

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Participatory Planning Addressing the Disconnect between Local and External Stakeholders**

#### ***A Case Study on Health in Harmony***

By

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Participatory approaches are being increasingly utilized in conservation projects. The idea stems from critiques of previous practice being too exclusionary resulting in poor outcomes. A broad theme in these critiques relates to a disconnect between the local and external stakeholders. This disconnect emerges from the differences in the epistemological foundations of the different stakeholders and manifests itself in the form of poor practice with inequitable outcomes for local communities.

Today, a variety of approaches to participation are utilized in environmentalism, depending on what they are motivated by and what they are trying to achieve. One such approach is Radical Listening, developed and utilized by Health in Harmony (HiH). HiH is an NGO working in Indonesia, Brazil and Madagascar with rainforest communities. Informed by a Planetary Health approach, HiH works towards protecting rainforests, providing local communities with access to healthcare, education and livelihoods. Through Radical Listening, HiH implements projects that are designed by the communities they will impact.

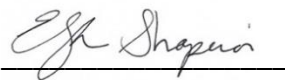
This research explores the extent to which HiH's Radical Listening approach to participation addresses the disconnect between the local and external stakeholders; as informed by themes derived from a study of past practice, their justifications and their shortcomings. This research studies HiH through 5 main themes; (1) **learning**, whereby open-mindedness, empathy, interdisciplinary approaches, and an iterative culture of learning are emphasized and perpetuated by HiH; (2) **nature of support**, through which the extent to which Radical Listening is truly participatory is considered alongside the types of interventions they carry out; (3) **relationship with communities**, which are explored in relation to the importance given to building trust, sharing power, aligning goals and having an open, honest, direct relationship with the communities; (4) **other stakeholders**, such as local government departments, other NGOs, donors and the community beyond HiH's target communities are considered; and (5) **reporting activities**, are looked at in relation to the consideration given to reporting failures, reporting broader, more abstract, outcomes, and learning from reporting.

With a few exceptions, I found that HiH's practice is conscious of and reflects the first four of these themes. However, they did not seem to represent the nuance required in reporting adequately.

I provide the following key recommendations for HiH with the aim of informing their practice so that it can better serve to address the disconnect between the local and external stakeholders in conservation projects:

1. To reframe the questions that they ask the community so as not to influence the outcomes of the Radical Listening sessions. The initial question that HiH asks the community starts with "You are the guardians of this precious rainforest...", which imposes upon local communities' ideas about what their relationship with nature should look like.
2. To represent better what currently seems contradictory; namely that the involvement of communities in decision-making is justified by their perceived expertise as opposed to the idea that it is their right to have a say in the design and implementation of projects that will impact them.
3. To acknowledge and operationalize ideas about entrenched systems that perpetuate inequity on a global scale. While HiH considers and is sensitive to the impacts of colonialism on the communities they work with, I suggest that they should be more reflexive about the degree to which older 'colonial approaches to conservation' continue to influence this work.

Approved



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