

The Birth of the Bhavishya Alliance

Learnings & Insights

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A Note on Methodology

This document is intended as an outline of key learnings and insights from the Maharashtra Change Lab process over three months. Emphasis is placed on drawing out some of the major lessons from the Lab which could inform and enrich future endeavours and thus be the subject of further research.

The complete document includes an abridged version of the Learning History of the Change Lab written by Gomathy Balasubramanian and therefore is not intended as a complete chronology of the project. Neither do the authors make a commentary on the relative importance of events. Instead events that illustrate clearly a point of learning are favoured over events that might be landmarks in a chronology of the project.

The basic approach has been drawn from Glaser & Strauss (1967) “grounded theory” to allow for patterns to emerge from the data collected, thereby generating theory via intensive analysis of the data, which included multiple documents from the Change Lab, the learning history and primary experiences.

This document is co-authored by Zaid Hassan who was on the Maharashtra Change Lab Staff Team, and Mia Eisenstadt, an external anthropology and development studies researcher. The authors recognise that their interpretation is one possible interpretation amongst many and that every participant will experience the Change Lab in their own terms.

Preface: The Birth of the Bhavishya Alliance

The process of giving birth is rarely simple. It comes with both profound joys and towering anxieties. While preceded by many years of work by many people, the Bhavishya Alliance was born and started to take its first steps during the three months of April, May and June of 2006. Appropriately enough, this period of creation was full of ups and downs, moments of happiness and sadness, challenges and breakthroughs. We attempt to honour the spirit and character of the Bhavishya Alliance here, through capturing our learning, developing questions and insights from the experience.

Like all parents, we are convinced of the beauty, strength and intelligence of this particular baby. We are lucky, however, to be surrounded by a community of stern but loving aunts and uncles who have supported us, and continue to do so, in our moments of parental blindness. To stretch the metaphor just a little further, we are very aware of the amount of work, energy and attention it takes to raise a child. The task of nurturing the Alliance is tied into the very same qualities of attention, love, and discipline that are required to bring up a healthy child and combat malnutrition.

The Bhavishya Alliance is extremely ambitious, complex, messy and fraught with risk. If, however, we remember that our commitment to this work stems from a need to see children healthy and happy then the risks are simply issues we must learn to navigate in the course of life. Only when we become parents ourselves do we begin to appreciate the anxieties and joys of our own parents. As the Bhavishya Alliance fast approaches its first birthday we would like to invite you to participate in the work of nurturing the Alliance, a unique multi-stakeholder partnership that is learning how to walk and to run.

Introduction: The Silent Emergency

“The Indian experiment is still in its early stages, and its outcome may well turn out to be the most significant of them all, partly because of its sheer human scale, and partly because of its location, a substantial bridgehead of effervescent liberty on the Asian continent.”

Sunil Khilani, *The Idea of India*

Child malnutrition in India has been described as a silent emergency. This is born out in the stark numbers of the nutrition crisis. Forty-seven percent of India’s four hundred and fourteen million children under the age of six have some form of malnutrition. Malnutrition is a complex issue to tackle because it’s a multi-factoral phenomenon. Because there is no one single cause, the factors that effect the situation are diverse and difficult to tackle in parallel. These range from social factors, such as the disempowerment of women and girls, to economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, through to political factors such as poorly functioning government agencies. Effects can manifest in equally diverse ways, with children suffering from stunted growth to increased susceptibility to disease. The situation is seemingly intractable, partly due to the increase in the absolute number of children being born, partly due to the complex nature of the change required at multiple levels (from the mother through to governmental institutions) and finally as a consequence of the size and diversity of India’s population and geography.

Within the State of Maharashtra where the Bhavishya Alliance started work, populations suffering from malnutrition include children in illegal urban slums in Mumbai, children in Adivasi communities in the forests of Nandurbar, and a whole array of rural and peri-urban communities in-between representing a variety of cultures. This sheer diversity of contexts means that no blanket approach to malnutrition can be implemented. Or rather, that no single approach will succeed. Approaches need to be contextualised for the particular circumstances of a situation. This leads to tension between the need to address unique needs and large-scale social change. Often policies towards malnutrition rely on a certain homogeneity of the population (of speech, language and cultural practice) if they are to deliver centrally driven services efficiently and within reasonable cost.

The uniqueness of the overall situation, leading to the label of “a silent emergency,” is that there are few visible signs of early to moderate malnutrition. Children, particularly those under the age of six, can look healthy without showing any of the obvious signs of illnesses, unlike in the case of other diseases. Parents, therefore, have little indication that anything is wrong with their children, at least until malnutrition is severe enough to result in more obvious symptoms. The challenge of affecting change in such a context cannot be

underestimated. Many development professionals, working in the area of malnutrition, are often perceived as the bearers of bad news. Many recount tales of hostility from communities and parents, who resent being told by outsiders (development agencies) that there is something wrong with their children, implying that they are not good parents. In other words, for many parents child malnutrition is not a problem, they are not aware of its existence.

The diversity of stakeholders affecting the health of a children are vast, ranging from young mothers and siblings, all the way through to nutritionists and food manufacturers to governmental officers at Panchayat, district and State levels. The nature of the situation presents immense challenges not only in technical or political spheres but also the social and communal. Establishing partnerships of trust between these stakeholders, who more often than not come from extremely different realities, is a highly complex task.

Purely technical solutions to malnutrition in India are known. Over the past 20

Child Malnutrition is a Complex Problem that Can Only Be Solved Through an Extraordinary Approach

Type of complexity	Definition	Ordinary approach for simple problems	Extraordinary approach for complex problems	Process requirement for complex problems
Dynamic	Cause and effect are far apart in space and time	Piece by piece	System as a whole	Systemic
Generative	Future is unfamiliar and undetermined	Existing solutions	Emerging solutions	Creative
Social	Actors have diverse perspectives and interests	Experts and authorities	Stakeholders and stickholders	Participative

Source: Kahane after Scharmer and Senge

years, many interventions ‘at scale’ have been attempted, including one of the largest government-sponsored nutrition programs in the world, the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS). However, “few decision makers have a holistic understanding of malnutrition's multi-sectoral causes” (Heaver 2004) and “nutritional inequalities across different states, socioeconomic and demographic groups are large—and, in general, are increasing” (Gagnolati 2005). As a result, millions of children remain malnourished. It is clear that new approaches are urgently needed.

The challenging nature of the malnutrition situation in India means that it cannot be addressed using traditional methods. The diagram below summarises the characteristics of complex problems and the requirements for addressing them.

The Change Lab: a Laboratory for Social Change

The Change Lab brings together approaches to addressing complex challenges that are systemic, creative and participative. The form a Change Lab generally takes is a sustained gathering of a group of people representing the different sectors of society affected by the issue at hand, coupled with various practitioners. This consists of people from government, business and civil society, as well as community based organizations (CBOs). This group comes together for the common purpose of fostering and creating innovation within a social system. The idea is to create the seeds of a new reality collaboratively. Over the course of a Change Lab a diverse group of stakeholders embarks on a common journey which, in broad strokes, consists of a shared process of seeing and experiencing the system directly, of connecting to their own personal commitment and in quickly prototyping seed initiatives on the ground with a growing group of stakeholders.

The Change Lab is, in a sense, a container (See Box 2). It is a controlled environment within which a group of people experience, become conscious of, and then develop strategies for how to cope with the turbulent and fast-moving dynamics of a modern society. In comparison with the “real world” – the Change Lab aspires to be a space within which it is safe to do things differently, be that shifting power relations or fostering a culture where mistakes are the basis of learning. It’s important to consider that the fast-changing nature of society today means that in some ways the strategies developed within the Change Lab themselves, are less important than having the environment and the capacities with which to continually develop new strategies in response to the ebb and flow of social challenges. In the midst of ever increasing social complexity the Change Lab is a response to the need for such a space.

Box 2. What is the container?

“The container, in this case, is any closed, inescapable environment. It can be 12 people in a 28’ open boat for 3 weeks at the Sea School, or it can be the river, the glacier, the ropes course, even a room somewhere. The image that best describes this principle is the stone polisher, the can that turns and tumbles the rocks we found at the beach until they turn into gems. The rocks don’t get out until they’re done, the friction between them, the chaos of their movement, is what polishes them, and in the end the process reveals their natural inherent brilliance. We don’t paint colours on them, we trust what’s there.”

- “The Container

The Bhavishya Alliance and the Maharashtra Change Lab

The Maharashtra Change Lab took place over three months in April, May and June 2006. It was the product of some three years of work. The project arose out of an initial conversation, between Joseph Jaworski of Generon Consulting and Tex Gunning of Unilever, around how the Change Lab process could be applied to the issue of malnutrition. The project found its genesis in the founding of the Partnership for Child Nutrition (PCN), which was convened by the Synergos Institute-Generon Consulting, UNICEF and Unilever. A local Indian organization, the Bhavishya Alliance, was formed expressly for this purpose. The Bhavishya Alliance and the Maharashtra Change Lab, which was run by the Alliance, were the first projects supported and funded by the Partnership for Child Nutrition, with the intention of convening more labs in different countries.

The purpose of the Bhavishya Alliance is to accelerate the reduction of child malnutrition in India. The Alliance's first project, the Maharashtra Change Lab, convened a "Lab Team" of approximately 30 government, business, and civil society leaders to work with the Alliance's Executive Committee and Champions to co-create three sets of results:

- **Solutions**

Three to six systemic, scalable, sustainable initiatives that can, by the end of 2007, substantially reduce child malnutrition in the five hardest-hit districts in Maharashtra.

- **Relationships**

High-trust relationships among participating leaders and their organisations, that will enable them continue to develop and implement breakthrough solutions to this and other vital societal problems.

- **Capacities**

Strengthened capacity of participating individuals and teams to undertake such deep innovation and change in large and complex organisational and societal systems.

Lab Schedule

Module	Title	Dates for Lab Team	Dates for Executive Committee and Champions	Dates for Esteemed Guests	Location(s)
1	Lab Launch	April 10-21 (12 days)	April 13 (or April 10-13 for those who want an immersion in Lab experience)	April 10-13	April 10-12 at retreat site in Maharashtra and then 13-14 in Belapur office
2	Community Learning Journeys				April 15-19 in various communities in the target districts and then 20-21 in Belapur office
	Break including substantial “home work”	April 22-May 7 (16 days)			In home organisations plus visits to various places in India
3	System Learning Journeys	May 8-26 (18 days)	May 12	May 11-12	May 8-10 at various places in India and then 11-12 in Belapur office
4	Nature Retreat				May 13-21 at retreat site in Uttaranchal (and in transit to and from)
5	Initiative Prototyping I		May 23	May 22-23	May 22-23 in Belapur office and then 24-26 in target districts and partner locations
	Break including substantial home work	May 27-June 4 (9 days)			In home organisations
6	Initiative Prototyping II	June 5-16 (12 days)	Occasional individual contact	June 9	June 5-8 in target districts and other partner locations, and then 9 in Belapur office
7	Initiative Prototyping III		Occasional individual contact	June 16	June 12-15 in target districts and other partner locations, and then 16 in Belapur office
	Break including substantial home work	June 17-25 (9 days)			In home organisations
8	Initiative Launch	June 26-30 (5 days)	June 27-28		In Belapur office

Reading the Change Lab as Theatre

If we were to try to “read” the Change Lab as theatre what kind of play was it? Who were the players? What was the nature of their relation to each other? Was there only one production being performed with a set cast or were there multiple plays taking place simultaneously on one stage? Can we understand the idea of a “plenary” conversation as the script of a play being performed in public? Can we understand “small group conversations” as being the scripts of plays being performed by a few actors on private stages? What was the difference between the “public transcript” and the “hidden transcripts” of small group conversations?

Questions, it is said, look to the future while answers look to the past. Each part of this section begins with a set of questions. We have not set out with the intention of answering these questions but rather of exploring and discussing them with a view to how they might inform the design of future Change Labs. Each set of questions are intended to extend and deepen the learning from the Change Lab in themselves.

In considering the metaphor of the Change Lab as theatre these questions provide a point of departure and set direction for enquiry. The theatrical metaphor provides a valuable tool in analysing an aspect of the Change Lab, or any social intervention, that is normally difficult to discuss, that is, the role of power. Power is considered to be a running theme throughout the lessons drawn from the Change Lab rather than treated as a separate area of learning. Part of the reason for suggesting power is a running theme comes from the idea in social analysis that *“communication is at all times already penetrated by power.”* (Flyvbjerg 2001)

“The theatrical imperatives that normally prevail in situations of domination produce a public transcript in close conformity with how the dominant group wish to have things appear. The dominant never control the stage absolutely, but their wishes normally prevail. In the short run, it is in the interest of the subordinate to produce more or less a credible performance, speaking the lines and making the gestures he knows are expected of him. The result is that the public transcript is – barring a crisis – systematically skewed in the direction of the libretto, the discourse, represented by the dominant. In ideological terms the public transcript will typically, by its accomodationist tone, provide convincing evidence for the hegemony of dominant values, for the hegemony of the dominant discourse. It is precisely this public domain where the effects of power relations are most manifest, and say analysis based exclusively on the public transcript is likely to conclude that the subordinate groups endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic partners in that subordination.”

– James C. Scott

An underlying concept that continually informed our thinking on power was the idea of the “hidden transcript” and the “public transcript” articulated by professor

James C. Scott. Scott argues that situations of power imbalance and domination result in a marked separation between the public and the hidden. Those who harbour even a subconscious fear of the repercussions of the speaking aloud tend to speak more openly in safe, private conversations rather than in large group conversations. Scott's work provides an elegant and simple tool to guide our understanding of the many events of that took place over the course of the Change Lab. The division between the public and the private also opens up a plethora of questions about dialogue that represents a cutting edge of research in the area of systemic change.

The Chilean public intellectual Humberto Maturana writes,

"We concede power by obeying. Power relations are a manner of relating in which obedience is the fundament. Hierarchical systems take place under power relations, that is, in obedience, and in obedience there is no collaboration. Collaboration is only possible when the relation is based in the emotion of love, that is acceptance of the legitimacy of the other in coexistence with you."

The context for the insights presented here is a ground breaking multi-stakeholder partnership. Our broad concern is to better understand the basis for collaboration between diverse sectors to achieve change. As Maturana reminds us, the basis for collaboration is love not obedience to power structures. Thus new innovations in multi-stake holder partnerships and the continued nurturing of existing Labs require new thinking to reflect on the patterns and lessons from experience gained by all in the Change Lab.

¹ "Making Mistakes: blindness and the expansion of vision" by Humberto Maturana Romesin and Pille Bunnell, Learning Organizations, Vol. 1 No.3, 2001

What did we learn about Change Lab design?

How does the design of the Lab influence the task of devising new approaches to the issue of malnutrition? If we analyse Lab design into decisions around time and space, what were the effects of the design? From living, working and collaborating in the Lab what was learnt about the lab spatial design is conducive to a successful Change Lab? How does Lab design influence social innovation? Is there enough space for creativity in the Change Lab? We will first examine our learnings from the design of time and then the design of space.

The Design of Time

What was the impact of time on the productivity and capacity of the participants? The time table was constructed in advance, did the use of time create order or put undue pressure on participants? What were participants views towards the timing of the Lab, how were participants feedback responded to? How did time pressure impact working patterns and creativity? How is the duration of the Change Lab viewed as a whole? Was the right amount of time allocated to each part of the U process? Or is it difficult to schedule a U-Process in advance? Does the U-Process have its own natural, 'indigenous' rhythm?

If time is the devil then speed is God' - .com mantra

Convening the Change Lab took place over three years prior to the launch. Due to the fact that the identification of partners and the formation of the various institutions required to run a Change Lab took so long, there was immense pressure to launch as soon as feasible. Advice from various Champions and donors, coupled with decisions made within the institutions associated with the Lab, meant that the design of the Lab, in sheer size and scale, resembled a high-speed, high-risk moon-shot. The need for speed over-rode most other considerations.

The cost of the timing was significant. Many of the parameters of the Lab were set without adequate consultation with the Indian staff and with the participants, all of whom were identified and bought on board by in the weeks prior to the Lab. It is noted that the non-Indian facilitators had a three year head start on Indian facilitators.

There was a lot of pressure, on people who were new to the project, to complete a momentous and socially significant task in a very small time frame. This timing raised the stakes, every moment mattered. Despite this, participants perceived that a lot of time was wasted and frequently the timetable created by facilitators did not schedule in enough time for participants to decompress, share stories and bond.

During the course of the Lab, there was a very difficult trade-off between the time it takes to arrive at decisions democratically and the time it takes for a decision to be made and enforced unilaterally. On the one hand there was a shortage of time to share information that would have resulted in informed democratic decisions, on the other hand there was a real need for participants to own the process, which would not happen if too many decisions were made unilaterally by a small group of leaders. The evidence of this was the number of times decisions made prior to the launch of the Lab were questioned by participants.

It is important to realise that often deep ideological or paradigmatic conflicts in groups take the form of conflicts around time. Differences in opinion about the relative worth of an activity or in the merits of allowing an idea airtime usually result in disagreements around time. It is normal for groups in conflict to spend more time arguing about saving time than using time effectively.

When a group begins to argue (to “cycle”) around a time-related issue there is usually a deeper issue at stake that the group does not want to tackle directly. In a number of instances these arguments were settled unilaterally by the staff team making a decision, in some cases they were settled in partnership with participant-facilitators and occasionally they were settled by the participants flatly refusing to co-operate.

“I have some fundamental questions—whom do I ask? We are doing a mockery. There is no time. We have less time. Let us look at facts in the face. Its being rushed. It was like a TV show-audience that gets to clap.” – Participant

Spatial Design

What are the constraints to creativity that are imposed by the physical environment? What did participants feel towards their environment, did they ‘own’ the Lab? In hindsight, what is the best way to conceptualise the space of the Change Lab, as a scientific laboratory, a college campus or even a family home? How participants experience the space that they live, work and breathe in is essential to map out theoretically because space can create or stunt social and working relationships. How does the working patterns of the designers reflect on the working patterns within the Change Lab and how appropriate is this design for the participants? Who is involved in the design and what is their capacity to change it or for its evolution? What did we learn about the relationship between Champions and the Lab Team from the use of space in the Lab?

The Impact of Space

The learnings presented here do not assume that finding a conducive and inspiring working environment to hold a Change Lab are easy or inexpensive to find, despite its importance. It is, however, critical to be cognizant of the effects that such decisions have on the success of a Change Lab. The decision for where to locate the Change Lab space was influenced by economic constraints and physical capacity rather than the requirement of a stimulating environment. In hindsight the Lab staff, particularly process-orientated staff, on Change Labs, could approach a more holistic understanding of space as a condition for a successful Lab.

In the design of the Lab the process of finding a space that was large and free for three months was not straightforward. Office space was donated for the duration of the Change Lab. Over the course of the months prior to the Lab this space was rebuilt to create a space to fit the Lab Team's needs. However, while the space was extremely flexible and generous in terms of spatial orientation, due to the fact that the rebuilding process was largely unsupervised by process-orientated staff, many details were left to be decided by builders unfamiliar with the process requirements. For example, the space was lit by strip-lights that, although making sense from an economical point of view, gave the space an extremely clinical character. Upon occupying the space, non-structural details that could be altered were altered by the Staff.

The effort of attending to the creation of the space was worthwhile. In contrast to traditional offices spaces within the Indian context, the space was considered to be highly innovative and unorthodox. The use of floor seating with traditional, hand-woven quilts helped changed the character of the space into something less standardised and more aesthetic and stimulating. The fact that shoes were not allowed to be worn into the space created not only a sense of a sacredness absent from the average boardroom but also sent an aesthetic reminder that this was an Indian Change Lab, with a distinct cultural heritage.

While the space was largely an open plan space, there was one corner office. The occupation of this corner office was subject of heated debate during the weeks preceding the launch of the Change Lab. There were two roles in conflict over the decision for how to use the space. The first role was the role of wanting to establish equality among all staff members. The second role was the role of respecting differences within the team, with more senior staff being acknowledged through the allocation of space.

Policy Recommendation: For future reference, more breakout spaces and different types of spaces (for reflection, for small group meetings, for relaxation) could have been beneficial in the Food Lab. The only break-out space available

was a small library, which was frequently used as a small meeting room, as a meditation room and as a place to de-stress. All staff meetings took place in the Library as it was the only private space available. Later on the process, co-design meetings with participants also took place in this room.

The Change Lab environment was partly compromised by the fact that relative to more natural spaces, it was highly artificial, with a lack of plants and outdoor spaces (it was on the seventh floor of a tower block). It physically resembled a container, which perhaps accentuated the feeling of being trapped on a roller-coaster. Again, a future policy recommendation here is to include a garden or a green space as part of the Change Lab environment.

In defence of the space, as a blank sheet, there was space for creativity, but the design of the Lab did not provide time or resources for participants to co-own the space or actively co-design it (perhaps a rare option at the best of times). As a result, the space was sometimes lacking colour, imagination and group identity. Collectives benefit from having a space that they see as reflecting them and they feel “at home” in. Feeling comfortable and ‘at home’ is more likely to promote an environment of trust and fellowship amongst the group. In contrast feeling trapped in a white-walled, strip-lit, sterile container, will raise stress levels and increase the propensity for conflict.

Nature as a Space

Time in nature was a major strength to the Change Lab design. There is a lot of evidence from participants of the immense enjoyment and sense of connection with self, source and the group from the time in the Himalayas (See pp. 19-24 Learning History 2006). During this time there was a lot of pleasure, insights and creativity, even as conflicts arose and were resolved. It was during this time in the Himalayas that participants began co-facilitating with staff, significantly shifting their ownership of the process.

However, the design of the U-process meant that this part of the process was a discombobulated section, rather than an integrated part in the Change Lab whole. This created a sharp contrast between stressful, high pressure and relatively non-aesthetic environment in Mumbai and the peace, stunning natural beauty and insight of the time in the Himalayas. In some ways the temperature difference between Mumbai and the Himalayas was mirrored in the dynamics of the group.

Both elements, a space that is conducive to work and connection with nature need to be integrated into Lab design much more fully in future Change Labs. Employing nature as a running theme in the design can permit the whole team to feel nourished by their environment and feel inspired and energised. While the

role of nature within the Change Lab process has been previously recognised, with the nature retreat playing a key role, this is not enough to maintain the peaceful stability of the group. This is a key learning. Rather than compartmentalise nature into a single module, natural and aesthetic spaces are an ongoing requirement through the trajectory of the Change Lab.

What did we learn about collective intelligence?

How was collective intelligence created? Was it seen? Did the Bhavishya Change Lab reaffirm the theory that the wisdom of the collective is greater than the sum of its parts? What were the barriers and the catalysts of collective intelligence, and how was this incorporated in to the design of the Change Lab? What did we learn about the forms of intelligence present? Given there are multiple intelligences, which were cultivated and valued? Which intelligences were underutilised to detrimental effect? Is the concept of collective intelligence limited or does our understanding of collective require conceptual expansion?

Complex social systems require decisions to be made on the basis of a collective intelligence as opposed to an individual in authority. An individual, no matter how experienced or expert, can never match the genius of collective intelligence. Decisions made either by experts or those with power within a complex system will display signs of logic in the short-term. A group displays collective intelligence when the conditions of diversity in its composition and access to information by its members are met. If a group lacks diversity or lacks information, then it will in all likelihood not display signs of collective intelligence but rather will tend to either conflict or group-think.

Self-nomination

Early in the Lab process the Staff Team learnt that several participants had been nominated by their bosses (or in some cases ‘super-bosses’) and told to report to the Bhavishya Alliance offices, either with little information about what was expected of them or being told that this was a part of their job and they had no choice. This was a factor that can undermine collective intelligence of any group.

Due to the intensely personal nature of the Change Lab, the probability of a successful process goes up dramatically if people participate of their own volition. Collective intelligence and collective identity is undermined by the presence of participants who are not present out of their own volition. Intention and clarity of commitment are key factors in the success of the Change Lab. Participants must ideally self-nominate, and come because they want to be there not because they are assigned. They must know what they are getting into, and if they still want to sign up then the Lab has a healthy foundation. Over the course of the Lab participants deepen and sharpen their commitment and intention, both at an individual and collective level.

One explanation for the number of conflicts that arose over the course of the Lab is the presence of participants who had not decided to undertake the process of their own free will. Due to the fact that there was no legitimate route to “exit” the project, these participants had very little to lose in objecting to the process. They

could not leave of their own free will and no one was going to ask them to leave. This policy of “inclusion at all costs” is incongruent with the conditions for the emergence of collective intelligence. There must be room in the process for people who choose to leave to leave as early as possible should they choose to.

“I realise that it is easy to talk about change and transformation. In this journey I experienced how disruptive this can be, when I was required to shift from familiar ways of understanding situations. I also realised that change begins with the self. It is easy to say that we have to bring about change in others. How often are we even conscious of the changes needed within us?” - Participant

The Condition of Information

The constitution of the Change Lab brought together participants with varying degrees of knowledge and experience with child malnutrition. Some participants knew nothing about child malnutrition, while others had spent decades working on the issue. This diversity of understanding contributes positively to the group because it prevents the development of group-think amongst the group². The diversity of the team will only be an asset when participants and teams have access to the information that is available within the group. It makes sense, however, to make some distinctions between the different types of information that a group might access. For example, it is useful to distinguish *propositional knowledge* (knowledge that is expressed through propositions or statements), *practical knowledge*, *experiential knowledge* and *presentational knowledge* (knowledge that is expressed through non-verbal channels)³.

During the first few weeks of the Lab, anxiety around sharing information was high. Those with more experience with the issue of malnutrition, particularly those with medical training, believed that it was critical to bring the rest of the Lab up to a minimum standard with regards to malnutrition. The main requirement being expressed was the need to share what can be thought of as “propositional knowledge” or the “logic” of child malnutrition. Many aspects of the process which did not directly and immediately address this need were deemed by several participants to be a distraction from the issue of malnutrition – at least until the issue of information transfer was addressed.

Even though a number of information based presentations were made, for example on nutrition, on government structures, this point was never really

² Groupthink is a type of thought exhibited by group members who try to minimize conflict and reach consensus without critically testing, analyzing, and evaluating ideas. Groupthink may cause groups to make hasty, irrational decisions, where individual doubts are set aside, for fear of upsetting the group’s balance. The term is usually used as a derogatory term after the results of a bad decision.

³ Singh, A (2005) ‘The Group Unconscious’ unpublished Masters thesis.

adequately resolved during the course of the Lab. Continual challenges to the process as the Lab progressed could be interpreted as a disagreement about the amount of time dedicated to the transfer of propositional knowledge specifically about child malnutrition. The tension between what can be called “content” and process was acute. The staff team and the facilitators engaged in a negotiation on this need, with participants continually asking for more time to give presentations in plenary. The facilitators spent time trying to balance the requirement for what was judged as an expensive way to use time, that is, an excessive focus on propositional knowledge to the detriment of practical knowledge, experiential knowledge or presentational knowledge.

In hindsight, one possible avenue to explore is to spend time comprehensively mapping the information (the propositional knowledge) that is “in the room.” The requirement of information for collective intelligence can partially be met if participants all know what each other knows in the sense of knowing how to use a telephone directory or an internet search. If participants are able to create and use a “knowledge map” – allowing them to know about the knowledge and experience of other participants, they would know enough to pull in the right individuals during the course of making a decision or designing an innovation.

“I feel good about the process and where we are. But I am bewildered by the ups and downs and the fluidity. We all have different skills and can come in at different times. The challenge is to stay with the call.” - Participant

In addition to meeting the needs of propositional knowledge, a greater emphasis must be made on the surfacing of presentational knowledge. It has been argued that “certain symbols and figures are embedded in the group's conversation and register at a pre-conscious or unconscious level in group members.”⁴ These symbols and figures become key to understanding group identity.

This type of knowledge was demonstrable during an improvised skit that the participants and staff put on in the first week of the Lab to illustrate the complexities of undertaking learning journeys into communities. One of the male participants noticed whilst playing a farmer, would not talk to another participant, a young woman, who was playing the role of a visitor. When questioned about this, the “farmer” explained that he was put off by the fact that the “visitor” had interrupted him while he was farming and she was wearing “city clothes” that he believed were not appropriate for a woman. This opened the gates to a conversation on gender, rare for the Change Lab. Much of the data came not from verbal expressions but from examining the physical behaviour of “actors” in the skit and examining the gender dynamics in the conversation itself. For example, various male participants verbally and energetically expressing support for gender equality while at the same time, not allowing women to speak

⁴ Nichol, B. (1995). *The Group Unconscious*.

for themselves. It was only when the facilitator posed the question of what was happening to the women in the group, explicitly asking all the men to be silent, did female voices engage in dialogue.

The skit and the ensuing dynamics provides an example of the surfacing of knowledge from the group unconscious, in this case gender dynamics, and demonstrates how tacit knowledge can become explicit within the group. The criticality of such knowledge to collective intelligence arising within the group cannot be underestimated. In general, the dimension of group knowledge that are somatic/body centric that are illuminated in theatre or performance are largely unexplored within in the current context of Change Labs (except for activities such as yoga that promote group body intelligence that were part of the Lab).

“The Lab Team Members came closer together as a community. The presentation by each member about their work, expertise and gifts uncovered what kind of potential exists in each member which can be tapped into. It brought the team together as a collective in the sense for the first time.” - Participant

Small Group Intelligence versus Plenary Intelligence

It is useful to contrast the collective intelligence of different groups. Small groups tended to work better together than the entire group in plenary. The majority of conflicts arose in plenary sessions.

There is a difference between the issues that can be raised and processed in small groups that cannot be addressed in a presentation to eighty people. Power asymmetries are amplified when presented in a public space causing humiliation and chaotic oscillations in status - small trivial issues then become emblems of wider relations of power. Asymmetries take on a larger and potentially more damaging impact when made public to a large group rather than at small group level. It is, however, very important to note that power dynamics are also maintained by individuals working in small groups. Shifts in power dynamics almost always occur in plenary, in “the public transcript.” When small groups are subject to unbearable amounts of stress or pressure they tend to “storm the public transcript” – in other words, issues that were once aired privately are taken to the public stage and precipitate group conflict. This is one reason why so many group conflicts surfaced in plenary sessions.

During the Realising Phase the Lab Team split into four small teams. One of these teams got caught in a lengthy conflict, while the other three teams did not (even though it’s important to remember that each team had its own fair share of both unhealthy and healthy dynamics.) The team in conflict was dominated by participants from one sector and did not meet the condition of diversity. Of the

other three teams, one was dominated mostly by participants from another sector, the two remaining teams had a greater diversity with no one sector dominating. While it is controversial to judge the performance of the various teams against each other, it is plausible that those teams that functioned well, coming up with innovative and systemic ideas, were teams that met the condition of diversity.

“Standing on a small hill, looking at sun-set, I asked myself: If I was born in pre-independence era, what would I have done? I recall one of the addresses to the team. While doing business, we cannot close our eyes to millions of people who have no food and thousands of babies that are dying every minute owing to malnutrition. This is not a simple problem that can be nailed through a fish-bone or through pareto analysis... it is the consequence of a larger systemic failure that includes all... the government, communities & the business world. And it will take all the players to shift the current reality.” - Participant

What did we learn about the nature of the team needed to deliver the Change Lab?

What were the roles of the staff and the facilitators and how did these evolve? How central is the role of the facilitator to the success of the Change Lab? Is there a power structure amongst the group of facilitators? How was formal authority recognised and how was informal leadership practiced? Was there a need for formal agreement? How was the progress and problems of the facilitators monitored and addressed? How were the facilitators and staff supported? What kinds of challenges did they face and how were these resolved in a healthy manner? What did the rest of the group feel towards the role of the facilitators? How do we overcome or transform to mutual benefit the power dynamics between the champions and Lab Team Members? How do we overcome or transform the power dynamics between the champions and Lab Team Members?

The appointment of Indian staff occurred for the most part in the weeks preceding the launch of the Change Lab. Other staff came on board after the Lab began. This meant that there were disparities between the non-Indian staff, all of whom had been working on and off on the project for three years, and the Indian staff. The learning curve for Indian staff was tremendous. The most serious issue however was not the learning curve *per se* but the lack of ownership that resulted from the fact that the entire Change Lab process had been designed by a small sub-set of the Team. In some ways this is an obvious mistake but the learning here concerns how decisions are made in the heat of a countdown to launch. There was a lot of pressure to start after 3 years of preparation work to harness the increasing momentum, which was at risk of getting lost. Further work needs to be done on clarifying the parameters and conditions of a successful Change Lab launch, taking into account local context.

This is a key learning about the healthy conditions for delivering a Change Lab: staff must be involved in designing the process, as well as the overall decision making process, in order to have a genuine sense of ownership and sustained commitment to the process. It takes time for staff to internalise and own the process and therefore an ideal scenario would be co-designing with the Indian staff prior to its inception. It makes sense to consider running a Change Lab type process for the staff and stakeholders in order to design a Change Lab for a wider group of stakeholders.

If we think about the Change Lab as a moonshot, the rocket was launched without first meeting a clear set of conditions for the success of the Lab, such as involving local staff in the design process as well as involving local stakeholders in the goal setting processes. Consequently, participants encountered a set of

predetermined (non-negotiable) goals, that they then partially rejected. This raises the question: how do you set goals and create the design process to maximise local ownership? Bhavishya is remarkable in that it has survived multiple ownership transfers, but it has taken a lot of time and effort to successfully transfer ownership.

Like concentric ripples in water, what happens at the core team impacts the wider system and the periphery. The nature of the Change Lab Team is greatly influenced by the Lab design, internal power structure, knowledge, health, well-being and communication of the core teams.

The social capital required to run the Lab only lay with a few of the people (those who had been involved in the formation of the Lab over the previous three years), in that most of the relationships with stakeholders were held by one or two people. The varying levels of experience with the U-Process inhibited Indian staff members from making informed decisions about the lab design. In some cases assessments made by Indian facilitators were dismissed because of their lack of fluency in the U-process. This undermined not only their authority but the cohesion of the staff team as a whole. There was also a resultant tension with the need to avoid 'elementary mistakes' in a high risk setting and the desire to be democratic.

In the weeks prior to the launch of the Change Lab, the non-Indian facilitation team had several conversations about how best to work as a team. It was agreed that due to the complex nature of the project a flexible approach would be required with different people taking on leadership at different times as skills and experienced necessitated. During the course of the Lab, as the stress of delivery and results rose this arrangement became more rigid as the most senior member of the team became *de facto* leader of the team. Sometimes this was a successful arrangement, at times where the complexity of the situation was high, the arrangement clearly did not work and roles required more precise shape and definition.

How to avoid replication of the situation? What are the skills and capacities required to operate as a flexible team with in a complex and high-pressure situation? No one individual can consistently make the right decision in a high stress, fast paced and complex environment. Therefore, rather than examine individual leadership in this Change Lab, the more important question is: *what skills and capacities need to be cultivated to maintain a healthy team leadership in the complexity of the Change Lab?*

Internal conversations amongst the staff team revealed an interest in a Deep Democracy process, that staff self-funded. In the third week during the break Myrna Lewis facilitated a Deep Democracy session. The intervention explicitly

dealt with the relationships. Dynamics were complex. Myrna's assessment of the dynamics of the room was that the dynamics represented what was going on with malnutrition in Indian society. For one facilitator, this led to a realisation about the nature of the work. Rather than the Change Lab being about supply chains, strategy, mismanagement or technology, *systemic change begins in the room amongst participants*. Many of the critical reasons why child malnutrition persists in society, for example gender inequalities, donor conditionalities, unhealthy power dynamics, a lack of collaboration between diverse agencies, a lack of space capacities for innovation, all exist in the room. They are embodied and enacted every day in relationships between participants.

The Health of Staff and Facilitators

"The success of an intervention depends on the interior conditions of the intervener" - Bill O'Brien

The facilitators and staff shared the same living space, which provided opportunities for informal conversations and time for team bonding and new friendships. At one level, this was fruitful for team cohesion. Despite the fact that the process was difficult for facilitators there was an array of lasting friendships that then informed the process. Soon after the Change Lab, one of the participants commented that the dynamics between the Lab staff and participants would have been markedly different had they lived together in the same space over the course of the Change Lab. This is important to note for future Labs and Lab Team building.

Facilitators learnt to judge their own limits, and realise that only if they themselves are adequately nurtured, stable, happy and healthy are they capable of maintaining the balance of the larger group. Specifically, facilitators developed the capacity to express needs and share what you have without undermining personal resources or coming across as being professionally inadequate. There were no formal support processes for facilitators independent of the staff team. Given the periodically high emotional charge of the situation, formalising a review and assessment process would ensure that the health (mental, emotional, physical, energetic) of facilitators was maintained throughout. It would also make sense to have various support mechanisms, such as shadow facilitators to assess situations and provided additional coaching for facilitators and staff team facing difficult issues and conflicts. It is important to explore other mechanisms to support and nourish the well being of all participants and staff.

The Lab Team Members began to co-facilitate relatively mid-way through the process. Relatively few of them were experienced and trained facilitators. Therefore, it is equally as important to monitor the health and performance of

participant-facilitators in the context of the Change Lab that deals with highly complex issues.

In a practical sense, staff and facilitators found their own ways to let off steam and regain energies. Early on in the process local facilitators would go home on the weekends despite long travel distances. Foreign facilitators faced a different challenge because they were far from home in a small town with limited facilities. One of the foreign facilitators joined the local laughing club and learnt reiki, whilst others read, ran, and tried to exercise despite pre-monsoon heat waves. There is an opportunity to use arts and sport to maintain the health and energy levels of the staff and facilitators as well as strengthen the health and collective intelligence of the team. In the latter half of the Change Lab most of these practices degenerated due to time and delivery pressures, which, was at the detriment to the facilitators' well being and the health of the overall process.

A key learning here is that facilitators must allocate time for their relaxation and renewal. This is not leisure but an inherent part of the process. For example, at one point there was no break for 3 weeks and for some, the process became charged, heated and difficult towards the end of this period. This would suggest an urgent need for discipline in collective activities that are chances for team building, socialisation, relaxation and rejuvenation. These clearly contribute to the success of the work and should not be neglected for the sake of time/cost saving in the short term.

During the course of the 12 week lab there were 4 weeks of breaks. The foreign facilitators were usually away for these breaks, either working on other projects or going home. Their lack of presence was commented on and felt. From time-to-time foreign facilitators missed critical days because of travel schedules. While this arrangement was contracted with the funders and home institutions, it was not contracted with the Lab Team. In future staff need to remember that it is critical to contract clearly with the Lab Team.

Attitudes towards the staff team and the facilitators shifted dramatically and often unpredictably over the course of the Lab. The dynamics of the Lab placed stresses and strains on the inter-relationships internally within the staff team as well as between the staff team, Lab Team and champions. There were several episodes when the Lab Team challenged the authority of the facilitators, sometimes on the basis of competency and sometimes on the basis of lacking authority. This had the effect of placing further stress on the internal relationships within the staff team. The staff team had a very short history of working together. Treating challenges to competency objectively was difficult because staff were still learning about each other strengths and weaknesses. Process orientated work means that facilitators as a team must be prepared to be attacked (see Mindell, A "*The Leader as a Martial Artist*" for more).

Part of the preparation for facilitators and staff must include coping with questions and doubts pertaining to their authority, legitimacy and competency. The team must be able to stand together if they are to function as a healthy collective. All attacks on this culture must be simultaneously taken seriously and rebuffed.

Team norms and agreements must be put into place prior to the launch of a Lab in order to create healthy conditions, mutual respect and accountability amongst team members. A culture of operating as a collective must be co-created and nurtured. It is easy to underestimate the time, energy, and attention required to cultivate such a culture. In this instance the staff team worked together for 2 weeks prior to the launch of the Change Lab. This was clearly inadequate. Just as it is nearly impossible to grow a healthy garden in 2 weeks, you cannot grow a healthy team in 2 weeks equipped to handle the stresses and strains of an unprecedented Change Lab in scale and scope.

“The hardest thing that a facilitator can do is to try and bring the attention of a group to its own dynamics. However, looking at ourselves honestly, both as individuals and as a group, is necessary. It is in fact the key to understanding how we will do things differently.” – Facilitator

The Nature of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

“We are in business and we are trying to see if we can do something better than business. We do not see that these are in conflict.” – *Tex Gunning, Unilever*

The uniqueness of the Change Lab, in many ways, arose from its multi-sectoral character. Participants, Staff and Champions were drawn from diverse contexts. For most people participating in the process the diversity of the group was new. It resulted in both confusion and richness. Participants and Champions found themselves having to marry their own perceptions of other sectors with the direct experience of having to speak, engage and work with people from different sectors.

From time-to-time sectoral differences came to a head and resulted in either heated debates or conflict. The earliest meeting of the Champions with the Lab Team resulted in a wide-ranging and heated debate about the nature of corporate participation. Champions who were activists found themselves face-to-face with champions from the corporate sector. Logics that were previously held as “truths” were aired and criticised.

Relatively speaking, the sectoral differences resolved themselves amicably within the Lab Team but not within the Champions. Part of the reason for this is obviously the amount of time Lab Team Members spent with each other, talking in both structured and unstructured contexts. This became clear when in the

second week a well-rounded multi-sectoral team presented ideas to Champions and were told off for being too corporate. One of the participants, from the corporate sector, wanted to know why the Lab as a whole had not rallied to defend the presenting team. Were we a team or not?

Overall, it could be argued that the differences in perspective and experience that existed within the room were not often recognised as positive, even when they served to bring the group together. Due to the collaborative nature of the Change Lab and the perception of high-stakes, conflict, particularly when it became sector-focused in nature, was generally viewed by participants with some alarm. The challenge of ensuring the participants felt safe (even if uncomfortable) with sectoral conflict was not adequately met.

The challenge and opportunity of the Change Lab are the dynamics that result from multi-stakeholder engagement and the very real differences of position that arise. While conflict is perhaps inevitable (particularly if people are being honest), the pay-off for learning how to work through conflict to a space of genuine collaboration is very high. The Change Lab undoubtedly gave the Lab Team Members an experience of this pay-off but more can be done to mine sectoral differences and bring them to bear on the outcomes of the Lab.

“Realisations that all of us across different sectors remain in our own cocoons within the 4 walls. Not aware of reality. Had to be at this lab to learn all these things. How sincere are we in doing our jobs is the harsh question. We have just skimmed the surface, we have not really dug deep. I think we have just begun.” - Participant

“I am clearer than ever that all the challenges we discuss as being “in the field” are in fact present in the room. If we want to know why communities are hostile to healthcare workers, then the answer is in the room. If we want to know why care programmes in the past have been unsustainable then the answer is in the room. If we want to know why there is low trust in the malnutrition system between different actors then the answer is in the room. If we want to change the system then we must also change what is in the room.” - Facilitator

The Role of Champions and Governance

While the Change Lab itself proceeded at the speed of a rocket, the establishment of governance structures proceeded at a much slower pace. In practical terms this meant that there were no “higher powers” that difficult decisions or disputes could be brought to. The Champions, in a way, served this purpose. Their role was nebulous at times, in that while they were very committed to the project their

roles were not formalised and they constituted a group larger than the Lab Team itself.

Champions however, did make a number of critical interventions. On a day-to-day level, one example involved a champion who was a facilitator was asked by the Lab Staff to come and act as a facilitator to help unblock the process. This was at a point where the legitimacy of the staff seemed to be particularly low. The Champion turned up and facilitated a session where he lovingly, directly and energetically challenged the Lab Team, reminded them of their purpose and helped them through an exercise of appreciative enquiry around their initiatives which helped crystallise participants ideas and next steps. After the session a staff facilitator commented that they were envious of the way he had spoken to the Lab Team, that is, directly and bluntly.

“We are floating in and out as champions. The connections have not been deep. There is a need for champions to meet. Where do we reposition ourselves? We need to meet again and more frequently.” - Champion

Relations with Champions went through its own life-cycle, of peaks and troughs. One of the earliest encounters resulted in a conflict between the Champions and the Lab Team. This in turn caused a conflict within the Champions group, around the appropriate role of corporations within the Alliance and a conflict within the Lab Team around how participants need to stick together when attacked by Champions.

During the course of the Lab it became clear that the Champions were operating as a distinct and very different team from the Lab Team. The stresses and strains between the two groups meant that they didn't really coalesce into a collective. This raises the question of how the Champions and Lab Team can operate as a single team given the differences between them. The key lesson here was in recognising that incorporating a large group of Champions into the Change Lab requires as carefully designed a process as needed for the Lab Team.

Power

Is it possible to arrive at a theory of power, a concrete understanding of the dynamics of power, permitting unhealthy power dynamics to be changed?

The neglect of power dynamics in the Lab created an artificial and disabling gap between the reality of the situation, compared to its idealised state. The Change Lab set up a space as if relationships within the space were not affected by power. For example, Lab Team Members were treated as if they were all of equal status. Senior Lab Team Members and juniors were assumed to be equal and so the design and values of the process reflected this. Incorporating awareness of

positional differences, for example, senior members being given additional time to be heard, would diffuse the power dynamics inherent in the proceedings and would display greater congruence with local Indian culture. In a sense treating participants as equals resulted in many interactions between participants being status transactions, with uncertainties in power being constantly (re)negotiated.

The location of decision-making power within the Change Lab was unclear. This meant that participants (and in some cases staff) were generally unsure of how to make decisions. This produced a lot of confusion because one of the key principles behind the methodology was to run an open process where participants design the innovations that they wish to implement. Not only was this unclear, participants were generally not used to being given such agency. Did the participants have power to do what they wanted or not? Or did power lie with their Champions, or with the Staff? Ownership of the process reached an amicable space only half-way through the process, when participants were invited to co-design and co-facilitate the process on an on-going basis. After that point a small group of participants self-selected to join the staff in making process-design decisions on a daily basis. This practice needs to be extended to the periods before and after a Change Lab.

Power differences, when ignored, risk becoming silent shadows and ghost-roles that leach energy from the group. The pragmatic effect within the Change Lab of unaddressed power dynamics were two-fold. Firstly, there were a number of unresolved conflicts that did drain energy from the group. According to Deep Democracy theory, one reason conflict arises is when a minority feel that their voices are not being heard and their positions not recognised by the group. This was true within the Lab. The minority then seek to influence the situation indirectly, through indirect criticism, through obstruction, eventually through protest, travelling down a road that means small issues snowball into larger conflicts the longer they go unaddressed. Asymmetries of power create difference but can also be a source of wealth as there is a range of assets from which the group can draw on to its collective advantage. In Deep Democracy theory and practice, conflict is an opportunity, for example, to incorporate the wisdom of the minority into the collective. Conflict, when resolved, forges the group into a more intelligent collective. When it remains unaddressed then it has the very real potential to fragment a group.

Second, the power dynamic resulted in a number of “hidden transcripts” where participants arrived at conclusions and positions that they clearly felt were unsafe to raise in plenary. This presented enormous difficulties. For example, participants would share information on a one-to-one basis with facilitators and expect a change in the situation without directly being identified. Over time the space grew safer and many participants who would previously not speak found their voice. Although it’s important to note that in some instances this finding of

voice was an act of immense courage born out of frustration. During the course of the Change Lab there were a handful of instances where this happened, resulting in rather dramatic dynamics that contributed to a sense of being on a roller coaster ride.

The sociologist Ulrich Beck makes the case that *“One could almost say, whenever nobody is talking about power, that is where it unquestionably exists, at once secure and great in its unquestionability. Wherever power is the subject of discussion, that is the start of its decline.”* (Beck, 2006) The point, of course, is not a decline of power for its own sake. Rather, it is important that participants do not feel that they are merely cogs in a process that is beyond their control, subject to hidden power dynamics. Instead, staff need to ensure that the whole group have real agency in the design and structure of the Change Lab process.

Therefore, when power dynamics are explicitly discussed the group can come to terms with its own collective identity and relational agency. When power differentials and dynamics are masked, there is a risk that both individuals and the collective becoming politically disenfranchised and essentially ineffective. The Change Lab as a vehicle for systemic change will only succeed when the power dynamics present within the larger system are consciously addressed.

“The learning journey truly became a defining experience in terms of the challenges it posed especially on the group dynamics front. It was a tough challenge for all of us at different levels – to deal with the baggage of our long experience, to cultivate new ways of perceiving reality, to comply with norms, to deal with authority we are not comfortable with – just to name a few. The team members were strong as individuals, each holding on to their views and positions. The residuals of the first week of the Change Lab were also working on the team. Conflict was seething and found the first option to surface when a request to have a briefing at the commencement of the learning journey was made. The tension continued through the next day and by evening had reached a point of explosion. The team split, tempers ran high, harsh words were exchanged and all were on the point of packing their bags! The cool breeze of the night helped saner counsel to prevail. Members became more introspective.

The first move was made without standing on formalities and the team assembled to dialogue. The facilitator had no clue how to proceed in this situation, what is the right next step. The beauty was it was not important to know in advance but just be present to the situation and listen. As a group we could tap into our collective resources. Personally it was important to be patient, not to stand on one's ego, be compassionate and empathetic. It enabled me get in touch with my inadequacies – to do sensing, to deal with the team; my struggles to be in charge of the process. We as a group could navigate the whole process and emerge stronger in the end. It also mirrored what happens in the community; there is a feeling that community does not have resources and that there is someone from outside who has knowledge and expertise to change their situation.”

- Participant

What have we learnt about the role of context and local culture in the Change Lab?

Which ideas and assumptions built into the Change Lab are Euro- or North America-centric? Is the practice of presencing culturally biased? In trying to create a shared culture is it important to find recreational activities that are appropriate for everyone? How do we characterise the current reality of the system? Can we share one reality, or do the different cultural and/or gendered viewpoints in the room necessitate the acknowledgement of multiple realities? What should the role of local languages be within the context of a Change Lab? Is English language appropriate or inclusive in the Indian context?

Bringing together a diverse group of people, Lab Team Members, Champions as well as Indian and non-Indian staff gave rise to complex cultural dynamics. These dynamics meant that it was difficult to create a shared culture that could be owned by everyone. While a shared culture did emerge, it was not smooth and nor did everyone feel close or attached to it. The importance of understanding the process of team culture creation and how it interacts with existing culture is critical to the success of the Change Lab. In one sense the culture of the Change Lab was largely disconnected from the culture of development that most institutions were operating within. This is a major concern for the future of the initiatives that are created. How can we avoid such critical disconnects?

Cultures of Leadership

Part of the Western dynamic that pervaded the Lab, emanating clearly from the foreigners was the need for equality, seeing it as a desirable characteristic resulting in a healthy working culture and that a lack of equality implied a lack of justice. This had several highly complex implications.

The first implication was among the staff team. Despite clear and semi-acknowledged differences among in knowledge about the Change Lab and the theories that underlie it, new facilitators and staff were invited into the decision making process, with the idea that consensus decision making was obviously superior to unilateral or hierarchical decision making. This, however, is not true in many situations, particularly where experiential knowledge about the process was missing. The result of this was the creation of a somewhat false equality with the staff team between Indian and foreign facilitators. The public position being that there are no formal distinctions that matter but delineations in authority arose nevertheless because some people knew more or had more experience than others. In many ways this dynamic extended into the Lab Team, with participants being invited into participatory decision making processes without necessarily having with the skills or the knowledge to make good decisions. In itself this is

not a problem, as the cultivation of collective wisdom requires people with both experience and those who are new to a situation. It could be argued that the creation of this false equality was more psychologically comforting to the non-Indian facilitators than to the Indian facilitators who several times expressed their willingness to be led.

What do local cultures of leadership look like? What happens when local cultures of leadership clash with non-local cultures that are bought it? Are cultural norms of leadership inviolable?

“There’s too much democracy here!” – Lab Team Participant

The challenge with the decision-making process was that at moments when consensus decision-making was not invited or needed, it seemed to be continually present. At several points participants complained that there was “too much democracy” in the process and someone should just lead.

The problems with the invitation of asking someone to lead are two-fold. One, it absolves the participants of responsibility in decision-making. The lament of “too much democracy” often went together with other, more pointed critiques of the Lab, such as being asked to do things that did not make sense to them. Two, in complex systems unilateral decision making usually results in a series of decisions that are at best a function of the leaders understanding and at worst decisions that ignore much of the wisdom in the room, leading to participants disowning the process and results because they came from someone else’s decision.

The question of leadership culture resulted in a confusion of roles between the staff team and the lab team. It was felt by several people, including the evaluators that more formal process leaders should have been agreed, a practice that would perhaps have been more comfortable for those being led than those doing the leading.

“The Indian reality is both transparent and opaque simultaneously. What is visible is as much a part of the truth as what remains unseen. Foreigners see what is overt, and conflate it with their preconceived notions of ‘the great Indian civilization’. In the process many assumptions evade critical scrutiny, and a great many inferences are either incorrect or partially true. But foreigners can be forgiven their errors. Not so the Indians. Over the years the Indian leadership, and the educated Indian, have deliberately projected and embellished an image about Indians they know to be untrue, and have willfully encouraged the well-meaning but credulous foreign observer (and even more the foreign scholar) to accept it. What is worse, they have fallen in love with that image, and can no longer accept it as untrue.”

- Pavan K. Varma, Being Indian: The Truth About Why the 21st Century will be India's

Another implication of the idea of equality was the belief that everyone on the Lab team was emotionally, intellectually and professionally suited to the process. The idea that there were participants part of the process who, for whatever reason, were not suited to the process was a new and difficult idea for the non-Indian facilitators. In debriefing an intervention with one of the Indian Champions, a skilled process designer and facilitator, he commented that the idea of putting everyone through a common process and expecting it suit all the participants was a particularly American idea. He commented that it was disrespectful to the people who were feeling the pain of the process, and that they should be allowed to opt out of the entire process without stigma.

The challenge of respecting local diversity and difference proved to be difficult for even those in the team familiar with the local context. Prior to the start of the Lab a decision was made, that yoga was a culturally appropriate energy practice in the Indian context (in contrast to other foreign practices such as Chi Qong.) By the second yoga session one of the participants was standing in the circle, the only person not adopting a yoga position. Upon being asked later on the participant explained that he was not Hindu and felt deeply uncomfortable with practicing yoga, which he believed might compromise his faith. Some of the facilitators who had suggested yoga as an appropriate practiced defended it, saying that the participant should not be allowed to opt out. How should decisions about inclusion be made in this context? It is important to note that at the end of the Change Lab the participant explained how his experience of the Lab was of not being able to find any traction or a place to connect throughout the process.

Local languages and participation

During the Lab design phase, a decision was made to run the Change Lab in English. The decision was made in order to simplify the proceeding. If the Lab were to run in local languages which additional local languages would be used? Would it just be Hindi or Hindi and Marathi? Running the Lab in three languages would increase the complexity tremendously. Having said that, informal translation between Hindi-English, English-Hindi, Marathi-English, English-Marathi were common throughout the course of the Lab. The exclusion of CBOs due to the language constraint meant the difficulty of them owning the process and the outcomes of the process increased tremendously.

What did we learn about gender in the Change Lab?

What do we know about gender and gender dynamics in the Change Lab context? Were there inequalities or differences between female and male participation in the Change Lab? How was the issue of gender addressed in the Change Lab design? What would be required for women to be equal participants in the Lab, and is this desired, by women, by men, and by the group? What difference does the gender issue make to the way we conceptualise and theorise about group dynamics and identity? What is the impact of culture on gender roles and gendered behaviour? What is specific about the Indian cultural context, how does this marry with alternative cultural conceptions of gender: rural/urban, north/south, Occident/ Orient? What did women feel about the Change Lab process and their role within it? What role did gender play in the development of innovations relating to malnutrition? Do gendered relationships in the room connect to the outcomes and solutions of the Lab?

For a Change Lab aspiring towards radical shift in child malnutrition, gender presents a formidable and ever present challenge. Both in the Lab amongst participants and in the structure of Indian society, gender presents difficult terrain for staff, facilitators and participants to navigate, particularly without a map or theory to hand. The issue of malnutrition is interwoven with the issue of gender that adds another layer of complexity, both in terms of the goals of the Change Lab and the methodology required to fulfil these goals.

Part of the problem with addressing the gender issue effectively is that many of the gendered dynamics underpinning team work and goal setting are invisible at worst, and hard to diagnose at best. This implies that many gender inequalities might be beyond the direct perception of the facilitators and participants, although they are obviously present in the room through body language, speech patterns and other non-verbal channels (It would be interesting to examine, for example, how the use of Lego Serious Play, a non-verbal tool, either helped bring the gender dynamic into the conversation or did it hinder?). They are particularly hard to detect if patterns of gendered behaviour in the room follow general trends and norms of Indian society. Behaviour can be naturalised and normalised and therefore difficult to question. The following participant commented on the normalised role of women in the communities they visited:

Amartya Sen (2001) makes the case that India is split in two gendered divisions, arguing that there is "*something of a social and cultural divide across India, splitting the country into two nearly contiguous halves, in the extent of anti-female bias in natality and post-natality mortality.*" How did this divide surface in the Change Lab? Would it be more problematic if it didn't surface? Or, if it did? How might gender inequalities be dealt with in a healthy manner? What would a Change Lab that bridged this divide look like?

Non-Indian facilitators experienced strong gender distinctions in group behaviour but in general were ill-equipped to address these dynamics. For example one non-Indian facilitator, noted, with some frustration, that he found it hard to “*connect with the women who all sit together over there in a block,*” and how “*there’s no room on the table*” for him (to sit with them). Discussing the usefulness of raising the gender issue, one young female participant argued that having conversations about gender “*would not change the behaviour of any of the men – so what was the point in having them?*” The experience of both the non-Indian male facilitator and the young Indian female participant indicates a lack of tools, process and ideas to cope with the realities of gender within the room.

The differences between the behaviour of men and women within the group, exemplified in the amount of time taken up by men speaking in plenary versus women, indicates that it is critical to think carefully about the nature of the collective. Instead of treating the group as a homogenous whole, it is necessary to consider the possibility that the whole is counterfeit and maintained through the norms of polite dialogue and conduct. One clear instance was when the group was having a dialogue about gender. A young female staff member expressed anger at the behaviour of the men within the group. Consequently, she reported being ostracised and treated coldly by some older men throughout the duration of the Lab. While these men may have felt that her anger was unjustified and misplaced, the group processes were not able to even recognise and describe this situation, let alone diagnose and arrive at a healthy state of affairs.

It is useful to examine the group as a whole and the conditions for collective intelligence from a gender perspective. In considering how the group is cultivated and behaves, and the extent to which processes are gender sensitive, the design of the Change Lab must take into account gender specific needs. For example, some of the staff members had young children. The working pattern of the Lab made it very difficult for mothers to either participate fully in the Lab or spend quality time with their child. The working style of the staff team could therefore be characterised as hyper-masculine, with long working days and occasional weekends. This, when considering the centrality of the family in Indian society, could be considered contradictory and the source of additional stress.

“In the group, women were largely silent and the issue was mostly debated by the men. At being prompted, women members pointed out to other factors that may influence team member behaviour in the community. Will talking only to the men and not the women silence them further and reinforce the existing patriarchal practices? Since, it is obvious that many of the members are from a different culture [urban, geographical] from the communities they will live in, will it not be better to emphasise upon sensitivity and consideration in relating,

rather than attempt to adhere strict norms of gender?” – Bhavishya Learning Historian

At a more complex level, the development of interpersonal relationships and group consciousness may occur at a different rate and mechanisms amongst the women, amongst the men or amongst the group as a whole. Understanding group behaviour and group intelligence requires examination of the cultural norms and existing cultural practice with respect to group formation in Indian society. For example, is it more common in Indian society for men and women to work in mixed teams or separate teams? The complexity and cultural specificity of gendered norms suggests that the design of the Change Lab may benefit from planning for time into sensing the current *gendered reality* of the Indian system before embarking on the Change Lab. As it was, the issue of gender dynamics arose in random sessions without being consciously designed or cognizant in the overall Change Lab.

From this data, the approach towards gender dynamics could be negotiated between local staff and foreign staff before the onset of the Change Lab. This is critical because cultural norms will vary tremendously between, say the working culture in Boston or rural Massachusetts and the working culture in Mumbai or rural Maharashtra. Specifically, it is useful to ask: “what are the ideal gendered relationships between men and women that the Change Lab could aspire towards? What is the balance between Western ideals of gender (for example, in general, that women have the right to equal air time to men) compared to Indian ideals of gendered relationships and how can we reconcile these ideals with realities?”

The use of the term the “group” or “collective” can clearly disguise the underlying gender dynamics. In response to one male participant continually describing how the Lab was like a family, one female staff member commented privately that she didn’t understand why he was saying that, as the family was the site of greatest violence in society. Exploring such comments was clearly below the line of social acceptability within the Lab. How are such lines of acceptability defined and how can they shift? Many gender issues sit within the group unconscious. *One highly problematic implication of this finding is that gendered wisdom was rarely brought to bear on the issue of child malnutrition.* Given the central role that gender plays within the reality of child malnutrition (as well as issues other Labs are concerned with, such as orphans and vulnerable children, teenage suicide and so on) it is important and urgent to increase the intelligence of the group as a whole to cope more skilfully with gender issues. This could result in innovations that transform existing gender disparities in a potentially unprecedented manner.

Finally, the continuous presence of the gender issue in the Lab suggests that the process could benefit from an in-built gender policy that would guide team

dynamics and would trickle down to the initiatives conceived by the various stake holders in the Change Lab.

“Women and girls look after the water needs of the family. I was curious about what this means in the daily life of the women. One morning, I saw a woman with several containers drawing water from a hand pump. I went to help her just to experience doing the task. After five minutes of continuous pumping, only a quarter of her container had filled from the tap. I spent half an hour there pumping water. It was really hard, and I felt awkward leaving her without completing the task. She continued to pump water for the next two hours. Men of course did not help women in this.” - Participant

What did we learn about the U-Process?

Sensing

The epistemology, or theory of knowledge, of the U-Process suggests that insights about how to shift the current reality will emerge through the ongoing practice of presencing and connection to source. This is a powerful idea in handling complex problems and in many ways the guiding idea in the Change Lab. How participants responded to the U-process was varied, and a lot of work by the Lab Staff was required for participants to reach a level of working trust in the process.

Current theory around the U -process views the Sensing phase as resulting in the group coming to a shared reality of the wider system. This is a nourishing idea, but can serve to obscure difference in both the perception and representation of reality. In post-modern thinking, as well as in post-colonial theories, rather than one shared reality, there is a plurality of overlapping realities. Recognising the existence of multiple realities, creates the space for the diversity of opinions and perspectives towards an issue such as malnutrition, particularly along the axes of gender and power.

This shift from one reality to many is advantageous to creating a group culture of inclusiveness and shared sense of ownership over the solutions and breakthroughs arrived at in the Change Lab. What processes can be employed in order to cultivate a culture where many truths can co-exist with each other, even if some are contradictory? The knock on effect of this is to prevent the propensity for conflict and the damage to the collective intelligence of the team that can occur from exclusion. Further theorising is necessary to ensure in the design that multiple realities are acknowledged and represented in the final product.

“Being in the Change Lab was the first break for me to introspect after 10 years of work. I realised that I had begun to become arrogant, to believe that I knew all the answers. I remembered my father’s warning that the day I begin to believe I knew everything would mark my failure. In the sensing phase, when we were asked to immerse ourselves in the reality producing the problems, I felt confused and believed that I was not being heard. It was painful [and useful] to realise that this was my own unwillingness to not make judgements.” -

Participant

Presencing & The Nature Solo

There is much documentation to testify that despite initial doubts and concerns towards the solo, participants found it a rich and personally transformative experience, that also enhanced the collective feel of the group.

For the majority, the solo provided an opportunity to connect deeply with nature to revisit the issue of malnutrition drawing inspiration from the natural world. However, many participants also commented that they felt the impact more for themselves than on group team building and collective intelligence and called for more group-based work in nature. The implication from this is that the solo was excellent for self-transformation, but that it can only go so far in cultivating group cohesion and consciousness.

A group-orientated activity in nature may also be required to reinforce the groups shared identity through shared experience. For example, it is well known that group outdoor adventures such as orienteering, mountain trekking and camping are successful ways of building a group in a natural environment. Perhaps a learning of note here is that given the success of the solo in nature and of social relations during the time spent in the Himalayas, plus the commonly held desire to spend more time sharing amongst the participants suggests there is a space for a more extended *group* excursion into nature. There was a collective hunger for more nourishing group activities. One such activity was arranged at the end of the Solo where participants spent a day on the banks of the Ganges decompressing and white water rafting. Participants greatly appreciated this day and it was a day of much bonding, relaxation and laughter.

Given the demand for more nature, sharing and team building, a short organised trip into nature, that is participant led, could strengthen participant capacity and also allow the group to function as a co-dependent team, that would have to learn fast the plurality of personalities within the group and their combined collective character. If such an excursion were to be organised and implemented before the onset of the Change Lab much of the groundwork around group thinking and listening would be achieved in advance. Such experiences help to bridge the gap between the individual and the collective and improve the knowledge of the group as a collective rather than the sum of the participants. The participants identified the need for more time towards collective sharing and it would be useful for this request to feed in to the design of future Labs.

“I watched the team as they left me in the tent alone. I didn’t know what to do. This was the turning point. It was very emotional and very painful. I wanted to run back in an hour; and managed to stay for the two and half of the three days required. Being alone helped me value relations in my life and helped me think completely differently. I remembered my family and my husband with great love. It helped me settle down, crystallise thoughts and prioritise relations.” - Participant

Realising & Social Prototyping

“After the solo, hearing other participants talk about their experiences alone in nature, I figured that almost everyone shared something that was out of ordinary. A lot of soul searching and churning was happening. People had lots of ideas about what Bhavishya could do to make a difference in the field of child nutrition. Most participants managed to crystallize their previous experiences and learnings into proposed action plan. There were close to seventy five ideas that emerged.” – Participant

The process of social prototyping presented the Lab Team with an alternative process to a traditional planning based approach. At least in the case of two initiative teams the process worked well, with teams successfully coming up with innovative approaches and directions for how to address child malnutrition.

The amount of time available for prototyping cycles was cut short due to time pressures. This meant that initiative teams did not gain the full benefits of a prototyping approach. Some of the teams also found it hard to abandon traditional planning based approaches. Part of the reason for this was that the explanation for social prototyping was incomplete. More illustrations of social prototyping are required as well as a clearer articulation of the principles that govern social prototyping, and the processes employed to prototype. An epistemology of prototyping is urgently required.

A key observation relating to prototyping was the role of facilitators. In general facilitators played the role of mediating conflict and coaching teams in the prototyping process. The degree of conflict rose during the Realising phases, as decisions around resources and staffing put pressure on participants and staff. This situation is well understood in socio-psychological theories of group-conflict such as Realistic-Conflict Theory. Suggestions for how to decrease conflict include making more resources available to the group as a whole, or failing that, *“conflict between groups...can be reduced if groups...join forces to obtain the resource coveted by all.”* (Halabi, R)

In general the prototyping phase was also confused by two external conditionalities. One was a lack of clarity as to the funds available for the initiative teams and what the route to accessing them was. Participants therefore were confused about how real their initiatives were. Questions were continually asked about this, without clear answers being provided. The second confusion arose from the fact that there was a general attitude that no initiative team should be allowed to fail. This meant that the key principle of “fail early, fail often” was negated. The quality of an idea was no longer the determinant of an initiative succeeding or not, other, more political goals took precedence over the idea and its viability.

Finally, final initiative presentations to Champions indicated a lack of understanding of the prototyping process. For example, the call from Champions for a centralised and unified strategy around the initiatives signalled that Champions were thinking about initiatives, with some modifications, as projects to be implemented, as opposed to experiments that might succeed, fail or generate new prototypes.

“Looking back on the process, the beauty was that it was not important to know in advance what the outcome would be. All that was required was to be present in the situation and listen. Hence as a group we could tap into our collective resources. Personally it was important for me to be patient, to not to stand on my ego, but be compassionate and empathetic. For this, I had to do my sensing of the team. I came in touch with my inadequacies and my struggles to be in charge of the process. In the end, we as a group could navigate the whole process and emerge stronger in the end.” - Participant

Summary of Recommendations

Throughout this paper, we have created various suggestions that are intended to extend the torque of the Change Lab and hence the capacity of the Lab to stretch in order to handle challenges as and when they occur. These suggestions are reiterated here as recommendations for future practice. However, we suggest that it is worth returning to the text to understand the contextual and conceptual underpinnings for each suggestion (page numbers are given in brackets where applicable).

1. Space

In terms of the physical spaces of the Change Lab more breakout spaces and different types of spaces (for reflection, for small group meetings, for relaxation) are necessary to create an environment more suited to the nature of the work. In the Bhavishya Alliance the break-out space available was a small library, which was frequently used as a small meeting room, as a meditation room and as a place to de-stress. All staff meetings took place in the Library as it was the only private space available. Later on the process, co-design meetings with participants also took place in this room (see P13).

2. Equally, a recommendation is to include gardens or other green spaces as part of the daily Change Lab environment. Rather than compartmentalise nature into a single module, the Solo, natural and aesthetic spaces are an ongoing requirement throughout the trajectory of the Change Lab (see P14).

3. Collective Intelligence – Knowledge

During the Lab it would be beneficial to spend time comprehensively mapping the information (the propositional knowledge) that is “in the room.” The requirement for information for collective intelligence can partially be met if participants all know what each other knows in the sense of knowing how to use a telephone directory or an internet search. If participants are able to create and use a “knowledge map” – allowing them to know about the knowledge and experience of other participants, they would know enough to pull in the right individuals during the course of making a decision or designing an innovation (see p18).

4. Nature of the Delivery Team

Further work needs to be done on clarifying the parameters and conditions of a successful Change Lab launch taking local context into account. A critical learning about the healthy conditions for delivering a Change Lab: staff must be involved in designing the process, as well as the overall decision-making process,

in order to have a genuine sense of ownership and sustained commitment to the process (see P21).

5. Systemic change begins in the room amongst participants. Many of the critical reasons why child malnutrition persists in society, for example gender inequalities, donor conditionalities, unhealthy power dynamics, a lack of collaboration between diverse agencies, a lack of space capacities for innovation, all exist in the room. They are embodied and enacted every day in relationships between participants. (P23)

6. One of the participants commented that the dynamics between the Lab staff and participants would have been markedly different had they lived together in the same space over the course of the Change Lab. (P23)

7. Health

Given the periodically high emotional charge of the situation, formalising a review and assessment process would ensure that the health (mental, emotional, physical, energetic) of facilitators was maintained throughout. It would also make sense to have various support mechanisms, such as shadow facilitators, to assess situations and provided additional coaching for facilitators and staff team facing difficult issues and conflicts. It is important to explore other mechanisms to support and nourish the well being of all participants and staff. (see P23)

8. It is equally as important to monitor the health and performance of participant-facilitators in the context of the Change Lab that deals with highly complex and potentially traumatic issues (Page 23).

9. Power

Shared ownership of the process became a reality half-way through the process, when participants were invited to co-design and co-facilitate the process on an on-going basis. This practice, of staff and participant participation needs to be extended to the periods before and after a Change Lab (see P29).

10. Only when power dynamics are explicitly discussed the group can come to terms with its own collective identity and relational agency. When power differentials and dynamics are masked, there is a risk that both individuals and the collective becomes politically disenfranchised and essentially ineffective. The Change Lab as a vehicle for systemic change will only succeed when the power dynamics present within the larger system are consciously addressed by the Lab

Team and Staff. This principle needs to be present in all stages of the Change Lab (See P29).

11. Gender

It is useful to examine the group as a whole and the conditions for collective intelligence from a gender perspective. In considering how the group is cultivated and behaves, and the extent to which processes are gender sensitive, the design of the Change Lab must take into account gender specific needs (see P35).

12. It would be useful to devote sessions to permit gender to be contemplated by the entire group, and to engage in activities to allow for Lab Team Members to understand different gendered perspectives. Theatre for Development and Deep Democracy processes are relevant facilitation tools that were underutilised in the Change Lab and are suggested for future Change Labs. It may also be useful to form a gender committee with the explicit role of observing gender dynamics and seeking interventions to correct these dynamics. For example, instead of male facilitators having responsibility for observing and correcting male dominance, a group of women could have this role. (See P36)

13. Furthermore given that gender is a major aspect of the malnutrition issue, how gender dynamics are embodied in the room was under explored and other processes and tools could be used to build on uncovering the hidden dynamics of gender. To reiterate, it is important and urgent to increase the intelligence of the group as a whole to cope more skilfully with gender issues. This could result in innovations that transform existing gender disparities in a potentially unprecedented manner (See P36).

14. U-process Methodology

The Solo was a success in terms of developing inner transformation, developing ideas and the reaction of the group to natural environment was so dramatically positive, that it is clear that nature needs to be a continuous thread in the U-process. In current usage the full power of nature to transform group dynamics and increase group intelligence and cohesion is underutilised in the Change Lab. (P38)

15. In the realising phase more illustrations of social prototyping are required as well as a clearer articulation of the principles that govern social prototyping, and the processes employed to prototype. An epistemology of prototyping is urgently required. More work is needed to make the principle that it is possible to experiment with multiple projects with a willingness to fail trying a practical reality in thinking and in funding. (P40)

Conclusion: What is Healthy Innovation?

This paper began with the metaphor as the Bhavishya Alliance as a newborn child and as the paper developed, we drew out the learning that can be gained from each step of the process, from birth to standing on its own feet. The learning in this paper has focused on the following areas that need improvement or were a nexus of learning: Change Lab design, Change Lab schedule, collective intelligence, delivery team management, the role of context and Indian culture, gender inequality, and the U-process. If we are to ensure that innovation is both healthy and scalable then we need to incorporate the lessons of the Maharashtra Change Lab into future efforts.

As the first in a new breed of approaches we have cause to celebrate, especially because the Alliance achieved ground-breaking results in the intended goals: multi-stake holder relationships, strengthened capacity and systemic solutions. In addition, there have also been the success stories of multi-stakeholder cooperation, personal and group transformations, long-term dedication to the tasks in hand and cutting edge systemic social innovations. Looking forward towards future Labs, three main themes arise from the Change Lab: innovation, power and health. While the Change Lab focused on the innovation process, it tended towards a neglect of processes in the areas of power and health.

Innovation

The U-process worked and generated a number of innovative ideas. The Change Lab brought together a number of individuals, representing a wide diversity of institutional backgrounds, many of whom had decades of experience within the field of child malnutrition. These individuals went through the process and came up with innovative and systemic approaches to tackle child-malnutrition. The outcome of this process was the Lab Team working together as a team and generating innovative ideas. (see Appendix 2: Community Knowledge Parks for an example.)

Power

A number of power differentials within the Change Lab went unaddressed. Some of these were simply hierarchical and status differences carried into the Lab from the outside. These, for example, include gender issues. Others were created during the course of the Lab. A critical example is around the Champions and Participants, specifically, who holds decision-making power and so on. At various junctions in the process, the logic of power consumed the logic of innovation. This happened almost all the times participants tried to explain their ideas to Champions. In other words, Participants attempted to explain logically their innovations, whilst Champions, as their role demanded, examined the same ideas

primarily through the logic of power (what is politically and financially feasible?) and only after that through the lens of innovation. The lens of power was missing for the Participants and the lens of the Participant experiences was missing for the Champions. The surfacing and transformation of power dynamics need to form an integral part of the Change Lab design.

Health

The majority of the Change Lab Team (including staff) perceived it to be a roller coaster, a long ride of highs and lows. All the participants survived the ride and the majority enjoyed it. Many are involved in sustainable outcomes: capacities, networks and relationships that will continue the hard work of the Lab Team into the future. The major learning here is that in spite of the successes of the Change Lab it put major strains on the individuals involved.

There were too many unresolved conflicts, not enough gender equality, a tight time schedule and ill-defined leadership and decision-making structures. The purpose of this paper has been to identify these points of learning so that future Change Labs can learn from early mistakes and insure that containers are happy, healthy spaces to facilitate satisfied participants to engage in ground breaking work in a healthy environment; rather than an environment that is shaped by unhealthy stressors. Fortunately for everyone involved, because the techniques were unprecedented there was little room to prevent these mistakes without the benefit of hindsight. With the learning in place, the conditions are ripe for great systemic and personal transformation of issues, such as malnutrition and others, to be addressed and solved.

Finally, it is important to remember that few parents are born the ideal parents, most have to listen and learn as they grow to raise a healthy child. The major points of learning from the Change Lab are new opportunities to extend and expand current knowledge of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Our hope is to see them embodied in future Change Labs.

“The past two and a half months have been like a roller coaster ride. There were times I felt even the facilitators and designers of the lab were not ready for the shape of things to come. The Bhavishya Change Lab was the single most unique and enriching personal experience in the last ten years. I had never worked so closely with such a diverse group of people. With them, I could speak my mind out without bothering to be politically correct. I got challenged on the role of corporate sector in the society and my life philosophy. I challenged others on their world view. Many a times, we did not agree, but then there was no need to. What was important was that we came to know each others views.” – Participant

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Appendix One: Abridged Learning History

This is an Abridged Version of the Bhavishya Alliance Learning History written by Gomathy Balasubramanian

One: Sensing

Uncover Current Reality

Sensing was the space in the left arm of the U. The sensing phase involved a deep immersion into the problem of malnutrition. Only when inside the problem, can participants “see” the reality of the social, economic, political, historical, personal and contextually specific situation that created the condition of child malnourishment.

“Seeing, means using your senses, your intellect and your emotions. It means encountering your subject matter with your whole being. It means looking beyond the labels of things and discovering the remarkable world around you.”

- Freeman Paterson, The Change Lab FieldBook V.2

Assisted by the staff, members built their capacities in the art of suspending judgement and differentiating between data-gathering and sensing. They debated many aspects related to gender, education, language differentials that emerged whilst engaging with communities that faced malnutrition.

Learning Journeys

The participants undertook three learning journeys as part of experiencing the first phase of the U – co-sensing in cross-sectoral teams. Learning Journeys are part of the co-sensing phase. The intention behind learning journeys is to take people spend time with and ‘get to know’ the issue that they want to change or the people or ‘target community’ they want to influence. Two of these journeys, therefore, consisted of visiting communities. The third focused on understanding the systems that create the current reality of malnutrition. Small cross-sectoral groups travelled together to the various communities and systems to immerse themselves in the realities that created malnourishment.

Community Learning Journeys

Members undertook two community learning journeys. The first was a mini-learning journey in Module 1, a half day in length. This journey introduced participants to the nature of sensing and learning journeys. They examined structures and interventions already in place that influence malnutrition: service providers and their challenges, community Anganwadi centres (ICDS⁵) and primary health care post to talk to mothers, NGOs working with self-help groups, government groups hosting clean drinking water and sanitation, municipality talks about child nutrition to mothers, and a teaching hospital with cases of severe malnutrition, low birth weight babies and cases of iron deficiency.

These were followed by further Community Learning Journeys in Module 2, three to five days in length. The teams that undertook the CLJs were formed during Module 1 and they enthusiastically prepared the logistics for these journeys. Six teams were formed and for 4 to 5 days they immersed themselves in the current reality of malnourishment by living with the people that were critically affected by malnutrition.

Teams checked in about their feelings, insights and perceptions after the completion of all the learning journeys. They considered some of the following reflective questions:

“What did you notice about yourself during the visit? What surprised you? Why do you think that is? What might you have failed to notice? What did you notice about your colleagues?”

This exercise synthesised and deepened the experience of sensing the current reality, and cultivated dialogue within the smaller teams.

On return from the learning journeys, the Lab team shared their experience and stories with each other. To members surprise, even the more seasoned

⁵ Integrated Child Development Services, run by the government of India provides universal health care coverage for children aged 0-5 years old, is the largest development programme in the world.

participants who were experienced working with poor and disadvantaged communities were deeply moved by the experience of sensing in the mini-learning journeys. The scheduled time for sharing members experiences about community realities was inadequate with many members expressing a need for more time after the Maharashtra learning journey. Following this, the staff decided to encourage participants to be involved in setting the agenda for the following days.

Systems Learning Journeys

Members drew a first set of initiatives from their experiences in the community learning journeys and the synthesised models of current reality. In the next steps members identified their key learning areas necessary to develop these initiatives. These needs were then clustered: government initiatives [ICDS] / policies, motivation, current evidence in nutrition, livelihood, local self-government, success stories, corporate functioning, partnership, women's participation, system strengthening. They then identified various systems that played a role in addressing the issue of malnutrition.

Members then formed self-directed cross-sectoral teams of 3 members. Together they embarked on several systems learning journeys where they visited different systems to understand their structure and function. This involved conducting interviews with key actors with different systems and shadowed others to understand their role in alleviating malnutrition and to understand cross-sectoral perspectives and functioning. The team was requested to use the relatively unstructured Open Space technology where interested members could meet with different Systems Learning Journeys teams to understand their experiences. One member of the Lab team refused and chose to make presentations as an alternative.

[April 14, Friday, Capacity building]

[10th April monday, post tea session Sensing in the U]

[13h00 systems learning journey plans]

[April 12, Wednesday; afternoon discussion on logistics, members and locations for CLJ; April 20, Thursday, 09h30 Community Learning Journey Debrief]

[April 21, Friday, 11.45 am Learning agenda for systems learning journeys]

[April 21, Friday, 13h00 systems learning journey plans]

Synthesising Collectively

Playing at building

Members of the Lab Team and the champions were introduced to the method of synthesising their individual perspectives through building and rebuilding collectively in the first module. They were given lego to create models of current reality that produces malnutrition in small, mixed groups using lego serious play⁶. This individual models was then synthesised into a single model for the Change Lab.

The Lab Participants use Lego Serious Play in modelling current reality about the situation that created malnutrition that they had sensed during the community learning journeys. The champions were also asked to contribute their experience to the synthesising part of this exercise.

Small mixed groups of champions practiced taking a variety of models: towers that toppled, animals, individual models of ideal and cold lab participants; and converged these into a single, unified model. Models of current realities that produce malnutrition with different players, roles, relationships and scenarios, and agents of change came alive in three dimension structures. Each sub-group then presented their models to the rest of the Lab Team. Using the methodology proved to be a mixed experience. Some members found working with their hands a relief from the intellectual discussions of the previous few days. Others found the method simplistic and felt that the time might have been better utilized putting down the information on paper.

⁶ <http://www.seriousplay.com/>

[11h00 Lego - building model of current reality, April 13, Thursday]

Synthesising the first model

This was consolidated into a complex model portraying the current reality. One representative from each team [Lego Models of current reality] built a common model for the Change Lab. They visited each table and collected the most unique, impressive & expressive piece of the model. These were then merged to create a shared understanding. Consolidating these pieces required sorting differences in perspectives in the group. Members were challenged to let go their old model to create a new one. This final model was then shared with the entire team. This was the first time that malnutrition in India and the context that was producing was portrayed by the Lab Team and the champions. This was a significant event because the harsh realities were conveyed in 3D for all to observe, some have described the total sum of the issue as an elephant that all had to contend with.

[April 13, Thursday; 16h00 Lego current reality consolidated model]

Building community current realities

The Bhavishya Team in six teams undertook learning journeys across identified districts within Maharashtra to get a sense of the current reality of the system which produces malnourishment. Like after the retreat in the Module 1, members were asked to form groups so that each has a representative from different Learning Journey to form models of current realities that they experienced in their community learning journeys. The members, however, negotiated continuing the community learning journey groups for one part of the activity, and then forming new, mixed, small groups. Each member identified two or three key systemic aspects and integrated these into a model of current reality using Lego blocks.

[post tea break model current reality using lego; April 20, Thursday, 09h15]

Current reality [LSP], April 21, Friday]

Modelling current reality

Community Learning journey groups and mixed small groups built models of current realities based on their consolidated understanding from the sensing in the three learning journeys.

Community Learning journey groups and mixed small groups built models of current realities based on their consolidated understanding from the sensing in the three learning journeys.

[April 21, Friday; 11h15 Initiatives listings]

Democracy at work

In the third module, a vocal minority questioned the intentions, expertise and the methodology of the staff; particularly its relevance to the work at hand. On the principle that this apparent conflict was symptomatic about deeper fears about participating the Lab, it was decided during a staff meeting to bring this into the collective attention of the Lab.

At this point, members felt emotional and uncomfortable about voicing their true feelings towards the project. Members raises several important points: the need to sense what was happening in the group and how this embodied the helping process, the need for facilitation in innovating about the 'how' rather than only the 'what', issues of personal responsibility, and the method and plan and extent of member participation in the design of the Lab itself.

In the same session, one of the members referred to a grievance about documentation that many of the Lab Team Members from the government concurred with. One of the draft community learning Journey reports circulated to the groups for corrections and feedback had a statement that members of the state sector felt was unfair. A state representative in the Community learning Journey group voiced that his feelings were hurt by this statement and then shared it with his other colleagues from the government in the discussion.

Many members in the Lab team, as well as the staff, equally felt that this statement in an official document was a childish comment, prejudicial to the entire public sector, and counterposed to the spirit of collaboration and partnership that the Change Lab was aiming to achieve. Other members also objected to the statement, feeling that it de-legitimised their contributions to alleviating the malnutrition. Both the staff member who edited the document, as well as the director apologised for this error in representation.

Furtherstill, some members from the government sector demanded a public apology from the person who had written the sentence. However, for this, the staff took the stand that the person who had written the sentence could not be produced forcefully for a public apology.

There is an important lesson to note about group conflict and multisectoral collaboration or future Change Labs. Please refer to the Learning and Insights document. It is useful to note the power of this one statement and the extent that it created conflict and occupied considerable amount of time and energy.

Identifying leverages

The members then focussed on identifying leverage points in the systems that created the current reality. The staff introduced to the Lab team concepts from systems thinking to synthesise their co-sensing of the current reality. They built models of current reality in groups and then identified leverage points. The question they addressed was: what broader patterns might that event be part of and, what kind of systemic structure sustains these patterns?

Sharing the journey with champions

The teams met with the champions in small groups and shared their experiences of the Learning Journeys and leverage point identification. Following this, champions noted that the Lab was moving in right direction. There was a marked transition after the community learning journeys. These were around three

themes, the importance of co-creating with communities in interventions, the nature of the change agent, and the nature of partnerships that were evolving. The community Learning journeys marked the start of understanding local realities that represented the beginning of actual work. Members had been exposed to new and alien contexts or reviewed familiar contexts through different lenses. In this work they had developed a sense of empathy to the life experiences of marginalized people, and become passionate towards grass roots needs. During reflection, members had become frustrated with the existing state of affairs that left people stuck in poverty and the circumstances that cause malnutrition. They had developed a sense of purpose for the work, and had moved to look at regions where the problem had been solved successfully in search of sustainable solutions. The criticality of local intervention had emerged. Whilst it was recognised the institutional changes had to be made, a critical area was empowering communities to develop the capacity to act together *with* the change agents.

“The lab was at the stage when Gautam Buddha was when he saw that death and suffering were inevitable parts of life; and decided to seek a way through which it would be possible to release humanity from this.”

The team had also started coming to terms with the diversity with the team and had started the process of forming a community. There was an effort to move beyond personal, class and ethnic barriers and develop empathy across these differences. Members were becoming more and sensitive to each other’s viewpoints, melding their perspectives to adopt a holistic point of view, understand their commonalities and differences, and displayed a sense of togetherness in minds and hearts.

Presenting leverages

In module 3 members delivered presentations to champions on the key systemic issues underlying malnutrition and leverage points for interventions after their

systems Learning Journeys. These findings formed the core of the initiatives that followed. Representatives from 5 groups had worked together to produce the final presentation. They had then made a plenary presentation to the other members and received their feedback. Copies were circulated to all champions. The presentation itself was a study in failure. The projector failed and powerpoint presentations were set abandoned. In lieu verbal presentation were presented. At this point the champions intervened to demonstrate that all the presenters were male, and encouraged women members to come forward. Planning in the presentation team had to be discarded.

(May 12, Friday; 13h00 presentation of the Lab Team Members)

Champion Feedback

The champion's feedback towards the Lab Team's work in module three was emotionally charged, and particularly critical towards the leverage points the that Lab team had identified. At one point, in the middle of the session, the staff intervened to request champion's comments on paper. This was however vetoed because the champions felt compelled to share their hopes and expectations. Some champions did put their comments on paper later on.

The discussion that followed the champions' feedback focused on two themes: the quality of presentation itself and the intention of the corporate sector.

The champions held that the presentation lacked depth of understanding to arrive upon systemic leverage points. They felt that there were no new insights and the passion demonstrated in the small group meetings was absent in the final presentations. They interpreted these as a disappointment: intellectual and dry. There was need to examine the existing models more thoroughly before arriving upon these leverage points. The Champions felt that there was a lack of collective synthesis of the experiences of the group that was hindering the emergence of collective intelligence.

The second critical issue the champions raised was about the intent of the corporate sector and the risk that the Alliance platform could be used for penetrating markets for corporate profit. They asked, what were the codes of practice to prevent any sector from using the Alliance platform for hidden or private agendas? The use of term 'business opportunity' was a source of concern for many members and was not resolved at this stage.

In addition, clarity was sought on the non-inclusion of grade 1 and 2 children in the goals of the Alliance.

[May 12, Friday; 14h00 Champion Feedback on Leverage Presentation]

Quieting the turbulence

Module 3 had been extremely turbulent. Many differences and points of contention had surfaced between the sectors and between the staff and the Lab team. The Team had already pointed out that time given for sharing and relating in the group was inadequate to share differences and reach some resolution about them. It was decided that all of the first day of the fourth module would be devoted to sharing amongst the group. The effect of being in nature in the mountains was already manifesting in the team and group dynamics. There was an openness to explore and resolve difficult issues without becoming entangled in them. Members first met in their initiative teams and discussed and then presented the harvest from these talks to the larger group.

Collective intelligence and new levels of participation

Following the feedback from the Champions the team reflected on the breakdown of collective stance during the fiery exchange; with some members disowning the points made in the presentation, particularly about corporate intent and pointing to poor staff performance as a reason for failure.

This session was a landmark, the beginning of various turning points in the Lab and its design. The staff and member relations transformed from guidance or teacher-student to co-creation and partnership. A team member co-facilitating the session with the staff, and it was agreed that a core team comprised both of staff and members be formed to decide on the future course and design of the Lab.

These reflections focused on the following critical themes:

- i) the lack of time to evolve collective intelligence,
- ii) the lack of clarity of corporate intent in the team,
- iii) the need to surface assumptions and perceptions of the different sectors and dialogue on the different viewpoints that emerged,
- iv) the dialogue process with communities,
- v) individual and collective commitment to the purpose of the Alliance,
- vi) nature of and communication with the champions,
- vii) the lack of reflective documentation,
- viii) feelings of exclusion and lack of connectivity in the group,
- ix) the nature of co-creation in work and community.

Of these themes particularly relevant was the intent of the corporate sector and whether they would use the platform as for 'business opportunities'. This highlighted the need for open dialogue on the positives and negatives of all three sectors. The nature of innovation was debated on, and it was pointed out that it was not just about the 'what' of malnutrition but the 'how' of relating. The issue of documentation resurfaced with the members of the state sector expressing hurt at no action being taken about the representation of the state sector in the Community Learning journey report.

There was a visible bonding in the Team, with most of the members sharing. For the first time, members acknowledged the need to share responsibility for the Lab. They felt that the open discussions had helped catharsis and lead to some of the most useful conversations to date. The role of nature was acknowledge as bringing them closer to their inner-selves.

“The exercise of the first month is to build common ground before we take off. The time for take-off is coming closer and closer. This transition happened at the right time. If the same dynamic had happened towards the end of the Lab, it might have caused more severe distress. The solo can be for both personal development as well as collective reflection on these issues.”

Finally the exercise discussed extensively the nature of commitment and the relevance of the next phase of the Change Lab presencing; and its importance in determining the character of individual commitment. The question before the participants were: “Who am I?” and, “What am I called to do for resolving the issue of malnutrition?”

Two: Presencing

A taste of the outdoors

On the day of the mini-retreat at 4am the group gathered together. The staff introduced them briefly to the idea of presencing, 'being present', the second, defining phase of the U-process. Being present requires being silent, not creating, rejecting or following through any thoughts.

To presense, members were asked to go out into the meeting premises for an hour in silence, alone. Members walked around, sat quietly and sometimes did both. The staff asked them to return back upon a signal given by the staff. In the group, members checked-in briefly volunteering any insights that they had. Many of the participants felt that they had relived memories from their childhood. Some remembered events they had long forgotten. Others were appreciated the time for themselves. Some members did not find the exercise meaningful and felt that the period of silence was too long. The morning ended with some Tai Chi movements for the group. As a closing exercise, the staff asked members to talk to an object in nature. *[April 12, Wednesday; 16h30 meditation and tai chi]*

The nature retreat

The nature retreat is guided by the principle that a return to the wilderness in its pristine state creates the ideal conditions for presencing. The silence from human conversation and the presence of the remote wilderness created the field where the inner voice could be evoked, the call heard and responded to. The mountains, particularly the Himalayas, have been perceived as especially conducive to meditation and reflection since ancient times. To intensify this experience with untouched nature, the trappings of civilisation were discouraged. The aim of the fourth module was to provide inspiration and commitment for the work of the remaining four modules concentrating on prototyping innovations. As is well known the retreat has a major role in energising and inspiring members.

“Time alone in silence is one of the most reliable ways we know to become completely present to the living generative field that connects all of humanity, to an expanded sense of self, and ultimately to what is emerging through us.” - Joseph Jaworski 2004

As mentioned, during the solo participants were asked to reflect on two questions: who am I and, what is my purpose in the Alliance? They had 72 hours of solitude to ponder these questions. In addition, the intention behind this exercise was to build collective purpose. Even though the participants were not sharing the same physical space, they were experiencing the same conditions at the same time and they remain part of the collective. Despite being physically apart, the solo was an important exercise in gluing the group together. This occurred firstly by convening into a circle near the base camp that acted in the heart of the group before the solo. Secondly, they had a chance to return to the circle to share the experience after the solos completion. In times of emergency the members could connect to each other also through whistles and radios.

The retreat was held in the village of Dugalbitta, in Uttaranchal in the Himalayas at an altitude of 2500 metres. The staff selected this site because it was the closest to the capital and yet the nature was still relatively secluded and pristine.

“Organising the retreat has been on my mind for about four months now. So after an aborted attempt earlier in the year to find a place to do it, this place was suggested this place and I had come with one of the LTMs here. It was probably around this time of the day, we arrived and within three hours we found this area after spending some time in a meadow that snow leopard had suggested which was totally unsuitable. So I feel very fortunate that we found this place. In my mind, it’s a very special forest, When we arrived first, it was full of flowers, all the rhododendrons were in bloom; it was a really, really beautiful place. So I am excited that we ended up doing the retreat here.”

Facilitator

Preparing for the wilderness solo

Capacity building

To prepare members for the 72 hours in the wild, staff conducted presencing training sessions on awareness, including sessions in the yoga practice *pranayama*. Silence and laughter exercises also formed a part of the training.

The staff reiterated regularly that the presencing activity was not particular to any one faith and therefore inclusive to all. The purpose was to silently commune with nature, the self and the Greater presence. The solo was an opportunity to reflect and meditate on life itself and could be use to strengthen individual practices. There were many methods of slowing and preparing the mind: awareness of the breath, chanting, yoga, prayer, reflection. None of these were compulsory. Being silent in nature itself could open one to communion with the plant and animal life around and with one's loved ones. Participants would gain insights about their purpose and their lives. However, some form of daily meditative practices was good preparation; and would ease the individual into the solo. The restricted diet could provide an opportunity to be aware of diet intake.

[April 21, Friday; Afternoon capacity building for presencing]

Retreat roadmap

During the third module the members of the Lab Team were introduced to the structure of the fourth module, the wilderness retreat. The staff asked the members to raise any doubts and questions about the solo. Many of the participants were nervous about the hilly terrain. They were urged to consider the adverse climatic conditions in the high altitude, and to ensure that that they brought appropriate warm clothing, equipment and rainwear. The dates of retreat and the mode of travel were discussed. The accommodations for the remaining days of the module at the site was also discussed.

[April 21, Friday; Afternoon road map - presentation on retreat]

Being ready for an inner and outer journey

To experience presencing, participants were required to stay in isolation in a tent pitched in the forests of the Himalayas for 72 hours around the meadow. Leaving the meadow in the afternoon of the first day and returning in the morning of the fourth day.

While in their sites, they had to stay within an 180 feet circle and avoid leaving this boundary. These solo tents were to be pitched far from the other tents so that members would not be able to hear or see each other. However, they remained within a larger circumference as a group around the meadow where the base camp was located.

Staff told the members to refrain from human contact except in the case of a physical or emotional emergency. If the participants felt that they needed support, they could call for help on the radio or whistle for assistance. Books, music, electronic equipment either used for work or recreation were prohibited. Each participant was given a small notebook to record insights. No fires were to be lit either for cooking or light. A torch was provided to be used in the dark, and in the presence of wild animals.

The food available for members was rationed. The presencing diet consisted of fruits, nuts and biscuits for the greater part. This had two purposes: to reduce intake to reduce digestive stress and also experience the hunger that people who are malnourished feel. Water for drinking and basic washing was also provided. The conditions were difficult but above all, the Solo was a voluntary exercise. If any member felt that she or he did not wish to continue the Solo, they had the option to return to the base camp in the meadow.

Transitional and organisational challenges

Returning back to the wilderness with the minimum trappings of civilisation is a difficult transition often fraught with fear and anxiety. Staff needed to organise members would feel secure to pursue their individual reflections freely in the

wilderness. The organising of the retreat had to be stringent to provide the optimum conditions of presencing for each participant. The organising was hindered by the size of the group, and by the unfamiliarity of the terrain. Individual participants needed to have appropriate clothing and equipment.

During the solo a base camp was established. The Alliance staff and the Snow Leopard team of outdoor experts ran the camp. In addition, there was a naturalist to respond to 'wildlife' emergencies.

The base camp had hot food and drink facilities and a few places for participants to sleep. It also had a medical officer to respond to health problems that participants could face, and had primary health care equipment and medicines. The Lab Team had completed confidential medical history forms, and were reminded in the retreat briefings to contact the retreat or the medical personnel and inform them if they did have a condition that required preparation. Contact numbers of hospitals and emergency health care was also on hand as back-up. The Lab Team itself had a few medical practitioners who could be called in an emergency.

In addition, another tent was pitched in the middle of the retreat perimeter that had outdoor experts who could reach any tent within 15 minutes to ensure that there is immediate emergency response. Three other staff had their radio on to respond to emergencies. The staff was asked to be ready to respond, if help was needed by the retreat staff team. Otherwise the staff pursued their solo, unless specifically called for.

In times of emergency participants were asked to use the radio or whistles. If participants heard a whistle from a nearby tent, they had to alert the base camp personnel and not undertake any action. The outdoor and medical experts and the retreat team staff were prepared for a potential emergency situation.

The individual sites for the retreat had different levels of accessibility and seclusion from the base camp. Members were asked about their physical health and fitness status and their fear levels. On this basis, sites were allocated, closer

or farther away from the base camp. The tents and other equipment was good quality to ensure they provide the shelter required.

Given that the food on the Solo was sparse, participants were asked to drink a lot of water to prevent dehydration.

The criticality of being stringent in this organising became apparent only during the time of the solo, when participants actually entered the presencing exercise.

Travelling to the site

The travel to the retreat site was long and complex. The journey to Uttaranchal was scheduled to be over two days. During the course of the travel by road to the retreat site, one of the buses broke down and the group was delayed further. The group arrived at the site late and extremely tired .

The wilderness solo

Why go Solo?

Members reflected on the purpose of the solo. Some reasons were to remove the ego, to experience solitude, to condition the mind rather than work on malnutrition, to realize the inner potential. Members who practiced some form of meditation talked about what might be expected in the solo. They talked about the critical role meditation in shaping their lives, in their awareness of purpose and in surrendering (?). They pointed out that the experience could have sacred meaning for individuals. It was also true that many innovations come to individuals during silence. Others pointed to the need to be open and suspend judgement, since the outcomes of the exercise could not be predicted and to seek sensational gratification might defeat its purpose.

Solitary and Collective Intelligence

The dispersal and re-entry back into the collective was a critical element in the Solo for developing collective intelligence. The group met together on the morning of the first day in the meadow near the base camp. The individuals formed the whole collective by holding a circle together and acknowledging each member. It unfurled in teams from the meadow, each in a silent line with individual members being dropped off at their sites with a silent farewell, and proceeding to the next till the last member reached her site. At the site, the outdoors staff checked the tent, and the provisions.

Each team re-furled back at the end of the exercise in the reverse order of unfurling, starting from the site farthest from the meadow, and proceeding to each tent sequentially, till the team reached the base camp. The whole team then sat in a circle and shared their experiences. This knitting was critical to embed the collective in the individual.

Team Expectations and apprehensions towards the Solo

The demands of the wilderness solo were high: many members had not spent time alone, in wilderness, without agendas and plans. There was uncertainty expressed about what to do during the solo. The second set of doubts was around purpose. They questioned: How will spending 72 hours alone in the Himalayas help working with the issue of malnourished children in Maharashtra? Might it not be better only to spend two instead of three nights in the solo?

Whether the solo must be for three nights or for two nights also came for discussion in the third module. Some staff and participants indicated a preference for spending only two nights in the wilderness. Those who had undergone a similar experience indicated that spending three nights was important. The third night was often the time when the individual had quietened down enough to hear the call of the Self/Divine/Collective. The first two days often were expended in coming to terms with the isolation, silence and

wilderness. Also, the overall time given to presencing, in comparison to sensing and prototyping was relatively short and it might not be advisable to cut it down further.

Individual members had the option of returning back to the base camp and civilisation if they felt the need to do so.

There was a certain degree of mysticism associated with the presencing activity and with the wilderness solo in particular. Earlier presencing sessions had talked about time spent communicating with nature and practicing forms of mediation. It seemed as if there would a particular experience that would mark the success of the presencing. This particular experience of communion with nature or a Higher Self or the Divine would come to the individual and offer revelations about both the self and the issue at hand.

Members who identified themselves as guided by science and reason rather than faith were unsure what the outcome of this exercise would be. One participant narrates that when one was a child, it was easy to believe in religion. It was easy to follow the path of faith, where one followed a guru or religious text. As a student of science, the individual began to seek answers and reasons. However, science was unable to give clear cut reasons for some phenomena particularly those related to life and death, ontological questions. If one did not want to turn to religion, it plunged the person into a moral quandary.

Some members were clear that the solo was critical to reflect on what change they as individuals will bring about in malnutrition, and this work on the perception of self was critical to the success of the Change Lab.

“If the centre is in me, then I have to work on it.” - Anonymous

Leaving civilization behind – a difficult change

Leaving the group and reaching the site of the individual solo was an intensely emotional moment for some participants. A few members broke down crying, remembering their families, feeling abandoned, doubting the process and their ability to accomplish it, feeling afraid of being alone without human company. In spite of the efforts made to ensure that the members were in complete wilderness, civilisation could not be kept out. For example, some of the sites were located near the road with traffic moving up and down. Various members commented on the contradiction between the perception of the Himalayas as India's most sacred place along side the pollution they found in some areas. On balance the team experienced the mountain retreat as a refuge from the insanity of the outside world (in spite of the odd car horn!).

Encountering wild life

The Lab team were exposed in nature to real wildlife, some of them for the first time. The teams reaction to this project varied from fear to bravery. On one occasion, a member heard a snuffling sound, and went to investigate, expecting to see a leopard. Another spotted a Martin, a large black brown squirrel and was moved by his beauty.

Many members became terrified of the wild animals in the dark. Many marked and organised their boundaries within their tents and around the camp-site to ward the approach of wild animals and insects... Another recounts a hilarious experience of spending three hours perched on a tree staring back at a buffalo, that he was sure was going to charge him.

For one member, the fear of bear attack was so strong, upon hearing snuffling sounds around his tent he practiced calling for help. Eventually, he surrendered to his fear, and let go. He then rethought his relationship with Nature: she was his mother and would care of him. The next day, he went to all the wildest areas to face his fear. This experience, changed his view towards the Lab. He realized

that no longer could he sit fearfully in the midst of his conflicts. To arrive upon any solutions, he needed to face them head on.

Fearing and Facing the Darkness

Several members confronted their fear of darkness. Some were paralysed by fear, kept their torches on all night, stayed awake till dawn. While a few realized that it was not possible for them to continue and returned back to the base camp, others stayed on battling their fears, using different resources for light and courage.

Health problems- barriers to the Solo

The health problems of some members intensified during the solo experience. For some members, completing the solo required extra preparation and care. Two members had their blood pressure increase and returned back to the base camp, before the 72 hours were completed. One member had an incapacitating back pain. Another member had an asthma attack that she had not experienced in more than eight years.

Reflections on the Solo

Organisational capacity

Many members commended the Alliance retreat team and the Snow Leopard team about the detailed organising that had been done. One of the participants, who keeps his radio on just in case, said that it was a privilege to hear the care that was extended to the participants who called on it. Others complimented the careful preparations taken for each site and each member. The staff members commented on the close connections that they felt with each other and with the group. These connections became stronger in the purer environments of the mountains and formed the bedrock on which they could overcome hurdles of the retreat. There had been many moments of anxiety: when the team was delayed,

when it rained, when members were doing the solo. The team were a diverse group held together by an intention towards changing malnutrition and now they were united by a shared connection.

A couple of the Alliance retreat team members shared their experiences of holding the space. They remarked on the stress involved. In these events, many people try to actually stretch their capacities – physical and emotional. It was a balancing act between encouraging people to stretch themselves (stay on for the entire 72 hours) and acknowledging the validity of participants sense of their own limits.

The question of capacity arose in one instance when the participants who had returned to the base camp earlier than the 72 hour period, began talking amongst themselves. A decision had to be made on whether this was to be allowed or whether they be requested to stay silent, so as to not disturb others. Finally a call was made by following intuition to allow the members to share with each other, and all the individuals who participated in this, commented on the high quality of discussion that ensued.

The staff team also had to be responsive to any calls for help, particularly on the radio.

The most rewarding part of organising the retreat for the staff was to see the safe return of the majority of the participants were safe and well who completed the solo. The transformation in the environment of the group with much more laughter and camaraderie added to this reward. The staff appreciated that members trusted them with their lives and commended the participants on their dedication and fellowship.

Strong Solitary Medicine

The staff warned the members that the solo was strong medicine. On return from the solo it was important to be careful and gentle with the self and take the time that they need to recover and understand the experience. Presencing was not

about rigid time constraints deadlines. Internal shifts within the self could be manifested in the coming week, month or year.

The exercise of solo exerted changes deep in the consciousness, where individuals began to perceive many connections. These connections could be arrived upon the next day or the next year. They tap into the individual's experience in diverse ways. He for instance feels sad about how modern development destroyed so much of nature. The team had to travel 24 hours from Delhi, the closest space to a natural environment. It seemed like going back into daily, urban life was like being back on the treadmill that destroyed this beauty.

The family groups were predominantly constituted to discuss these delicate issues. The three retreat team staff also offered their continued support in the coming days to the members, urging them to get in touch with them when required. A short skit was also planned as a check out exercise where participants played going home to their families and colleagues and talking to them about the experiences of the solo. This was important to bridge this rather unique experience.

Purpose of the Solo

The aim of the solo was to tap into a deeper sense of knowing, to transcend boundaries within and between individuals and groups. The team were working on 3 levels at the same time: a), working on initiatives that would address malnutrition, b), building relations amongst the team members, champions and communities, and, c), build capacities of the members and the three sectors.

The first aim was to create some time. To innovate space and quiet is necessary for ideas and insights to come. The major theme of the solo sharing was fear and overcoming fear. How did the insight of fear link to an insight into how the system embodied this in creating malnourishment?

Participants could now approach the fears, doubts and struggles they experienced in the Change Lab with a new sense of courage, oneness and energy.

The Team felt a greater sense of team oneness: marking communion and the beginning of collective intelligence.

Secondly, capacity building aspect of the Solo was to awaken the sense of purpose in the individual. What am I here to do? This commitment was essential to overcome the fear of undertaking the long and arduous journey of solving malnourishment. Fear was a major theme in the solo and in the team.

“An important principle of the U-process is that if an individual has to change the system he / she belongs to, she has to change herself. If she continued to do what she had always done, she would always get what she always got.”

It is the middle process, and represents a shift from breathing and breathing out and realizing. The solo is a turning point for individuals and for teams. Teams were able to process the experience they have had prior to that and it created a sense of the collective. It represents a turning point, a focusing point, a collective formation point. It connects people through a deep and authentic commitment that is essential for profound innovation.

Some members questioned if all team members were able to continue for the 72 hours affect the team shift? Would members that had experienced a deepening of the distress experience a paradigm shift? The process approach was that if a critical mass of the team were able to make a shift, the entire team moved into the new reality.

Building collective intelligence

The most significant criticism of the Lab design was that before the wilderness solo began there was little opportunity for people to share and connect. Members suggested to allocate a day for this to allow the collective intelligence of the group to emerge.

The teams first met in their family groups to check-in how they felt personally after the fourth module. Then, two kinds of questions lay before the team for

discussion. First of all, what was each member going to focus on? These areas could be wide and could include working on the Alliance and its design or about initiatives. The work on the Alliance could be part of the design team work. The design team would meet as soon as possible to work out the course of action for the Champion's meeting in the forthcoming module, the meeting with funders and prototyping capacity building.

Secondly, what were the gifts they were bringing to the Alliance purpose and the collective? There were many ideas in the lab team and these had to be surfaced by focusing on initiative areas.

Three: Realising

The Alliance Seed

Module two and three - The First Round of Initiatives

Upon returning from their community learning journeys in the second Module, members built models of current reality synthesising their experiences. Each member rapidly formulated one or more key initiatives that they felt were critical in changing the current reality expressed in their model. This was the first experience of prototyping for the member where they placed their interest areas on paper for collective consideration. They outlined the universe of possible ideas and articulated the beginnings of intervention ideas. These were continuously refined, challenged discarded and upgraded as the Lab proceeded. Five areas of intervention emerged: a) awareness and education, b) community empowerment and community based organisations, c) service delivery systems strengthening and, d) community monitoring, advocacy and monitoring. The issues identified were water conservation, nutritious food and employment.

April 21, 11:15am, Initiatives listings.

The art of Intervening Successfully

In the third module of the Lab, after the systems learning journeys, the Change Lab began to look towards forming the initiative. An esteemed guest, Srinivas from Illumine visited the lab and engaged in a conversation with the team. The discussion centred around a single issue: the Lab Teams' definition of success. Specifically, what did a successful intervention look like? Members from the Lab Team wrote the answers down and shared them. Different group members had different ideas about success. The more conventional definition was that success meant problem solving and reaching targets with metrics and milestones, bridging the strategy and practice gap and have a commonly agreed roadmap for implementation of the initiatives with clear entry and exit plans and

accountability to the community. Another definition involved aspiring to demonstrate best practice and build scalable initiatives that achieve targets. A third concept of success would be to deepen understanding about malnutrition engaging the three sectors. A fourth picture of success was emergence continuous, committed work for the nutrition of mothers and children that develops incrementally over time, like the growth of a tree with small successes.

May 10, Wednesday, 15:45pm Esteemed guest – Srinavas from Illumine.

Picturing success - The Alliance seed

The third module saw intense engagements within the Lab Team to synthesise efforts that portrayed the current reality that created malnutrition from different perspectives, build relations and build collective intelligence. These engagements formed the seed of the Alliance. The models of current reality created the soil for creating and nurturing the prototypes. The next set of actors, the champions of the partnering organisation, the Executive Committee and Friends of the Alliance, so that the vision encapsulated in the golden seeds could unfold. The wilderness solo could be viewed as the gestating period of the seeds to sprout into the various initiatives.

May 10, 15:45pm Esteemed guest - Srini from illumine

Module four: Answering the call

The group energies were significantly higher following the wilderness solo. This marked the threshold before entering the third phase of realizing. The energy and focus of attention of the group had shifted increasing towards action and co-creation.

In the U-process, the left hand side of the U is like expiring and the right hand side is like inspiring. Many members had expressed impatience at the time taken to breathe in, immerse themselves in the reality of the situation, before acting. This slowing down was important for laying strong foundations of collective

intelligence to emerge. This shared understanding, relations, commitment and knowledge could then inform the realizing phase of the U.

This part of the phase was devoted to co-creation. In this phase, the members worked in parallel, small work teams and converged back to share the issues arising. Two kinds of teams were formed: 1) specific initiative areas and, 2) Alliance issues and participation in Lab design and the follow up strategy post-June.

The team worked together in the initiative areas in the fourth module. This was a significant milestone in identifying initiatives seeds. Members and staff participated in this exercise where they identified initiatives that they saw as essential to alleviating malnourishment. They also examined what they personally were called to do and the gifts that they bring to the Alliance. The collective transformed and conflict settled, not because the differences expressed were reduced but the manner of expression was more compatible to discussion. The group felt a renewed sense of commitment to working with each other. These changes were evident both in the atmosphere of work and the speed at which the tasks were performed. The team created an extensive list of initiatives that richly covered various aspects of the solutions required to transform current reality.

Module five: Initiative teams model exchange

Lab Team Members' presented their understanding of successful existing models of community development. The key objective of this session was to learn from what already was there and incorporate this learning into new initiatives. Models that were discussed were:

- RHEP-Integrated Rural Development: Gram Vikas
- IMNCI
- Balvikas Project (SEWA) Model

- ANKUR
- Export support to women SHG: A Kerala report (KIDS system learning journey team)
- Micro-nutrients and enlisting survey: Nashik experience
- MRLP linked CCA: Convergence model
- Efforts in systems strengthening
- RJMCHN Mission model
- Initiatives in Talasari & Thane
- Community initiative of Neo-natal health: SNEHA
- Improving child growth
-

May 25th, 10:00am successful existing initiative models

Forming initiative teams

In the realising phase of the U, the challenges ahead of the Lab team were to a) arrive upon four to six initiatives, b) form the ideas and c) form the members of the initiative teams. The methodology proposed was open space technology. Members would identify those with whom they share leverage points in the shifting the system creating the reality of malnutrition and form small, initially fluid groups. Each Lab Team Member could decide whether she belonged to the group that was forming or create a new one. Some members of the lab wished to review the initiative teams formed in the retreat and regroup them. It was pointed out that this would be a logical, linear way to pursue the objective of making initiatives. The argument for intuition and appeal for trust in the open space methodology was made as the next iterative process of prototyping.

b. The Content (the what) Six initiatives groups to address the following areas were formed rapidly:

- i) Strengthening community & government participation leading to a accredited health & nutrition delivery system [community accreditation, later known as *Aamhi Aamchya Mulha Saathi*],
- ii) Information management improving dialogue with communities [IMS]
- iii) Comprehensive approach for reduction and prevention of Malnutrition [Comprehensive approach / systems strengthening]
- iv) The Voice of the Urban Child to focus on urban children otherwise invisible to policy
- v) Bhavishya alliance for facilitating multi-sectoral partnerships and innovative processes
- vi) BANYANS for community development to promote dignity and self-reliance.
- vii) There was the seed of a seventh initiative about the role of youth as leaders and change agents. This attempted to become a part of the BA.

This prototyping exercise produced the first cut of the final initiatives. It also marked a framework for the Lab Team work for the remaining three modules.

Both the staff and the Lab Team participated in this exercise, this was the start of a significant transition in the structure of the Lab. During team formation in the Open Space, there was much energy, discussion, negotiation and confusion between the members as to which initiatives would be formed and who will be part of the team. At the end of the session, there was a feeling of success and instant euphoria. Lab Team Members were excited about working together on their teams.

Despite this, doubts lingered in the air that the groups were too broad, simultaneously subsuming specific approaches while duplicating others. At the end of the day, the question remained as to whether these teams or those proposed in the retreat was more representative of the collective will.

May 25, Thursday, 14:30pm Identifying key initiatives through Open space technology

Building Innovations

The newly created initiative teams worked through the module five and the beginning of module six to give structure and substance to their innovations. They prepared a brief written description of their proposed partners, the location of the pilot, help and inputs needed and the questions they had. The staff asked members to use the law of two feet⁷, while preparing the initiative proposals. The teams were also asked to use Lego for prototyping.

June 5, Monday, work on initiative prototyping; June 6, Tuesday, 12:45 Presentations of Initiatives and Feedback; Afternoon Presentations of Initiatives and Feedback

Breaking and Rebuilding new Innovations

Each team then presented these initiative proposals to the remaining team members and received feedback from each other in the open group. With each initiative presentation, the remaining initiative teams were given a few minutes to reflect together on the following questions and give feedback:

- What are the ideas you liked / appreciated?
- What are some challenges / inputs to refine or increase focus?
- Where are the links between your initiative and that presented?
- What help can you give the team?

⁷ The Law of two feet is a rule applied in group processes where members have the freedom to move between groups to participate in the discussions and draw linkages.

The feedback in the lab team was quite direct. The presenting teams were requested not to respond to the feedback. In the feedback, some members felt that the initiative Banyans might be more of a vision rather than an initiative that can be sustained and therefore unrealistic. This feedback was compounded by the composition of the Banyan team that was predominantly staff with only one Lab Team Member. At the end of the session, the Banyan merged with the community accreditation team; and the lone member joining the Systems strengthening Team. The staff from this point withdrew from the initiative teams as members and undertook facilitation roles. The initiative around change agents also could not coalesce into a team.

One tension in forming the initiative groups were about personal preferences for people to work with rather than from a sense of working on the same idea. One member felt that he was not welcome in his initiative team and did not share the same purpose. His presence in the team was tolerated because he was the sole corporate member and a mandate in the formation of the initiative teams was corporate representation.

June 5, Monday, work on initiative prototyping; June 6, Tuesday, 12:45 Presentations of Initiatives and Feedback; Afternoon Presentations of Initiatives and Feedback

Theory into Action: Synthesising

Initiatives teams discussed the linkages between the whole and the parts and then presented a summary to the Lab Team. The initiative *systems strengthening*, that uses the comprehensive life cycle approach, suggested that all the initiative teams merge under its framework, since they are parts of the entire system. One team member from the MIS while acknowledging the linkage between the two initiatives, pointed out the importance of remaining as separate initiatives because of the differences in approaches. This emphasis would allow

parallel innovations to develop. The tension of individual initiatives and a synthesised whole was a continuous theme throughout the Lab, and emerged significantly in the comments of the venture committee members in the eighth module.

[June 7, Wednesday; 11h30 Linkages [the whole] between the initiatives [the parts]; 12h45 presentations of linkages and parts; [June 26, Monday; 12h20 Plenary of trial presentation runs - preparation of champions meet]

Initiative Seeds [Module six]

This session of conversing with the esteemed guest from illumine defined the nature of the seeds that were emerging in first module of prototyping. The session also brought to bear the collective intelligence of the group to synthesise the larger picture. “I want my project to become our project.”

Focussing on content, the ‘what’

The nature of the seeds (initiatives) that were cultivated in sixth module emerged. The following seeds were identified in the conversation:

- i) **Strategy** a comprehensive strategy and **toolkit** of services that can be used to intervene in the life cycle of people to reduce malnutrition,
- ii) **Measurement** Community audit for transparency;
- iii) **Gap Filling** Identification of and **filling gaps** in outreach particularly for otherwise invisible urban children in unrecognised slums;
- iv) **Feedback Loops**. Protocols for **information loops**, discussion and feedback and the creation of a cadre of change agents.

These four seeds fit together to form a coherent programme of solutions to the issue of Child Malnutrition.

This session defined the seeds of four initiatives that were then iteratively worked on through the remaining period of the lab.

Focussing on method, “the how”

Two critical aspects emerged as a consequence of the synthesising. One was that of ‘how’ these initiatives would relate with communities Secondly, issues of sustainability and centricity of communities.

Two initiatives: Banyans and Youth presented an insider’s view of the picture. These were loose cannons in forming the initiatives, because they focussed on the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’. The first, Banyans brings sustainability on the table as a criterion for the initiatives. Sustainability directly involves centricity of community and marks a frame shift from purposive to relational perspectives. This frame shift was at the heart of the entire work of the Alliance, and the Alliance was uniquely placed to enable this shift. The second described creating a cadre of educated youth, change agents; who will own relational and change processes in the community; as ‘insiders’ in the community. The challenge ahead was to learn how to institutionalise this.

June 7, Wednesday, 14h20 identification of the golden seeds

Building on questions

The team met in a state of both excitement and apprehension to work on the linkages and synthesis of the initiatives. Five questions were addressed through arriving upon a helicopter view of the landscape about individual initiatives [purpose, location, methodology, timeframe].

1. Which initiatives had to be undertaken? What is needed of the team? *The idea is not to focus on the negative ideas but on the golden seeds of three to five initiatives that will be undertaken.*

2. Who will undertake the implementation, full-time and part-time? Who are the two three people who will lead? *This answer will involve contending with issues about organisation; and coming to terms with individual commitments to the initiative and the Alliance as well as support needed for them to continue to work.*
3. Where will the initiatives be implemented? *What is the geographical focus of the piloting work? Will all the initiatives be clustered in the few districts?*
4. How the team implement the initiatives? *What does it mean to use a prototyping approach where failure is more often true than success for the next few weeks and months?*
5. When will the initiatives begin implementation and what will the schedule be? *In the short-term, when will the pilots be ready and how will the team schedule their work? It was suggested that July would be a good time form a work schedule.*

[June 7, Wednesday; 10h45 Plenary - capacity building on prototyping.]

Two major concerns emerged towards the end of the sixth module as critical elements of discussion. The issue of individual commitments to specific initiatives was the first. Related to this were the sub-issues of organisational ownership, team membership and involvement of partnering organisations, particularly the champions. Also raised in relation to this, was the structure of the Alliance and the role of the staff. Until this point, the staff had participated in forming the initiative teams. Now the Lab Team decided that staff remain in their role as facilitators rather than become part of the initiative teams. This marked a critical change in the structure of the Lab.

The second set of issues was the absence of community in the dialogue in the Change Lab. The centrality of the community in the innovations was put on the table and they discussed various aspects of community involvement was discussed: ownership, time frame, relationship building with community based organisations and networks. Related to this was the role of the two initiatives of community accreditation and systems strengthening. The former was about enhancing community abilities to monitor the services provided by the State to hold it accountable. The latter was around strengthening the State's capacity to deliver services that would substantially reduce malnourishment. Synthesising these two apparently contradictory foci was a source of tension within the initiatives formulation. The larger question was whether the other two sectors should act to plug gaps in the service delivery systems of the state.

June 8, Thursday, 12:30pm, key issues and moving forward of initiatives.

Initiative development

To develop initiatives, members continued to work in their initiative teams through the seventh and the eighth modules and prepared for the venture committee meetings. In each module, the initiative teams made presentations to the other team members for feedback. In the seventh module, an open space⁸ was created for initiative teams to receive feedback and individual members to learn about the work of the other teams. A second round of presentations was made in the eighth module to the Lab Team and feedback was sought. Issues related to duplication and synthesis into the whole continued; in terms of approaches and geographical locations.

This phase was also characterised by tension and time pressure. Members and staff worked under the pressure of creating the initiatives by the close of the date. The schedule of the Lab was originally tight, and it had to be adjusted to accommodate sessions on sharing content about malnutrition as well as to create

⁸ <http://www.openspaceworld.org/>

sharing spaces for collective intelligence to develop. The pace of breaking down and rebuilding was hectic and many of the discussions academic. There were many heated dialogues in the group about various aspects of the initiative, its structure and form. Many of the conflicts in the group served to surface differences that would not have been visible otherwise and move the group forward. The groups collective intelligence and strength began to suffer as all other activities began to slide, particularly relaxation and presencing.

People were personally affected at this phase. A female member from a community based organisation recounts that she had become quite depressed and withdrawn with the discussions. The rainy season was the most difficult times for child malnourishment since many of the villages are inaccessible and it was difficult to reach medical help. She felt sad that she was unable to do the work she committed to with communities. This was compounded by stresses in finalising the initiative proposals. It was stressful because of confusion about who was going to work on the initiative, how they would work and where. Who was going to be responsible? How would we communicate across distances? How was the permission from her organisation to be obtained? Where was budget for the piloting going to come from? Was there enough time to develop the proposals?

Another tension in the initiative teams as about the equal participation in the teams, particularly in terms of gender equality. A member described how three women in an Initiative team remained silent and their inputs were not added to the short note prepared in the sixth module. The facilitator pointed out this phenomenon and a consequence was that the three women sat together and presented the importance of dialogue with the mothers of the malnourished mother and the cycle of malnutrition in pictures rather than words. In another group, a member commented that a he was not consulted on the methods to be used on a trip to the state sector to understand Anganwadi functioning. He was forced to participate in a classroom like situation that highlighted the status difference between the field workers and officials. He challenged the usefulness of the sensing exercise if group members still didn't show change in practice.

In spite of the troubles, this phase was mostly characterised by long, hard, committed work by most members towards developing these initiatives. There was also a kind and healthy network that had grown to support members. There was a lot of bonding amongst the team in the realising phase. Since they lived and worked together for two months, they had shared their personal lives. It was understood that there would be differences and conflicts during the sessions. However, when the tension became too much, they would find a way of relaxing together, or going to other teams to understand their work. Many members would tease each other, calling each other names. They looked after each other when ill, fetching refreshments when needed, and kept track of each member's well-being.

Initiative teams discussed many issues related to the Lab in these teams including discussions on the nature of the different sectors and how they operated in the organisation. They also developed norms of working in the group. In one group for instance, it was decided that the team would only meet in Belapur. Since the different team members came from different parts of the state, this would be a method of ensuring that no preference was given to any one member.

[June 7, Wednesday; 11h30 Linkages [the whole] between the initiatives [the parts]; 12h45 presentations of linkages and parts; [June 26, Monday; 12h20 Plenary of trial presentation runs - preparation of champions meet]

The Champions Retreat

A 2 day Retreat was arranged for all the Champions of the Bhavishya Alliance on the 16th and 17th of June 2006. The main objectives were to develop a shared understanding among the Champions of the current reality of the Alliance and to develop a shared understanding of the roles of each of the sectors in the Alliance. Twenty one Champions attended the Retreat, and there was a general agreement that it was very productive, and led to a good understanding of the role of the

Champions. The following points were the primary decisions made by the participants.

The group identified two critical areas. Firstly, the nature of the initiatives and the need for specificity in focus about the systemic challenge they pose. The second area was sharpening the role of each sector on the whole, and attention towards the role of the corporate sector.

The individual initiatives would be developed into specific proposals with sharp focus on project areas, partners, time lines and budgets for three month pilots, that start by July 2006. These proposals could be presented in the Venture Committee Meeting. This meeting would specifically focus on responses to the recommendations of the Champions, as well as present the detailed proposals for piloting the initiatives.

Two issues of contention were also discussed. The group agreed to retain the short term objectives of Alliance focussing on severe malnutrition. The second agreement was that while the corporates would not use the Alliance platform for developing business opportunities, should such opportunities arise, they would not be precluded from using them. Both issues required further discussion.

[The Champions Retreat: June 16 – 17 2006]

Presenting initiatives - Module eight

The Final Cut

The initiative teams made short presentations to the champions about their initiatives. The champions were asked to reflect on three points: aspects of the presentation that they would want to understand better (questions), aspects that you think are strong (appreciation) and aspects which need strengthening (suggestions). The champions put the initiatives through a rigorous questioning process including reflections on scope of the intervention and the inclusion of the urban context, contextual and cultural specificities, and challenges of scale.

The champions and the Lab Teams proposed a bifurcated structure for finalising the initiatives and moving forward as follows:

- A) The champions visit initiative teams and discuss their proposals; offer both critiques and support and explore the possibilities of partnerships.
- B) Then the group could deliberate together on synthesising the four initiatives.

This structure was however, not adopted by the champions. Instead they required time to deliberate amongst themselves about the quality of the initiatives and the vision of the Alliance. They agreed to form an inner circle of discussion that the participants and staff could observe from the outside periphery. At this point this unexpected decision on the part of the champions caused considerable anxiety and unrest in the Lab Team.

[June 27, Tuesday; 10h30 Presentations of the Bhavishya overview, and the four initiatives - champions meet]

Venture committee deliberations

A few champions commended the Lab Team for their hard work and the quantum of work taken to form these initiatives. They also admired their extensiveness and one said that the 'how to' aspect of these initiatives were very powerful.

They also had several critiques. A major criticism was the qualitative issues in the proposals. These included lack of realism, lack of clarity in the systemic changes and focussed interventions, need to refine budgets. The initiatives had not accounting for rural infrastructure, current policy scenarios, state corruption, behaviour change motivation, and public service delivery. In addition, the core competencies of the different sectors had not been highlighted. The corporate sector role had not been fully explored, particularly their contribution in systemic thinking and scaling. *Finally, the pressing need to co-create the initiatives with the community was pointed out.*

A further key theme in the feedback centred around lack of synthesis of the initiatives. All the initiatives had many overlapping ideas: surveys, advocacy and capacity building. There were four identifiable components that could be integrated into a common framework: behavioural change, community empowerment, systems strengthening, and information management.

New Conceptual frameworks

Thus the initiatives had to be integrated into a core model to move forward, based on the development of a single conceptual framework that merged common activities in the various initiatives, and back support system. This would be the basis of a phased action plan that mapped the roles of the different actors and streamlined resource and infrastructure management. Genuine differences were to be identified so that they were not lost for the sake of simplicity in developing this framework. In piloting these different approaches the underlying assumptions were rigorously tested. These initiatives would be implemented in tribal, rural and urban populations.

The need for synthesis raised concerns of retaining individual initiatives focus. It was pointed out that each initiatives had an approach specific to itself (pull, push, gapping and information loops) and therefore created diversity. This diversity allowed greater understanding about what worked and did not; even if it might imply redundancy of efforts. The other concern was deciding priority of approach within this common framework amongst the different initiatives.

[June 27, Tuesday; 14h00 champion discussion of initiatives in a fishbowl - champions meet]; Post Tea Break Champion discussion of initiatives in a fishbowl)

The challenge of a rigorous approach

While considering the move forward, a facilitator pointed out that prototyping phase was incomplete. Each initiative still needed to co-create these innovations

with partners, particularly the communities. Would this be institutionally and financially supported, given the strong feedback from the Venture Committee, or would the Learning Team need to refer back to the champions again?

The venture committee stated that the initiatives were fundamentally sound but needed fine tuning. This would require further conversations with champions. Given the magnitude of work that had gone in into developing these initiatives, they needed rigorous investigation. It was suggested that the relationship to the champions could be a continuous interactive process of smaller meetings of sub-groups of the Alliance staff, initiative teams and champions.

[June 27, Tuesday; 14h00 champion discussion of initiatives in a fishbowl - champions meet]; Post Tea Break Champion discussion of initiatives in a fishbowl

Green Lights to Move Forward

The EC? convened in the morning to discuss the initiatives and the future course of action for the Alliance. They reported that while the venture meeting might have caused frustration, the outcomes of the Change Lab had been excellent, and the Lab Team be commended for their commitment and investment.

The primary role of the Alliance was to develop *best practices* and roll them out. These best practices would be holistic solutions, evolved by tapping into the collective intelligence of the community constituted by the multi-sectoral approach. In this sense, the Alliance would not replicate the role of institutions mandated to solve the malnutrition problem in different areas.

These best practice solutions would include a variety of innovations: methodological, structural and institutional. As a crucible of best practice, the role of the alliance is to identify systemic patterns; and propose hypothesis based on these insights. These then would be tested, documented and evaluated rigorously; and will be continuously refined through open feedback.

In this sense, it would enable transfer of knowledge and transparency. Concern would be shown about the existing gap of insights around scaling already existing best practices. The Alliance would develop strategy and best practice for mainstreaming innovations through both the state and the corporations.

All the four initiatives had been embraced by the champions with offers of enduring partnerships. The prototyping efforts of the initiatives would be supported, and the continued presence of seconded members facilitated. The four initiatives provided an action base where responsibilities become granular.

Common areas grounded in the long-term capability in the initiatives would be synthesised with the initiative teams into an integrated vision; that is complex and operating at several levels. This would crystallise the teams working on the issue, communication about the work of the alliance and resource management. This synthesis would attempt not to subsume local, cultural and geographical differences. It would also account for differences in approach between the different sectors. These were areas that needed further dialogue.

[June 27, Tuesday; 14h00 Executive Committee report to lab team]

Out in the World - Closing of the Change Lab

Seeding the ground for the future

Group members each identified one aspect of their journey through the Change Lab that they wished to take forward to the next phase. Four themes emerged:

- 1) the spirit of open dialogue in the discussions and progress in spite of diversity of interests
- 2) the maturity required to be detached from models, to depersonalise critical feedback and letting go of individual frameworks easily,
- 3) the importance of relationships and friendships in collective working,
- 4) finally the generosity of spirit displayed in the retreat and the need for presencing in daily work.

The Lab's engagement with the Venture Committee at the end of the Change Lab was a time of the emergence of collective intelligence and maturity. This was a worthy accomplishment that members could be proud of.

Sharing reflections

On balance, the Change Lab had been a good but difficult learning experience. The harsh reality of malnourishment was played out in the last three months of the group. The journey had been an emotional roller coaster of highs and lows. A member provided an example of a low, when he said that he became dismayed when members became overly ideological during discussions. Many people commented on the wilderness solo as marking a high point in the Lab.

The team acknowledged that the journey of the Lab has been tiring and at times people felt they were stuck between a rock and a hard place. The journey had tackled not only the reality of malnourishment but also the issues of individuals, institutions and multi-sectoral partnerships. The critical element that enabled the journey to flow and ideas to flourish was the growth of collective movement and support. After working on so many different ideas, the team was flexible about letting go of their individual and sectoral models. They were willing to continue to act cohesively to evolve best practices. They recognised the criticality of the support of Champions in this.

Changes of the heart and the mind

On a personal level, members remarked on the array of personal transformations resulting from their participation in the lab. For instance, a member said that this was a new beginning for him, that he had a lot of time to reflect on himself and he began to express himself in new ways. The solo was a personal test for many participants. One member talked about his tendency to be reactive and how he was forced to be reflective about this in the sessions on suspending judgement (sensing phase). Another member commented on the endurance required and

coming to terms with one's own strength. This member realised that she could begin to be kinder to herself by being kinder to others.

Most of the Lab felt that the biggest gift of the exercise had been the relationships with each other. Despite the trials and tribulations, all the Team members continued to sit together to work even in the last day, in spite of their exhaustion and the harsh feedback that they had received. In this sense, this team experience has been unique.

In the beginning, the reasons for working together were institutional. Three months later, individual relations mattered. For one member, the Lab had been the single most rich experience since college, and provided an opportunity to meet some amazing and committed people.

Strength in Diversity

Members discussed how the diversity of approaches, perspectives and work backgrounds and the opportunity in the Lab to celebrate this diversity. The lab transcended the difference of age, with young people working with senior members. One of the youngest Lab Team Members commented on the support that he got from more experienced and older members, equalised with him and helped him learn enormously.

The Change Lab demonstrated that partnerships can be formed at the ground level. Members of the different sectors can relate and learn from each other and work together rigorously to make major advances on a tough social issue. They can access the support of the other sectors in their ongoing work. Learning had occurred across differences. Individual confidence grew from the support of the group to improve their own capacities. The importance of co-creating initiatives with stakeholders particularly the community, and learning from some of the issues in doing this also emerged.

Reflecting on conflicts

Many members reflected on the conflicts that had occurred in the Lab Team. This was a natural consequence of speaking openly and transparently from differing perspectives. A few Lab Team Members acknowledged that in their earnestness to find the best solution, they might have inadvertently been harsh to each other or hurt each other. In any case, conflicts were part of the process of coming together in the team. The skit that was performed in the morning by building on each other's ideas demonstrated that the team could work together for the purpose of the Alliance. Despite time, resources and capability that posed pressured to them.

The Bhavishya Family

In spite of living in close proximity for three months and having intense struggles, Lab Team Members had affection for each other and could still be happy in each other's company. Many members also commented that the relationships resembled those of a family. Group members who were from outside the country, talked about the sense of belonging that they experienced here. Conflicts that occurred were not given much importance once the event has passed. In the end, because of these bonds that had developed, when they meet in the future it will be like reunions of families members.

Staff Commitment

The team acknowledging the work that the staff had put in during the Change Lab. A few members pointed out humorously that each of the 30 participants had strong personalities and so facilitating the team was like herding bulls with three horns each. Performing this task in the Change Lab was applauded. One member who was also an experienced facilitator commented that she was amazed by the facilitator's commitment, particularly their listening skills. In their shoes, she would be tempted to run away.

A Shared Commitment to Society

The humanity of the Lab Team was shown clearly. The reason driving the work of the members was an individual commitment to return back to society some of the gifts they had. This wish was in everyone's hearts. It was commended that Alliance has undertaken to do something critical to eliminate malnutrition and has the potential to arrive upon breakthrough solutions. This desire for the well-being of humanity was behind the ongoing collective movement forward. Thus, at the end of the Lab, the members have knit closely together and are committed to the issue of solving and have a vision of success.

Lingering questions and issues

Many members felt that the debates and discussions were incomplete. There were still many questions ahead. However, the Change Lab marked the beginning and not the end. This Change Lab was just the first part of a long journey – the first two and half months. At the end of it, the dispersal of the Lab Team was not the end but the beginning of connecting with people from different sectors not just within Maharashtra but in other states of India. There was a feeling of excited anticipation towards what the future Bhavishya work would entail.

“In the same day, I would feel very low and then very high.

What will remain in my mind is the three days and night alone.

One reason I have remained positive is the many things that I have faced in my life. I do not hope. Instead I am confident that we will have a positive impact.

When we see this cardiac machine, the graph is up and down and when the line is straight the person is dead. I think the Alliance is still alive, as long as there is up and down”.

[June 27, Tuesday; 18h00 checkout - champions meet]

[June 28, Wednesday; 17h45 check out with the lab team]

Five: Reflections & Conclusions

Introduction

This learning history is an attempt to narrate the Change Lab story from careful continuous observation throughout its evolution over the 3 months. As you can imagine, the creation of a multi-sector community is an unprecedented task involving clear milestones, hurdles and successes. The Change Lab Team grew and developed in the face of these challenges, developed collective intelligence and decided to move forward in new and innovative directions.

In the history of the Change Lab the condition of the group did not oscillate randomly, but correlated with the phases of the U-process. Reference is made in the text to points when there is clear correlation between the U-process and the development of the Change Lab Team.

The learning history presented here is thematic, and is divided in 10 sections as recorded and written by the learning historian based on these themes. In each of section a detailed overview of the events that are pertinent to each theme are given. The sections are:

1. Diversity and inclusion
2. Gender
3. The Corporate Sector and the Lab Team
4. Conflict and Reconciliation
5. Collective Intelligence
6. The individual versus the collective
7. Feedback
8. Design
9. Co-creation

10. Community Ownership

Section 1. Diversity and inclusion

Collective intelligence took time and effort to evolve. Conflict and listening to differences within the Lab team was essential learning in emerging collective intelligence. The critical guiding principle was inclusion and whole-hearted efforts from all angles were made to keep the members of the Alliance integral to the Change Lab process.

Open and honest communication

The group discussed various important issues including the role of corporate sector and the documentation conflict. There was a visible bonding in the Team, with most of the members sharing their thoughts and feelings. In these sessions, Lab Team Members acknowledged the need to display and share responsibility for the Lab. They felt that the open discussions had helped catharsis and lead to some of the best dialogue in the Change Lab.

Inclusion

As a follow on from diversity, inclusion was a critical concern of the Change Lab. A poignant issue circled around inadequate representation of the community in the membership of the Lab Team. The second set of issues was around differences between sectors, and particularly around corporate intent. The team struggled with the critical question, how to include both points of view and allow dialogue to emerge?

Strength in Diversity

It was remarked on the nature of partnerships that that while the corporates control enormous resources and were capable of contributing strategic inputs, their social purpose was lower on their agenda. Conversely, the government had resources, and had social purpose, but their strategic resources were lower on their agenda. NGOs, on the other hand, had clear purpose, but needed support in

both resources and strategy. In this sense, the partnership could aim at synthesising these various aspects to the collective benefit of the group.

Therefore working in synergy, the Alliance could benefit from the strategic intelligence of the corporations, the social capital of the NGOs and the experience and service of the governments to strengthen communities. This powerful mix would lead to the enhancement of initiatives overall.

There were real and deep differences positions that the government, corporate and NGO sectors hold in the team. Differences were overcome by plenty of opportunities to listen to each other's viewpoints. It was essential to discuss issues collectively, while looking at the strengths and weaknesses; as thus far there had been little opportunity for discussion of diversity.

Some of the teams members reflections on the multi-sector alliance included:

“The non-governmental sector for instance starts by solving problems. Then they seek problems that they can get funds for.”

“The development sector ends up killing leadership.”

“The corporate sector is not just about HLL or ICICI. These are big companies. These companies are not just accountable to the owner but to shareholders also. This helps bring in some accountability to the larger world.”

“There are other companies that are exploitative and use middle men for their operations.”

The Staff pointed out that these differences in opinions were a reflection of the current reality of malnutrition. It was very difficult for the actors on the ground to reach a common agreement. Thus, one of the major successes of the Lab was bringing different voices on the same platform to understand one another.

Nevertheless, having the intent to act was not enough to ensure that malnutrition was addressed, codes of practice were necessary. Under the framework of social responsibility all partners were required to put the purpose of eliminating

malnutrition above those of personal interest. It was necessary to view communities not as resources that could be used by as actively choosing agents who can contribute and provide.

Including champions

Another set of issues emerged around including champions. Two of the champion interactions were very heated. Firstly, during the third module following presentations on the systemic leveraged points. The conflict in these sessions was that this was a consequence of a lack of systemic communication, some members suggested. Champions were not aware of the larger purpose of the Champion's meetings, their roles or the extensive work of the Lab. Systemic efforts were required to bring them on the same page, particularly through documentation. The group agreed that the staff ought to communicate more thoroughly with the Champions to bring them up to speed.

This issue became most heated during the third module, when the champions were critical on the presentation of the leverage points by the members. In the Lab Team reflection, there was confusion amongst champions about the presentation topics. Thus, some champions thought that that they were to hear the initiative proposals. When the proposal was about systemic leverage, they became angry. Again, many of the issues raised by the champions were about the manifest patterns of malnutrition, while the teams were attempting to present the systemic cause for malnutrition. These differences in the levels of abstraction also lay behind the champion's comments. Again in the eighth module, this need for systemic communication was expressed.

Time emerged as a critical constraint in the inclusion of the Champions. The time allocated for champions' sharing was considered inadequate both in the third and the eighth module. The time constraints impeded the possibility of becoming one community.

Section 2. Gender

The Learning Team identified women's empowerment as a key leverage point for systemic change. In the second module they had been exposed to the reality of women's status in the communities where they undertook journeys. They found that women's role was considered secondary to men in the communities and in families and women were rarely economically independent. Gender disempowerment was embodied in the examples of female foeticide and dowry deaths and young brides. Systemically, women were not equally represented in governance. The reservation quotas in the Panchayat system (33%) had improved this to some extent but its reach in culture or practice was limited. It became important to recognize women's roles and strengthen women's decision-making and political participation to tackle malnutrition.

A difficult systemic issue embodied in the group

Gender emerged as a difficult issue within the group in various contexts.

In the first module, while building capacities in the community Learning Journey, the question of appropriate gender behaviour and clothing was raised. Clarity on this was important when going to rural villages, with strong gender role stereotypes. Difficult questions arose such as: should men in the group talk to the women in the villages? If her husband is present, would it affront him? How does one behave in a tribal village where gender roles are determined by different parameters? Must the women in the group dress in a gender appropriate way rather than in unisex or western clothes? How do cultural practices impact the communities' perception of the community learning journey group? This issue returned in the second time during the presentation of leverage points, when it was discovered that there were no women in the team (this was then responded to and changed).

A female participants' perspective:

“We had written up a one page proposal about what was new and challenging in our idea. We three women in the group felt that our ideas were not represented; and the leverage points unclear. We were feeling quite down; but kept quiet. The facilitator brought to the attention of the group that all the members were not speaking in the group, particularly the women and those who work in the field. She suggested that these are the people who should make the presentation. This made us feel good. We three women decided to make the presentation. We drew a picture of the current reality, about the women's group and the youth group from our experience in the field.”

Section 3. The Corporate Sector and the Lab Team

The role of the corporate sector came under rigorous discussion at various points during the Lab. Three themes emerged that will be discussed in turn, the purpose of the corporate sector, the underestimation of the potential contribution of the corporate sector and the understanding between the Lab teams and the Corporate sector.

3a) Purpose of Corporate Participation

The first issue was the purpose of the corporate presence in the Alliance, and their intentions towards the Lab as a business opportunity. In one conversation a Lab Team Members pointed out that members from government and NGOs were already committed to working with alleviating malnutrition irrespective of Alliance. In contrast, members from the corporate sector were perceived to possess the option of not working on this issue outside of the Change Lab, which would affect their role in the Lab Team.

In module three a major question was raised around whether the Alliance could be used by the corporate members to penetrate new markets, fortified foods for

instance, and enhance private profit. Use of the term “business opportunity” rather than ‘corporate social responsibility’ suggested to some that there were financial motives behind corporate involvement. Members wanted clarification and a categorical refusal by corporate partners to sell products through the Alliance’s work. This required an unprecedented negotiation between previously opposing sectors to work together.

Towards the end of the seventh module, in the retreat organised for the Champions, the issue of corporate intent returned. It was agreed that the Corporate Sector would not use the Alliance platform as a business opportunity to market their products, but should such an opportunity emerge, the Corporate sector should not be precluded from exploiting it. This issue required further discussion.

3b) Underutilised Corporate Potential

The corporate role had tremendous potential of extending from being a resource provider: ideas, technology and money, to being systemic and strategic partner capable of processes of scale. However this potential remained largely unrealised through the Lab. In many instances, corporate intervention remained undefined; this aspect requires further thought to partner with the corporate sector for optimum synergy.

3 c) The Corporate Voice

The discrediting of the corporate role caused distress to the corporate sector. Members expressed hurt feelings that their role was seen as profit based only. They wanted to know if the Team trusted their intentions and presence.

The corporate sector pointed to the considerable individual stakes that each member had invested by being part of the Change Lab as evidence of their commitment. Many of them risked their individual growth curve in the

organisations they belonged to by attending the Change Lab. Furthermore, the applicability and purpose of this work was largely invisible to their colleagues in their sectors. Involving their home organisations in a meaningful manner was not an easy process and they wanted support for their contributions.

Finally it became clearer that the intention behind the corporate involvement was clear: they were part of the community, and like the rest of the community, wanted to act to transform malnutrition. They were part a pluralistic, democratic society and as such had the right to act as members. Corporate members in the Team acted from this viewpoint, and their contribution was acknowledged and respected.

Section 4. Conflict and Reconciliation

In the third module, one of the members referred to a grievance about documentation that created unrest amongst the government sector. In a draft of the Community Learning Journey reports circulated for corrections and feedback, a statement was written that mentioned a government official sleeping on the job in the Community Learning Journey. A state representative in the Community Learning Journey group was hurt by this comment. Many members in the Lab, as well as the staff, felt that this representation in an official document was not in the spirit of partnership of the Change Lab.

Some government members requested a public apology from the person who had written the sentence. However, the staff took the stance that the issue could not be personified in this manner.

However, the issue remained 'live' and the group was unsettled. With each new re-emergence, the issue acquired more weight. It was thought that 'outing' the writer would indicate some action taken against such sectoral prejudice. Finally in the fifth module, a demand was made to the staff of the Alliance to produce the individual who had written the sentence so that he/she could apologise.

Given its repeated emergence, the critical question before the group was: how to move forward after the conflict? It was proposed that the issue be discussed in the community learning journey group and resolved it there. Some residues of the event continued to colour the remaining work in the Lab Team.

[May 11, Thursday; 10h00 Check in - plenary dialogue; Open conversation about feelings and thoughts between the LTMs and Lab staff; May 26, Friday; 15h00 Conflict resolution discussion on Nandubar documentation issue]

Section 5. Collective Intelligence

In this section all the factors that undermined or contributed to the emergence of collective intelligence during the Change Lab are identified and explained.

a) Collective Learning

The group discussed that opportunities for learning and assimilating current knowledge about malnutrition, expertise within the team, secondary references and best practices on the ground, were lacking. Many members were new to the issue of malnutrition. The collective intelligence of the group was undermined by the vast differences in the understanding of different team members about the issue. Sharing about the current status of malnutrition, theories about malnutrition and the state programme became added to the Lab structure in the second module. This was a major factor enhancing the collective intelligence of the group.

b) Synthesis

The differences in thinking between members could not be synthesised adequately to arrive upon systemic perspectives. These differences had to be continuously raised and exchanged to build increasingly complex models of the reality of malnutrition.

The issue of synthesis emerged again amongst the venture committee in the eighth module. Champions mentioned the many overlapping activities proposed

by the four initiatives required synthesis. Lab members interjected that the purpose of the Alliance was to create holistic innovations based on patterns perceived. Complex multi-layered integrated vision was necessary rather than single-issue solutions.

Many members of the community also stated that such an integration might subsume diversity in approach and focus of each initiative and therefore should be avoided.

c) Documentation

Structurally, the issue of synthesis became focussed on the areas of documentation and communication. As the Lab proceeded, it became evident that more resources had to be allocated to documenting and organising knowledge related to malnutrition. In addition, it was essential to document the richness of the Lab teams learning. This documentation was to serve two purposes: for sharing with other interested individuals and groups, particularly the champions, the effort of the Change Lab; and to record it as best practice for purposes of scaling. A critical stumbling block in scaling the changes is the knowledge generated in an intervention was rarely noted down and shared.

The issue was raised in the third module with members maintaining that not having documentation that they could read for reflection and sharing with the champions was hindering progress. It was suggested that a core group of participants be formed to process these ideas and thoughts and offer them for future reflection. This issue remained till the completion of the Lab, with documentation and communication remaining incapable of fully reflecting the experiences of the Lab Team.

(Editors note. Perhaps a technological tool would have been useful to record learning and reasoning as it was spoken. For future Change Lab s it might be advantageous to use one of the many available technologies so that the

progression of decision-making can be clearly documented and recorded and made visible to all and projected on the wall.)

d) Sharing and co-supporting experience

It was agreed that overall there was the lack of adequate opportunity to share experiences during the Lab team.

e) Connecting

In the first module, some team members felt that not adequate time was devoted to storytelling and personal narratives, for building stronger interpersonal links. In the third module, this issue became tense. Lack of collective intelligence and relating was pointed out to be one reason for the breakdown of the Lab Team cohesiveness. There were pockets of members who felt excluded or disconnected from the group. Many connections between the members were loose and based on commitment to a common purpose.

Section 6. The individual versus the collective

The Change Lab saw a continuous tension between balancing individual and collective worlds between people in power and people at the grass roots. The individual world was characterised by independence and potency: leader, helper, powerful, strong, potent and surviving. This world was one of personal conviction and perspectives. The collective world was characterised by dependency and impotency: follower, malnourished, helplessness, and confusion. The underlying theme was 'You are helpless'. The intention amongst the team was one of collective purpose and changing this dynamic between people in power and the grass roots.

Many planning interventions occur under the assumption that the relationship of helping communities is simple and easy. In contrast to this rather simple picture, as born out by many of the experiences of the Lab, the helping relationship was

often characterised by inability to hear and respond by the change agent to calls for help, unwillingness to admit dependency and anger by the beneficiary; and difficult relations between the change agent and the community based on struggles of vulnerability, power and control. The key to bridge this was listening: the ability to suspend the 'I' and hear the other to create the collective. The need to listen was emphasised as an essential skill for working effectively in groups.

The methodology that was most acceptable to the members was individual sharing and presentations in plenary.

Attention was drawn to the fact that this was an embodiment of the relationship between change agents and communities. Any shift in this reality had to occur in the situation had to emerge from people within the room, for these were the ones committed to eliminating malnutrition.

Section 7: Feedback towards Structure and Methodology

The Lab Team made many criticisms towards the design and methodology of the Change Lab. In the following sub-sections (a-i) each point of feedback given by the Lab team is detailed, including why and what action was taken to respond to the feedback.

a) Lego

In the very first module, conflict about the methodology came under question. The use of Lego for synthesising current reality came under some criticism; that the methodology did not capture the reality in its entirety, it was not representative and it might have been better to write papers.

b) "Check-in, check-out"

In the community learning journeys in the second module, one group refused to undertake the exercise of check-ins and check-outs, and of staying in the communities they journeyed to, and felt that the facilitation was irrelevant in the current context.

c) Open Space Technology

In the third module, various members refused to adopt the open space technology involving small groups, and to share their experiences of systems learning journeys. They felt that each team must make presentations to the entire group so that the richness of detail was not lost.

e) Facilitators intentions

The most explosive session was in the third module, when one of the members criticised the performance of a particular staff member to another facilitator. The Labt Team member questioned the facilitators' intention and contribution in the Lab.

Staff members were invited to share their concerns in the process. Staff invited the team to reflect and write down their major concerns and fears about the Lab, its structure and the staff. The members and staff would select a location on a continuum depending on the degree of responsibility they felt for the concern raised. The anonymous method enabled issues to be surfaced fast and prevented some voices dominating others.

f) Processing Issues

A minority of the Lab Team Members reacted with strong anger to the proposal of sharing their viewpoints through the method proposed. They wanted to discuss the issues in the larger session and were not amenable to writing their concerns down. Some felt it would restrict sharing and that there was no one who had 0%

responsibility. In addition they felt that the facilitators had an extra opportunity to share and the members must be given the same freedom.

g) Role Confusion

Some members felt that the cause for the conflict during the presentation of leverage points was because of the lack of clarity of roles amongst the staff around leadership.

h) The Solo

When the time spent in the solo came under question, attendance was made voluntary with members having the option to return back to the base camp when they felt like. A significant shift in this module was the acceptance of diverse needs and responses to the structure and the legitimisation of this difference.

i) Staff Competency and Presenting methodology

Issues about competency of the staff and the usefulness of the methodology proposed continued to manifest themselves in the initiative groups, though with far less intensity.

In the fourth module members shared their experiences in open, unstructured plenary and worked willingly past differences.

In the fifth module, the methodology proposed to determine the initiatives came under question again. However here, the group collectively decided to vest trust in the facilitator's proposal in the methodology. This was the critical session that outlined the six ideas that were the seeds for the final initiatives. The session was filled with energy and both members and staff participated in co-creating the experience.

Champions Feedback

a) Method and Timescale

The issue of methodology came under question in the third and the eighth modules with the champions. In the first instance, when the feedback from the champions were profuse and heated about the Change Lab, the facilitators suggested that they be written down and submitted to the staff, to ensure that all the voices were heard. This was resisted and the staff were criticised for not providing adequate time for discussions.

b) Fishbowl Methodology

In the eighth module, the staff suggested that the champions meet in each initiative in an open space, give their support, critique and commitments. The champions vetoed this methodology, claiming that they needed to share amongst themselves to come to a common understanding. They instead chose to create a fishbowl, with the champions discussing inside and the staff and lab team forming the outside circle.

Section 8. Design

The Lab Schedule was identified as one of the critical factors identified with the limiting the emergence of collective intelligence. The schedule had to balance the plan to achieve the purpose of the collective and the emergent expression and processes essential for co-creation.

It was argued that a perfect design that planned every action every minute did not exist. The work to change the current reality involved a lot of processes by different actors over time. Realistically, there were different paces in individual team members and this had to be recognized.

Rushed Collective Intelligence

On the one hand, it was essential to conform to the Lab structure because of project commitments namely: time, resources, and people. On the other hand, the group felt as if the lack of opportunity for sharing was the primary reason for the lack of emergence of collective intelligence. For this intelligence to emerge, time and space for sharing and relationship gelling was necessary.

Again in the third module, lack of time was identified as a critical reason in not being to develop a deep systemic picture of current reality and critical leverage points. Furtherstill, collective intelligence was perceived to be impeded because time was not allocated for members to respond to the Champions.

Learning from Mistakes and Moving On

The staff admitted that a failure in planning had been around the judgement about time needed to build collective intelligence. This was a critical turning point in the Lab with the readiness to co-create: converse and act on critical issues collectively emerging. At this point the future Lab sessions were investigated/imagined to remedy this flaw. It was proposed to create a core group of staff and members who would reflect on the design of the Lab and revisit certain activities to undertake them in more detail.

Section 9. Co-creation

Co-creation, sharing the responsibility and power to decide within the group, was another critical issue. The idea was for each member to take ownership for the collective process. The transition to this new reality was difficult for the group.

The balance between leading the process and allowing collective emergence reflected societal reality, just like when members went to communities as change agents to shift current reality.

The effort of co-creation in the Change Lab had to continuously balance between being open to modifying the Lab design while continuing to have a predetermined purpose, schedule and methods. The Change Lab could not be entirely redesigned and the staff had to play their roles of facilitation, co-ordination and management. However, this was balanced by open discussions on how the design worked, and the greater participation of the members in the design of the Lab with the passing of time.

The Lab saw an increasing movement towards co-creation through the course of the Lab. In the very first module, following a sharp conflict about structure and schedule, the staff followed a practice of seeking consent from the member for the agenda of each day. Subsequent to this, till after the wilderness solo, the staff presented the daily design and agenda to the Lab Team and sought their inputs. This marked the first act in the co-creation process.

A significant shift occurred when the members were asked to share in the responsibility of facilitation with one member facilitating the first session in the fourth module together with a staff member. Until this point, the staff had sole responsibility of owning and monitoring the process. The sharing of facilitation symbolised to the group that better decisions can be made together. There was a real emergence of sharing the responsibility for the successes and failures of the Lab, of managing resources and relations.

From this point onwards, this mixed team participated in designing the daily activities for the Lab. The agenda continued to be presented to the Lab Team and their feedback sought for the remainder of the Change Lab.

Section 10. Community ownership

What makes a successful intervention?

The role of communities in the Alliance's work emerged in several plenary discussions. The Lab team were exposed to poor communities, sometimes for the first time, in the community learning journeys. In this section the key points discussed by the Lab Team in defining a successful intervention and aspects that can serve to hinder such interventions are presented.

a) Absence of Community Representation

The absence of communities, particularly poor and marginalised communities that faced the harsh reality of malnutrition, was repeatedly noted all the sectors in the Lab. While, this sector was partially represented by NGO actors and a very few community based organisations, these were inadequate and non-representative.. *A key principle was that without community ownership, no sustainable change was possible.*

The community could be either defined as partners to whom the Alliance is accountable to or as beneficiaries of the services provided by the Alliance. The aim was the empowerment with community and development of solutions together. Thus while there were people capable of the first level of work in the dialogue space, there was still need to evolve how communities were to be involved in a systemic way to work together in the Alliance platform.

b) Intervening locally

An early mistake was the belief that success was global or national. Later on it became clear that success had to happen locally, otherwise intervention only served to create dependency. Thus, institutional solutions that succeeded at the local level were necessary.

c) Self-critical reflection

Successful initiatives had to have the intention of enhancing self-esteem rather than destroying it. Communities were complex entities with multiple layers of alignment between the individual and the collective. It became clear that the authority to intervene successfully depended on had respect only if interveners were self critical and reflective about the nature of the intervention.

d) Community centric

It was pointed out that unless the communities were brought back in the centre, the initiatives would not be successful and self-sustaining. Working with Srin from Illumine, the team defined the highest mark of success as when the community were invoked to act to solve its own problems.

e) Co-creation

To incorporate community input, it was important to determine who needed to be involved and begin dialogue, build community buy-in and relationship building with community based organisations (CBOs) and networks.

The prototyping process was delayed because of failure to account for time needed to build relations with communities with whom the Alliance sought to intervene.

Section 15. Conclusion

This learning history is an attempt to narrate the Change Lab story from careful continuous observation throughout its evolution. In each section an overview of

The story of creating a multi-sector community has clear milestones, when it confronted challenges, developed collective intelligence and decided to move forward in a new direction.

These milestones were understood to coincide with 'hot spots'. These refer to moments of emotional stress either due to anger or pain. They were landmarks in the creation of 'collective intelligence' and 'decision-making' moments when the community as a whole decided to choose one option from many.

The states of the group were not random, but closely correlated with the U-process. There was also similarity between the timeline forks in the Mini-lab in Aurangabad and the Change Lab.

Thus, the number of 'hot spots' were highest during the sensing phase and reached a peak before the fourth module during presencing. In the Mini-lab the number of 'hot spots' also increased during presencing. These 'hot spots' concerned all members of the community and raised several collective concerns.

Raising concerns, however diverse, gave rise to collective intelligence in open sessions. Members confronted many issues and conflicts in the beginning of the fourth module. In the Mini-lab, the members and staff shared their live stories in a manner that moved and glued the group together.

Conflicts prompted change in Lab design to allow for more team participation. For instance after the conflict about the time of sharing in the Learning Journeys, the staff consulted the team for consent to the daily agenda. In the fourth module, a core team was formed with members from the LT and the staff to work on the design of the remaining part of the Lab.

The collective intelligence of the group began to take real form in the co-creation of six initiatives. This was also the phase when the collective intelligence of the community sought to increase by building partnerships with institutions and communities. In the Mini-Lab, too, members worked with innovators to understand the nature of innovation and partnerships.

Section 16. Surrendering in the U

The worlds between the individual vs. the collective were continuously bridged by conflict and surrender throughout the Change Lab. In retrospect, these tensions precipitated change. The individual was brought into repeated engagement with the group, transforming both the collective and the individual. Moving forward required balancing this tension. This was done either through the surrender of the 'I' to the 'We', or by listening to the wisdom of the minority voice to transform the course of the majority.

Expertise vs. experience

In the sensing phase, the 'I' was characterised by expertise while the 'We' was characterised by experience. Several collisions between the staff and the members and between members touched on the competency of the facilitators, expertise to undertake the exercises and design failure to acknowledge expertise present in individual members.

Individual transformation vs. collective purpose

During presencing, the 'I' was characterised by emphasis on individual transformation while the 'we' was characterised by collective purpose. Thus the time spent in the wilderness solo came under repeated scrutiny for its role in serving the overall purpose. Some members felt that this time and resources might be better utilised for facilitating collective sharing. Without this, the benefits of the solo for the individual will not be shared across the differences that existed in the team. Further, some members already knew their purpose in life, and wanted to act on the issue rather than be restricted into silence and isolation.

Others held that the time for individual reflection was critical for determining individual commitment and purpose in moving forward. The balance between

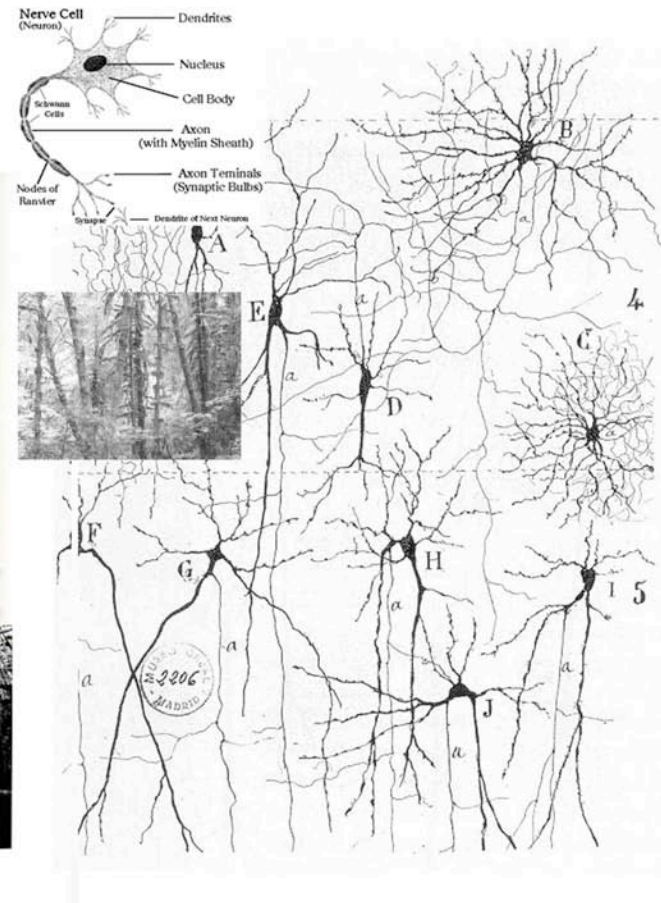
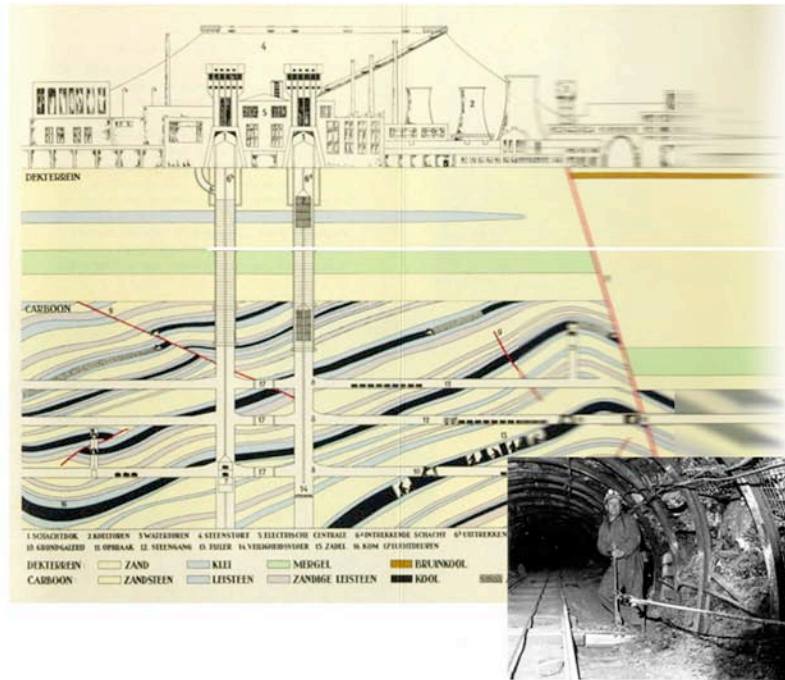
these two was achieved by legitimising individual choices to not complete the 72 hours. Two members, who were alone for the first time, consciously chose to return earlier. Finding that they were not the only ones to complete the agenda set, and each other's company of great value, was affirming.

“I have finally understood why this process is called the U. I always wondered why it is not the step or an arrow process. I am more used to this. Or why it is not a circle, like action analysis. Why is it the U? Are we running out of alphabets? But now after seeing the dynamics as part of the group, I think go through depths. We go to the bottom of it, we feel low and then we slowly start coming out of it. It's a very important process. The way this has been emerging; I think really requires us to come out collectively. In spirituality, looking within is considered to the most difficult aspect of perception. It is easier to look out. Most people fly towards the cosmos. How many go to the depths of the sea? This is hard. So this process which has allowed us to go deep inside and then come out might be very useful.” - Participant

Appendix Two: Community Knowledge Parks

Community Knowledge Parks Version 3.0 | June 23, 2006

Moving from Data Extraction to a Sustainable Knowledge Society



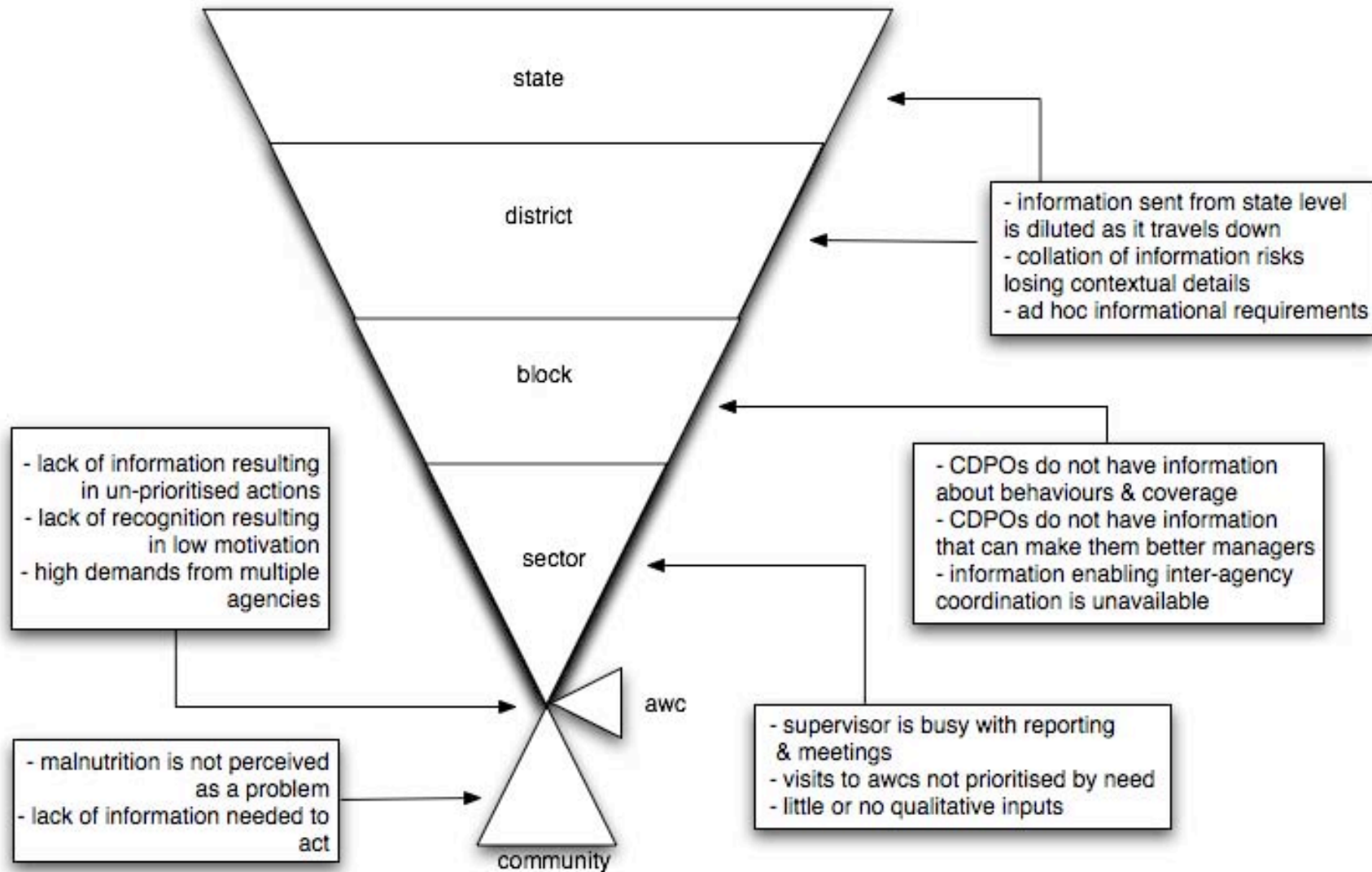
Our vision for reducing malnutrition is to set up community knowledge parks which provide useful information on an ongoing basis to service providers and surrounding communities. This will allow them to make timely, critical and informed decisions on issues relating to malnutrition. We believe that this initiative will shift us from a system where data is extracted from communities to a more sustainable knowledge society.

Goals

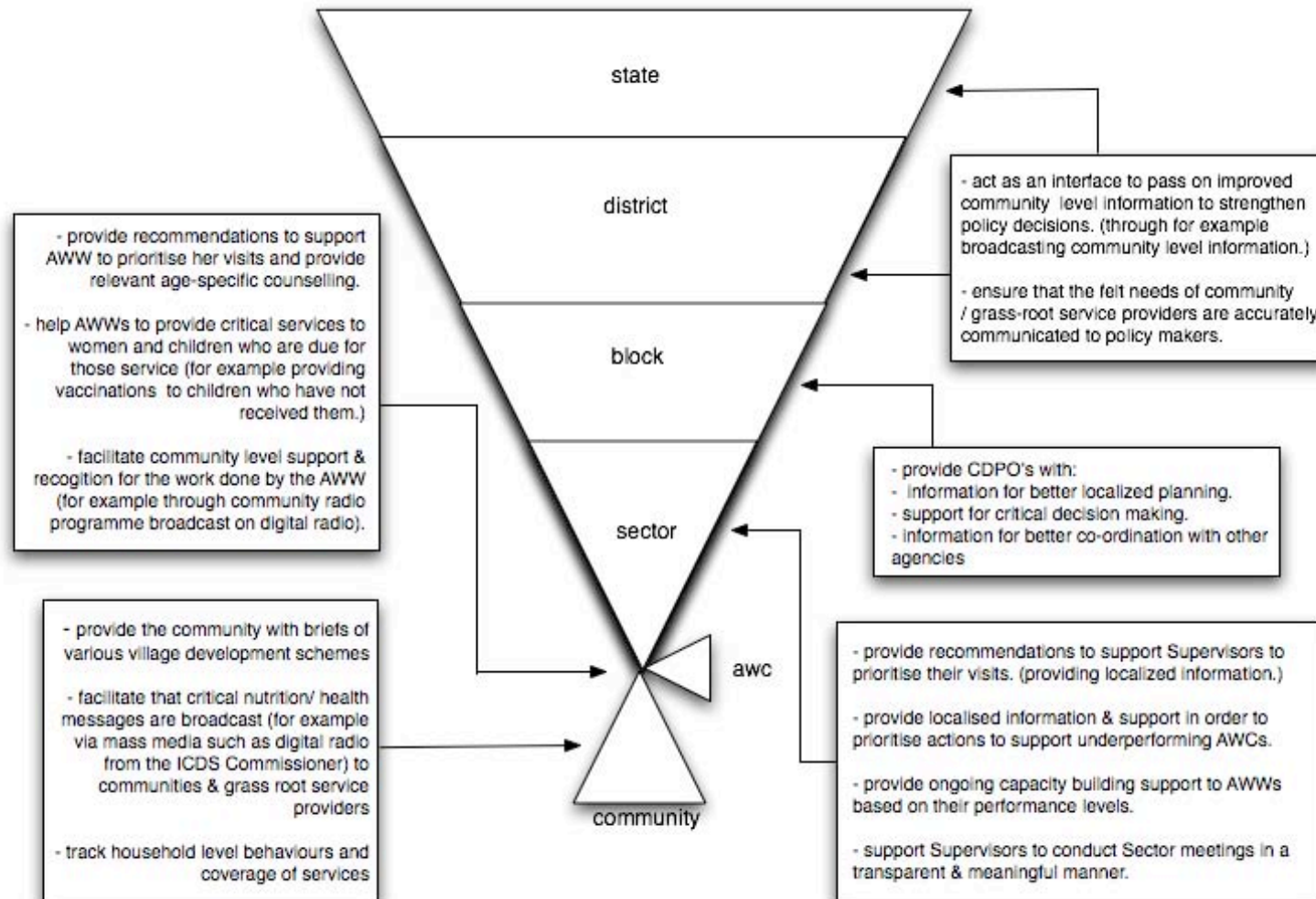
Community Knowledge Parks will:

- ▣ support contextual, decentralized decision making to the community level in order to allow functionaries at this level (for example the anganwadi worker and supervisor) to prioritise actions for addressing malnutrition.
- ▣ provide qualitative inputs for critical actions to existing service providers, including government agencies.
- ▣ provide qualitative inputs for policy decisions at the district and state levels.

Why are community knowledge parks required?



How will community knowledge parks help reduce malnutrition?



CAUSAL THEORY

Mind sets within implementers slow or accelerate change

EXTERNAL FORCES push on outcomes

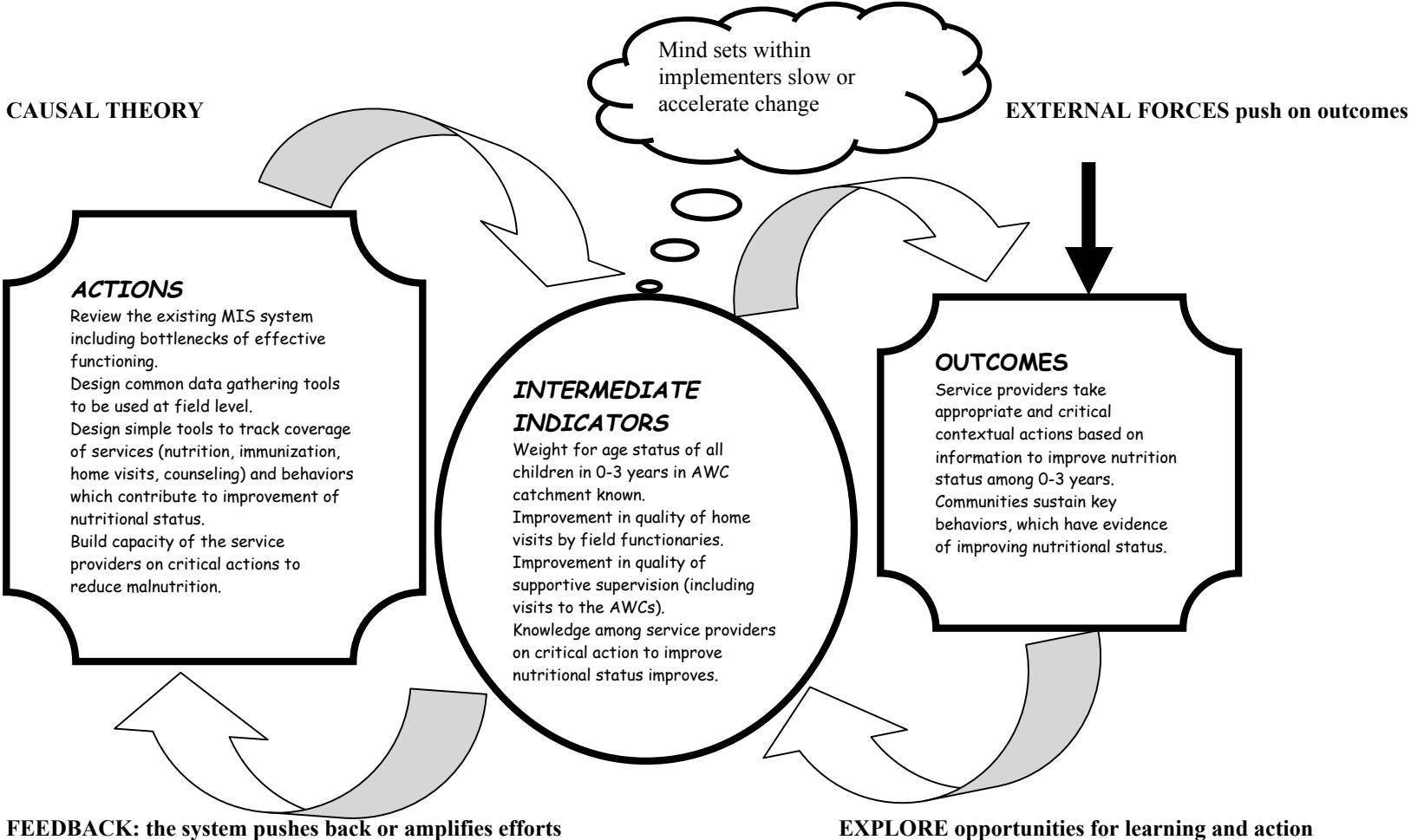
ACTIONS
Review the existing MIS system including bottlenecks of effective functioning.
Design common data gathering tools to be used at field level.
Design simple tools to track coverage of services (nutrition, immunization, home visits, counseling) and behaviors which contribute to improvement of nutritional status.
Build capacity of the service providers on critical actions to reduce malnutrition.

INTERMEDIATE INDICATORS
Weight for age status of all children in 0-3 years in AWC catchment known.
Improvement in quality of home visits by field functionaries.
Improvement in quality of supportive supervision (including visits to the AWCs).
Knowledge among service providers on critical action to improve nutritional status improves.

OUTCOMES
Service providers take appropriate and critical contextual actions based on information to improve nutrition status among 0-3 years.
Communities sustain key behaviors, which have evidence of improving nutritional status.

FEEDBACK: the system pushes back or amplifies efforts

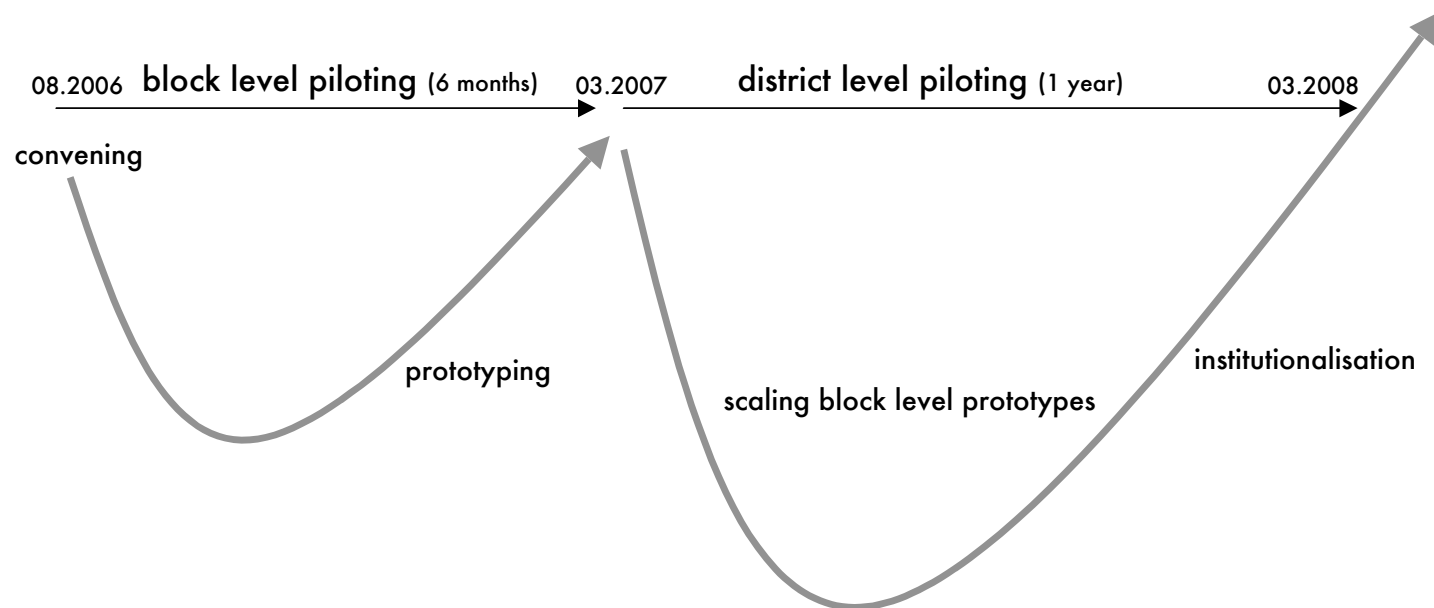
EXPLORE opportunities for learning and action



During the block level piloting phase we will set-up 2 community knowledge parks in each of the six blocks. Each knowledge park will be organised around a cluster of 10-25 anganwadi centres. Each pair of these community knowledge parks will be an experiment to determine what ownership models, processes and technologies work best. The sustainability model for community knowledge parks will emerge from these experiments. Successes during this phase will then be scaled up during the next phase of the project, district level piloting.

What is the overall implementation plan?

Piloting of community knowledge parks will take place in two phases – Block Level Piloting (6 months) and District Level Piloting (1 year). The process for block level piloting will involve bringing together a small, motivated stakeholder group to design and coordinate community knowledge parks using a simplified and Indianised version of the U-process. Successful models will be scaled up during District Level Piloting.



What is the block level implementation plan?

07.2006 – 08.2006

▣▣▣▣ **Scoping, Fundraising, Identification & On-boarding of Partners**

09.2006

▣▣▣▣ **Convening – Partners issues invitations to stakeholders for participation**

09.2006

▣▣▣▣ **Foundation Workshop** (3 day mini-Change Lab)

& **Identification** of a core team to launch the Community Knowledge Park
(ie local co-ordinators, technology partners, equal access people and others)

10.2006

▣▣▣▣ **Learning Journeys** for Core Team (they will need to learn about the problem in their context)

11.2006

▣▣▣▣ **Synthesis Workshop** (Key Learnings)

11.2006

▣▣▣▣ **Innovation Retreat** (where the team designs the Community Knowledge Park)

01.2007-03.2007

▣▣▣▣ **Implementation** (review & refine in 1 month cycles)

Where will Block Level Piloting take place?

Initial block level piloting will take place in two tribal areas, two rural areas, one urban area and one peri-urban area on the outskirts of the metropolis. The locations are as follows

- ▣▣▣ Tribal – Dhargaon (in Nandurbar) and Surgana (in Nashik)
- ▣▣▣ Rural – Sahada (in Nandurbar) and Sinnaur (in Nashik)
- ▣▣▣ Peri-Urban – Thane (in Thane)
- ▣▣▣ Urban – L ward in Mumbai Municipality

Locations have been selected either because current governmental team members are responsible for service delivery or partner organizations have a strong presence on the ground. For the Urban pilot, we will be partnering closely with the “Voice of the Urban Child” initiative.

Who will be involved in implementing this initiative?

The following Lab Team Members, Alliance Staff & Partners will be responsible for the implementation of this initiative.

Lab Team Members

Time commitments are subject to institutional approval.

Sourav Bhattacharjee (75%)

Technical Programme Co-ordinator, Care India

Sushama Parab (75%)

Child Development Project Officer, Thane

Nageswara Rao (75%)

Senior Executive, Credit & Risk Management, Tata Teleservices

Sharad R. Wadekar (25%)

Deputy Chief Executive Officer (Child welfare), Nashik Zilla Parishad

H.B. Rathod (25%)

Deputy Commissioner, Integrated Child Department Services Scheme, Navi Mumbai

Bhavishya Alliance Staff

Zaid Hassan

Generon Consulting

Dr I. Bhagwat

UNICEF

Partner Organisations

We have received several verbal commitments (✓) of support from a number of the following organisations.

ICDS ✓

Department of Health & Family

Welfare

PRI

UNICEF ✓

Care India ✓

Local NGOs & CBOs (BAIF, Vachan,

NSSS)

Tata ✓

Equal Access ✓

What support does this initiative require?

From Government

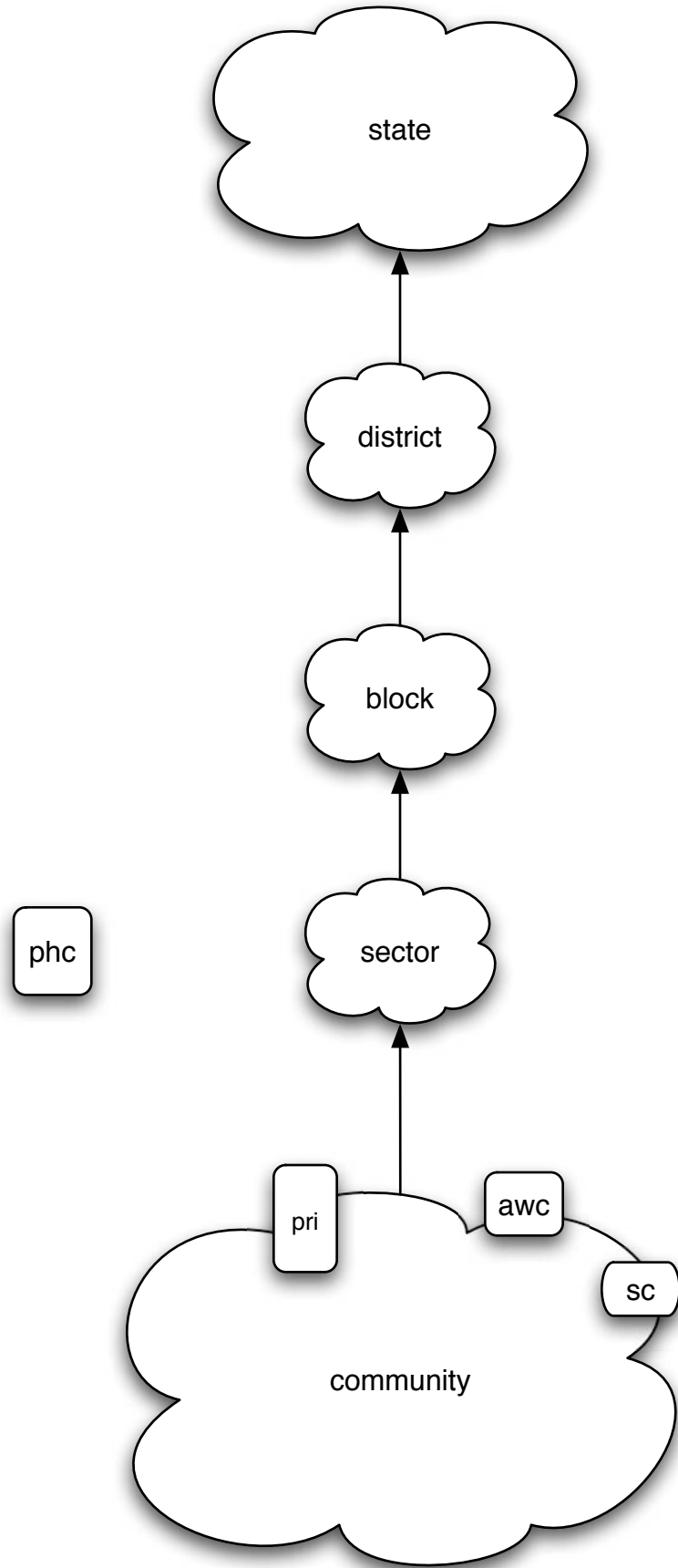
- ▣▣▣ Immediate support is required to bring on-board functionaries at state, district, block, sector & community levels to participate whole-heartedly, with a spirit of experimentation.
- ▣▣▣ Funding support is required.

From Corporations

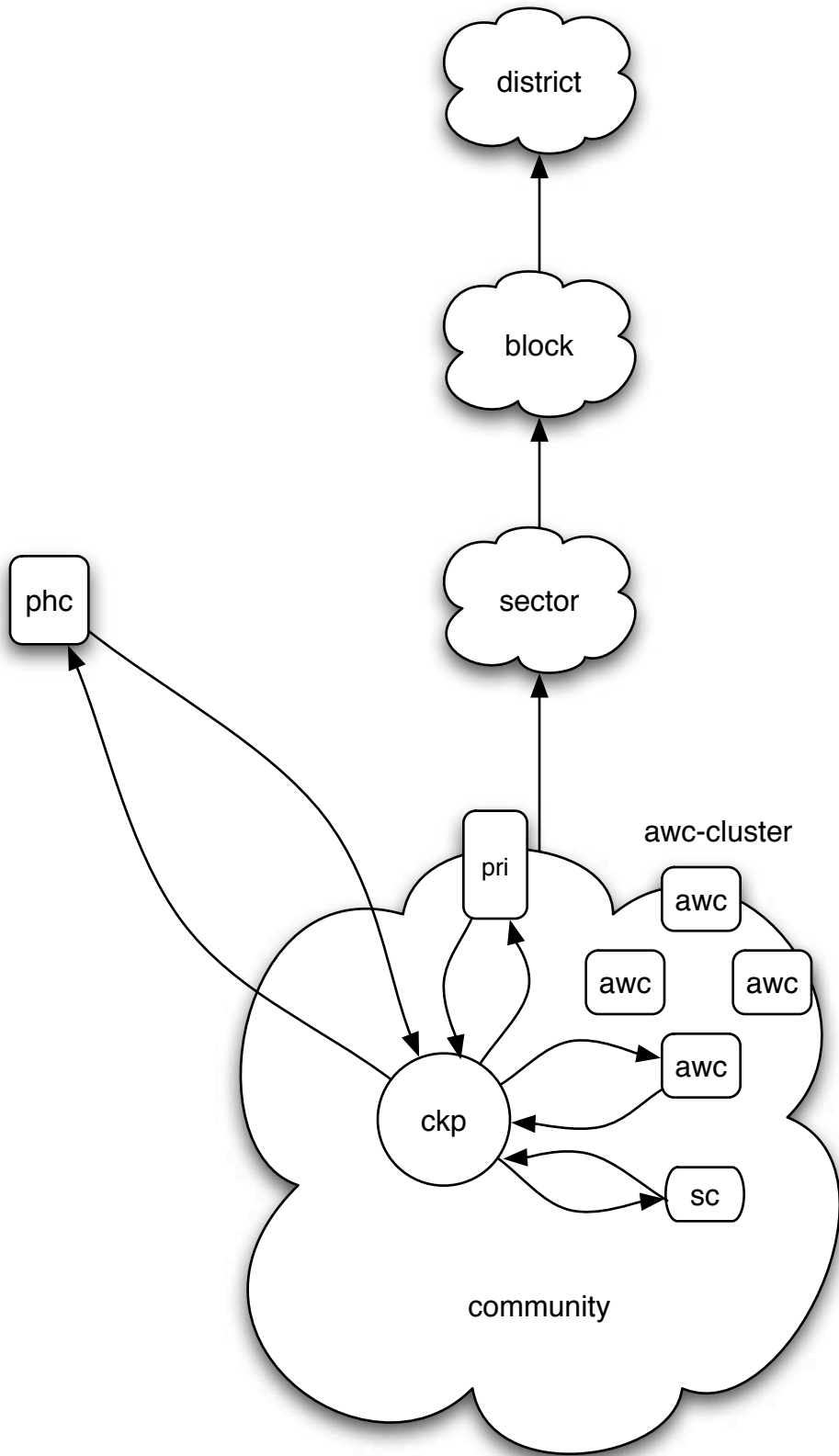
- ▣▣▣ Immediate support is required in defining the possible technologies and the scope of work involved in implementing possible technical solutions.
- ▣▣▣ Immediate support is required in understanding what possible sustainability & micro-enterprise models might be experimented with during block level piloting.
- ▣▣▣ Funding Support is required.

From Civil Society Organisations

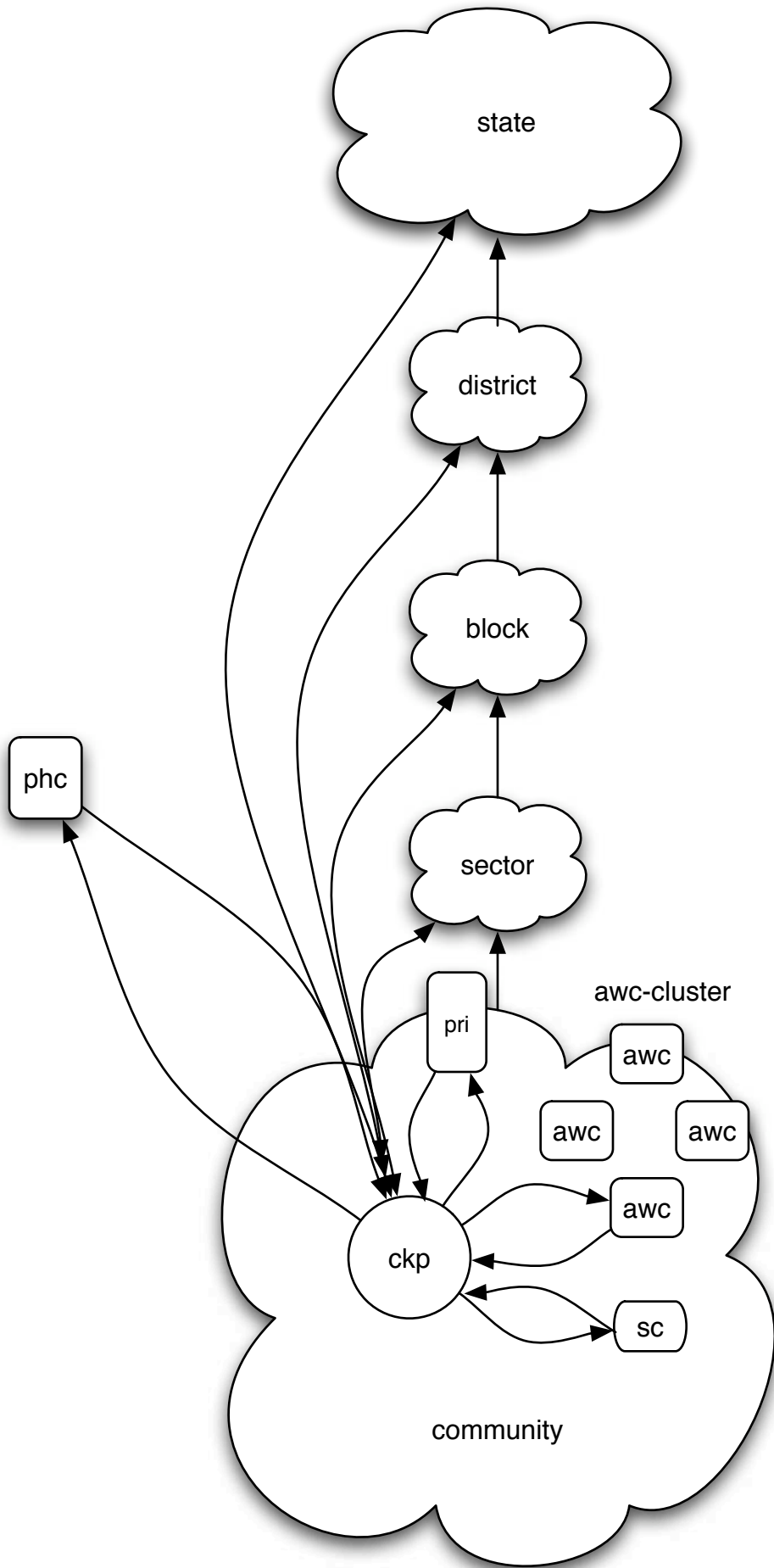
- ▣▣▣ Immediate support is required to locate and build partnerships with community based organisations who would be interested to convene stakeholders and co-ordinate community knowledge parks.



"DATA EXTRACTION"



COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE PARK



TWO WAY INFORMATION FLOWS