

First Regional Positive Deviance Forum, Bali, Indonesia

January 19-21, 2010

A Perspective



The Forum was an exceptionally informative and inspirational experience. It was planned by volunteers working with Indonesia's PD Resource Center (PDRC) led by Susi Widiastuti with support from Randa Wilkinson, Monique Sternin, and the PDI staff.

The Forum reflected the rich **diversity** of Indonesian culture; 300 ethnicities, over 700 languages, synergism between Muslims (esp. modern/reformed) Hindus and Christians. It reflected the **resilience** of the people who are perched atop three tectonic plates which have been responsible for numerous earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis which have killed hundreds of thousands of people. It is small wonder that PD has found a home in Indonesia and is flourishing.

The Forum also reflected the approach Jerry took in introducing PD to Indonesia in 2002 and subsequent follow-up visits made by him and Monique. He started with PD workshops for leaders of government and international NGO's to gain informed support. With leadership support, he then provided a community-based 12 day PD facilitator training for NGO's and village health coordinators who opted in to take a PD approach to local challenges. It was clear from talking with local participants at all levels that the Sternins did this with great love and humility with the attitude that it isn't about PD, it isn't about us...it's about the community.

The Forum was attended by 150 community health coordinators, NGO's, Sub-director of the Ministry of Health, Director of Nutrition and Health Planning Ministry, Nutrition Program manager from UNICEF and a few other supportive luminaries. Many of the participants representing community experts had never flown in an airplane or visited Bali.

After a blessing on the event by leaders from government , UNICEF and INGO's, there was a moving illustrated tribute to Jerry and his legacy in Indonesia by several people with whom he had worked so closely over the past decade. Monique provided a touching response.



Arvind Singhal's plenary address held us spellbound with PD's storied history and illustrative examples of PD values; Gandhi, Mother Theresa and Jerry. Arvind focused on PD as a heroic journey of ordinary people making many small contributions that dramatically improve the lives of everyone in their community. He reminded us that PD is not about doing great things but doing small things with great love, humility and grace.



Through a skilled group of translators, there was a rich sharing of PD initiatives in Indonesia focused on childhood malnutrition, neonatal and maternal mortality, goiter, girl trafficking, challenges faced by street kids, etc.

The striking thing about the PD work in Indonesia is how deeply rooted it is in the community and how its influence has spread beyond the original application. Success in preventing under-three-childhood malnutrition in a Javanese village led to a PD-based approach to goiter prevention. This village had no electricity, paved roads or middle school. Children had to be schooled in a town too far away to commute which was disruptive to families. Having succeeded in preventing malnutrition and goiter, villagers have leveraged local resources and their ability to work collaboratively and attract outside resources and they now have electricity, a paved road through the middle of town and a middle school.

A few international initiatives were also featured including PD at Merck in Mexico; a school in Merced, California, neonatal/maternal mortality in Pakistan and MRSA prevention in the US. Indonesia has experienced a dramatic increase in the prevalence of MRSA from 2,8% (emerging pathogen) in 1986 to 30% (endemic) in 2008 with a range from 15% in Denpasar to 58% in Jakarta. Community acquired MRSA hasn't visited Indonesia...yet. This puts Indonesia where Denmark was in the early 80's and the U.S. a few years later. They have a choice to act on the problem or neglect it.

Sharing of experience, ideas, stories and data was refreshing in the **brevity** and **simplicity** with which it was done. It took place in a variety of venues including:

- 20 minute presentations
- Breakout sessions focused on areas in which the attendees expressed interest
- “Bazaar” comprised of booths featuring PD initiatives from 20 communities in Indonesia and India that attendees could visit between sessions and discuss with community health coordinators manning the booths.



The first day we met in a large conference hall with 6 to 8 sitting at round tables. The second day’s breakout sessions were convened in smaller conference rooms. On the morning of the last day all 150 sat in two concentric circles and everyone was given an opportunity to briefly comment on one thing they had experienced at the Forum that had “rocked your boat” and that they were going to take back to their community to support the work.

The PDRC staff and Randa’s daughter, Hilary, created a large network map in the shape of a four leaf clover with the names of all 150 participants distributed around the edge.



We all took turns drawing lines with magic markers from our name to the names of those with whom we had connected.



A picture of a new community emerged out of the process. Asep, a community health coordinator from a village in West Java (one who had traveled by air for the first time to get to the Forum in Bali which he was visiting for the first time) captured the moment by

announcing : “PD is romantic...PD is love!” Everyone cheered & applauded and someone asked if the group wanted to keep their new community alive. This elicited another affirmative cheer.



(Asep is 2nd from left on front row. Photo taken after the Forum)

On the spot, Dian, a skilled local *techy* who had provided audiovisual support for the Forum, created a “First PD Regional Forum Facebook,” projected it on the big screen and enlisted members. Facebook exchanges have been lively since the Forum. Those with access to the internet are finding ways to engage input from colleagues who don’t.

The **role of conference planners and facilitators** was crucial and unique. Throughout the Forum it seemed like the different sessions self-facilitated. This came as a result of skilled facilitators who remained inconspicuous enabling attendees to be conspicuously engaged in self-organizing and actively participating in presentations, discussions, breakout sessions, Bazaar and side barring during the two- a-half days.

Stories played a dominant role in the Forum and were rich sources of learning. Stories rewrite scripts. Stories uncover possibilities. Unlike data, stories are unarguable; they stand on their own. They foster relationships:



(Susi and Randa saying goodbye after a spectacular Forum)

There are many who make the thread that runs through the work in the communities of Indonesia. A community of practice has emerged that holds onto the thread. The poet William Stafford captured this image with the following lines:

The Way It Is

There's a thread you follow.

It goes among things that change.

But it doesn't change.

People wonder about what you are pursuing.

You have to explain about the thread.

But it is hard for others to see.

While you hold it you can't get lost.

Tragedies happen; people get hurt or die;

and you suffer and get old.

Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.

You don't ever let go of the thread.



Jon Lloyd