

# Applying the Process of Appreciative Inquiry in Community Development

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## Abstract

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an unconventional method in bringing about change to organisations and communities, and needs to be understood in terms of its principles, perspective and implementation. AI has been implemented in various contexts such as organisational development, education and health. However, more evidence on its application and outcomes in community development is needed. AI, which complies with most of the principles of participatory action research, was used as a research design in this study conducted in Soweto, Gauteng, South Africa. The researchers in collaboration with community members used the 4-D cycle and various tools and activities of AI in a community project. The study yielded positive results about the application and relevance of the AI in community development. There were valuable lessons learnt about the 4-D model in community development. The study adds value regarding the application of AI as a community development model in the South African context.

**Keywords:** Appreciative Inquiry (AI); community development; participatory action research (PAR)

## Introduction

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was developed to counteract the problem-based approach to organisational development (Ashford and Patkar 2001; Mathie and Cunningham 2003). It is a model which identifies the abilities, assets and achievements of organisations and bases the process of development on those. AI has been widely applied not only in organisational development, but also in leadership development, education and health and it yielded much success (Clossey, Mehnert, and Silva 2011; Lahman 2011; Niemann 2010; Puente, Crous, and Venter 2007; Snyman 2010; Steyn 2010). There has



been growing interest in the application and practice of the theory of AI in community development (Nel 2011).

This article reports on the application of AI in an under-privileged community in the South African context. The study was conducted through participatory action research (PAR) and AI methods with a group of women who acted as co-researchers in the study. According to Somekh (2006, 6–8), PAR has the following key methodological principles: Firstly, it integrates research and action. In this study, the researcher and the action committee engaged in social action with the purpose of bringing about positive changes within the action committee's community.

Secondly, PAR is conducted by a collaborative partnership of participants and researchers. In this case, the researcher engaged the action committee as partners in the research process and through participatory measures they engaged in all the processes involved in the study.

Thirdly, PAR involves the development of knowledge and understanding of a unique kind. Through applying AI methods in a participatory way, the researcher and the action committee uncovered different strengths, assets and opportunities that the action committee and community were not previously aware of.

Fourthly, PAR starts from a vision of social transformation and aspirations for greater social justice for all. In this study, the action committee formulated a vision of a better future in which they are able to function optimally and take advantage of opportunities. They then set out to make that future a reality by formulating plans and strategies.

Fifthly, PAR engenders powerful learning for participants. The action committee was engaged as partners, co-researchers and co-producers of knowledge through the course of the study in order to facilitate their learning and that they may be able to repeat what they were learning on their own after the researcher terminated her engagement with the project.

Sixthly, PAR involves exploratory engagements with a wide range of existing knowledge. Throughout the course of the study, the researcher recognised the action committee members as the experts of their own environment and as possessing pre-existing knowledge about the community. Therefore, the researcher always had an interest in and inquired into what the action committee knew already.

Seventhly, PAR locates the inquiry within an understanding of broader historical, political and ideological contexts. Before engaging with the action committee and during the connecting phase, the researcher had to learn about the broader context of the study and engaged in other actions later with the action committee to learn and understand as much as possible about the broader context of the relevant community. Lastly, PAR like AI involves a high level of reflexivity.

The study was conducted at the Snake Park locality in Soweto, near Johannesburg in Gauteng, South Africa. The area residents are engaged in various community projects that aim at improving their socio-economic livelihoods and holistic development of their community. The goal of the study was to describe and consequently assess the process of applying the AI method in community development at the Emndeni Skills Development Centre in Snake Park, Soweto, and to ultimately assess the effects of the process. The following were the objectives of the study:

1. to describe the facilitation of the four phases of AI process within the above-mentioned disadvantaged community in a participatory action way;
2. to provide the findings of the facilitation of the four phases of AI, done in collaboration with the action committee;
3. to critically reflect on the findings; and
4. to make recommendations for the use of AI in community development based on the finding of this study.

## **Appreciative Inquiry as Conceptual Framework**

AI is a model and practice framework that is asset-based and capacity-focused in nature. It was initially developed as an organisational development method in the 1980s at the Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio in the USA, by Professor David Cooperrider, an expert in organisational management, development and behaviour and his associates (Nel 2011). Cooperrider and his associates developed AI to counter the problem-based approach as they argued that organisations had to be viewed as a “mystery to be embraced” which takes place through discovery, imagining, appreciating, discussion and co-construction of the future (Ashford and Patkar 2001, 41).

Viewing organisations as problems to be solved and attempting to solve those problems through a problem-oriented approach have had little success over the past few decades. The introduction of AI meant that organisational researchers and managers had to rethink their view on change in the world (Ashford and Patkar 2001). Over the past decade, the interest in applying AI and other asset-based approaches has grown and spilt over to other fields such as community development (Nel 2011).

AI fits well with the asset-based community-led development (ABCD) approach as it focuses on what already exists, what works well and what is positive in a system and begins the process of development from these points. According to Ashford and Patkar (2001), AI seeks to identify the best of “what is”, that is what already exists, and involves a pursuit of “what could be”, that is what could be brought about in future.

The basic perspective in capacity-focused approaches is that all communities, no matter how poor they are, possess skills, talents and capacities that can contribute towards positive and sustainable social change (De Klerk 2010; Kretzmann and McKnight 1993; Schenck, Nel, and Louw 2010). Another assumption is that the more people are aware of their assets and capabilities, the more likely their confidence in themselves is to increase and the more likely they are to be prompted towards taking responsibility for their own development. The AI model does not assume that there are no impediments that exist in communities; rather, it suggests a different focus, whereby what already exists and is working in communities can be mobilised to create better circumstances. It does not imply that communities do not require more resources but it suggests that external resources can be more effectively utilised when internal community resources have already been exhausted (Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros 2008; Schenck, Nel, and Louw 2010).

There are five principles upon which AI is founded (Ashford and Patkar 2001; Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros 2008; Mathie and Cunningham 2003). The **constructionist principle** states that communities create their reality through their collection of different experiences, assumptions and expectations. The **principle of simultaneity** states that the inquiry and the change that would result take place simultaneously, thus making the process of inquiry related to that of intervention. According to the **poetic principle**, since reality is a social construction, a community could be seen as a book that is based on incomplete stories that are constantly being written by the individuals therein. The **anticipatory principle** says the ways in which people behave are not only responses that they have to different life events as they occur; but they are also an indication of their anticipations of what awaits them in future. Lastly, the **positive principle** states that people tend to be more enthusiastic about things that make them feel good, thus the more positive the inquiry, the more people are invested in and inspired about the process, which positively affects the chances of sustainability.

The AI model follows a 4-D cycle whereby the **discovery phase** focuses on discussions on past achievements and successes and on identifying the values and principles that were present when those successes were recorded (Nel and Pretorius 2012). In the **dream phase** participants are required to imagine what the future could be like if they took advantage of the assets and capacities that they have as individuals and as a collective that they have identified in the discovery phase in order to bring about positive change in their community.

During the **design phase** participants are assisted to formulate in-depth plans on how to mobilise their identified community's resources, abilities, knowledge and skills as a collective for the achievement of the dreams that they have developed. The **delivery phase** is the last phase and it involves taking advantage of the assets that were identified during the discovery phase, establishing new partnerships for the purpose of moving a

project forward, learning new skills and putting into action the plans that were formulated during the design phase (Ashford and Patkar 2001; Niemann 2010).

## **Research Methodology**

The group of seven women included in the study as the action committee was identified from the Skills Development Centre (SDC) of Emndeni in Snake Park, Soweto. This centre was selected from a total of 15 other SDCs in the Gauteng province using non-probability sampling methods. The following conditions were used to select this SDC: firstly, the SDC had to have an already established group or groups of people working together for the purpose of community development. Secondly, the SDC and the group of people had to have evidence of experience of some past community projects or community engagements in problem-based interventions so that they could be given an opportunity to learn the new AI method. Thirdly, the SDC and the group had to be open to learn about the AI method and implementing it in the execution of one of their projects. Finally, the research project had to add value to their community development goals.

A manager at the Emndeni SDC recommended the group for the research project as he indicated that all the members in this group stayed in the same area and that they all met at least three times a week, which would make it easy to access them. The group consisted of seven women who had registered themselves as a co-operative. They were engaged with organic and hydroponic vegetable farming in their community, and they managed three farming sites. One of these sites was on the premises of the Emndeni SDC, the second was on the premises of a local high school and the other was in an open field in their community. The group sold its vegetables to local schools, local street vendors, individuals and households in the community. However, their business operated only on a very small scale, owing to the size of their farming sites. The co-operative had been in existence for three years before its engagement with the researcher.

The research design used in the project was AI as a contemporary action research method which is about “learning about the real world of action, experience and practice for facilitating change” (Nel and Pretorius 2012, 19). As such, AI is similar to many elements of PAR in that it is research that takes place in a context where the research participants are engaged as co-researchers, making it a bottom-up process (Babbie, Mouton, and Prozesky 2001; De Vos et al. 2011; Somekh 2006). In the project, the research participants were engaged in a participatory and developmental manner in all the processes involved in carrying out this project.

Throughout the course of the project, the researcher and the action committee applied the methodological principles of PAR described by Somekh (2006, 6–8). They engaged in social action with the purpose of bringing about positive changes within the action committee’s community. The action committee was engaged as partners in the research

process and through participatory measures. The researcher and the action committee used different tools and activities to collect data in the first three phases of AI.

In the Discovery Phase, there were six different activities that were employed in identifying the resources and abilities that are possessed by the action committee, namely storytelling, gifts of the head, hands and heart, inventory of qualities of group members, map of local associations, inventory of local institutions, and the application of the leaky bucket algorithm to identify and analyse financial assets (Ashford and Patkar 2001; Kretzmann and McKnight 1993; Schenck, Nel, and Louw 2010). These activities were chosen as they were identified to be best suited to identify the assets and strengths possessed by the action committee members and which could be used later for the purpose of development. They used storytelling to collect narratives of past successes and achievements of the action committee members through collaborative and self-initiated efforts. They also did an activity that helped them to identify and map different qualities possessed by each one of the action committee members. With the tool called “gifts of the head, hands and heart” they identified the knowledge, skills, experience and passions possessed by each of the action committee members. In the activity of mapping local associations, they asked each action committee member to list social associations that they belonged to and also to list other associations that they know about in their community. With the tool called “inventory of local association”, they identified all the physical assets that are present within their community. Lastly, they used the “leaky bucket algorithm” to map the channels through which money is brought into their community, ways through which money circulates and is kept within their community, and channels through which money exits their community.

In the Dream Phase, two activities were used to collect data, namely the visualisation exercise and the personal and group wishes exercise. The first exercise was the visualisation exercise and it was aimed at inspiring more long-term visions in the action committee for their group (Ashford and Patkar 2001; Schenck, Nel, and Louw 2010). This activity was chosen as it assisted the action committee members to stretch their vision beyond what may be possible in the near future and made it easy for them to articulate the sort of changes they wanted to see in their lives and their group in the long term.

The second was the group wishes exercise and it was aimed at formulating more immediate dreams and visions for the action committee. This activity was simple and straightforward, and with it the researcher wanted to solicit the most immediate thoughts among the action committee regarding the improvements or enhancements they need. In this exercise the facilitator provided writing material to the individual action committee members and asked them to write down three wishes that they have for the group. However, during the exercise the researcher only asked the group members to write down the wishes that they had for their group in order to have more direction and structure regarding the purpose of the project whereas the exercise usually asks for personal wishes as well (Ashford and Patkar 2001; Schenck, Nel, and Louw 2010).

In the Design Phase, two tools were used, namely the programme evaluation and review technique (PERT) chart and the Gantt chart. The PERT chart involves making representations of the plans to be achieved and depicting the sequence of the tasks to be undertaken and the envisioned time frames. The Gantt chart is an extension of the PERT chart as it takes apart the different objectives or tasks identified in a PERT chart and describes them further with regard to their activities, resources needed, responsible persons, time frame, costs, progress and comments or recommendations (Schenck, Nel, and Louw 2010). These two activities were chosen as they would assist the action committee by spelling out to them the different tasks to be undertaken, how they were to be performed, by whom and by when. The action committee could also clearly see and understand the sequence of the different tasks that were to be undertaken and could also see what was required on their part to perform the different tasks. The researcher and the action committee reviewed all the resources, assets, skills, knowledge, associations and abilities that they had identified during the discovery phase to see which ones of those they could mobilise for the realisation of the dream and how.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The main ethical issue that was considered by the researcher in the study was the freedom of individuals to participate and withdraw from this study. According to the Nuremberg Code (Homan 1991), voluntary consent means that the persons should firstly be of a legal age to be able to give consent and, secondly, they should be informed about the subject matter and all the elements thereof, and understand them, so that they are able to make an informed choice without being subjected to any form of force, deceit, fraud or any concealed motive. The researcher made consent forms available that were signed by all the participants to ensure that they give knowledgeable, willing consent to participate in the study.

Secondly, the researcher also made available the confidentiality clause of the study, which was signed by the participants, to assure them that all information shared by them in the study would be treated with the highest level of confidentiality. It is very important to reduce the risk of harm to the participants by maintaining their confidentiality, especially when it comes to publishing research findings and archiving research data (Hammersley and Traianou 2012). The action committee members worked together during most of the activities and phases in the study and they also had to share with each other information and some of the activities that they did on an individual basis. It was therefore impossible to keep their identities confidential from one another throughout the course of the study, given its participatory nature. However, in writing the research report, the researcher ensured that the identities of the action committee members remain confidential.

## **Findings of the Study**

The location of the sessions for the project was a garage at one of the action committee member's house and this was the best venue available as it was big enough to allow for

all the activities undertaken, and it also allowed for privacy and for as little disturbances as possible. The sessions were facilitated through two-hour sessions once a week. In total, the researcher and action committee met over a period of more than 30 sessions from the connecting phase where she initiated contact with the action committee to the last stage where she terminated her contact with them. Each session started with an icebreaker which was in the form of singing of a gospel song and one of the action committee members opening with a short prayer. After the completion of the activities in each session, a process of reflection analysing of the findings followed which was done by the researcher and the action committee in a participatory way. In the following section the findings of the study will be discussed in detail.

### Discovery Phase

The discovery phase was facilitated over six sessions. Numerous assets, abilities, knowledge, skills and resources were identified during this phase which was evident of the perspective in AI that every system possesses positive assets and capabilities that could be mobilised for development. Table 1 contains a summary of the findings in the discovery phase from the different activities or tools that were used to collect the data.

**Table 1:** Activities and findings of the discovery phase

<i>Activities</i>	<i>Findings</i>
Storytelling about past achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The action committee members acquired the skills of beadwork and shoemaking. They contributed money and started making shoes and other items of beadwork and sold them to their community</li> <li>• The action committee received donations of maize meal and minced meat from a local business man every week. They then started a feeding scheme for needy children in their community cooking in their own houses and using their own resources</li> <li>• Despite having very little schooling, the action committee members enrolled for Agriculture, Business Management, Computer Literacy and Life Skills courses at the Emndeni SDC and they passed all those courses</li> </ul>
Values that made successes, achievements possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The skills that the action committee members have to work with their hands in farming, sewing, beadwork, shoemaking, cooking and baking</li> <li>• The action committee members' desire to serve their community</li> <li>• The support that the action committee members have been receiving from their community through donations and the community buying and consuming their products</li> </ul>
Qualities possessed by action committee members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action committee members are hard-working people</li> <li>• Action committee members are very caring people</li> </ul>
Knowledge possessed by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business management</li> <li>• Computer skills</li> </ul>



<i>Activities</i>	<i>Findings</i>
action committee members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life skills</li> </ul>
Skills possessed by action committee members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gardening</li> <li>• Cooking</li> <li>• Sewing</li> <li>• Crocheting</li> </ul>
Map of associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emndeni SDC</li> <li>• The Ntaba Mhlophe Farmers Association (NMFA)</li> <li>• The Sebetsa O Thole Mopotso Secondary School</li> <li>• The different churches that the action committee members belong to</li> </ul>
Inventory of local institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)</li> <li>• Primary and secondary schools</li> <li>• Local businesses</li> <li>• Crèches</li> <li>• Different government service offices such as the clinics, the SAPS, the Department of Housing office and the local municipality office</li> </ul>
The leaky bucket algorithm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <b>money that is flowing into the community</b> is mainly from the different types of social grants that are received by community members, and from the different employment positions held by different community members</li> <li>• The <b>money circulating within the community</b> does so in different governmental institutions, NGOs and crèches, which employ individuals from within and outside the community, leading to the creation of wealth in the community. Local business such as the local supermarket, the local hardware and the tuck shops, encourage people to spend money within the community. Other informal businesses in the community were hair salons, street vendors and money lenders</li> <li>• The <b>money flowing out of the community</b> was from community members leaving the community to seek services and facilities that are not available in the community such as banks, and community members belonging to associations such as schools and healthcare facilities that are outside the community. It was also from the community members that are employed outside the community and that have to pay tax. Apart from the local supermarket which mainly sells groceries and food, the community members consume goods and services based outside the community</li> </ul>

### Reflection on the Discovery Phase

The action committee consists mainly of single parents, illiterate women living in a disadvantaged community. However, the findings showed that there are many assets prevalent in their community, as captured in the literature, that all communities, no matter how poor they may be, possess assets (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993; Mathie and Cunningham 2003). They had never considered most of the strengths and assets that

were uncovered during the discovery phase, and although they might have known about their existence, they had never thought of them as assets that they have at their disposal to use for the benefit of their projects and their community.

Given the fact that most of the action committee members are uneducated women who are approaching old age and who are not usually engaged in activities that require writing or reading, the researcher had to adjust the technicality of the activities to cater for the action committee members. This was done mainly through encouraging them to write in their own languages, and to take as much time as they required to complete the exercises. The researcher refrained from using any complex communication as much as possible in the activities to accommodate the action committee members. In addition, the researcher made use of translations in the execution of the activities, and all instructions and discussions were also given in the action committee members' home languages. According to Schenck, Nel, and Louw (2010), it is important that a facilitator have an attitude that is non-judgemental and non-discriminatory but exudes warmth and acceptance, and the researcher upheld this throughout the course of the project.

During the facilitation of the different activities, the researcher realised that the action committee tended to include also stories of problems that they had encountered. The researcher found that although she wanted to discourage them from talking about their own challenges she could not really stop them. Nel (2011) states that groups should be allowed to share their challenges to acknowledge that they came along with the successes that have been achieved, and that facilitators should recognise the emotions that they evoked among the group members. Therefore, the researcher did not stop the action committee members whenever they shared their challenges but tried as much as possible to redirect the discussion to positive inquiries.

### **Dream Phase**

After having discovered their diverse assets during the discovery phase, the action committee members were inspired to envision a better future which could be realised by them through mobilising these assets that they have. This led them to the dream phase of the project which was facilitated through three sessions. The following dreams were formulated for the project through the group wishes exercise:

- sufficient water and/or water resources for the vegetable gardens;
- a stall in which the group members would sell their vegetable produce; and
- an office for all the administrative work.

The researcher and the action committee formulated a shared dream for the group by selecting the dream that was most common among the action committee members or one with the dominant theme. According to Schenck, Nel, and Louw (2010), this is one way of deciding on a shared dream for a group. This dream was one of having adequate

water or water resources in the vegetable gardens so that it would be easier for the group members to water their plants.

### **Reflection on the Dream Phase**

The action committee members found the group wishes exercise in the dream phase quite overwhelming, as they were requested to express themselves through drawings and other creative visual presentations. The researcher had to cheer them on and tell them that they were capable of doing what the exercise required. While working on their dreams, the group members needed to be allowed enough time to think about and express their dreams in a non-distracting atmosphere (Ashford and Patkar 2001). The researcher allocated more time and privacy to the action committee members to complete their presentations by allowing them to take them home to continue working on them in their own time and space. They brought back their drawings during the following session.

The researcher and the action committee members did not struggle to reach consensus about which dream to work towards. They all presented dreams that were similar or complementary to one another, and were also very relevant to their group. Consensus about which dream to work towards was reached through selecting the dream that was more common among them and through prioritising which would be more important to achieve first. Developing a dream for the action committee was done through reflecting back on assets that had been identified so that the dream was focused on what could be achieved through the mobilisation of the available assets.

Naturally, there were differences among the action committee members regarding how the dreams were to be prioritised and which one would ultimately be formulated as the dream for the project. The disputes that arose did not result in arguments or fighting but every idea and view that was tabled was listened to and acknowledged through group discussions. Ashford and Patkar (2001) state that a vision or dream for a group is good if it is shared in that the process of formulating it was highly participative and all group members have contributed towards formulating it.

### **Design Phase**

After having developed a dream, the action committee members undertook the design phase of the project where they had to develop plans on how they could bring their dream to reality. The design phase was facilitated over two sessions whereby two planning tools were used in developing the plans of action to realise the identified dream. The plans of action were identified and formulated into goals, meaning that the dream was to be delivered through the following three identified plans of action:

- During the exercise of mapping associations in the discovery phase the action committee had identified the NMFA as one of the associations to which they belong which is made up of six other local farming groups as well as the action

committee. Although this association was still in existence, it was no longer functional or serving its purpose of providing support and peer learning to the different farmers in it. As a first plan of realising their dream, the action committee members decided that they would revive this association and try to learn from the other farmers on how they water their gardens as the other farmers are in the same community and are likely to be subjected to similar conditions than those of the action committee.

- Secondly, to approach two local businesses, namely the local supermarket and the local hardware shop and ask them for donations of hosepipes and/or watering cans.
- Lastly, to approach the local municipality office to ask for its assistance in being provided with water resources such as hosepipes, watering cans or taps.

The researcher and the action committee then broke down these three goals further into different objectives, decided on the resources that are required and the person(s) responsible to attain the objectives, and attached time frames to the objectives.

### **Reflection on the Design Phase**

The action committee members had initially grappled with the idea of mobilising available resources, as opposed to approaching external structures for donations and funding. Their first plan of action in realising their dream was for them to revive the NMFA in order to learn from the other farmers on how they water their gardens. The action committee members seemed reluctant to do this. They were seemingly keener on the plan of approaching the office of the local municipality rather than that of mobilising the local farmers in the NMFA, especially since their initial interaction with these farmers was not successful. The researcher also got the sense that the action committee was keener on approaching the office of the local municipality as the responsibility of realising their dream would be laid on other people than themselves. The researcher reminded them of the value of community development as captured by different authors that community development relies on the authentic and self-driven efforts of people at grass-roots level, which are based on the social capital or relationships that have been built, and with the people, such as themselves, being fully aware that they are capacitated and have assets to bring about the desired changes (Pretorius and Nel 2012).

The second plan, which entailed obtaining donations from the two identified local businesses, also upheld the principle that change should be relationship-driven as the action committee members would not be working alone but would be employing assistance from two institutions within their community, which demonstrates the bridging role of social capital in communities as explored by Mathie and Cunningham (2003).

The third formulated plan, approaching the office of the local municipality, was also in line with establishing local networks that would be mobilised for the purpose of the

project. In both AI and ABCD, emphasis is placed on social capital, as it is believed that the networks being established are horizontal, based on trust and form a basis through which other assets could be accessed or mobilised (Pretorius and Nel 2012). Although the office of the local municipality is based outside the community, it was seen as an asset as it renders services to the community. Indeed, the AI model allows for the mobilisation of external assets as long as the community members would have leveraged the form and extent of the external resources' involvement in the process, and also ensure not to surrender their control over to the external resources (Nel and Pretorius 2012).

### **Delivery Phase**

The delivery or implementation that was undertaken in the project was only in its initial phase and there is still opportunity for it to be expanded. The delivery was conducted over a period of about four months as the action committee went about meeting the different identified stakeholders, forming relationships with them and putting the plans in motion.

The researcher and the action committee members revived and mobilised the NMFA as it consists of other farmers that are farming under similar circumstances and may have knowledge, skills and resources that could help them in realising their dream. This alliance offered the action committee members and the other farmers many opportunities as they all possess different skills, knowledge and assets, thus other future endeavours could be achieved by them as a collective. For example, the local association could mobilise social action if there was some form of injustice taking place, it could advocate for the establishment of certain services or facilities within the community; and it would also be able to constantly share skills and knowledge with the committee members and vice versa (Mathie and Cunningham 2003). In the NMFA the action committee members were taught a skill of making their own watering cans using plastic bottles and they started using this skill soon thereafter collecting water from their houses to their gardening sites. This brought more value to the project as the fact that they were collecting water from their own houses was seen as another form of investment by them into the project.

In line with sustaining the project, the researcher and the action committee mobilised two of the local institutions that they had identified – the local supermarket and the local hardware shop – as they thought that these two institutions could have the resources that are needed to take the project forward. The purpose of identifying and mobilising local organisations is to form local structures that can sustain the community-led development (Pretorius and Nel 2012). Relationships were built with these two institutions for future prospects of the project and the needed donations were also acquired from them. The researcher and the action committee formed a partnership with the Food Resilience Unit (FRU) in the office of the local municipality as one of the local institutions that they had identified to ensure continued assistance and interaction between them.

After the implementation of the project and with the view of sustaining it and continuously bringing new developments to it, there were various core principles that the action committee would have to adhere to:

- The action committee members had to affirm their position as drivers of the project and not surrender the project to be run by the institutions that they were forming relationships with, especially the experts in the FRU. Groups have to continue to lead to have more leverage on the process of development and to steer the involvement of external structures in any direction that they determine (Mathie and Cunningham 2003; Pretorius and Nel 2012).
- When the project progressed more into the delivery phase the researcher began to gradually remove herself from the facilitation role to develop leadership in the action committee. Facilitators of the AI process need to build capacities of leadership within groups so that community members could be able to continue the development process (Ashford and Patkar 2001; Schenck, Nel, and Louw 2010).
- The action committee needed to have learnt certain skills with regard to taking the project forward and to sustain it by themselves. These skills include how to access resources, maintain positive relationships among themselves, and negotiate with outsiders (Ashford and Patkar 2001; Schenck, Nel, and Louw 2010).
- The action committee members would have to ensure that the following aspects are in place as suggested by Nel (2011): enhance their relationship that they have now established with the different local associations; build more networks or partnerships; continue to build capacity of the action committee members; strengthen participation of all members involved by ensuring that tasks are allocated and rotated among them; and, lastly, build capacity of the wider community by ensuring that there is sharing and dissemination of information.
- On an ongoing basis, the action committee would need to engage in monitoring and evaluation whereby all members involved in the project take part in the process of evaluating a project as well as their participation and that of others in it, thus promoting a sense of ownership of the project. Monitoring and evaluation need to be an ongoing process (Mathie and Cunningham 2003).

## **Critical Reflection on AI Process**

A facilitator of participatory community development needs to be warm, non-judgemental and non-discriminatory (Schenck, Nel, and Louw 2010); upon connecting with the community and during the facilitation of the discovery phase, the researcher adopted this attitude. The AI is people-oriented and its success is largely dependent on the tone that is set and the atmosphere created by a facilitator when engaging with a community during the connection phase. The attitude of a facilitator which should exude positivity and hope for the future cannot be overemphasised as the lack thereof would

deprive community members of the ability to see any good and positivity about themselves and their community, which in turn would make it difficult for the AI process to unfold. The researcher therefore had to be inspiring and communicate hope and optimism in all that she did with the community.

The AI process is also inward looking as opposed to conventional approaches that look to experts and external resources for what they could do for communities to solve their problems (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993; Mathie and Cunningham 2003). This process required a change in the way of thinking from both the researcher and the action committee as it is seemingly easier and normal to talk about problems and what is lacking than to look internally to what already exists and could be used to bring about development. The facilitation of AI required a conscious effort from the researcher to ensure that she avoided discussions that were based on problems and deficiencies. Although these could not be avoided, the researcher acknowledged them but quickly redirected the focus of the discussions to being appreciative.

The facilitation of AI should be accompanied by a conscious process of reflection (Ashford and Patkar 2001; Nel 2011; Schenck, Nel, and Louw 2010). The researcher and the action committee did this at the end of each activity whereby they reflected on lessons learnt, and the emotions that were aroused during the different activities. The researcher found that this was crucial as it brought vividly to the awareness and realisation of the action committee members all the assets, strengths, qualities and capabilities that they were discovering about themselves and their community, and it made them to appreciate those more. Much value could be lost if there is no aspect of reflection given to the process of the AI, especially in the discovery phase as the AI requires a shift in mindset and attitude from that of “consumers” of services to “designers” and “producers” of community programmes (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993; Mathie and Cunningham 2003; Pretorius and Nel 2012).

Adequate time should be allocated to the facilitation of the AI process. As was noted during the course of the project, the process took much longer than expected to move from the discovery phase to the delivery phase. Therefore, facilitating the process of the AI requires that the process be allowed to unfold naturally and not be rushed with ample time allocated for each phase to be fully implemented (Nel 2011; Nel and Pretorius 2012).

## **Conclusions**

In the development agenda of South Africa as a young democracy, much emphasis has been put on redressing the imbalances of the past as the majority of the population are still affected by the legacy of the country’s past. The employment of the AI model could help to ease the demand that is currently being laid on government resources and projects and others from the private sector and other NGOs. The focus would be shifted to mobilising the resources, skills, knowledge, talents and strengths that people in communities have to advance the development agenda (Kretzmann and McKnight

1993; Mathie and Cunningham 2003; Pretorius and Nel 2012). This may not replace but help to complement the work that is done by government, the private sector and the civil society, and it would ease the demand that is currently placed on them.

Furthermore, AI inspires people to look to the future and anticipate a time and circumstances beyond their present and what they have been subjected to in the past (Pretorius and Nel 2012). In South Africa, where the devastating effects of apartheid are still prevalent and facing a large group of the population, AI could be the step that would inspire people to start rebuilding the future instead of keeping their focus on the injustices that they suffered in the past.

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