

BRIDGING *the* GRASSROOTS

*A Study about the Influence of the
Asian Rural Institute on Rural Leaders*



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農村リーダーにおけるアジア学院の研修効果に関する調査

SUPPORTED BY THE FETZER INSTITUTE

Introduction



Xiaoan Li, Ph.D.
Program Officer, Fetzer Institute

As a private operating foundation in Kalamazoo, Michigan, the Fetzer Institute works to foster awareness of the power of love and forgiveness in our world. People across the globe, from all cultures and traditions, embrace love and forgiveness in daily life, and these values are universally viewed as central to the fabric of humanity. In this context, the Fetzer Institute pursues a unique role—working to investigate, activate, and celebrate the power of love and forgiveness as a practical force for good in today’s world. We are interested in how people truly experience and understand love and forgiveness from their diverse points of view.

To achieve this mission, from 2010 to 2013, we worked with hundreds of advisors from various disciplines across the world to identify exemplars of love and/or forgiveness in action; to reflect on and learn from their success; and to share this wisdom and any best practices in ways that benefit the lives of individuals, communities, and organizations.

We are grateful to our advisor Professor Richard Gardner, who identified the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) as one such exemplar. ARI envisions itself as an expression of God’s love in the form of a “multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, interfaith community” and aims to instill in grassroots rural leaders a greater sense of “servant leadership” in their work with the poor and marginalized. ARI’s efforts over the past 40 years have engaged and benefited thousands of students and participants from all over Asia and beyond. In our work together, both Fetzer and ARI recognized the value of conducting a loosely defined impact study to analyze and evaluate more fully ARI’s educational practices and their effect on students’ learning experience and outcomes, including their service in their local communities upon their return. In addition to this being a helpful evaluation, we hope it will raise awareness of a successful model whose central aim is to develop leaders imbued with the ideal of servant leadership, and one that is a deep expression of love, forgiveness, empathy, and compassion.

Huge thanks to Principal Investigator, Sarajeon Rossitto and her research team, who were essential to this work. We celebrate the learnings that have emerged from this project and that are well documented in this booklet. Our deep gratitude also goes to the ARI for their collaboration, to all students and alumni of ARI who participated in this research, and to the many more who worked effectively behind the scenes to help make this possible.



Rev. Kenichi Otsu
*Director,
Asian Rural Institute*



Tomoko Arakawa
*Assistant Director,
General Manager*

This was the first time in the Asian Rural Institute’s 40-year history to have an objective training program evaluation carried out by a third party. Although the need existed for a long time, we were not blessed with the opportunity until recently. Through the recommendation of Sophia University Professor Richard Gardner, we were fortunate to have an assessment of our training program and organization approved by the US-based Fetzer Institute and carried out by Sarajeon Rossitto a nonprofit NGO consultant based in Japan.

Through the years, ARI has attempted to live up to its motto, “That We May Live Together,” and we worked hard to achieve what seemed impossible: multicultural coexistence, intercultural understanding, and developing people, grassroots leaders in particular, who can create peace in the community by loving all forms of life. We have always believed in the great value of respecting all of God’s creations, including nature, which supports humanity and all other living things. By focusing on the development of skills and abilities, we have aimed to promote sustainable communities, and environmental sustainability, while working directly in collaboration with people at the grassroots. This is how we came to create this unusual value-based training program aiming to meet the needs of rural communities, focusing on the real conditions in which they live.

Even though we have tried many things in the past, it has been extremely difficult to evaluate the impact of the training just by looking at the activities of our graduates who are located all over the world, often in remote, rural communities. However, thanks to this project, we now have proof that our training is not just for our own self-satisfaction but is actually bearing fruit related to our goals and ideals.

We must emphasize the importance of using The Fetzer Institute’s focus on “peace, love and forgiveness” for the evaluation. Even though these are our aims, in the past, we had not reviewed ARI’s training through the lens of “peace, love and forgiveness.” From this starting point, we could assess what Graduates learned, how they learned them through our training, how they implemented those learnings and how the learnings were related to the promotion of “peace, love and forgiveness.” This is very important as the sharing of such skills and values have the potential to solve diverse current world problems.

The analysis surpassed our expectations. The results from the efforts over these two years are of great importance and value, and we intend to use them for our future policy and program development.

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2013 ARI Participants

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This study gathered qualitative data and as such there is only limited statistical information. The volume of data gathered was extensive and this report summarizes the study's key findings.



Graduates were excited to share their ideas and experiences.

WHY THIS STUDY?

As the Asian Rural Institute approached its 40th anniversary, the ARI leadership recognized that
 1) there had been no systematic evaluation process over the lifetime of the ARI program, and
 2) there was much to learn from the previous 40 years.

The purpose of this study was to...

- Gather feedback from various sources (Staff, Graduates, current ARI Participants) with a focus on the ARI curriculum elements most meaningful for Participants, as well as what ARI Graduates were able to apply when they returned to their home communities.

- Use the feedback to assess the ARI program and how it contributes to personal and community transformation.
- Provide ARI with a list of recommendations for future program development.

WHO DID WE TALK TO?

From April 2013 to April 2014, all 31 of the 2013 ARI Participants were interviewed, and all the essays and reflection papers from 2008-2013 Participants were reviewed. From August 2013 to May 2014, data was gathered from 124 Graduates in 20 countries through surveys, individual and/or group interviews. This 124 includes the 42 interviews from visits to Sri Lanka (January 2014) and the Philippines (April 2014). In addition, 21 current and past staff members were interviewed. In total, feedback was compiled from 300 persons from 36 different countries.

The entire evaluation project was completed over a 2-year time period (2013-2014) to allow for a deeper level of understanding of the complex issues and relationships over the 40-year history of ARI.

124 GRADUATES



The ratio of males involved was only slightly different than the actual Graduate female / male ratios, 37% and 63% respectively.

COUNTRIES OF GRADUATES SURVEYED OR INTERVIEWED

Out of 56 ARI Graduates' countries, Graduates from 20 countries were directly interviewed, visited or surveyed.



Graduation Year

~ 1979

1980 - 1989

1990 - 1999

2000 - 2009

2010 ~

Number of Graduates

17 persons

21 persons

23 persons

48 persons

15 persons

WHAT DID WE TALK ABOUT?

The core themes discussed were in two categories, program development and impact:

Programmatic Themes

- Recruitment and selection process: who are appropriate persons and how to find them, as well as how to bring new organizations into the ARI network.
- ARI curriculum and how to make it more meaningful to Participants in light of current and future challenges rural communities face.
- Challenges faced during the training program and upon return home.
- ARI outreach and network development; post training communications, contact and engagement with ARI.

Impact Themes

- Learnings: What Participants and Graduates learned, what was most meaningful to their work and community.
- Personal transformation: How Participants and Graduates changed their ways of thinking and behaving.
- Organizational and community transformation: What Graduates did upon their return and how they shared skills, knowledge and values.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

As with any program evaluation, there are challenges in collecting quality data. Below the main challenges encountered in the ARI evaluation:

The 40 year time period

When trying to collect feedback from Graduates over a 40-year time period, there are issues such as inaccurate contact information due to Graduates moving, difficulty in Graduates recalling specific information from years prior, changes in perceptions over time, Graduates passing away, etc.

Lack of up-to-date contact information

Contact was initiated by email and ARI had accurate emails for half of the Graduates, many of them being from more recent years. It is unknown if those earlier Graduates may have had different and/or more negative opinions or feedback.

Self-selection bias

Although Graduates and Participants provided some constructive criticism, not one respondent engaged interviewers solely to complain. This may be self-selecting, due to self-censorship or due to those with complaints falling out of contact with the ARI network.

Overlap in responses

53 persons provided us with information and data through multiple sources - group or individual interviews as well as through visits and surveys. Therefore the perspectives of these individuals are weighted more heavily. While a disadvantage in terms of statistical reliability, it also means that more detailed information was gathered from this subset of Graduates.

Access

Due to the diversity in the ARI community population, there may also be some bias in data collected through interviews. Factors that may have impacted the nature and quantity of feedback shared could be the level of English ability, personal and social characteristics, as well as gender norms. Also, it is likely that the data is biased towards those Graduates with internet and electricity access purely for logistical reasons; for example, 10 Graduates from Myanmar were scheduled to do phone or Skype interviews, but only two were completed due to poor phone and internet connections.

The results described here represent a slice of the ARI experience and although there were many limitations, feedback came from a sizeable number of Graduates from diverse backgrounds on a wide array of themes. The extensive feedback collected and its subsequent analysis lay a foundation for building a stronger ARI.

THE OUTPUTS

Besides this booklet, a variety of materials are being produced based on this research in the form of reports, articles and presentations with the goal of being impactful for ARI in terms of program development and expanding ARI's outreach:

- 1) Internal presentations and meetings with ARI staff aimed at program and organization development.
- 2) An informal but detailed packet including most research outputs for managerial staff use and organizational capacity development. This includes suggestions and resources for both organizational and training program development.
- 3) Articles and conference presentations aimed at both enhancing the study of ARI impacts and developing more awareness of the methods and approaches employed by ARI.



ABOUT THE ARI RURAL LEADERS TRAINING PROGRAM



ARI is a registered educational institute for vocational training, however, the training methods are quite different from what one might find at a traditional school, training center, or university. While there are many trainings that focus on community development, agricultural skills or leadership, it is the conscious fusion of these differing training foci that make ARI distinctive. Consistent with the mission of building an environmentally healthy, just and peaceful world in which each person can live to their fullest potential, ARI does not promote so-called “modern” agricultural technology that depends on chemical inputs, expensive equipment or large-scale monoculture, but instead promotes methods using local resources, aimed at sustainability and self sufficiency.

ARI's motto “that we may live together” is found in all aspects of the program. Each year, 25-35 participants from 15-30 communities across Asia, the Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America take part in ARI's 9-month intensive Rural Leaders Training Program. Participants, many of whom are from marginalized racial, ethnic or religious groups, are sent by community-based organizations to build their personal and community capacity. Many come with limited travel or international experience.

ARI leaders work alongside Participants and Volunteers engaging in field work, daily chores, and programming and the training involves a 360-degree experience of creating a community where distinctions between religions, ethnic and linguistic groups, educational backgrounds, caste, gender, job titles, and /or community positions are replaced by a flat hierarchical structure. Such an environment promotes equity, as well as personal growth and transformation.

CORE VALUES OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM

The Rural Leaders Training Program is based on three conceptual pillars:



Servant Leadership

Servant leadership, the concept of leading by serving, has been a core ARI value since its inception. Participants learn about leadership through the actions of ARI Staff and other community members, as well as through classroom sessions, social events, and engagement with community members while working together in the field. In the classroom, Participants learn about models of leadership, such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi, organization management skills, and current issues that may help them become more effective leaders. Participants also have the opportunity to practice and further develop their skills by leading field work teams and organizing community events. Working alongside Staff members and in work teams allows Participants the opportunity to learn from both serving and following.



Foodlife

The term “Foodlife” was developed at ARI to illustrate how food and life are interdependent and cannot be separated. ARI values the soil and this includes the people that work the soil as well. Thus, value is placed on the dignity and satisfaction in producing food with one's own hands. Farmers and rural communities are looked up to as the providers of life, rather than looked down upon, which is the case in many communities.

In addition, ARI embodies deep respect for the entire life cycle of food, including taking care of the soil, sowing, harvesting, preparing meals, washing dishes afterwards, reusing left over food, and composting, as well as food sales and processing for income generation. All steps in the foodlife cycle ultimately lead to making the most effective use of local resources in order to promote sustainability.



Community Building

Different from what is understood academically as community development, community building emphasizes learning through sharing and active engagement between diverse community members, which includes ongoing communication coupled with caring for each other. Through the sharing of study, work, meals, living quarters and daily chores, Participants learn from each others' experiences, knowledge, ideas, and know-how. Since the ARI environment is such that each member plays an important role in every aspect of the community, it is the daily experience crossing linguistic, social, cultural, ethnic and religious borders, which allows all Participants to grow as individuals and as a group, finding strength in diversity. The challenges and joys encountered along the way are part of the learning and transformation processes.



Social justice is the basis of the training program.

While many of the skills and much of the knowledge gained may be utilized soon after completion, the Rural Leaders Training Program has a broader mission of promoting social justice. Utilizing agriculture skills development and promoting leadership skills in a diverse environment are ultimately aimed at promoting understanding, tolerance, respect and peace from the grass-roots level. The intensive investment in individual and value oriented transformation is what has the potential to empower ARI Graduates to bring about broader change in their communities.

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

The mainstays of the curriculum include:

- Experiential Learning: Learning by doing through day to day work in the fields, in the kitchen and in the dorm.
- Classroom Learning: Introducing a variety of issues and skills including project plan writing, global warming, nonviolent communication skills and health issues.
- Spiritual Development: Taking part in different types of religious program services and sharing ideas about beliefs and practices.
- Community Events: Building skills in planning and time management.
- Individual and group reflection.
- Interactions with the broader community through regular visits from volunteers, guest speakers and supporters.
- Study tours to community organizations and organic farms.



CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT

Participants and Graduates were asked 2-3 questions about the curriculum. We tried to solicit...

- 1) Which themes, skills or other aspects could be reduced or cut.**
- 2) Which themes, skills or other aspects could be added or expanded.**
- 3) More general logistical issues such as scheduling, balance of contents, materials and methods.**

Almost all Graduates and 2013 Participants expressed satisfaction with the training program contents overall and more specifically with the knowledge, practical skills and leadership training aspects of the program. Some of the more critical feedback came from 1990's Graduates, perhaps because this was a time of organizational transition.

Comments from 2013 Participant interviews and from the 2008-2012 Participant materials review were more concentrated on how the program was run and what they learned. The reason for focusing on 2008-2013 Participants is that the curriculum contents and methodology were basically the same over this time period.

During interviews, Graduates focused more on what they learned and what they wished they had learned. Several also expressed an interest in seeing ARI adapt to the needs of the 21st century.



FEEDBACK ON TRAINING PROGRAM & CURRICULUM

Overall, there were many ideas for additions and revisions rather than deletion of any skills or knowledge development themes.

The following include some of the main suggestions for curriculum advancement:

- Ensuring that speakers and contents match the Participants' needs and expectations.
- Dividing the curriculum into semesters, each having benchmarks and more targeted learning questions.
- Making clear the purpose and/or expectations of outside community visits.

Many Participants and Graduates offered suggestions for additional topics for workshops and hands on learning, including:

- Contemporary issues: including sustainable development, rights, ecology and the environment, climate change and disasters, and gender.
- Organization management skills: strategic planning, project management, proposal writing, and monitoring and evaluation.
- Communication: English and Japanese language skills development, cross cultural communication skills.
- Agriculture related skills: skills relevant to different contexts, as well as income generation programming such as food processing.
- Activist skills: advocacy and community organizing.
- Some Participants and Graduates also suggested that ARI make active use of the Participants' own skills for such additions to the curriculum.

Recent participants gave much feedback for program development including:

- More focus on intercultural understanding.
- More attention to language levels and/or translation of the presenters.
- Take into greater account the language and knowledge gaps among Participants.
- Employ participatory methods such as role-plays and simulation activities to offer greater engagement and more experiential learning.
- Allow more time for reflection and digestion throughout the year to prepare for implementation.
- Several Graduates suggested a short-term refresher training course so they could update their knowledge and skills as well as share their experiences.



2013 Participants in a skit on gender roles

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Staff began introducing changes soon after initial consultation with the researcher in spring 2014.



The ARI staff (2013)

One example of adjustments made include the development of information sheets in preparation for outside visits and increased discussion on the purpose and meaning of such visits.

Staff also began interviewing Participants 3 times during the training, rather than just at the beginning and end to better gauge needs, learnings, challenges and interests. This is in addition to regular meetings between Participants and their consultant, an ARI staff member who serves as their personal mentor and adviser throughout the program.

Staff are reviewing feedback to assess what further changes can be made to enhance the training.

MOTIVATION

Why do people come to ARI?

Graduates and Participants were asked about their original purpose or motivation for attending ARI's Rural Leaders Training Program. Participants, those currently in the program, explained their intentions in the moment while they were still learning, while Graduates reflected back on why they remembered taking part. Some had very vivid and specific responses while others shared general comments. Despite the diversity of the respondents, most feedback can be broken down into two main categories:

1) To develop agriculture and/or leadership skills

Approximately 70% of all Participants and Graduates surveyed and interviewed expressed the desire to improve their farming and/or leadership skills. Many Participants connected the two skill sets by noting that the ARI training would provide an opportunity to learn leadership techniques, which would better enable them to assist their communities to put into practice the agricultural skills they also expected to gain.

From the onset, many of the 31 2013 Participants interviewed considered how they could use the training to make change in their home communities. Twelve explained their interest in learning agricultural skills, specifically organic farming, for example, Participant 14 explained, *I am from a rural area, remote area. We need many skills – leadership, agricultural develop. We want to know for our community. ARI is a good training institute for agricultural leadership. Everything for me is good for our community.*

Graduates shared many similar comments, and from the online Graduate surveys, a wide array of reasons for joining the program were noted, including the desire to learn more about the following topics:

- 30% Leadership and/or servant leadership
- 25% Farming/agriculture in general
- 25% Organic farming specifically
- 15% Sustainable agriculture

Many Graduates, before going to ARI, viewed the training as primarily technical in nature, and that it would provide new skills they could bring back so that community members would gain the technical skills to improve their crop yields. Of the 35 Graduates interviewed online, 85% described the importance of



Agriculture
and/or
Leadership
Skills
Development

Community
and/or
Organization
Development

organic farming, citing farmers in their community as focal points for learning. Graduate 30 described their community as farmers who *don't know the techniques in farming itself*. The majority of persons visited and interviewed in groups also mentioned leadership and agricultural skills as well.

2) To build their organization or community capacity

Besides the skills above, many Graduates and Participants responded that their aim was to gain skills and knowledge that would help develop the capacity of and better serve the needs of their communities or organizations. Few Graduates and/or Participants mentioned this as their sole reason for coming to ARI, but it was mentioned alongside other aims. For example, 20% of the 2013 Participants explained that their motivation included learning for the community and sharing upon return because it was their organizations or communities that sent them.

With few exceptions, most Graduates talked about the specific community needs that motivated each of them to apply to ARI. The broad range of community needs across many different individuals, societies, and countries highlights the diversity of situations where the ARI training could be utilized.

Related motivations listed in the Graduate survey were very broad and fall into several related categories:



Working with the grassroot people was what motivated me to join ARI. I have the passion to work especially with marginalized people when I joined my organization. They gave me a chance to go to Japan to learn about ARI and more on the agricultural techniques. I was very interested to join the program since I know I can use it in the future.

Graduate 14

About 30-40% rural living and rural community related
About 30-35% community development related
About 30-35% learning in a new context, with leaders from other countries or learning from Japan
Less than 10% in total mentioned more contemporary issues such as peace, gender, marginalized population issues.

Graduate 117 reflected back on learning about the training program,

I was excited about the training because I just read the details. It talked about the leaders and the grassroots. I am working as a development officer. The one who is a frontliner: Going to the field and taking care of our clients. Most of them are farmers, small entrepreneurs, small fisherfolks. So as we read about ARI, it's interconnected. We are also serving the grassroots. So, that's how we started to get in touch with ARI.

Other motivations

Other Graduate motivations included learning from others, exposure to new ideas, their own spiritual development, and developing skills and/or knowledge to better deal with the impacts of development. Graduate 86 told us it was specifically the ARI mission, *That we may live together* that attracted them. It was during the field visits and interviews in Sri Lanka and the Philippines, that social justice and personal development themes often arose in discussions. Graduate 37 told us they took part to *transform myself* while Graduate 33 explained that although it's important that they work with farmers, that they *always work for peace and justice* and this also drew them to ARI.

General Feedback

Several Graduates emphasized that organic farming or agriculture was not ARI's main purpose and that this is sometimes misunderstood by applicants and should be explained more clearly. However, given the diverse contexts from which Participants and Graduates come and how vast needs are, it is not surprising that some join explicitly for the skills training. For example, those from contexts where food security and hunger are daily issues, the farming techniques may be mentioned more often because such learning can have huge impacts on nutrition, health, stability and the development of communities.

Building skills, community development, and social justice are all fundamentally intertwined and as such many mentioned reasons in close alignment with ARI's values.

INFLUENCE

How the training program influences Participants and Graduates

Data was gathered from Participants and Graduates on training program aspects which were useful or important, as well as what Graduates were able to use upon their return to their communities.

Participants reported what they thought they were likely to use, whereas Graduates discussed learned skills and knowledge in terms of what they had been able to implement.

In consultation with ARI staff, a matrix was developed to track responses. The matrix was based on ARI's training program contents and priorities and included skills, knowledge and values. Section 1 focused on technical farming skills, Section 2 on servant leadership, Section 3 on practical aspects of the training, and Section 4 included a wide range of values incorporated into the program.

The first section below summarizes the learnings and personal changes reported by the 2013 Participants, and the following section introduces the influence the program has had on Graduates and how they were able to utilize the learnings. Quotes and comments from Participants and Graduates have been edited and summarized.

①

Influence on Participants

Learnings and personal transformation reported by 2013 Participants

Learnings

2013 Participants were asked at the beginning, middle and end of the training what they wanted to learn and what they had learned. Most reported learning not only what they expected, but also much more than they had anticipated.

In the final interviews, the skills, issues or values they found useful, important or meaningful were tracked. Figure 1 below depicts the top 5 learnings reported by 2013 Participants.

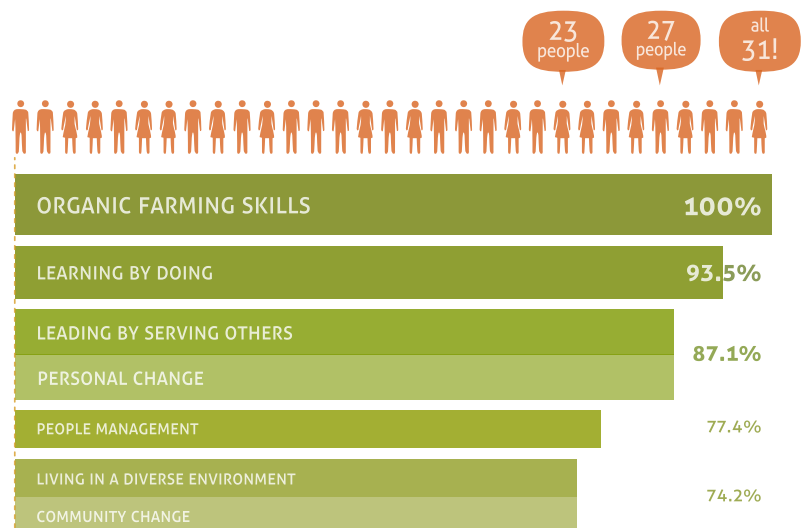
A majority discussed developing skill sets and knowledge in organic farming, agriculture techniques and leadership. Others commented on learnings directly connected to ARI values, which may have not been easy to understand before the training. Tracking the core values for Section 4 proved to be challenging given the gaps in language skills and subtle nuance of terminology.

Expected use of learnings

In the final interviews, 29 of the 31 Participants shared at least one example of actions they would like to take upon return, including using or sharing organic farming techniques, food processing, employing participatory approaches, making use of local resources, serving the marginalized, and raising awareness about the dangers of chemicals, as well as addressing women's issues. From all the possible plans discussed, three general themes were identified: educational programs, agricultural programs and community development programs.

Figure 1: What was useful?

Top Learnings reported in final interviews with 2013 participants





FOODLIFE

At ARI, everyone takes part in every aspect of the food cycle.

lesson from ARI on the role of servant leader. The servant leadership methods completely changed me. Staff are always practicing servant leadership and that is why. It is not just taught and learned but practiced every day. All people are equal. No discrimination. I never learned this before. I know the word "servant leadership" as a Christian but not in practice in the community. But from ARI I really came to know its meaning.

Participants recalled how the methods reflect the importance of community members, the need for leading by working with community members and focusing on their needs. Several also recalled understanding the importance of being humble, a good listener, and collaborative, as Participant 18, explained, *My way of thinking changed a lot... The servant leader is in the community, listening to the people in the community, actually asking them what they need and what they want and responding based on this active interaction.*

Participants 3, 7 and 14 shared their before and after stories with us. Participant 14 said, *before, we have project in a village, I go to visit them ... they do their duty, I do nothing. I just sit down. I don't do. They cook, I eat. I realize when I go back to my country, I will do everything with them. Not top down, share it together, this is my thinking now, I changed.*

Participant 3 also explained, *I want to change my behavior. ... I also acted like a dictator.... I used to say "You do not know. You need to ask me what to do." I feel now what I did then was wrong. Now I know I need to talk to many people. I need to speak less and listen more. We can make groups and share responsibility. ...now I am practicing the ARI way. ... I want to share, I want to change myself, my behaviors more.*

Participant 7 shared the personal impact this way, *Let me start with who I was before ARI. I studied a lot, went to a lot of training and workshops and these helped me become to a better leader... When I thought about a leader before I thought their main duty is to direct others and give duties. But here the Leader is in the forefront; working with others, working together. Here I was very shocked to see leaders doing things like dishwashing and cleaning the toilet. It was so strange to me, but if the director does it, why I can't do the same? The way they will see me in my community will be just how I felt.*

Personal Transformation

In final interviews in November 2013, all Participants were asked if, since they arrived in April, they felt they had changed. Thirty of the 31 (97%) Participants acknowledged a personal change and such reported changes came from both on and off campus experiences. Some focused on skills and knowledge while others focused on their development in terms of values and perspectives.

Here the personal influence of the program has been categorized as follows:

Foodlife - the cycle of food connected to all aspects of life

Most discussed learning farming skills but such learnings were not directly connected to the personal changes experienced. This may be because ARI employs natural sustainable farming techniques as a conduit for value development.

Some Foodlife values were discussed in connection to local resource assessment, reusing and recycling as much as possible, sustainable development and the promotion of self sufficiency. Viewing the community from the starting point of what it actually has is significant for many who previously viewed their communities through the lens of what they lacked and needed from the outside.

Participant 17 relayed their ideas about the various resources they are often unaware that they have may taken for granted, specifically soil and time, *Ask everybody and they will say: we are*



Foodlife - the cycle of food connected to all aspects of life

Servant leadership - leading by serving

Building respect and community in a diverse environment

Connecting global and local issues

poor, but we are rich. We have good soil; there is land. The problem is how people spend their time. Men work from early morning until 10 or 11. Why people say we are poor but we do this? We waste time? We need time management, leadership skills and organic farming through sustainable agriculture. If people can understand this, we can develop.

Servant leadership - leading by serving

Servant Leadership methods, skills, and style were reported by 87% of the 2013 Participants including the evolution of their understanding of what makes a person a leader, and most also told us they learned by doing and the modeling of servant leadership practiced at ARI.

Participant 30, who in the midterm interviews was critical of ARI methods, shared that they learned about servant leadership,

A leader is not a commander but serves the people. I got a great challenge and



Building respect and community in a diverse environment

Over half of the 2013 Participants (55%) reported personal changes related to the diverse ARI environment. Common themes included the importance of understanding each other, and how the training taught them to be more patient with and accepting of other people with different ideas and ways of thinking. Several mentioned that they came to recognize that each person comes with different ideas based on their background allowing all participants to learn from each other. Differences that were challenges early on in the training were overcome through active listening and engaging dialogue, and from this grew tolerance, understanding, acceptance, respect and cooperation.

Participants 16 and 9 shared their experiences and possible future benefits in the following ways.

Participant 9 told us, *Here at ARI, we try to understand each other. Even in our communities we have different feelings and views of life. I believe my learning here will help me organize those with different ideas. Even in field management, we had an argument. Even with this, we are able to come up with a good plan and good implementation. Sometimes I was very afraid of arguments in my church back home. But I will allow people to have arguments so they can express themselves so they can realize how other people feel. We all have ego, and pride. It is better if they argue than if they hold it all in. We become much closer from this.*

Participant 16 shared, *Sometimes, back home it was difficult to approach a Hindu or a Muslim without knowing them. But ARI embraces all, without boundaries. It changed my life. I came to understand every faith. I shouldn't despise other people from other faiths. If I have the chance to approach persons from different religions, different faiths, it will help in community development.*

Using the nonviolent communication and conflict resolution skills taught, active listening enables Participants to better understand each other at ARI. Participant 5 explained a change in attitude, *I became patient. My weakness is I easily get angry... If I see bad attitudes I just got angry. But I have really changed, so I can approach others in a good way. Not getting angry, understanding their attitudes and learning how to explain to different people. Each person is different. We need to be sensitive to each person. We need to be close to each other to understand.*

Participants also reported a transformation from seeing differences as a weakness or basis of conflict to understanding that differences in perspectives can actually bring the community strength, new ideas, and resources. Participant 34 told us that, *My opinion changed. I want to receive other persons and their opinions and ... I want to discuss for the best ideas or ways to achieve what we need.*

Participant 29, talked about the training influenced how they, *have relations with different people, and how to accept differences. Or even how to make a distance*

ACTIVE LISTENING

Communication with people from different countries develops patience and understanding.

“
I want to change my behavior... I need to speak less and listen more.

Participant 3

PLANS

Before the training is completed, participants share their implementation plans.

with people – a comfortable distance. It's something nobody could have just told me. I also realized that there are many ways to solve issues.

Connecting global and local issues

Participants also reported developing an understanding of global and local issues through lectures, workshops and visits to different parts of Japan. The observation trips, homestays and study tours provided exposure to social issues such as homelessness, mercury poisoning, impacts of mining, and local concerns such as suicide and aging society. Seeing the challenges development brings is eye opening to many, as Participant 7 recalled with great surprise, *We have also observed challenges people in Japan face. I saw with my own eyes the homeless. During the study tour in western Japan we saw how patients with leprosy were treated and Minamata disease [a mercury poisoning illness]. We saw some of the challenges here in Japan. I was shocked to see this.*



40TH ANNIVERSARY

In September 2013, 58 Graduates from throughout ARI history joined in the celebration and continued sharing.

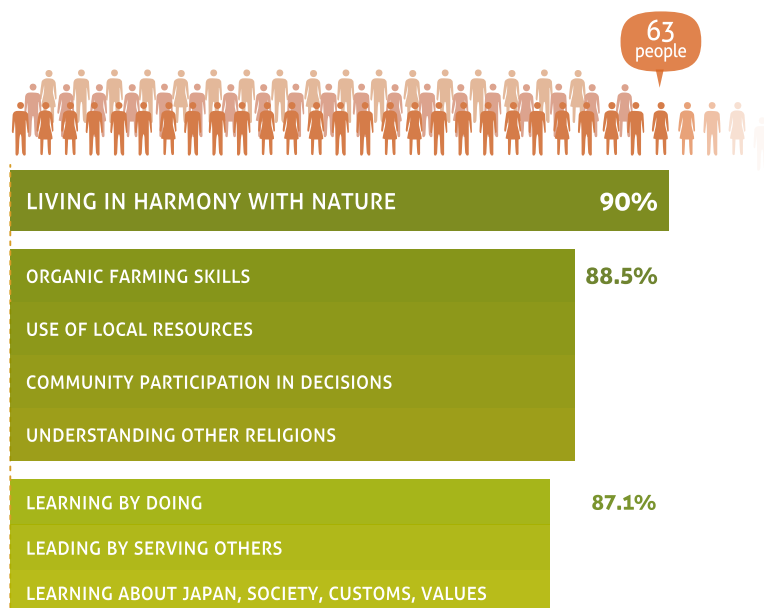


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Influence on Graduates

Figure 2: Top learnings reported by Graduates

Graduates listed the top three learnings in the 2013 survey. Below are the top ranking learnings:



The evaluation team gathered information on what Graduates learned and each method of data collection gave insight into the influence the training had on them. In surveys, interviews and visits, a majority of Graduates’ responses – approximately 80 % (of 124 Graduates) – included natural farming techniques and/or leadership as the most important skills learned.

The survey asked Graduates about the top three learnings, and in all forms of data collection, Graduates were asked about which learnings they were able to utilize upon return home. When asked about what influence the program had on them personally, many talked about a change in views or values based on the diverse community experience, and this often translated into a change in behavior. Graduates were also asked to share examples of how their work was influenced by their training at ARI and this provided a rich variety of stories.

It became clear that many Graduates are incorporating the values of Foodlife, servant leadership and community building into their work. Some mentioned the use of agricultural skills bringing about family and community access to healthy food, while others talked more about organizational development and becoming better able to meet community members’ needs.

The examples included below are representative of 1) ways Graduates have been influenced by the ARI training and 2) how they have influenced their communities through the transfer of knowledge, skills and values. Graduates discussed their work connecting to both the core principals of ARI and to the larger issues of sustainable development and building sustainable communities. The volume of feedback was vast, and what follows are summaries of the findings.

Foodlife, agriculture and natural farming techniques

Graduates reported learning and making use of a variety of specific farming skills learned at ARI, such as the making of organic fertilizer and pesticides. Some started by implementing through a home garden or farm, setting up a demonstration farm through their organization, sharing techniques with community members and local farmers or integrating agriculture into other programs.

Agriculture and farming technical skills

In the group interviews, a majority of Graduates mentioned that the skills learned in organic farming were vital to their daily work and community; using this knowledge, they were able to improve food productivity at home. In the 35 online interviews, 23 Graduates (66%) specifically mentioned use of learnings related to farming and/or agriculture techniques and 20 (57%) mentioned integrating food production and preparation. In the ARUGA (the ARI Graduate Association in the Philippines) meeting held in April 2014, most Graduates shared information on an agriculture skill or knowledge they were able to employ. Several Graduates working with children's homes, churches or schools reported utilizing sustainable farming skills in those places to promote access to healthy food and food self-sufficiency.

Graduate 34 explained how ARI changed both their viewpoint and farming methods, *My organization is agri-based so this training was helpful. Earlier, my idea was about agriculture business: to increase the production because the population was increasing and production was needed, and main emphasis was using fertilizer. But when we went to ARI, I realized that that benefit is not there because they are ruining their whole creation. Then I changed my use of chemicals and fertilizer and still*

I'm doing agriculture but mostly with the natural system and natural way of thinking.

The value of Foodlife

Understanding and directly participating in the entire Foodlife cycle had a major impact on Graduates. Many Graduates shared that they learned a new way of seeing food, and developing a connection to it. In the 35 online interviews, for example, about one-third talked about Foodlife in explicit terms, using the concept as a way to motivate the community together as a group. For example, Graduate 75 introduced how mobilizing the community as a whole to be involved in farming, including sharing crops raised and preparing meals as a group, helped facilitate local community development and developed a sense of cohesion in a place where the struggle for food was a daily concern.

Graduate 21 described the nature of Foodlife as the connection point for a number of other important issues, *For my community members, about 80% of which produces their own food, Foodlife, means life depends on food. And we, as humans, need to help sustain the environment that gives us food. We are trying to change the behaviors that destroy the environment and the crops, and promote sustainability. That is why we are promoting organic farming. We need to earn money, and keep the soil to grow food.*



KEY THEMES

Agriculture and farming technical skills

The value of Foodlife

Practical farm management skills

How to use and adapt local resources

Dignity of labor & the value of rural life

Demonstration farms

Environmental sustainability and connecting issues

Community-based training

Practical farm management skills

Time management and planning skills were frequently mentioned by Graduates as useful learnings that could be readily applied in diverse contexts. Such skills were gained from daily work on the farm, program planning, farm management, classroom sessions and the intense daily schedule at ARI. Many shared stories about trying to change the concept and use of time upon return, but the success of such practices was inconsistent. Graduates saw the value of time as necessary for proper planning. Graduate 57 explained, *After coming back from ARI I knew the value of time. I became the best follower of the time table in our organization. This is a change for my life, in the organization, society and in my family.*

How to use and adapt local resources

Graduates commented on developing the ability to identify local resources, as well as coming to understand that focusing on outside resources can result in dependence and/or unhealthy practices that are not sustainable. Some recounted not being able to see the resources available in their communities before ARI, and having their eyes opened to the existing, yet sometimes hidden, local resources. This represents a shift in understanding of new uses for the resources they do have, rather than focusing on the resources they do not have and need to obtain from elsewhere. For example, Graduate 67 shared, *The first thing, I teach our people – whenever we eat, we need to consume all food and if we still have leftover food then we need to utilize it tomorrow. If we cannot use leftovers anymore, we need to throw them in the composting bin and we can use for the fertilizers. ... That is also the way we learn from ARI that everything has its own place like recycling, like paper, like cans, bottles, etcetera.*



(L.) Babycha Devi Mangastabam, 2006, sharing natural farming skills with local women. (Manipur, India)

(R.) Marta Sianipar and Yuta Takeno (both 2012) working with school children and teachers. (Indonesia)



Judy Daka (2001) and John Nyodo (1983 and 1993, Training Assistant) working with their staff planting tomatoes. (Zambia)

Dignity of labor and the value of rural life

The dignity of labor and the value of rural life are mentioned by Graduates as part and parcel of realizing the value of farming and producing food with their own hands. This is in contrast to the urbanization pressures many face whereby a “good” life means sending one’s children to the city for university and to get a “good” job there. Some come to rethink labor with their hands in a different way. Instead of being ashamed, they can feel pride in the important role of providing sustenance to the community. Graduate 121 told how he used to be embarrassed as he made his way to his farm in his farm clothes, but now he was proud to be a farmer and able to share what he learned with others.

Demonstration farms

For many Graduates, ARI itself served as a model for disseminating knowledge into their home communities. One common method was the development of demonstration farms; some Graduates used their own land to demonstrate the organic farming and its comparative benefits in terms of sustainability, crop quality, and soil preservation. Others used land around schools, churches, or children’s homes for demonstration. In many cases, this led to greater participation from the community and the demonstration farm acted as a “farm school” similar to the field training at ARI.

Graduate 17 worked among impoverished youth, founded their own NGO-based demonstration farm and they were able to make direct and lasting impact upon individuals within the community, sharing technical skills and motivation by providing an example.

Environmental sustainability and connecting issues

In discussing the connections between learnings, many shared developing a consciousness of living in harmony with nature and gaining more respect for the environment, such as Graduate 21, *Living in harmony with nature is the motto of recently established environmental community based organizations. I have been able share with community members the danger of chemical pesticides, slash-and-burn farming as well as the deforestation.*

Graduates described what they learned about the impacts of chemicals used in agriculture and how they were able to make use of the knowledge about chemicals affects on the soil, health and the environment. Graduate 82 told us that before the training at ARI, they *did not know the dangers of chemicals. After ARI I tried not to use chemical fertilizers or pesticides and organized about 20 seminars a year introducing the dangers of chemicals.*

Graduates discussed gaining a better understanding about the connections between issues, such as multinational corporations and GMOs, organic farming and healthy living, health and nutrition, poverty and globalization, hunger and agriculture policy, as well as disasters and climate change. Still others were able to activate their learning to tackle broader issues as Graduate 77 told us how, *ARI gave me the confidence and courage to take on larger issues, national international issues, and succeed in policy changes. Many things such as getting land to produce food. And living on land with no rights. ... Also how to develop livelihood rights.*

Graduate 4 explained the importance of understanding the connections between, *rural leadership promotion, peasants rights, consumers rights, and the creation of sustainable life style by utilizing local resources.*

“*ARI gave me the confidence and courage in take on larger issues, national, international issues, and succeed in policy changes.*”

Graduate 77

“*After coming back from ARI I knew the value of time... This is change my lifestyle in organization, society and family.*”

Graduate 57

Community-based training

Several Graduates recounted taking training programs to another level through the creation of what they called their “mini-ARI” training centers. These community-based trainings varied greatly in contents and targeted specific themes such as environmental education, microfinance, income generation, financial literacy or vocational training, in addition to agriculture skills. Many integrated ARI social justice values and employed participatory methods along with skills promotion.

Several programs targeted women to promote organic home gardens so that they can both feed their families healthy food and help gain extra income. These programs may start with a focus on transferring technical skills to local women but Graduates also described these programs as attempts to empower community members to have more control over their food, their income and their lives. For example, Graduate 1 also described an agricultural and livestock training as a source of empowerment, *Recently, we have given several thousands of ducks to rural women groups to raise, nurture and sell them to ensure livelihood security and increase family income. These women are now economically independent and possess good money in their hands and they take decisions of their own to use their money.*

Graduate 110 introduced how they promoted the skills to different populations widening the reach of the training, *Not only for farmers and women but I also promote to students...because there are many Catholic schools, I thought maybe it is better for the Catholic schools to integrate organic farming into the curriculum. We have a K to 12 educational system and students can select their practical arts like farming, or welding. So I said to the bishop and to the clergy that it is good for us to promote organic farming in our school.*

For many Graduates, agricultural skills, development, sustainability awareness and knowledge awareness alongside the value of Foodlife, come together in their daily lives connecting each aspect of the ARI training.

Servant Leadership

The modeling of servant leadership is one of the greatest influences of the ARI training program. Servant leadership changed not only the Graduates' understanding of what a leader is and how to lead but also altered their understanding of their role as a leader, the importance of community members and the need for leading by working directly in the community.



Changing idea of leader - from commander to facilitator
 Leading by serving and Leading by example

Working at the grassroots and listening to the community
 Challenges in applying Servant Leadership



Changing idea of leader => from commander to facilitator

Many Graduates used similar language when talking about their ideas of a leader before the training - “giving orders,” “commanding,” “dictating,” and having a “high position”. Often leaders are “in an office”, not getting their hands dirty and not directly involved with those “below” them. However, their ideas about leadership were transformed while at the Asian Rural Institute. The transition from commander to facilitator took time, and many did not feel at ease with this at the start of the program. They came to understand the difference in the skills, demeanor and impact of the facilitator who works directly in the community together with the people as compared to their previous notion of the dictator type of leader. The facilitator-leader still requires skills, vision and direction but also needs to be humble, a good listener, and have a positive attitude to help others develop their own solutions.

The leader becomes a guide on the road, shedding light on different routes to take rather than the commander telling followers where to go. This change

is profound and has long lasting effects as reported by Graduates 79 and 125.

Graduate 79 explained, *Before I was the big boss, ordering, demanding - not doing. Completely changed. I am an example for others. Now all understand me. Now I respect their role and listen to what they say. Improvement in team work. I am giving the opportunity to others. Even if not 100%, we can try if we are a good leader, we can! And then a big change will happen.*

Graduate 125 told us, *Before, when I conducted meetings I only talked, one man --- that's what I really learned in ARI ... you make consensus and not only one man rule, so that everybody will learn. Everybody will have the opportunity to talk or to share.*

Leading by serving and Leading by example

The Director and other staff members working with everyone else, modeling servant leadership by getting their hands dirty is a lasting memory reported by many Graduates. They come to understand that how leaders position themselves in the community is also

connected to the way they will be perceived and the actual impact they will be able to have. This change in leadership style allows the Graduates to better integrate into their community and act as a resource.

Graduate 100 told about putting it into practice, *Then I changed myself. I thought, how I serve as a servant to the community. I am a leader but I am a servant for the community.*

Graduate 40 shared a common memory reported by early Graduates, *... One early morning Dr. Takami was washing the toilet. That really hit me hard and now I thought, this is really leadership. Show it by doing. Not only talking about leadership --- but actually working with that leadership. You're the servant leader. You should train the people how should do it. Dr. Takami very clearly demonstrated that. We have to turn the community by doing what we are preaching. Not just preaching or telling but by actually DOING what we are preaching. Learning and working together. Not to give orders, not to have servants do it for you, but to actually do it yourself. ... It's our job and responsibility - so lets do it! So this was another good lesson I learned.*

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Before, we were not taking into consideration the community's proposals. Now, we were able to listen to them, according to the servant leadership training.

Graduate 85



Babycha Devi Mangsatabam (2006) leading a capacity development workshop for local organizations. (Manipur India)

Ratna Prasad Sapkota (2005) talking with local community members to prepare the set up of an irrigation system and toilets. (Nepal)

Working at the grassroots level and Listening to the community

ARI emphasizes participatory decision-making and the need to work directly with the members of the community. Graduates shared positive feedback about developing invaluable communication skills including language skills, active listening skills, more sensitivity to others and different methods for engaging different persons. Other learnings included becoming more open to new ideas, becoming a better facilitator, being better able to convince and negotiate with others to ensure that more voices are heard. Many came to appreciate the skills of learning to communicate with diverse audiences in ways those people can relate to without prejudice and with an open mind. Upon returning to their home communities, many Graduates attempted to invoke greater collective decision-making.

Graduate 13 shared, *We have many activities in ARI: community work, participatory learning. From that I understand how to be a good leader. Listen to people around, Not just make decision myself, Not just from my side. But consult people. Make an idea and apply together.*

Graduate 85 described their work as, *Before we were not taking into consideration the community's proposals. Now, we were able to listen to them, according to the servant leadership training, listening to their proposals.*

Graduate 31 contrasted their time at ARI with life before entering the program saying, *Before ARI when we have decision making time, I'm the person who get the final decision. I don't get others idea. After ARI, I sit with my staff, when you want to get some decision, I discuss with them, what is their opinion? All those things, we come to final decision – collective decisions. I try to do my best, to get all decision.*

Graduates from diverse contexts shared a change in their approach, such as Graduate 108 told us, *Before, sometimes I just focus on what I can do, not realizing that that is not the need of the people in the community. Now that should be confirmed, coming from the people, coming from the community before really acting and involving the community in planning, implementing.*

Graduates also emphasized the change in how they view themselves in relation

to other members of their community, and how the view of them within their communities also changed. This allows the Graduates to become better integrated into the community and more able to serve as a resource.

Challenges in applying Servant Leadership

Many shared challenges in introducing and applying servant leadership in their home communities. Only Graduates 28 and 92 said it could not be used outside ARI, and Graduate 123 explained that they could not apply this to their work with Indigenous Persons.

Difficulties in implementation included the expectations of what a leader is. One Graduate told us that their community was *shocked, because they felt that the leader must be a person who must always be served.* This response was an exception, but it serves as an example of the challenge in implementing new leadership methods.

While many told us that servant leadership was a challenge to initiate or that it needed to be introduced slowly, many also found it a valuable learning and meaningful when working with different groups and stakeholders. Some Graduates commented that it takes time to change minds and behavior – just as it took them 9 months to change during their ARI training. As Graduate 11 described, *Of course it is not easy, we do not totally change other people ... we get some difficulties; we get some good things also. We know how to cooperate with other people. To offer our ideas. Not to teach them, but how sharing is more important than teaching. If you teach you don't share what the needs are. We need to know how to work with the people.*

Many Graduates found the servant leadership skills and values vital to motivating and organizing local community members regardless of their different backgrounds as pastors, agricultural leaders, community organizers or international development project staff. Graduates have changed the way their organizations' work by changing the decision-making style, becoming more inclusive, creating more ownership among the different stakeholders in the organization and/or improving the skills of the staff and the stakeholders in the community they serve.



Joefel Resol (1990) working with youth during an environmental education workshop. (The Philippines)

Stuart Sempala (1994, 2001 Training Assistant) sometimes goes to villages looking for the orphan children who are being used for cheap labor. Here he is seen trying to get the young boy freed so he could go to school. (Uganda)



Community Building

Community building is connected to both ARI's mission and the Fetzer Institute's focus on developing peace, love & understanding. Graduates often discussed the diverse community environment as having a direct influence on their ways of seeing and behaving and many emphasized the relationship between respecting differences in building community and the Servant Leadership training model.


KEY THEMES

Becoming more tolerant
- Understanding, acceptance and respect for others
Interfaith environment

Serving the marginalized
Peace, love and forgiveness

Becoming more tolerant: Understanding, accepting and respecting for others

Graduates reportedly appreciate how the ARI experience exposed them to a diverse religious, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Through the daily experience of sharing opinions, experiences and ideas, Graduates realized changes in their way of thinking and recognized the need to step back and develop patience and humility in order to develop relationships with others.

From the survey responses alone, 60% of all Graduates felt that the experience of being with people with social and cultural differences helped them better understand and respect differences. In most of the interviews, Graduates referred to the learning and personal impacts of working with different types of people, and learning to understand and accept differences. This can enable them to rid themselves of previously held ideas or prejudices. Graduate 24 told of sharing a room with a person from a country he previously had negative ideas about and how overcoming those fears changed his ideas about working with others.

Graduate 21 introduced the impacts of the community environment this way, *I understood it as all about sharing - sharing is one of the major activities at ARI, we share knowledge, we share experiences... we come from different social backgrounds, but I think we understood ourselves, and solved our issues within ourselves, and respected each others' cultures. We work with people of different cultural backgrounds, and I respect their cultures.*

Graduate 95 explained that they, *Learned how to work together with so many different people, many people are doing the work, not only one person; learn to do many things, encouraged to learn everything; People are not divided; not laborer and boss, people at all levels became friends.*

For many Graduates, these skills enabled them to strengthen collaboration with members of their own communities. Several Graduates in both the Philippines and Sri Lanka made the connection between the diversity that exists in their home country and how the ARI environment of extreme diversity enabled them to work more effectively with different people upon their return. Graduate 103 explained, *What's*

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**Sharing is
 one of the
 major activities
 at ARI.**

Graduate 21

most meaningful was the diversity. It broadened my perspective by learning with people from all these backgrounds - different people, generations, genders. It also broadened my perspective on community organizing. It also helped me in post-disaster work and understanding what it means to serve the parish.

Several expressed that it was the daily practice rather than the classroom teaching which made the greatest impact, including Graduate 89, *I think for me I found the ARI life, - I call it the soft part - sharing the flavor, equity, dignity. You don't learn it systematically and you don't label it. You practice it day by day.*

The methods used and soft skills gained were often discussed by Graduates, for example Graduate 66 explained, *The softer skills could probably really make us better with respect. ... The softer skills and hard skills are the part of the training because they are connected to everything. To respect differences of them all. In various situations accepting difference is very important. Respecting others cultures. Respecting others' traditions, respecting others' beliefs. Appreciating the differences. ... This is part of the core, the soul of ARI.*

Graduate 46 shared their transformative experience this way, *I could develop a positive way of living together in love, understanding each other and forgiving each other. A servant leader is a leader who humbles herself or himself and serves others and works with others at same level. This is not physical humbleness but rather a spiritual humbleness for when the flesh is suffering the spirit is growing.*

Graduates 2 and 52 specifically talked about looking at others more equally. Graduate 2 said, *I learned respecting all cultures, tribes and religion people equally.*

Graduate 52 shared, *There is equality - whether you belong to the so called "developing countries" or "developed countries." We are all human beings working together to appreciate and experience the abundance of the blessings of our creator. Sharing one vision that is worthwhile for the world.*



T.L.M Makeen (2002) has initiated monthly meetings of diverse religious leaders to look for ways to approach local issues together. (Sri Lanka)

Interfaith environment

Whereas many early Graduates identified ARI as a Christian organization, more recent Graduates emphasized the inter-faith and multi-religious composition of the ARI community as an important element in their learning. Graduates agreed that religious diversity enhances the program and, given the current state of tension in the world, could potentially expand the impact of the training by building stable communities.

For many, it was the first time to get to know and/or work with people from other religions or those without any religion. Several Graduates, including Graduate 3, told us that, despite being from a diverse country, it was at first surprising but impacts deep, *Then there are some things when I went to ARI that opened me a lot like about religion, because I am a serious Catholic. Then when I went to ARI, I said, whoa! Different people, different culture, different religion, then there are some people that have no religion! So, it changed me and I became more open-minded.*

Graduate 67 shared the importance of learning in a multi-religious atmosphere and how this can impact their local efforts, *The second learning for me is we live life together harmoniously - some have no religion, some Buddhist, some Hindu, some Christian and some Catholic but we worship together harmoniously. We listen to each ones struggles in relationship to God. So, I think this something that we also need to apply in my country even though Christians are a minority. If in Japan with this small Christian com-*

munity can, I think we can also practice learning from different cultures, different languages, different religions, and live together harmoniously.

For Graduate 7 whose work post-ARI has involved peace promotion, the importance of difference forms one of the most important aspects of the ARI training, as through respecting differences can communities form peaceful bonds, *Our society is always looking at matters through religious eyes. Though we live together peacefully, we do not purely accept one another's culture or faith. ARI taught us to respect all regardless of their religion, color or race ... at ARI I heard stories from Buddhist friends from Sri Lanka and Thailand. I learned how to live in society and respect one another. Respect each other with different nationalities, religion, faith and tradition. We eat, we pray together. This melted my ego.*

Some expanded their perspective on their work, such as Graduate 26 who explained their work with Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians upon return and told us, *It changed me totally. Now I am not only working for Christians. I can serve the whole world. Like when the rain comes, it gives benefit to all creatures in this earth.*

A few Graduates also openly discussed their spiritual development and how ARI provided an opportunity to further develop and/or reflect upon their own beliefs. Some reported understanding how to combine the lessons learned at ARI to enhance the work in their ministries by combining church programs with organic farming or engaging women from minority groups.

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Graduate 26

Serving the marginalized

Serving those most in need or with the least power has been vital to the social justice focus of the ARI training program and more than half of Graduates prioritized working with and serving marginalized groups. Graduate 18 made working with the marginalized an explicit focus of their work upon return home and focused on ex-convicts and criminals, providing them with better educational prospects. Graduate 25 reportedly, *Started schools for low cast Hindu and poorest Muslim communities, adult literacy for parents and empower women to start small business by providing them loans.*

Graduate 7 shared a change in their work, *After seeing the poor life situation of the marginalized especially women and Dalit (underclass people) in my surroundings, I planned three schemes: 1. Education for all children. 2. Women's programs to support the families. 3. Free daily food service at the public hospital.*

The flat hierarchy opened the eyes to the realities in their own societies, as Graduate 89 told us, *The whole idea of the brotherhood like we are all the same at ARI was meaningful. We have some levels in our society - very clear from top to bottom. If you speak English you belong to one social group, caste and class. Everything has a value in some way so for me ARI ripped this off.*

For Graduate 30 this was a deeper reflection on one's purpose of life, and was *Very useful to understand that the meaning of existence is serve others, and ethically to work in solidarity for those who are neglected, forgotten and deprived.*

Peace, love and forgiveness

Although most Graduates did not use such terms as peace, love, and forgiveness explicitly, they are encapsulated in discussions about sharing, developing tolerance, respecting differences, and serving the marginalized. Many Graduates engaged in social change work commented that the experience and knowledge development from ARI gave them a broader base for empowerment through developing a sense of solidarity with people from all over the world. This motivated many to go beyond the boundaries of their previous work to expand their efforts in the promotion of sustainable practices, understanding, and social justice in their communities.

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To understand that the meaning of existence is serve others, and ethically to work in solidarity for those who are neglected, forgotten and deprived.”

Graduate 30



Mzungu Raphael Ngoma (1990) works with local people struggling for the right to stable housing and land ownership. (Kenya)



Renuka Badrakanthi, (2004) gathering community members in the campaign against the Seeds Act that would inhibit community seed banks. (Sri Lanka)

Babycha Devi Mangsatabam (2006) and Sangita Devi Yumnam (2013) are working to develop leaders to promote human rights in their community. (Manipur, India)





Sayni Chaudhari (1995, 2002 Training Assistant) set up the Sister Home Learning Center for women to promote skill development. (Nepal)

Broader Influence of the Training

There were many other reported learnings resulting in personal and broader impacts and here we highlight just a few:

Enhanced understanding of Gender

ARI's flat social structure helps develop sensitivity to equity and gender roles. By experiencing equal involvement, barriers between men and women become less rigid and many report developing a more inclusive view, such as Graduate 31 who reportedly gained a better understanding of women and their value, and also gained a less traditional gender outlook.

Graduate 75 explained, *I was not so concerned about women's programs, to talk about so much to women. I said, what is this thing women are talking about? In my organization, we now have a gender policy. We are trying to share gender with the community members, how to share roles, how to share responsibilities. Gender is a key component in the program now.*

Seeing men in the kitchen doing cooking, cleaning and menu planning had a big impact particularly on men, because regardless of generation or country, most had no prior experience seeing men doing cleaning or cooking before ARI. Graduate 913 shared their experience,

Generally a man who is brought up in a developing country doesn't wash plates and utensils. Dish washing is considered as women's work in my community and in my home. But, at ARI we don't differentiate among people who should wash dishes. By washing dishes I could enjoy the dignity of labor and it really helped me to be more humble, especially when I see that all the staff are doing the same thing. This motivated me and gave me strength in my day to day life.

Several male Graduates specifically cited gender equality as an issue to improve at home, and one they only realized after training at ARI. Some, like Graduate 79 explained, *I started to work with my wife, cooking, working in the garden on the land. This resulted in an improvement in my family, and better communication.*

Graduate 85 noted broader changes, *By using servant leadership not only at the Sending Body office, but in the field, and in households, men start believing in the idea. They take up jobs, like washing the plates. We encourage men to assist in chores - before, only women could do these tasks.*



KEY THEMES

Enhanced understanding of Gender

Personal Development

Implementation beyond local communities

Two graduates in Sri Lanka talked of the conscious efforts to create participatory programs including all family members. Graduate 80 runs family development programs, rather than women's programs, with the aim of inclusion because they believe that *when the family is happy and peaceful, the community is as well.*

I told them to include men and children and wives. Now they're happy not only husband or wife, but both. After our work, many husbands are very happy and then they believe in their families. There are many big problems and the solutions I found in 1990 from ARI were very, very important. They now use our family program in Bangladesh and India also.

The gender neutral system was not easy for everyone, as Graduate 91, a 1970's Graduate recounted her experience, *The first few days when we got together at the dining place, everybody was eating together. I was seated underneath the shelf, where dirty dishes were collected, because I was not happy to sit with men. I was always afraid of men. I thought men are not safe at home so I was not comfortable to sit beside men.* However, she went on to explain that her ARI experience helped her gain confidence to work with men, which had a positive impact on future relationships with male and female co-workers.

Personal development

Graduates often reflected on their own personal development when asked about what they got from the program and how they changed. Some responded that they had not thought about it very concretely before and found the interviews and surveys a good chance to think about what they had gained while others clearly recognized the influence ARI had on their lives. There were many comments about lifestyle and attitude changes; among these were becoming more confident, more motivated, more positive, valuing a more simple lifestyle



I started to work with my wife, cooking, working in the garden on the land. This resulted in an improvement in my family, and better communication.

Graduate 79

and better able to take risks. Graduate 89's parents shared how their daughter had matured; she left home a girl and came back a confident young woman with new eyes on the world.

Many stories of the ARI impact on personal development, such as those below, were shared in terms of before and after the training.

Graduate 35 shared their change, *I used to be arrogant. I thought that the role 'I' played was the most useful and important in the organization, and that what I thought was right. I gave importance to qualification and intelligence. In the nine months at the ARI, all these things changed; CHANGED FOREVER. Most importantly, my attitude changed. The change in me came from within through foodlife, worklife, evaluations, living together, staying with Japanese families etc. This was the greatest TRANSFORMATION ARI training brought about. My colleagues told me they saw a change in me.*

Graduate 113 explained, *Before ARI, I really didn't have the guts to stand in front of people. I was just a junior staff in my organization. Before ARI, they would not let me speak in front when we had trainings. I used to do documentation only. ... ARI really molded me to increase my self-confidence.*

Graduate 123 told us, *Before I had no guts to face the mayor, the village captain, and all those political leaders, but after ARI, I have the guts to talk with them. ... It helped a lot with my confidence.*

Implementation beyond local communities

There are also Graduates who took their learnings beyond their local communities through sharing skills, knowledge and values with international development programs and networks. Graduate 16 explained that although they were not active in one grassroots community, what was learned at ARI helped their international development work, *When you talk with them (local farmers) and they see that you have some basic knowledge you gain their trust. ... When they know I have some knowledge about agriculture, they talk deeper to me. This is very important for me, and for my work. Not for my own achievement but ultimately for the benefit of the group, of the farming community.*

Many of the methods ARI has used since the early days are more common place in international development now. Graduate 89 explained that *Over the years, it (the international development field) went from being dominating to deferential to participatory and I already experienced the participatory and service approach at ARI. We talked of participatory management and my colleagues found it very difficult, but I found it very easy. My colleagues were less open to it and I think I got it from ARI. I'm sure my colleagues were struggling. It was difficult to convert from conventional leadership - even for my NGO colleagues.*

Ariel de la Cruz (2005) has been part of Greenpeace campaigns to facilitate people's access to varied diets of ecologically farmed foods. (The Philippines)



Naw Lee Myar (1998, 2007 Training Assistant, right) at a global conference on the status of women's rights. (Myanmar)

General comments on the influence of the training program

At first glance, Graduates' work may be seen as direct application of farming and leadership skills, but once we delve deeper into their stories, the sustainability and community building aspects as well as the focus on the marginalized reflect the value-based learnings that are more directly connected to the ARI mission and motto, "that we may live together."

What can be learned from the comments above is that it is the solid value base of the Asian Rural Institute's training program which deeply influences Participants and motivates them as Graduates to implement not just skills-based programs but also to actively share learned values with their home communities. The feedback from Graduates shows that their

influence in organizations and communities has been significant as they attempt to transfer and promote values-based skills and knowledge.

While it cannot be assumed that all Graduates achieved success, these examples can be viewed as testimonies to the importance of such a training program. Although this assessment cannot prove a direct link between the training program and major changes in communities, it does show that the training program itself has a strong influence over Graduates' values and their activities. These values, if transferred to those in their communities may have broader impacts as they promote change from the bottom up and can have a multiplier effect.

CHALLENGES

Graduates face upon return

Change is neither easy nor fast and almost every Graduate described challenges upon return to their communities and organizations. Personal, organizational, and external conditions beyond their control all presented challenges. The most obvious and immediate difficulty faced is reverse culture shock; after being in an innovative community environment for 9 months, they returned to limiting conditions.

Personal challenges

Among the personal reasons mentioned are basic changes that happen in life: marriage, death, illness, pregnancy and birth. Graduate 108 shared her story, *Number one, my marriage was affected; maybe because I was very focused on the work. Then I became ugly, because of the sun. When you do farming ... it's very hard for women.*

Several Graduates mentioned a lack of resources to begin their new plan. Graduate 104 shared their experience, *So when I came back, the challenge was, how am I going to implement all the things I learned from ARI? I was so excited, I just didn't know how to start without land.*

Challenging organizational conditions

At the organization level, much reportedly depended on existing leadership's understanding of ARI and the openness to change. Some Graduates shared stories of how they were able to incorporate learnings into their work, but many faced difficulties. Some started programs on their own or created new organizations. Graduate 103 told of their compatriots' experiences, *Many Graduates faced some conflict with the Sending Bodies when they returned.... People returned to a hierarchical system which contradicts the servant leadership system taught in ARI. ...It is hard for someone to go back to that type of organization to implement anything. They are often forced to leave.*

Graduate 40 explained the expectation to bring back resources and shared what several others said, *The expectation [to bring back resources] was very, very high. They thought because we got trained in Japan, we bring back tangible things ...but this is a grassroots training. They say "you go all the way to Japan just to make compost?" This is the sort of feedback we got, but that was the thing that we needed to change.*

Changing beliefs and behavior is not easy as described by Graduate 66, *People accept new ideas, but don't like to end old ideas. They understand the new ideas but will not do new things.* Graduate 111 also discussed showing the need for demonstration of benefits and advantages, *One challenge is if one cannot see, they will not believe. You need to really show them the advantages. Also there are some professionals who really don't believe (in organic farming).*



External pressures beyond their control

Graduates faced a wide range of external pressures upon returning home. Those in situations where food shortages, hunger and disasters are common found it hard to change the use of chemicals and GMO seeds. Graduate 62 told us of their dilemma, *We have a lot of natural disasters, so we have many challenges. We respond to these disasters and the people need food quickly. We cannot always keep all our natural farming values all the time, because of the need in times of crisis.*

Local instability, conflict, changing borders and political changes affect Graduates in ways that were hard to anticipate. Graduate 103 told us, *After ARI, I could not go back to the area where I previously worked. In 1991, there were many vigilante groups, and there was a massive killing, so I could not enter the region anymore. I was transferred to another region and could not start what I had planned.*

Government policy and the work of INGOs often limit change as well. Graduate 97 sighed, *Donors stop supporting us if we do new things, we cannot do what we want.* The promotion of GMOs, nonindigenous seeds, and chemicals make it hard for organizations to change, according to Graduate 7, *The government subsidizes chemicals, so people laugh at you when you change. Chemicals make bigger, fancy food that looks good. It took 3-4 years to convince people.*

The change from agriculture to agribusiness, whereby multinational corporations control land, production and labor, hinders the work they do as their communities lose access to local resources. How this changes their daily lives is not always apparent to local people, according to Graduate 106, *People do not realize their human rights are violated by the big chemical and other multinational corporations.*

Despite these difficulties, many Graduates shared positive stories of programs and activities they have been able to accomplish over the years and how they felt they have been able to impact their communities positively. Knowing such challenges offers ARI the opportunity to strengthen the program, helping participants become better able to deal with possible difficulties.

Graduates face diverse challenges, many beyond their control, such as landmines left from past conflicts. (Cambodia)

“*People accept new ideas, but don't like to end old ideas. They understand the new ideas but will not do new things.*”

Graduate 66

GRADUATE CASE STORIES

from visits to the field

The following two pages spotlight the work of a few Graduates in Sri Lanka and the Philippines who were visited as part of this program assessment. These Graduates have not just looked to transform their communities by sharing farming skills and knowledge, but they have also incorporated many of the ARI values leading to the development of more inclusive and equitable communities.



Laki responding to the disaster needs of the rural poor.

① *Case Stories from Sri Lanka*

Thirty-two of the more than 90 Sri Lankan ARI Graduates from 1977 through 2013 took part in this study. They are engaged in all lines of work and include people from various ethnic and religious groups.

The stories below include diverse ways Graduates have brought positive changes to their communities.

In Sri Lanka, Graduates have developed a strong network through the ARI Graduate Association (ARIGA), which has promoted recruitment of ARI applicants and the development of other leaders.

Case Story 1: Laki & Nelum

Lakshman Perera & Nelum Jayasekara (both 1977)
 Currently retired, past organizations include: Kandy City Mission, YMCA, Habitat for Humanity Sri Lanka, and Care International

After the ARI training, Laki and Nelum returned to Sri Lanka and started working as a team at the Kandy City Mission; they were married later in the same year. They worked as a team for 35 years, serving low-income families, promoting sustainable, integrated agriculture practices, healthy lifestyles, income generation skills, and interfaith understanding – aiming to help empower people in remote, rural areas.

Nelum and Laki worked with a strong sense of serving their community by working towards one simple goal, *That we may live together by sharing what we have*. Laki told us that it was this *overriding principle that kept me going*. They believed that building peace at the individual level and within each community was integral for the future of their nation.

Laki focused on farmers while Nelum worked primarily with women and families. They promoted women's participation and their inclusion in decision-making in all their programs. Laki told us that if we asked Nelum, she may say she was tagging along, but her role was very important. She organized programs educating families about nutrition, children's health, the need for a balanced diet, the importance of education and the type of support families needed to provide to children in school. She also served as a role model encouraging women to be involved and to take a more active position in families and communities.

Laki and Nelum are both Christian and were always conscious of including Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims; through their interfaith activities, they carried on the ARI values of developing respect for differences through active engagement.

After working at the Kandy City Mission, they promoted community building, education and grassroots empowerment through projects with local and international organizations, such as:

- Organic Farming Techniques for home gardens
- Income Generation activities such as Batiks, Carpentry, Food Processing
- Dairy farming and processing by-products such as Yoghurt & Cheese
- Bio Gas Production
- Establishment of Kindergartens
- Microfinance programs
- Safe water and sanitation projects
- Environmental protection programs
- Improved housing programs
- Community Based Rehabilitation for Elders

Through the years, Laki encouraged others to join ARI's training program and, as one of the founders of the Graduate Association (GA), promoted information sharing and mutual support of Graduates.

Case Story 2: Renuka

Renuka Badrakanthi (2004)
 Current organization: Weligepola WDF

Renuka founded Weligepola, an organization focusing on the poorest women farmers and their families, engaging in needs-based activities bettering women's lives and the conditions in their communities.

Weligepola has been developing women's skills in natural farming to create home vegetable gardens which result in regular access to fruits and vegetables, and access to cash from selling food they do not eat. Income generated is used to improve their quality of life by supporting children's education and purchasing daily necessities. Weligepola has helped village

Renuka working with local women in the community.



Chamika working with youth to become local leaders of the future.



T.L.M Makeen has been involved in reconciliation programs since his return from ARI.



women come together through microfinance programs; in addition to loans, the savings and future planning training have resulted in building confidence and better living conditions.

In the women's group visited by the researcher, 5 of the 6 women had built new homes for their families, giving them access to potable water and electricity. The broader impacts of Weligepola include raising the position of women in the family and the community. One husband explained that initially men did not expect much of women. This changed as men and boys saw the changes made in all their lives; later, men sometimes helped women and girls in the family garden.

The seed bank Renuka organized allowed local people to exchange seeds resulting in maintaining local plant varieties, keeping indigenous food cultures alive, and reducing the need for purchasing seeds or being dependent on seed distribution programs.

The projects and plans Weligepola develops come from the people in the communities. Families are encouraged to set goals and make year long plans, which are then brought to the local group. From these, the local group sets priorities, goals and upcoming projects for the year. The local group plans are then incorporated into village plans. Through this facilitation, Renuka's organization promotes cooperative community building by bringing together members of the communities to engage in dialogue.

Case Story 3: Chamika

Chamika Jayasinghe Arachchige (2000)
Current organization:
Healthy Lanka

After returning home from ARI, Chamika worked with about 1000 small-scale farmers living on tea estates, distributing vegetable seeds and fruit plants to the community, and showing them how to grow using organic methods. However, the government's subsidy program included supplying agricultural chemicals, so before the farmers would change their practices, they had to also be convinced of the dangers of chemicals. Chamika had to help them redevelop the soil with the help of cow dung because it was damaged from chemical-use. Over time, community members became able to use local resources and learned how to compost and create organic pesticides.

When developing civil society groups in the villages, Chamika found that servant leadership was the best tool for focusing on sustainable development because of the flat hierarchy. He changed his leadership style and found that through better communication, personal relationships improved. He encouraged both positive and negative feedback and felt that by incorporating such feedback into events or projects, teamwork also improved. Chamika also focused on broader community participation in decision-making, introducing the importance of the inclusion and participation of women.

In his new organization, Healthy Lanka, Chamika expanded his focus beyond agriculture and nutritious food, and got involved in the more sensitive themes of substance abuse and gender norms. He explained the need to focus on, *helping women understand that they were not responsible for their men's abuse of alcohol. Nor did they have to take on responsibilities abandoned by these husbands.* Healthy Lanka aims to help women understand such "care" reinforces and enables alcohol related misbehav-

ior. Women may become more empowered once they realize they do not need to put up with poor treatment.

Chamika is also creating programs for a new 5-year plan, focusing on the creation of a bigger national plan. The strategy will target sharing resources in the form of skills and knowledge, not subsidies. He found that, when only sharing financial resources, people's lives did not improve. He is also looking to develop youth leadership programs so they will become village based trainers for drug, smoking and alcohol abuse prevention, child rights, gender discrimination and the environment; these youth can then impact the quality of life directly where they live and may become future local leaders.

Case Story 4: Makeen

Makeen, a Muslim from the North-west part of Sri Lanka, told us that ARI's program was successful because it changed attitudes about leadership and community involvement. After ARI, he worked in reconciliation, women's leadership, and family development programs aimed at improving the quality of life of local families and community building. He also changed his leadership style from directing others to power sharing and working together with in the community, which he felt encouraged more ownership over programs.

Thaibu Lebbe Mohammed Makeen (2002)
Current organization:
WODEPT (Women's Organization for Developing Equity, Peace and Temperance)

Makeen wanted to focus on reconciliation upon return since he was working in an area that was at the center of the conflict. Having learned how to communicate and negotiate with different types of people at ARI, he organized a reconciliation center using different activities to engage diverse community members to develop understanding and consensus. While creating a safe space for discussion between internally displaced persons and locals, including Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, he wanted to particularly focus on Muslims because they were not actively participating in more formal reconciliation activities.

For those engaged in farming, he emphasized natural farming methods including developing home gardens, recycling, and composting, but he explained that these programs were just the means to achieve bigger goals of building understanding and inclusion.

Makeen's organization, WODEPT, aimed to develop leadership and promote equity by getting men more involved in the family and women more engaged outside the home. He felt that their work so far has helped bring women together and become more confident, so that they believe they are able to actually solve community problems on their own. WODEPT's microfinance programs target women, utilizing the participatory approaches learned at ARI.

Makeen's next step was a focus on "community politics," helping women and others become more engaged in local leadership and enabling people in the community to better understand social issues so that they are better prepared and more confident to take on greater leadership in the community. He said women were reluctant to be publicly engaged, but he is very optimistic about the future seeing a local Muslim woman from WODEPT will participate in ARI in 2015.

Ariel is active in the sustainable farming movement in the Philippines.

2

Case Stories from the Philippines

Of the more than 100 ARI Graduates from the Philippines, 30 took part in this study. Most were interviewed at the biannual Graduate Association meeting in April 2014.

Most Filipino Graduates are active in community-based organizations or religious institutions. They are located throughout the nation from northern Luzon down to southern Mindanao and have been contributing in many ways to the betterment of lives as educators, farmers, pastors, nuns, and community activists.



Case Story 1: Ariel

*Ariel de la Cruz (2005)
Organic Farmer,
Negros Occidental*

Ariel is an organic farmer in Negros and during the visit to his farm, he discussed how food access was more closely connected to the primacy the government puts on business and profits than to the natural resources the Philippines has. He explained, *We are a tropical country, but we lack food! What I got from ARI is how the people or a community or country can survive, if we have access to our own resources.* He made community self-sufficiency a priority and is constantly telling young people, *You must develop yourself and how to become self-reliant.* He has been sharing the skills, knowledge and concepts by inviting others to visit his farm to see how it's done, telling neighboring farmers, *If you want to know - come!*

Ariel was the 2014 recipient of the Negros Outstanding Smallholder Organic Farmer award. He has also been active in advocacy work for legal reforms against GMOs and in protection of small farmers. Based on his own farming experience, Ariel has given testimony to the government and media about the impact of GMOs and chemical farming as part of a bigger campaign organized by Greenpeace in the Philippines. As of 2014, Negros was one area in the Philippines that no longer allowed GMO seeds. He shared the challenges ahead, *Ordinances and laws are easy to pass and explain, but the most important is how you wake up the people. Not just farmers, but also local government to what the impacts of GMOs are.*

Ariel also talked extensively about the relationship between farming and an array of social justice issues. *The most important is connectivity. So farming, society, peoples' understandings, economic, environment, and education, so many things are connected! Many people said that "we will go organic" It's not just about profits. It's also the way you feel, and your understanding. Even if you earn millions or billions, the point is why you are doing it. If you don't understand, you will go back to the old unsustainable ways.*

Ariel is planning to develop a training center and expects to have programs that employ methods similar to ARI, such as learning by doing and sharing by living together. He hopes this center will transfer not just natural farming skills and knowledge, but the values of self-sufficiency and sustainability through learning in a collaborative manner.

Case Story 2: Hossana

Hossana came to ARI as an agriculture extension work from city agriculture office of Davao City in Mindanao. One of the few government representatives to have taken part in the ARI training, she shared experiences and skills and knowledge-based learnings similar to other Graduates, in organic farming, leadership, and community building skills and values.

*Hossana Guzman
(1994, Training
Assitant 2001)
Davao City Agri-
culturist Office*

Prior to ARI, Hossana was promoting chemical agriculture practices, but after learning about the adverse impacts of chemical pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and the benefits of organic farming, she returned with the goal of promoting natural farming benefits and methods.

Since learning about the advantages of working directly with the people in the community, Hossana changed her management and leadership style. Before, when she ran meetings and trainings, she was the main speaker because she saw that as her role as the leader. After ARI, she began utilizing more participatory, consensus-based methods so that everyone would have the opportunity to take part directly in the learning process. Her trainings evolved from her talking about organic farming to engaging community members and directly demonstrating different skills and methods.

Hossana came to realize that she needed the participation of different community members to discover more about their actual needs and conditions. Thus, her approach became more inclusive, involving not just farmers and farmers' associations, but also women's groups, the wives of farmers and their children. The more she was able to penetrate into the communities and understand their needs and wants, the more she became able to collaborate with them and help them meet their own needs.

Beyond developing better relations with community members and the people gaining access to more sustainable practices and healthier food, this also developed a sense of community empowerment by them becoming more directly engaged in in community affairs as well. She was amazed by what the women were able to accomplish compared to the past as they took more control over their lives, avoiding the middleman, and selling their products directly at the market. Community women also became able to educate consumers about their products and the benefits of natural produce.

Case Story 3: Luis

Luis used chemical fertilizers and pesticides because agricultural schools promoted them for higher crop yields, but since ARI, he has promoted organic farming exclusively and has remained committed to organic farming as the optimal farming method despite some of the challenges he faced convincing others to make the switch.

Luis L. Arueza (1985)
Social Action Center
of Zambales

Currently, he is developing programs targeting sustainable agriculture and livelihood development outside the farm. Because the Philippines is a disaster prone country, he also addresses the issues of disaster risk reduction and climate change. Farmers and others in the community need to understand the connections between their work and these issues if they are to plan for the future.

Based on the ARI leadership training, he changed his methods to become more participatory and inclusive. Before ARI, he would on his own, *decide any project or any program or make any decision; now I always consult the community.* Now they discuss together the problems faced, the different ways for dealing with them, and then after getting feedback from different perspectives, they try to come together to create a unified solution.

Luis explained how he's been trying to improve participation in organizations and local decision-making, targetting women because few women were participating in the farmer's organizations. Decision-making may start with what should be planted or what variety of seeds to use, but he said that for a big change to happen, *men also need to be involved because men are usually at the top. Sometimes there are communities that are resistant*, but to make the change happen it takes time and everyone's participation. Luis explained that he has seen changes in the communities such as increased participation in local government and the local development council by both men and women.

When asked if the ARI training may promote change in communities, Luis explained that he has seen socio-political changes occur in the communities he has worked with, *because I work with an organization and the organization works with many, many communities and people. So what I learned, I share with the communities. In some, I see socio-political change.*



Luis has been active for over 30 years in many projects promoting natural farming, environmental sustainability and social justice.



The women at the the Caraga Rural Bank and the Friend Foundation employ ARI learnings in many ways.

Case Story 4:

A Team of Graduates working together

Carmelita "Lita" Bilaoen (1977)
& Alma Leyson-Castillo (2004)
People's Bank of Caraga

Annalyn "Tata" Rosaban-
Gonzales (2006) & Genalyn
"Gen" Oliveros-Hegina (2008)
The Friend Foundation

Four Graduates, working at two affiliated organizations, in San Francisco, Mindanao have been focusing on improving the lives of rural people through microfinance services and community based trainings to develop skills and knowledge. The two organizations serve local farmers, small business

people and fisherfolk.

Staff told us that Carmelita, a 1977 Graduate, employs a servant leadership style placing emphasis on getting everyone's participation in the organization, whereby all are involved in decision-making.

The Caraga Rural Bank staff employs participatory methods to better understand the needs of people in the community and program content is based on assessing what the community wants and needs rather than what the organization staff thinks the community needs.

Alma, 2004 Graduate at the Caraga Rural Bank, explained how they incorporate problem-solving techniques into their training whereby each participant is required to review a community problem, such as waste disposal, and develop a plan to solve it. After the training, the participants' project plans are introduced in their village, aiming to gain local support. Examples of plans implemented thus far include tree-planting, construction of drain-canals, cleaning the local environment, and making home gardens. Improvements go beyond the individual or family level and impact their communities. Alma explained, *When we have follow-up, some mentioned that they have changes in their community.* Some participants also *said they are empowered after attending the trainings* because they could change their living conditions.

Tata and Gen, The Friend Foundation staff graduating in 2006 and 2008, have been able to develop training programs based on their ARI learning. Gen showed the demonstration farm for sharing integrated natural farming methods. They also introduced other programs focusing on skills development, nutrition and environmental education.

Tata explained that women are the main focus of income generation trainings because they often lack skills and opportunities for work. The skills learned are based on their interests, needs and the resources available. She shared past participant comments that the trainings were very practical and done in ways easy to understand. The income generated is often put towards food, the farm or into their home, resulting in an improvement of family conditions. Beyond income generation, Tata told us that the women develop confidence and a sense of their own power, just as she and Gen told us the ARI training supported their own personal development.

Comments on the Case Stories

As shown in the previous cases, Graduates are strongly influenced by servant leadership methods and their activities often include the use of agriculture skills and technical knowledge. It is the commitment to working with marginalized populations and targeting social justice values that may have deeper, long-term impacts. Such examples show the ways the ARI training program promotes value change, which, if transferred to organizations and/or communities, may bring about broader opportunities, a better quality of life, and change at the local level by focusing on lifestyles, environmental sustainability, community participation and inclusion.

RURAL LEADERS TRAINING PROGRAM RECRUITMENT & SELECTION SYSTEM



ARI staff give serious attention to each application.

Graduates were also asked to give feedback about the characteristics of ideal ARI applicants, the recruitment and selection processes and post training communication with Graduates. All of these provided a wealth of information for enhancing ARI's training program, recruitment system and the Graduate network.

Overview of the Recruitment & Selection Cycle

April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
Outreach for the recruitment of SBs		Individual applications submitted through SBs				Confirmation of Participants		Arrival			
Review & confirmation of potential SBs			Screening of Applications			Pre-training preparation for Participants					

APPLICANT RECRUITMENT & SELECTION CYCLE

The Role of Sending Body Organizations

While most Graduates reported that Sending Body Organizations (SBs) are essential, others felt that persons should be able to apply as individuals, although on a limited basis. SBs may be necessary to serve as a level of screening to assess the applicants' work, their accomplishments or leadership capacity, activities in the community, etc. However, if ARI expects Graduates to return to SBs and implement their learning through them, then SBs need to be more actively engaged to ensure they understand the training and ARI values, as well as ARI expectations of Graduates. Those who felt the SBs were important also tended to think that ARI should have more regular contact with SBs. Such communications between ARI and SBs could be for recruitment or after training implementation progress, and could provide ARI with a new body of knowledge about needs and circumstances at the grassroots level that could help develop ARI's knowledge base and the direction of the training program.

Sending Body Organization Recruitment

ARI has based its recruitment process on its network with religious and interfaith organizations, as well as past sending bodies. ARI is starting to look into finding more organizations that may share information about the program to widen its outreach.

For the recruitment of SBs, Graduates suggested that ARI better utilize, expand, and develop networks with

- Church groups
- Interfaith organizations and networks
- Past Sending Bodies
- Graduates and Graduate Associations
- Focusing on Non-Christian Graduates - to promote more religious diversity
- National NGO registries and network organizations

Ideal ARI Applicants

Staff and Graduates shared feedback on the type of persons ARI should target for program participation. Some felt rural or agricultural community leaders should remain central, while others commented that other grassroots leaders should be targeted as well since they would also be able to make use of the training program skills, knowledge, and values.

Reoccurring comments about who would make a good candidate include those who

- 1) Are directly involved in communities,
- 2) Understand community needs,
- 3) Are able to bring about community-based change and
- 4) Based on their experience or role, seem able to apply servant leadership upon their return.

Other more individual characteristics mentioned included being open-minded, hard working, and flexible.

Although not discussed by a majority of Graduates, some felt that the following should be included in outreach and recruitment:

- Religious diversity - More people from different religious backgrounds.
- Lay population - recruiting from within a church population and going beyond ministers or pastors.
- Local government staff - focusing on local agriculture extension workers in countries where they are autonomous enough to use the training.
- NGO workers - those from grassroots organizations or field staff who work specifically in grassroots communities.

Participant Screening and Selection

ARI staff members spend many weeks reviewing applicant materials and to make the screening process even more comprehensive, ARI attempts to get feedback from Graduates or local organization leaders about the applicants. Several Graduates suggested that making use of technology such as Skype, Viber or other Internet calling services could be helpful for conducting more one-on-one interviews. Visiting applicants for in-person interviews was also suggested, but almost all understood that this would not be possible financially.

Many felt that Graduates could be a more active part of the recruitment and selection process since they know both the local context and the training program. This would also assist ARI staff that has limited time and resources available to travel to local areas.

While there was general agreement that Graduates should be more active in the recruitment of Sending Bodies, as well as the screening of Participants, there are different perspectives about their role. Some would like Graduates to have more decision making power, some would like Graduates to serve as advisors, and others view too much Graduate involvement as leaving out potentially good applicants. The

process should still involve a thorough screening process that results in some being accepted and some rejected. But ARI also needs to recognize that when a candidate recommended by a Graduate is not accepted by ARI, the Graduate may lose face in their organization or community.

Graduates shared ideas emphasizing the importance of diversity in each class make up and most agreed that the balance of genders, races, ethnicities, regions of the world, countries, type of organizations and religions was important for a successful training. Language skills and the commitment to contribute to their communities and organizations were also common themes.

Some felt it was important to expand the number of nations that ARI targets, while others felt it was important to develop a critical mass of Graduates in specific countries before expansion. Expanding the number of countries may expand ARI's reach. However, it is also important to develop a significant number of Graduates in a country leading to the development of a supportive environment, conducive for learning implementation.

STAYING IN CONTACT WITH GRADUATES & SENDING BODY ORGANIZATIONS

Graduates and Staff felt that ARI needs to prioritize maintaining more regular contact with Graduates upon their return, even with limited resources. There were few specific ideas about how to maintain such contact with Graduates except to use technology more effectively.

Most appreciated *Network*, the Graduate newsletter which is usually published two times per year and sent in paper and email formats, but many wanted to see more current stories, more thematic articles focusing on issues such as the environment, farming skills or development challenges being faced. Some suggested giving the Graduates and Graduate Association's more responsibility for the newsletter articles.

There was much discussion about how ARI could support recent Graduates and better prepare Participants for the return home. Ideas included more communication with SBs, requiring a progress report 6 months after returning home, or requiring Participants to prepare trainings (for farmers, staff, youth, etc.) based on their learning. The development of a concrete one year action plan while they are still at ARI was another suggestion to help Participants

prepare for the challenges they may face.

In the countries without established Graduate associations or Graduate networks, ARI could more proactively help them start one upon return by introducing other Graduates, sharing skills in how to make a mailing list, how to keep a database, or how to create a simple newsletter. Such practical steps could employ Participants' or Staff Members' existing skills and knowledge.

THE ROLE OF GRADUATES & GRADUATE ASSOCIATIONS

Comments about potential roles for Graduates in ARI after they return home:

currently in operation

Outreach - network development

- Recruitment of sending bodies
- Screening of applicants
- Pre-training orientation of participants

Join ARI as Full time regular Staff

- Updating the training curriculum – from regular evaluation
- Graduate follow-up communications
- Trainers and involvement in the training (currently 2)
- Full time involvement in the management of ARI (currently 2)

Organizational development

- Graduate follow-up communications when they return home
- Reporting on others' achievements
- Evaluation of training usefulness - ongoing

possible expansion/development

Graduate advisory committee

- Could serve as a sounding board for information not accessible in Japan
- Could meet online 2 or 3 times a year with very specific purposes as defined and needed by the ARI management.
- How many, where, criteria and how to select would need to be defined based on the real needs of ARI as well as Graduates' capacity and conditions.

Review, Adapt, Recharge, and Thanks

There are many more stories than any one report can cover, but here I have tried to capture the essence from the many people interviewed and visited. From the experiences shared, it is clear that the servant leadership methods, foodlife, and community building approaches remain relevant. At a time when the world is increasingly divided, this training program serves as a beacon of hope that people can come together and find strength in diversity.

This assessment process presented the Asian Rural Institute with a unique chance to gather stories and feedback from Participants, Graduates and Staff in a way not done before. We have had opportunities to discuss and reflect upon the organization's purpose, influence and future. Comments on recruitment and selection processes, curriculum contents, learnings and their use, as well as day-to-day issues faced offer much for ARI's potential organizational and training program development.

As ARI considers its strategic plan for the future, Staff can be re-energized by the evidence showing how so many Graduates have affected positive social change in their communities. ARI may also serve as a model for other training programs by demonstrating the significance of influencing social justice values over skills development alone.

It has become apparent that more than ever we need to think globally in our local work and we need to develop understanding and compassion across borders if we are to live in a more just world. As many told us, the world has changed and so too must ARI in order to enhance grassroots leaders' ability to develop sustainable solutions to local problems by dealing more directly with 21st-century needs, circumstances and challenges. Forty years on, hunger and poverty are still serious problems but globalization has blurred lines between "developing" and "developed" countries and technology has made the world more connected. Addressing how local communities are impacted by the acts of global decision-makers and how issues such as land control, the imbalance of resources, multinational corporate control, disasters and political instability are connected to local conditions may enhance ARI's influence and Graduates' impact.



Sarajeon with Graduate Shiva (2003) and Sewa Lanka staff.

To build bridges between leaders from the grassroots requires that ARI invest many resources – people, skills, money, and time – which are often in short supply. Graduates' stories reinforce that ARI Staff commitment and hard work reap high yield results and that there is great potential for programs that focus on social change as a gradual, bottom up process.

I have been profoundly touched by many people these past two years. Thank you to all the Graduates and Participants who took part. Your continued efforts make this training program successful. ARI supplied the materials ... but you built the bridges.

Thanks to everyone who supported this project; a special note of appreciation to ARI's new Director Tomoko Arakawa who gave counsel in ways big and small all along the way.

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Tokyo, Japan
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BRIDGING *the* GRASSROOTS

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BRIDGING *the* GRASSROOTS

*A Study about the Influence of the
Asian Rural Institute on Rural Leaders*

For more than 40 years, the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) has invited more than 1200 grassroots leaders from 56 countries to its campus in Northeastern Japan for its Rural Leaders Training Program.

Over nine-months, Participants develop skills in:

Servant Leadership

Sustainable Agriculture

Community Building

Participants join the training program as local leaders from churches, orphanages, grassroots NGOs, community-based organizations, and educational institutions.

In addition to gaining leadership, natural farming and community building skills, the ARI community environment is intentionally created to allow each Participant develop an understanding of different ways of thinking, believing and solving problems as well as how global issues are connected to local realities.

The overarching purpose of the Training is to discover the meaning of the ARI motto “That We May Live Together.” The ultimate goal is for Participants to take this motto back to their home countries to spread the possibility of greater respect and understanding among people and their environment.



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