

Aharenmen! Who Better Understands a Community Than Those Who Live In It!

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Abstract

Community engagement has proven fruitful in communities throughout the world. Community engagement has enabled communities to be proactive in establishing ownership and managing the necessary changes to create a safe, happy and productive society for all its members. This has been particularly evident in relation to the active participation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups in the community as more and more people are playing a role in influencing the decisions that affect their lives.

Care Society, a locally founded and community-centred non-government organisation in Maldives working in the disability field, utilised Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) as the vehicle for facilitating the active involvement of all community members, including people with disabilities and their families, in raising awareness about the value and rights of those who have disabilities. CBR is development for the people by the people and as such is a dynamic and effective strategy that can be used with a variety of communities; across diverse cultures; in urban, rural and remote locations; and across a myriad of government sectors.

Using the author's experience living and working in Maldives, this paper will describe the process facilitated by Care Society in engaging communities in their own development. The collective reflections of the CBR Team on the realities of working from a participatory framework will offer strategies for the effective use of CBR in any community context. Additionally, this paper will provide recommendations for how 'outsiders' can be a valued resource within the context of community work.

Keywords

Community driven, active participation, resources, partnership, ownership

Introduction

In 2002 I had the invaluable opportunity as part of the Australian Youth Ambassador for Development program, which is an initiative of the Australian Government, to live and work with Care Society in Maldives on a capacity building assignment. The Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Team within Care Society was incredibly enthusiastic and committed and comprised Care Society's project manager and founder member Ijazulla, Azmira — a special educator, Shidhatha — a newly appointed Community Mobilisation Officer, and me — a Community Development

Officer and Occupational Therapist. Together we undertook a 12-month pilot project funded by UNICEF which explored the most effective means to introduce CBR into the country.

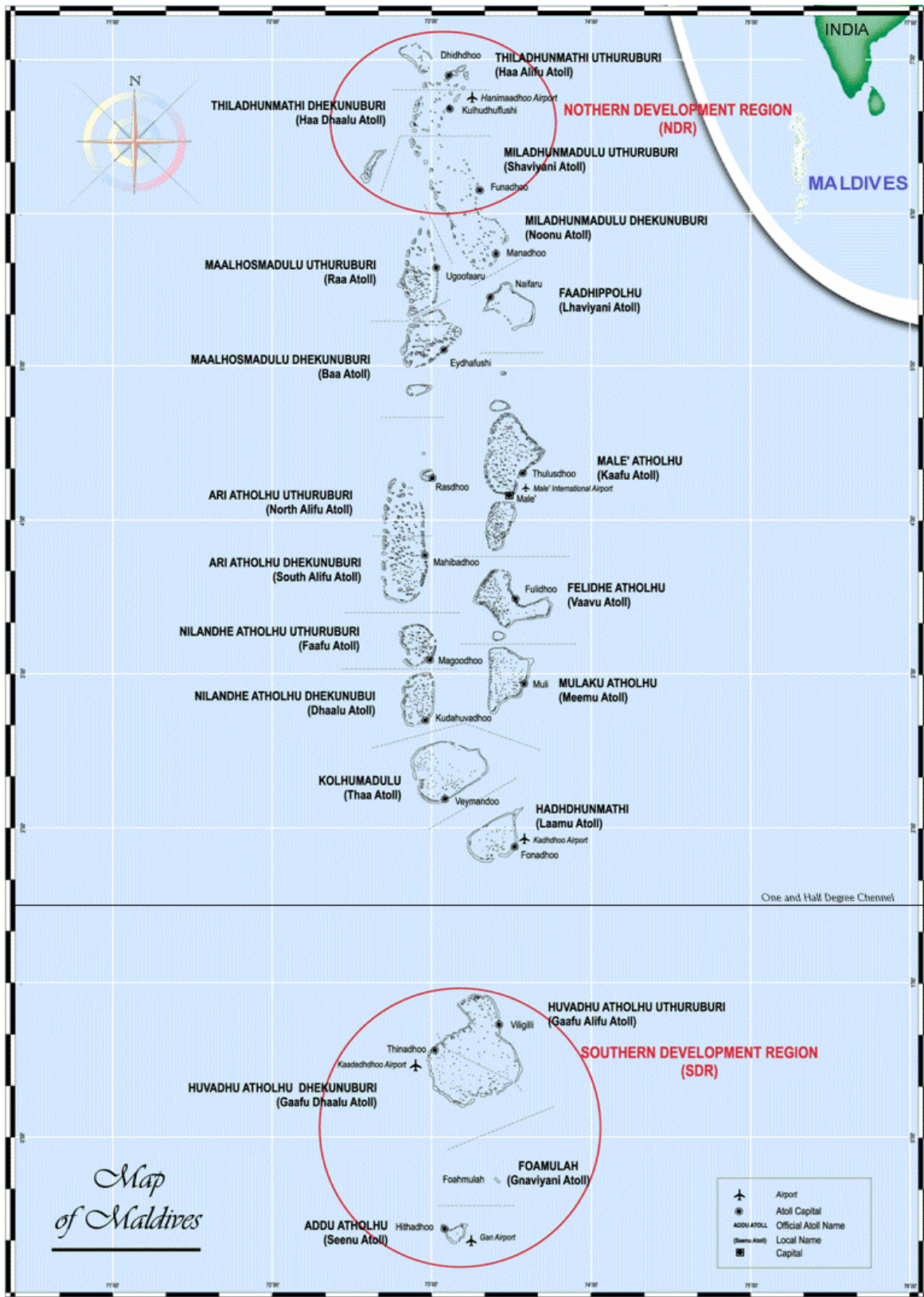
This paper will describe the project that was undertaken: its purpose; goals; outcomes; and will primarily focus on the participatory processes which are the keys to success in any CBR program. This paper results from the collective reflections of the CBR Team at Care Society and will provide recommendations for how 'outsiders' like you and me can be a valued resource within the context of community work. Due to Care Society's current circumstances working in Tsunami relief activities, the team is using me, their local Australian resource, to represent their views in this paper.

Aharenmen! A simple yet powerful vehicle that drove the success of the Community Based Rehabilitation Program in Maldives. Who better understands a community than those who live in it? "Aharenmen!" Proclaims the community.

In Dhivehi, the national language of Maldives, 'Aharenmen' is the word used when talking about 'all of us'. This one simple word grasps the collectiveness of ideas, resources, knowledge, skills and personalities that exist in the community and grasps the very key to optimising community engagement.

Maldives is a nation formed by several coral atolls located south west of the Indian subcontinent. If you were to measure the distance from north to south the country covers an 846 km stretch of ocean with land area comprising only one per cent of this area. Maldives embodies 1192 islands, of which only 199 are inhabited. The population is approximately 310,000 with 30 per cent of the population living in the capital city of Male' (BBC News, 2003; Ministry of Planning and National Development, 2002b), which is 1.5 square kilometres in area. The population of Maldives is 100 per cent Sunni Muslim.

In the past two decades Maldives has made significant gains in the development of education, health, gender equity, social welfare, housing, urban development and security (Ministry of Planning and National Development 2002b). The reality of the environmental challenges poses limitations in the availability of various community and social services, including disability services, as services are commonly based in the capital city of Male' leaving two thirds of the population without access to needed services.



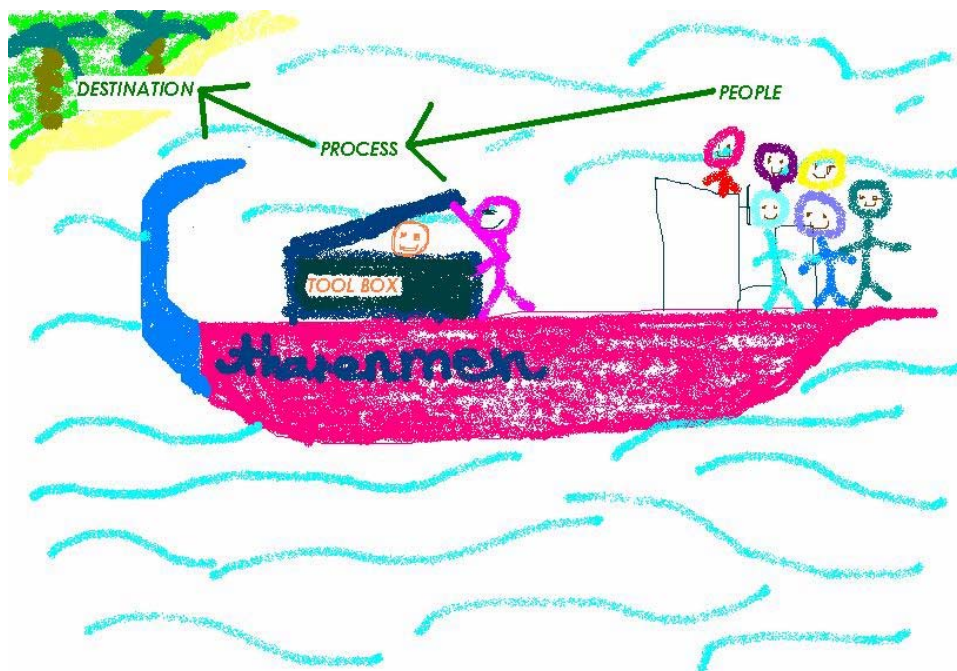
Source: Regional Development Unit (2003)

Care Society is a non-government organisation locally founded and established in November 1998 with the aim of identifying and addressing the common issues of the community relating to disability (Afiya and Ali 2003; Care Society 2000). Care Society's primary focus is on providing services for people with disabilities, which will enable them to live happy and productive lives in Maldives (Care Society 2001). The reality of geography in Maldives is a core factor that prompted Care Society to identify and develop a strategy with its roots in community development to contribute to the advancement of rights, opportunity and social inclusion of people with disabilities and subsequently the advancement of the national community. Currently, Care Society is continuing its work in the disability arena and has recently broadened their scope of work to facilitating Tsunami relief activities in Maldives.

Community Based Rehabilitation was identified by Care Society as the community development strategy which would be most effective in working towards the inclusion and engagement of all people in society. CBR works towards advancing the capacity of communities to create the necessary changes for an equitable community for all (ActionAid India 1999; Peat 1990). The goal of CBR is to find a system in the community that can meet the needs of all people in relation to the target issue, in this case disability, as well as to educate, include and create partnerships with governments and the public (Helander 1999). CBR is a gradual process that takes time and has been implemented successfully throughout Asia and the Pacific to alleviate poverty, provide adequate health care and enhance the provision of human rights for people with disabilities (Hilfstein 2001; Peat 1990).

The key ingredient of CBR is its focus on the involvement of all community members, including those with disabilities and their families. All members are viewed as equal in the implementation of CBR. The fundamental features of CBR include community ownership of its vision and process, participation (or engagement) and partnerships as well as the use of current community assets and building on the technical expertise of the community, making it economically viable and feasible (Krefting 1996; Twible and Henley 1998). In brief, the community drives the process of CBR.

CBR can be best shown visually as follows:



Source: Parasyn (2005)

The project

The 12-month pilot project which commenced on March 2002 involved the development of an 'Introductory CBR Workshop', its translation, facilitation in the two island communities Hithadhoo and Hulhudhoo-Meedhoo in Addu Atoll, monitoring, evaluation as well as the refinement of the workshop content, structure and approach. The expected outcome was that a contextually suitable 'model' workshop would be designed for the purpose of its ongoing facilitation in island communities throughout the country. It was also anticipated that, as a result of the workshop, communities would develop the necessary knowledge and skills to initiate and sustain CBR programs in their community.

It is important to note that the pilot period of this contextually designed project was not to end at the completion of the 12 months. Strategies for continual monitoring and refinement of the CBR program were developed to ensure that the workshop approach, structure, content and monitoring/support systems could be adapted to best suit each community.

Let us look at the process of how this project came into being. This process will be examined in light of the entry of an outside resource person to highlight the common entry point for external resource persons in community development projects or programs.

At this point, it is critical to mention that often in literature on community development and participatory methodologies there is reference to the phrase 'handing over the stick' whereby the facilitator, often the outsider to the community, symbolically gives a stick to the community to drive towards their vision (Rajendra 2001; Yea 2001; Chambers 1999; Pretty et al. 1995). However,

Twible (2005) and I challenge the semantics of this phrase as it denotes a permission from the facilitator to step into the driver's seat. I propose and believe that true community ownership and partnership occurs when the community 'picks up the stick' and drives towards their destination and the outsider can only ever be a co-pilot in the journey when invited. It is ludicrous to think that we can hand over the stick when the stick has never been ours in the first place and if we think we had the stick, we are clearly in the wrong community and need to go back home!

Before the 'Resource Person'

Generic processes are commonly used to gain an understanding of the core vision of the community (Chambers 1999; Rajendra 1999).

1. Care Society in *consultation with the community* undertook the first stage of a Situational Analysis to identify the key issues impacting on the community in relation to disability.
2. Assistance and resources required to address the issues were assessed and identified.
3. Action was taken to obtain and invite chosen resources into the process — Care Society sought and received UNICEF funding of 46,563 Maldivian Rufiyaa (approximately \$USD4,000) to fund the pilot project. My invitation as an external resource under the AYAD program also formed part of this community action. My primary role included working with the CBR team in the workshop development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; providing relevant and appropriate research and literature on CBR; and facilitating 'train the trainer' education in community development, CBR, participatory approaches, disability, facilitation and coordination of workshops, reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

During the 'Resource Person'

Focus shifts to identifying more specific community skills and resources for the particular community project (Yea 2001; Rajendra 1999; Pretty et al. 1995).

4. Using the five-day Introductory CBR Workshop, individual, community and broader institutional *skills were identified, discovered, used, expanded and refined*. The workshop sessions which facilitated this included:
 - a. What is Community Based Rehabilitation?
 - b. Looking closer at ME
 - c. Experiencing disability
 - d. Analysing your community
 - e. Prioritising issues of disability in your community
 - f. CBR Management
 - g. Establishing a CBR management structure
 - h. Developing a CBR action plan
 - i. Raising community awareness
 - j. Future of CBR in your community
 - k. Evaluation of the workshop.
5. Resources, strategies and timelines were identified (particularly in sessions C through J).

6. Monitoring, evaluation and modification — Monitoring and evaluation of CBR programs and activities were specifically addressed in sessions F and H. The methods for monitoring and evaluating the workshop for the purpose of designing a contextually suitable one included a:
- *Pre-workshop Questionnaire* to identify the existing knowledge in the workshop participants relating to disability and CBR
 - *Workshop Evaluation Form* to gain detailed information about the workshop structure, content, approach, materials, strategies for improvement and development in knowledge based on the pre-workshop questionnaire
 - *Daily Facilitator's Evaluation* to aid facilitators in monitoring the development in participant knowledge, identifying modifications necessary and in improving daily facilitation
 - *Six months Post Workshop Monitoring/Review Visit* which was conducted with participants of the first workshop to review progress, evaluate the workshop, address any issues raised by the community and plan for the next step and future of CBR. A similar visit was conducted with participants of workshop II, however due to timing this occurred outside the pilot period.

After the 'Resource Person'

Action: the vision becomes reality (Yea 2001; Rajendra 1999; Chambers 1999; Pretty et al. 1995).

7. Skills, resources, strategies and timelines were and, continue to be, transformed into *action*.
- The CBR workshop is facilitated in other island communities upon the invitation of the community, for example, Thinadhoo Island.
 - CBR Core groups are established in island communities.
 - Community awareness activities are being facilitated in schools and during community activities.
 - The first Inter-schools Club, formed as part of the Maldives Youth Community Awareness Project (MYCAP) in 2002 is working to raise awareness of the importance of inclusion of all youth in the community. The Club is called 'SMILE – Let everyone smile' and has prompted a working partnership between Care Society and the Department of Education, Maldives.
 - CBR and rehabilitation training courses and exposure trips have been successfully completed in India, Sri Lanka and Philippines for island community members.
 - Education and skills development centres are being established, run and managed by the community.
 - Communities are managing their own financial, human and material resources.
 - Care Society is providing a support service as requested by island communities which encompasses assistance and training in setting up, designing and managing skills development centres in Hithadhoo and Thinadhoo, registration and enrolments of community members with disabilities into the centres as well as identifying and assisting communities to seek the necessary financial assistance and training to sustain the programs (Ali 2005).
8. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the people, the process and the destination.
9. Preparation is underway for ex-post evaluations of CBR in Maldives. Care Society has invited the return of the 'Resource Person' to assist in this evaluation. Plans for the evaluation are currently in progress.

Evidently, Care Society, through its commitment to learning from the local community and working within the social, political, economic, cultural and environmental forces that exist in the community, has witnessed the key to community development, that is, community ownership and active engagement of all community members, and with respect to disability programs, this especially means those members who have disabilities and their families as the decisions that are made impact on their lives — they know best!

Observations

So far, I have preached, no doubt, to the converted. I have talked the talk of community development literature and I have walked the walk with Care Society and seen how community engagement is the key ingredient to successful identification, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of community projects and programs. However, for us as 'outsiders' who are assigned a facilitator and resource role in this process the question still stands — 'How do we become a valued resource?'. I see that this question needs dissection as it has two stages. Firstly, 'How do we get invited onto the dhoni (boat) to take part in this journey?' and, secondly, 'Once on the dhoni, how do we ensure we are not thrown off?'.

Here are some of the lessons or rules I learnt during my dhoni journey in Maldives, India, Fiji and Australia.

Most importantly

<i>It's NOT about YOU or ME — It's about the COMMUNITY!!!</i>
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Additionally:

Remove your excess baggage

Identify your personal and professional values, beliefs and learning/working styles then check them into a locker at the International or Domestic Airport, bus or rail station on your way in (Twible 2005) ready for pick up on your way home. Literature on intercultural transition attests to the importance of identifying and being aware of your core values and beliefs (Beasley Intercultural 2002; Pretty et al. 1995; Bennett 1993). This is very important in establishing for yourself who you are, what you know, why you know it and where you have come from. However, you are now entering a culture foreign to your own in which you will be presented with a new set of values, beliefs and styles within which you need to learn to work. Your own values and beliefs may be very alien to those with whom you live and work. In saying this, however, it must be noted that I see there being two primary categories of values, beliefs and styles. Those that are structural, such as time concepts and organisational styles, and those that are humanitarian, such as human rights issues (Twible 2005). The structural category can be easily checked in, however, with humanitarian values and beliefs it may be more challenging to lock them away. Nevertheless, it is important to

keep them locked away in a combination lock brief case that can only be opened once the following AFO combination decoding occurs:

A Alien check! Reserve your Alien judgment

F Find out as much as you can about the:

- Situation, background and origin of the value or belief
- impact your view may have on the situation, particularly the people with whom you are involved
- impact your view may have on you (and your community and country) in this community or country

O Offer and Openly discuss — once enough information has been gathered, sensitively open dialogue about the issue in a non-threatening manner (suggestions for this will be discussed in point 5c).

This AFO combination was extremely important in Maldives. Ali (2005) states that Maldives is still a very closed society with respect to human rights and as basic human rights are only now becoming prominent on government agendas it is crucial that issues of not only human rights, but disability rights also, are slowly and sensitively introduced to ensure the inclusion, implementation and sustainability of human rights in society. It is crucial to know the context of the community when you unlock the brief case.

Arrival and entry

This period always makes me think of the Road Safety advertisement on television which teaches children to cross the road through song: 'Stop at the kerb, look to the left, look to the right, look to the left again. Then if the road is clear of traffic walk straight across the road — don't run! Walk straight across the road'. Arrival and entry takes on three key developments which can assist you to carefully walk onto the dhoni.

a) *'Be' with the community — Look, Listen and Learn!*

I often define this as a state of openness, observation, listening and sponging, questioning and passively engaging in all that is happening around you. Get to know the community (Rajendra 2001; Yea 2001; Rajendra 1999). The best way to experience a community is to experience it first hand. Spend time with the community and as Ijazulla states “open your ears and eyes” (Ali 2005). First impressions can often be misleading because initially people like to express the best of the community and also present the community to you in the way they think you live in your community. A simple example of this was during the second workshop that was held with the Hulhudhoo and Meedhoo Island communities combined. We were informed that the island administrations were to merge and that the communities did not favour this. The team was consistently sensitive to this political situation in the workshop design to ensure that each community was recognised as a separate entity. However, upon facilitating the workshop, and spending time with the community, we were informed by the community members that, and with

particular reference to CBR, they will willingly merge their resources and skills for the benefit of CBR and that this was the optimal way of initiating a strong CBR program.

This stage takes time and this time can vary depending on the community. Cook (2005) reports that in a project driven by indigenous communities in Alice Springs, the time taken for the outsider to “be” with the community in an effort to build the trust and respect of the community prior to being used as a resource, was 9 months. Similarly, Twible (2005) tells of the importance of “be”ing with a community during a Veteran Affairs project in the early 1970s in which RSL Day clubs were established and managed by older people for older people. The Veteran Affairs’ workers identified that “be”ing with older people in the RSL clubs played a key role in the extent to which the workers were trusted, respected and used as a resource throughout the establishment of the day clubs that still exist today, thirty years on.

b) Foreigner Watch! Big Brother is watching you! — Be aware of your social obligations and behaviour

This is a crucial factor in how I, along with other ambassadors, was viewed. We had to be careful about what we wore, what we did, what we said, who we talked to, where we went, when we went, how we went; the list is endless. As is common in any community, we make generalisations about others very easily and quickly (Beasley Intercultural 2002; Rajendra 2001; Bennett 1993). In Maldives, we had to be aware of ourselves and our behaviour to ensure we kept a level of respect within the community. This was important because we were from outside the country and as such people were interested in us and wanted to know us and therefore we were always watched. I learnt this the day a young boy approached me on the dhoni and said 'Where is your bike? Where have you been? How is your leg? I know you because I watch you' and it was not uncommon for me to arrive at work in the morning to hear 'You went to (insert the relevant place) with (insert the relevant person)'. 'How do you know?' I asked 'because... [and the relevant social alignment was added]'. Therefore, it was vital that we understood what the cultural norms and behaviours were as well as what was expected of us, so that we could fit in as best as possible and break down any cultural barriers as well as ensure that we did not lose the respect of the community (Ali 2005). One brief example is the time when Adam, one of the former members of the CBR team, and I worked with a group of youth volunteers to run disability awareness activities at a Scout Jamboree. The group of volunteers was unknown to each other, so working together on this project created friendships and hence a greater social network. I was also deemed a critical member of this social group and thus throughout and after the event it was very important to continue socialising with them. The social activities involved joining them for a swim in the artificial beach, playing cultural games followed by eating traditional short eats. Engaging in this social activity solidified the nature of my friendship with them and showed my acceptance and pleasure to be a part of their community.

c) Share, Share, Share! What's your story? — Engaging communities involves a reciprocal engagement

I also needed to allow myself, as did Care Society and each member of the CBR team, to share and disclose information about myself, my family and my community. I found the more I shared the more I was trusted and accepted by the community (Beasley Intercultural 2002; Chambers 1999; Pretty et al. 1995; Bennett 1993). The sharing of personal information can also help to break down myths about my culture and community and vice versa. For example, religion is a very significant part of the Maldivian lifestyle (Afiya and Ali 2003). As such, faith and living by religious beliefs and teachings is very important. In a discussion with a group of my Maldivian friends it was discovered that western meant Christian. That is, the perceived western culture, based on what was seen in Hollywood movies, of wearing short skirts, bikinis and low cut tops was believed to be Christian and thus the Christian religion was misinterpreted by some Islamic friends as the Christian teachings disrespecting the human body, which opposes an important value they held. Further discussions and clarification about Christianity and Islam brought much relief to my friends as they then felt more comfortable to be working and relating with people from a Christian background.

In relation to work, understanding the influences of religion on, for example, government decisions, protocols and structures assisted us, the CBR team, to ensure that official religious scripts and references were made appropriately throughout the preparation, delivery and evaluation of the workshop.

Further, in any given relationship that is being developed, we consistently seek to find a common ground as a sign of the interconnectedness of the people in the interaction (Beasley Intercultural 2002). Whether it is a common person, place of education, interest, value, belief, island, travel destination — the list goes on — it is through a reciprocal engagement that an invitation is extended to us to, firstly, step onto the dhoni and, secondly, allow the community the opportunity to discover how they would like to use us as a resource.

Find some cultural brokers

We enter a community blindly and therefore finding cultural brokers or a reference group of people who can teach you about the values, beliefs, lifestyle, norms, ways of doing, ways of thinking, ways of seeing, and ways of understanding is crucial to working within the realms of community development (Twible and Henley 1997). I was fortunate to have several people as my cultural brokers; from our landlord and his family to our youth ambassador in-country manager to friends I met on the street as well as all the friends at Care Society, particularly the CBR team and the island communities. My reference group provided me with much knowledge and challenges and often in a very blunt and direct way for which I was grateful. For example 'Chris I think your expectations are too high' and 'Chris every time you do these things I feel sad because I realise what we don't have or can't do in Maldives' as well as 'What will people think of us Chris!' and 'Chris I am telling you this because I am your friend. But you can't do this in Maldives'.

I learnt that it is important to have several cultural brokers to gain the various perspectives within the community. The information was occasionally conflicting; however, the variety of perspectives allowed me to broaden my understanding of the culture, the community and the influences on the information presented, it allowed me to distinguish between what was myth and what was reality and, importantly, it increased the opportunity to learn about the knowledge, experiences, backgrounds and skills of those around me (ADD 2001; Ife 1999; Kenny 1999; Pretty et al. 1995; Bennett 1993).

During the CBR process cultural brokers provided Care Society's CBR Team with knowledge of the inner working systems of an island community — whom do we (the team) approach, what protocols exist in this island community, how are volunteers invited to attend the workshop, who are the key players, how do we book a venue, who can check the language used in the manual? The list of questions for a cultural broker are boundless, but once answered the means to the end seems to fall into place and the chances of staying on the dhoni are greater.

Friends First! — Form social relationships, they are much more important than working relationships.

This is a tip I learnt from Ijazulla, the CBR team leader. As I watched his approach with his community I noticed that often there was no discussion of work for hours after first meeting. Quality time and social interaction were the priorities and generated an environment of trust and enjoyment which then became the backbone for the introduction of work issues and tasks and the solidification of a working partnership and engagement.

From my experience, getting to know my colleagues on a more personal level was the key to a successful working relationship. Beginning in any new culture or community and as is usual for someone starting in a new place of work or when meeting new people, it is common for people to be reserved at first meeting. This was true in my experience with the CBR team. Add to this the common misconception that we as outsiders coming into the community are 'experts in the field' (Twible and Henley 1993), and instantly the working relationship is not on equal footing. Needless to say it was very difficult to engage in discussion about work and actions that were approaching their specified deadlines. It was not until, by chance, an opportunity arose where I had a discussion with my former counterpart Adam about his dreams, aspirations, his past, his family and friends and vice versa that channels of communication were opened.

The discussion involved dialogue about what was important to Adam, his community, the country and his knowledge of disability, his training and his eagerness to learn from me. Reciprocally, he learnt about my background and knowledge and my eagerness to learn from him and his community. These discussions continued for several weeks and at times we were so engrossed in conversation that it was well beyond close of business before we even realised our Care Society

colleagues had left. However, the hours were well worth the time as the outcome of this was that we gained respect for each other and were open to challenging each other's thoughts and ideas. I continued to work from a 'Friends First' approach with future CBR team members, which proved fruitful in the working relationship.

A similar outcome was experienced with island communities during the workshops as the workshop content and structure were designed in such a way that the community was engaged in dialogue and experiential learning about themselves and their community, initially on a personal level and then in a more professional capacity.

This 'Friends First' strategy has also presented a true reality in my involvement in cultural groups within Australia, including the Ukrainian community in Sydney, the Indigenous population in Wreck Bay and particularly when working with children, adolescents and adults with disabilities and/or mental health concerns and their families. Once a trusting friendly rapport was established a working relationship was developed.

Talk the talk and Walk the Walk — Learn the language of communication of and from the community

Communication took on several forms during the CBR project; spoken word, presented word and the suggested word.

(a) Learn the spoken word — Talk the Talk!

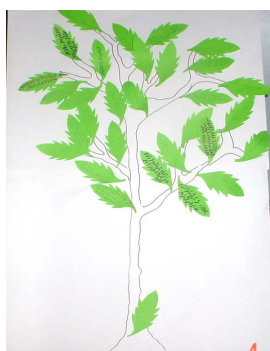
The spoken language is a major part of a culture (Wlodkowski 1997). Through both formal and informal means, e.g., classes, tuition or friends, learning the language has endless benefits. Learning the language introduced me to how the community speaks, how sentences are constructed, how grammar is used for people of variable status in the community, how the language is translated into English and hence why, when my team communicated with me in English, their communication often sounded blunt or direct and why in my effort to be politically correct and appropriate in my phrases, which often resulted in long and vague sentences, my team became very confused with the message and meaning I was trying to relay.

CBR literature suggests that information about CBR should be presented in a language that is understood by the community (ADD 2001; Helander 1999; Tjandrakusuma 1997). Throughout the translation of the CBR material I learnt the importance of being simple in my expression to ensure that words could be translated without the meaning being lost. Additionally, learning the language provided me, as well as the team who brushed up on their island dialect, with the opportunity to break the ice with community members. The community appreciated that I was trying to communicate with them and proceeded to teach me more words and engaged me in their culture and traditions. As a result, I know the Maldivian National Anthem, songs of the fisherman and other national love songs. Although I only had the chance to learn a basic level of Dhivehi, it decreased

the extent of misunderstandings, misinterpretation and increased the number of community members with whom I could engage.

(b) Vary the presented word — Walk the Walk!

In community development language takes on a broader scope. It is not only the spoken word but, in my experience, language can also encompass visual, auditory and physical means of communicating. As such, and to ensure that the communication needs of a wider population were addressed, all material and communication were facilitated and presented through experiential activities, visual aids, demonstration, through song, discussion and reflection (Beasley Intercultural 2002; ADD 2001; Pretty et al. 1995). A variety of media was used to ensure that the language spoken was understood by all participating community members and consequently enhanced the flow of discussion and feedback that could be generated amongst the community (ADD 2001; Wlodkowski 1997). One example of this is the CBR Resource Tree which was developed and was a symbolic and visual representation of the strong base of resources from which CBR could begin in that island community (ADD 2001). The community could opt to contribute in any way they wished and this ensured their commitment, ownership and the community friendliness of CBR. The CBR Resource Tree from the first CBR Workshop follows.



(c) DON'T TELL! Ask and explore — The Suggested Word

From my experience and from reading diverse literature on community development I am aware that there can be resistance by communities to engage with outsiders because 'Whom does she think she is coming in to tell us what we need or want? What does she know about our community' (Yea 2001; Chambers 1999; Ife 1999; Kenny 1999; Pretty et al. 1995). Some advice I was given by K R Rajendra in India, which I take with me to any community, is that I must have the mindset 'you (the community) know — I don't know' and approach any situation in this manner (1999). In the context of communication, as an outsider, what this means is our enthusiasm to offer information needs to be regulated. We need to wait to be asked to offer, suggest and share our ideas, views, practices and information. Once we have been offered the opportunity we then, as the Road Safety advertisement suggests, walk with the idea — DON'T run! In this way, the community can then assess its relevance and usefulness to their situation. In most cases, my approach constituted my asking about the 'fit' of my idea, information, or suggestion with the community's vision, which then often opened up a forum to explore its relevance. Some examples of questioning are:

- What is your opinion/perspective on...
- How would you go about....?
- I have read/seen/heard....is this something that could be useful to your community?
- In past projects this has occurred....is this relevant to your situation?
- Could/Would this idea/option work?
- What would happen if....?

In feedback sessions with the CBR team it was identified that some critical skills of an outside resource that are strongly valued by the team and community are the outsider's ability to, firstly, listen, then offer thoughts and ideas and then openly discuss the idea in relation to the culture. Further, additional invitations to offer suggestions would increase if the outsider truly listened, 'opened their ears and eyes' and accepted their thoughts and ideas being challenged, modified and even rejected.

Its not what you know but WHO YOU KNOW — Learn the social alignments and respect them

Communities have social alignments — learn and respect them (Ali 2002; Beasley Intercultural 2002). I was informed by my cultural brokers that the Maldivian community often gained an impression of you based on your social alignments. For example, 'You are friends with Ahmed. He is the cousin brother of Fatima. She works with my cousin at the Ministry of Education' and if this person was well-respected then you were often instantly trusted. In reverse, my friends at Care Society often informed me of whom I should and should not befriend based on the social alignments of the person. This was advice I embraced for serious consideration and application as a way to gain the respect of my colleagues and to ensure my safe transition onto and journey on the dhoni. Similarly, it was important for the CBR team to learn the community networks and structures; who are in the positions of power, who is well-respected, who is a talker, who is an actor, who is viewed as a threat to the community activities: the questions are limitless (ADD 2001; Helander 1999; Tjandrakusuma 1997).

The alignments are also an effective way to get things done. The community is very aware of whom has which contacts, skills, knowledge and experience and often target people through their alignments to gain assistance in terms of skills and funding when needed. I learnt in the early stages of my time in Maldives that it is critical to my relationships to be polite to and accommodating of everyone, particularly because the person with whom I am interacting may be a significant player in the CBR process. People who may have bumped me in the street or cut in front of me in traffic were, in fact, the friend of the team who assisted us with translation, or bulk printing or IT support or graphic design. In this collective society the best advice I can give based on what I learnt is that EVERYONE IS YOUR FRIEND!

Adjust your size — Fit into the working style. Don't rock the boat!

A brief reminder — you have already checked in your excess baggage to ensure you are open to the style which is the reality for the community. Yet, working in a different community can be challenging because new people, new dynamics, new ways of doing, new time pressures, new knowledge. — again an endless list — present themselves. The success of the CBR program in Maldives was a result of it being driven by the community and me, as the outsider, fitting into the community's tool box of goodies. They picked up the stick and from time to time offered me a chance to co-navigate.

An example of my size adjustment was with respect to time. Time lines and time management are viewed differently between cultures as the Maldivian way of life is such that time is not as stringent as it is in Australia (Beasley Intercultural 2002; Bennett 1993). This varied perception of time resulted in the occasional insufficient allocation of time for workshop preparation. The value of collectivism and importance for Care Society staff to join forces and do things together played a major role in completing the necessary tasks on time and exposed me to a new working style. I was introduced to and hence adjusted to the sense of community, partnership and collective action that constituted the working culture of Care Society. This was further demonstrated in the openness and sharing of personal knowledge and resources by island community members in the workshops and thus presented a solid foundation from which CBR could commence in Maldives (Tjandrakusuma 1997; Twible and Henley 1993). Again this emphasised to me that I, the outsider, need to be led by the community and used as a resource when requested so that I can be moulded into the working style of the community.

Therefore, to be a valued resource:

Remember: Its Not about You – It's about the Community!

Remove your excess baggage

Arrival and Entry.

“Be” with the community – Look, Listen and Learn!

Foreigner Watch! Big Brother is watching you! – Be aware of your social obligations and behaviour

Share, Share, Share! What's your story? - Engaging communities involves a reciprocal engagement.

Find some cultural brokers

Friends First! – Form social relationships, they are much more important than working relationships.

Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk - Learn the *language of communication* of and from the community

Learn the spoken word – Talk the Talk!

Vary the presented word – Walk the Walk!

DON'T TELL! Ask and explore - The Suggested Word

Its not what you know but WHO YOU KNOW – Learn the social alignments and respect them

Adjust your size to fit into the working style – Don't rock the boat!

We will never be an expert on the community, but we can practise being the expert 'outsider' cum valued resource.

I have no doubt in my mind that the success of CBR lies in the extent to which the community drives and is engaged in its own development. I heard it with my own ears and saw it with my own eyes in Maldives, India, Fiji and even in Australia. Similarly, Care Society witnessed this first hand in the positive process and outcomes of the CBR pilot project and particularly in the decision by both communities to begin CBR programs in the islands. The CBR process and engagement of each island community is still observed today. Increasing numbers of community members and island communities are working together for a more inclusive, safe and happy society for all.

Furthermore, I strongly believe that 'outsiders' like you and me can impact either positively or adversely on the process and outcomes of any community development project or program depending on how we respond to an invitation to join the community's journey. Therefore, it is critical for us to remember that we will *never* be experts on the community because 'who better understands a community than those who live in it!' But — we *can* practise being the expert 'outsider' cum valued resource. So, in a nutshell, how do we become a valued resource? By simply remembering two key realities for your journey:

- 1. The community is the only driver!**
- 2. If you learn the rules — You won't get wet!**

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