

**From Social Engineering to Community Transformation:  
Amul, Grameen Bank, and Mondragon as Exemplar Organizations<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

In this article we argue that the problem-solving paradigm of engineering is limiting and therefore not suitable for social change. Social change requires more than rules, legislations, and procedures. It requires nurturing and building people so that they can transform communities, and thus not simply solve or navigate problems but go on to uproot the causes of problems to create a new and vibrant society. Learning from community psychology, we propose that there are five essentials of community transformation that a social change agent should pay attention to, which are: 1) being a passionate facilitator embedded in the community, 2) defining the problem with the community, 3) using multiple methods and perspectives to measure the problem, 4) conducting collaborative implementation, and 5) being flexible to change when needed. We present case studies from three countries—India (Amul), Bangladesh (Grameen Bank), and Spain (Mondragon)—that support the model, presenting further credence to the community psychology approach to intervention. We found in all three cases that a social change agent is not a catalyst that leaves the chemical reaction unchanged; the change agent is also transformed in the process. We urge social agents of change to disassociate from the problem-

solving paradigm of engineering and adopt the community psychology approach, which can help transform both the community and the agent. Implications for leadership, sustainable institution building, organizational development and the lessons for social scientist are discussed.

## **Introduction**

Engineering is an applied field that attempts to solve problems by using the theories and methods of science, and indeed it is dedicated to finding technological solutions to human needs, and in that sense is a discipline focused on problem solving. For example, using the knowledge of physics and chemistry, engineers are able to construct tall buildings, providing housing for many people in a limited space; applying the knowledge developed in genetics, they modify food crops that are resistant to certain viruses or yield higher quantity of produce for the same input; employing theories of fluid flow, they develop water systems for irrigation or stents that allow free flow of blood in the hearts of people whose arteries are clogged. It takes years of training to become an engineer, and with increased specialization, even a master's degree is often not sufficient to have an appreciation of the theory and methods of a branch of engineering, and learning a discipline is increasingly becoming a life-long commitment. Though it may sound extreme and belittling, it may not be an exaggeration to say that engineering is a problem solving profession, a noble profession, yet limiting in many ways.

There are some limitations to the engineering approach. First, it necessarily exists in a problem space, and if there is no problem, engineering as a profession would become defunct. Though practically it appears that there will always be problems, it is a theoretical possibility to be in a state where there are no problems. This would become clear when we pause and reflect on the concept of problem, and accept that by nature it is socially constructed. In fact, what is

viewed as a problem in one culture is not so in another, and that is why engineers are working on different problems in various parts of the world. Second, it is driven by experts who have years of training, rather than those actually struggling and living with the problem. One of the major limitations of such an expert driven approach is that problems may be defined in a distorted way to fit the knowledge base of science or the expertise of the problem solver. The above limitations have serious consequences when we approach social problems with the zeal of engineers.

When we borrow the engineering model and employ it in social sciences, per force we become social engineers,<sup>2</sup> and borrowing the theories and method from engineering, we box ourselves in identifying and solving social problems. The approach is necessarily top-down, where experts dictate what a problem is and how it should be solved (Esman & Bruhns, 1966; Esman, 1972). And it is not unusual to find solutions that are of no value, because either they did not solve the problem as perceived by the end users, or they created other problems, even worse than the original malady. We find many examples of how Western experts have exported their solutions, technological and social, to developing countries, with a complete disregard to indigenous solutions and issues (Arisaka, 2003; Bhawuk, 2008) that lead these societies to be worse off than they were before these interventions were implemented.

For example, when a new technology is imposed instead of integrated in the community with the participation of the people, it often destroys the community. The plight of the Yir Yoront aborigine tribe in Australia is a well-known example from anthropological literature, and it all started with the introduction of steel axes by the missionaries toward the end of the nineteenth century. The missionaries were well meaning experts who worked from their own worldview and were trying to help the natives, but instead it "led to confusion, resentment, and

general unhappiness in the daily lives of the people; it turned out to be no liberation at all for the Yir Yoront. The failure resulted from an insufficient understanding of the value-laden nature of a particular technology and its total embeddedness in the cultural system of the Yir Yoront” (Arisaka, 2003: 245). Participation from the community could have avoided such a tragedy, and what is instructive is that even the kindness of well meaning missionaries, when coming from the top-down expert-driven mindset, is simply destructive. A similar situation arises when native wisdom is totally disregarded. For example, fascinated by the idea of running water, and oblivious to the constraints of the ecology, the water consumption habits of people in many developing countries are magnified to unnatural levels, and indigenous water systems are neglected to ruins, leading to a chaotic situation of extreme shortage of drinking water. Nepal, a country rich in hydro-power, stands at the brink of water shortage of catastrophic proportion today, and the native wisdom of water management is buried so deep under the engineering debris that people are not sure about ever meeting their water needs.

There is a way out, and it is not to condemn engineering, science, the scientific method, or institution building, but to build on the human strengths and the ability of human beings as individuals and communities to transform themselves. Whereas engineering is about problem solving, human experience is about community building and transformation. In this article we discuss how lessons learned in community psychology suggest that we move away from the engineering problem-solving paradigm and adopt the community transformation paradigm, which will allow us to define our needs vis-à-vis our ecology and availability of resources, and to grow together as a community instead of leading an individualistic life that constantly converts communities into markets that cannot meet mindless human desires. We begin by presenting a model derived from the community psychology literature that suggests that there are five

essentials of community transformation—the role of the social change agent in the community, the way the problem is defined, information collected, solution implemented, and the need for flexibility in each of these steps. We then present three case studies—Amul (India), Grameen Bank (Bangladesh), and Mondragon (Spain)—that support the model. We conclude the article with a discussion of the need to move away from the engineering problem-solving paradigm for social change, and discuss some implications for leadership, sustainable institution building, and organizational development.

### **Essentials of Community Transformation**

Community psychology has come a long way in dealing with problems from counseling individuals to designing interventions that focus on the community. The field has also evolved from being expert driven to developing a partnership with the community in designing and implementing interventions. In solving social problems, the goal is to be faithful to the needs of the community and its members, allowing them to create their own voice and, eventually, sustain their own changes rather than telling them what their problems are and how they should go about addressing them (Rappaport, 1981; Trickett, 1984; Wandersman, 2003). The social agent of change has to act much like a community researcher and have a certain degree of openness to the issues and changes resulting from the interventions (Shweder, 1995; Weisner, 1996). To facilitate an effective relationship between the change agent and a particular community and the creation of a program of change, change agents can learn some lessons from community

psychology. These lessons are essential for leading a community to transform itself and include: 1) the change agent locating himself or herself in the community as a passionate facilitator of transformation (Sarason, 2003), 2) defining the problem from the perspective of the community (Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 2000), 3) using multiple methods to measure the problem (Banyard & Miller, 1998; Stewart, 2000), 4) collaboration during implementation (Wandersman, 2003; Trickett & Espino, 2004), and 5) being flexible to change at any time, given the community's evolving needs (Tharp & Gallimore, 1982; Sarason, 2003).

### *Being an Embedded and Passionate Facilitator*

Unlike scientists and engineers who are supposed to be disinterested and dispassionate observers of scientific processes, people interested in social change have to be passionate about the issues they are going to work on and concerned about the community they are working with. Social change agents should ask themselves some tough questions and try to sort out why they are attempting to bring about change in a particular community in the first place. Sarason (2003) emphasizes the need for community researchers to locate themselves and their own motivations in their research. In many disciplines, this may seem counterintuitive to the process, even pointless, but not in community development programs. He argues, "the path of atoms in a cloud chamber do not affect or are not affected by the physicist's personality and thought processes. That is not and cannot be the case in a community intervention" (Sarason, 2003: 209). Because of the nature of social change and its requirement for the change agent to work closely with others, often people from various backgrounds, these agents are not at liberty to ignore their own

motivations, expectations and hopes for a project. At some point, they could all affect the way one tries to collaborate, collect data or implement change.

Furthermore, community change efforts require a significant commitment of one's time and energy, due to their complexity and the intricacy of the evaluation process (Tharp & Gallimore, 1982). First and foremost, the change agents need to understand and commit to the time commitment. Locating one's own role in a project or reasons for doing it can be tricky. Sometimes this involves some self-exploration about one's social identity and motivation. If community members and participants are from a different cultural group than the change agent and members of his or her team, it is imperative that the potential effects of this situation be stated and understood before attempting collaboration, as they can create obstacles in the process or unknowingly misrepresent the data altogether (Langhout, 2006; van Uchelen, 2000; Stoecker, 1997). Trust and understanding are built over continued contact with one another, and it is crucial to think about one's own contextual background and how this potentially affects his or her relationship with community members and one's view of the problem. In locating oneself in the community and the problem space, *one has to remain a passionate facilitator, rather than an expert telling the community who should do what, how, and when.*

The embedded facilitator is nevertheless a champion of the project, and needs to find other champions in the community. The concept of champions is borrowed from management literature. It refers to organizational entrepreneurs, or intrapreneurs, who identify new ideas and champion them, or carry them through, from ideation to fruition. Peters and Waterman (1982) presented evidence from American companies that showed that product champions play a significant role in developing and implementing new ideas. For example, in one of their studies they found that in a data set of twenty-four cases, of the fifteen that were successful, fourteen involved a clear product

champion. Of the nine failures, just three were champion-led (six either had no champion, or the champion had left early and the project consequently had fallen apart). They also found support for this in Japan. According to these authors, product champions are neither intellectual giants nor dreamers. They are pragmatic and once they identify an idea, their own or someone else's, they doggedly pursue it to the end.

Bhawuk (2001) proposed that in the context of international development projects, donors and recipients needed to identify champions for the projects. He argued that a major reason for the failure of foreign aid projects is the inability of both the donors and the recipients to negotiate who would champion the project. Champions need the support and protection of senior people in the system to carry out activities that may be irregular but necessary to lead the projects to success. A critical aspect of championing a product or project is overseeing it from the beginning to the very end. Since experts are often attached to projects and interventions for a limited time of less than a year to 3 to 5 years, the value of the community or local champion can hardly be overemphasized. It is the local people who are permanently associated with the project and are responsible for sustaining development, and hence it makes sense to choose champions from among them. The experts should play the role of facilitators as mentioned above, and help build the technical skills of the community champions.

A major difference between a product champion and a community project champion would be personality characteristics. James Brian Quinn, a management scholar (quoted in Peters and Waterman, 1982: 206) describes champions as "obnoxious, impatient, egotistic, and perhaps a bit irrational in organizational terms." These qualities seem to characterize managers in individualistic cultures, which are not likely to be universal. The champions of community programs and projects targeting social change would be zealots of change but masters of social and political skills since

development requires changes at many levels and only a politically skilled leader can see them through. They must also be sensitive to cross-cultural differences since they have to often interact with people from different cultures. They could also play the role of local informants for the experts who are new to the community. Like the product champion, project champions need not be intellectual giants or creative people to offer unique solutions; they should have the patience and social skills to communicate new ideas and convince people to carry them out. In a nutshell, these champions are sensitive and skilled politicians committed to change.

### *Defining Problems with the Community*

One of the main roles of social change agents is to bridge theory and practice, educating themselves in theories of community development that have been known to work and then identifying and crafting ideas and methods that would fit the need of the particular community they are working with (Julian, 2006; Spoth & Greenberg, 2005; Snow, 2000; Wandersman, 2003). In order to properly apply the theoretical ideas to specific communities in need, the change agents need to collaborate with community members and become partners in the process rather than work as expert leaders (Trickett & Espino, 2004; Pena & Gallagos, 1997). The ultimate goal of collaboration is not to give community members a voice, but to allow the change agents to understand the problem more completely and to emphasize the value that needs to be placed on local knowledge. Trickett and Espino (2004) state, “the importance of valuing local knowledge represents in part a reaction to the kind of expert knowledge social scientists claim as a result of their carefully controlled work. When the concern is making knowledge socially

useful, however, the issue of where the knowledge is applied becomes central” (p. 11). The commitment to collaboration and the use of local knowledge means that change agents have to create a space for community members to define the problem for themselves and this calls for anchoring the methodologies in the context of the specific community. It is in this phase that the role of facilitator becomes transparent. An expert tells the community what the problem is and what the solution should be based on his or her expert opinion, whereas a social change agent facilitates the discovery of the problems and their solutions in the context of the strengths and resource constraints of the community.

It is important to examine the concept of superordinate goals here as no community can ever take the first step toward change or transformation if its members are not committed to the goals of the program. When two or more parties are involved, superordinate goals are defined as goals that are not achievable by the efforts of a single party (Sherif & Sherif, 1959). Cooperation of all the parties is a necessary condition for achieving these goals. The goals of community development programs or interventions must necessarily be superordinate to both the community members and the change agents for them to be able to work together to accomplish them. Both the parties must be equally accountable to the achievement of these goals. And this can be achieved by following the above procedure where the expert works with the community and helps the community members develop and implement the program. If the community members are not involved, they will lack the motivation to support the project.

A method of enforcing superordinate goals is to evaluate project members from both sides against the same criteria. This is rarely done in community development programs, since usually the experts who come from outside have more power, and they avoid joint responsibility with the community members. It would be useful to install a 360-degree feedback system, where all

stakeholders get to evaluate each other for development rather than for punishing people for making mistakes. A key assumption in carving superordinate goals is that all members have equal access to information. The experts seem to control the information to their personal advantage, and elimination of the information asymmetry between the expert team and the community members is a prerequisite. The key players of the project must have full information about the resources and they should be accountable for its utilization. Setting superordinate goals in this way will engender dual-accountability among the community members and the experts, which is likely to lead to the successful development and implementation of change programs.

### *Using Multiple Methods and Perspectives*

In order to understand a complex community issue, it is best to review it from multiple perspectives, which means that as change agents, we cannot be overly committed to one particular method or viewpoint. It is important to highlight the value of methodological diversity, by understanding that method is only a tool to address the question, and should never automatically define the solution. “The pluralist stance is that traditional scientific approaches (usually quantitative, often experimental) and their alternatives (e.g., qualitative, narrative, post-modern) all have their place and are all to be valued” (Barker & Pistrang, 2005: 202). Because both quantitative and qualitative measures can be used to evaluate community phenomena, it is best if the quantitative measures that have been pre-determined, are informed by the culture and context under study. Social change agents are not immune to pre-conceived notions and cannot be objective; hence *self-exploration is the first step to responsible social change*.

People from different cultural backgrounds view the communities in which they live differently (Dumas, Rollock, Prinz, Hops, & Blechman, 1999; Guarnaccia & Rodriguez, 1996; Cooper & Denner, 1998). While it is the responsibility of social agents to be equipped with scientific tools, it is also their responsibility to be well informed by the participants, regarding their cultural beliefs and viewpoints. Social change agents need to be open to many different methods to accomplish this. One way of extracting this culturally relevant information is via qualitative methods (Stewart, 2000; Banyard & Miller, 1998). Qualitative research methodology allows one to gain insight into the perspectives of the participants, and as a result, the change agent is able to serve the needs of the community as they would themselves define them, not as experts would. Stein and Mankowski (2004) suggest that the process of discovering problems should include asking, witnessing, interpreting and knowing. By following these steps and drawing the participants in the problem definition phase, one is able to reach the research and action goals of the community with them knowing full well what they need and want.

Qualitative measures also help ensure that the cultural differences that exist between researcher and participants are bridged. Grounding research in a mutually created meaning of the problem allows both the change agent and participants to invest in the change that is ahead of them (Wicker, 1987; Hughes & Seidman, 2002). The narratives and meanings invoked through qualitative inquiry allow for a better interpretation of the outcomes of a project and are also useful to inform the other quantitative measures used in the study. Informing quantitative measures using qualitative applications is critical because many times quantitative measures created outside of lived contexts are simply not appropriate (Greenfield, 1997; Marsella, 1998; Stewart, 2000; Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra, 1996). By conducting focus groups, interviews, narrative, storytelling sessions, or using ethnographic techniques (Weisner, 1996), one is able to

get a deeper understanding of the problems, the issues and their probable solutions. Because of the potential change in ideas and goals, it is essential that the social change agents gain an insider's viewpoint of the community when facilitating the development of an effective community program.

### *Conducting Collaborative Implementation*

After obtaining the relevant contextual information and members' perspectives, one needs to collaboratively execute program goals. Often, a compromise between engineering and social science approaches stops the input of the community in defining the problem, and the experts take over the implementation of the solution. It is no surprise that development projects are known to collapse after the experts leave (Bhawuk, 2001), because the community never buys into the implementation of the solution. Much like academic researchers, while working collaboratively and closely with a community project is often difficult for change agents who are working on multiple assignments, it is vital that they stay as connected with the ongoing process as possible (Tharp & Gallimore, 1982; Julian, 2006). Not only will the feedback given by participants and other community members intricately involved in implementation be invaluable to proper execution, it is also important for future implementation efforts (Price & Behrens, 2003; Trickett & Espino, 2004) and theory building. The more social agents share experiences with diverse communities, the better prepared they will be for future work. The involvement in the implementation phase shows that one is passionate about the change process and is willing to stay committed till the end to see the transformation. This highlights the role of the change agent

as an insider rather than a dispassionate outside expert, and by sharing responsibility of program implementation, one cultivates trust and further understanding of community members' perspectives (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Schram, 1997). Furthermore, by remaining involved in the implementation process, one is able to maintain a systems perspective in which sustainable change and future community progress are emphasized. Creating sustainable change is argued to be the goal of empowerment (Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 2000; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2004), which is created by defining the problem in the words and ideas of community members, listening to their stories and life histories, and implementing programs from their standpoint, as discussed above. By empowering, one gives the words and ideas of the community the agency to change.

An important component of whether a community can sustain needed changes, is whether members feel a sense of collective efficacy and hope that their situation can change for the better (Foster-Fishman, Cantillon, Pierce, & Van Egeren, 2007). By empowering their words and stories, obtained through careful qualitative methods and culturally anchored quantitative ones, there is a likelihood that members will feel as though they have been heard and their ideas are central to the ultimate goals of the community program. Following this protocol will help to ensure that members have a stake in the success of the endeavor, which creates a more lasting ideal (Zimmerman, 2000; Stewart, 2000). With community voices elevated, the next procedural step would be to illuminate the goal of system change. A good marriage between a community and the social systems in place to serve it is one of "competent individuals involved in responsive social systems" (Kelly, Ryan, Altman, & Stelzner, 2000). By illuminating the ideas of the community through informed methods and empowerment, one allows to foster community

members' competency and stake in their community's future. This helps create responsive social systems.

Participatory action research fosters a high level of commitment to change from community members and social change agents. When community members become active units of change, the goals of the intervention are that much more likely to be met. Instead of the traditional social engineering approach, which is expert-led, where change agents "lead the pack" toward the goal with little community collaboration, change agents need to be steadfast in their responsibility as cooperative change agents supportive of direct citizen participation (Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). By increasing the responsibility and feeling of control over the particular program, and by implementing participatory interventions, social change agents increase the buy in from the members' point of view and, as a result, are likely to increase the efficacy of the program (Wandersman, 2003; Schorr, 1997). Wandersman and Florin (2000) noted that "participation increases feelings of helpfulness and responsibility and decreases feelings of alienation and anonymity" (p. 247). When this participatory action component is combined with culturally anchored research and empowerment, the renewed confidence and voice of community members is likely to enable them to challenge the status quo and work to change the social systems which will then be able to help even more people. Challenging the efficacy of poor social systems by loaning needed communities an active and participating voice is certainly a valid procedural step in this model of effective community change.

The legacy of participatory research lies with Paulo Freire (1970). The basis of Freire's ideas is a critique of the dominant culture's presumed expertise regarding the social ills of those in other, less dominant, groups (Herr & Anderson, 2005). While Freire's writings were

dominated by the liberation movement happening in Latin America at the time, the tenets of action research, at their core, employ qualitative methodology in order to empower citizens. One of the general characteristics of action research is for the change agent and the community to create new and useful knowledge that can lead to social transformation. The goal of the social change agent is to extract meaning from participants, not only to work to create the best possible intervention that fits their needs, but also to motivate and empower them to focus on the systemic changes needed. Thus, social change not only requires superordinate goals but superordinate implementation procedures.

### *Being a Flexible Change Agent*

Finally, because implementing a community program involves so many stakeholders, it is important to be flexible all the time, from problem definition to solution implementation, to accommodate a variety of opinions as well as the changing circumstances of the community involved. Sarason (2003) notes, “an intervention is an exercise in diplomacy, which is the art of compromise based on the recognition that each of the parties cannot have it all its way” (p. 211). Sarason (2003) points out that if there are a number of people involved in implementing a community program, then all those with opposing ideas from that of the change agent must still be considered and understood. Along with creating the program based on the community’s definition, there are bound to be members who disagree and have the right to be heard. Retaining one’s own flexibility in construction and evaluation is fundamental to make sure that

the community needs are met over the length of one's time working with them (Tharp & Gallimore, 1982).

It is perhaps being inflexible to suggest a specific protocol for community development work. Since each community is different and requires a different approach to solutions, points two, three and four discussed above will be influenced by the fifth point—flexibility will be needed in problem and solution definition as well as implementation of the solution. And no project of social change can make any progress if the facilitator is not passionate about the issues, and deeply concerned about the wellbeing of the community, which was the first point we discussed. Empowerment, participatory action and the unique and culturally anchored mixed methods that promote their inception are ways to ensure that we are properly representing community members and staying flexible to their desires. Working as community scientists forces us to juggle our lives as objective change agents and passionate and humanistic members of a community in which we locate ourselves, and while this is, at times, a difficult task, it creates an opportunity to be a living bridge between people and ideas. Social change agents cannot afford to be expert engineers talking down to people and communities, and they have to evolve into becoming passionate community members who can lead the people to identify their own needs and ways to meet those needs, for the best leader is one who is not missed by the empowered community.

Bhawuk (2001) presented a template for effective international development project negotiation that seems to be equally applicable for developing any community project. He used the metaphor of a suspension bridge, and suggested that superordinate goals and champions constituted the two pillars necessary to construct the bridge to build a development project. We saw in the above discussion that these two constructs are embedded in the five-step process. Thus, developing

superordinate goals and finding and nurturing community champions would be two other criteria that would help go beyond social engineering toward community transformation. It should be noted that principles of collaborative participation and empowerment are also at the core of the model.

### **Three Cases Supporting the Model: The Community and the Change Agent**

Exemplar programs that have used the above procedure or some variation of the ideas included in them to help transform a community are available all over the world. Mohatt, Hazel, Allen, Stachelrodt, Hensel, and Fath (2004) reported a community psychology intervention program in Alaska that successfully used most of the above principles. In the following, three case studies are presented to demonstrate the applicability of the model to community transformation. These three organizations and the change agents who were instrumental in starting them are Dr. Kurien of Amul in India, Dr. Yunus of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and Father Don Jose Maria of Mondragon in Spain. These cases are from two continents—Asia and Europe, are spread over three industries—agriculture, banking, and manufacturing, and cover farmers, micro-entrepreneurs, and people with technical skills, thus allowing for the potential implementation of the protocols across cultures and industries.

*Amul and Dr. Kurien*

Amul (Anand Milk-producers Union Limited) is a name known to all Indians, which is an exemplar cooperative demonstrating the value of community participation in change management. Amul was organized as a cooperative by Mr. Tribhuvan Das Patel in 1946, and he invited Dr. Kurien to lead the cooperative in 1949. Amul has more than 2.6 million members who are involved in milk production in Gujarat and its annual turnover is over US\$1 billion. Amul started the “white revolution,” and has led India to be the largest milk producer in the world, collecting 6.5 million liters of milk every day from some 12,800 village cooperative societies in Gujarat. It has 13 district dairy unions where milk is stored and processed and milk products are manufactured.<sup>3</sup>

### *Being an Embedded and Passionate Facilitator*

Dr. Kurien is known as the “father of the White Revolution” and the “Milkman of India.” In 1946, milk distribution in Bombay was monopolized by Polsons Dairy, a British company. Polsons had a monopoly and it forced dairy farmers to sell their milk, a perishable product, at a price that was extremely small compared to the final selling price. Hence, Amul was born as a protest to this practice. Dr. Kurien later described that “Amul’s birth was thus a harbinger of the economic independence of our farmer brethren. Amul’s mission was the development of farmers, nutrition to the nation, and heart in heart, the real development of India” (Kurien, 2001). The choice of the word “farmer brethren” is not merely cultural and is indicative of the community that Amul has been from the start.

Dr. Kurien described his humble beginnings in the town of Anand in 1949, “a dusty small town of 10,000 people,” which was anything but pleasant. He narrated his story in an interview (Roger, 2007): “I was compelled to come here because my education was paid for by the government, then British government. Therefore, my obligation to the British government was transferred to the Indian government. So I was sent to Anand. People were not modern. Road, communication, everything was bad. There was no bathroom. Three corrugated sheets made my bathroom. That is how I started.” He could not find a decent rental place because he was “Christian, and outsider, and above all a bachelor.” So he lived in the garage of the dairy plant. He had to construct his own lavatory. He lived in the same modest condition as that of the community he represented. But he stayed back because of the warmth he received from the farmers. And he states, *“It is here that I found myself, and I am glad that I stayed here.”* The world-renowned social entrepreneur who created a world-class organization, and led India to become the largest milk producer in the world in his senior year claims to have found himself in Anand. This shows the power of mutual transformation. *When a change agent stays committed to the community, the transformation is bidirectional, and the change agent transforms with the community.*

It is plausible that the farmers could relate to him as he was no different from them in his living conditions despite his elitist education. In the interview, he further noted: “I could have gotten a high paying salary in a city. But I could not have received the warmth, affection, and the love of the people that I worked with, and people for whom I worked in those environments.”

## *Defining Problems with the Community*

Some argued that Amul's "system which involves participation of people on such a large magnitude does not confine itself to an isolated sector. The ripples of its turbulence affect other areas of the society as well."<sup>4</sup> This is certainly true and Amul has impacted the transformation of the Indian communities in many ways. For example, Indians are drinking three to four times more milk than they did four decades ago. This has immeasurable impact on the health, nutrition, and life expectancy of the Indian population.<sup>5</sup>

However, the greatest impacts were experienced by the villages that participated in the Amul program. Dr. Kurien described in an interview how Amul has effected social change at the village level in multiple ways (Roger, 2007). For example, people stand in line to deliver their milk without trying to take short cuts. They do not complain if they have to stand behind an untouchable in the line. Hence, the cooperative has thus given a deathblow to the caste system in its own way. Another example is that Amul provided women an opportunity to have a voice in the "home economy" as they are the major participants in the program.<sup>6</sup>

In an interview, Dr. Kurien had remarked that there was no way to replicate Tribhuvan Das Patel, the farmer leader who started the cooperative in 1946. However managers like himself could be developed through education and training. Thus, recognizing the importance of both managerial professionalism and the specific challenges of rural management, Dr. Kurien advocated the creation of the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA) to train young aspirants to become professional rural managers. One of its main missions is to "educate a new breed of professional rural managers having appropriate values and ethos to help rural organizations and institutions in professionalising their management and empower rural people

through self-sustaining processes.”<sup>7</sup> Community building requires allowing leaders to emerge from the community who understand the needs of the community. This is not to downplay the role of the expert, which clearly in this partnership is represented by Dr. Kurien, a mechanical engineer by training.

### *Using Multiple Methods and Perspectives*

Amul has many times gone against the expert wisdom, and yet succeeded because of its willingness to try multiple methods and perspectives. Dr. Kurien related that, “in the early days of Kaira Union there was no dearth of cynics. Could natives handle sophisticated dairy equipment? Could Western-style milk products be processed from buffalo milk? Could a humble farmers’ cooperative market butter and cheese to sophisticated urban consumers? The Amul team—farmers and professionals—confounded the cynics by processing a variety of high-grade dairy products, several of them for the first time from buffalo milk, and marketing them nationally against tough competition” (Kurien, 2001).

Amul has not only installed more than 4000 Automatic Milk Collection System Units (AMCUS)<sup>8</sup> at the level of Village Societies, but also proved the cynics wrong by successfully producing powder milk from buffalo milk. In fact, in 2005, the total annual production of milk product from buffalo milk was higher than cow’s milk and its contribution in terms of financial value was twice as large as the contribution of cow’s milk.<sup>9</sup> This is despite the fact that many years ago the expert from New Zealand advised Dr. Kurien that they should not try to make powder milk from buffalo milk because it would not work. Amul went ahead and did it and now

makes more powder milk than New Zealand and is the largest producer of milk in the world (Roger, 2007).

### *Conducting Collaborative Implementation*

Dr. Kurien is a true believer of collaborative implementation. Between 1970 and 1996, he established a national dairy program popularly known as “Operation Flood.” Through this program, he made possible for dairy farmers to own and operate milk production in urban areas of India. Not only was this program a huge success that helped dairy farmers to improve their financial well-being, it also contributed to the improvement of the infrastructure of rural areas that were involved in it.

Endowed with decision-making capacities, some leaders in cooperative-member communities have built facilities like libraries and healthcare centers with their profits. The success of the Operation Flood management model led to its application to other commodities. Fruits and vegetables are now produced and marketed through a cooperative system involving a network of over 250 farmer-owned retail stores in Delhi.<sup>10</sup>

When Dr. Kurien was awarded the World Food Prize in 1989, Dr. Norman Borlaugh, the founder of World Food Prize honored Dr. Kurien as “one of the world’s great agricultural leaders of this century” for his dedication “to streamlining management and distribution strategies with the

skills and knowledge of rural and small-scale producers.”<sup>11</sup> Hence, what Dr. Kurien achieved in Amul was not a scientific discovery but rather a result of working closely with the dairy farmers.

### *Being a Flexible Change Agent*

As proposed in the model above, the experts have to be passionately involved, yet be flexible in allowing the community to take its own course, sometimes painfully slowly, to decide how they would like to develop. *Community transformation is a slow process and cannot be managed like profit-oriented organizations that are hungry for quarterly growth.* Dr. Kurien faced an uphill task in the initial years of Amul, but he was flexible to seek remedies. For example, the rapid growth of the Amul movement resulted in overcapacity of milk in winter months when the production of milk was on average 2.5 times higher than other months. Farmers again were forced to sell at lower rate to middlemen. Dr. Kurien among others sought the assistance from the Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI) in Mysore to produce baby food and cheese from buffalo milk. This was the world’s first commercial cheese and baby food production from buffalo milk.<sup>12</sup> His skillful handling of challenges and moving forward earned him the praise of Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri on many occasions in the sixties, and he commended his "extraordinary and dynamic leadership."<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Kurien’s flexibility to learn and adapt is still evident after more than five decades. He remarked, “In Amul we have a commitment to total quality. But, occasionally, we may make a mistake—or, our customer may think we’ve made a mistake, and the customer, as they say, is always right. That is why, for Amul, every customer complaint must be heard—not just listened

to. And, every customer complaint must be rectified to the extent humanly possible” (Kurien, 2001).

In an interview, his daughter, Nirmala Kurien said, “Nelson Mandela wrote in his autobiography that if a person has a very good mind, and a very good heart, the person is unsurpassable. And my father has both those qualities. (...) He is very passionate about India and what India can do, and what India will be.” When asked, as a man who has become a legend in his lifetime, how he would like to be remembered in history he remarked, “As a man who tried his best to improve the living standard of the milk producers of India. Most of whom are small farmers, marginal farmers, and landless laborers. So I was able to help in my own way to raise the living standard of the poor. That is how I would like to be remembered.” Again, we find that the identity of the change agent has merged with the community.

### **Dr. Muhammad Yunus & Grameen Bank**

Dr. Muhammad Yunus is an exemplar social entrepreneur, and has eloquently argued that access to capital is a fundamental human right (Hertz-Bunzl, 2006). He has created a community where this fundamental right is guaranteed by members of the community rather than by the goodness of heart of donor countries or the World Bank. He created the Grameen Bank in 1976, which literally means a village bank. Grameen Bank has since reached nearly 7.34 million borrowers of which 97 percent are women and 50 percent of them have successfully crossed the poverty line (Ford, 2007).<sup>14</sup> Counting an average of 6 people in a family, one could say that

Grameen Bank has directly benefited more than 42 million people in Bangladesh, accounting for nearly a third of the population of the country.

When Dr. Muhammad Yunus, winner of Nobel Peace Prize for 2006, started in 1976 a Bank Project with a unique service for the poor of Bangladesh, loan without collateral, he clearly understood the need of the community. People who came to borrow from him had nothing of value to give in collateral, and therefore could never qualify to get a loan from a traditional bank. In 1983 he created the Grameen Bank, which stands for a new idea, micro-credit, and serves more than five million people, who have started small businesses or services. The bank is owned by the borrowers, and they own 94 percent of the equity of the bank (6 percent is government owned). Today Grameen Bank has transformed into a family of services including Grameen Trust, Grameen Fund, Grameen Fisheries, Grameen Telecom, Grameen Shakti, Grameen Phone, Grameen Education, Grameen Knitwear, Grameen Solutions, and so forth.

The success of Grameen Bank has caught worldwide attention and Grameen's model has been replicated in various countries (Ferguson, 2007). The Good Faith Fund in the United States and the Amanah Ikhtiar in Malaysia (Ikhtiar Trust of Malaysia) are some examples (Auwal, 1994). An analysis of Dr. Yunus' effort shows that rather than solving the credit problem in a banking sense as a technical expert, he led the community, intuitively and naturally adopting the five principles of social change stated above, to a transformation that has become an exemplar in its own right. In what follows we discuss how the five principles of community transformation seem to get validation from the work of Dr. Yunus.

### *Being an Embedded and Passionate Facilitator*

Yunus is the “the father of microcredit,” which refers to giving small loans to people who would never qualify for it under the most generous of procedures adopted by a commercial or development bank. Following this unique idea, which emerged out of necessity in Bangladesh, he is become today one of world’s best known social entrepreneurs (Hertz-Bunzl, 2006). Yunus has created a system where every applicant acts as collateral for each other, every applicant automatically becomes a stockholder of the bank and their voices are represented in Grameen’s decision-making processes. This system supports the emergence of local champions, and is a part of Grameen’s “standard operating procedure.” Applicants are expected to be responsible and accountable for their well-being, the well-being of their peers and the well-being of Grameen Bank.

By creating champions, Grameen becomes a facilitator of change rather than an organization that carries out the change by itself. Grameen Bank does not allow the poor to become dependent on it, but acts as a catalyst to help them overcome poverty on their own. Hence, Grameen Bank does not operate as a welfare organization but as a truly profit seeking organization. The interest rate charged by Grameen Bank is 5 percent higher than what would be offered by the commercial banks in Bangladesh (Auwal, 1996). This is quite paradoxical but Grameen’s rationale is that a higher interest rate is needed to effectively serve the population that has been neglected by the commercial banks. For example, Grameen believes in visiting potential loan applicants rather than waiting for them to come to the bank. This seems like an inefficient and expensive process but has counter-intuitively been effective in addressing poverty. Giving loans to beggars to sell popular consumer items is another example that many

commercial or government banks in any part of the world could not even think about. However, by providing a loan of USD \$10 Grameen has successfully transformed many beggars from being “losers” and a burden on the society to becoming self-supporting “champions” controlling their own well-being.

Grameen has demonstrated that it is possible to remain a facilitator even in emergency situations that often call for leaders to take control and direct rather than allow the community to take charge and manage the crisis. In 1998, when Bangladesh had one of the worst floods that destroyed the economic base of a large population; Grameen took a massive initiative in providing new loans, deferring old loans and providing basic relief goods for people impacted by the flood. This was consistent with Grameen’s policy of charging fee for the services they provide for victims of natural disasters and calamities. Though all these efforts were done in a truly humane spirit, all of them were accounted for accurately on a commercial basis and none was written-off. Yunus remarked that “if you give it free, like the oral saline solutions, they will waste it away,” and he responded to the critics by arguing that “Grameen Bank is the people’s bank, it has to protect its interest for the people who own it, to the point of charging those same people for relief services extended to them.” He further argued “that is what makes the bank stable and prosperous: The people who own it.”<sup>15</sup>

### *Defining Problems with the Community*

Grameen approached poverty reduction from an “action research” perspective (Auwal, 1996), which emphasizes understanding the environment being studied. Hence, Grameen’s

approach embeds it in the community. New employees, for example, are required to stay in a village for a year and are asked to actively participate and learn reflectively from Grameen's approach to poverty issues and their alleviation, which are often emergent in nature (Auwal, 1996). Grameen recognizes that poverty is not necessarily a result of illiteracy but rather a result of inaccessibility to capital. Hence, the thrust of Grameen's approach rests on the belief that the poor have adequate 'survival skills' to compete in the capitalistic world provided they can obtain capital (Yunus, 1987). Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has noted that Grameen's approach is as much in line with Adam Smith and Peter Bauer's notion that the poor can compete in capitalistic world provided they have adequate institutional support (Sen, 2005).

Realizing that poverty is not an isolated issue from the overall social development, Grameen worked collaboratively with the poor in developing what is popularly known as "*Sixteen Decisions.*" Among others, these "sixteen decisions" are hoped to address the need for the poor to raise their social, cultural and political consciousness. For example, the practice of dowry that is prevalent in Bangladesh is not only morally wrong but also perpetuates the cycle of debt and poverty. Hence, one of the sixteen decisions requires every borrower to commit against the dowry system by stating—"We shall not take any dowry at our sons' weddings; neither shall we give any dowry at our daughters wedding. We shall keep our centre free from the curse of dowry. We shall not practice child marriage."<sup>16</sup> The "sixteen decisions" are in a way a binding contractual agreement between the bank and the poor, which is monitored by the community not the bank.

## *Using Multiple Methods and Perspectives*

Dr. Yunus and Grameen champion multiple methods and perspectives both to understand the problems of the poor as well as to generate solutions for the poor. These approaches include the need for Grameen to be in the field. Scholars have noted that Grameen is successful in reducing poverty in Bangladesh because it combines both informational and communicational approaches. Integrating these two approaches, Grameen has leveraged the creativity of its employees as well as clients (Auwal, 1996).

Yunus tells how he started Grameen, which illustrates the value of using multiple methods:

“It made me realize that, whatever I had learned, whatever I was teaching, was all make-believe; it had no meaning for people's lives. I traveled around the village and talked with its people. Soon, all my academic arrogance disappeared. I realized that, as an academic, I wasn't really solving global problems; I wasn't even solving national problems. I decided to abandon my bird's eye view of the world, which allowed me to look at problems from above, from my ivory tower in the sky. I assumed, instead, the worm's-eye view and tried to probe whatever came right in front of me—smelling it, touching it, seeing if I could do something to improve it. Trying to involve myself in whatever capacity I could, I learned many things in my travels (Yunus, 1997; p.1).”

What Dr. Yunus calls a worm's-eye view can be viewed as a metaphor for an alternate methodology. After all he was open to accept that his bird's-eye methodology was of no help, and was willing to adopt a new approach where he was embedded in the community he was trying to help, and he could smell and touch the change he was trying to make.

### *Conducting Collaborative Implementation*

All the borrowers automatically gain the status of Grameen's stockholder. They are represented in the decision-making processes at the board level. By involving the poor and often uneducated in the decision making process Grameen has continued to collaborate and also involve the community members in the implementation of all their programs. It demonstrates that the poor also have wisdom and competence to take care of their needs. All they need is the opportunity, and Dr. Yunus and Grameen have provided such opportunities in an environment of support (Auwal, 1996).

Grameen's solidarity group approach (Dana & France, 1996) in where they ask each borrower to form a group of five of similar needs and backgrounds and delegate the repayment responsibility to the group is not only culturally appropriate but also provides the borrowers an opportunity to collaborate with each other. Hence, not only Grameen collaborates with the borrowers to generate solutions but also encourages the borrowers themselves to collaborate with each other for their individual and collective success (Bhattacharyya, 2004), leading to the transformation of the community. These collaborative engagements also raise the level of the borrower's engagement, commitment and pride in Grameen, which is reflected in many ways.

For example, when Dr. Yunus was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, nine women from the villages accompanied him to Oslo and millions of borrowers were glued to their TV sets watching the award ceremony. There was a feeling of euphoria among the 7 million borrowers-cum-owners.<sup>17</sup>

### *Being a Flexible Change Agent*

Grameen's approach of decentralization, flat-bottomed structure and collaboration with the borrowers allows the organization to be responsive to the changing and emergent needs of the poor. It also allows for assessing and anticipating such needs (Auwal, 1996). The quote below is a testimony for the change agent to be flexible, and Dr. Yunus states in his own words how he took one step at a time, without doing much sophisticated analysis that is known to lead experts to paralysis. Dr. Yunus and Grameen illustrate the value of allowing the solutions to emerge from the context naturally rather than imposing prefabricated solutions:

“Let us not expect that a social business enterprise will come up, from its very birth, with all the answers to a social problem. Most likely, it will proceed in steps. Each step may lead to the next level of achievement. Grameen Bank is a good example in this regard. In creating Grameen Bank I never had a blue-print to follow. I moved one step at a time, always thinking this step will be my last step. But it was not. That one step led me to another step, a step which looked so

interesting that it was difficult to walk away from. I faced this situation at every turn.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Don Jose Maria and Mondragon**

Based in Basque Country, Spain, Mondragon Corporación Cooperativa (MCC) is one of the world’s best known worker cooperatives (Thomas & Logan, 1982). The success of Mondragon Cooperative Corporation (Whyte & Whyte, 1991; Morrison, 1991; Thomas & Logan, 1982) is an example of building a community through economic activities based on democratic principles of participation and one person one vote, unlike the stockholder system where one person can have more say than hundreds of people because they have invested more money.

Starting from scratch, five young engineers founded Mondragon in 1956 with inspiration and guidance from a priest, Don Jose Maria. Today, it has expanded its operation over 10 countries, employs more than 80,000 workers, has wide ranging portfolios in manufacturing, finance, distribution, research and training, and is twice as profitable as any other Spanish corporations.<sup>19</sup> Don Jose Maria never occupied any executive position, but still played a key role in the success of Mondragon:

“With some projects it is almost impossible to identify the single spark which lit the flame, often because such a spark simply does not exist. In this case, however, the writing is on the wall and even those of us who were not lucky enough to have played an active role in the group’s initial development can clearly see that Father

José María was indeed the fundamental driving force behind the whole experience.”<sup>20</sup>

### *Being an Embedded and Passionate Facilitator*

Don Jose Maria never had a plan to be at Mondragon and tried to persuade his superior to allow him to pursue a graduate degree in sociology at the University of Leuven in Belgium. His superior, however, refused and he ended up in Mondragon, a town of 8000 people known for its poor economic condition (Russell & Rus, 1991). He took the new responsibility seriously, and considered himself as a teacher rather than a preacher. He often went beyond his normal pastoral duties to engage the local community in the discussion of local issues (Russell & Rus, 1991).

The desperate economic and social situation in the community inspired him to build Mondragon economically and socially. A strong advocate of “knowledge is power and that people must raise themselves by their own efforts,”<sup>21</sup> he established a technical school as a vehicle to overcome Mondragon’s social and economic challenges (Miller, 1996). In 1956, when five young engineers who were his former students approached him for the possibility of setting up Ulgor (a kerosene stove factory) in Mondragon to help build Mondragon’s economy, he was eager to help. During the next 20 years, he was instrumental in ensuring that the economic activities were embedded in the principle of human dignity, democratic cooperation, solidarity and the importance of knowledge (Miller, 1996). He was often criticized for mixing religion and worldliness, and his response was—“If the Gospel does not apply to the economy, then to what does it apply” (Vincec & MacLeod, 1996: 23).

Don Jose Maria's passion for Mondragon sometimes put him in difficult situations. For example, realizing that Mondragon desperately needed a financial arm and failing to get the attention of his associates, he forged two signatures of the founders of Ulgor to obtain approval from the government to establish a co-operative bank (Caja). His credibility did not diminish because his intention was only to help the cooperative, and so two of the founders of Ulgor did lead the bank, which is perhaps the most important arm of the Mondragon enterprise today (Russell & Rus, 1991).

### *Defining Problems with the Community*

When Don Jose Maria first arrived in Mondragon, he noticed that emigration of youths due to the lack of employment opportunities in Mondragon was a serious problem. He felt the future of the Mondragon community would be bleak if the youths left the community, and so working closely with blue-collar youths and their parents (Russell & Rus, 1991), he established a technical school to help Mondragon's youth to acquire necessary skills to be more employable in Mondragon.<sup>22</sup> His approach of working closely with the community and defining problems with them was also evident in Mondragon's (MCC) core principles. For example, every cooperative needs to operate on the basis of participative management and has social responsibility (Clark, 2004). The cooperatives are open to self-criticism, hold open discussions, and work closely with the political and economic realities of Spain (Russell & Rus, 1991). Don Jose Maria's approach of defining and solving problems with the community is also evidenced by the fact that he leveraged the cultural aspect of the Mondragon community. As the Mondragon culture valued

solidarity and teamwork, he successfully transformed those practices in Mondragon's (MCC) daily operations (Whyte & Whyte, 1991).

### *Using Multiple Methods and Perspectives*

Don Jose Maria is a keen believer of "testing ideas in the real world" (Vincec & MacLeod, 1996: 23). His belief was deeply influenced by the motto "See, judge and act" of the Young Christian Worker's movement in which he was actively involved (Vincec & MacLeod, 1996: 23). Though he valued and taught the Church teaching, he found them to be too abstract for direct application in real life. His deep conviction that ideas need to be tested led him to experiment with some of the dominant thinking and assumptions of economic and social order. Specifically, he challenged Emmanuel Mounier's assumption that humanistic cooperative business could not succeed in capitalist markets. Through Mondragon's (MCC) success of infusing capitalist managerial technique in humanistic cooperatives, he proved Mounier to be wrong (Vincec & MacLeod, 1996; Guillé, 2001).

He believed that ideas can be refined by listening to people with openness, debating on them, and trying them out. These values are deeply embedded in Mondragon's culture. In fact, Mondragon has a dedicated organization (EZAI) with the sole purpose of promoting research into public policies (Mondragon Corporation Cooperativa, 2006). His emphasis on practicality and striving for multiple perspectives are also evident in Mondragon's organizational structure and how decisions are made. It uses a Governing Council and a Social Council; the first is responsible for managing tasks and profitability and the second for concerns about people (Heller, Pusic, Strauss & Wilpert, 1998). The Social Council functions much like the

employees' union and the Governing Council like management, and differences that cannot be negotiated are resolved at the annual general meetings through the democratic principle of voting on unresolved issues (Whyte & Whyte, 1991).

### *Conducting Collaborative Implementation*

Mondragon puts social development at the core of economic development goals (Shipp, 1996), and collaboration with the community is its standard operating procedure. It is noted in Don Jose Maria's written reflection—"The self-managed society will be that in which all of us, with our education and willingness to participate, are able to realize accomplishments [Reflection, 20:57]" (Herrera, 2004). This is also clearly reflected in Mondragon's notion of "joint self-employment" (Lutz, 1993). What this means is that every employee is a co-owner and responsible for collective goals. This is true not only within Mondragon's cooperatives and between Mondragon's cooperatives but also between Mondragon and the community they serve. Shipp (1996) argued that the ability to foster cooperative entrepreneurship and striving for collective economic advancements are some of the unique characteristics that contributed to Mondragon's success. Community psychologists have also argued that Mondragon (MCC) is an exemplar of how "empowerment outcomes at the community level of analysis are expressed in multiple empowered organizations within a community and collaboration across multiple sectors within a community. Ideally, communities of this sort provide multiple opportunities for their citizens to participate and shape community life" (Speer & Hughey, 1995).

### *Being a Flexible Change Agent*

Though Don Jose Maria failed many times in his effort of transforming Mondragon's community, he was persistent and flexible enough to accommodate different strategies. For example, when he failed to convince the "Unión Cerrajera to open its apprentice school, he organized the community to create the Escuela Politécnica Profesional for training young boys in industrial skills" (Russell & Rus, 1991: 66). Don Jose Maria's flexibility is well reflected in how Mondragon adapted its business strategy to the changing external environment. It also constantly invested in technology and worker skills (Guillé, 2001). For example, changing the ratio of flat wage structures from 1:3 to 1:6 (the highest salary is not more than 6 times of the lowest salary) is an example where Mondragon (MCC) adapted to the capitalist ideology (Guillé, 2001). Another example is when Mondragon formulated an option for non-members who work for Mondragon's publicly listed companies to participate in the ownership and management of their organization.<sup>23</sup>

Mondragon's ability to be a flexible change agent is well described by Kanter (1972: 133) and Stryjan (1989: 43). Kanter noted that Mondragon "developed their communities by stages.... Members often made choices at each step of the way. ... The full organization grew out of a series of smaller steps and built on existing commitment as the base for generating more commitment." This was echoed later by Stryjan who noted that Mondragon has "in fact, evolved gradually, nearly accidentally, in a succession of organizational choices and changes and not as a realization of a preconceived plan."

## **Discussion**

We started the article by discussing the paradigm used by engineers in solving problems and suggested that this paradigm was limited in solving human problems by virtue of being mechanistic and thus leading problem solving through legislation and procedural changes, often coming from experts who are unaware of the issues the community faces. Critics of the social engineering approach to institution building have faulted this approach from the outset as static, a priori, and unoriented (Siffin, 1972; Ganesh, 1980). In contrast to the social engineering approach, the protocol presented above recommends empowering the community to define and solve the problems in their own terms, using their own language and community expertise. The three cases we presented support the idea that when people in a community come together, they transform not only their own lives but also those of the many other community members they interact with, and their unsophisticated ideas far bedazzle the solutions proposed by experts.

It should be noted that Grameen and Mondragon have both instituted collaborative participation as their standard operating procedure. Though it is not clear if participation is a part of Amul's operating procedure, their operation clearly demonstrates collaborative participation. It should also be noted that in all these organizations, the founders acted in more ways than the traditional sense of being facilitators, and were deeply involved in making many major decisions with the community. They demonstrated that collaborative participation includes the social change agent and it is expected that the change agent will work in the community as a community member, rather than a distant observer—a social change agent is not

a catalyst that leaves the chemical reaction unchanged but rather is also transformed in the process.

This article has implications for institution building in that it invites researchers and practitioners to shift the focus from one approach to another. Instead of “planning, structuring and guidance of new or reconstructed organizations” (Esman, 1972: 22), which is driven by the creation of an organization as a tool to bring about change in the society, it recommends allowing people in the community to define their need in their own words and to find their own solutions, however unsophisticated it may look to the trained experts. To think that organizations that would “embody changes in value, functions, physical and/or social technologies” (Esman, 1972: 22) can be created in a planned manner might have been in the zeitgeist of the 1960s and 1970s, but the dismal performance of development projects all over the world in the developing countries clearly speaks to the failure of this top-down scientific management (Taylor, 1911) approach to institution building. New organizations of change cannot be fashioned by social architects and engineers in their design office unless the community is involved in defining, designing, and implementing the changes on their own terms, at their own pace. To quote Kaplan (2002), “In order to be involved in, or be a guide to, the transforming of the present into a future state—the essence of our work—one must have the skill to do this in such a way that the object with which one is working is not violated, but is transformed according to its own laws” (p. 140). Thus, a shift can be noted in the community of experts that support Community-Driven Development or CDD that is founded on the basic principle of empowerment (Esman, 2003), which is closer to the protocol presented above.

An important lesson from this analysis pertains to the operation of NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and INGOs (international NGOs) in capacity building and helping

the needy people. These organizations often work in the social engineering paradigm where they raise funds from donors who are committed to serving a cause, be it saving the children, saving the environment, alleviating poverty, or helping fight injustice, and hire experts to go and carry out projects in different parts of the world. NGOs and INGOs work as brokers who match the donor and the receiver, and never build a community that can help itself in perpetuity. If these organizations were to leave the social engineering paradigm and adopt community transformation, they would be able to help the global community better. It is plausible that if a community developed in one part of the world that learned to save their children, then this community could replicate itself in other parts of the world, and permanently resolve the problems facing orphans and other needy children. Clearly, social engineering has limited success in bringing about social change, and there is a need to move toward the community transformation paradigm.

All three cases highlight the importance of finding culturally appropriate solutions, in defining the needs of the community, measuring the variables of interest, exploring alternative solutions, and implementing the chosen solution. They also demonstrate that social transformation follows a meandering path rather than an engineered blueprint. None of these communities started with an equivalent of a Marshall Plan (European Recovery Plan), but evolved one step at a time, often fortuitously and what they have been able to achieve competes with some of the largest planned interventions including the Marshall Plan. Mondragon has achieved much more than what the Marshall Plan was able to achieve in Europe. Similarly, the Bhakra Nangal Dam (built over 25 years from 1948 to 1963), which was praised by Late Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru as the “New Temple of Resurgent India,” does not compete with Amul and

its contributions to the nation. And no effort in Bangladesh comes closer to the impact that Grameen has been able to effect through transformation of the lives of poor people.

The three exemplars that we presented in the article stand for three basic human rights—Right to Livelihood (Amul), Right to Credit (Grameen) and Right to Employment (Mondragon). Basic human rights like these are the need of the people at the Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP) (term coined by Prahalad & Hart 1998, to capture the vast worldwide population that earns less than US\$ 2.00 per day), and the way to serve them is not necessarily to sell a product to them, but to partner with them and to empower them, so that they can become experts in their own small local area and lead people around them to become self-sufficient. It is about social transformation, and economic development is an emergent outcome of such a transformation. Other such human rights could include right to live, right to health, women’s right to live as they choose to, right to good environment, right to ethnic identity, right to live without humiliation, right to practice one’s religion, and so forth, and it seems that only social transformation can lead people to secure these rights.

The three case studies show that the five principles identified in this article—the need for the change agent to be embedded in the community as a passionate facilitator of transformation, defining the problem from the perspective of the community, using multiple methods to measure the problem, collaborating during implementation and being flexible to change at anytime—are found to be useful across cultures. These principles are likely to be true for community transformation in developed countries as well, especially where community building rather than developing an organization for some stated objective, for profit or otherwise, is the goal. However, these cases provide evidence that, at the operational level, culture has a significant role to play and these principles will need to be adapted to the local ethos to be relevant. In the case

of AMUL, we find that despite the norm rather than attitude driven collectivist culture in India (Triandis & Bhawuk, 1997) AMUL was able to drop the trappings of the caste system and cultivate the queue system at the milk collection centers where people stood in line without paying attention to whether the person next to him or her was an untouchable. Grameen has adopted the group approach (Dana & France, 1996) where each borrower is asked to form a team of five people of similar needs and backgrounds. This approach delegates the moral responsibility of repayment<sup>24</sup> to the group and by so doing not only takes advantage of the in-group cohesion found in collectivist cultures (Triandis & Bhawuk, 1997) but also provides the borrowers an opportunity to both expand the constitution of their in-group and work in the comfort of their in-group members. Finally, Don Jose Maria successfully adopted solidarity and teamwork practices that are valued in Spain's culture in Mondragon's (MCC) daily operations (Whyte & Whyte, 1991) by allowing the voice of workers in the shaping of the policy of the organization. Thus, it is clear that in all three cases, collectivist practices of valuing in-group have been used in unique ways to transform the community to cultivate new values that serve both the community and the individuals. It seems that a culturally appropriate solution can always be found to even challenge values that need to be changed (e.g., the caste system in India) for development initiatives to be sustainable (Dale, Ling & Newman, 2008).

Across cultures, these three cases also show that the change agents for sustainable transformation cannot be short-term visitors and have to spend their entire life working with the community. Dr. Kurien, Dr. Yunus and Father Maria gave undivided time and attention to their organizations. Grameen Bank and Mondragon started with the personal visions of Dr. Yunus and Father Maria, whereas Kurien nurtured AMUL on the vision provided by Tribhuvan Das Patel. In all three cases, it is clear that the change agents were totally committed to the transformation of the community and the organizations emerged as a tool toward achieving that objective. We also

find that the change agents were not self-promoting leaders but cause-promoting crusaders—Dr. Kurien championed the “Right to Livelihood,” Dr. Yunus championed the “Right to Credit” and Father Maria championed the “Right to Employment.” Recent incidents of corruption in multinationals and financial scandals in profit and not-for-profit organizations alike indicate that we have leaders who are more interested in hijacking the organizations for their personal goals rather than steering them toward sustainable transformation of the community. Thus, as supported by the three cases, community transformation seems to require leaders to provide both vision and long-term operational support by being embedded in the community irrespective of cultural differences.

This article shows that in the implementation phase of any interventions, it is important that the change agent become an insider rather than a dispassionate external observer. Being an insider does not mean that the change agent will lose his or her objectivity. Instead, by being an insider, the change agent can contribute to the understanding of the issues with the necessary subjectivity, which will help him or her to implement solutions that are culturally appropriate. An insider change agent is similar to an anthropologist studying a culture, the difference being that the change agent uses his or her insights to transform the community with the full involvement of the community. Some of these transformations would require cultural changes, but since the community and the change agent would jointly identify them, it would be both ethical and easy to carry out the implementation.

The five principles demonstrated in this study have four important implications for transformations that are sustainable. First, the three case studies show that learning is bi-directional in that both the agents of change and the communities learn in the process of transforming the community. This social learning, which has been argued as central to non-

coercion (Ison, Röling, & Watson, 2007), is important for sustainable development as it makes the change process spontaneous because learning is implicitly motivating and self-propelled and inherently incremental. Social learning also contributes to the learning of the community at the collective level, akin to what has been referred to as organizational learning. Thus, following these five principles creates a learning community, which fires up the transformation process that continues to grow to meet the changing needs of the community.

Second, the three case studies show that sustainable transformations can only be successful when innovative solutions are culturally appropriate, which is often the case when they are derived from the communities. In other words, communities themselves serve as a capital (Callaghan & Colton, 2008) for solutions needed for their transformation. Thus, importing “best practices” must be done cautiously, since they can become a liability if special attention is not given to adapting them to fit the cultural ethos, and may in the long-run hurt rather than help sustainability.

Third, the importance of defining problems with the community and measuring them in multiple ways was highlighted by the three cases. Following the five principles should support sustainable development by creating an environment of trust where continuous communication can take place between change agents and community members. The relevance of doing so has been noted by Holden (2008, p.475) in the context of the planning process:

“[I]f planners and members of the democratic public can work towards a common understanding that it is a process of continuous communication and interaction among citizens and experts that needs to be sustained in the push toward sustainable development, that knowledge is to be generated and tested in public

contexts, and that stories have standing alongside scientific models and statistics, important moves toward sustainability can be made in the planning profession as a whole.”

Fourth, the five principles not only address the planning process but also the implementation and evaluation phases of any change process. For example, stories serve as qualitative indicators and also provide a thick description that helps in understanding the problems and in finding relevant solutions. Stories also provide identity to the community members and guide future efforts by serving as milestones. Thus, the five principles presented here appear to be inherently supporting sustainable changes in communities.

The model presented in the paper is grounded in theories and ideas from community psychology, and shows what it takes to start a community intervention “of the people, by the people, for the people,” to borrow a phrase from Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address given on November 19, 1863. What is interesting is that the three cases presented above amply demonstrate the power of community building when these precepts are practiced. As these cases come from three countries, cultures, and economic sectors, it is a generalizable finding that empowering people does lead to transformation of the community, a community that “shall not perish from the earth,” to quote Lincoln again.

This article has implications for leadership research and practice. The three social change agents discussed in the paper are transformational leaders of the type that Burns (1978) presented rather than the one that Bass (1990) discussed. These leaders have made personal sacrifices to help their followers, and thus have transformed themselves personally beyond their own imagination as was noted above. The leadership literature is often silent about the

transformation in the leaders. We assert that transformation is a two-way street, and this transformation is the reward that keeps the leader or social agent motivated rather than any monetary benefit or gain in social status. This is consistent with Burns' description of how transformational leadership involves both the leaders and the followers transforming each other to higher levels of morality. Burns suggested that the collaborative process and relationship emerges from the appeal to social values, and this is clearly the case with the three social agents discussed in the paper. Thus, the reason for the limited success of the social engineering paradigm is the exchange based interaction between change agents and community members, i.e., the transactional leadership style adopted by change agents, whereas transformational leadership leads a community to constantly reinvent itself.

This study also contributes to the field of organizational development (OD) by suggesting how the OD process can be improved by using the five principles presented above. Organizational development cycle commonly consists of diagnosis, intervention and evaluation.<sup>25</sup> In diagnosing the problem, the process can be improved by not only defining the problem from the perspective of the employees as is commonly done but also by including end users and other stakeholders as well as measuring the problem using multiple methods. Following this approach will help identify and define the problem from multiple perspectives and prevent the neglect of issues considered important by end-users, which is critical for sustainable transformation. In evaluating organizational development efforts, often effectiveness is used as a criterion for the cost sustainability. The principles identified here do not undermine the importance of effectiveness and every effort should be made to increase effectiveness. However, effectiveness should be examined against the criterion of sustainability. It is often in the self-interest of change agents to demonstrate quick results but doing so without emphasizing

sustainability may do more harm than good to the community, and no organizational development is worth the effort if it is not going to have a lasting impact on the community. Thus, by adopting these five principles organizational development process can help transform the change process leading to community transformation rather than short-term and tentative changes that breed cynicism and create a negative image of the change process itself.

Finally, it is clear from the three cases that the change agents have to commit their life to achieve such transformations. This is a lesson that community psychologists and social science researchers need to internalize. Researchers cannot expect to have impact by scientifically testing an intervention in the spirit of creating a scientific society and testing reforms as experiments as Campbell (1969) envisioned. What is needed is a lifetime commitment, which would then transform both the community and the researcher. This idea is not new to researchers who know that for research to have a significant impact one needs to work on a program of research rigorously testing various aspects of a theory over many years. Also, researchers generally agree that no research is considered of value if it does not have an impact on the real world. Thus, social scientists need to become humanists who get in the trenches with community members, share their tools and commit to empowering the people in the community to define problems and issues in their own vocabulary and worldview. Community citizens should measure variables of interest in multiple ways, and implement the solutions that they think could help solve the problem. Social scientists need to show their commitment by remaining an embedded and passionate facilitator who is ever willing to change the course. There is perhaps not one social science theory that has impacted society and lead to social change to the same degree as any of these three organizations have done. This should assure even the skeptics that it is time for a paradigm shift in social change, and there is a need to move

from expert driven interventions to people championed programs that will allow the community to transform and continue to grow spontaneously.

## Note

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Serena Wong and the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments that helped us improve the article significantly.

<sup>2</sup> The term social architecture was introduced by Perlmutter (1965) to develop a theory of social change that could be applied to bring about change in the society, which was grounded in the engineering paradigm of problem solving.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the basic information about Amul is available at their webpage (<http://www.amul.com/>) as well as at <http://www.nic.coop/founders/amul.asp>.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.indiাদairy.com/cont\\_highest\\_milkproducer\\_amulorigin.html](http://www.indiাদairy.com/cont_highest_milkproducer_amulorigin.html).

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.indiাদairy.com/cont\\_highest\\_milkproducer\\_amulorigin.html](http://www.indiাদairy.com/cont_highest_milkproducer_amulorigin.html).

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.indiাদairy.com/cont\\_highest\\_milkproducer\\_amulorigin.html](http://www.indiাদairy.com/cont_highest_milkproducer_amulorigin.html).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.irma.ac.in/institute/mission.php>.

<sup>8</sup> AMCUS is used to capture member and product information including milk fat content, the volume collected and amount payable to each member.

<sup>9</sup> Food and Agricultural Organization of United Nations: Economic and Social Department: The Statistical Division. <http://www.fao.org/es/ess/top/commodity.html?lang=en&item=951&year=2005>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.worldfoodprize.org/laureates/Past/1989.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.worldfoodprize.org/Laureates/Past/1989.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.indiাদairy.com/cont\\_highest\\_milkproducer\\_amulorigin.html](http://www.indiাদairy.com/cont_highest_milkproducer_amulorigin.html).

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Verghese\\_Kurien\\_-\\_The\\_White\\_Revolution/id/4996051](http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Verghese_Kurien_-_The_White_Revolution/id/4996051).

<sup>14</sup> Micro Health Plans for Macro Benefit. (2007, January 24). *The Washington Times*, p. A17. Retrieved March 29, 2008, from Questia database.

<sup>15</sup> "Unity, work, discipline" (opinion & editorial). *Manila Bulletin*. Manila Bulletin Publishing Corp. 2006. Retrieved June 14, 2009 from HighBeam Research: <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-155756441.html>.

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.grameen-info.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=109&limit=1&limitstart=10](http://www.grameen-info.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=109&limit=1&limitstart=10).

<sup>17</sup> [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2006/yunus-lecture-en.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2006/yunus-lecture-en.html).

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.grameen-info.org/bank/socialbusinessentrepreneurs.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> Luftwaffe's Top Gun. (2005, December 12). *The Daily Mail* (London, England), Answers to Correspondents. p. 53. Retrieved March 29, 2008, from Questia database.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.mcc.es/ing/quienessomos/historia.html>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.afsc.org/newengland/bigcat/ttl.php?FID=1208>.

<sup>22</sup> <http://gvanv.com/compass/arch/v1405/saint.html>.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.mcc.es/ing/contacto/faqs.html#>.

<sup>24</sup> The loan and its payment is still the responsibility of the individual in the Grameen Model.

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.managementhelp.org/misc/new\\_OD.htm](http://www.managementhelp.org/misc/new_OD.htm).

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