



Blended Conscientisation Methods Uncover Structural Roots of Individualized Problems

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In 2019 [SeventyThree.ltd](#), a firm of analysts, business developers, and development educators, working together with the Barunastra Foundation, an Indonesian organization dedicated to the empowerment of coastal communities, commissioned a study on the livelihood and governance system of the small island communities of Saribi-Sukmader in Papua Province, Indonesia. Our team applied a set of tools and methods for community empowerment, blending critical conscientisation methods. Conscientisation helps participants reflect on and “unpack” dominant belief systems that result from oppressive cycles of socialization. The team used two curricula; [Training for Transformation](#) (TfT) and the remembering method inspired by the [Memory Work Method](#).



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Highlights

Feelings of insecurity can point to a wider structural colonisation.

Current development work can strengthen the oppression and sustain de-humanisation.

High levels of anxiety, shame, and hopelessness encourage dependency on existing power structures rather than collective action.

“The driving factors of emotional insecurity include the history as well as the existing structural factors: community awareness of their situation that informs their action.”

Training for Transformation (TfT)

TfT manuals contain a set of tools, including the identification of a “code” as a concrete presentation of a familiar problem about which the group has strong feelings. The group selected personal debt as a common issue among them. The problem identification was followed by six steps of deconstructing the structural factors contributing to this seemingly personal economic problem.

In the discussions, participants shared the feelings of shame, guilt and hopeless associated with debt. Some of them noted that they have unintentionally taught their kids to tell lies to the debt collector so that they can avoid having to pay back their loans. Others also mentioned that they are indebted to a level to which they do not feel that they have any freedom in their lives.

Participants analyzed the major economic, political and social systems that perpetuated debt. The economic factors include a lack of necessary public investment and market access to generate enough income to get out of poverty. The group pointed to the juxtaposition of engaging debt in order to get money to buy fuel and fishing gear to pay off existing loans. Further, being trapped in debt with very little social capital leads to a dependency on the elites who have access to government resources. This competition has eroded trust among community members, preventing them from collaborating and organizing to find solutions.

Memory Work Method

The Memory Work Method emphasizes the relevance of experiences in shaping one’s personalities. The sharing of personal experience enables each person in a group to recognize the social and cultural threads tailoring their shared stories. The process began in silence remembering the most meaningful sound of their upbringing and concluded with intergroup sharing.

Methods

Five women and five men living in fishery communities responded to our invitation. The Memory Work Method captured the depth of the individual as well as collective emotions. In the sharing among the women’s group, the sound of nature appeared to have had strong connection with the collective emotions. Each remembered the sound made by the sea waves, birds, and leaves in the garden. They used to enjoy being in the nature when growing up and feel safe in it. The women remembered the abundant food in the garden and the feeling of security that gave. The situation of living an abundant life has changed following degraded food gardening practices.

In their upbringing, up until the age of 12, they used to play almost nude without fear of being sexually abused. The group also claimed that the situation has changed to an extent that young girls are scared of being left alone and are anxious about their sexuality.

“There is little togetherness among us.”

The men's group shared a childhood memory of the sound of parents, especially of their mother. A man shared the memory of his mother's comforting cuddles and imitated the vocalizations she used when putting him to sleep in her arms. Together the group remembered, wrote, and sang an old song mimicking a mother's comforting lullaby. Sharing in the men's group was led by testimonies about the security and love that a mother naturally provided to their children. In their analysis, the men made a strong connection with the eroded love and compassion among the community. "Our relationship is dominated by jealousy and competition" said one of them.

Feelings of security became a major longing among the participants. The tools and methods from TtT and Memory Work Method generated community testimonies wherein we measured feelings of insecurity. We analyzed the transcripts of the Memory Work Method, the interpretation and discussion of the code, and the six step process of deconstructing structural factors of insecurity.

Results

The TtT and Memory Work Method revealed how:

- Structural and historical colonization is related to individual-level emotional insecurity.
- The existing development model with its focus on injecting cash and other support into local communities are unwittingly reinforcing emotional insecurity.
- High levels of anxiety, shame and feeling hopeless encourage a high level of dependency to the small numbers of elite patrons. This reinforces and recreates jealousy and distrust and prevents community collaborative leadership.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: Some theoretical tranches of Community Psychology such as the psychology of poverty and oppressions can become the anchor by which community emotions are examined. A Community Psychology approach is critical to inform development work and policy change in the area of poverty reduction and a rights-based approach to community development.

Practice: Negative self-image and shame are often considered individual-level issues. However, community programming and healing is appropriate when there is shared internalized oppression.

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