

Integral Development

Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective not the truth.”
Marcus Aurelius (121 -180 AD)

The purpose of this short paper is to suggest a different paradigm for an increased alignment between Donors, Agents of Change¹ (AOC) who are often NGOs and Beneficiaries, which ultimately is likely to be more authentic, more effective and more durable.

International development² generally involves a process where a donor desires to assist human beneficiaries by giving some form of value, often in the form of infrastructure , technology, food or equipment, so that they can have a better quality of life. Western based AOC’s (typically Non-Government Organizations known as NGOs, INGO’s or Aid Agencies) receive donations to enable an impact to be made for a particular cause and this transaction typically includes what may be called the “donor promise”. This promise, mostly implied, is that the donors money will be used in the way the donor thinks it will be used, to deliver outcomes that the donor perceives are better value for money, as they perceive value, than the donors other alternatives. To deliver on this promise the NGO typically engages of a number of intermediaries (see Fig 1 below).



Fig 1. A typical International Development value chain, where a donor from a Western Nation gives to an International Non- Government Organisation (INGO) which in turn subcontracts the delivery of outcomes to local organisations which ultimately deliver outcomes that positively impact on the lives of individuals in poor communities.

In making a “promise” to the donor, the AOC will describe some proposed outcomes and how they will be achieved and state or imply that the donor will also have less risk in achieving these outcomes if they use the particular “delivery mechanism” of the AOC (mostly NGOs). And this is the beginning of a process that is often flawed and paradoxically works against the very things that the Donor and the AOC set out to achieve, and as Oscar Wilde famously said “All men kill the thing they love”.³

¹ In this context an Agent of Change refers to an event, organisation, material thing or, more usually, a person or organisation in this case typically an NGO, that acts as a catalyst for change.

² International development is a process for human development with the aim of ensuring a better quality of life for people who are poor. At a community level it includes issues such as food security, technology, water and sanitation, health , education, governance, infrastructure, economics, human rights and the environment. It is generally distinguished from International AID which refers to responses to emergency situations and is more about service delivery and less about sustained longer term development.

³ From the The Ballad of Reading Gaol, a poem by Oscar Wilde, written in exile either in Berneval or in Dieppe, France, after his release from Reading Gaol on or about 19 May 1897

In seeking to conceive and communicate impact through their delivery channels, the AOC typically takes a linear world view that starts as a concept and ends up in action that is planned and delivered with the intention to achieve outcomes, hypothetically described in Figure 2 below.

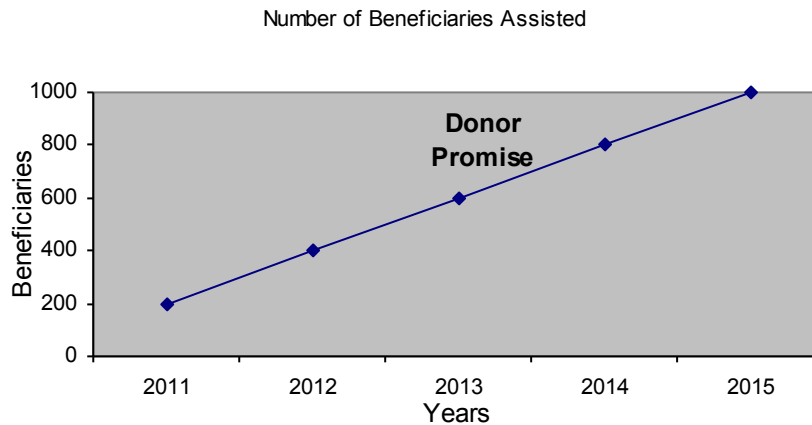


Figure 2: The Chart above describes the development process as a linear progression, anything on or above the line meets the donor promise, and anything below the line would be seen as a failure to deliver on the intended outcomes.

Here a paradox is created because of the simple truth, that to grow as humans and as communities⁴ we learn from and become stronger and more resilient through our challenges and mistakes; it is these that cause us to reflect and evolve whether that is through an increasingly sophisticated and nuanced world views, application of wisdom or harnessing a greater range of material options. For individuals and groups of people who are poor, to increase their perspectives in ways that increase their options, generally requires some shift in worldviews and for this shift to take place it is likely to require some kind of dis-ease, failure or real risk of failure. But risk of failure is unattractive to donors and both donors and AOCs tend to indentify outcomes below the donor promise line as failure. Thus in a effort to attract donors, AOCs try as much as possible, to take risk out of the programming equation which in turn undermines a communities ability to make choices which could potentially cause a “program” to fail, at least within the scheduled timeframe.

³ In this case a community refers a community of interest and affiliation as described in the following definition: "a community of interest is a gathering of people assembled around a topic of common interest. Its members take part in the community to exchange information, to obtain answers to personal questions or problems, to improve their understanding of a subject, to share common passions or to play. In contrast to a spatial community, "a 'community of interest' is always defined not by space, but by some common bond (eg feeling of attachment) or entity (eg farming, church group)." F. Henri & B. Pudelko (2003) Understanding and analyzing activity and learning in virtual communities, *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* (2003) 19, 474-487.

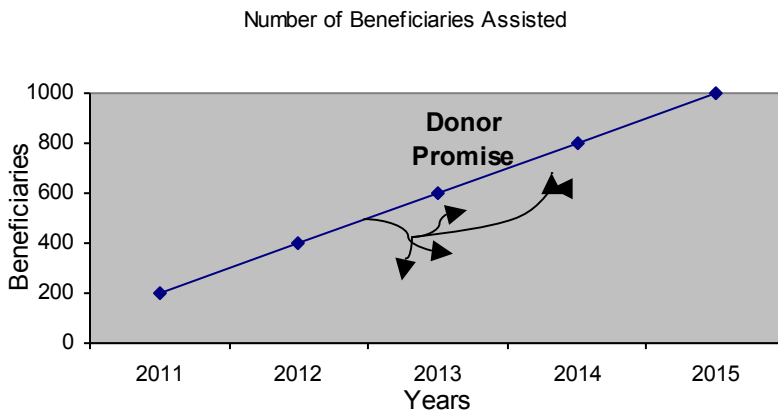


Figure 3: The revised Chart above shows the development quandary when a deviation occurs that may be perceived as a potential program failure or alternately as an injunction⁵ that is necessary for resilience building. The problems for the AOC is whether, when and how much to intervene, if useful intervention is possible and what to communicate to donors.

In fact this risk aversion is also likely to curtail the AOC's own aspirations as they tend only to "program" interventions that they think they can guarantee, if necessary though their own efforts, rather than risking embarking on a journey with a community, the destination of which is still to emerge. And this type of intervention can actually disempower a community, as the AOC's objectives have usurped the beneficiaries true objectives, like a cuckoo's egg in the poor communities nest.

This aversion to failure is akin to never letting a child fall and so that child never learns to walk on their own, or a human body that is never allowed to encounter disease and so cannot build the strength and resistance that will sustain it more safely into the future. **(Make additional note Homeomeric nature of donor, AoC and community?)**

Individual donor access to new forms of media and global connectivity pose additional challenges for AOC's, as more than ever before, donors expect to have more information about and in many cases direct interactions with beneficiaries. From the AOC standpoint communications that are not "reframed" by them significantly complicate donor perceptions of how success or failures are portrayed.

The Present Mess

The "mess" that AOC's (particularly NGOs) working in International Development face now and are increasingly likely to face into the future is:

1. How to factor in risk as a potentially necessary development injunction, in such a way that donors will still support and fund programs

⁵ An "Injunction" in this context is something commanding that something be done.

2. How to articulate an initiative (in the form of a project or program) where outcomes are unknown because the “problem” to be grappled with changes as the program develops and as people who are poor encounter more choices, complexity increases and more, different and unknown challenges will be encountered and require resolution from players who now see their world differently.
3. In the context of the typical value chain (Fig 1) where designs are generally formulated with the donor in mind and prior to engaging with communities. Thus how to bring the issue of ongoing program design and redesign to the field where the program is taking place and engage in a process of iterative emergence.
4. How to avoid AOC’s developing designs that aim for less than may be possible and but that they can be sure to deliver and in fact prioritising their success above higher aspirations of greater impact in communities that may be more community dependant and so have a perceived higher risk of failure within the timeframes negotiated with the donor.
5. How to measure progress and positive change when none of those involved are sure what will happen or how or when and in what form change will take place.

Shifting perspectives from Linear to Integral Emergent

Conceptualisation of development in communities that are poor can generally be best thought of as “Wicked” problems (Rittel, 1973). A Wicked problem is one in which each situation is essentially unique, evading definitive scoping, where there are no defined ends, solutions are partial and better or worse rather than being right or wrong; where every intervention counts, altering the entire situation and all within the context of being a part of another problem.

Shifting interventions from ‘linear solution thinking’ in overcoming development challenges to wicked problem thinking requires a new way of conceptualising what is to be done, when and by whom.

The Integral perspective as described by Ken Wilber⁶ provides a framework for conceptualising development as an iterative process and has advantages both in the way of perceiving what is in fact closer to an actual development process, as well as broadening the scope the options and possibilities apprehended. This has been depicted in the “Spiral of Emergence” (Figure 5 below).

In this spiral I have depicted the AQAL⁷ quadrants at its core to indicate that with every new injunction and in every reflection and action there is change and movement in the four

⁶ Ken Wilber (born January 31, 1949) is an American author and philosopher who has written over 30 books covering mysticism, philosophy, ecology, and developmental psychology. His work formulates what he calls Integral Theory. In 1998, Wilber founded the Integral Institute for teaching and applications of Integral theory.

⁷ AQAL stands for “all quadrants all levels”, and is at the core of the Integral Operating System’s framework to make sense of the complexity of the Kosmos. All of Wilber’s AQAL categories—quadrants, lines, levels, states, and types, relate to relative truth in that none of them are true in an absolute sense. An account or theory is said to be AQAL, and thus *integral* (inclusive or comprehensive), if it takes into account or makes reference to all four quadrants and four major levels in Wilber’s ontological scheme.

quadrants depicted below (Figure 4). Exiting from the central path of this development spiral is likely to be because some the quadrants are not sufficiently tetra-meshed⁸ to sustain the same upward movement. Using AQAL in its most fundamental form potentially provides a different way to view and articulate the development process and could be used to move a “current situation” into one that provides new options for dealing with many of the issues outlined in the “mess” above.

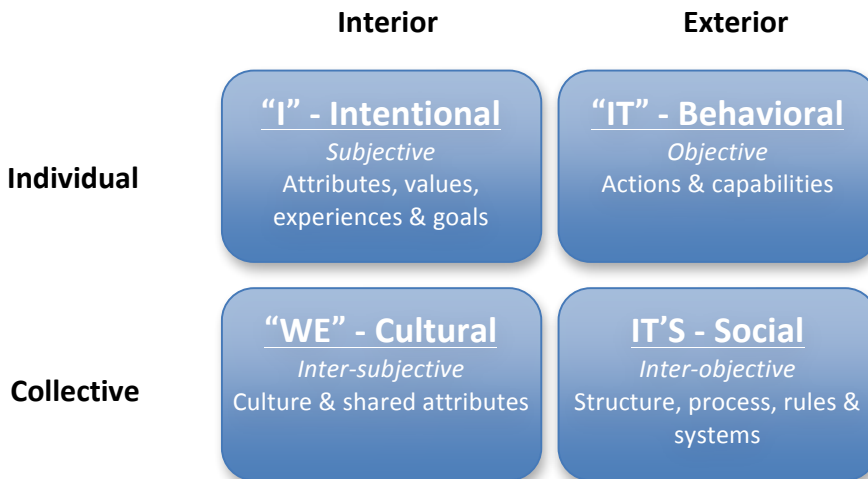


Figure 4: AQAL – All Quadrants, All Levels

The AQAL dimensions above can be understood as:

- “I” - the subjective worldviews of the individual - “how ‘I’ see the world around me” and
- “It” - the objective dimensions that includes behaviors, actions and capabilities - “what is available to me, what resources can I access?”
- “We” – the inter-subjective worldviews of the group and community – “how ‘we’ see the world “
- “It’s” - the inter- objective dimensions that includes organizational systems, processes, rules and environment that are available to the community - “what is available to us?”

Together these four AQAL dimensions take into account the interior and exterior perspectives of a given situation, as well as the individual and collective perspectives. And the success of any initiative to promote sustainable development is going to be impacted by the degree to which each of these four dimensions are aligned to and support each other.

⁸ Tetra-meshing refers to a state where the level of development in each of the four quadrants is aligned and thus enables each quadrant to deliver its full potential.

The Spiral of Emergence – Local Economic Development

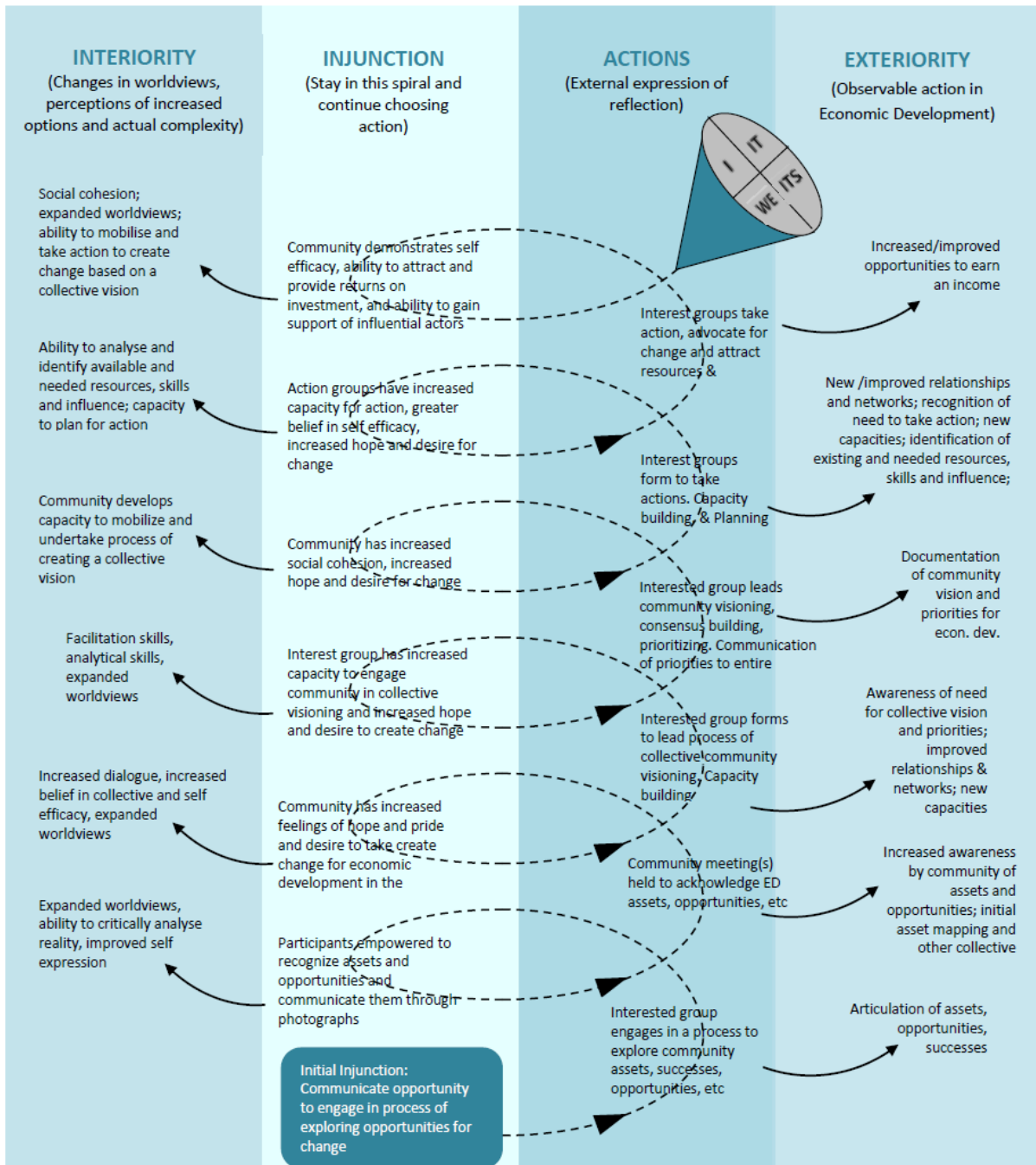


Figure 5. The Integrally informed emergent spiral above uses local economic development as its subject but conceptually could be applied to any development sector. It depicts the relationship between apprehension and action in the form of lived experience and demonstrates multiple “exit” and re-entry points each of which is not an end but the beginning of another spiral. In this context the movement depicted is upward as it can be argued that all movement is intrinsically upward if given enough time.

A developing world example of the interrelationship between the four AQAL dimensions in the context of “Micro-finance” may well be as follows. A Muslim woman in rural Pakistan wishes to start a small business and to do this will need to take a small loan from a microfinance institution in the nearest town. Firstly, in the individual dimension, the woman must believe that taking out a loan is something that makes sense to her in terms of her life and future, in the second dimension a microfinance organization must be available to her to visit. However, if in the collective “we” dimension, the culture does not support women to leave their homes and go to town, or to communicate with male microfinance loan officers, then it is unlikely that the woman will seek a loan and thus will not start a business. If she is able to overcome this barrier, then in the dimension of collective systems and environment, local legal and regulatory frameworks will need ensure that red-tape around documentation concerning her autonomy, collateral or identification do not exclude her from completing the loan application. From this example it is obvious that unless there is sufficient alignment between these four dimensions so that each supports the other, then it is unlikely that an initiative such as small business loans supporting women wanting to engage in small businesses activities, will succeed.

The addition of the four dimensions above allows for a more comprehensive way of making sense of a particular local context, so that a better and wider range of responses is possible. The starting point in many interventions is to engage in conversations within a community “as though the answers matter”. And to do this it is very beneficial to have such a multidimensional map to help make sense of the territory.

In the first instance, an Integral view of the problem to be tackled can provide a much more complete picture of the many variables at play in any given situation. In my own speciality of local economic development, people in communities I am engaged with are often living on less than \$1 each day. The fundamental issue is how incomes can be increased in sustainable ways. It is no surprise that as people’s incomes increase they can solve many of their own nutritional, health, education and savings issues. It is also no surprise that as their incomes increase so do their choices as well as the emergence of fresh challenges and problems at the individual, family and community levels.

The linear equation of the traditional donor promise may be that x number of people increase their incomes by $y\%$, but this view of progression or success fails to adequately take into account and assess movement in the worldviews of individuals and communities which are likely to make future increases in income both possible and sustainable.

For each element of economic development, such as, access to technology, markets, micro-finance, education and training and appropriate infrastructure and legal and regulatory systems there are lines of development in each quadrant and there will also be a baseline for the current situation in each of these four quadrants. These levels can benchmark where things are now located at an individual perceptual level, at a group or community level of social or cultural behaviour and in the right hand quadrants a current situation of what is available to

individuals and communities. For positive change to occur in any of these elements in such a way that it is observable there will need to be commensurate change in the interiority of the left hand quadrants if this change is to be sustained.

For example in the west, if a truck driver wins a million dollars in a lottery, unless there is a real change in his worldview the likelihood is he will not invest the money in building his own trucking company but instead spend most of the money and return to his previous position of driving a truck.

AQAL can be not only be used to develop a baseline in four perspective but also to project preferred future and to measure changes toward that future. The Integral example described in Figure 6 (below), shows the current and future situations that may exist for a community that is working towards having a road constructed to their local town.

What is significant about using such a pictogram is that it is possible that over the course of several years to demonstrate substantial progress in the left hand quadrants as well as the upper right, *without* a new road being built. That there may still be “no road” does not detract from the reality that a great deal has been achieved *towards* the existence of a road. It may be an upcoming election that means that the road will become material or it may be the next, it may be dependant on a number of macro factors, but it is likely that the changes in three quadrants will mean that the road will eventually be built.

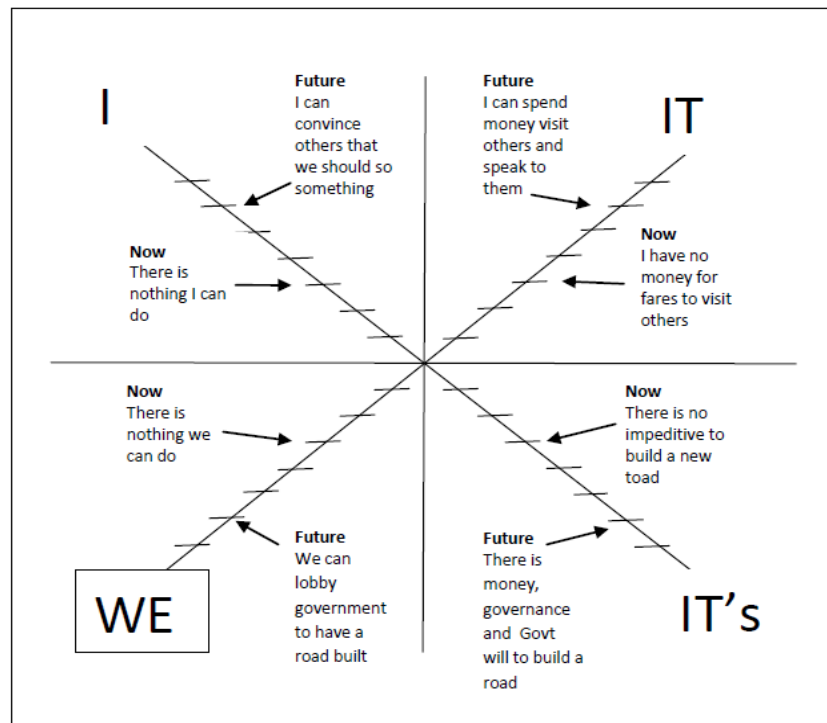


Figure 7. A fictitious example of a prospective Integral map which describes the current and future states of a community empowerment project to have a road built.

In the example above, the ‘linear’ donor promise equation would almost certainly view “no road” within the given time frame as failure; however with the benefit of an Integrally informed monitoring great changes in the enabling environment can be demonstrated *and* communicated. In fact such change is not only likely to ensure that the road is built, but when it is, that it will be built well and it will be maintained.

The Benefits of Integrally informed Development – Reframing the mess and reenergising the process.

Using the Integral AQAL approach potentially provides increased depth, understanding and a more nuanced picture of what gaps exist between current levels and future preferred levels in the elements necessary for future positive change to occur. This allows for a number of possibilities that can begin to address the current development “mess” described earlier.

(a) By identifying the observable positive changes that are desired and then tetra-meshing the left hand quadrants with those in the right will provide a framework for more effective development as it will:

1. Allow for the articulation of desired end levels that are needed in the “I” and “We” quadrants.
2. It will allow for the interiority of sustainable development to be conceived and articulated as a necessary and valuable development outcome within the context of more traditional “visible” outcomes.
3. Enable the exploration and formulation of strategies and actions that are likely to meet the gaps between a current situation and desired future levels in all quadrants.
4. Allow for the multidimensional and incremental measurement of outcomes and in shorter timeframes that can be affirmed by all stakeholders and communicated to donors as opposed to longer lag time, two dimensional success/failure propositions.

(b) The AQAL ‘map’ provides the potential for making decisions on the nature of interventions in the individual and community levels that are most likely to lead to the greatest changes in the exterior dimensions of the highest possible number of elements that are restraining sustainable livelihood development.

(c) Through the collection of data from a number of programs that have Integrally informed designs and monitoring and evaluation frameworks there is a high likelihood of being able to demonstrate to donors, that allowing for the real possibility of failure and the more intentional consideration of changes in the interior dimensions, consistently demonstrate greater material and sustainable development outcomes in the longer term. And that working intentionally with all AQAL dimensions does in fact provide greater return on investment than more shallowly conceived programs which focus on faster definitive exterior achievements without paying the necessary attention to the interiority of a situation.

(d) In the context of development, the four AQAL dimensions provide the potential to change

program designs from the fear that individual program or program components may fail, to focusing on tetra-meshed end states that allow for a myriad of flexible shared learning opportunities. This focus can more fully utilise the initiative, creativity and energy of staff and community members on the ground, to generate continuous iterations of relevant and timely interventions and apply them towards end states. This approach also allows for an increase in flexibility and for the ongoing adjustment of approaches as successes are achieved and complexity increases. In this framework measurement of progress and positive change is also possible when none of those involved could have predicted what change would happen or how or when and in what form the change takes place.

(e) The use of AQAL as a “map” also allows for consideration as to the roles of field staff, as their worldviews and available resources can be overlaid on the present and future map of the community and the changes that it will be necessary for them to bring to the process if they are to play a constructive role.

Bibliography

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