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Abstract

Over the past 15 years, Visualisation in Participatory Programmes (VIPP) has been used in many communication and education programs around the world as a toolkit for participatory planning and training, as well as partnership building for many programmes. VIPP has its roots in the popular education movements of Latin America and in the structured methods of *Metaplan*, in Germany, but it first came together as a distinct set of methods in UNICEF, Bangladesh in 1991. The VIPP methodology breaks down this "seminar culture" and is adaptable for use with almost any framework. The authors document how, since 1991, VIPP has been applied successfully in programs and events in Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and North America, including the development and design of regional communication initiatives, training on Participatory Learning and Action, WHO's teaching/learning methodology on for adolescent health, and strategic planning for health programs in the UK. This article takes a critical look at the ability of VIPP methods to transform the environment and context of the work of communication programmers and development workers using these methods. It analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the methods and the conditions under which it is most beneficial for communication programmers.

Keywords:

Participatory facilitation, training, learning, group dynamics, team building, community development, empowerment, indigenous knowledge

Introduction

Over the past 15 years, *Visualisation in Participatory Programmes* (VIPP) (UNICEF Bangladesh 1993; Salas et al. 2006) has been used in many communication and education programs around the world as a toolkit for participatory planning and training, as well as for partnership building. VIPP has its roots in the popular education movements of Latin America and in the structured methods of *Metaplan*, in Germany (Schnelle & Stoltz 1977) but it first came together as a distinct set of methods in UNICEF, Bangladesh in 1991.

Since 1991, VIPP has been applied successfully in programs and events in Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and North America, including the development and design of the Meena Communication Initiative for South Asia; the Sara Communication Initiative for Africa; and the Adolescent Reproductive Health Communication Project of Bangladesh. In Latin America and South East Asia, VIPP has been widely applied to training on Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) and to programs which reinforce biodiversity and the indigenous knowledge of ethnic minorities. It has also been used widely in the creation of many national, regional and local communication plans; curricula development; training; and project planning and review in many public health and social development programs. For instance, it has become the cornerstone of methodology for the World Health Organization's orientation program on adolescent health (WHO 2004). It was also used in Strategic Planning

for the Reduction of Obesity and for Smoking Cessation and Tobacco Control by the National Health Services, UK (2004).

This article takes a critical look at both the successes and limitations of VIPP methods when they are applied to social, health, and environmental development projects and programs. It analyzes the strengths the methods, the challenges encountered in their application, and it charts out a course for further development of the VIPP during the next decade. Much of the content of this article is derived from thinking and reflection in developing the new facilitators' manual on VIPP written by the same authors (Salas et al. 2006).

What is VIPP?

VIPP is a methodology for conducting group events which puts people at the center of the process of solving development and social problems and coming to new, collective visions of the future. It is unique in that it provides a creative combination of different participatory approaches which emphasize visualization techniques.

VIPP offers an alternative to the usual “seminar culture” of planning workshops, seminars, training sessions, business and organizational meetings. These are usually conducted very formally with a multitude of presentations and little creative interaction between participants. In recent years, computerized presentations have become the *status quo* in almost any group event. Many of us have experienced “information overload” in group sessions, where a large part of the content of presentations is lost due to lack of audience involvement and audience fatigue. Often the viewpoints of participants are not heard, nor processed. Typically, decisions are made and conclusions reached with little involvement of participants.

VIPP methods attempt to change this through democratizing interaction in group events. VIPP consists of visualization techniques, including the use of multi-colored cards of different shapes and sizes, on which participants express their contributions and share these with one another, either anonymously or openly, depending on the question being addressed. VIPP is composed of a wide variety of participatory methods (see Appendix 1). Many of these methods have been adapted from other participatory traditions. However, in VIPP they can be applied at various levels with homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. They form a coherent toolbox of techniques with precise instructions on their possible applications.

In VIPP processes, all people involved take part in arriving at a consensus on an issue or in learning something new. Those who are less talkative are able to express themselves through visual inputs. Those who usually dominate cannot control the process and are forced to let others contribute. Through visualization, repetition and circularity in discussion are reduced while new ideas are highlighted and processed. This adds to the creativity of group processes and the practicality of their outputs.

Roots of VIPP

VIPP is derived from two main traditions. One is from Latin America where the work of Paulo Freire (1970) has widely spread and influenced development processes. Freire believed in the creativity of the underdog – the poor and oppressed in society. He developed methods of empowerment, raising individual and community consciousness through helping people identify blockages to progress. Through such processes, often involving visualization and

literacy education, he helped the poorest sectors of society to articulate their needs and defend their rights.

These methods, sometimes called *conscientization*, spread through the work of many non-government organizations (NGOs) in Latin America. Over the last 40 years, applications of “Freirian approaches” have been documented in many different manuals, books and articles. New philosophers came forward, such as Orlando Fals Borda (Fals-Borda & Rahman 1991) in Colombia. He applied *Participatory Action Research* (PAR), an adult education method that was first formulated by Kurt Lewin (1948) in the United States. Borda used PAR in *conscientization* processes by getting the poor to understand political organization processes, starting with the recovery and valuing of local history and moving to collective action.

The other main tradition from which VIPP is derived comes from Germany where the *Quickborn Team* invented an approach they called *Metaplan*. Schnelle and Stoltz (1977), with other colleagues, set out a system of training in which decision makers come together with those who may be affected by decisions, visualizing problems and issues and preparing common solutions. These methods began in the 1960s when German society was experiencing student unrest and some were looking for an orderly way to engender more democracy in social policy decisions. Since that time, a whole industry has grown up around *Metaplan* processes and materials in Germany, involving the public and private sectors and civil society.

However, it was not until the 1980s that these methods were substantially applied to international development work. At the Institute for Agricultural Extension, University of Hohenheim, Germany, a group of trainers began to develop creative processes for application in international rural development and these were applied to training courses at the German Foundation for International Development (DSE), Feldafing, Germany. A manual called “Participatory Methods for Group Events” was published and revised several times to support this work (Ullrich, Krappitz & Gohl 1991).

In 1991, Neill McKee, then with UNICEF Bangladesh, having learned about these methods in a seminar at DSE in 1986, engaged Hermann Tillmann and Maria Angelica Salas of the University of Hohenheim to come to Bangladesh to help train facilitators for application of VIPP in UNICEF planning and training processes. They named the methods “Visualisation in Participatory Programmes”, or “VIPP”, and developed the first manual which was published in 1993.

VIPP synthesizes the visualization techniques of *Metaplan* and the empowerment approaches of Freire and Fals Borda. It can be applied to any situation where a group of people are working together to analyze situations and plan activities or are to be trained on new concepts and approaches. VIPP stresses a democratic philosophy and the central role of the facilitator or “moderator” who fosters the generation of collective knowledge by encouraging dialogue between people.

Philosophy of VIPP

There are a number of key concepts involved in VIPP:

Development within a vision of empowerment: The methods are designed to increase democratization in group deliberation, to empower individuals, groups and communities at different levels through facilitating dialogue that leads to local decisions and actions. Traditional bureaucrats often reject such approaches as they may rob them of power. However, some managers may come to the realization that their efforts have a far better chance of success if they are owned by a team and by the communities with whom they are working.

Facilitation of groups: The facilitator in VIPP processes is a skilled, methodological guide who recognizes that each individual has experiences and knowledge which can contribute a great deal to the outcome of group processes. He or she helps groups to arrive at collective knowledge for joint action. In VIPP processes, participants are equal partners. This does not exclude individual expression but it does help to limit the usual tendency of one or two experts dominating the proceedings.

Lifestyles and cultures: Another basic tenant of VIPP is the need to strengthen group or cultural identity. VIPP does not prescribe universal techniques or impose rigid frameworks. VIPP recognizes that there are different learning styles. The facilitator is free to motivate participants to express themselves orally or visually, based on their lifestyles and cultures. In heterogeneous groups, the facilitator may engage participants in intercultural dialogue, demonstrating respect for the values and perceptions of other people. Although this may be more difficult within national programs with national goals, VIPP processes help such programs take local realities into account. If applied properly, they can assist in the devolution of planning processes.

Communicating personal perceptions: Everyone perceives reality in his or her own way. We select details out of our physical and social environment and interpret them according to past experiences and established values. However, our perceptions can change through dialogue with others. During visualized group processes, new insights may be acquired. VIPP catalyzes group interaction to create synergetic processes which generate new ways of looking at things. Subjective perceptions may be modified and the outcome may be accepted as part of the collective knowledge of the group. Sustainable development usually results when people take ownership of decisions and are motivated to both individual and collective action. VIPP facilitates this process.

Mobile visualization: Most of us have five senses, yet the oral tradition of imparting information still dominates most group events. However, the more senses we employ in a process, the more we internalize and learn. In VIPP, ideas are normally expressed on mobile, visual media, such as on multi-shaped and multi-colored cards mounted on charts or moveable boards. Ideas can be developed in small groups, clarified in plenary, revised and processed in the next step by the same group or new group. Visualization helps people to understand complex relationships and synergy between different concepts and to maintain a continuous record of each stage of the process. It allows presentations to be creative but logical and patterned in certain given codes. These methods help to capture the attention of participants and to maintain

focus. In discussions on the issues, the comments of other participants are captured and remembered. Visualization also helps create an immediate record for facilitators and participant so the ideas are not forgotten.

Process design: Every group process has its own distinctive and evolving dynamic due to variations in learning styles of individuals, variations in how groups build team spirit, and in how they manage crisis. The VIPP facilitator has to consider these factors in a plan for each event. Plans may include sessions such as introductions, warm ups, problem analysis, problem solving, strategy planning, and on-going evaluation of the process. The design of an event, such as a course, seminar or planning session should take into account the interrelationship between the purpose, content, duration, and the participants. Also, factors such as people's daily mood swings, attention rhythms, and possible conflict between participants must be taken into account in planning and adjusting plans.

The Uses of VIPP

Since it was first developed in Bangladesh in the early 1990s, VIPP has been applied to a large number of processes and programs around the world. These may be classified into the following categories:

- Planning communication strategies and programs, as well as other programs
- Communication materials development and storyline planning
- Putting research into action
- Community-level development work
- Training workshops
- Training of facilitators and trainers
- Curricula development
- Running conferences and information markets
- Management, human-resource planning and team building
- Business meetings

One reason for this wide application is that VIPP is not tied to any one institution, framework or set of steps. VIPP methods can be applied to just about any group event. This section describes different kinds of applications and gives some examples. However, Appendix 2 lists a large number of applications that have taken place throughout the world.

Planning communication strategies and programs, as well as other programs

It has been found that any kind of development program, including communication strategies and plans, can be designed using VIPP methods. This may include steps such as analysis at the community level, consultations with a wide range of stakeholders and discussion and planning sessions at the project directorate. Steps may include problem analysis; development and elaboration of goals, objectives, strategies, activities; and monitoring and evaluation. Users have found that VIPP methods allow quick collection, classification and processing of ideas and issues which usually constitute blockages to planning progress.

Meena Communication Initiative for South Asia

The *Meena Communication Initiative* for the South Asian girl child is an example of a communication program which was planned through a series of VIPP workshops. It involved participants from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the

Maldives. They worked together in a number of stages in the development of the program: synthesizing research findings, developing characters and storylines for more research, refining stories, and developing production schedules. The workshops involved writers, artists, programmers, researchers, academics, and gender, health and education specialists from all participating countries. These workshops were designed to build consensus on the whole program. The participants also used VIPP helped to create stories which address a range of social development issues: gender discrimination in education, health services, nutrition, child labor, early marriage and dowry. It was found that by employing VIPP methods, these diverse countries could agree on such issues. Source: Salas et al. (2006)

In communication planning, VIPP has been employed with a wide range of partners or a coalition to arrive at a plan for a program at the national, state, regional or community level. This process is sometimes called *social mobilization*, “a process of bringing together all feasible and practical inter-sectoral social allies to raise people’s awareness of and demand for a particular development program, to assist in the delivery of resources and services and to strengthen community participation for sustainability and self-reliance.” (McKee, Bertrand & Becker-Benton 2004, p. 65). The objective is to bring together many partners to combine resources and broaden ownership in a particular program. It may involve devolution of the planning process to local government and grassroots levels so that greater ownership and sustainability is achieved.

Social and behavioral networks and communication in Bangladesh

In 2005, UNICEF Bangladesh with the Center for Communication Programs, Bloomberg School of Public health, Johns Hopkins University, held workshops to involve marginalized groups in an in-depth investigation of risk perceptions and behaviors regarding sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. In one workshop, the participants also developed local communication plans for HIV and AIDS prevention. The participants included male sex workers/males having sex with males; brothel-, street-, hotel-, and residence-based sex workers; people living with HIV and AIDS and injecting drug users. Also included were researchers and participants from NGO programs who work with the above-mentioned groups. The same program has also used VIPP in planning workshops with people living with HIV and AIDS, sex workers and folk media specialist to develop mass media, local media and folk media strategies, Bangladesh.

It was found that the main challenge was to effectively engage such diverse participants from different social strata, some being semi-literates or non-literates. However, the participants actively gave their inputs and developed local level plans for implementation.

Source: Salas et al. (2006)

Communication materials development and storyline planning

VIPP has also been widely applied to planning of storylines for print, radio and television using entertainment education (EE) approaches which are intended to educate while entertaining. The objective is to ensure that stories are embedded in social or cultural practices and address issues

in a realistic manner.

Creative writing is usually understood as an individual endeavor. However, it has been found that bringing together people with various perceptions of the issues, including members of the intended audiences, can lead to excellent results. People in homogeneous groups often spark one another's imagination, leading to creative outputs. The VIPP rule of writing only one idea per card is especially useful in planning stories or creating messages because it is easy to move ideas into new sequences, add ideas or discard ideas altogether. Some people believe that writing should not be left to a committee. However, a creative working group can avoid the symptom of "writers block" and can at least provide useful ideas for a professional writer to complete.

Adolescent Reproductive Health Communication in Bangladesh

In the Bangladesh the Adolescent Reproductive Health Communication Program, writers, researchers, programmers, trainers, media officials and adolescents have been fully involved in the development of story lines for comic books, radio and TV programs, using VIPP methods. Such participatory methods have engendered partnerships and ownership of the project so much so that it has become national in scope. (see Figure 1 and 2)
Source: Salas et al. (2006)



Figure 1: Exercise in adolescent reproductive health communication planning workshop, Bangladesh. Source: Bangladesh Center for Communication Programs



Figure 2: Adolescent reproductive health story writing workshop, Bangladesh

Source: Bangladesh Center for Communication Programs

Putting research into action

The results of surveys and qualitative research methods can be classified and directly applied, using VIPP methods. Findings are written up, one idea per card. This allows an easy method of assessing, classifying and matching findings. In some cases, VIPP itself has become a tool for action research. For instance, in Uganda, VIPP was used in focus group research on adolescent sexual maturation (Kasente, Musisi, & Balihuta, Dec. 2003). In such uses, the VIPP facilitator becomes a member of the research team.

Community-level development work

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) has advanced in the last decade from its rural focus into Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). VIPP can be used as a complementary approach to PLA. VIPP is usually used by people who are literate while PLA is used in grassroots communities where literacy is not assumed. It employs local people's drawings, mapping processes and a good deal of discussion to arrive at conclusions. However, the basic philosophy and many of the methods are the same as VIPP. VIPP methods have been used to train facilitators on PLA. Card and chart methods have also been used with mixed groups of literates, semi-literates and non-literates.

VIPP in Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)

Over the past decade, VIPP has been used to train village-level facilitators. Such training emphasizes recognition of the potential of local indigenous knowledge and the threats

placed on rural, minority groups in many parts of the world. During 2004–2005, the Indigenous Knowledge and People’s Network in Southeast Asia was involved in training 18 facilitator-trainers in VIPP facilitation, PLA tools, and intercultural communication. The focus has been on developing community action plans to strengthen livelihoods, cultural identities and preserve biodiversity in specific geographic areas.
Source: Salas et al. 2006

Training workshops

VIPP can be applied to program training in areas such as communication, life skills, HIV/AIDS, health and educational issues. Such training dispenses with the traditional teacher-pupil relationship and the process becomes interactive, tapping into both the emotional and intellectual sides of the participants. There is little one-way transmission of information. Instead, the proceedings are elaborated by the participants with guidance from facilitators. New knowledge is arrived at through recalling and synthesizing the experiences of participants. Rather than simply answering questions, facilitators work with the participants to discuss issues from their own perspectives. They visualize their deliberations in small groups and bring them to the plenary where they can be discussed further and synthesized into an overall framework. In this way, training workshops can be used to bring out the creativity of every participant.

In VIPP learning processes, the particular knowledge and experience of every participant is accentuated. The trainee is in the center of the process, not the trainer.

Training of facilitators and trainers

In training of facilitators for VIPP methodology, the content of training is also the method, i.e. using VIPP methods and the issues of participation to train on VIPP. It has been found that a four to six-day training course is required for basic VIPP skills, such as improving visualization and presentation skills, understanding concepts of communication and facilitation, practicing facilitation, overcoming recurrent problems of group processes, designing events, and learning planning and creativity tools. Trainees learn by doing. Such training includes a good deal of practice in facilitation, feedback and reflection on methods and their applications.

VIPP facilitator training

At the World Fish Centre in Penang, Malaysia, a group of 15 participants from different sections of the organization learned how to facilitate planning sessions, workshops, business meetings, and storyline creation sessions using VIPP. The training program included an introduction to the VIPP approach, visualization and presentation skills, practicing facilitation as a team, application of creativity tools, and designing forthcoming events. The participants learned the basics of VIPP and defined the role of the facilitator. Finally they applied different evaluation tools to assess achievements of the training workshop. The participants were able to apply their newly-acquired skills in different events soon after the training.

Source: Salas et al. 2006

VIPP methods can also be used to train facilitators and peer educators for programs in health, education, rural development, etc. However, it has been found that if too much of such

subject matter is used in training, participants will begin to focus on these issues rather than on facilitation skills, and the training session may become side-tracked into debates on technical matters.

Training of facilitators and peer educators working with adolescents on life skills

The participants for this workshop were adolescent peers of street vendors, street based sex workers, garment workers, out-of-school youth, in-school youth, college youth, street children, trainers of peer educators and NGO program managers.

The methods used were drawing, buzz groups, small group work, role plays, plenary discussions, visualized presentations, drawings, feedback committee and evaluation. The participants felt empowered since the process of the workshop was participatory. All voices were heard and the creative processes helped adolescent participants to work well with adult program managers and trainers.

Source: Salas et al. 2006

Curricula development

We often assume that curricula development is the job of experts. But experts are sometimes divorced from those who are applying curricula in classrooms. It has been found that VIPP methods can be used to bridge this divide. Curricula can be planned through participatory consultations with teachers and students. In fact, the presence of administrators and psychologists will enrich a planning workshop and assist in creating a more useful curriculum.

Very often in such sessions, conflict may arise over what should be taught in which sequence, and how to measure learning achievement. VIPP methods have been used to bring government officials, educational researchers, psychological experts, teachers and student representatives together to build consensus on these issues.

Running conferences and information markets

VIPP methods can be modified for uses in conferences or “Information Markets”, involving large numbers of participants. The methods are used to facilitate better dialogue and understanding in the proceedings which are usually dominated by one-way communication from invited speakers.

Using VIPP in such events requires a large team of skilled facilitators who can assist in smaller group deliberations, clustering and labeling the ideas generated for presentation to plenary. Rather than the usual paper presentations in specialized panels, such conferences split into mini-workshops with topics of interest to the participants. Each workshop employs a facilitator to support dialogue. A combination of VIPP methods can be used, such as expert interviews, drawings, statements and structured discussions. This helps broaden the discussion and perceptions about issues. The deliberations of each mini-workshop are then fed back to the plenary.

In an Information Market the participants shift into a new “market” venue for a presentation and discussion on a different topic. The facilitators stay in place, repeating the process with

each new group. In this way they can gather different results from different groups and these can be summarized and reported to the plenary.

Management, human resource planning, and team building

In managing organizations, the process of making decisions on how personnel and budgetary resources should be used is often completed by supervisors and “sprung on” staff with little consultation. VIPP techniques can be used to consult employees on these matters. They can also be employed to review employee performance, to redesign ineffective work processes, and to revitalize an organization’s operations. Such team building exercises may be essential for achieving goals.

Such processes involve writing or reflection on mission statements, problem analysis on impediments to progress, brainstorming and visualized discussion on solutions. They may lead to reflection on overall objectives, the role of the organization or group, operational issues, and specific activities which the group can carry out to build better teamwork. However, if layoffs or cuts in the workforce are envisaged, it is usually better for these to be carried out first, before involving all employees in an open process.

Business meetings

Experience has shown that business meetings are often boring affairs for most participants, often dominated by one or two individuals, including the chairperson, and may involve repetition, circularity, sidetracking and sideline discussions. Experience has shown that these timewasters can be overcome by using VIPP methods to quickly visualize and prioritize, using a quick card collection to gather important issues, hold visualized discussions on them and vote, if necessary, on actions to be taken. Such joint decision making usually has more chance of actually being realized than simply giving orders, as long as responsibilities are clear. It has been shown that VIPP methods can save time in business meetings and can also be a democratizing force in institutional work, as long as they are applied correctly, not in a manipulative and imposing way.

Evaluation and VIPP

Continuous evaluation is built into VIPP processes and events. Feedback is given by participants on the processes and methods on a daily basis through methods such as feedback committees/process monitors, moodmeter, flash (instant reactions to proceedings), feedback and memo boards, and drawing exercises. In addition, at the end of an event a number of factors are usually evaluated by participants on a 1 to 5 or 1 to 7 point scale, or at least on a linear continuum from “bad” to “excellent”. These may include:

- Objectives (measured separately)
- Initial expectations
- Materials
- Participation/interaction
- Facilitation team’s performance
- Logistics
- Accommodation
- Food

- Recreation
- Ownership and/or consensus on outcome
- Workable drafts of strategies
- Predicted effectiveness of outcome in future
- Allocation of responsibilities for follow up
- Avoidance of initial fears - certain behaviours (measured separately): insincerity, poor communication, conflict, domination by a few, poor focus in discussions.

Such evaluation gives VIPP facilitators instant feedback on the process and allows them to reflect on their own role, skills and shortcomings. Facilitation teams are encouraged to spend time on such self-reflection at the end of each event in order to improve future performance. In this way, performance of the groups they facilitate and outcomes of events are gradually improved.

However, it is recognized that evaluations of VIPP events are not standardized. It is up to facilitators and participants to arrive at the factors they think are important to measure in each event. But even if the final evaluation results of all VIPP events could somehow be combined to arrive at average scores, it is recognized that participants' scores do not translate into measures of the actual impact of the events in terms of advancing social development goals.

Since VIPP is not a methodology being used by one or two agencies for application within a particular program, it is difficult to measure its overall impact. The applications listed in Appendix 2 represent only a portion of the actual uses of VIPP in the past decade and it would be nearly impossible to make a final statement on the overall impact or value of VIPP and its contribution to development without a great deal of time and resources to carry out a formal investigation. On the other hand, the apparent popularity of VIPP for a wide variety of applications by a wide variety of organizations, does give one the impression that the methodology is highly valued by those who take it up. Apparently VIPP is a method that fills an obvious need in planning and training processes in international development.

However, it was decided that a full survey of organizations and individuals using VIPP would be a time consuming and costly endeavor, given the wide diffusion of the method, and that it could lead to a biased response from mainly keen VIPP facilitators. Therefore, when undertaking the writing of the new manual on VIPP (Salas et al. 2006) the authors met to discuss their own experience in using VIPP – the best and the worst. These were written up and shared with a core group of experienced VIPP facilitators to get their opinions and additions, especially concerning the limitations of VIPP or how VIPP could be improved. The findings are given below.

VIPP Caveats and Limitations

Materials and equipment: VIPP has sometimes been accused of being too expensive in terms of materials and equipment. There are now a number of Western sources of *Metaplan* materials to order from (e.g. see <http://www.neuland.biz> or <http://www.neuland-online.de>.) On the other hand, experience has shown that VIPP processes can be done with homemade boards or on walls. In addition, some organizations have started to manufacture their own VIPP materials at low cost out of locally available materials. For instance, the Indigenous Knowledge and People's Network in Chiang Mai, Thailand, produces environmentally-friendly VIPP kits with baskets manufactured from bamboo and cards made out of *Saa*

(mulberry paper), a common weed found across Southeast Asia [<http://www.ikap-mmsea.com>].

Lack of teamwork: There is a tendency for facilitators to want to “go it alone” from the beginning, without having the experience it takes to properly facilitate certain events. Facilitation teams are encouraged, wherever possible. Long experience has shown that reflecting with and being supported by others leads to better outcomes. In this way, skills can be built up by an informal mentoring system. Sometimes even experienced facilitators want to work by themselves whenever possible, to control processes in their own way. But some of these people have a tendency to become “entertainers” rather than facilitators and may get “stuck in a rut”, always performing the same “set of tricks”. Part of the problem is that facilitators often work in an environment that does not contribute much to their self-development.

Vulnerable inside facilitators: Sometimes facilitators come from inside organizations and their bosses dictate what they should do. This can derail good VIPP facilitation. VIPP facilitators need to be better trained not to take on the facilitation of processes in which they are subordinate to the organizers, if at all possible, or processes in which they may be perceived as having a vested interest. The best approach is to go over the basics of VIPP with managers to try to convince them that an independent facilitator is required, or to at least lay out the ground rules and make it transparent to participants from the beginning that the facilitator is playing an independent.

“Flip-flop” clients or organizers: Many VIPP facilitators have experienced clients or sponsors who say that they are committed to participation but who do not recognize the important role participatory processes play in helping to achieve the desired outcomes. It is often difficult to engage them in a serious discussion prior to the actual events which would help to clarify the objectives and the process to be used. Sometimes this leads to demands for last minute changes and discord between facilitators and clients. Joint planning sessions bring about mutual understanding and give a chance for facilitators to negotiate what they require, as well as to explain what is entailed in a VIPP workshop. Without such agreement, disaster can result.

Unclear or ambiguous objectives: Unclear objectives can lead to poor outcomes. Very often not enough time is spent on clarifying objectives with organizers or clients. It may be necessary for facilitators to work with them to formulate or reformulate their objectives or to rephrase them if they are too ambitious or ambiguous. Another road to disaster is starting an event by allowing the participants to develop the objectives “from scratch”. This may negate all preplanning since they may have very different ideas and hours could be spent in discussing what the objectives should be and how they should be worded. Unless it is one of the intentions of the event to start with a completely blank slate, clear objectives should be sent beforehand to all participants.

Time troubles: Facilitators often report that they don’t have enough time to complete objectives. This could be because the objectives are not clear or they underestimate the time it will take to complete certain exercises. Very often it comes down to the problem of not spending enough time to carefully design events. The VIPP facilitation manual spells out the importance of this but inexperienced facilitators may try to take short cuts and to act without proper planning. There are many methods of saving time in VIPP processes that can be internalized by

facilitators.

Including experts: Some VIPP facilitators ask how they can deal with people who have authority from their status and knowledge, but not from their attitude and congenial relationships with others. Organizers may want them involved due to these above-mentioned qualities and the facilitator is faced with fitting them into a participatory process. It is up to the facilitator to demonstrate the value of democratic procedures to such people and to devise ways of including them as resource persons, especially at the beginning of an event. VIPP has a number of methods of doing this which are underutilized.

Dealing with conflict: In some events there may be participants who have strongly opposing views on issues and they begin to dominate the proceedings, arguing with each other publicly. Other participants may have little to contribute in such bilateral debates. They may lose interest and look for ways of escaping the proceedings. It has been found that it takes experience for facilitators to step in to troubleshoot in such situations. One way that experienced facilitators have found useful is to suggest to the conflicting pair that they should go for a walk and discuss their differences themselves, or simply talk about something else, such as their families and hobbies. During this time, the rest of the participants may work on the issue and try to resolve the impasse. Another way is to set up a time for a more formal discussion, using one of the VIPP debate methods or other techniques.

Frustrated participants: Facilitators report that in VIPP events the participatory processes may frustrate some participants who are more anxious to arrive at conclusions. They want to have all answers spelt out for them quickly and they find the democratic methods of VIPP too slow. Experienced facilitators try to explain why it is important for participants to learn from one another and why all the information cannot be given at once. One method of dealing with this is to go over the schedule at the beginning of each day so that participants are informed what to expect from the day's proceedings.

Distracted participants: Very often workshops are held close to the workplaces of participants and although they may attend the opening sessions, they are soon pulled back to their offices due to the demands of supervisors or their own unease concerning pending work. This kind of situation has ruined the dynamics and outcome of many workshops. A number of solutions have been found useful. The first is to convince managers to hold a residential workshop far away from the workplaces of participants so that they can "tune out". Another is to inform participants in the invitations that one hundred percent attendance is required and to reinforce this at the beginning of the event. A third means of control is to ensure that there is a "no phone" rule throughout the proceedings and to limit phone calls and internet connections to breaks.

Dealing with diversity: Many facilitators report that dealing with diversity of ideas, values, cultures, religious and ethnic backgrounds is a big challenge for them. For example, one experienced facilitator reported having to plan and facilitate a workshop for HIV/AIDS prevention with representatives of sex worker groups and journalists. There was a huge potential for conflict and disagreement. In this case the design of the workshop had to allow a good deal of inclusive exercises with dialogue. At the beginning of the workshop, ground rules were agreed on by all so that everyone had an equal opportunity to participate and there was demonstrated respect for all ideas offered.

Training of facilitators: A short training course is enough for participants to acquire the skills to be able to facilitate business meetings, short planning workshops, staff retreats, and other types of participatory group processes. However, to become a full-fledged facilitator of major events, much more experience is required and facilitators should gradually build their skills first, working with experienced facilitators, if possible, before taking on complex events. Also, to be a trainer of other facilitators, a good deal more experience, knowledge and skills are needed. In addition to knowing how to use VIPP methods, trainers of facilitators need to learn and internalize theories of learning and how to apply them to group processes. They also need to know how to design a whole program and to have in-depth knowledge of group dynamics, and the various possible applications of VIPP methods and techniques. Such trainers must also have a very good understanding of the philosophy of participation, be very communicative in style and attitude, and have deep respect for diversity in participants.

Conclusions

The above shortcomings indicate that there is much room for improvement in using VIPP methods. More VIPP training is needed at all levels: beginners, second-level, and training of facilitators. However, given that there is no single institution where VIPP is housed and no center for VIPP within UNICEF, where the methodology was first articulated, there is a need to set up other mechanisms for facilitators to exchange while advancing their skills. The consultation on the future of VIPP, referred to above, determined the need to create a “Community of Practice” for VIPP facilitators. Taking advantage of modern information technology, a virtual community has been established on the Internet through a website set up in conjunction with the second version of the VIPP facilitators’ manual (Salas et al. 2006). This site offers a space for exchange and consultation about facilitation for fellow facilitators, worldwide [see: <http://www.southbound.com.my/vipp/>].

A “Community of Practice” involves a process of exchange through facilitator peer contacts, sharing of experiences and solutions to problems of facilitation and participation through electronic dialogue. It involves website administrators linked to experienced facilitators. They provide new material on-line, send out key questions, post the answers to challenges, and motivate network members to communicate regularly. Such a network crosses institutional, national and cultural boundaries and, it is hoped, will become an innovative space.

It is evident from the above that VIPP is an innovation that has been diffused and used widely throughout the world to improve social communication programs and other programs which address social, health and environmental issues. The next few years will determine if it can be taken even further to new levels of achievements and recognition through the use of modern information technology.

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Appendix 1 - A Summary of VIPP methods

Process methods:

- Rules for writing card, ground rules and for group work
- Traffic signs to steer the group process
- Visualizing instructions
- Establishing ground rules
- Gathering expectations and fears and processing them
- Variety in group formation: plenary, small groups, buzz groups, rotating plenary

Key methods for idea generation and processing:

- Card collection and clustering
- Visualized idea collection with open questions
- Visualized presentations in plenary
- Visualized discussion
- Single and multi-dot question
- Pro-contra debates
- Fish bowl

Creativity Tools such as brainstorming, brain-writing, topsy-turvy, mind mapping

Other methods to improve group learning processes: mini-dramas and role plays, expert interview or panel, field visits, study tours, nature hikes, case studies, information market

Games and exercises (200 available):

- Icebreakers and Getting to Know One Another
- Warm-ups and Energizers
- Communication
- Perception
- Intercultural Communication
- Team-building and Cooperation
- Conflict Management
- Case Studies and Role Play
- Gender Analysis and Sensitization
- Creativity and Problem Solving
- Relaxation and Meditation
- End Games

Evaluation:

- Feedback committees/process monitors
- Moodmeter
- Flash (instant reactions)
- Feedback and memo boards
- Drawing exercises
- Final evaluation
- Facilitator's self-assessment wheel

Appendix 2 - Examples of application of VIPP, 1990–2005

Source: (Salas et al. 2006, pp. 173 – 176)

Bangladesh and South Asia

- Planning, training and communication design by UNICEF in health, water and sanitation, nutrition, education, gender training, HIV/AIDS, etc. (1990 to present)
- Meena Communication Initiative – planning, script writing, research design, training. (1991–2003)
- Communication training. (1992–1993 and 2002–2003)
- Adolescent Reproductive Health communication planning, script writing, research review. (2001- 2005)
- BRAC-NGO leadership training, gender training, human resources program meetings, Human Rights training, etc. (1991 to present)
- Many other Bangladeshi NGOs use VIPP methods in training, planning for many social programs. (1992 to present).
- UNICEF India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka also applied the methods to program planning and training. (Beginning in 1992)
- Used by JHU/CCP in planning state HIV/AIDS program in Maharashtra, India. (2002–2003)
- Used by UNDP to develop its sub-regional project: HIV and Development in South and Southwest Asia. (1998)

China and Southeast Asia

- UNICEF Vietnam - planning of social and health programs. (2002 to present)
- Training Health Educators in Hanoi, UNICEF-Vietnam - planning, needs assessment, dissemination. (2002)
- VIPP-training - NGOs of Southeast Asia in Kunming, China. (1999–2002)
- Training of facilitators - Sino-German woman's employment project, China. (2002)
- Training of facilitators – EU projects for Dairy Sector, Environmental Protection and Poverty Alleviation, China. (1997–2001)
- Training of DfID project staff - Yunnan Environment Development Project in Kunming. (2002)
- Training of a Regional Trainer Pool in Southeast Asia. (2004–2005)
- Training of facilitators - World Fish Centre, Penang. (2004)
- Training of facilitators - Asian Indigenous People's Pact (AIPP) in Chiang Mai, Thailand. (2004)
- Application of VIPP in international and regional conferences: Cultures and Biodiversity in China, Thailand, Vietnam (2002 - 2006).
- Annual Program Consultation, East Asia Division, Swiss Agency for Development. (2005)

Africa

- In over 20 African countries – training on methods and use in program planning in UNICEF programs. (1994–2001)
- Used widely in UNICEF's HIV/AIDS network activities. (1994–1999)
- Sara Communication Initiative – planning, script writing, research reviews in over 20 African countries. (1994–2001)

- UNICEF regional office team-building exercises and management training. (1993, 1998)
- Emergency program development and planning. (2000)
- Communication training. (1994–1999)
- Used for management and research - Sexual Maturation at Primary School, Uganda. (2000–2004)
- Institutionalized in Zambian agriculture development training institution. (1998 to present)
- Used by CCP for national HIV/AIDS communication planning in Namibia. (2002)
- UNDP/World Bank/WHO Special Program for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR): Meeting for the planning of a Forum of African Medical Editors. (2003)

Latin America and the Caribbean

- Training of project staff - forestry project, Ngobe Indians, GTZ, Panama. (1992–1994)
- Training workshops on PLA methods, Guatemala & Honduras. (1995–1996)
- Training of facilitators for UNICEF Latin America in Quito, Ecuador. (1997)
- Training of village facilitators - Quispillaqta, Ayacucho, Peru. (1997)
- VIPP methods used for planning and training, University of Technology, Jamaica. (1998–present)

US-based agencies

- Programs in health/nutrition planning/training in Africa, Linkages Project, AED, Washington. (Mid-1990s to present)
- Program planning, Health Communication Partnership, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. (2002–present)
- Program planning, performance management system, Catholic Relief Organization, Baltimore. (2002 to present)

Europe

- Training of rural communicators, Hohenheim University, Stuttgart (1985–1993)
- Advanced level VIPP-training, Black Forest, Germany (1994 & 1998)
- Program consultations, UNICEF Innocenti Centre, Florence, Italy. (2000–2003)
- Facilitator training, UNICEF Serbia-Montenegro (2002)
- Strategic Planning - Reduction of Obesity and Smoking Cessation and Tobacco Control, Nottinghamshire, NHS, UK. (2004)
- Joint Strategic Plan Review with National Committees, UNICEF, Geneva. (2004–2005)
- Consultation on Accreditation and Training for Autism, Treehouse, London. (2004 and 2005)
- Program reviews, Child-to-Child Trust, London. (1996 to present)
- Program planning - International Institute for Environment and Development, London.

Other global applications

- Training of facilitator, UNICEF-NY and staff development college in Turin, Italy. (1996–present)
- Program reviews and planning by UNICEF in HIV/AIDS, many health areas, violence against women and children. (1994 to 2000)
- Development of a partnership for Africa by UNAIDS at the World Bank, Washington. (2000)

- VIPP - cornerstone of WHO teaching/learning methodology for adolescent health. (1998 to present)
- Global workshop on Indigenous Ways of Knowing organized by the Millennium Ecosystems Assessment in Alexandria, Egypt. (2004)

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