

## **Chapter**

### **Becoming the change you want to see in the world**

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Gandhi's famous quote "You must be the change you wish to see in the world" has inspired the title of this chapter. He believed that advocates of social change need to encourage others by their own example, showing that the means influences the end and the individual shapes the social. Like Gandhi I believe that to give substance and content to a vision of social change, it is helpful to begin living and creating such change now, through daily practices.

Feminist popular education for me is about creating learning environments where participants are encouraged to experience themselves and their relationships with each other in new ways, where patriarchal mind-body splits and social hierarchies are challenged, where individuals are supported in linking their personal life experiences with a collective social and political reality, and where opportunities are created for initiating changes to the relations that participants perceive as oppressive. Changing old habits is complex; it is not a one-off event but an ongoing process of *becoming* that requires continuing experimentation and reflection.

This chapter draws on my experience with Gender at Work, an international NGO which works with local civil society organizations in several sites across the world, to support their efforts to bring about more equitable gender relations in their programs and communities ([genderatwork.org](http://genderatwork.org)). In recent years, my colleagues and I have been experimenting with developing ways to support leaders within community organizations trying to change their programs and practice to become more gender equitable. In this chapter I reflect upon some of these innovative approaches, in particular those that I have introduced and integrated into Gender at Work's action-learning processes—namely, the setting of intentions and mind-body healing practices drawn from the repertoire of Capacitar

(capacitar.org). The questions motivating this work are: What facilitates such change? What helps women and men move from hopelessness, despair, passivity, and self-deprecation in such contexts? What enables learning that will bring lasting change? What helps people consider changing entrenched and exclusionary cultural norms that are so much a part of everyday life they are almost impossible to see, let alone identify as problems needing to be addressed?

The chapter opens with a discussion of the general approach to changes in organizational culture developed by Gender at Work over the past 15 years. I then describe the practices of intention setting and Capacitar, showing why and how they have been integrated into this framework. I also discuss some neuroscientific explanations for why it is so hard to change old patterns and what processes helps to create new norms. In the final part of the chapter I illustrate how these practices have tended to work in enhancing participants' capacity for personal transformation, allowing them to start transforming existing gendered practices into positive energy and action for change, and "becoming the change they want to see." The experience that I draw from in this account comes predominantly from recent work in the Horn of Africa where violence, war, and conservative, culturally-based gender relations are prevalent; I also refer to change projects in Southern Africa.

### **[A]Gender at Work's Gender Action Learning Process (GALP)**

Over the past few decades, considerable effort has been invested internationally in policy and constitutional reforms aimed at furthering gender equality. Despite such efforts, the process of changing gender norms and inequalities supported by cultural practices remains a much more difficult and ongoing challenge. In recent years, Gender at Work has developed a holistic approach to addressing the gap between gender equality goals and deeply held cultural norms that lead to women's poverty, marginalization, and human-rights violations. This approach has been used to successfully intervene in different cultural, organizational,

and community contexts in Bangladesh, India, South and East Africa, and the Horn of Africa (genderatwork.org).

A core methodology within this approach is the Gender Action Learning Process (GALP) whereby we support partners involved in social change and development. GALP facilitates a reflective peer-learning space in which participants/social-change actors are supported in choosing what, in their own organizations and programs, they wish to change to become more gender equitable (Kelleher, 2009). While this is the starting point, other power relations are inevitably also confronted. These depend on the context and can include race, class, ethnicity, caste, language, geography, age, ability, and sexuality.

The process is designed to respond to the complexity of diverse social and cultural contexts. This non-prescriptive approach to facilitating reflection and change typically lasts around 20 months and engages three to six organizations in a particular region. It begins with an *in-situ* organizational visit by two Gender at Work facilitators during which the participants (which include identified change agents and other key representatives from the organizations) reflect on their history, existing programs, organizational culture, readiness for change, and the reasonable next step. This meeting is termed “Hearing the Stories.” Then, three peer-learning workshops in the region allow participants space to think, plan a change project, and get supportive feedback from facilitators and peer organizations. In between these workshops, consultation is available with a locally-based facilitator, who works closely with the Gender at Work personnel and model, and brings experience, relevant ideas, and a supportive ear to plans for implementation. Participating organizations are expected to recognize that such change is a long-term process and to commit to all the required meetings.

The action-learning approach offers a container in which participating organizations might question their assumptions about gender and other internalized norms that negatively affect them. It offers them space to re-evaluate their beliefs in the face of different

perspectives, and to experiment with doing something new—to cultivate new norms—via their change projects. The peer-learning environment enables participants’ learning from deep reflection on their own and others’ experiences. In the first peer-learning meeting, we share a conceptual tool, based on the integral framework developed by the American thinker, Ken Wilber (2007), that encourages participants to appreciate quantitative and qualitative changes, by both women and men, at personal and systemic levels (see Friedman and Gordezky, 2011). We assume that to create new norms, change is required at multiple levels—personal, organizational, community—and must integrate the head (concepts), the heart (emotions) and hands/feet (practice). All our processes thus weave a mix of exercises that engage participants in a variety of ways simultaneously and that access a spectrum of analytic, creative, conceptual, and intuitive capacities. The GALP framework was thus highly conducive to the mind-body practices that I introduced into our work.

### **[A] Introducing Mind-Body Practices into GALP**

When I was hired as Gender at Work's South African program manager in 2004, I had learned from personal, political, and organizational experience that social change requires much more than a “raised consciousness.” I had been a student of Resonance Repatterning® for six years and I had also just completed Capacitar’s “Multi-cultural Wellness Training” involving body-mind-spirit practices. I had experienced their value in my own life, and had seen remarkable shifts in peers on the Capacitar training course. I wanted to share these practices with others; I assumed that they would help to deepen and create a more integrated learning experience for participants.

Resonance Repatterning (RR), a system developed by Chloe Faith Wordsworth, draws on the quantum physics premise that we exist as fields of vibrating frequencies. Our thoughts, feelings, needs, and physical symptoms are all vibratory expressions (or patterns) that manifest positively or negatively in our health, our relationships, attitudes, and life-

issues. The value of RR is that it provides a methodology and practical tools we can use to change our resonance and thus support coherent frequency patterns (resonancerepatterning.net). We can also learn to resonate with an intention for creating new possibilities. In her workbook on “Transforming Unconscious Patterns,” Wordsworth (2002, 43) defines an intention “as an aim that determines who you are, how you relate, what you do and the outcomes you experience.” Resonating with one's intention affects more than oneself. Quantum physics teaches us that “all objects in the universe are continuously interconnected through a vast webwork of interacting quantum fields. ... This field is organized like a hologram, with each part containing information on the whole” (Oschman, in Wordsworth 2007, xiv). Therefore, according to Wordsworth, “[c]reating order in just one part automatically benefits the whole” (2007, xvi). This means that our resonance as facilitators affects the whole group field in which we are working. (whole... As Chloe Points out...)xiv

I recognized the opportunity for using Resonance Repatterning to help new teams of GALP facilitators collaborate more effectively by resonating—or aligning—with a common intention. In many of the contexts where we are invited to facilitate organizational and social change, cultural norms and assumptions that perpetuate social inequality and practices of exclusion are deeply embedded. It is important for us, as facilitators, to create learning spaces where participants can both experience and dream about a “new possibility”—ways of being and relating not bound by existing cultural norms. As facilitators, we also come to these processes informed by “our past” and we, too, need both to resonate with the intention of such a new possibility as well as be able to take actions that implement this resonance. Once we, as facilitators, align with our intentions, the vibration that is created enables similar frequencies in the unified field to respond and resonate with that intention, not unlike the resonating frequencies that vibrate back and forth between the tines of tuning forks. While

facilitators at GALP use Wordsworth's system of Resonance Repatterning, others who work with the concept and practice of intentions for aligning energies—for example, Lynn McTaggart (2008) and Deepak Chopra (1994) offer different tools with similar objectives.

The Capacitar practices that we have come to use in GALP were developed by Dr Pat Cane in the late 80s as part of a popular education framework initially intended for use with resource-poor communities needing to heal from various traumas (political, economic, environmental, war-related, and so on). The practices—or “wellness modalities”—evolved from a variety of indigenous traditions around the world. These include adapted Tai Chi, acupressure, “finger holds” (holding different fingers which are associated with different sets of emotions), and the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) which involves tapping on acupressure points while focusing on an issue requiring attention, in order to release blocked energy flows. They are understood to help harmonize and balance one's sense of self, enabling people from situations of conflict to build energy and personal strength that help them confront some of the worst ravages of colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist dehumanisation. They appear to awaken people to their own wisdom, power, and capacity and help them learn how to live with compassion in the midst of struggling against adversity (Cane 2005, 5–8).

Cane refers to the work of leading psychologists who argue that a large number of people suffer from traumatic stress due to natural disasters, accidents, domestic abuse, and political violence, and from the secondary trauma of living in a violent world (2005, 7). In some places, whole societies suffer from intergenerational trauma because of their violent histories, structures, and institutions. Healing in most cases means not just alleviating symptoms in the individual, but also addressing the healing of family, community, and society. Cane outlines typical examples of post-traumatic stress symptoms relevant to change projects concerned with transforming power and gender equality: feelings of helplessness,

detachment, isolation, alienation; loss of capacity for love or intimacy; inability to nurture or bond with others; loss of hope and a sense of meaninglessness. Familiar with these symptoms of trauma in the South African context, it seemed like “a good idea” to introduce these healing practices into the group processes in GALP. As will be shown, over time, the Capacitar exercises have come to play an important role in facilitating significant personal transformations amongst the people we have worked with, adding value to the whole change process and proving particularly significant in the context of the Horn of Africa.

Both setting intentions and the Capacitar practices are “tools” which help to align the facilitators and all members of the learning group, much like a conductor attuning the musicians in an orchestra. In my experience, combining GALP methodologies and peer-learning environments with these “tools” has been highly effective in helping to construct a learning atmosphere characterized by hope, enthusiasm, mutual respect, and generosity, even in situations of extreme trauma and conflict.

#### **[A] Explaining Mind–Body Practice**

Mind-body practices have, for thousands of years, been demonstrating their power to heal or “make whole” to those who subscribe to them. These effects are finally being backed up by (relatively recent) neuroscience research and quantum physics. Servan-Schreiber (2004), a psychiatrist pioneering research into body–mind connections, describes the human brain as composed of a cognitive brain (the neo-cortex), responsible for language and abstract thinking, and a limbic or emotional brain, responsible for emotions and the instinctual control of behaviour. He points out that the emotional brain controls much of the body’s physiology, autonomic responses, and psychological well-being. The limbic brain is literally formed or mapped *through* our emotional experiences, creating physical neural pathways that can become deep grooves the more times we repeat that experience. This phenomenon is responsible for our habitual thoughts and feelings; every time we repeat an emotional

experience, we solidify its pathway. The emotional information resides in our cells, where it can be activated without words. For this reason, according to Servan-Schreiber, “it is often easier to access emotions through the body than through language” (2004, 34).

Capacitar practices engage the emotional/limbic brain, helping it to unblock energy and facilitate a moving forward by reprogramming it through body work. The focus on the body and its connection to the emotional centre of the brain helps us adapt to present conditions instead of continuing to react to past experiences. In this way, Capacitar is one of the tools that can help to challenge feelings of inferiority, isolation, cynicism, or anger often caused by various kinds of social oppression and subordination. After doing a set of Capacitar exercises, participants often describe their feeling state as “lighter” or “well.”

The various Capacitar practices appear not only to have an impact on the emotional brain, but also to activate, or help participants access, the capacity for connection inherent in us as humans. Echoing a common response to Capacitar, Farhan Haibe, a Somali male participant in a Gender at Work process, says that “the exercise helps me to be one with the others” (Personal communication, 2007). In this sense, these practices contribute to a softening of rigid ways of being and thinking, creating a greater openness amongst participants toward others. Feeling at one helps them move beyond their separating identities based on religion, gender, language, class, education, and so on. This connection aids them in considering new ideas because they can now hear each other in new ways and with slightly less anxiety and fear; this, in turn, helps them contemplate cultural change. The enabling of change through Resonance Repatterning can be explained in similar terms—by activating one’s resonance with a new coherent pattern or intention, one creates new neural pathways. According to Wordsworth (2007, 154), “Every time you feed these new neural pathways through coherent actions and responses, the old neural pathways you once resonated with are weakened through lack of use.”



Dr James Oschman, a biophysicist and cell biologist who explores alternative therapies, offers further explanation for the experience of well-being and connection described by participants in the GALP workshops. In his foreword to Wordsworth's book (2007, x) Oschman writes, "[W]hen atoms and molecules are energized they can vibrate in unison and emit coherent energy such as that produced by a laser," and this vibration has a positive, energizing effect on our whole body, our tissues, our nervous system, and our mind.

Through the connections of your body with the vast fabric of space, the world around you begins to align with your purpose or destiny . . . Love, appreciation, confidence, self-worth, and hope are all coherent states of being that are radiated into the space around you and that makes it easier for others to shift in the same direction . . .

[W]hen we are chaotic, it is difficult to manifest our intentions; when we are coherent the universe supports us. (In Wordsworth 2007, xi)

The conceptualizations offered by Oschman and Wordsworth, which rest on an understanding of all objects in the universe as interconnected, are important in understanding the effects of these two practices—the setting of intentions and Capacitar exercises—in creating a connection between individual change and broader social transformation. In the following section I discuss some of the effects of the integration of these practices in GALP and how they work to enable and support the complex processes of lasting personal and social change.

#### **[A] Practicing Intentions and Capacitar Exercises to “Become the Change.”**

An aspect of our work in which the setting of intentions has been particularly powerful is that of supporting social change projects within a specific region. For example, when we started our action-learning process in the Horn of Africa, we worked with two local facilitators who were familiar with local cultures and fluent in the relevant local languages. We needed to

give serious consideration to perceptions of gender in this region where gender equality is regarded as a foreign, western import that ignores cultural concerns. Though we had communicated before, we were all meeting each other and working together for the first time so it was important for us to clarify our framework and develop a shared resonance. As a group we brainstormed the following intention:

We work in a way which is respectful of where participants are coming from and the risks they face in confronting conservative/traditional cultural beliefs, views, and practices. We create space for participants to explore and examine their own meanings, assumptions, and visions about gender equality and to clarify the differences between gender equality and women's rights approaches. The process is energizing and inspiring and enables partners to develop the most suitable and strategic ways of challenging what they feel needs to change.

We create learning environments which catalyze both personal and organizational change and which allow participants to feel safe, relaxed, and open so that they can become more of who they are. We help ourselves and participants unlearn old ways of thinking, being, and doing, letting go of all obstacles to growth. We ignite the desire among participants to reflect and write.

As facilitators, we are calm and centred and maximise on all our respective strengths and experience to build a strong and collaborative team. We successfully agree on and ensure the best possible programme design and outcomes. We build a warm working relationship and work together easily, smoothly and with fun. We listen carefully to each other and resolve conflicts and disputes amicably and harmoniously. We are clear about our different roles, our expectations of each other and what we are each accountable for.

I used Wordsworth's Resonance Repatterning system, by defining the intention, clarifying points of dissonance, and utilizing appropriate healing modalities to create coherence and to ensure a common resonance amongst us as facilitators. Participants crafted their own changes, according to their own visions and “in their own idiom” (Friedman and Kelleher 2009).

Capacitar practices, on the other hand, have been remarkably powerful, in my experience, in producing responses amongst participants that enable personal and social transformation. In all group workshops, throughout the day, we use Capacitar exercises that help address the stresses of the context. They contribute to breaking down barriers and hierarchies toward building unity; helping participants relax and release blockages, pains, and baggage they might be carrying from past experiences; cultivating an openness to different ways of thinking and relating; and activating positive energy for agency and change. A participant from north Sudan summed up the value of the exercises as being “connected to real problems in our lives. They help us to learn with our whole bodies and ... to live in peace with oneself and with others.” The following stories illustrate the way we work with the practices and some of the effects we have noticed amongst participants in GALP.

In our groups, we start the day with Capacitar’s adaptation of Tai Chi. Then everyone bows, looking into each other’s eyes to recognize each other’s “wholeness.” Moreover, the way the exercises center the individual in the body contributes to group cohesiveness and centeredness. We do the exercises in a non-judgemental atmosphere, reminding everyone to connect personally in playful, less self-conscious ways, and be willing to be authentic—all of which increases self-confidence and interconnection. When people feel relaxed in their bodies, they are more willing to respect someone else’s presence. A facilitator put it this way:

They help open up people to themselves, and to see each other as humans, building tolerance and trust, acceptance and forgiveness . . . [c]reating a common space. The work is a leveler.

Mahlet Mariam, working with Oxfam Canada's PACE program and the Gender and Learning (GAL) project in Ethiopia, shares a powerful story from a workshop in Southern Sudan. In that context, women are supposed to kneel down when in a room. There were 16 men in the workshop, all from different tribal groups previously at war with one another, who were to create a network for a joint peace process. Mahlet's position as facilitator was challenged from the outset: firstly, as a woman in an organization dominated by men and patriarchal ways, and, secondly, as a woman outside the Sudanese culture. Between the men's mistrust of each other and of a woman facilitator, tensions in the room were thick. Mahlet used breathing exercises and Tai Chi to address them. Although the men were skeptical at first, after they experienced Tai Chi's relaxing effects, the group requested more. The men had begun the process by not looking at each other, but by the end of the workshop, they were making eye contact and working together. The Tai Chi helped them calm down and connect in a new way; they commented on how the process had helped them to look at each other as human.

There are many examples in our work of the way in which continued practice of Capacitar exercises contributes to the building of personal power, or "power within." An Ethiopian woman we worked with, Habesha Nigussie, was a volunteer in a credit-union association with a very poor membership. When we first met, she was shy and withdrawn, spoke very softly and dressed in a way that made her appear almost invisible. She practiced the Capacitar exercises at home over the two years we worked with her. When we last met, Habesha was colorfully dressed and spoke clearly in a large group plenary. Not surprisingly,

she said that one of her favorite exercises was “the Lion,” in which one roars out one’s frustration and/or silence and connects with one’s inner power.

During the peer-learning workshops, after supper, I have offered some relaxation exercises, such as “head–neck–shoulder releases,” hand massages, “finger holds,” and EFT for those who wish to join in ([capacitar.org](http://capacitar.org)). These exercises acknowledge that tensions, stresses, conflicts, painful emotions or memories are stored in the body tissues and can be released. They help create spaciousness and can build a powerful bond between people. They can also contribute to challenging gender stereotypes, as the following story shows.

Mohamedeen, from a conservative community in Northern Sudan, learned a hand massage during the first peer-learning event in Ethiopia. He and his friend partnered each other one evening as I taught a simple hand massage that relieves stress and pain in the body. Being Muslim, the two men were willing to work only with a same-sex partner. They giggled uncontrollably for the whole hour, most likely to help them cope with something they’d never done before. The next morning, they reported how well they had slept and how relaxed they felt. The exercise can be done with people of all ages and conditions. Indirectly, it also teaches a form of non-sexual touch. The reactions it can unleash, however, are unpredictable. Eight months later, at the second peer-learning event, Mohamedeen reported:

I want to share ... in the family ... what I gained in the workshop, especially the massage, to practice communication with the hand. The exercise broke the ice between me and my wife. Now she is too enthusiastic to know from whom I learnt the exercise, when, how? ... I convinced my wife that nothing happened and I learnt it as part of the exercise in the workshop. Though, the exercise helped to create closeness, it also created jealousy so I promised to get a letter from Michel. (GAL Report, 2008)

At the final peer-learning event, we were updated on the story:

After my wife read the letter that Michel wrote, she became okay with it. The second thing is that I tried to share domestic responsibilities at home and tried to cook. The first time, I burned the cooking.

In informal conversation, Mohamedeen told me how he used to perceive the problems in his relationship as being caused by his wife, but now he is realising where he is at fault as well.

A benefit, that we have seen, of using the Capacitar exercises that release stuck energy, is that of greater openness to the moment. Such receptivity can help participants listen better to others and be open to what is being catalysed by a change project. This helps facilitate more openness in dealing with the fearful and difficult aspects of cultural and social-norm change. Mahlet expresses this:

The exercises give me clarity and focus. They are very profound. I feel settled. There is nothing afterwards—my heart is an open space. They allow me to hold, to engage, and to listen. My soul space is already open. (Gender at Work workshop, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

Reports from participants in our workshops who have practiced Capacitar exercises also indicate that they help them realize their potential for taking greater control over their own energy and moods. As Habesha says, “It’s possible to make a choice not to be frustrated all the time—it is possible to let go, this is a choice we make.” And Fazila, a South African facilitator, adds: “Regular practice results in action versus wishing something will go away.” Another facilitator maintained that as one works more and more with Capacitar exercises “you get less attached to a particular ego.”

You can let go of “this is how I want to look, and how I want to be admired.” This allows you to be a better facilitator. It lets you hear more, even stuff you don’t want to hear. It gives you greater courage . . . to manage a situation. If you can be open, you can work collaboratively for a solution. (Gender at Work workshop, 2009)

This personal capacity is carried into the change projects where participants are empowered to be more proactive than reactive, and sometimes more strategic. By helping people “think good things inside,” or feel surrounded with positive energy, both women and men feel more empowered and exude confidence, usually leading to more affirmative results. In Southern Sudan, for instance, the Women’s Development Group (WDG) worked on a project for learning about domestic violence. They developed a curriculum to teach the results of their research, to provide information to families around new ways of living peacefully at home, and to support parents in raising boys and girls in more equal ways. In the final peer event, the Sudanese facilitator, made a direct link between this project and the mind–body practices:

[I]f you want to make a project you need to surround yourself with positive energy. This is what we learned from the exercises. This is reflected in the naming of the project. WDG’s project, for example, is about domestic violence but they don’t use this name because it is negative, so they call it “Home Peace Education.” (GAL Report 2009)

Other practitioners of Capacitar have reported that the exercises engender a kindness to self and other, helping to find ways of dealing with anger, hurt, and desires for revenge in ways

that interrupt violence, rather than repeat, the cycles of violence. An Ethiopian participant revealed that,

Before, I used to challenge men who degraded me, in a very aggressive, fierce, and quarrelsome way. Now I have learned to challenge men in a more understanding way so both of us can understand each other's point of view. (GAL Report 2009)

By reducing fear and anxiety, and building confidence and a sense of capacity, new ways of relating are nourished and these are, hopefully, taken forward into participants' own organizational cultures. In this sense, these exercises represent a "politics" as well as ways of "breaking the ice" amongst participants and making them/us feel good.

**[A]Grounding the possibility for change in the body and in the world.**

While the mind–body practices help ground the possibility for change in the body, GALP requires participants to take action in negotiating cultural change in the world. A South African colleague, Jenny Bell, believes that Capacitar works in groups because it "sets an undertone of intention which seeps into that environment. We set the intention through the practice to care for ourselves, to love ourselves, to care for and respect others, the world" (Personal communication, May 2009). The structure of the group peer-learning environment creates a resonant field that generates positive energy that participants can access when they leave the workshop setting and go home and repeat the practices alone. The mind–body exercises thus help participants become more "coherent," which leads to a sense of greater potential and expansiveness. Given that these exercises are being done in the context of organizational and social change projects, there is somewhere for that energy to be channelled. The combination of both feeling a sense of renewal in one's own body and seeing the results from the change projects—projects that participants themselves have envisioned,



owned, and implemented—is what re-energizes and re-inspires participants to continue, even under difficult conditions. For people rendered “inferior” by systems of colonialism and patriarchy, this access to one’s own power is a fundamental challenge to such systems’ notions about who is valued, who has dignity, who can and who can't.

Furthermore, the peer-learning environments that are part of the GALP, also create opportunities for an enhanced sense of self, by taking participants away from the usual constraints of their home terrain. Together with the Capacitar practices, they move participants’ attention from being preoccupied only with the self and respective cultural contexts, to a much broader connection with others—with “the global.” Once participants return to their respective organizations and homes, that moment of “wholeness” is fragmented. Each time participants return to the peer space of subsequent peer learning workshops, it is as though they have moved around a spiral to return once more to that “wholeness.” Meanwhile, when they are dispersed, regular use of the Capacitar practices can energetically remind them of the resonant field of the peer learning, thus keeping them connected and not isolated.

Mahlet has told me that all six participating partner organisations from the Horn program have integrated the Capacitar practices into their everyday lives—personal and organizational. The facilitators noticed how the practices helped challenge the private–public divide and develop commitment to personal change that expanded out to collective change in families and communities. Mahlet reported that in her organization “everyone is demanding it; they say it helps them to concentrate and be present. One woman who was very agitated said, ‘I found peace after that.’ Thereafter I decided to do it [Capacitar] everywhere” (Gender at Work workshop, 2009).

### **[A]Challenges and Adaptations**

In all the workshops I've facilitated, I've experienced very little resistance to the introduction of the Capacitar and other relaxation practices. Typically, people feel an initial strangeness, but with practice this diminishes. As a colleague from KwaZulu-Natal, puts it:

I was confused at the beginning and I thought we are like crazy people. But when I was stressed at home I tried to do it on my own and it's where I found it working . . . I was relaxed and I was peaceful inside. So I am saying when a person is doing Tai Chi fully focused on it, one will get the meaning of it.

The exercises do need to be contextualized for the group before we undertake them, and often the language for discussing them needs to be adapted to the situation. For instance, Jenny Bell (personal communication, May 2009) describes how she does this.

In rural areas where water is needed, I convert the exercise from Tai Chi on the shower of light into an image of lifting a huge bucket of . . . water . . . and ask the group to imagine pouring this over themselves. I explain that we need to imagine this water seeping deep within our body swirling softly around those places which are feeling pain and gently easing them. . . . Groups love this exercise and always request it.

For the group to get on board, however, the facilitator has to resonate with his or her intention when leading the practices. Jenny expresses this well:

Facilitators have to believe and invest their mind/body/spirit in the practice for it to have an effect on the group. If I, as a facilitator, truly believe, then my certainty

becomes contagious. So to work it requires for me, the facilitator, to have a mindfulness. This sets the environment of care which is essential and the practices reinforce that care—for self, for others, for the world. So one starts out hesitantly but as one uses the practice the certainty grows (Personal communication, May 2009).

At a recent South African workshop, two participants who had missed the initial explanations of Capacitar were dubious. One felt that she couldn't get the benefits because she didn't understand why she was doing it—even while admitting that she was very disconnected from her body. The second one questioned the Eastern base of the practices, asking if there was an African alternative, such as drumming. Drumming, dancing, and singing are practiced in many parts of Southern Africa and are valuable methods for energizing the body and connecting people. In Southern Africa, Kenya, and India, dancing and singing do form an integral part of our workshops, but not in the Horn context. I am unaware of equivalent African alternatives to the Eastern-based practices that have calming and releasing effects, not achieved through more vigorous options. Indian participants have commented upon the caste-based nature of certain practices— how, for some castes, meditation is seen as a tool of the oppressor; it cannot be used with Dalits, for example.

To ensure people understand the value of the practice, I advise facilitators to offer contextually appropriate and strategic introductions at the onset of the process. However, the attendance at peer-learning events is not always consistent and there is no time to repeat these introductions. I also encourage participants to try the exercises and see for themselves. Once people feel the benefits in their own bodies, their interest grows. For more intellectually-minded participants, it is possible to offer both scientific and political explanations. Unfortunately, I don't often have the luxury of time to do so. Creating specific opportunities

where people have more time to learn the principles and background to the practices is another challenge.

### **[A]Conclusion**

Through its philosophy, attitude, and practice the Gender Action-Learning Process aims to role-model an ongoing process of becoming the changes that participants wish to see in the world. This takes place as a dialectic of learning and change, in part facilitated by using practices that challenge body–mind–spirit splits, and by empowering participants to own the process, the meaning, and the nature of the change. On the one hand, the GALP learning environment provides a space where participants experience what it might be like to live and relate in a different way; where they learn tools to see, be, and act differently; where they feel included, respected, valued, and open to receive challenges. On the other hand, through their change projects, participants are required to begin experimenting with translating this experience into changes in their own lives—personally, organizationally, and in the communities where they work— thus creating new neural pathways and eventually new habits. Through a process of continuous reflection, participants make conscious their biases, assumptions, and beliefs, and explore new learning about what it takes to create new cultural norms.

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<sup>1</sup> The Gender at Work workshop (2009) that is referenced here below, took place in Antigonish, Canada, in April, 2009 and involved a number of facilitators from the GALP program from around the world. I gratefully acknowledge their permission to use their stories and words in this and other publications.