

CEI Teaching Resource: People & Communities

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This guide introduces lecturers to a step-by-step process for teaching undergraduates on diverse economies and action research. Courses using it provide students with the tools to explore community livelihoods, to document community economies, and to mobilize people's assets for social enterprise development. The lecture sequence roughly follows the resource kit *Shifting Focus: Alternative Pathways for Communities and Economies* by Cameron and Gibson (2001) and adapts it to the classroom setting.

Originally, contents were taught over two consecutive courses as part of the Global Studies and Social Entrepreneurship (GSSE) program at the School of Global Studies at Thammasat University, Thailand. The first course focuses on in-class instruction and uses a [team-based learning](#) approach for the delivery of course contents. The second course takes place in northern Thailand as a 3-week community-based field immersion initiative during which students are housed with local hosts. Thus, this resource illustrates instruction in both types of settings.



Asset-based community development involves an open and exploratory research process. When students apply it during a field immersion course the purpose is often not readily apparent to the host community. In order to avoid misunderstandings and to align the expectations of all involved it is advisable to explain the research process and desired results during a meeting with members of the host community.

CORE READINGS FOR LECTURERS

Cameron, Jenny & Katherine Gibson (2001): *Shifting Focus: Pathways to Community and Economic Development: A Resource Kit*. Latrobe City Council and Monash University, Victoria. [PDF available at www.communityeconomies.org/resources/community-resources/shifting-focus-alternative-pathways-communities-and-economies]

Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2006): *A Postcapitalist Politics*. University of Minnesota Press

Gibson-Graham, J.K., Jenny Cameron & Stephen Healy (2013): *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming our Communities*. University of Minnesota Press

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LESSON PLANS

Class 1: Course introduction and group formation

This course is meant to provide a fresh look on the diverse practices that make up community economies. Research methods (asset-based research methods) and theoretical concepts (diverse economy) are introduced in order to make these practices visible and to mobilize them to improve wellbeing.

After introducing students to the course contents and objectives, groups are formed (5 to 6 students per group). These groups are fixed for the whole duration of the course. In order to ensure that talents are somewhat equally distributed among the groups, the following method is used for group formation:

Ask questions about personal attributes and skills. Those students, to whom these attributes apply, raise their hands. Then ask them to stand up and form a row. Repeat this procedure with further questions and each time students line up next to the previous group. Finally, ask the remaining students to join their colleagues.

Given the learning objectives and activities throughout the consecutive courses the following type of questions can be asked:

- Who is good at creating video clips?
- Who is an international student?
- Who writes blogs or articles?
- Who has experience in working with communities/vulnerable groups?
- Who is very outgoing and adventurous?

Once all students are lined up ask them to count from 1 through to 6 (or 1 through to 5, depending on class size). Those with the same number form a permanent team, who work on all group assignments together.

Class 2&3: Methods for community participation: Creating Social Maps & Stakeholder Analysis

The first step in an asset-based action research process is to identify community researchers, who are the local experts on their communities. Students don't have the resources to recruit community researchers. They have to implement the process by themselves. When part of a field immersion course, students will need to learn as much as they can about the community themselves. There are a number of participatory rural appraisal methods, which can provide a good overview about aspects of community life, including social maps, transect walks, seasonal calendars, timelines, and stakeholder analysis. Social maps can be precursors of secondary resources in asset maps.

Classes 2 and 3 introduce PRA tools to the students, which they then have to apply outside of class and present their findings in week 4. Student groups can be asked to create a social map, village transect etc. of the university campus or their district.



During the field immersion course students were given a different assignment in each week resembling a participatory action research process: Orientation and overview in week 1, research phase in week 2, and documentation of findings in week 3. Students presented their findings and progress after each phase, but continuously received support from instructors throughout the whole process. **Above:** Instructors giving feedback to students at different stages of the field immersion course.

Class 4: Community participation methods – Practice

In the previous week each student group was assigned to use a specific PRA method. The groups have 10 mins to present their findings and receive feedback from the instructor(s).

Social maps and stakeholder analyses are particularly useful tools for students to familiarize themselves in a new context. Social maps highlight the location of key institutions (headman's office, churches, schools etc), local resources (forests, fields etc), and households (including general socio-economic data). The information is gathered while walking around in the village. Stakeholder analysis, on the other hand, focuses on the interests and needs of key individuals and institutions that are affected by a development project. It moreover seeks to identify the relationships among these stakeholders.

In our field immersion course students were given a week to familiarize themselves with the local community by using social maps and stakeholder analysis.



From left to right: Social map, student pointing out relationships among community stakeholders, and presentation of a seasonal calendar.

Class 5: The diverse economy

This class offers an introduction to the concept of diverse economies based on the first chapter of *Take Back the Economy*, titled ‘Reframing the Economy, Reframing Ourselves’ (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013). The reading puts forth the idea that the economy extends beyond earned incomes, capitalist enterprises, and private ownership. Most activities of our social life have economic effects and are potential contributors to our wellbeing. Subsequent classes will introduce research methods to identify variants of the diverse economy. (For examples of other courses that use *Take Back the Economy*, and for materials from these courses, [click here](#)).

Class 6: Asset-based community development (ABCD)

Based on the reading *Building Communities from the Inside Out* by Kretzmann & McKnight (1993) students learn about asset-based community development and asset maps. The reading exposes them to the idea that marginalized communities are rich in skills, assets, and relationships. We use two related tools to capture and document these resources, namely asset-maps and an inventory of gifts.

Short exercise: The final part of the lecture can be used for students familiarizing themselves with the inventory of gifts. Each group can select one group member, who is interviewed about his/her gifts of the hand, head, and heart.

Class 7: The process of asset-based community development

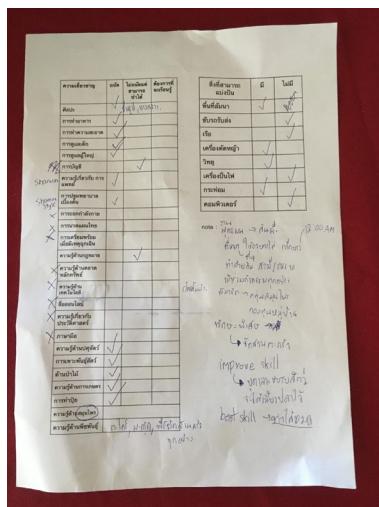
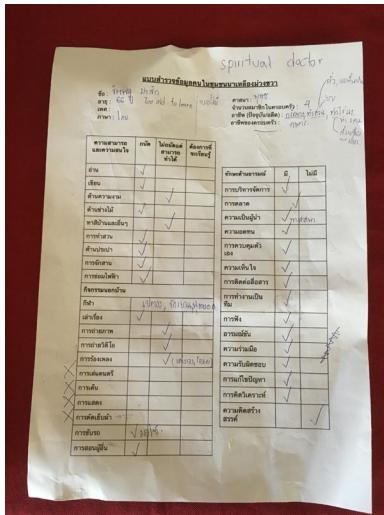
Based on the reading *Shifting Focus: Pathways to Community and Economic Development* by Cameron & Gibson (2001) students learn about the stages of an ABCD intervention, starting from the recruitment of community researchers, over asset-mapping and idea generation, to idea implementation. They learn that local associations and institutions identified in their social maps, constitute secondary resources in their asset maps.

Exercise: Each student group is asked to draft a capacity inventory survey. Their respondents are senior students about to graduate. They are provided with survey templates from *A Guide to Capacity Inventories* by Kretzmann & McKnight (1997). In adapting the survey, they are asked to consider the following:

- What is the purpose of capacity inventory/portrait of gifts: To identify the prevalence of skills or to identify people with skills?
- Will you use the guideline to interview students randomly or do you focus on certain groups of students?
- Are you using structured or semi-structured interview guidelines?
- Structure your interview guideline into sections or themes.
- Explore people’s skills in more depth and formulate questions to find out about how they have acquired their skills, the context in which they use them etc. Also consider how these skills may contribute to a community project.

Class 8: The process of asset-based community development – Practice

In the previous week each student group has drafted a capacity inventory survey. The groups have 10 mins to present their findings and receive feedback from the instructor(s) on the interview questions and the structure of the survey.



Left: A capacity inventory survey used by a student group during the field immersion course. “Too old to learn” (see right image) is a frequent response of elderly people when asked whether they wish to learn new skills.

Class 9: Conducting appreciative interviews

Based on the reading *The Positive Path. Using Appreciative Inquiry* by Ashford & Patkar (2001) students are introduced to appreciative inquiry (Ai). Same as ABCD, Ai is a strengths-based development approach. At the heart of Ai is the appreciative interview, which aims to identify the common essence of successful community projects in the past. In contrast to the survey-style capacity inventory appreciative interviews encourage storytelling. Respondents are asked about positive experiences in the past and what they can learn from those experiences for the present. The final segment of the interview is about dreams for the future.

A strength of the appreciative interview, compared to capacity inventories, is a strong emotional element during interviews due to the sharing of positive memories. Another advantage is that questions about the future foster idea generation for desired projects. At the same time conducting appreciative interviews requires some skill and experience (see class 10). Due to the open questions, data analysis can be challenging as well.

Exercise: At the end of the class students are given the assignment to interview senior students about peak experiences with social innovation projects [note: the GSSE program includes multiple such projects]. The instructor prompts the class to formulate questions for an appreciative interview guideline, which in our case took the following form:

- What social innovation project has been the most remarkable for you?
- What was a special moment you have shared with your team mates?
- What was your role in the team at that time?
- How have you overcome difficulties in that project?
- What outside resources/people have contributed to that project?
- What lesson have you learned from that experience?

- How can you apply what you have learned from that experience in the present?
- What is your vision of success for your social innovation project?
- What impact will your social innovation project have in 2 years? What will your target group look like?

Note: Especially for undergraduate students some guidance is essential in order to ensure that questions follow a logical sequence and explore different aspects of a positive experience.



Above: Students explaining their interview guidelines, sampling strategy, and preliminary findings during the 2nd week presentation.

Class 10: Conducting appreciative interviews - Practice

Each student group has interviewed a senior student using the Ai guideline from the previous week. The groups have 10 mins to present their findings and receive feedback from the instructor(s) on their findings.

There are recurrent challenges in the application of this interview technique among students unfamiliar with it:

- Risk of missing the essence of a story: Students may focus too much on reproducing the story itself, instead of analyzing the factors leading up to success.
- It is important to ask follow-up questions when respondents provide vague and general answers. For instance, when asking about visions for the future responses like “I want the community to live well together” is an entry-point to start a conversation, but in itself does not provide clues about actions leading up to desired change.

In order to enhance the learning effects with this technique the instructor should address these common mistakes beforehand.



Above: Students conducting interviews during their second week. Each group could choose whether to use capacity inventory surveys or appreciative interviews.

Class 11: The diverse economy revisited

The reading for this class *Sustainable community development in northeastern Thailand. The Inpaeng network* by Rado (2013) illustrates the diverse economy of farming communities in Thailand. Activities include subsistence agriculture, production of cash crops, hunting and gathering, contract labor, cooperative production, and alternative finance (saving groups).

All groups are given the assignment to draw a diverse economy iceberg on a flipchart paper including all activities mentioned in the reading. The assignment is due in class 12.



An excursion to a nearby community enterprise was organized during the field immersion course in order to illustrate possible outcomes of an asset-based development process. The enterprise “Chewa Withi” is a cooperative owned by more than 700 producers. Originally it was created by farmers on the basis of traditional know-how on the use of local herbs. Local herbs are processed into cosmetic products for both the domestic and export markets. This practice facilitates efforts to conserve biodiversity in the area as it has become the foundation for people’s livelihoods. **Above:** Visit to “Chewa Withi”.

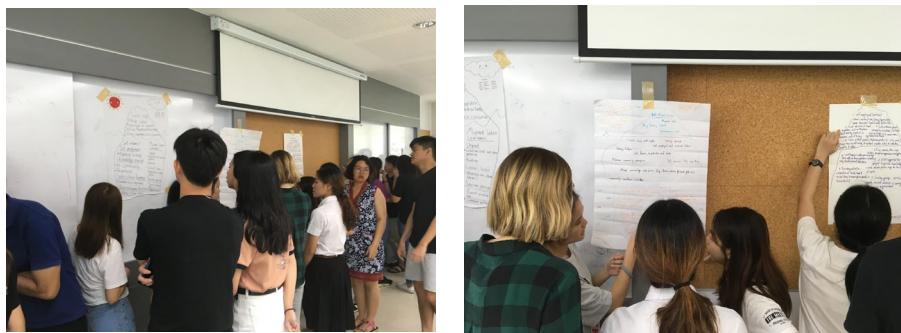


Above: Visit to “Chewa Withi” **Right image:** The herb on the upper stack is processed into soap, whereas butterfly pea (lower stack) is processed into shampoo.

Class 12: The diverse economy revisited – Practice

All student groups have created a diverse economy iceberg including activities from the previous reading. The groups are asked to hang their flipchart papers with the drawing on the wall next to each other. Each group then assesses the drawing of another group, commenting on the accuracy of the depiction of activities and entities above and below the waterline (see images below).

The remaining part of the class introduces students to alternative depictions of local economies, including the diverse economy table, which breaks down activities int terms of types of labor, of enterprises, transactions, property, and of finance. Yet another tool (called “leaky bucket”) illustrates financial inflows and outflows of a community. In conjunction with asset maps this tool can stimulate conversations about using diverse economic activities in order to reduce a community’s financial outflows.



Above: Students engaging with each other’s work.

Class 13: Community economies in a post-disaster context

In previous classes marginalized communities have been depicted as communities of resources, skills, and unrealized potential. What about communities that are facing exceptionally precarious conditions, such as disasters or lack of basic rights? Are there situations in which this positive framing does not apply, or even appears misplaced?

These questions were discussed, following the reading *The Banaba Social Enterprise Development Project: more-than-subjects and ethical action in a community food economy* by Hill (2013).

Such conversations are especially relevant in classes with international students coming from various political, and societal contexts, including areas that are still experiencing civil war (as is the case in a number of states in Myanmar).

Class 14: Course wrap up

Summary of the sequence of activities during strengths-based process and its adaptation in the classroom/field:

Step 1: Recruitment of community researchers. As most courses may not include resources to hire community researchers students need to familiarize themselves with the community context through social maps and stakeholder analysis. In field immersion courses involving homestays students' hosts can provide information and help students in drawing accurate findings from the research process.

Step 2: People as the primary resource. Students are using either capacity inventory or appreciative interviews. In choosing respondents students rely on data on stakeholders, households, and institutions from the previous exercises.

Step 3: Secondary resources. Largely covered by social map and stakeholder analysis.

Step 4: Generating ideas. Students analyze and document the data they have gathered through various means: Inventory of gifts of the hand, head, and heart; asset maps; diverse economy icebergs etc. Usually this takes a workshop format in which locals use the data to brainstorm ideas. For our educational purposes students present their findings to their hosts and receive feedback.

Since this teaching resource was developed in the context of the GSSE program, students have concluded their presentation with a social innovation idea building on the data they have gathered. This shows them how they can combine asset-mapping with more traditional (i.e. problem-focused) social innovation approaches. Here, asset-mapping constitutes a first step by identifying local contributions and by making sure that local capacities are not duplicated by outsiders in the social innovation process.

Step 5: Turning ideas into reality. At this stage local people make preparations to build community initiatives. Following a field immersion course local resource persons serving as a bridge between educational institutions and local communities can organize follow-ups on the ideas circulated in the idea generation phase.



Students' hosts and village headmen were invited to the final presentation which concluded the field immersion program (left). Headman giving comments on students' findings and social innovation idea (right).



A traditional Northern Thai "Bai Si" ceremony concluded the program... ...with students receiving blessings from a village elder... ...as well as from their host parents.

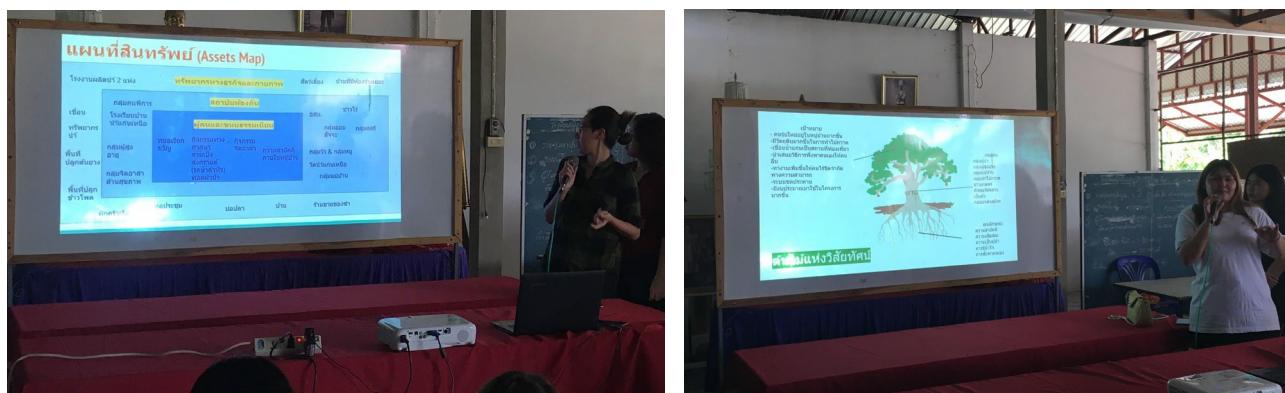
Class 15: Analyzing the data.

In the case of the GSSE program in-class instruction provided tools for students to use in a consecutive 3-week field immersion course. Therefore, this final unit was devoted to introducing students to the community context.

In a self-contained course an additional class provides an opportunity to further discuss tools for data analysis. Students will likely tend towards using ways to illustrate their data that they already had experience with – in this case capacity inventories and diverse economy icebergs. As these types of documentation are closely associated with an ABCD process, it is important to introduce tools to document data from Ai processes as well, such as a vision tree. Here, fruits represent goals, roots may represent values, and the stem can be used to symbolize community groups and their activities.



At the final presentation in the field students used capacity inventories, Thai versions of the diverse economy iceberg ...



... asset maps, and a vision tree to document their findings.