2015 PSO umpleby abstract on ICA methods

**Group Facilitation Methods to Aid Community Development Globally**

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Presently many organizations and individuals are working to improve the living conditions of people around the world. The United Nations, individual countries, and many Non-Governmental Organizations are working to ease the burdens and improve the lives of people, particularly the poor. This presentation describes the work of the Institute of Cultural Affairs, an organization that practices grass roots organizing and trains people in rural or urban communities to work together to identify problems, and build networks of supportive people and organizations. In the 1960s the Institute of Cultural Affairs, based in Chicago, Illinois, started working with poor communities. They developed some very useful methods for facilitating group conversations.  They gradually used these in poor communities around the world.  They would come together each summer to discuss what worked and what did not.  They would modify their methods, plan the next year's activities, implement the activities, then meet the following summer to discuss progress.  Academics do something similar with annual conferences, but they are more focused on publishing academic articles than on improving the lives of real people in real communities. For examples of such conversational exercises, see [www.gwu.edu/~umpleby/ptp.html](http://www.gwu.edu/~umpleby/ptp.html)

Currently the global network of universities is growing rapidly and striving to improve. Universities have large numbers of students and faculty members seeking to advance knowledge in the social sciences, using a conception of social science taken from the physical sciences. But social systems are composed of purposeful, thinking participants, not inanimate objects. In addition to searching for reliable cause and effect relationships more of what is called social science could be devoted to developing conversational methods that aid joint action toward shared goals. If this goal were to be accepted within the social sciences in universities there would be a great increase in the number of people working to improve social systems and developing more effective social change methods.