anganwadis in India, were you lucky enough to have attended one that made beautiful early memories?



These memories depict the systems that were already in place. Launched in 1975, the government of India's Integrated Child Development Services program serves children under six, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. Child care centers called anganwadis are at the core of the program, providing links to a range of government social service programs and infrastructure. With each anganwadi serving a population of approximately 800 people, in Maharashtra, some 108,000 anganwadis serve a population of 121 million people.

The Bhavishya Alliance

UNICEF, Unilever, and Synergos—which worked together to conceive the Bhavishya Alliance—believed that achieving sustainable change in a reasonable timeframe would require change from within. This included internal change in people, organizations, and sectors. To help participants go beyond their habitual, siloed ways of acting, the founders drew on Synergos' learning around Bridging Leadership⁵ and a promising approach to social change called Presencing,⁶ to embed practices to enable participants to connect their inner selves with their outer work. These inner work practices help people uncover and overcome individual and collective barriers that prevent them from engaging in new forms of collaboration or inhibit their openness to emerging solutions.

Building an alliance

As they launched the partnership with UNICEF and Unilever, Synergos sought a bridging leader who could bring a wide range of diverse actors to the table. Surita Sandosham, a lawyer by training, led the Rockefeller Foundation's Next Generation Leadership program. Convinced of the power of multi-sectoral collaboration to address complex problems, Surita was drawn to the opportunity to test this approach in a high-stakes environment, like child undernutrition.

Surita and colleagues at UNICEF, Hindustan Unilever, and Generon Consulting set out to engage actors from across the nutritional ecosystem, seeking organizations and individuals who played, or could play, significant roles in the system. They searched, too, for champions who could become bridging leaders—leaders who

look at problems in a systemic way and see themselves as part of the wider system. Instead of working independently, in a silo, bridging leaders connect, collaborate, and partner with others to create change. For the Bhavishya Alliance, the goal was to find people who could see themselves in the people they served, who could bridge divides and bring others along. In Ramani they found an ally.

All of the organizations and people that joined the alliance made a commitment to work in more holistic ways. One of these members, Dr. Armida Fernandez, had worked her whole life to improve the health of new born children and mothers in the informal settlements of Mumbai. She had founded an organization for nutrition, education, and health action, called SNEHA. With her leadership, SNEHA joined the alliance. Dr. Fernandez came to play a crucial role in the Bhavishya's Governing Council, representing the voices of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community based organizations, and the mothers and children the alliance sought to serve.

As the team reached out to organizations across the system, they encountered a range of preconceptions. Organizations and people who were distrustful of the private sector were reluctant to join the alliance; and some simply did not have the bandwidth. Most existing partnerships between NGOs and government departments tended to focus on technical solutions to a particular part of the problem of child undernutrition.

More than ever, the team was convinced that the alliance would need practices that challenged biases, enabled systems thinking, and opened people's minds and hearts to engaging each other with authenticity and love.

Within two years, the team had gathered a network of champions from various government departments, NGOs, and corporations. With Hindustan Unilever, the TATA Group, and two of India's leading private banks – HDFC and ICICI – as trustees, the Bhavishya Alliance was registered as a charitable trust. A multi-sectoral governing council was established to provide policy and programmatic direction. Members included trustees and representatives from various government departments, UNICEF, and Synergos, among others.



Laying the foundation for collaboration and inner work

The Bhavishya Alliance’s founding partners intentionally laid the ground for the systemic, creative, and participatory approaches they believed were best suited to the complexity of the undernutrition challenge. With help from Generon Consulting, they designed a Change Lab to launch the alliance’s work and build the foundations for collaborative practice and leadership.

Each alliance member sent one or two people from their organization to participate in the 12 week Change Lab. The Lab involved two levels of participation: Change Lab members and Champions. Change Lab members—eight from the corporate sector, 11 from civil society, and 10 from the government—were seconded from their organizations for a three-month period and were active in the day-to-day workings of the Bhavishya Alliance. Champions were senior decision makers and leaders from organizations, who were committed to the alliance’s goals, to sharing their experience, and to participating in decision-making. In terms of process, Change

Lab members would co-create and propose a set of collaborative, breakthrough initiatives to the Champions—exploring and then sharing new ideas for addressing child undernutrition in Maharashtra.

The Change Lab was designed around the Theory-U framework, developed by Otto Scharmer and colleagues. Theory-U rests on the belief that our interior condition—the source and quality of attention—matters crucially in how we act in the world. The Theory-U process offers a way to build high-trust relationships among leaders across a system, enabling them to intentionally tap into their collective capacities. It illuminates and helps leaders overcome their individual and collective blind spots and to face complex problems in a deeper, regenerative way.

Lab participants journeyed through three typical phases of the Theory-U process—Sensing, Presencing, and Realizing⁷—exploring how inner work techniques can play a meaningful role in their personal lives, while also improving ways of working.

The Sensing phase helped participants listen with their minds and hearts, getting in touch with the world outside of themselves and outside of their institutional bubbles. For a better understanding of the context of undernutrition in Maharashtra, multi-sectoral groups of participants went on learning journeys to communities coping with undernutrition. As part of this inner work practice, learning journeys encourage participants to witness, observe, and absorb the reality they witness—rather than just thinking about solutions. They were introduced to techniques to help them listen without judgement. They reflected on their own and other people’s perspectives, examining different dimensions of the problem and looking for solutions that may already exist. Later, learning journeys took them to other states to get a sense of patterns across the wider ecosystem that contribute to child undernutrition.

Using the learning journeys as a foundation, participants came together to share what they saw, felt, and learned. Informed by the diverse perspectives and new outlooks, they created verbal and visual models of the larger system. Looking at the big picture and stepping into the shoes of others generated promising new ideas to address child undernutrition. Equipped with this new perspective, they presented their observations and preliminary concepts to the Champions.

In the Presencing phase, participants retreated to the Himalayas, to a quiet place for reflection and contemplation. By stepping away from their offices, cities, and daily lives, participants were encouraged to let go of their attachments and habitual ways of thinking. Each participant spent three days and nights alone in the mountains, with only water and limited food—no books, phones, media, or writing materials. Retreating to nature is an inner work technique designed to help people return to themselves and their deeper purpose, and slowly become aware of what may be holding them back. Being alone, confronting fears and barriers, was a difficult experience for some participants. Yet their shared experience of solitude in the mountains kindled trust. The group began to evolve into a team.

In the Realizing phase, the learning, sharing, and reflecting from the earlier phases, enabled participants to relinquish the security of known solutions and embrace more emergent ways of working. Change Lab facilitators invited them to translate their understanding of the system, and ideas for change, into prototypes. Generally, prototypes model things on a small scale and can be tested quickly. In the Bhavishya Alliance, prototypes laid the ground for pilot projects, which became the main channel for the alliance's work.

Power, conflict and perseverance in a high-stakes environment

The Change Lab held within it not just diverse perspectives, but complex relationships and power dynamics—between powerful government offices and small community based organizations, between nutrition experts and generalists, between women and men, between international and Indian facilitators, and between Champions and Change Lab members. Added to this complex dynamic were the Champions' high expectations for the Theory-U process. They wanted strong returns on their investment.

Through the three phases of the Change Lab, participants entered a more self-reflective space, beginning to imagine how things could be different. But some were easily pulled back, overcome by the pressure to meet high expectations in a short timeframe. Others reverted to their place in the established hierarchy and their ingrained identities—as nutrition specialists, NGO managers, and influential donors.

They became more entrenched in their own views, more preoccupied with how others needed to change.

Some participants may have given up, unable to voice their perspective or navigate a path for themselves. Others became more skilled at the inner-outer movement, drawing from their internal strength to help move the group forward. For example, in a plenary session, when senior government officials threatened to leave after a period of prolonged conflict with staff, Shabri⁸—a community health worker—requested the officials to join the group in a circle. Linking hands with people on either side of her, Shabri began singing a folk song about hungry children. Gradually, everyone was in the circle, holding hands, and singing along. Shabri was aware of the larger possibilities and the critical need for everyone to work together; her courageous action guided the group back to their purpose.

Change Lab members persevered through these challenges, united by their common purpose and growing interpersonal bonds. They began to explore different forms of power, especially the power to bring about change collectively. The alliance grew into a group of people willing to challenge and listen to each other, suspending judgement. In the end, they produced designs for four innovative initiatives that they tested on actors across the system. On the last day of the lab, Change Lab members presented their proposals to the Champions. Though many Champions were excited about the possibilities uncovered in the Change Lab, others doubted the viability of the proposed initiatives. Because the Champions had not been engaged intensively in the lab, these doubts caused the meeting to end without approval for any of the proposed initiatives.

Though the Change Lab was challenging, some of the ideas that emerged from it were developed into a set of innovative and collaborative pilot projects, and the Bhavishya Alliance ran for another five years. In hindsight, it is clear that the Change Lab and the challenges encountered produced powerful lessons and prepared fertile ground for the alliance's future. People's individual inner work enabled them to come together to build a culture that valued reflection, that allowed disagreements to surface, that encouraged listening, and that gave them the courage to face their

own imperfections and mistakes. Importantly, the Change Lab experience allowed participants to step outside of their professional roles and organizational identities. For example, Rajlakshmi Nair, from UNICEF, displayed courage when she challenged a group of senior development professionals and set the stage for a number of difficult, but necessary, conversations:

*Do we really make a difference in the community? Because I am also a person with a development background and I've seen that we have done harm. Let me tell you, it's all driven! It's NGO-driven, it's government-driven, it's UNICEF-driven, it's World Bank-driven!*¹⁹

What happened next?

When the lab ended, Surita and a small group of remaining Champions saw the need to refine the pilots, get them funded, and fortify the Bhavishya Alliance team.



Synergos photo

The alliance was entering another phase, which required a more formal structure. In 2007, K.S. Murthy—an Indian CEO—was hired, and the alliance's governing council was formalized, with Surita joining as a representative from Synergos. Rajlakshmi remained heavily involved in the alliance's work and UNICEF seconded two additional consultants.

Other Change Lab members tried to continue supporting the Bhavishya Alliance but, for most, this was not formally built into their very busy jobs. Nevertheless, remaining connected to the people who had been a part of the Change Lab was critical for the Bhavishya Alliance team. The Change Lab had a deep impact on Manish Srivastava, who initially participated from Hindustan Unilever. Later, he was able to negotiate a secondment to the Bhavishya Alliance as an Organizational Development and Partnership Consultant—staying connected to the cause after the Change Lab had ended. Together, Surita, Rajlakshmi, and Manish helped share the energy, ideas, and ways of working that had germinated in the lab with the new team.

Over the five years that followed, Bhavishya Alliance tested more than 11 pilots and initiatives. In most of these initiatives, government, NGOs and the private section collaborated around a specific problem. Some initiatives were serendipitous, the result of the team's ability to be fully present and engage with emerging opportunities. In one initiative, with support from a colleague, Manish was able to leverage Hindustan Unilever's cohort of management trainees and supply chain leaders to work closely with district health officers and NGOs in Nasik district in northwest Maharashtra. Together, they studied procurement patterns to inform improvements to the public health system's medicine supply chain.

Ongoing inner work practices

Following the Change Lab, Bhavishya's inner work practice was opportunistic and adaptive. Surita and Manish helped build a culture that valued the balance between the inner and outer selves, encouraging people to practice bridging leadership. They were able to create safe spaces in regular work routines, nurturing participants, cultivating open hearts, and encouraging reflection.

Learning journeys with diverse groups of people became a regular part of Bhavishya Alliance's pilot projects. In addition to learning journeys, the team also drew on people's experiences with contemplative practices, such as meditation, encouraging them to share these practices with their colleagues. This kind of sharing became a part of the alliance's culture. Facilitators intentionally made space at meetings for people to connect to their inner selves—to be mindful of keeping an open heart and to listen in generative ways, trying not to judge through preconceived lenses.

The Bhavishya Alliance team also experimented with theatre and art. The aim was to encourage people to venture beyond their professional roles, getting them to deal with difficult issues. For example, when the alliance faced some critical challenges in 2007, Manish opened a meeting of 60 stakeholders with an inner work technique inspiring creativity—asking everyone to paint their mood. They used their creations to enter the conversation from a deeper, more personal place. The mood of the group shifted significantly, allowing the alliance to broach more challenging conversations. In another instance, while facilitating a partners' meeting, Manish began to mirror the group, reflecting back to them their behavior and interactions with one another. This simple technique was another way to surface issues—in this case about inter-organizational relationships—that would have otherwise been difficult to talk about.

Meetings that bring partners together are valuable for exploring ideas and perspectives, but there is seldom enough time for deep dialogue. Even when time is not an issue, people's conditioning in formal meetings may inhibit genuine dialogue. When offered informal, less structured spaces, the Bhavishya Alliance team found that participants would seek out deeper dialogue around a particular issue. The team encouraged these types of informal interactions by setting up the room for partner meetings, providing quiet spaces for conversations or self-reflection, and by allowing sufficient time for breaks outdoors, in nature.

Theatre, art, contemplative moments, and deep dialogue—these are some other ways the Bhavishya Alliance team tried to keep the inner-outer connection alive. These practices helped nurture bridging leadership, laying the ground for trust and compassion to grow.

While the alliance conveners focused on bringing various sectoral players together, they came to soon realize that reflection within each sector was just as important. At a meeting led by the alliance's corporate stakeholders, government members were invited to interact around specific issues—sharing their ideas on how to use the corporate knowledge base to address gaps. The chance for corporate partners to reflect on their own was immensely valuable, helping them understand where they were and how they wanted to move forward. We learn from Bhavishya that how you show up to work in collaboration with others is intrinsically linked to understanding your own sector and the barriers within. Exploring the inner-outer connection—the relationship between your inner self and your work in the world—plays out at many levels. It is applicable at a sectoral level—to the inner world within a sector as well as the outer, multi-sectoral space.

The close of Bhavishya

In 2011, Bhavishya Alliance came to a close, with the pilots ending as planned. Several of the organizations involved scaled elements of these strategies. The Bhavishya organization was taken over by Unilever, as the Bhavishya Alliance Child Nutrition Initiatives, a not-for-profit company. It centers on hand washing behavior change and has shifted away from the alliance's initial focus—serving as a platform for multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Lessons learned from the Bhavishya Alliance strongly informed Synergos' framing of Bridging Leadership and multi-sectoral collaboration to address complex problems around the world. The approach evolved as it was applied in Ethiopia, Namibia, and Nigeria. Manish was an important part of these efforts. Today he is a Social Presencing Theatre facilitator with the Presencing Institute.

After years in Synergos, working on multi-stakeholder partnerships and building on the lessons learned from the Bhavishya Alliance, Surita is currently Executive Director at Heartland Alliance International, where she continues a regular practice of meditation and reflective practice with her team.

Rajlakshmi still works at UNICEF Maharashtra, from where she has supported several state nutrition missions. She thinks the Bhavishya Alliance approach was ahead of its time, and believes its lessons are valid and even more needed today.

Dr. Fernandez agrees, given recent Indian government policies mandating contributions to corporate social responsibility. After handing over the reins of her organization to a new CEO, Dr. Fernandez now focuses her attention on bringing palliative care to those who can least afford it. She closed a recent interview with the India Development Review saying:

*Ultimately, I think that everything in life is about love, Love is an echo...
If you love, you care. And if you care, you'll do what you have to do.¹⁰*

What have we learned?

Three main areas of learning emerge from the journey of the Bhavishya Alliance: about the nature of inner work; about the inner-outer dance of bridging leaders and multi-stakeholder partnerships; and about inner work and complex problems.

The nature of inner work

Inner work demands and sparks courage. Time and again, people demonstrated courage, taking personal risks to pursue the alliance's purpose. Courage was palpable during Surita's unrelenting work to move the status quo, while building a safe container for difficult conversation; in Shabri's singing to diffuse severe conflict in the Change Lab, reinvigorating a sense of purpose; and in Rajlakshmi's challenge to senior development professionals. Drawing from their inner strength to overcome whatever obstacles they faced, they acted with courage and love to bridge divides. This is the essence of bridging leadership.

Inner work can be frightening. When you look inside and face your fears, it may scare you. Seeing your purpose with greater clarity may lead you to take risks for which you may not yet be prepared. The journeys undertaken during the Bhavishya Alliance show us the value of having a coach, mentor, friend, or small community of



non-judgmental people accompanying you along the way—to challenge you gently when you are shying away from bold action. Manish and Surita, for example, spoke convincingly of the value of a supportive community of people as an enabling factor, helping them to persevere and remain hopeful through challenges.

Inner work cannot be forced. Each of us is on a journey. You look within because you have an inner calling. If that is not the case—if you are not ready to move out of the frame you inhabit—no one can make you. Some members of the Change Lab were not ready for this journey into themselves, and dropped out.

Inner work nurtures deep and sometimes unlikely relationships. The experience of Bhavishya teaches us about the extraordinary power of relationships in social action. Many people who met and worked together in the alliance's early years stayed friends. As interviews for this case study progressed, the love and respect with which people spoke of their colleagues was palpable -- a little smile as they reminisced,

their change in tone, the nuance and detail of their stories. These relationships were fundamental to the quality of their leadership in the Bhavishya Alliance, and the qualities they took forward in their work and lives.

Inner work shapes the way you are in the world. Inner work is not a set of activities or methods that magically transform us into bridging leaders. It is a way of seeing and being in the world—facing our fears and barriers within; opening ourselves to new perspectives; seeing ourselves in others, including those who are different from us; taking risks to bridge divides; cultivating authentic relationships; not being afraid to love; creating spaces that allow us to be vulnerable with others; and building strength in the face of uncertainty. Being fully present has become a way of life for several people who were engaged in the work of the Bhavishya Alliance. They have learned that it requires ongoing effort and practice.

The inner-outer dance of multi-stakeholder partnerships

The Bhavishya Alliance journey shows that the inner-outer dance occurs at many levels. This dance does not only happen for individuals—it happens between people and the organizations and teams they inhabit, between a group or sector's inner world and its outer, multi-sectoral space.

Even if bridging leaders are able to affect change within their organizations, one layer out, there is the wider sector, in which they may compete. This influences how leaders show up and what relationships they cultivate. Just as we have barriers that deflect us from our purpose, groups too have inherent barriers that hinder their contribution to social change. Mistrust harbored by one group about another does not automatically fall away when a few individuals overcome their prejudices or fears. Perhaps a greater focus on work within each sector in Bhavishya might have helped to institutionalize a culture of bridging leadership.

As systems intersect, many layers of the inner and outer are at play. In the course of our frantic day-to-day business, we may not have the space or time that allows us to reflect within our own organizations, sectors, or identity groups. A bridging leader who has realized the value of inner work in their own journey may be able to build a

collective practice in their organization, or even reach beyond their own organizations to cultivate reflective spaces and relationships in a wider sphere.

Perhaps what we learn here is that this inner-outer dance, rippling out through bridging leaders in short and long cycles, is vital in helping us navigate our fears and build relationships that keep us true to purpose. Perhaps embedding the inner-outer dance at different levels can sow the seeds of deeper, wider systemic change. The aim is to break down the fear of what we may have to give up when we collaborate with people that are different from us.

Inner work's power in navigating complex problems

Undernutrition is a classic instance of a complex problem: the cause and effect are far apart in space and time, often spanning generations; solutions are not really known, or known solutions are not working well for the most marginalized families; and the problem is driven by socio-political factors. This means little agreement among stakeholders on how to interpret or solve the problem. The founders of the Bhavishya Alliance were intentional in addressing this complexity. They convened actors from across the nutrition ecosystem to understand the system as a whole and to grow their individual and collective capability to allow creative, collaborative solutions to emerge.

Conclusion

What can we learn from the Bhavishya Alliance about effective leadership in these rapidly changing times of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and inequality? Perhaps we learn that individual-focused inner work is valuable, but it is the dance between the inner and outer realms, at different levels, that really opens our hearts and anchors authentic, trustful, loving relationships. This, in turn opens possibilities for collaboration and collective social action. It is a dance well worth practicing.

Andrea Rodericks



Notes

¹ L. Haddad, N. Nisbett, I. Barnett, E. Valli, “Maharashtra’s Child Stunting Declines: What is driving them? Findings of a multidisciplinary analysis,” (Brighton: IDS, 2014), 1.

² This framework originates in the cognitive sciences, but has increasingly been applied to address complex problems. See for example M. McLachlan (Full Circle Consulting) and James Garrett (IFPRI), “Nutrition change strategies: The new frontier,” *Public Health Nutrition* (January 2008): 11(10), 1063–1075.

³ McLachlan and Garrett, “Nutrition change strategies: The new frontier.”

⁴ A traditional Indian decoration, where patterns are made on the floor, usually with materials such as rice flour, sand, petal

⁵ Bridging leadership may be described as the capacity to build trust and tap the fullest contributions of diverse stakeholders, helping them come together across divides and work as partners.

⁶ Becoming totally present—to the larger space or field around us, to an expanded the sense of self, and to ultimately do what is emerging through us. As described in P. Senge, C.O. Scharmer, J. Jaworski, and B.S. Flowers, “Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organization, and Society,” (London: Nicholas Brealy, 2005).

⁷ The Theory-U process has since evolved to five movements: Co-initiating, Co-sensing, Presencing, Co-creating, Co-evolving.

⁸ Not her real name. For this and other examples, see Manish Srivastava, “Presencing: A journey of individual and collective transformation.” *Here & Now*, Quarterly Publication of the Indian Society for Applied Behavioral Science, Volume 23, Issue 3.

⁹ As spoken in the Bhavishya Lab video: “Bhavishya Alliance – 2006 – Getting Started,” Last accessed on July 20, 2019

¹⁰ “Interview with Dr. Armida Fernandez,” *India Development Review*, (September 2018), Last accessed on July 20, 2019.

Exploring inner and outer geographies: A joint expedition in public health leadership in Namibia

Who are you?

This was the question Kasee Ithana as asked most often as she led the African Public Health Leadership Initiative (APLHI) in Namibia from 2008 to 2012. Though Namibia had come out of a long struggle for independence, personal identity was still being shaped by the divisions that historically separated people. Race, ethnicity, language, political affiliations, and gender were cast in simplistic terms – Owambo or Herero; English or Afrikaans; male or female; SWAPO or not; local or foreigner.

Kasee was somewhat of a mystery. She looked like a Namibian and had gone to school there, but her surname was that of an outsider and she hadn't been seen in Namibian professional circles. It may be this unique position as an insider with an outsider lens that enabled Kasee to understand and overcome what was happening. When asked who she was, Kasee realized her kinship, her affiliations, her ties, and her community were being questioned. There was a prevailing scepticism and suspicion that would make the project difficult to manage – acceptance and trust were the major issues impacting APLHI.

Context: Project landscape

In 2008, 18 years after independence, Namibians were still living within their personal histories of segregation, discrimination, racism, violence, and trauma. Entrenched gender inequality had resulted in high levels of gender-based violence. Inherited structural poverty and income inequality contributed to high rates of violent crime.

In the early 2000s, Namibia also experienced the impacts of the HIV epidemic. At 22% prevalence in 2002, HIV/AIDS caused a rise in maternal, infant, and child mortality while decreasing the country's life expectancy to 54 years old. Maternal mortality rates were 449 per 100,000 live births in 2006/7, almost double the number of deaths recorded in 1992.

This was the setting for the African Public Health Leadership Initiative (APHLI: 2008-2013). The initiative aimed to strengthen Namibia's Ministry of Health and Social Services by re-aligning stakeholders to build capacity, unlock potential, and untangle complex systems.¹

The APHLI took place during a time of significant change and pressure. HIV/AIDS had weakened human capacity within the health system and, simultaneously, increased its workload. The nationwide rollout of anti-retroviral therapy in August 2003 and efforts to prevent mother-to-child transmission successfully improved life quality and expectancy, but strained health personnel. People at all levels in the health system experienced emotional and physical exhaustion, and felt unable to meet demands for more and better outputs.

In interviews conducted at APHLI's start, participants reported a lack of trust among colleagues, with frequent back-biting and jockeying for positions. One regional director said:

The team work is missing. We are divided and fragmented and have this baggage of cliques is our history. We have not attempted to make and have a shared vision, which is blocking us from seeing people as individuals.

Prior to the APHLI, participants had attended different leadership and team workshops, but felt nothing happened, nothing changed. The APHLI was designed with a new approach in mind – valuing each individual's deepest beliefs, recognizing

individual responsibility, creating ties among a diverse group, and galvanizing action for common cause. Though not articulated in any documents, the APHLI seemed to intrinsically grasp that action in itself can generate hope.

In the absence of a better alternative, acting for hope beats sceptical spectatorship every time.²

Case study

The APHLI design

The APHLI arose in part due to interest from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop and test innovative models to improve public health systems in developing countries, particularly in Africa. With this in mind, three global organizations, McKinsey, the Presencing Institute, and Synergos—each with specialized experience in trust building and capacity building—conceived the APHLI and partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation to implement it. The four-year project was envisioned as a proof of concept to shift the attitudes, values, and relationships underpinning how individuals, teams, and sectors operate within the Namibian health system. McKinsey compiled and presented data on Namibia’s health priorities in fresh ways; Presencing brought its Theory U process to organizational change; and Synergos facilitated the project, using its Bridging Leadership approach to restore trust and boost collaboration across the ministry. As the chief executive officer of the ministry at the time, Kahijoro Kahuure explained:

People in siloes don’t recognize the importance of linkages. You can’t work alone. Real improvement will be people-centred improvement. When we started recognizing people, people’s needs and their personhood, this cascaded down to better service for our patients. How you treat people matters at all levels.”

A regional director at the time also recalled: “The project broke down work boundaries. People whose voice I had never heard before, could even chair a meeting.

Implementation

Over the course of implementation, the project forged and reinforced linkages between and among different organizations and sectors, resulting in a variety of promising new community health initiatives. The APHLI established a leadership development forum, launched the maternal health initiative, then rolled out regional delivery units. Through the human-centered Theory U process – which stresses connection to the real self and to others – participants were able to better understand the human experience behind statistics and data.

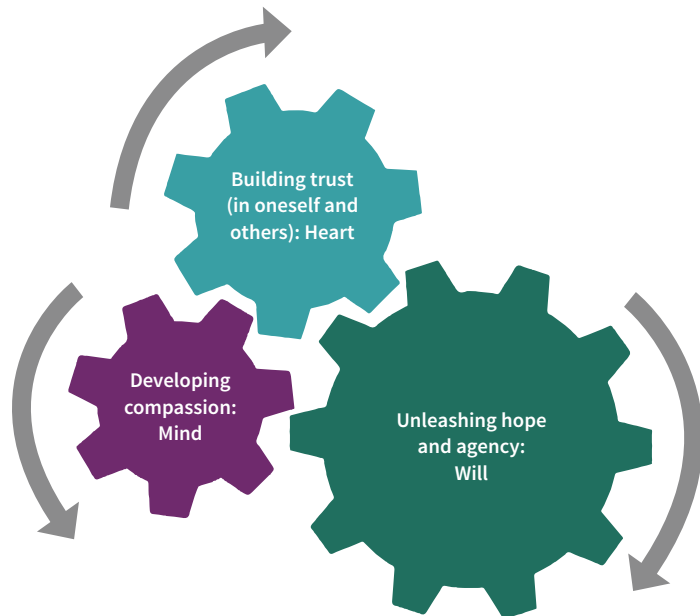
Using the APHLI’s innovative approach and design as an example, this case study posits that self-reflection and trust building are prerequisites for change. As General Secretary of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjold, wrote in his journals:

The more faithfully you listen to the voice within you, the better you will hear what is sounding outside. And only he who listens can speak.³

Table 1: Tools for the trip

Destination	How to get there	Tools used in the APHLI Namibia	Cross-cutting practices
Trust in colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humanize the other Address structural inequalities (ethnicity, gender, and hierarchies) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check-ins Reflective dialogues Use first names Dialogue walks 	Inner work, nuanced and sensitive facilitation, Theory U, metaphors, operating in a safe space
Compunction and urgency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confrontation with data Develop compassion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive data review Sensing journeys 	
Sense of personal agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address past histories Take on leadership functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journey of life/river of life Local models of leadership 	

Figure 1: Connecting heart, mind, and will



The participants identified three central components of the APHLI: building trust in oneself and across the team, translating that trust into concrete actions based on an analysis, and taking ownership of any challenges encountered. Like interlocking cogs, these elements together addressed the overlapping needs of the heart, mind, and will to achieve lasting change. Recognizing their inter-connectedness was a critical first step. As neuroscientist Dr. James Doty explains:

Techniques for eliminating distraction and journeying inward can increase focus and help us make decisions more quickly, but without wisdom and insight (opening the heart) the techniques can result in self-absorption, narcissism, and isolation. Our journey is not meant to be an inward journey alone, but an outward journey of connection as well.⁴

Building trust in the group: Heart

We needed to create the container where people could open up and share and then deal with their inner struggles, struggles that were blocking their performance. I challenged the people to consider what they wanted to take from the past and what they wanted to leave behind? Being a Christian helped me and in turn the process helped me to make more use of my faith - to combine the personal and the professional parts of life, to become integrated. (Kasee Ithana)

In post-apartheid Namibia, trust between different ethnic groups, political affiliates, social groups, work cadres, and even between men and women, was low. As Kasee said:

We have a history where you can't trust each other.

When APHLI began its work in Namibia, distrust pervaded the health system. As a facilitator, Kasee had to encourage inner work to build trust and create an enabling environment where collaborative action could thrive. Essentially, participants needed to understand and accept themselves and their pasts – including recognizing their values, beliefs, fears, and hopes – before they could be fully present in the group.

Despite some lingering skepticism, the participants in the leadership development forum workshops quickly and successfully built bridges of trust across the traditional divides that existed in the group. Participants commented on how the project integrated the personal and the public, merging their inner and outer selves. Building a connection between participants' personal commitments, values, and working lives ultimately strengthened their engagement with the work.

Developing compassion: Mind

Recent research suggests that a compassionate act may be based as much on cognition as it is on emotion. In *Behave: Human Behaviour at its Best and Worst*,

Robert Sapolsky distinguishes between feeling someone's pain and understanding someone's pain – the latter being more likely to result in a compassionate act.⁵

In the case of APHLI, team members were guided through interactions with both data and experience to widen their perspectives. Awareness of others in Namibia's post-conflict context implied recognizing past traumas, accumulated layers of distrust, and the need to build a new foundation of trust and acceptance.

Two activities, 'Stakeholder shoes' and 'sensing journeys,' were used as tools to awaken this deep awareness of others. Through them, individuals were guided to take on a different persona or role and to enter into it fully for an entire day, thus facing the varying realities within the healthcare system. People across the ministry experienced the health system from new angles – as a pregnant woman waiting eight hours to be seen; as a husband standing in a queue for his wife's medicine; as a mother walking to the clinic before dawn to be first in line, ensuring she will be seen that day. These experiences gave project stakeholders a richer understanding of the challenges faced by Namibians seeking healthcare, humanizing the data.

A nurse in Erongo at the time commented:

Sometimes you are blinded by the things you see every day. You need those fresh eyes. We went out to see for ourselves. It was a way to open minds by not relying on assumptions, but going out to see for ourselves. The sensing journey put a mirror up, so we could look at ourselves (nurses) from the other side.

Unleashing agency and hope: Will

The first meeting of the leadership development forum was held in Waterberg, a beautiful nature reserve with special historic significance for Namibians, to take participants out of their ordinary settings and schedules. An interactive program and this naturally stunning setting – an unusual venue for a government workshop – encouraged laughter, reflection, camaraderie, and good will.



Through activities like the 'Stakeholder shoes' and 'Sensing journeys,' participants had seen different realities on the ground, had reviewed their place within the system, and now saw themselves as change agents. The first forum created a much-needed space for participants to contemplate lessons learned and their implications for their work in the health system. Some forum members said it was difficult to maintain this perspective upon returning to their offices, while others reported successfully integrating it into their day-to-day routines.

Outcomes

Through this series of APHLI activities, participating ministry officials began to see their colleagues as respected individuals and comrades. This vision was extended beyond the group which made up the Leadership Forum to the wider health community– allowing leaders to see patients not as one of 'them', but as one of 'us'. This re-framing is a critical movement in the inner work landscape. The head of the ministry's Khomas Regional Delivery Unit explained:

We needed to address the rift, to get out of the 'us' and 'them' situation and build bridges.

By focusing on a small group of leaders, the APHLI helped to build a bridge across the divides of old societal injuries, bringing reconciliation and deeper trust to Namibia’s healthcare landscape.

For Namibia’s Ministry of Health team, the APHLI program was a journey toward becoming bridging leaders. Both the defining concept and end-goal of Synergos’ approach to social change, bridging leadership is the capacity to build trust and tap the fullest contributions of diverse stakeholders, enabling them to collaborate more effectively to achieve impact at scale. The aim of Bridging Leadership is to create and sustain effective working relationships among stakeholders whose collective input is needed to make lasting progress on a social challenge. By bridging varying—even conflicting—perspectives, Bridging Leaders find a common agenda that is more likely to produce durable solutions to social and economic problems.⁶

Table 2: Organizational Health Index data:

Statement on key OHI Element	Percent of all surveyed ministry staff who agreed, 2008	Percent of all surveyed ministry staff who agreed, 2011
The ministry has a clear direction and compelling vision.	39%	60%
The ministry has adequate capacity for innovation and learning.	37%	52%
The ministry demonstrates strong Leadership.	54%	66%

In 2011, after two years of the APHLI program, the ministry conducted an internal Organizational Health Index survey with the assistance of McKinsey and Synergos, to gauge staff perceptions of the ministry’s overall organizational wellbeing and effectiveness. The results, shown below, document measurable improvements in related markers. (see Table 2)

These data suggest an increase in agency within the ministry. This sense of agency was built on a foundation of improved understanding of self and of others, supported by inner work and a focus on bridging leadership. Two members spoke about how the program recognised each individual’s agency. One participant remarked, “The program was not bound by your position at work,” while another observed, “We all had an equal voice and the work barriers were broken down.”

Importantly, this sense of agency yielded results. For example, based on an assessment of relevant data, the Khomas unit in Windhoek, Namibia’s capital, launched nine maternal health innovation projects. These included hosting interactive radio programs, introducing antenatal care services to thirteen clinics, and creating quick access to additional clinic space by securing and renovating shipping containers.

What were the long-term results of the APHLI project?

Participants felt that top leaders’ participation created a cascade of benefits.

Everyone was on board. We broke down bureaucracy and created new channels.

The APHLI brought some rapid changes to the health system, including decreased maternal waiting time, increased efficiency in the Khomas region, and additional clinic space in some regions.

With that said, participants also observed that interventions like the APHLI are vulnerable to leadership changes. For example, when the permanent secretary of health transferred to another ministry, the project lost a champion and gains were not consistently sustained. As other staff transferred or left, some of the original team spirit – sparked through the project’s innovative, bridging leadership-driven approach – dissolved. This underscores the value of institutionalizing the practices introduced by the program as one of the last steps of implementation. This can be accomplished in myriad ways, such as creating an annual or semi-annual bridging leadership program or building the management of bridging leadership activities into the job descriptions of staff members.

The APHLI did not sufficiently embed bridging leadership practices to ensure sustainability, as explained by the current deputy executive director:

We needed to take the practices all the way down to middle management. We need to ensure everyone is touched so it becomes part of the system.

Seven years later, the regional delivery units are no longer functioning. The project was not able to leverage the leadership development forum's initial cohesion and solidarity to maintain high levels of performance and systemic change. Though case study participants still articulate how the work transformed their individual lives, these experiences need grounding in everyday systems in order to be fully and sustainably adopted.



Synergos photo

Conclusion

The APHLI recognized that changing a complex system required personal transformation of its leaders and leadership dynamics. There was also an implicit realization that taking action is itself a source of inspiration. As Cornel West says:

Hope is more the consequence of action than its cause. As the experience of the spectator favors fatalism, so the experience of the agent produces hope.⁷

The case study confirms findings from other health leadership development projects that coalesce around the value of personal change and team motivation. The APHLI took these tenets further and engaged a team of people, exposing them to creative, challenging exercises, and activities to open their hearts, activate their minds, and energize action.

Project methodologies nurtured greater self-awareness and group cohesion, leading to mobilization. Given the country and the constituencies, this was a personal and transformative experience for participants. The APHLI was able to build trust, which in turn enabled action. Ten years after the Theory U process, participants still recall highlights and can trace its influence on their own lives. The project did not articulate an approach of personal transformation, reconciliation, or hope, yet it seems to have filled that purpose.

Aided by these changes, APHLI made significant achievements within Namibia's healthcare landscape. The project aligned with and contributed to wider changes in Namibia's health system, such as the decentralization of antenatal clinic services and a 30 percent decline in maternal mortality between 2007 and 2013. Unfortunately, some of these benefits to the health system were not as long-lasting and participants' personal transformation. Explanations for this may include the complex and dynamic nature of the health system, funding challenges, and the project's relatively small scale (as compared to Namibia's health system). Given more time, resources, and attention to sustainability, perhaps these methodologies could have been more deeply embedded in the system. Sufficient time is needed to dismantle poor practices and institutionalize new ones. Though APHLI did not have that time, it was

still able to point the way to a promising process for improving outcomes by focusing first on shifting the attitudes and practices of people.

DeeDee Yates

Notes

¹ Harnessing the Power of Collective Learning: Feedback, accountability and constituent voice in rural development, edited by Roy Steiner and John D'Agata. Routledge, 2016.

² Cole, "Have Human Rights Failed?" A review of Kathryn Sikkink Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21st Century. NYRB Vol LXVI Number 7, (May 8, 2019): 50 (quoting from West, Cornel and Mangabeira, Roberto. The Future of American Progressivism: An Initiative for Political and Economic Reform. Beacon: 1999.) 50.

³ Dag Hammarskjod, Markings (New York: Vintage, 2006) 13.

⁴ James, Doty. Into the Magic Shop (London: Yellow Kite, 2016).

⁵ Robert Sapolsky, Chapter 12 "Feeling Someone's Pain, Understanding Someone's Pain, Alleviating Someone's Pain" in Behave: The Biology of Humans at our Best and Our Worst, (London: Bodleyhead, 2017) 520-552.

⁶ Material supplied by Synergos.

⁷ David Cole, "Have Human Rights Failed?" A review of Kathryn Sikkink Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21st Century. NYRB Vol LXVI Number 7, (May 8, 2019): 50 (quoting from West, Cornel and Mangabeira, Roberto. The Future of American Progressivism: An Initiative for Political and Economic Reform. Beacon: 1999.) 50.

Bridging inner and system governance: Co-creating responsive health systems for better health outcomes in the Philippines

Jackielyn's story¹

When Jackielyn told him the pain had started, Joseph knew it was time. After six children this was a familiar scene, almost routine. He helped Jackielyn lie on the bamboo floor, with a lamp as their only source of light and the sound of rain pounding outside. Jackielyn said the pains were becoming more regular; the baby was coming in a few hours, maybe minutes. Hurriedly, they sent for Aunt Denia, their village's traditional birth attendant, as they had done before. They wanted to give birth in the hospital because Jackielyn's seventh pregnancy put her at high risk. But, after being shamed during her last prenatal check-up for having so many children, she'd changed her mind. So once again they settled to have the baby at home, away from unwanted reprimands and judgments.

Joseph held Jackielyn's hand, wiped the sweat on her face, and whispered, "It'll be over soon." But living in one of the farthest and most isolated villages in the district, with no available transport, on top of the heavy rains, they knew Aunt Denia would take a while to arrive. Patiently they waited. They had no other choice.

At last Aunt Denia arrived. Joseph heaved a sigh of relief. But Aunt Denia was firm, "She has to give birth in the hospital." Joseph's relief turned to worry. They were 12 km from the closest hospital and no transport nearby. They would have to travel on foot, through heavy rain, down steep muddy slopes. Before they could begin the uncertain journey, they heard the familiar sound of a newborn baby crying – their daughter had arrived.

Later in the night, after Joseph had dozed off, he was abruptly woken. "Jackielyn is dizzy," he was told, "she hasn't stopped bleeding for five hours, her blanket has been replaced three times." Aunt Denia and two of the older children went to seek help from the village faith healer. They returned clutching only a piece of ginger.

Having no other option, Joseph and Aunt Denia loaded an unconscious Jackielyn into a hammock and struggled through the mud, floodwater, and rain, looking for a tricycle to get them to the municipal hospital.

After a long, tiring journey, they found the emergency room door padlocked. Joseph banged incessantly. Eventually, a sleepy security guard peered through an opened shutter and called out: "There's no doctor here, go to another hospital, we can't do anything for you."

Left again with no other choice, they travelled another 21 km to reach the next hospital. Joseph hurried to the emergency room, carrying his drenched wife. As he laid Jackielyn on the bed, he felt a coldness not caused by rain. They were too late – Jackielyn had bled to death.



Jackielyn's family

Introduction

Jackielyn's story vividly portrays the inequities in the Filipino healthcare system. In 2013, when Jackielyn passed away, maternal mortality rates in low-income, rural areas of the Philippines were exponentially higher than in wealthier urban areas; many more infants died at birth in poor communities than in wealthier ones. Only 40% of mothers from the poorest quintile had a skilled birth attendant, and only 30% delivered in a health facility. Women living in poverty died giving birth, without the opportunity to be seen by a doctor.

This was the dismal state of health outcomes in the Philippines, a country nearing the 2015 deadline of its commitment to meet Millennium Development Goal (MDG) health targets. For Dr. Enrique Ona, Secretary of the Department of Health, improving the country's health outcomes was urgent. Something had to be done to reform the health system, which was failing far too many Filipinos.

But reform would be complex. Since 1991, the main responsibility for public health administration and financing lay with local government. The Local Government Code of the Philippines of 1991 had transferred control of public health facilities, personnel, and governance from the national government to the elected leaders of provinces, cities, municipalities, and barangays (villages – creating some dire long-term consequences. These provincial and local leaders simply did not have the capacity

to maintain – let alone improve – the quality of healthcare in the Philippines. Service delivery and public health financing were fragmented; elected political leaders (notably mayors and governors) were ill-equipped to oversee healthcare provision; health inequity widened.

Dr. Ona knew of an encouraging initiative. The Zuellig Family Foundation had prototyped a health leadership program in ten municipalities, later expanded to a further 72 municipalities. In late 2013, with little time left to meet the 2015 MDG deadline, Dr. Ona challenged the Foundation to replicate its program in 609² poor, priority municipalities across the country.

An innovative health change model: Prototyping

What was the innovation that spurred Dr. Ona's challenge?

The Zuellig Family Foundation's mission is to be a catalyst in improving health conditions for poor Filipinos. The mission assumes that health is a right and that every Filipino should receive the quality of healthcare they need and should enjoy. Led by its president, Ernesto Garilao, the Foundation sought to understand the realities of health inequity and the lengths poor people had to go to for basic healthcare. To this end, the Foundation analyzed the health ecosystem; studied health governance in other decentralized systems; and explored different models of leadership. Then, it translated learnings into a health change model.

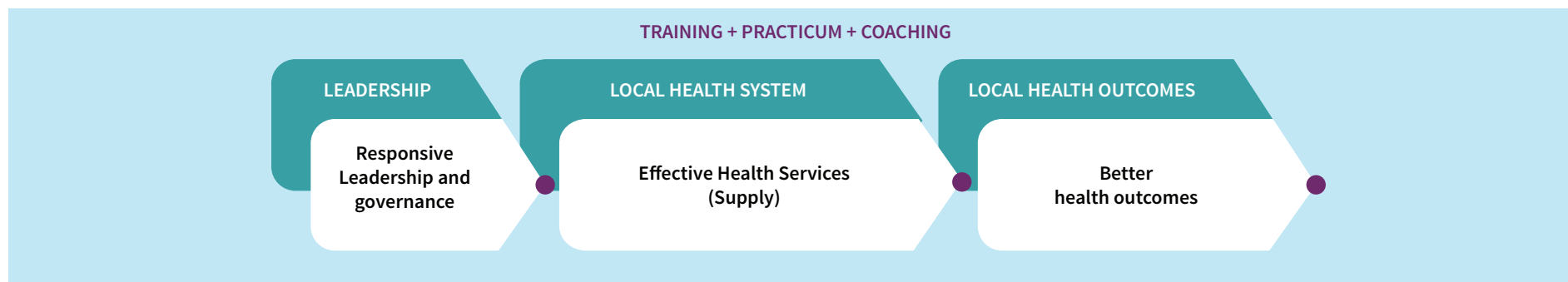


Figure 1. Zuellig Family Foundation's Bridging Leadership-driven Health Change Model

The model (Figure 1) proposes that a responsive health system, with strong and committed local leadership, can provide equitable access to healthcare, in turn improving health outcomes for Filipinos living in poverty. In this model, a responsive health system requires political leadership and community participation. It needs leaders with a clear sense of purpose and the capacity to build trust and tap the fullest contributions of diverse stakeholders, helping them work together for the common good. This is Bridging Leadership. By ‘bridging’ diverse, often conflicting perspectives, bridging leaders help forge a common agenda for finding and implementing solutions.

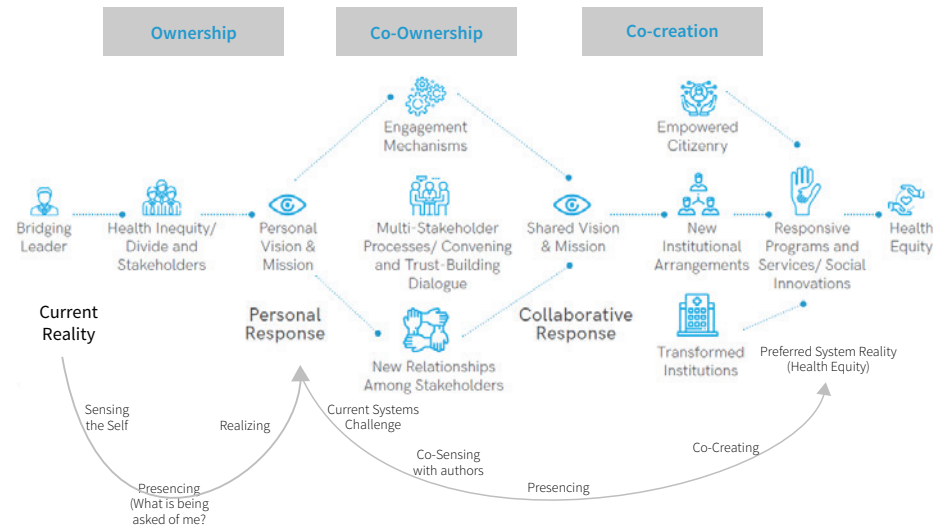
As proof of concept, the Foundation chose to work with local political leaders in selected municipalities to prototype the model through a program on health leadership. Participating municipal mayors and their health leadership teams embarked on a two-year leadership development journey through a curriculum designed to engage them in a co-learning, experiential process to transform their attitudes and practices.

According to transformative learning theory,³ transformation begins when a powerful catalyst makes us question our current beliefs or values; only then do we open up to different perspectives on change. By focusing on co-learning and these deeper, experiential aspects of learning, the program hoped to widen participants’ perspectives, ultimately sparking new patterns of thought about healthcare.

If mayors and their health leadership teams were going to become bridging leaders, they needed to be able to apply their learnings in the real world. With this in mind, the program comprises 70% job-related experience (in a guided practicum); 20% interaction with coaches, experts, peers, and other stakeholders; and 10% formal training. (See Appendix 1 for a curriculum outline.)

Across the modules, the curriculum highlighted the three processes that form the Bridging Leadership framework: ownership, co-ownership, and co-creation (Figure 2). Ownership is a leader’s personal response to problems in the health system, anchored in a values-based understanding of how leaders are both part of the problem and part of its solution. Co-ownership brings key stakeholders together through trust-building to arrive at a shared vision and collaborative response. Finally,

Figure 2: Bridging Leadership Framework (AIM-TeaM Energy Center integrating Theory U by Otto Scharmer, as modified by Zuellig Family Foundation)



co-creation gives birth to new ways of addressing systemic problems. Together the processes enable collaborative action for social change. The framework overlaps with, and draws on, three movements in the Theory U process: sensing, “presencing,” and realizing.⁴

A mix of interactive, reflective and hosting methodologies enabled participants to reflect on their leadership, to understand health inequity, and to host processes for deepening dialogue between diverse stakeholders. Deep-dive sensing journeys – an Inner Work practice that encourages you to walk in someone else’s shoes – put mayors and their health officials into direct contact with poor families to learn first-hand about the predicaments facing families when they try to access healthcare. Stories of maternal deaths and visual representations, such as health system roadmaps, exposed mayors to the realities and human costs of a dysfunctional health system in their own municipalities.

Exposure to, and reflection on, these disconcerting realities helped dislodge mayors' assumptions that healthcare was the responsibility of health workers alone. Mayors came to see how they were part of the complex system that feeds into poor health outcomes – they played a role and had responsibility in the process. Once mayors connected the stories of maternal death to their own roles as political leaders, it was difficult for them to remain unmoved. Compassion awakened their sense of purpose.

Inspired by the program's teaching, mayors and their health officers co-created an action plan to address the gaps and weaknesses in their local systems. In a practicum, they applied what they had learned and implemented their action plans to achieve chosen milestones. Stakeholder interactions, coaching, mentoring, and peer learning opportunities supported these leaders in exercising their capacities for Bridging Leadership. At the end of the program, leaders joined a retreat to reflect on their learning and leadership experiences.

In municipalities that completed the program's two-year learning journey, there was an impressive decrease in maternal deaths – and the rate of decrease remained consistent for two years after the program ended. The program showed that mayors can become champions for health and that, together with their leadership teams, they are the main integrators of local health systems. The proof of concept was clear.

It was at this point that Department of Health Secretary Dr. Ona issued his challenge to the Zuellig Family Foundation to expand the program to 609 municipalities.

A partnership to improve health outcomes for all Filipinos

Dr. Ona's challenge presented the private family foundation with a rare opportunity to take its health leadership model to scale, but moving from 72 to 609 municipalities was a leap, with many risks. The potentially life-saving benefits outweighed the risks, the Foundation accepted the challenge and so is, the Health Leadership and Governance Program was born.

The Program, with a partnership at its core, aimed for immediate impact through improved leadership and governance at two levels – at the Department of Health level (nationally and regionally), and at the local government level (in provinces,

municipalities, and barangays or villages). Because of the Program's wide target, spanning 609 municipalities, the Foundation formed partnerships with academic institutions to assist with the expansion – providing training and coaching while facilitating inroads to many of the new municipalities. Each academic institution ran the Bridging Leadership training program in their respective region. Using a cascade approach (training the trainers), the Foundation also trained and empowered faculty members to spread the Program's mission.

Similarly, to prepare Department of Health leaders for their roles in directing and managing the program, the Foundation ran a Bridging Leadership program for regional directors, designated regional program coordinators, and Department of Health representatives from the provinces. The goal was to inspire change at multiple levels within each geography, creating holistic, lasting change.

Baj Datinginoo was the designated program coordinator for the Center for Health Development Region 4B (Mimaropa). Over the 18 years Baj had worked in the health space, she had seen her region get stuck in its birthing pains, unable to emerge as



Baj in her boat

co-equal with its sister region, Region 4A (Calabarzon). Burdened with stagnating health outcomes and the added challenge of delivering quality healthcare to their island provinces, Baj longed for an innovative way to make health services more responsive to the needs of people in her region's isolated island communities. The Bridging Leadership program injected the fuel for Baj to jumpstart her team. Her enthusiasm and clear sense of purpose inspired every member of her team to engage their co-regional leaders and local government partners to enroll in the program.

Learning Bridging Leadership at local level

At the local government level, the Foundation worked with the Department of Health to co-create customized Bridging Leadership programs for political heads and their counterpart health officers. Using the design of the prototype curriculum as a guide, the expanded program also included a training, coaching, and practicum application.

To illustrate the Bridging Leadership processes (ownership, co-ownership and co-creation) in action, let us trace the experiences of a mayor and his municipal health officer.

Mayor Sam Parojinog and Dr. Wynona (Nona) Vega participated in the Health Leadership and Governance Program at their local level. Because Mayor Sam had only completed elementary school, he was anxious he would not be able to cope with the Program's learning challenges. His signature on the learning contract marked his commitment to participate in activities designed to develop his leadership to improve the health system in his municipality. He and Dr. Nona pledged to attend the training days, participate in coaching sessions with their Department of Health representatives, and implement an action plan in a guided practicum period.

Their journey began with an interactive equity walk, visual representations, games, and stories – to help them see the inequities and challenges that exist in the health system. Mayor Sam came to see how people who were relatively well off had access to support, while the poor remained in their villages without healthcare, which they badly needed and desired. Dr. Nona recalls how the content was presented in a way that touched “down to the core of the heart”.

The next stage of their ownership journey focused on Bridging Leadership and introduced them to practices for cultivating the inner self. For both the mayor and the doctor, this was a unique feature of the program. Reflecting on their lives and leadership-journeys, taking self-inventories of their values and leadership capitals, and completing reflective exercises helped them reach a clear sense of purpose and understand themselves better.

Mayor Sam says:

I learned to be true to myself, to be honest and not corrupt, to be transparent, and to have courage as I serve as mayor. I choose to do this because my children must see me practicing my values and how staying true to my values gave me my success ... Who I am as Sam when I go home, is the same as the Sam they see in office.

Dr. Nona was able to connect her spirituality to her professional calling:

I was able to relate my service to the people as my way of serving God. As I take care of the people, He also takes care of me.

Bridging leaders have a purpose. For mayors and their health officers, their purpose was to understand their health systems so that they and their teams could take collaborative action to reduce health inequities. But how can leaders realize their purpose and begin moving toward this bigger calling?

Mayor Sam remembers an activity that opened his eyes, awakened this realization, and brought the concept home. The Foundation and the Department of Health had designed a data-based health system roadmap showing health targets achieved or surpassed (green), status quo (yellow), and targets not yet met (red). Mayor Sam's municipality had much more red than yellow or green on its roadmap. With the help of Dr. Nona and a Department of Health representative, the mayor began understanding the stories behind the numbers. Through this roadmap, and by probing “why?” again and again, Mayor Sam came to grasp the different components of the health system. He also came to understand that leadership and governance drive every single one of these components, from health financing to service delivery.

Together with the data, the roadmap helped Mayor Sam and Dr. Nona, and their teams, to identify priority action points for improving health outcomes for poor families.

Knowing the inherent complexity of health inequity, both participants used the program to connect to a deeper source and understand what was being asked of them. Yet, even with a clear sense of how they each wanted to bring about change, they acknowledged that the changes were too complex for them to achieve alone. The time had come to build co-ownership in order to co-create ways to address the problems in their local health system.

They learned how to identify critical stakeholders, how to engage them, and how to build relationships with and among them. Deep listening and dialogue were crucial tools in this process. They translated their learning into a municipal action plan. In addition, they each drew up a plan of personal action points for developing their competencies as bridging leaders. With their action plans and reinvigorated selves,



they embarked on a six-month guided practicum, designed to reinforce their learning and apply Bridging Leadership to their work and lives.

The program's deep-dive experience was a crucial milestone for both participants. The program designed and included this experience to help leaders deepen their understanding of the health situation – enabling them to see through the eyes of their constituents. For this exercise, Mayor Sam and Dr. Nona went to the farthest villages in their municipality and talked to a family that had experienced inequities in the municipal health system. The mayor and doctor also convened a community assembly, facilitating a conversation to reach a shared understanding of health issues in their municipality. Once the group had arrived at a shared understanding, they thought together about the change needed and explored how to achieve it.

Another important milestone was to conduct simplified leadership workshops for municipal and village leaders and other stakeholders, enabling them to co-create a shared vision and plan of action, and to define who would be accountable for what. Dr. Nona noticed how the workshops shifted participants' collective perspective on health – from health as the absence of disease to seeing it as personal wellbeing; from seeing health improvement as a medical matter to seeing it as involving multiple sectors. A blaming mindset gave way to a shared sense of responsibility and trust.

Mayor Sam recognizes how his own listening and willingness to be vulnerable enabled trust:

As mayor, I felt a shift in dynamics with the community. When I truly listened to them, I learned all their problems. We were also able to level with them that, with the challenges, Doc and I will not solve all the problems – they also have the responsibility to contribute.

Trust-building and power-sharing lie at the core of Bridging Leadership, but the very idea of power-sharing was new, and unsettling, to elected politicians and health experts in the program. Over time, leaders who had the courage and openness to try a different approach were grateful that they did. The program enabled them to practice Bridging Leadership as a form of participatory governance.

On this note, Dr. Nona says:

Having understood deeply the root of inequities, the social determinants of health and how I am expected to be a bridge – to apply ways and means to engage, that each is part of a collaborative experience – I had to change my perspectives ... Now, knowing the importance of listening and building relationships, I've opened myself better to others.

Personal change to enable systems change

Across both the prototype and scale-up experiences, one theme resonated among leaders who were able to live out the Bridging Leadership approach: personal change, sparked through Inner Work, drives systems change. More than knowing what to do and how to do it, the leader's character, being, and values play an integral part in their leadership. Often, leaders forget that leadership work is, at its heart, a personal activity; they forget to pay attention to themselves and explore their role in reforming the system. Monthly coaching encouraged Mayor Sam and Dr. Nona to nurture habits of self-care and renewal. Ongoing reflection kept the mayor and doctor aware of how deeply connected their personal and professional worlds were. Through the program, participants learned that inner development is a key ingredient in leadership.

Dr. Ryan Guinanan, of Benguet State University Open University, a partner in the program, explained why inner work and ownership are so important for Bridging Leadership:

If an egg is broken by an outside force, life ends. If an egg is broken by an inside force, life begins.

He stressed that ownership cannot be dictated, it has to grow from within. The warmth of a coach or mentor helps nurture this inner growth.

The ownership process challenged paradigms and helped participants to integrate different levels of awareness, beginning with an awareness of the self, anchored on purpose and values, then connecting to an awareness of one's part in the system that

creates the problem, and finally coming to an awareness of commitment and action for change. This transformative journey affirms strong core work as the foundation for sustainable structural changes.

To assist this journey, the Bridging Leadership program draws on the Filipino concept of loób ("inner self"). This deeply rooted indigenous concept goes hand-in-hand with kapwa ("shared identity"). A person's loób is his or her potential to relate to others, a potential that is realized in kapwa, the practice of pooling strengths and supporting one another. Making a personal commitment to address a wicked problem, such as health inequity, requires an open mind, an open heart, and open will. Within the Filipino context, this means connecting to the loób – the inner principles of affection, disposition, feelings, attitudes, thought, decision, and responsibility.⁵ For some, this connection resonates spiritually – a sense of a sacred obligation motivates a leader to higher accountability and better performance.

Leaders' narratives, at all levels of the program, testify to an approach where Inner Work inspired and directed external work, enabling leaders to connect better to others, build trust, and bear the costs of leadership and persist even when the work becomes difficult.

For Baj Datinguino, the Bridging Leadership journey rekindled hope. All too often, she'd experienced how ungrateful government service is, she has reached a point where her tired body, mind, and heart have said enough is enough. Connecting to her purpose and values through the program made all the difference, deepening her understanding of herself, of why she persists, and for whom. Baj reflects on her leadership journey:

It made me have a hopeful mind set, to focus on the good in every person. It served as fire to positively influence others. As I work to make a significant dent in public service, I will do so on the side of boldness. If I err, may it be for too much audacity and not for too little. In knowing what I ought to do, everything else is secondary, I simply know that the place I want to live in is that of service.

Conclusion

The scaled-up program achieved its objectives because the transformative learning approach – rooted in Bridging Leadership and Inner Work – was more personal than technical, more inspirational than instructional, applicable to both life and work. Not all participating leaders had the same experiences or achieved the same results, but those who embraced the learning process wholeheartedly found deeper meaning and purpose in their leadership. For Mayor Sam and Dr. Nona at the municipal level, Baj at the regional level, and Dr. Ryan from a partner university, personal change through Inner Work transformed their leadership approaches.

For health leaders in the Philippines, the future remains challenging and uncertain; it is a future that requires a new and different kind of leadership. This case study

illustrates how leadership can support the public good, showing that change is possible and that leaders can work collaboratively to reform a system for the better.

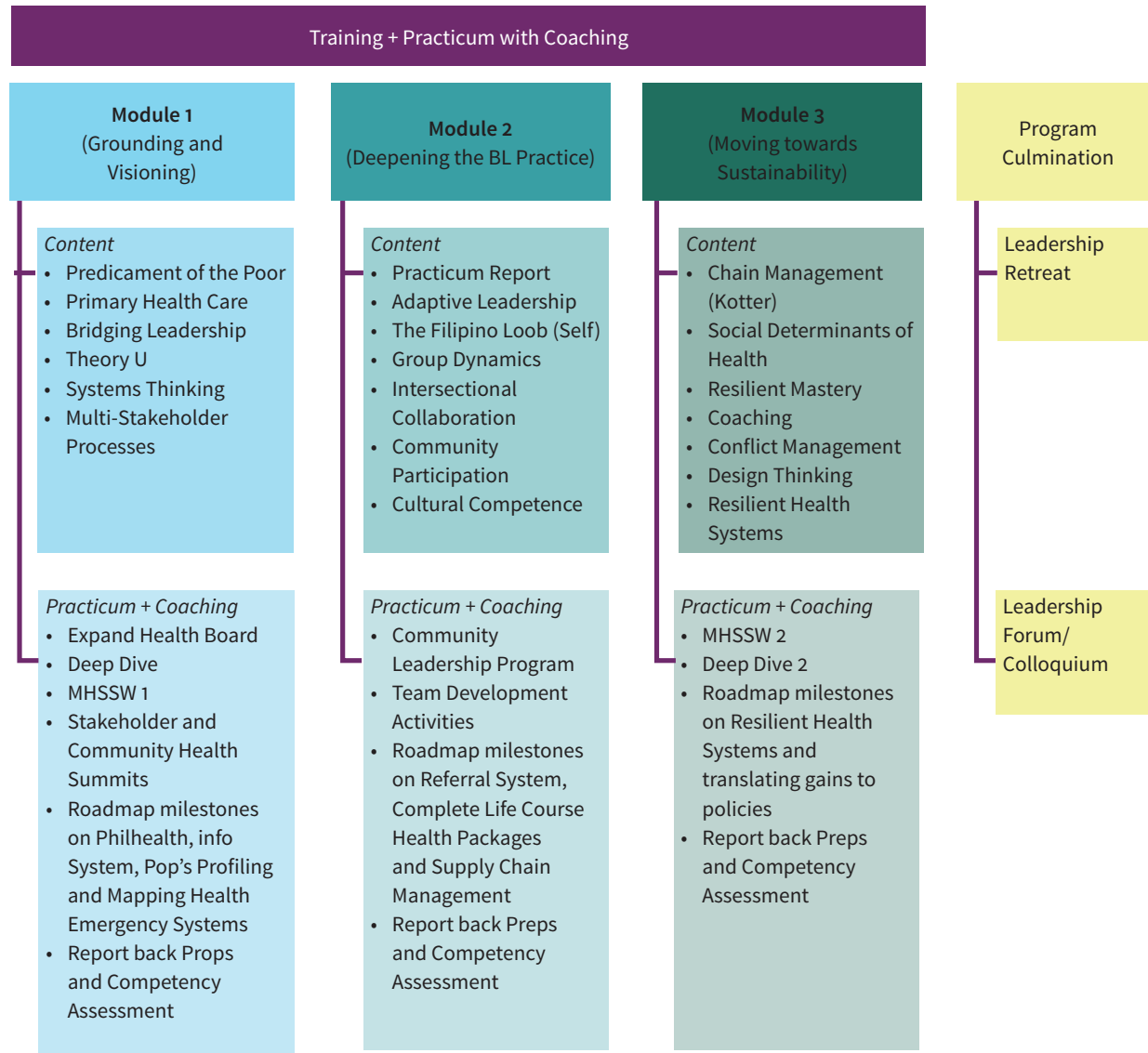
The health leadership program, in its various iterations, offers important lessons for addressing complex social problems. The leaders participating in the program show how important it is to attend to personal change in addition to structural change. Addressing complex social problems needs to be both personal and structural – it is not an “either/or” approach. Inner Work puts the human heart at the heart of leadership, cultivating shifts within each person’s core that ultimately transform their work towards health equity.

Heidee Buenaventura



Zuellig Family Foundation photo

Appendix 1: Curriculum Outline



Notes

¹As narrated by Jackielyn's husband and other family members.

²National Anti-Poverty Commission, 2013.

³Fleming, Ted. (2018). "Mezirow and the Theory of Transformative Learning," in Critical Theory and Transformative Learning, ed. Victor Wang (IGI Global, 2018) doi:10.4018/978-1-5225-6086-9.

⁴See C. O. Scharmer, The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler, 2018).

⁵D. M. Miranda, Loob – The Filipino Within: A Preliminary Investigation into a Pre-Theological Moral Anthropology (LOGOS Publications, 1989).

Reigniting Ubuntu for School Change in South Africa

Neo's story

During the week, Neo normally wakes up to the crow of the first rooster, though in winter, when there might be snow on the crowns of the high mountains above their house, she is awakened by the cold that cuts through her blankets.

She and her brother, Tumo, was with water she boils in a large tub, and then they have their breakfast of bread thinly smeared with a yellow lard, and tea in enamel mugs. Sometimes, her brother would recount the dream he'd had, and she would only partially listens, because, somehow, his dreams were always about the same old memories of father and mother.

Neowould think about how much she wants to pass her Grade 11 exams, so that she may proceed to Grade 12 and pass her final school exams so she could go on to a university, like the boy from their school had done last year.

They'd put the boy's picture, with a trophy in his hand, in the newspapers. He'd won a scholarship and came back sometimes to stand in front of them at school assembly, to tell them about the university of concrete in the bustling centre of Johannesburg, that city of gold.

It takes Neo and her brother an hour to walk to school. On the way, they'd meet other children coming out of their houses, all neatly put together in their school uniforms, and they would balance each other by their shoulders or briefly race along stony tracks, and would chatter and gossip, so early already. Sometimes they would recount a horror, how they'd looked on helplessly as a woman was mugged by the Nyaope boys with their bloodshot eyes, who stole her money and her ARVs to mix with their marijuana; or the way the principal hadn't been able to separate the two boys who'd drawn knives and almost stabbed each other at school.

Most often, they talked about the subjects they were studying. Neo would talk about natural sciences. She wanted to be a doctor, to save people's lives. She used to help the home-based carer who had come once a week to bring adult diapers and wash her mother and put balm on her festering wounds as she wasted away. Neo's best friend Thelma, who always managed to tweak her uniform and hair to look glamorous, wanted to be rich and talked always about how accounting wasn't so difficult. "We've been poor for too long," Thelma would say, sounding older than her years.

If they studied hard and kept out of trouble, they would also do well. If their teachers taught as they were supposed to, instead of coming to school drunk on Mondays or never at all, they could do well and would pass their exams and, like the boy last year, would also get scholarships. And after that, well, it was up to them to make what they would of their lives.



Kagiso Trust photo

Neo's story reflects the aspirations and disappointments of the many young South African's whose education falls far short of the democratic ideal of equal education for all. Set in the mountainous Thabo Mofutsanyane District on the eastern side of the Free State province, the story depicts typical living conditions and experiences of children growing up in a context of rural poverty. The district is one of the province's poorest, with two-thirds of its households living below the poverty line.

Over the past decade, remarkable changes in Thabo Mofutsanyane District schools have brought hope to children like Neo and her brother. Between 2010 and 2015, 166 government schools in the district participated in the Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme, an initiative of the Kagiso Trust. District results in National Senior Certificate examinations leapt from a pass-rate of 65% in 2010 to 87.5% in 2015. Three years after the program had ended, the district pass rate in 2018 had risen to 90%. And in 2019, the Free State ranked first among the country's nine provinces.

What accounts for these striking achievements? And what part did the Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme play? At the core of the program is a series of retreats designed to enable self-reflection, collaboration and accountability among school teams and district officials.

Kgotso Schoeman (former CEO of the Kagiso Trust) says: "The real change in schools has been because of the retreats. The retreats allow a conversation around values, and what holds organisations together."

The case in context

In its founding and history, the Kagiso Trust exemplifies collaboration for social change towards a better society. In 1985, during a period of intense struggle against Apartheid, a group of prominent clerics, secular leaders and business people founded the Kagiso Trust. Collaborating with the South African Council of Churches, and others, the Trust worked to oppose Apartheid. More recently, since the birth of South Africa's democracy in 1994, the Trust has worked towards a prosperous, peaceful, equitable and just society.

The Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme is named in honor of Beyers Naudé who had been a leading Afrikaner theologian of the whites-only Dutch Reformed Church. In 1963, he gave his last sermon, placing "the authority of God over the authority of man", removed his robes, and left the church to become active in the Christian Institute, the South African Council of Churches, and other structures opposing Apartheid. Along with Desmond Tutu, he later became a Patron of the Kagiso Trust.

Education is a responsibility for all within society and the burden to empower the next generation through education must be borne by all.

These words of Beyers Naudé convey the spirit of collective responsibility that infuses the Trust's education initiatives.

South Africa has struggled to overcome Apartheid's legacy. Even before the apartheid era, few black children had the chance to go to school and then only to mission schools. When the white National Party government came to power in 1948, it proceeded to enact legislation that entrenched racial categories and drove 'non-whites' into subjugation. And so began the notorious system of Apartheid. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 took control of African education away from the missionaries and transferred it to a separate racial education authority. This compelled black African children to attend government schools, with curricula designed to prepare them for 'their station in life'. Up to fifth grade, teaching was to take place in the students' 'native tongue'; English or Afrikaans were to be the medium of instruction for post-primary education.

In June 1976, primary and high school students in Soweto, Johannesburg's largest black township, revolted when the white government ordered that henceforth, Afrikaans would be a compulsory medium of instruction, alongside English. Although the language policy triggered the protests, this was a much wider movement against Apartheid. Under the motif "freedom before education", protests continued to disrupt schooling through the 1980s, and on until the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990.



After the country's first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa's new government moved swiftly to integrate fragmented and racially segregated schooling into a single system but with provincial responsibility for schools. But despite extensive educational reform and high public expenditure on education, vestiges of the apartheid education system remain extant.

Former 'Bantu education' and 'homeland' schools, and schools in poor neighbourhoods, have a generally poor performance and high drop-out rates compared to former, predominantly white schools. Under the new dispensation, schools are assigned a quintile ranking, relative to the poverty level of the surrounding neighbourhood. Schools in quintile 1 are in the poorest neighbourhoods; those in quintile 5 in the wealthiest. On almost any measure of educational performance and quality, schools in the lower quintiles fall far behind those in the higher quintiles.

South Africa's worst performing schools are concentrated in the country's poorest and largest rural provinces, where there are schools with no water for learners to drink, no textbooks for them to read, not enough desks for them to sit at, all contributing to a poorly equipped learning environment. Country-wide, as recently as 2019, 74% of schools had no libraries, 80% had no science laboratories, and 63% had no computer laboratories. Inequalities and failures in the system were even starker in 2009 when the Kagiso Trust began its work in school development than they are now.

Against the backdrop of widespread inequality in the educational system, South Africa's Constitution affirms every citizen's equal right to education. This right – together with Nelson Mandela's words "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" – inspires the educational aspirations of children and young people, aspirations only to be dashed by dysfunctional, poorly resourced schools.

The Beyers Naudé School Development Programme

The Beyers Naudé Schools Development Program aimed to improve educational outcomes in rural areas, by developing instructional leadership and curriculum capacity at selected rural schools and supporting the education system to function more effectively in participating school districts.

Disappointing beginnings, eureka moments and lessons for a new design

Between 2005 and 2007, the Trust had funded and contracted school development service providers to improve teaching and learning outcomes in ten schools in rural parts of Limpopo province. After two years, there was no marked improvement.

Kgotso Schoeman, the former CEO of the Kagiso Trust, was struck by two contrasting incidents at two of the participating schools. At the first school, when the headmaster forgot to lock the school gates; some community members stood guard while others went to find him. At the second school, negligence had enabled the theft of computers and other equipment. Kgotso assembled the school staff and School Governing Body, and called a press conference to expose their culpability, by

omission, in the loss of the equipment. The School Governing Body subsequently raised funds from the broader community to safeguard the school.

These two incidents became eureka moments for Kgotso. He came to understand that where school stakeholders did not abide by values of ownership, responsibility and accountability, little progress could be achieved. He also came to believe if provincial departments of education were not committed to the processes of change, they too would continue to fail accountability tests.

A rare opportunity for self-reflection deepened these insights. As a Synergos Senior Fellow, Kgotso was invited to the United States in 2007, to engage with members of the Synergos team and go on a personal retreat. It is here that he encountered the idea of Bridging Leadership and came to appreciate the importance of inner work. Three days alone in a tent in the Montana desert gave him time to do his own inner work, as he puts it, “to re-energise, to reflect and to recommit myself to my personal goals and my goals for the Kagiso Trust”.

Laying the foundations for trusting, trustworthy and accountable system

Together with colleagues Themba Mola and Yoyo Sibisi, and others, Kgotso convened workshops for the participating schools in Limpopo province to reflect on and account for their poor performance. The workshops paid dividends; within two years, the schools showed marked improvements in the National Senior Certificate examination results.

With insights from the Limpopo experience, the Kagiso Trust team designed the Beyers Naudé School Development Program around five propositions:

1. Provincial education departments would provide matching funds for school improvement programs.
2. Stakeholders in participating schools would participate in retreats for individual and group reflection, to account for their own and their school’s performance, and to chart ways forward.

3. Specialized service providers would then assist with capacity development tailored to the needs of each school.
4. Parents and the community at large would engage in school related activities.
5. Schools that achieved their agreed performance targets would receive incentive rewards

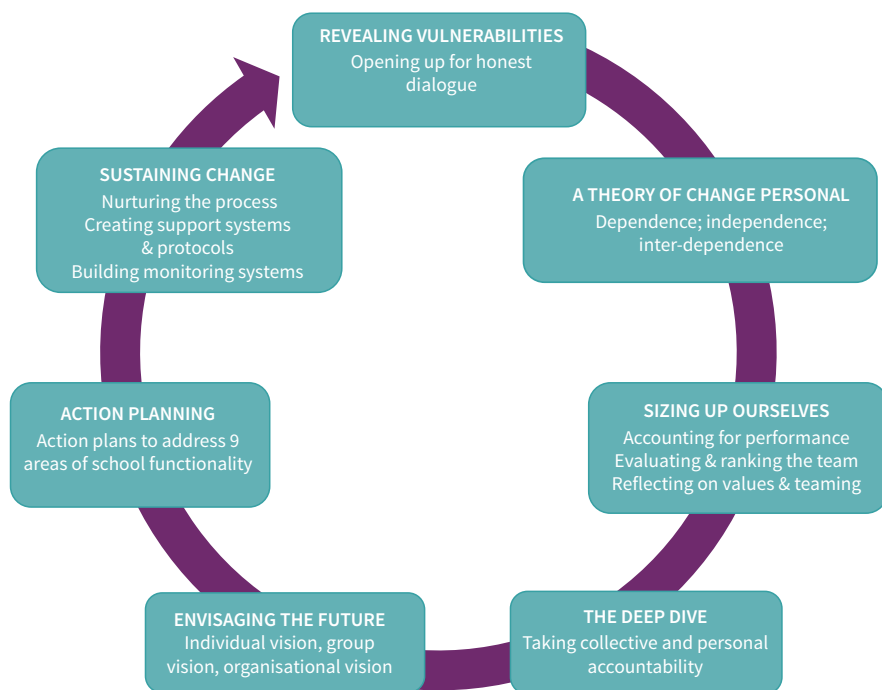
The Trust proposed the program to education departments in seven of South Africa’s nine provinces. Few were willing to provide matching funds; in others there was limited commitment to the program.

The Free State Province was enthusiastic. Michael Phutsisi, Manager of Partnerships in Education in the Free State Department of Education, understood the potential of partnerships to advance change in a system with weak internal capacity. Strong support came from ‘Tate’ Makgoe, Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Education in the Free State.¹ He had an ambitious vision for education. Having been active in the struggle against Apartheid, he believed that improving education in the province was a profoundly political goal. When the early successes of the program became evident in a 10-school pilot in the Thabo Mofutsanyane District, the MEC agreed to match the Trust’s funding offers.

At the outset, the program identified challenges facing the school system in the province, many of which were generic across the country, for example, high failure rates in mathematics, science and accounting, and an undersupply of teachers qualified to teach these subjects. Schools had a dearth of teaching and learning resources, and teachers had not been properly trained to implement the changing national school curriculum. Teacher morale was low; human relations were fractured; teachers, leaders and learners alike acted in undisciplined ways that compromised a culture of learning.

In collaboration with the Department of Education, under the leadership of the MEC, targets were negotiated and agreed, and an implementation program was developed.

Figure 1: The Empowerment and Training Workshop Process



Empowering school teams

The initial and catalytic processes of engagement with schools were the retreats. Otherwise known as Empowerment and Training Workshops, the retreats typically convened at local lodges or hotels for two days over weekends, away from the pressures of work, so that school teams could participate with undivided attention.

A central purpose is to mend the human relationships that have broken down in many schools and build humane and accountable relationships for a healthy

teaching and learning environment. To build a shared sense of responsibility across a school's eco-system, workshops typically include principals, teachers and members of School Management Teams, school support staff, School Governing Board members, and circuit managers (officials responsible for monitoring and supporting schools). The retreats now follow almost ritualised processes, starting with sessions to reveal vulnerabilities.

Revealing Vulnerabilities. At the opening session, a facilitator prompts the participants: "Tell us one thing that most people do not know about you, what you are grateful for, and what is your most unfulfilled wish." As innocuous as this exercise seemingly is, it generally results in people revealing things about themselves that their colleagues were not aware of, despite having worked together for many years. For the Kagiso Trust team, deep interaction around self-revelation is an extremely powerful, opening activity to open space for genuine reflection.

Theory of Personal Change. The facilitators then posit a theory of personal change, with the opener that "Organisations are only as good as the people in them, and not the other way around." The theory describes three types of individuals (those on an dependent growth path, those on an independent growth path, and those on an interdependent growth path), with the purpose of suggesting an ideal type to strive towards. Individuals on an interdependent growth path "understand that cooperation and combining talents results in the creation of something bigger and better".

Sizing up Ourselves. In this first part of a self-evaluative process, the workshop participants rate their school's performance and begin to identify some of the reasons for poor performance. They also begin to identify their collective culpability. Following the evaluation of the school's performance, the workshop then describes and reflects on the key characteristics of best performing teams, including visions and purposes, ownership, management and systems, leadership, and very importantly, their culture and their values, described as "behaviours in action." Typically, participants concede that their schools do not have the attributes common to high performing organisations.

The Deep Dive. Becoming more intrusive, the deep dive first calls on participants to “...please tell us all, what are two things that you personally do that hamper the performance of your team.” Whilst this mea culpa session is often difficult and uncomfortable, participants do come to unburden themselves, and to confess by way of example, to failing to attend departmental meetings; to being insufficiently communicative; to failing to share instructions from the district office; to coming late to school on Monday morning, or not at all on some Fridays; or to physically assaulting an unruly learner. For most, this session forces them to “own up” for their actions, their mistakes and shortcomings and to shift from exteriorising the causes of problems.

Participants are then required to “finger point” each other. This is also a critical step as individuals are often not aware how their behaviour negatively affects others, or the school as a whole. They are asked to, “...tell us two things that any of your colleagues do that hamper the performance of the school.” This session is probably the most difficult of all; it requires individuals to be both honest and brave. However distressing or hurtful some of the accusations might be, in the end, they appear to have almost always been liberating and in many cases, to have resulted in new, almost sacred covenants amongst members of school teams.

The accusatory part of the retreats are not always successfully resolved. In some instances, individuals refused to acknowledge failings on their part and to be accountable for their actions. In one case, a participant threatened to shoot a colleague. In another, a participant took legal action against a colleague for defamation of character.

At the tail end of the session, participants are required to reflect on what they’ve experienced. Many indicate that they were initially frightened and vulnerable, but then concede, “...because everyone was being honest, and because no one was trying to hurt anyone on purpose, it was the right thing to do.” For many, talking from the heart was liberating and empowering, “a hallelujah moment.”



Envisioning the Future. The Kagiso Trust team came to understand that the retreats would not be successful if they were not forward looking, for individuals and for the school as a whole. The forward-looking workshop sessions take participants through a process of personal commitment: “Tell us two things that you are personally going to do from now on, to enhance the performance of the team.”

The participants describe their new resolutions, which are subsequently typed and laminated. They are required, following the retreat, to put them in visible places at their places of work.

Using simple project matrixes, participants are then required to develop priority plans for their schools around key areas of school functionality, including: leadership, management and communication; governance; quality of teaching and learning; curriculum provision and resources; and learner achievement, among others. Once these plans have been further developed, the Trust funds selected service providers facilitate these change management activities. It also monitors the implementation of agreed activities and evaluates their outcomes.

Incentives

The rationale for offering incentives is to effect behaviour change and to motivate stakeholders to achieve desired targets, and in particular, to sustain the enthusiasm for change, generated through the retreats. Incentives have been relatively inexpensive items such as laptops, fax machines, and other office tools. Other incentives have been holiday trips for school teams and their partners to the port cities of Durban and Cape Town, to which very few had ever been. The program came to offer more expensive rewards to benefit whole schools, often with contributions from the private sector, including toilets and water supply systems, where these did not exist or were in poor repair, and laboratories, libraries, multi-purpose halls and other facilities when schools achieved agreed targets. The provision of infrastructure, such as computer labs and multi-purpose centres some of which are accessible to community members, has mobilised communities to protect these facilities and to support school improvement.

Less tangible but equally motivating incentives have been the public award giving events, convened at the schools or at the provincial capital city, addressed by senior government officials, and even the MEC, to celebrate good school performance. “The events are now fashionable. It has become prestigious for schools and their best performers to be invited. Extensive media coverage is important too, because it spreads the importance of education in the lives of our people,” says the Free State MEC for Education.

Outcomes

In quantitative terms, the achievements of the program in this Free State district were remarkable. For example, it supported 120 elementary and 46 secondary schools, with individual retreats for each of the schools and the participation of more than 12,000 school stakeholders. The program impacted 455,000 learners, including through school camps, learner motivation sessions, career guidance activities and other events. It implemented leadership development support to the senior management teams in 40 schools to provide instructional leadership.

Investments in school infrastructure have contributed significantly to improved education outcomes in the district and better teacher morale. However, the qualitative changes engendered by the program have perhaps been more impactful, as they have changed people’s lives, their commitment to visions for schools, and the ways that they now interact.

A principal said of the impact of the retreats, “Learners and teachers are now willing to work extra hours. Teamwork among teachers is now commonplace. Teacher discipline is 100%. There are no more instances of ‘Mr. Monday’ or ‘Mr. Friday.’”

At another school, six teachers sat the lobby of a principal’s office, pens and writing pads in hand. “We are waiting for a departmental meeting with the Principal,” one of them told the case writer. “We participated in a retreat. Now commitment is high. Everything he is doing is transparent. We work as a team.”

In many schools, team members now use their own funds to pay for facilities for time away for reflection. Perhaps what the retreat workshops achieved was to “remind them not to forget,” or to reconnect participants to the basic tenet of the African value system of Ubuntu, which is that, “you are a person through other people, or I am, because we are.”



Kagiso Trust photo

Much of African Indigenous Knowledge is tacit, embedded in practices, relationships and rituals, transferred orally between generations.² Whilst most black South Africans are Christians, Ubuntu remains foundational to the way people immerse themselves in life. Ubuntu frames people's relationships with their ancestors, with their communities and with themselves. It foregrounds reciprocity, respect, and connectedness. It is assumed as a shared value system, although more often observed in its breach, than in its practice.

There is a Sesotho saying *Morena ke lekhoba la sechaba*” Meaning that a chief (or leader) is slave to the people. In other words, a leader is someone whose purpose is to serve the common will of the people, someone with the capacity to maintain community cohesion, to resolve conflict, to protect the most vulnerable, and to build and direct teams for tasks for the common good.

*A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that other are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when other are tortured or oppressed.*³

Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu

The retreats may well have reconnected participants to their own personal Ubuntu.

Conclusion

The Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme brought about remarkable changes to schools in one of the poorest districts of the Free State province. Four years after the close of the program, the district continues to be one of the top performing districts nationally in the grade 12 examination. The success of the program may be attributed to the reflective, visionary, decisive and effective bridging leadership roles of a number of individuals, with uncompromising value systems, who triggered a high degree of formal and informal collaboration amongst key stakeholders both inside and outside the boundaries of the participating schools. This leadership was also able to navigate normally rigid systems, through risk taking and innovation.

The retreat processes were catalytic in bringing about personal transformation and behaviour change, and by all accounts, were responsible for the sustained changes in school performance. What is truly remarkable is the way in which process of self and group reflection of very short durations had such profound effects, particularly when they did not offer opportunity for extended deep self-reflection, meaningful conversations, isolation, stillness, meditation, and the being in nature practices associated with inner work. The inner results of the processes were not Damascene moments, and yet the outer results have been profound. What the processes of self-reflection did was to remind fractured individuals working through dysfunctional relationships of the values and ways of living embedded in Ubuntu.

Morabo Morojelo

Notes

¹A Member of the Executive Council, Education is a provincial minister responsible for education in the province.

²See, for example, M. Munyaka and M. Mothlabi, M. “Ubuntu and its Socio-moral Significance,” In *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, ed. M. F. Murove (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 63–84.

³Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Random House, 2012), 35.

Acknowledgments

Synergos expresses deep gratitude to the case writers – Andrea Rodericks, Beyene Tadesse, DeeDee Yates, Heidee Buenaventura, Renato Guimaraes, and Morabo Morojele – for their dedicated work in conducting the research and writing to produce the full case studies and abridged versions. Special thanks to the individuals and organizations whose stories, quotations, and insights give the case studies their meaning. We are grateful to Shirley Pendlebury for writing the framing paper for this case study collection.

The project on Inner Work for Social Change would not have been possible without the vision and support of the Fetzer Institute. Synergos is immensely grateful for their partnership in making this project a reality, even and especially as the world navigates tumultuous times. A special thanks to Bob Boisture, Kurian Thomas, Gillian Gonda, Amy Ferguson, and Jenny Smith.

We would also like to thank the core team of the Inner Work for Social Change Project, including Len le Roux, Kathryn Uhl, Shirley Pendlebury, Derek Schwabe, Swati Chaudhary, Constance Monatla, and Marina Poudret.

This project has been powered by the combined brilliance of its advisory team, including Bruno Vercken, Daniel Groody, Emmanuel Garza, Ernesto Garilao, Gretchen Ki Steidle, Mark Gerzon, Sue Davidoff, and Vijay Shankar Kathan. The advisory team enriched and invigorated the dialogue on inner work for social change.

Several advisory team members wrote detailed reviews on early drafts of the full, in-depth case studies. Renald Morris and Chong-Lim Lee also served as reviewers. We thank all the reviewers for their time, attention, and insightful comments.

Photos used in the Philippines case study courtesy of the Zuellig Family Foundation; in the South Africa case study courtesy of the Kagiso Trust. We are grateful to the Zuellig Family Foundation and the Kagiso Trust for supporting these two case studies.

Synergos is a global organization helping solve complex issues around the world by advancing bridging leadership, which builds trust and collective action.

The Inner Work for Social Change project aims to shed light on the power of personal transformation in social impact.

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INNER WORK for SOCIAL CHANGE

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ABOUT THE FETZER INSTITUTE

The Fetzer Institute builds the spiritual foundation for a loving world: a world where we understand we are all part of one human family and know our lives have purpose.

Creating a more just, sustainable, and thriving world requires new forms of leadership that use the power of spirituality and Inner Work to create a more connected, loving society.

For more information, visit fetzer.org.

