

D-Lab Development

2009.12.07

Panel Discussion

Bish Moderates Invited Fellows

Professionals from around the world, who come to MIT for a year. Have experience in the field

Bish's questions

Etiquettes or protocol (how do you connect to culture)

Largest cultural differences with USA

Technological changes with positive impact

Examples of tech that stayed with local people

When outsiders left

Factors that contribute to success

Ugay Taznin - Bhutan / city planner urban planner/architect

Francisco Beretto - Mozambique / public works advisor

Delmo G - Brazil / forest engineer

Nadin H - Lebanon / engineer

Advice to those traveling to the field:

Ugay - you will find people are well disposed to stories of foreigners. Don't find much hostility. Look closely to what you do and what you don't do. One important thing is the way you dress, compared to the US (where it is very casual). Bhutan is a traditional country. Have generations of people living together.

Francisco - portugese is main language. If you want to make something with people, you have to involve them. Not the same as America where you go it alone. The last projects he has worked on with the community, were chosen by the communities. The communities are interested in having feedback and seeing the results of projects.

Delmo - don't have sex in the community. You have to stay focused with what you are doing. Technology... work with people to understand the reality of the situation. Understand the reality of the community. This can change from community to community within the same culture. (Bicycle example)

Nadia - Lebanon is a conservative society. Formal clothes in meetings and specific greetings are expected. Eating is not polite in meetings or classrooms. She noticed that coming to America, every seminar has food. Meeting with community members, be sure to target the leaders and approach and work with them.

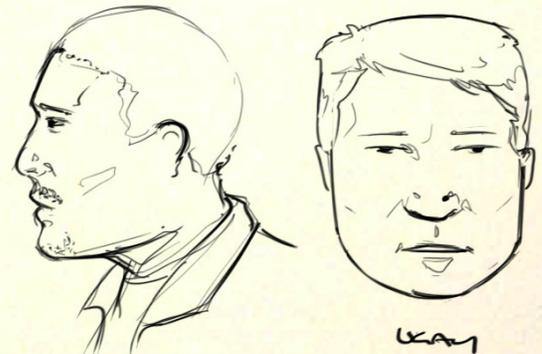
Politics of working in community:

Ugay - thinking of Bhutan specifically, you are expected to have all your travel plans in order before you leave for the place. Have you contacts and plans set. Bhutan is very small, so it is very hard to get in.

Francisco - ???

Delmo - have to gain the trust of the communities. Understand that there are others who have been there before you

Nadia - ??



FRANCISCO

UGAY

How to manage expectations of coming from MIT, and not having answers?

Ugay - Have time, go and observe what people really need. Rather than asking. Bhutan has lots of forests and use wood for stove cooking. Consumes a lot of wood, and has health issues because of smoke. Bhutan is very interested in fuel issues (around forests conservation and health) for cooking.

Francisco - to make a project successful, look into ways to work with business, and allow this project to make money for the community. (Financial viability)

Delmo - the answer to the problem is with the community, not with you. Sometimes the solution is not a technology, it is a method, that a technology is part of. Understand the reality of the situation, and then you can make a real difference to people

Something you are very proud of:

Ugay - there are lots of projects I am happy with. Just being an urban planner, I am one of only 4 in the country. There are only 40 architects, aren't that many professionals.

Working on a Planning Act for his country while here at MIT, and looks forward for that coming to fruition (hopefully). Designed a meeting hall, that has been constructed, and now allows for 10,000 people to gather.

Delmo - a project where he didn't give the fish, but taught how to fish. A project that the community doesn't need him anymore. Assisted the people to do their own urban planning.



Bish:

My impression is that the community is not a homogenous entity. There are different aspects to it.

What should students not do that would make things more difficult for them:

Ugay - listen to those who come out to speak with you. But look for other parts that don't come out. Make an appointment to go and see different elements. Doesn't see as such a problem in US where people are encouraged to speak their mind, in Bhutan, it is not the same, some people don't have the confidence to speak in public.

Nadia - as a female engineer going to a site and giving instructions to male workers, has encountered resistance to acceptance of her ideas. Encourages women to be strong and insistent if you believe in what you are doing.

Lessons from unsuccessful projects:

Delmo - a group of women working with handcraft of vegetable fibers.. they but they didn't come back to document the work to see where it went.

Overcoming language barriers and involving the community:

Ugay - sometimes translators don't do a good job... Finding some way to assess your translator

Delmo - that is a good point, because I am talking a lot about understanding the reality of the situation. And language is an important element to that.

Francisco -

How to engage the community in participatory manner:
Delmo - google it... PRE (participatory rapid appraisal) relations inside the community and other institutions. How do people work, how do they use natural resources.

Ugay - important to come to understanding of ideas, and misunderstandings can happen. Listen to them from local perspective of what they think. Know your area of expertise and what their expertise is.

Bish - have to tell them, that your idea is just another way, not THE way

Francisco - change is something radical at times. Make a compromise of what your project is and where the community is. Use your skill to make things work for both you and community.

How to show results and impact when action and impact are far from each other:

Nadia - show them a similar project in another country. Let them know that it was done in another place, and show the results that happened there, and the time it took to happen.

Delmo - showing people the cycle of water, so they understand what is happening to water. This helped in one situation to show people what was going on.

Francisco - in Mozambique, there can be resistance to adding chemicals to water. Have to find ways to show that the product isn't harmful.

Amy - understand what people believe about water, from experience of working with people have having water workshops. Understand what people understand about water. Part of this is also establishing trust, listening to people, and incorporating their answers into your solution.

How to maintain long term impacts with the community:

Delmo - For community, it is personal. They understand you are from an institution, but in the end, you know the people.

Working with women in the community, how to get to that second level of communication:
Francisco - find a contact outside the mainstream contact..

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