

Lesson: An Appreciative Approach to Community Research 90 min

Lesson Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

Knowledge

- ❑ Understand the importance of looking with appreciation at the assets in a community and the ways God has blessed the community in the past.
- ❑ Understand how to help community members prioritize problems that are hindering their development.
- ❑ Be familiar with some cultural questions that could be used in studying their communities.

Attitudes

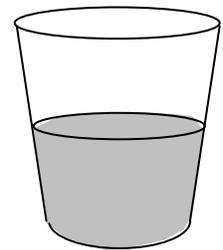
- ❑ Ask God to transform each of us so that we can appreciate all that he has given to us, and a desire to help others see this also.

Practice

- ❑ Practice the skill of appreciative learning in their families, church, and community.

Starter: Water glass demonstration (facilitator instructions) 5 min.

Fill a full sized clear glass with water to its vertical midpoint, and then place the glass in a location where the entire participant group can see it clearly, preferable on a table or a stool so it is up off the floor. *Make sure the glass is filled to its midpoint, or else group responses can take you in the wrong direction.* Now ask for observations from the group about the glass of water. Let them begin to respond on their own, but if you need a leading question, consider one like: *How would you describe the volume of water in the glass?* People sometimes describe it as simply being “half”, so another leading question might be: *“Half what?”*



What is the Volume in the glass? Half full or Half Empty

- You're looking for responses like either half-full or half-empty.
- When you get one of these responses, ask how many agree with that response.
- Then ask how many would describe it another way.
- It is even OK if everyone describes it one way or the other.

Plenary Discussion: Half full or half empty? (10 min) It would be technically correct to describe this glass as being either half-full or half-empty. Many would describe it as half-full, others as half- empty. The way a person answers this question, however, can reveal some things about the perspective of that person.

- **Question to group:** How would you describe the perspective of a person who sees this glass as being half-empty?
 - *Something that is not there*
 - *Top down perspective*
 - *Negative*
- When we approach a community with this perspective our attitudes are revealed in our dialogue. This can carry a debilitating effect on the people of a community in the developing world because people often have a marred self-image. This marred self image is that they are ignorant, backward, impoverished, can do nothing for themselves, they don't have hope and, perhaps, that God has forgotten them.
- **Question to group:** What is the perspective of a person who sees this glass as being half-full?

- *Positive*
 - *What is available*
 - *Potential*
- Approaching a community this way helps the community to recognize that God has not abandoned them. When we approach the community with an appreciative perspective, we are already announcing the Kingdom of God. Our perspective tends to bring hope; it lifts people.
 - This approach to dialog with community members is called **Appreciative Inquiry**. This is a good way to help begin to mobilize a community to recognize their own resources.

Small Group Exercise (10 minutes - optional if time) In pairs, share with each other: 1) two good things from your timeline that has positively contributed to your life; 2) one of your spiritual gifts; 3) one blessings you have received from your family; 4) one blessing you contribute to your family. Ask for several pairs to give a few answers. Ask how it makes them feel to recount these things.

Segue way: The way we have appreciated our lives, is now how we want to look at communities.

Small Group Exercise: (20 min) Facilitator: Create groups of 4-5 people. Give each group clean newsprint and a marker.

- Assign to each group a specific area of life in the community: spiritual, economic, health, agriculture, and environment (you choose).
- The task of each group is to develop three appreciative research questions (half-full perspective) for their assigned domain (spiritual, economic, whatever). Facilitator: if you need to give one or both of the following as examples

Half empty perspective	Half full (appreciative) perspective <i>This is the task of your small group.</i>
Tell me What your problems? <i>Why do the children look so dirty</i> <i>Why do live in this bad condition</i> <i>Why do you still live here</i>	How does this community support a family in a tragedy? How do the people in this community have a strong social cohesion? What makes you feel proud about your community
How many children in this community under age 5 died last year?	What are some measures that your community takes in order to prevent the death of young children?

Needs Assessment vs. Appreciative Inquiry

When we start with problems or “needs” (the traditional way people have approached “development” or communities), it focuses on things people don’t have or haven’t been able to overcome. When we focus on resources they already have, they can build on them.

Eventually, both need to be done. But we are trying to get people to think in a new way, looking at how they have already succeeded in some areas, seeing resources God has already put in their hands. Later, we add “Overcoming obstacles that keep us from improving our lives.”

Asset-Based Development is a term commonly used to describe this approach.

Appreciation: More than a technique

- Our approach to people and situations can reveal our own assumptions about people, God and reality.
- In general, do we see what “is” in the world around us or do we focus on what “is not”?
 - In our families? At work? School? Our view of government? The Church?
 - What is the relationship between how we see things and what our ministry approaches will look like?
- Appreciation is part of a healthy, Godward worldview.

Facilitator review with large group on appreciative inquiry. 5 min

1. What is the function of appreciative inquiry in helping a community to be transformed?
 - *People realize that God has not abandoned them.*
 - *Recognize that they do have resources*
 - *Taste hope. Able to begin thinking about the future.*
2. Why is it better to focus initially on a community’s resources before focusing on their needs?
 - *Helps a community realize that they (often) have unrecognized resources.*
 - *Helping people in a community to recognize that they do have resources encourages community-based initiative.*
 - *A community cannot build on failure or what they do not see themselves as having.*
3. Do you believe God is working in a community?
 - *If so, then your role is to help the community members recognize this truth as well.*
 - *Appreciative dialog is one way to do that.*

Facilitator Summary:

The community comes to view its past and itself in a new light. We do know things. We do have resources. We have a lot to be proud of. We are already on the journey. God has been good to us. We can do something. We are not God-forsaken. *Helping a community to view itself appreciatively is a major step toward helping its people recognize the broken relationships described by Bryant Myers and by Fikkert and, secondly, to begin to address that brokenness.*