



Health In Harmony

A Guide to Radical Listening for Planetary Health

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome! We are so glad that you are interested in learning more about our Radical Listening methodology. The fundamental core of this work is a belief that humans everywhere would like to thrive now and would prefer conditions where their family, community, ecosystems, and the planet will thrive far into the future. We believe that the experts in how to achieve this mutual well-being are those who are experiencing ecosystem degradation (due to either outsiders or the reality that community members themselves have too few choices).

Our goal is to work towards planetary health¹ and we recognize that in order to achieve that goal we must begin to see the well-being of all living systems, all species, and all people as intimately intertwined. When communities and ecosystems in one place thrive, that creates a positive feedback to all other systems on the planet. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. Structural racism, coloniality and an economic system based on the false premise of unlimited growth and extraction are rapidly undermining the very basis of our capacity to survive on this planet.

The idea that forms the basis of planetary health, that the human and natural world are deeply intertwined, is not a new one. In fact, it is rooted in local, ancestral, and Indigenous knowledge about the interconnected and interdependent relationships between people, plants, animals, spirits and places. However, long histories of colonialism, paternalism, and extraction have contributed to devaluing this knowledge.² Importantly, local communities who often possess the greatest expertise about their own interconnected environments are paradoxically,

Summary of Key Points covered here about Radical Listening

- The fundamental key to listening is a recognition of Interbeing – that all our well-beings are intertwined.
- Communities know their own needs, and they know the most feasible solutions for living in balance with their ecosystems.
- If solutions have been suggested by community members, they will be locally and culturally appropriate and more likely to be followed and sustained.
- Allowing communities to lead this process reveals respect for their knowledge, and capabilities; this helps engender a sense of trust and commitment between communities and global citizens who can help funnel resources to their solutions.
- Following the knowledge of communities in how to bring about their own thriving contributes to an increased sense of agency, empowerment and hope.
- This methodology is effective in improving a community's ability to thrive, reversing the loss of rainforest, and helping bring about a thriving future for our planet.
- We suspect that this methodology is more broadly applicable to other ecosystems and other contexts besides planetary health, but are still gathering data on this.

¹ The term Planetary Health is a relatively new one that embraces interconnections between human health, the health of an ecosystem, and the health of the whole planet. However, we acknowledge that Indigenous systems have never seen these things as separate.

² See Jason Hickel's book: *The Divide: a brief guide to global inequality and its solutions.*

listened to the least and afforded little agency in determining their own future. Those who are directly experiencing ecosystem degradation also often have the fewest resources available to use in addressing the challenges they face. We believe that if the human species, plants, animals and all living entities are going to thrive and even survive, resources need to flow to these communities – AND the use of these resources must be under their direction and control.

This methodology is not designed to address the global exploitation systems or companies that clear forest. That is a severe and horrible threat accounting for about 30% of rainforest carbon loss and we are grateful that there are people who work on those systems changes. 68% of the loss of carbon in the rainforest is in the form of degradation³ which is from logging or the subsequent fire that can happen in damaged forest. What we have found is that in many places in the world this degradation is caused by local communities who actually would prefer to protect the forest but often have few other choices to access cash for urgent needs such as healthcare. This is particularly the case in SE Asia and across Africa. In South America and elsewhere the context is sometimes slightly different where Indigenous communities and descendants of, for example, rubber tappers are often active protectors of the forest, but can sometimes need support to be able to stay on their land and defend it from invaders.

We have developed a methodology that honors the agency of the experts in protecting rainforest and facilitates wealth transfer directly to their solutions, not as a form of charity, rather as a reciprocal thank you for the well-being their expertise - once activated - returns to all global citizens. We call this methodology Radical Listening. This document represents Health

In Harmony's current understanding of this methodology and explains in more detail how we have implemented it up to 2021. It draws heavily on our experiences at the first site that Health In Harmony supported in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, with our ally organization Alam Sehat Lestari (ASRI), our joint second site in Indonesia at Bukit Baka Bukit Raya (BBBR) National Park and replication sites in the Manombo Special Reserve in Madagascar and the Xingu Basin in the Brazilian Amazon. Further insights come from sites that were visited by our founder before our first site, candidate sites that have been evaluated for potential replication, and the experiences of other organizations on similar journeys. We see this as a living document that will improve over time as further knowledge is gained from other sites through monitoring and evaluation of our programs. We hope the reader of this document will share their own experiences as well and further improve this work.

³ Baccini et al. (2017) Tropical forests are a net carbon source based on aboveground measurements of gain and loss. *Science*.

WHO IS THIS DOCUMENT FOR?

We see this document as being most useful to the following groups of people. In each case we recommend that you read this document and then contact us if you are interested in the practical training we offer to hone your listening skills. You can contact us at info@healthisharmony.org to organize a virtual in person training and/or to receive our more in-depth playbook.

1. Rainforest Community Members: Health In Harmony is acutely aware of the intense urgency of the climate crisis and is currently seeking Radical Listeners to train so that the needs of rainforest communities⁴ all over the world can be uploaded to a virtual Rainforest Exchange platform that we are developing. This website/app will allow global citizens to see and directly support the solutions that rainforest communities identify. We are looking for people who are either members of rainforest communities themselves and/or have roots in these communities (see the **Who Should Listen** section below).

2. Non-Governmental Organizations: Development or conservation organizations who are interested in learning about a methodology that may be either a new approach or a variation of something the organization already does.

3. Donors and supporters: Those would like to understand the Health In Harmony model better as part of your due diligence in deciding whether or not to fund our work or partner with us.

4. Those Interested in using it in other contexts: We realize that many of the key principles here are not only applicable to ecosystems besides rainforests but also in

many other contexts. For example, what would Radical Listening yield if people experiencing homelessness were asked what the solutions are, what would the employees or customers of a company propose as the solutions for a company that wants to be more ecologically sustainable, or what would a neighborhood anywhere in the world need as a thank you in return for reducing their carbon emissions? While we dream about these things, we have not yet tested this methodology extensively in these other contexts but would love to hear the results if you try it out. We may also not yet be thinking of all the ways this model could be extrapolated to other contexts so feel free to reach out if you have ideas.

⁴In this document we use the term "community" in a geographic and political organization sense. In some places a community may be a village, in others a group of people organized together in a larger region such as widely the dispersed riverine families in the Amazon rainforest but who act collectively as all part of an rubber-tapper reserve (RESEX).



WHAT IS RADICAL LISTENING?⁵

Radical Listening is an alternative to the existing development and conservation paradigms which are explicitly colonial and either exclude or only partially include local perspectives. In Radical Listening groups of people come to consensus about what the best solutions are for protecting their ecosystem and improving their own lives. The key to Radical Listening is the willingness to let go of control over the outcome, and to have the humility and pre-existing commitment to actually implement the community's solutions. Radical listening is based on the fundamental principle that communities are the experts in knowing how to solve the problems they face since they have intimate understanding of their interconnected world. It is an inclusive approach to community engagement that makes room for a community to identify both the intersectional drivers of complex problems and the intersectional solutions needed to thwart them. The goal is to create a supportive context for communities to come to consensus about which key system changes would bring about a thriving community and ecosystem for them now and far into the future. The truly radical thing about radical listening is that it is done with the explicit goal of implementing precisely the solutions the communities identify (see process map below).

⁵ Of note, there is no reason to use the term "Radical" with communities, especially if there are negative connotations around this word in different cultural contexts.

- **Radical Listening is listening to a group:** The group (vs an individual) has the capacity to collectively determine which ideas are good ideas and which ones address the root causes of the systemic problems of that group (henceforth, 'community') is experiencing⁶. When consensus is reached in the eyes and ears of the whole it also fosters a shared understanding within the community, avoids the opportunity for individuals to angle for their own benefit, and sets the groundwork for accountability for any entity working with the community to implement those solutions. Many meetings are held across a region and what we have found is remarkable evidence of shared understandings of key solutions across different communities.
- **Radical Listening helps identify key fulcrums of change in a community:** Communities of any given place experience and therefore understand problems in their complexity. Almost by definition, in the absence of full contextual understanding, the best solutions (or the right combination of solutions) usually elude outsiders. Our experience is that these community-designed solutions are always systems changes that recognize the appropriate/integral interconnections between economics, health systems, access to knowledge, and ecosystems.
- **Radical Listening helps people become aware of their own agency and centralizes community knowledge:** In most development, conservation, or health work, organizations or governments normally have the power, determine how money is spent at community level, and

As an outsider, when Kinari Webb first came to the regions around Gunung Palung National Park which was rapidly being logged, all she could see were problems: any one of which could have been the target of a non-profit's work. For example, not enough children were going to school, only about half of households had toilets, and most people used firewood to cook, causing lung disease and ecosystem degradation. When asked, 40 communities living in and around the park identified lack of access to healthcare and training in organic farming as the key (fulcrum) elements of the system which - when implemented - would reverse rainforest loss. They were right. It did reverse rainforest loss. It also improved their household health and economic outcomes. Remarkably, when these fulcrum elements were implemented and nothing was done about the other issues like education and water and sanitation, there was still a dramatic change in those other problems, too. After five years, 41% more children finished primary school (maybe because of more money to pay school fees and because fewer children had to stay home to care for sick family members), indoor toilets increased by 22% to 71%, and using wood for cooking declined 40%(possibly because of health education and more resources being available to buy gas stoves with more income and fewer healthcare costs).

⁶Higgins, E. T., & Toness, A. (2010). Eight Steps for Facilitators. Online, <http://uupcc.org>. Lykes, M. B., & A. Crosby. (2014). Feminist Practice of Action and Community Research. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.) Feminist Research Practice: A Primer. London: Sage.

often implement their ideas rather than honoring, and being guided explicitly by, the knowledge of the community. This process undermines agency, is usually ineffective, and can either waste precious resources or enrich only those who already have power. Radical listening subverts this hierarchy by being participatory and centering community knowledge and agency within the development process.⁷

- **Radical Listening yields solutions that are more likely to be implemented and therefore more efficient and effective:**

How you determine the solutions may be more important than what the solutions are. Even if 'better' solutions might theoretically exist, those chosen by the group are more likely to succeed because they will actually be implemented with full buy-in. The stages of behavior change are precontemplation, contemplation, preparing for action, and then doing something. This process identifies what people are already prepared to do.⁸

- **Radical Listening is based on reciprocity:**

We recognize that everyone has something to give to help bring about a healthy, thriving planet and our methodology honors all the actors: not only the communities but also those with resources to help bring about community-designed solutions. Agreements are structured so that all parties work together towards a healthier planet for all as mutual gift giving. Motivation is intrinsic (i.e., we all want a better future) not extrinsic (I am doing this for money alone).

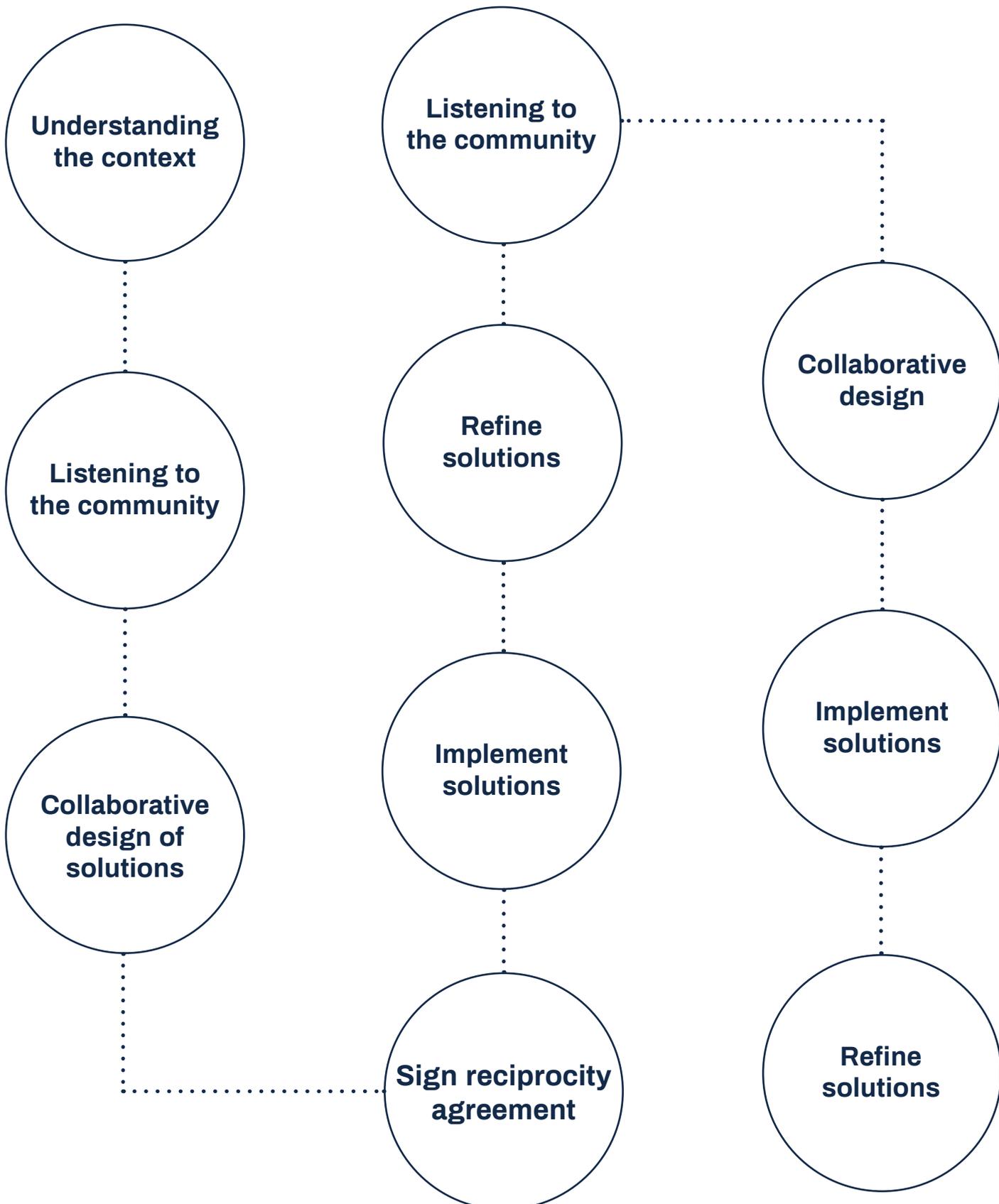
- **Radical Listening is done with an intention to implement:** Listeners do so with a good faith understanding that they will do what they can to bring the resources so that the community solutions can be implemented together. Listeners who are not prepared to invest in community-designed solutions (i.e., who do not have the funds or access to resources) should not enter communities until they possess this capacity. Follow-through on the results should not be dependent on future grant proposals coming good or not. This honors the time and wisdom of the community. Nevertheless it is important to be transparent that not all solutions determined by the community may be achievable. "We can't promise we can help implement everything, but we can promise we will try."

⁷See the following for the long history of this anti-colonial approach: Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Herder & Herder. (Original work published 1968 in Portuguese), Fals Borda, O. (1998). *People's Participation: Challenges Ahead*. Bogota: FAIEP, Gaventa, J., & B. Horton. (1981). 'A Citizens' Research Project in Appalachia, USA', *Convergence* 14(3): 30–42, and Chambers, R. (2008). PRA, PLA and pluralism. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research* (2nd ed., pp. 297–318). London, England.

⁸ See Chambers, R. (2008). PRA, PLA and pluralism. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research* (2nd ed., pp. 297–318). London, England: Sage, and Bessette, G. (2004). *Involving the community: A guide to Participatory Development Communication*. Penang, Southbound.

Where does Radical Listening begin and when does it end?

Radical Listening includes several stages that we outline in the iterative process map below. Each stage can inform a former or next stage.



1. The first stage involves **understanding the context** to gather more information about the history, socio-cultural context of the area and communities where the Radical Listening meetings will take place. This background research is essential for both outsiders and insiders who come from these communities and should be conducted in a systematic and participatory manner.
2. The second stage is to **listen to groups of community members as they identify the root causes of the problem and determine overarching solutions**. The role of the listeners is to pick up on which ideas are gaining resonance within the group and eventually reflect back to the group what they are hearing and see if that is correct. Enough meetings are held until either a consistency emerges in the solutions or it is clear that there are subsets of a region that are facing different challenges (we tend to find consistency in a given ecological context but dissimilarities in different ecoregions). The number of meetings depends on the population size (see the invitations section).
3. In stage three, meetings are held with community representatives to **collaboratively design the specific details of the solutions**. At this stage, as the implementing organization, we usually sign a **Reciprocity Agreement** where all parties lay out their commitments in writing.
4. During and after implementation of the solutions further meetings may need to be held if unexpected problems arise in order to **refine solutions**. In other words, Radical Listening is iterative, understanding that as changes are made, solutions may need to shift.
5. If there comes a time when it appears that the original solutions have now been fully implemented and those challenges seem to have been resolved, the project could either end or **further rounds of Radical Listening** could be held to determine what the community now identifies as the solutions to bring about even more thriving. The ideal is that over time community members themselves become Radical Listeners and use this methodology to further improve the well-being of their communities.

A woman in one of the communities around Gunung Palung became the first female village chief, after being hired to implement many of the community solutions. She, herself, became a great Radical Listener and used it in how she led her community. The women came up with a plan to decrease logging even further that was extremely effective and they created a farming cooperative to grow herbal medicines.

In which contexts could Radical Listening be used?

Health In Harmony's mission is to bring about a thriving future for our planet through reversing rainforest loss and thereby mitigating global heating and the climate crisis. So we use Radical Listening within a planetary health framework and specifically work in tropical rainforest ecosystems. Our choice is based on a triage of the world's ecosystems and recognizes that 78% of land-based emissions comes from the loss of tropical rainforests.

However, we, as well as our partner organizations have also tested the model in other ecosystems and have found that extremely similar forces are at play in the bombing of coral reefs, overfishing, high-mountain ecosystems and degraded dry forests. While we have not specifically tested it in the context of poaching, we imagine that it would work similarly well in this context.

While we have not tested this framework outside of a planetary health model, many of the key principles of how to attentively listen and how to determine key consensus decisions, should be broadly applicable across various contexts.

Everywhere we have used this methodology, the degradation of ecosystems occurs either by local community members who are unable otherwise to secure their current well-being, or by outsiders. The outsiders may be companies or individuals but our experience is that these people often have the permission of local communities or individuals to enter. Sometimes this permission is purchased or sometimes there is implied violence if it is not given. In other contexts, communities are actively resisting but simply don't have the resources or connections to protect their land. Everywhere we have been,

these communities would prefer other solutions that maintain a healthy ecosystem, but simply feel they have been placed in a situation where they do not have a choice but to log or mine their forest.

One man in Brazil worked his whole life to protect the land his riverine community jointly owned, but when his son got a severe illness and needed expensive care, he made a deal with a logging company and effectively sold access to the community land.

Which entities could practice Radical Listening?

Humble entities who recognize Interbeing (see below), and who have the capacity to access the resources needed to implement the community decisions. Groups who already have a history with the communities of colonialistic approaches or who have already harmed the communities are unlikely to be able to gain the requisite trust necessary for Radical Listening. The key is that the motivation must be true respect of local knowledge and a readiness to implement the solutions determined by the communities. Whoever is listening has to be willing to let go of control and make a true commitment to implement the solutions a community has agreed are necessary, i.e., the solutions *communities* want and in which they are ready to invest time, energy and resources.

How is Radical Listening different from other methodologies?

- **Active Listening:** This is a process of listening attentively to one individual — Radical listening is about doing this with a group to find collective wisdom and then actually implementing those solutions. Nevertheless there are many similarities in the full attention it takes to listen.
- **Participatory Methods:** Most Participatory Methods focus on soliciting feedback on an existing solution - with Radical Listening the communities design the solutions themselves and refine work as it proceeds. Radical Listening is largely in alignment with many of the features which have been shown over time to be effective.⁹
- **The World Bank’s “Free Prior and Informed Consent” (FPIC):** This method is designed to apply only to Indigenous peoples and only when meeting certain specified conditions. It is not a universal requirement. After a project has been outlined, if not fully planned, it is followed by a consultation with the affected communities. However, Indigenous Peoples do not have veto power in these processes. Petersmann, 2017 notes, Indigenous communities “are deprived of the absolute right to refuse a project even when it has been established that the project will lead to adverse impacts on their land and natural resources, will cause their relocation, or significantly impact their cultural heritage.”¹⁰
- **Facilitating:** Facilitating is guiding the conversation and often directing towards specific aims. Radical listening instead is a process of letting go of the outcomes and trusting the community and the process. Radical Listening is standing witness as people wrestle their way to their truth, not leading them towards an answer.¹¹

It can be quite difficult as a listener not to fall into facilitation. But our experience is that when the listener does not do that, people within the group will often step in and that their own facilitation is much more powerful. As an example, in one meeting a participant complained for quite a while about a path through their rice field. Another community member said, “Hey, that’s off-topic, we know you have this personal concern but we are trying to figure out what will benefit the whole community.” If the listeners had said something like that, it would have eroded the trust of that individual, but when the community themselves guide the conversation, more trust is actually built.

⁹ Let us know if you would like further details on other methodologies.

¹⁰ Petersmann, M. C. (2017, July 14). The latest World Bank Environmental and Social Framework: Page 21 of 22 progress on fair and equitable benefit sharing? (Part II) [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170815195529/http://www.benelexblog.law.ed.ac.uk/2017/07/14/the-latest-world-bank-environmental-and-social-framework-progress-on-fair-and-equitable-benefit-sharing-part-ii/>

¹¹ Hickey, S., & Mohan, G. (2005). Relocating participation within a radical politics of development. *Development and change*, 36(2), 237-262, Chambers, R. (2008). PRA, PLA and pluralism. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research* (2nd ed., pp. 297–318). London, England, Rahman, A. (2008). Some trends in the praxis of participatory action research. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Action Research* (pp. 49-62). London: Sage., Higgins, E. T., & Toness, A. (2010). Eight Steps for Facilitators. Online, <http://uupcc.org> Accessed April 2018.

History of Radical Listening

In 1993 Kinari Webb, spent a year in Indonesian Borneo studying orangutans in Gunung Palung National Park as an undergraduate biology major. She was horrified by the constant loss of rainforest due to logging by the surrounding communities.

Kinari met many community members who lived near the rainforest. In general, they were farmers and fishermen but they lacked adequate healthcare. What care they had was expensive, far away, and of low quality. She also learned that logging was one of the few ways that communities could get the cash to afford healthcare. This intersection between healthcare access and logging made total sense to Kinari once members of the community explained it, but was not something she ever would have thought of herself. She began to wonder how many other things were obvious after being explained by community members, but were completely opaque to her as an outsider.

Kinari decided to train as a physician and return to Indonesia to work with rainforest communities to address these dual crises. After completing her medical degree from Yale University, she trained as a family medicine specialist in California. During her final year in residency in 2004, the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami occurred and Kinari volunteered in Aceh to help. There she was horrified to see how much the myriad aid agencies did not listen to community members but simply implemented what they saw as the best solutions. This meant that vast sums were spent on malaria medication and prevention in an area that had no malaria. In addition, when the communities asked for help clearing their rice fields of tsunami debris so they could plant, the NGOs said they were only willing to give outbags of rice. Kinari decided she could not work in this

model and realized she would have to start her own non-profit that would be based on listening and implementing community solutions.

After founding Health In Harmony in the United States in 2005, Kinari traveled across Indonesia to find where she would begin to address the intersection of human and ecosystem well-being. She was looking for a place with 1) viable forest under threat, 2) a supportive local government, and 3) a significant human health need. After evaluating sites throughout Indonesia what she found was that lack of healthcare was nearly ubiquitous and also a key driver of ecosystem destruction. In 2006 she ended up choosing Gunung Palung National Park where she had studied orangutans and knew many people in the local communities.

Kinari and Indonesian dentist, Hotlin Ompusunggu, co-led a program there called Alam Sehat Lestari (which translates to Healthy Nature Everlasting) or ASRI (harmoniously balanced) for short. Together with a local community member, Pak Farizal, they organized more than 400 hours of radical listening with the communities around Gunung Palung National Park. They did so many hours of listening because they thought that every village would come to a different solution. However, that was not the case. There was, in fact, complete consensus among and between communities.

Representatives from all the 23 communities all the way around the park were specifically asked, “You all are guardians of this precious rainforest that is valuable to the whole world, what would you need as a thank you from the world community so that you could protect it and thrive yourselves?”¹² They said that with access to high-quality health services and training inorganic farming, they would be able to stop

¹² This is a loose translation from the Indonesian.

logging.

Based on the results of these discussions, in 2007, Alam Sehat Lestari (ASRI) began to provide high-quality, affordable health care for all community members including a fixed clinic, mobile clinic visits to remote communities, four wheel drive ambulance service, and birth control access. In order to provide affordable healthcare, a non-cash payment option was implemented where community members could choose to pay with seedlings for reforestation, manure for the organic farming training, or handicrafts that were sold both locally and globally. Variable discounts were also co-designed where prices would drop for an entire community up to 70% based on the amount of logging in their community (but even non-discounted care was heavily subsidized). In other words, the more these communities gifted the world forest protection, the bigger the gifts from the world community. People said they loved this model because it would help the communities get the few cheaters to stop illegal logging. In addition, organic farming as an alternative livelihood to logging was implemented in all the communities. Over the course of ten years a total of \$5.2 million was spent which included providing health care to a population of 120,000 people, building a large medical center, training thousands of organic farmers, reforesting 100s of acres and providing education to adults and children about health, healthy ecosystems, and the inter-relatedness between the two.

After ten years Stanford did an analysis of this pilot project and found that overall community health had improved with decreases in diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, and tuberculosis. Simultaneously rainforest protection had improved with a 90% decline in logging as a primary livelihood and there was a stabilization of the loss of primary forest. When compared to

other national parks in Indonesia, the averted loss of primary forest was worth \$65.3 million dollars in carbon.¹³ It should be noted that this Stanford paper did not account for below ground carbon (which is significant because of large areas of peat swamp) or the 52,000 acres of rainforest that grew back over those ten years.¹⁴ That value also does not take into account all the other benefits of rainforest including biodiversity, water cycling, and spiritual value. In other words the \$65 million is an underestimate of the much larger gift that the communities gave back to the world. We also recognize that even by citing this research we are playing into a colonial way of valuing carbon and putting a monetary value on what can't be valued.

Throughout this time Health In Harmony supported ASRI through a transfer of funds and other resources including knowledge from the Global North but specifically under the direction and control of the local communities in an anti-colonial manner.¹⁵ Since then Health In Harmony and ASRI have spread this model globally with another national park in Indonesia, a protected area in Madagascar and a network of protected areas in Brazil over 8.5 million hectares. At the same time, we have tested this model in other ecosystems across Indonesia, in the Philippines, in Madagascar and Brazil and trained other organizations which have done radical listening in Malaysia and Mozambique. We have found that many fewer than 400 hours of listening yields consistent results across a region. In this document lessons will be shared from all these locations and illustrative examples drawn from them.

¹³ Jones, et al. (2020). Improving rural health care reduces illegal logging and conserves carbon in a tropical forest. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(45), 28515–28524. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2009240117>

¹⁴ *Fauzi et al. *Jurnal Ilmu Lingkungan*, 2019 Forest Change Monitoring and Environmental Impact in Gunung Palung National Park, West Kalimantan Indonesia.

¹⁵ For example, Health In Harmony frequently pushed back at donors who wanted to dictate the terms or wanted to influence what ASRI did if it was not in alignment with the community requests.

CONCERNS THAT MAY ARISE:

We have learned in conducting Radical Listening training that significant concerns may arise as one contemplates doing Radical Listening. These concerns can come from outsiders to the community or from community members themselves. The concerns we tend to hear fall under the following categories:

1. **“Why not just do payment for ecosystem services?”**: The idea of ecosystem services limits the value of an ecosystem to just some part of it’s benefits, such as carbon sequestration or water cycling benefits without honoring the complex importance and myriad meanings and benefits the land may have to communities and even to the world. In addition, if people are paid (extrinsic motivation) to do something instead of doing it from intrinsic motivation (I want to do this because I believe it to be the right thing) they are actually less likely to follow through on it.¹⁶ Indigenous communities have known and practiced this for thousands of years through a process of mutual gift-giving.¹⁷ Not only is intrinsic motivation more powerful, but once it is lost, it can never be regained. The classic example of this is that in the US people are paid to give blood whereas in the UK they give it because they want to help others. Which country gives more blood per capita? The UK. And in small scale tests, when people are ever paid for blood, they start giving less and that continues even when the incentive goes away.¹⁸ Intrinsic motivation can value all the complex benefits and people can feel delighted and honored to share those, versus feeling that they must do it because they are being paid.
2. **“Isn’t just giving cash better?”**: This is a variation on the above concern. Our experience though is that the solutions communities generally design incorporate things that they can’t buy with any reasonable amount of money. For example, a quality health care system or training in new agricultural techniques is not something an individual can purchase, since these are things generally created for large numbers of people.

“...cash is only king when all parties have the same access to resources that can be purchased with money. Instead, through their Radical Listening approach, Health In Harmony recognized that their organization was in a position to deliver unique value to communities through providing access to non-monetary intangibles — healthcare, training — creating a positive-sum outcome for both the organization and their partner communities.” Erik Tulin from Rare Behavior Beat¹⁹

¹⁶ Fehr & Gächter, 2000. J. of Economic Perspectives: Fairness and Retaliation, the Economics of Reciprocity, and See Madhuri Karak, Feb 2020, Radical Listening: Harnessing the Power of Empathy in Conservation.

¹⁷ See Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer for a beautiful description of the value of Indigenous gift-giving traditions.

¹⁸ Abolghasemi, et al (2010). Blood donor Incentives, a step forward or backward.

¹⁹ See Madhuri Karak, Feb 2020, Radical Listening: Harnessing the Power of Empathy in Conservation.

3. **“What if they ask for too much?”**: One leader of a non-profit partner in Brazil was very concerned with the plan to do Radical Listening. “If we ask people what they want, they will just each ask for \$1 million dollars in their pockets!” When we said this had never happened anywhere else, and we doubted it would happen there, his smiling response was, “But we are Brazilians, we are never afraid to ask for money.” As it turned out the community did not ask for this. In fact, they asked for quite inexpensive and very doable things, but again, things that benefited the whole community and weren’t really buyable by one individual.
4. **“But I do know better!”**: This is not only an issue for outsiders who often feel that because they are more educated they are better able to determine solutions, but can also be an issue for community leaders. In conducting Radical Listening in Bali, one community leader did not want to do Radical Listening in his community because he was afraid that they might come to a different conclusion than he had about what the key needs were. Eventually he decided that there was value in knowing if the community didn’t agree with him and this convinced him to proceed with Radical Listening. Afterwards he was thrilled because he discovered that the whole community saw things the same way he did (and vehemently so). Now he knew he had lots of support to deal with the issue of an inadequate irrigation system and too much plastic trash in the streams.
5. **“They might ask for something we can’t provide.”**: One organization we trained that works in Mozambique was initially very concerned about asking the communities because they feared they would ask for assistance with health care. This was not their expertise and they didn’t know another organization they could call on to help if that was the case. In the end, they were right that the community did want health care, but what they specifically asked for were nurses in a few centrally located areas. This turned out to be inexpensive and easy to provide.

However, it certainly can be the case that communities ask for something that is outside the scope of what a given non-profit can provide. We had this happen in our second site in Borneo where the community saw a new road as a key solution (we are sure they are right and wish we could afford it, but sadly can’t). The community understands this and is grateful for the other solutions we can implement. However, we can continue to advocate with the government to build the road (naturally in a way that protects the environment since this is a prerequisite of the way the question is asked). For this reason, Radical Listening should always be qualified with, “We can’t promise you we can do everything you ask for, but we can promise you that we will try.”

METHODOLOGY

Stage one: Preparation

Pre-Assessment:

Health In Harmony has always done significant background research before choosing a location to work so that a paired set of listeners has as much background information as possible. While this background research is critical, at the same time, we always understand that there is only so much that can be learned without talking to the communities. We do not see any of these factors as being “go or no-go” but simply having a relatively comprehensive understanding of a given area is important before conducting listening. Our desktop research involves assessing the following:

History and Demographics:

- Ecological condition of the region and the history of the people’s relationship to the land and threats to the ecosystem either from communities or outsiders
- History of colonialism both at a national and local level. As we want to take an anti-colonial approach, this is particularly important to pay attention to so as to avoid reproducing colonial relationships as much as possible.
- Current and past demographics
- Economic situation including most common occupations
- Health indicators as can be assessed from national level statistics (understanding many countries do not have good data)
- Current political situation and government involvement in the region
- Educational access

- Non-governmental actors active in the region. This is important as these organizations may be good partners, can share knowledge, and may have conducted participatory methods in the past.

Cultural context of the potential rainforest communities:

- Gender dynamics.
- What sorts of community negotiation tools are employed to resolve internal or external community conflicts?

What forms of dispute resolution mechanisms are used?
- How are community meetings conducted by the community’s own governance structure and/or those done in collaboration with the local government?
- How are major collective efforts that the community undertakes together marked?
- What is the basic social structure and what are the hierarchies it contains?
- How are decisions usually made and who participates?
- Who is considered part of the ‘community’ and who is an outsider? (For example, there may be people with access to political power who might still be considered to belong to the community; some people might be excluded from some things based on gender or caste; even menstruation can affect participation in some cultures).
- What is an appropriate dress code for the region and culture to make sure team members are well prepared prior to the meeting.
- What are cultural norms around thanking participants in meetings? In some cultures this would be food, others soap or oil is more appropriate.²⁰

²⁰ If compensation is appropriate, we recommend distributing any compensation after any Radical Listening meeting so as to not bias the outcome and be aware of setting expectations.

- What are cultural norms around signing agreements (stage 4 of Radical Listening) at a site? Who needs to be included in these meetings following cultural norms and customs?
- With potential partner NGOs to learn more about their work, interactions with the communities, and lessons learned.
- With potential future staff members or local Radical Listeners.

In Madagascar the tradition is to slaughter a Zebu (cow) to bless the program and to make the signing of any agreements official. It is also important for local authorities to attend the meeting. If this had not been done, any further work with the community would likely not have been successful.

Site Assessment:

In some situations the desktop research may be supplemented with a site assessment to provide additional information, context (transportation, accessibility), and an initial Duty of Care assessment for the region. In these meetings, the following meetings might be held.

- With stakeholders and experts in the region to obtain information about forest threats and level of healthcare facilities
- With individuals in the communities to supplement any information that is collected in the desk research and pre-assessment stage
- With government agencies to gauge receptiveness

Choosing a Site:

Health In Harmony is acutely aware that humanity must halve atmospheric dioxide by 2030 to avoid the civilization-altering impacts of the climate crisis and the collapse of nature²¹. For this reason, we have until now chosen sites with particularly important ecosystems that are of global importance such as rainforests with important climatological or biodiversity import. We recognize, however, that people everywhere have something to contribute to a healthy planetary ecosystem and hope someday that all communities have the opportunity to trade with the world community for what they can give to planetary health.

Health In Harmony has until now selected sites where the local government is supportive, where the national government has determined that this land should be protected as rainforest, and where there is a significant threat to the forest either from community members or outsiders. Of note, we do not necessarily see land conflict about ownership as meaning that we cannot work in an area but it is important to know beforehand. In an anti-colonial manner, we see our role as reversing a flow of resources to communities who have fewer resources due to a long-history of extraction. This explicit reversal of the transfer of resources is absolutely necessary at this time in history if we are to survive as a human species. Each country is not an island and we must recognize the survival and thriving of all people all over the planet is interdependent.

²¹ IPCC. (2018). Summary for Policymakers in: Global Warming of 1.5°C. World Meteorological Organization.

A note on working with governments:

We are very careful to follow all laws and to honor local government leaders. However, we also recognize that our primary goal is to support the communities. Radical Listening also extends to asking the community how they would like us to relate to the government. For example, in one case the communities asked us to specifically not work with the national park staff as they had had bad experiences with them. In all cases, we have always been extremely clear with all government bodies that we will never report information to them about community members that could in any way harm the community (like who the loggers are). And we make sure that the community knows we would never do that.

Who Should Become a Radical Listener:

We recommend that listeners ideally self-identify as women. We say this with the recognition that in some cultures gender is more fluid than in others and the cultural definition of gender should be considered in choosing listeners and understanding power dynamics. We aren't trying to impose a gender binary here, but rather recognize that some gender differences might come into play when learning to be a better listener and that actively selecting women can help support more equity in patriarchal societies. We say this while recognizing that there can be some tension with cultural and social norms. The three key reasons we feel, however, that choosing women as listeners can be important are:

1. Because of the global power of patriarchy, nearly everywhere in the world women have

less power than men and this is especially so in public spaces and settings. So, if the listeners are women, women in the community may be more willing to speak.

2. In many cultures women are trained to be better listeners. This fulfills cultural expectations related to bearing primary responsibility for the majority of care-related work.
3. Women are often perceived as less threatening (largely because they have less power in most contexts) and this can help create a safe space where everyone feels more comfortable to speak.

However, in certain contexts we are aware that this may not be possible culturally and we have sometimes paired someone who identifies as a man with someone who identifies as a woman and that seemed to work well too. One of our listeners has also been a gender-fluid individual and they seemed to work particularly well, because of their great listening and empathizing skills. However, in general we still have a preference for women because of the power-dynamic factors noted above. Another reason to have women listeners is that if one is in a culture where women may feel less comfortable to speak in a group meeting, female listeners can meet later with the women just to confirm that they agreed with the overarching solutions and to make sure nothing was left out.

Our recommendation is that there be two listeners. One person should ideally be recognized by the community as being of the same ethnic and/or language background or from the same cultural context. In our experience, in some places like Madagascar there is so much language and ethnic variability and so little mobility that even someone from a few hours away may

be considered an outsider. However, in many places in Indonesia, there is quite a bit of mobility and so much cultural mixing that someone who speaks Indonesian and comes from the same island is likely to be considered an insider. These are the sorts of things that are important to know beforehand and are also helpful in selecting listeners (which is why the preparation stage is so important).

The reason for having an insider as one of the listeners are twofold:

- 1. Trust:** having someone who the community perceives as likely to generally understand the challenges they are facing and someone who is less likely to wish them harm can be helpful in engendering trust. This is particularly critical in communities who have experienced long histories of exploitation.
- 2. Cultural context:** someone who fully understands all the cultural nuances of what is being said can be critical, especially in places where some of what may be said is implicit rather than explicit.²²

We recommend that the insider be paired with an outsider.²³ Depending on the cultural context the outsider may be someone from a different ethnic/cultural context in-country or from farther away. However, this person should ideally speak the language of the group being listened to, or the national language. The reason for the outsider is as follows:

- 1. Framing:** We have found that when an outsider is present, community members will step outside of their cultural context mentally in order to explain their situation

to an outsider. Paradoxically, this can actually help them understand the situation better themselves. An example of this is when a man in Madagascar commented in a Radical Listening meeting: “We have a saying here that comes from our ancestors. They said that there would be forest until hens have teeth. But now we can see that what was true for our ancestors, no longer is. We can see, ourselves, that soon the forest will be gone.”

- 2. Representative of the global partnering:** When someone is present who is perceived by the community to be from “outside” then that may also help engender trust that the solutions the community identifies may really be enacted (although of course, real trust can only be built with time and when actual solutions are implemented). The outsider should also be chosen with an awareness of colonial history to be more sensitive to differences in power and privilege between insiders and outsiders and its potential impacts on the Radical Listening process.²⁴

The two listeners should be able to communicate well and have good rapport. That means that they should share at least one language.

²² Cooke, p. 49 in Hickey, S., & Mohan, G. (2005). Relocating participation within a radical politics of development. *Development and change*, 36(2), 237-262.

²³ This is the way that we have tested this methodology for the reasons outlined although it is possible that just insider listeners would get the same results.

²⁴ For example, in Indonesia a Dutch outsider would likely not be a good choice.

Listening is a learned skill but there is also some innate variability in being particularly attuned to others and the capacity to synthesize what you are hearing quickly. The humility to recognize whether listening is one of your skills is important as well as a dedication to continually improving this skill. The listeners should also have a large degree of self-awareness and sensitivity to how they are being perceived and must constantly reflect on how their own background and behaviors may be affecting others. Having been trained in recognizing implicit biases within oneself and actively combating them is essential.

A note on using a translator.

The ideal is definitely that the outsider speaks the local language, but if this is not possible, then a translator may be used. The translator should be of very high quality and be able to do simultaneous translation and even be able to pay attention to multiple conversations at once (this is extremely difficult and exhausting work). When someone speaks, look at the speaker, not the translator. Even when you can't understand their words, you can understand their emotions and body language. You want this person to know that you are listening to them, not the translator. And when you speak, look at the audience, not the translator. The outside listener using the translator should also pay very close attention to who is not being translated and ask them to repeat what they said if it was not translated.

One should coordinate with the translator beforehand about how you want them to translate. Remind them that you want them to translate, not speak or insert their ideas. It's ideal for the translation to be as literal as possible as well, even if the grammar is slightly weird. At the beginning of a Radical Listening meeting using a translator, it is helpful to request that people speak just a little bit at a time, and then pause while that is translated. The speaker should demonstrate this as well in how they speak.

The translator should be someone from outside the community to help avert any biases wittingly or unwittingly affecting the translations. And obviously, the translator should not be the "insider" as their task is to listen.

Who comes to the meetings:

Who participates in meetings is the part of this work that we worried about the most as we first began our work. We worried that marginalized members of the community might be left out or that we needed to be careful in who we chose to participate. However, over time, regardless of who came to the meetings, we found incredible consistency in what the solutions were in that region. Eventually, we became much less concerned about who came and focused instead on having enough meetings in a given region to hopefully even out any participation issues.

Nevertheless we do try to get as representative a sample as possible of the community. This means that ideally half of the listeners should be women and all ethnic groups should be represented. The only group that is an absolute must are the community leaders. In the few cases where we have done radical listening without them we ended up having to repeat the meetings because the community leaders were not necessarily on board as they hadn't heard the same conclusions as everyone else. Our general approach is to have the two listeners meet first with the community leaders first. We explain to them who we are and why we would like to gather together a group of 20-50 people from the community to listen to what they see as the solutions for protecting the forest and helping bring about a thriving future for themselves and the whole planet. We ask the community leader(s) to organize the meeting and we ask for at least half the participants to be women and for religious leaders and heads of collectives to also attend. If there is ethnic variability within the community we also ask for all groups to be represented.

We recognize that asking for women to come to the same meeting as the men, is not the norm in

some cultures. This is the case in Madagascar, but when we explained why we wanted both men and women to be in the same meeting, they accommodated our request. They could understand that just like these communities were experts in things that people from outside likely wouldn't understand, women and men often have their own realms of expertise and we wanted to hear both. Interestingly, the first woman to speak prefaced her comment with "Men, you should say this..." and then she spoke for five minutes. The men simply nodded and clearly agreed with her.

It should be noted that in many cultures women are primarily responsible for health care decisions and expenses (in the US women make 80% of health care decisions)²⁵. Given that these expenses can be among the largest in a given year, women are essential participants in these meetings.

How many meetings to have:

One of the reasons we have become less stressed about who attends any given meeting is that we have found that after 3 or 4 meetings with different groups in a given ecosystem each group is coming to the same conclusions (these groups may be villages, parts of larger communities, or gathered individuals in widely spread out communities like the rubber tappers of Brazil). This is not to say that people knew the answers when they sat down to have the meeting, but in the process of wrestling with the question and evaluating various suggestions, they eventually all agreed on what the key needs are and how best to address those needs. While the listeners may be hearing the same results in each meeting and feel like they have already garnered what the key solutions are, it is still important to have more meetings.

²⁵ Matloff-Stepp et al, 2014. *J. of Healthcare Poor and Underserved: Women as health care decision-makers: implications for health care coverage in the United States.*

The reason for this is so that the participants themselves can experience the process. Being listened to helps build trust and support between the listeners and the communities and their leaders.

We usually do 1-2 meetings for political units representing about 1,000 people. In Indonesia this roughly translates to one dusun, in Madagascar, a village, and in Brazil a Resex or Indigenous Protected area where people may be very widely spread out but still act as a unit in political decisions.

METHODOLOGY

Stage two: Root causes and Solutions Meetings

Set-up

We recommend that the location for the meeting be culturally appropriate. We have always followed the advice of the community leaders about where it is best to hold the meetings. Homes and places where people usually gather to meet or eat together are good options. Be aware that if you do hold the meeting in someone's home, it's possible that the host may feel like they have a little more of a right to speak. It's also important to learn beforehand (see the preparation stage) about any significant internal rifts in the community. It will then be important to either choose a neutral location for the meeting and make sure people from both "sides" attend, or to hold two different meetings. The timing of the meeting should be mutually agreed upon but ideally it should be during a time that is most convenient for the community members and impinges on their work the least.

We ask that everyone gather in a circle even though this may not be culturally typical (in Indonesia it is normal for the leaders and guests to sit up front and face the community members). The reason we gather in a circle is because it flattens the hierarchy and helps make it clear that everyone's input is equally valuable and encouraged.²⁶

In preparing to listen, one should be a good receiver. That means the listeners should wear culturally appropriate clothing and not flaunt wealth disparities (through social markers such as jewelry etc.). A body posture of openness

is also important. As much as is physically possible, the listeners should simply be members of the circle and sit on the ground, floor, hammocks, benches, or chairs as others are doing. If there is some variation in height around the circle, the listeners should ideally be at the lower level²⁷. One should be as rested as possible and not distracted by other concerns. It is always important to treat people with respect and remember that prior to, during and after the meeting, your behavior is being watched all the time and how you present yourself, really matters.

Once everyone is gathered we generally offer a very brief introduction. We usually say our first names (no titles) and that we are here to listen to them because they are the experts in protecting the rainforest. We say that we are very happy to tell them all about ourselves at the end of the meeting but that the reason for today's meeting is not us, but them. We do this to explicitly avoid as much as possible biasing the answers (for example a health professional might bias the outcomes of the meetings towards health related solutions). We also tell people that while we can't promise we can implement all the solutions they identify, we can promise we will try.

²⁶ Chambers, R. (2004). Participatory Workshops: A sourcebook of 21 sets of ideas and activities. London:Earthscan., Bessette, G. (2004). Involving the community: A guide to Participatory Development Communication. Penang: Southbound.

²⁷ Again, as much as this is physically possible for the listeners but if accommodation needs to be made for physical ability, the listener should explain and note that they would prefer to be sitting with the others. There may also be slight cultural nuances but in all cases one should be aware of trying to flatten the hierarchies and particularly not place the listeners above the community.

The Question

After the introduction, the question that we ask is something like this (obviously translated to a rainforest community language and modified based on appropriate cultural considerations):

“You all are guardians of this precious rainforest that is important for the health of the whole world. What would you all like as a sign of thanks from the world community that would allow you to protect this forest and bring about a thriving future for yourselves?”

The key elements of the reasons we have chosen to frame the question in this way are as follows:

- 1. Positive framing that assumes the best of everyone:** We recognize that often it is the community members themselves who are participating in illegal logging or other destructive practices. We also understand (and have shown in surveys in all our locations) that the vast majority of community members want the forest to be there for the long-run -- they just aren't able to choose their long-term thriving when their short-term survival is at risk. There is also behavioral data that framing a question in a positive light yields a higher willingness to engage in a question.²⁸ By saying that they are “guardians” even if that is not yet the case, it frames their relationship to the forest in a positive light.
- 2. Reciprocity:** By describing the relationship with global citizens as a ‘thank you,’ both donors and rainforest communities can feel proud of what they are giving to the world. We have often noticed people literally sitting up straighter when we ask it in this way. The transaction is not one of charity with an implied hierarchy but rather of mutual gift-giving. One man in Indonesia explicitly told us, “I love that you asked the question that way, because it is true — we have something precious to give the world and we could really use some help to actually protect it.” In addition, by saying the gift-giving is a “thank you” it implies that the protecting is already happening (even if that is not yet the case) and it encourages in everyone a belief that a thriving future is possible.

²⁸ See *Rare Behavior Beat*.

“The first thing that sticks out to me with the focus on “thanking” is how it naturally frames the interaction in terms of reciprocity rather than a market exchange. Over the last few decades, researchers have found that simply re-framing an interaction as being in a market context or not radically affects the degree to which people are willing to cooperate with each other. If you set up an interaction as financial, people look for how they can extract the most value. If you instead frame an interaction around community and reciprocity, people choose to uphold their side of a deal even without monitoring or enforcement.” Eric Tulin for Rare Behavior Beat

We recommend once the question is asked and any clarifications made, that the listener simply stop and **be quiet**. Often there will be a period of silence but this is Ok. Let the question sit and in our experience people will begin to speak.

Once people begin to speak the listeners must pay extremely careful attention to what is said. This is exhausting work. It requires intense energy and focus. However, the process of attentive listening – really hearing people – encourages genuine participation and helps build trusting relationships where people feel their own agency.²⁹ Given that listening is probably one of the most important things that one does on a daily basis, it’s remarkable that it is so rarely taught as a skill. And it is a skill – one that can be taught, learned and improved upon. The fundamental skills in Radical Listening are the ability to receive well; the ability to read body language; the ability to remember; the ability to verbally reflect what one has heard; and the ability to relate on an emotional level. This document talks about some of the theoretical considerations around listening, but we highly encourage you to sign up for one of our virtual training sessions so that you can actually practice the skills.

Interbeing:

Listening is a process of spiral reciprocity where the more deeply one feels oneself to be heard, the more likely one is to share deeply, and therefore the more wisdom can be received. Being listened to can bring about a feeling of affirmation and trust. On both the part of the listener and the speaker, it can also begin a process of being aware of what Thich Nhat Hanh calls “inter-being” – a deep knowledge of our interconnectedness and spiritual oneness. Each of these Radical Listening skills must be grounded in a felt sense of Interbeing.

²⁹ This is conceptualized around four key topics: power, motivation, legitimacy, & trust by Borg, et al (2012). Opening up for many voices in knowledge construction. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 13(1), Art. 1, and Eversole, R. (2003). Managing the pitfalls of participatory development: some insight from Australia. World development, 31(5), 781-795.

“Why must a Radical Listener start with Interbeing? Because one who listens to and receives a story with a deep, felt sense that, “We are connected, and your wellbeing is inextricably related to my wellbeing,” creates the possibility for a palpably different experience than one who listens and receives because, “You’re poor (or uneducated, or old, or helpless, or...), and I want to help you.” No matter how unconscious, the latter sets up a power differential that will sabotage the work of Radical Listening from the start. Alternatively, listening that is grounded in Interbeing charges the space with curiosity, open heartedness, respect, and love. It softens boundaries and creates fluidity in the communication. Trust is given a chance to grow and flourish, and a rich and multifaceted relationship forms among the Listener, the person or community who is sharing their story, and the more than human world of which they are a part. Without a felt sense of Interbeing, true Radical Listening is simply not possible.” Pat Plude

Receiving

Listening to words is only one aspect of Radical Listening. We listen with our entire bodies. Being a good receiver also includes **managing our body language** to actively communicate that we are fully present and engaged. The virtual training will include tips on good receiving body language including body posture, tips about meeting people’s eyes³⁰, mirroring people’s emotions (smiling, frowning, etc), and making small noises like hmmm, yes, ah, I see.

One must also learn to work with the constant mental distractions that affect us all. Listening is a process of continually bringing yourself back to the present. We must be able to quiet the voices in our minds that crowd out our ability to really hear what another is saying.

When listening to a group, one is also listening to the web of how a conversation flows and watching which threads are picked up by the group and which dropped. One is also observing the body language of the whole group and seeing

which ideas resonate and which don’t. People are likely to lean in, nod, or sit up straighter when they agree with something said. They may also make small noises of affirmation.

Documentation is important. Both listeners should ideally take notes on paper. When you take notes, people feel like they are really being heard. The listener should tell people at the beginning of the meeting that you are just writing down ideas, not names. Names and photos should only be taken with permission. A chalkboard or whiteboard is not recommended, because it requires someone to stand. Also, when people have low or no literacy, writing things on the board is distracting, and can make people feel excluded. We recommend noting in some way in your book which ideas are getting general resonance from the group as this can help when you go back to reflect and summarize.

³⁰ This is somewhat culturally dependent and must be modified accordingly.

Emotions

It is important to recognize that listening is not just about hearing words, but also about listening to the emotions behind the words and learning to manage how the emotions of individuals and the group may affect your own responses and emotions. In our brains, we have **mirror neurons**, which respond to other's emotion and the same areas of the brain that are active in the person having the emotion become active in the listener.³¹

Recognizing and managing these responses is one of the skills we will also address in the virtual training. We will also teach Karla McLaren's approach of recognizing that there is a question in each emotion that arises.³² These are:

- **Anger:** What needs to be restored?
- **Sadness:** What needs to be released?
- **Fear:** What action needs to be taken?
- **Joy:** What needs to be celebrated?

Honoring Anger

When strong anger arises in a group, it is important to recognize that an individual may be expressing an emotion more widely held by the group. Note that the anger means that specific person really cares about something, so it's a good sign. You can reflect back to them, "I hear that you are really upset because you really want this, and the need for this is not being met." The reflection does not judge the anger or indicate a resolution (no fixing) but rather simply reflects back to them that they are fully heard. In our experience, sometimes the most oppositional people can become your very best allies, because they are the people that really care.

³¹ Rizzato & Donelli, (2018) I am your mirror, mirror neurons and empathy. Blossoming Books.
³² Karla McLaren, The Language of Emotions

Reflecting & Summarizing

Once one has listened for a good long time (at least 20-30 minutes and possibly much longer), one should begin to reflect back in a way that makes the speaker feel heard and understood. We have found that these meetings range in length from 1-4 hours. The longer meetings are usually made so through translation difficulties, but there is also cultural variability. Nevertheless, we have found that most meetings finish just around the 1.5 hour mark. We usually find ourselves just listening for about an hour until there is a point when there seems to be consensus. When this happens there is often a strong sense of the energy in the room dropping as people have less to say and seem content with what has been said.

At this point, after a quick consultation between the two listeners, they can reflect back the key points of what they heard: “So what we are hearing, is that you all see X, Y and Z as the key problems in your community and these are the key solutions. Is that correct?” When reflecting back one should ideally use the exact **key words** that the community used. These are specific words that have emotion and force behind them, or words and phrases that speakers have used multiple times. Using the exact words the community used (another reason using a translator is not ideal) helps people feel more heard.

Reflecting is a way of checking in with everyone to make sure that you are hearing correctly. Sometimes people say, “No, it’s not quite like that,” or they might say, “Yeah, that’s correct, but don’t forget this.” Reflection helps you determine if you are on the right path and allows people to correct the listeners if they don’t have it quite right.

For a Radical Listener, it will take faithful practice to reflect back lovingly and non-judgmentally not only in one’s speech, but also in one’s heart. Imagine listening to a community sharing their most intimate and painful struggles with you, searching together to find solutions that will allow them to have a more thriving future. Even a hint of blaming, lecturing, warning, interrogating, or educating in your tone of voice – or your body language – will be felt by the community.

When you feel like the meeting is coming to an end, one can then summarize. For example: “I hear that these are the three key issues.” Keep summarizing until everyone says, “Yeah, that’s it.” There is this moment when you get it right, where everyone in the room relaxes and agrees (body-language).

A note on consensus. If you are talking to a group and there is one person who strongly disagrees, our experience is that they usually have something really valuable that the rest of the group needs to incorporate and think about. If you give them the space and time to do so, normally groups will shift the answer or even completely move to that person’s position. If someone won’t let go of their point, there is usually a reason why. Occasionally you may need to check in separately with marginalized

groups to make sure they agree with the group decisions. Knowing who these groups are from the pre assessment work can be key at this stage.

Express hope. Say, “I have hope that we are really going to make progress with these solutions.” Then make a **follow-up plan**. Say something like, “We will let you know in two weeks how things are going.” Make sure you are accountable and actually stick to that plan. **Never make a promise you can’t keep.**

“In Gunung Palung National Park every time the founders went to communities that had participated in radical listening sessions, even ten years later, they would have people walk up to them and tell them how proud they themselves were of doing such a great job designing the solutions for their communities because they could see how well those solutions had worked. That sense of ownership of the solutions is powerful.”

Stage Three: Implementation

Our experience is that this process of Radical Listening always yields integrated systems solutions. This is to say, non-siloed solutions that recognize the interconnection between economics, healthcare, ecosystem wellness, and education. This is because it holds up a mirror to what the communities we work with already know about the interdependence between social, communal, personal and environmental well-being. We have yet to conduct Radical Listening anywhere that did not identify some form of healthcare access and livelihood solutions as being integral for protecting rainforest. (We've also tried out the approach with coral reefs and fishing communities and found the same thing – overexploitation of ecosystems in order to access healthcare.) We find that it is not the need for items which can be planned for (buying a form of transportation, building a house, or having a wedding) but rather extreme needs of survival that arrive unexpectedly (such as a medical emergency) that drive people to overexploit their environment. People also often see access to education both for children and adults as essential to shifting to a restorative economy. Some communities are destroying forests to access very basic needs of survival such as food (we particularly found this in Madagascar) but this is usually only the case if a negative spiral of destruction, worsening health, and worsening livelihoods had gone on too long.

“One woman in Indonesia said that if anyone denied logging to pay for healthcare they were lying because that was the only way to get the large amounts of money necessary to access care from their remote location. This was not only for severe emergencies but even just for birth control access each month, which she described needing five planks of wood just to pay for.”

Determining details of the solutions

Once enough meetings are held to feel that there is clarity in what the broad solutions are for a given region (see the section on determining how many meetings are enough), the next phase is determining the exact details of those solutions. For example, if healthcare has been identified as a need then how exactly should that be provided? Some of these details may have come out of the initial meetings. At our second site in Borneo, for example, the community's primary need was for midwives. In the Xingu Basin in Brazil, the need was for help with evacuations and to have a doctor, dentist, and immunization nurse visit three times a year. However, the exact details of these solutions will still have to be worked out. If mobile clinics are needed, in which exact locations should they be held, how often, etc. These details will have to be determined during the next round of meetings. Likewise, if a specific form of sustainable livelihood training has been requested, how exactly that should be done must then be determined.

We usually hold these secondary meetings mostly with the community leaders in a given region although they will often invite others to join. Bringing together leaders across a region is important because in issues like mobile clinics or the placing of nurses there likely needs to be coordination and consensus between communities about which central locations are best. This is also the point where there may need to be negotiation about how many resources can be provided at that time by the listening entity. For example, at our first site in Indonesia the communities would have ideally liked a doctor to visit every community every week but this would have taken more doctors than could possibly be hired in a country with so few physicians on a

per-capita basis. In the end, they were happy with bi-weekly visits to centrally located places.

In Madagascar, we held a secondary meeting with the community "Kings" from 30 villages to work out the details of the broader solutions. For the request for mobile clinics, one of the tasks was to determine the specific locations. Since it involved multiple communities and different interests, we had assumed that this task might take the good part of a day. But within an hour, they had already arrived at a decision, and had chosen the 7 best locations.

When healthcare is identified as one of the needs of the community, at Health In Harmony we have learned to not provide health services entirely for free. The reason for this is that we have found that people often place greater trust and value in things that they have to pay for. However, in the interest of equity, it is essential that everyone be able to access care even if they have no money to pay for it. The way we do this is by allowing people to pay for care with non-cash payment options. What these barter options should be, however, should be determined by the communities. Our only condition is that these payment options do not damage people's well-being in any way, including by not damaging the environment. Popular options include seedlings and handicrafts made from non-timber forest-products harvested in a sustainable manner. We prefer these options as they further honor and recognize the linkages between human and environmental health.

Incentive System:

We usually introduce this idea at the end of the initial Radical Listening meetings. We say that the global community is likely to be willing to give more signs of gratitude if the communities are actually protecting the forest and thereby providing a greater gift to the world. At one of our meetings when we introduced this idea, an elderly man said he loved the idea because it would help them exert social pressure on the few cheaters.¹

At the secondary meeting with the community leaders, the details of this incentive system are then worked out. We want to make sure not to limit access to anything that will help people protect the forest, such as alternative livelihood training. At Health In Harmony, we have often worked out a discount system for healthcare. Again, everyone will always be able to access care because they can pay with barter options, but we usually have a variable discount that is framed as a greater “thank you” from the world community. So far, our research suggests that these discounts are powerful motivators for community members to discuss protecting the forest with their neighbors.

However, in order to institute this kind of system, there will have to be a mechanism of monitoring and the communities should also design this themselves. There is also data that suggests that simply measuring something tends to lead to changes in that variable, so the process of monitoring in addition to the incentive system may also help with eliminating logging.

One of the mistakes that we made at our first site was not having the community design the monitoring system, as we feared that they would cheat. Instead we partnered with the National Park office to gather information on forest degradation with which we determined the ‘incentive’ status of each community. However, this data proved not to be reliable and after two years we had to go back to the communities and apologize that we had not asked them in the first place. They designed a system of “forest guardians” who were individuals who came from each area bordering the park and knew each logger personally as they had grown up together. These people would not only do monitoring but also help find alternative work solutions for each individual logger. This solution was wildly successful, and through it we learned yet another important lesson about the critical role of listening.

Signing agreements:

Once the details of the implementation and any incentive and monitoring system have been worked out with the community leaders, we recommend signing a contract which broadly lays out the roles of each party. We specifically make this contract quite loose and not very detailed as we know that the details may change over time through continued Radical Listening. For example, we would not put the exact locations of the mobile clinics in the contract as that may change, but we would say that Health In Harmony agrees to provide healthcare per the request of the communities through mobile clinics. On the part of the communities, they are promising only to “try” to reverse rainforest loss. They do not have to agree to actually do so.

³³ See Fehr & Gächter (2000) Cooperation and Punishment in Public Goods Experiments for the behavior change theory around this.

We also honor any cultural rules about what makes a contract official. In Indonesia, all the signatures must touch a stamp that is called a Meteri. In Madagascar, a Zebu cow must be slaughtered. (See Stage 1: Preparation).

Example from Gunung Palung national park, Indonesia:

In the implementation phase of our first site around Gunung Palung national park in Indonesia, we had a difficult experience where a few individuals attempted to derail the project. However, since there was so much support from the overall community, the broader community found a way to work around those individuals. This example also shows the power that community pressure (even the power of presumed potential future pressure) can have on the outcome of Radical Listening sessions. In the final meeting to sign the reciprocity agreements, one of the village heads started shouting and giving all kinds of administrative reasons as to why no one should sign. We were very surprised by this because everyone had been so enthusiastic earlier. This made other villages angry because they wanted the benefits. A young man snuck over to us in a break and explained the problem: the man was a “logging boss” who hired people to log and owned a sawmill. He was apparently afraid that if he signed, his village would be angry at him for logging, and if he didn’t sign, his village would be angry that they wouldn’t get the discount. His only chance was to get no one to sign.

Eventually one of the oldest village chiefs came up with a solution: a listener would come to each of the 21 village chief’s houses and ask them to sign individually. At the logging boss’s house he glumly asked how many had signed, when told, he grabbed the pen and signed. He then closed his sawmill and moved to other work. Amazingly, he then became one of the program’s best supporters.

Enacting the Solutions:

Our principles at Health In Harmony are the following:

- We exclusively hire local personnel (we prefer to hire directly from the region where we work, but some of the more educated staff such as doctors and program directors may need to be brought in from elsewhere in the country) and are recruited based on their willingness to completely follow the lead of the communities.
- We prioritize hiring women for all roles and specifically for leadership roles. There is some research to suggest this may be key as women may on average care more about the environment.³⁴
- We work closely with government agencies (e.g. National Park and Ministry of Health offices) while demonstrating a non-corrupt, ethical approach. We never, ever pay monetary bribes as part of our principle of being the change we want to see in the world (see organizational culture section below). We follow all legal rules and serve as a bridge between community priorities and government resources.
- We may work with outside capacity builders if requested by local staff. For example, we sometimes have international healthcare providers visit. These folks will not provide care directly but will see patients alongside the local providers and this allows for mutual learning to happen in both directions. We refer to this as an educational exchange as the 'visitor' learns equally, if not more, from the exchange as the host.

- The legal framework of our relationship with the in-country team is dependent on legal rules in that country, but our overall vision is of a tree that shares the same DNA of Radical Listening: Health In Harmony is the trunk whose job is to funnel water (i.e., funding) and other resources to the branches, in an explicitly anti-colonial manner. The branches, which may have independent legal structures (such as ASRI in Indonesia) or through an Accord de Siege (Health In Harmony, Madagascar), benefit the globe by fixing carbon, releasing oxygen and all kinds of other ecosystem benefits, in proportion to how well the communities (the leaves) are thriving.

Healthcare

We also want to make a few notes about providing healthcare. We have found that there may be no better way to engender love and trust than through caring for someone's physical wellbeing when they are in need. Also, anxiety about lack of access to healthcare can be an extreme burden even for community members who are not currently ill, so the impact of providing healthcare is community-wide even if not all individuals utilize the care. Improvements in health on a community-wide basis means that there is less need for friends and neighbors to shoulder some of the burden when people are sick or die.

We always hire community members to be community health workers who help treat specific illnesses such as tuberculosis and leprosy where patients often require support during the long treatment period. These community health workers (usually women) are also trained in

³⁴ [Cook et al \(2019\) When more women make decisions, the environment wins.](#)

treating common illnesses and identifying warning signs of severe illness especially in children. They form a bridge between the local community and professional health care providers. In Madagascar, we have partnered with the government and worked closely with the local Agent Communitaires and traditional midwives by including them in the mobile clinics and providing capacity building if requested. Everywhere we work, we partner closely with the traditional healers in the communities as an extension of our principle of honoring community knowledge and practices. In Brazil, the communities we work with are particularly interested in integrating traditional healing modalities and what they call “white medicine” and see health as a widely holistic thing that includes complete psychosocial well-being (as do we).

We always operate within existing health systems and develop strong partnerships with local health authorities and government agencies. We see our work as supplementing and enhancing what the government can provide until a time when they can fully assume that work.

Organizational Culture

- **Remembering we are always setting a precedent:** We do not pay much over local prices for renting the facilities for our clinic and staff and procurement of program equipment. We also implement this in staff benefits and salary so as not to create community jealousy and problems with other organizations.
- **Constant Coordination and Listening among staff:** One of the key cultural features of our site in Indonesia is the morning meeting. Every single morning there is a half hour to one hour meeting. All staff attend (including cleaning staff) and a pen is spun to see who runs the meeting. Everyone gets a chance to talk. This allows for joint solution finding, coordination of all parts of the program, and celebration together of successes. This sort of intentional power-sharing among the team is also critical to really grasp the diverse impacts of Radical Listening and to also learn how to participate as a better listener.
- **Egalitarianism and a sense of family:** Running a very flat organization is not typical in Madagascar or Indonesia which are both very hierarchical countries. However, we strive to honor and value all our staff and promote a culture of equality. A sense of everyone being equally valued also extends to our relationship with the community.
- **Respect:** We strive to treat everyone with respect and to honor diversity and local cultural norms.
- **Being the change we want to see in the world:** This manifests in lots of ways from riding bicycles to work where possible, to not hiring staff who smoke, to not paying bribes. The last one is a big issue and has definitely increased the expense of the program, but we do not want to support a system that robs money from the poor and perpetuates bad governance. We are willing to take longer, or even be unable to do some things, in order to not participate in a system of monetary bribes we do not believe in.

Follow-up meetings:

Radical Listening is not one and done. Once the communities have determined what the overall solutions are and the details worked out with the community leaders, there will be a period of implementation. However, we have found that sometimes modifications need to happen. For example, in Madagascar some of the mobile clinic locations were simply too busy, so additional sites needed to be added. We use Radical Listening check-ins to assess how the programs are progressing and if further problems are arising.

In Indonesia, once we started the organic farming training, as was requested by the communities, manure went from having no price, to being expensive, to not being purchasable because people were hoarding it. Thus in one of the Radical Listening check-in meetings, the community suggested that they needed more animals in the communities. In working out the details, the decision was made for widows to receive goats for free, but with a requirement to pay back a few bags of manure to the farming cooperatives before they could sell further bags. They were also required to pass on one baby goat to another widow before they could sell future kid goats. In this way, the most vulnerable members of the community would receive assistance, and over time more manure would be available.

Summary & Next Steps:

As listed at the outset these are the key principles of Radical Listening:

- Communities know their own needs, and they know the most feasible solutions for living in balance with their ecosystems.
- If solutions have been suggested by community members, they will be locally and culturally appropriate and more likely to be followed and sustained.
- Allowing communities to lead this process reveals respect for their knowledge, and capabilities; this helps engender a sense of trust and commitment between communities and global citizens who can help funnel resources to their solutions.
- Following the wisdom of communities in their own thriving contributes to an increased sense of agency, empowerment and hope.
- The fundamental key to listening is a recognition of Interbeing -- that all our well-beings are intertwined.
- This methodology is effective in improving the ability of a community to thrive, reversing the loss of rainforest, and helping bring about a thriving future for our planet.
- We suspect that this methodology is more broadly applicable to other ecosystems and other contexts besides planetary health, but are still gathering data on this.

If you are interested to learn more, to practice the skills of listening, and/or to join our global force of Radical Listeners please sign up for on-going webinars on www.radicallylistening.org or reach out to us at info@healthinharmony.org to schedule a training. To request a training, you must have a minimum of 3 participants who are interested.



**Health In
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