

The Barefoot Guides and the Barefoot Guide Alliance

Transforming social change practice



Why does the Barefoot Guide Alliance exist?

We enable social change practitioners and leaders across the globe to more collaboratively use their experience and collective intelligence to initiate and support effective change practices to contribute to a freer, more just, equitable and sustainable world.

There are projects and programmes of transformational social change in most societies, but so few resources are invested in developing disciplined *practices* of social change that will enable these projects and programmes to fully and sustainably realise their goals. The work of social change must go beyond technical fixes and project boundaries, to address the real complexities of poverty, oppression and exclusion.

Social change practitioners and leaders require a deep understanding of the nature of change and how to unlock and enable it. Only some of the answers lie in text-books, and so we have to find other ways of distilling effective practice. We

have learned that we can do this collaboratively, in creative action learning processes, using tools of collective intelligence based on real experiences. Not only is collaborative learning an effective approach to developing capacity but it also lays foundations for collaborative action and authentic and deliberative democracy.

Both the Barefoot Guides and the processes through which they are developed and disseminated, support practices of transformative social change. Our Barefoot Guide Alliance exists to further innovate and develop Barefoot Guide products and practices, as detailed below

What does the Barefoot Guide Alliance do?

The Barefoot Guide Alliance is focused on this challenge in a variety of ways:

1. We support the development of Barefoot Guide products

We bring together practitioners, leaders and other social change actors to surface, deepen and share their experiences, and to articulate and communicate improved and more transformative practice, more widely, through:

a) Publishing Barefoot Guides through collaborative Writeshops:

Four Guides, focusing on different spheres of social change practice, have been produced, with the participation of over 240 practitioners from all continents. Several more are in the pipeline. Each Barefoot Guide describes good practice, through stories, deep analyses and

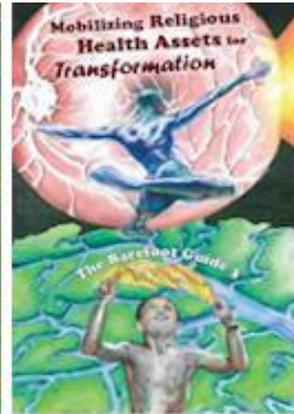
helpful frameworks, written in straightforward language and artistically illustrated with images and some poetry. Accessible practice description is key to enabling the full and joint participation of a wider variety of stakeholders, particularly to include leaders at local or community level in practice dialogue with government officials, donors and NGO practitioners. Academic texts, while helpful for some, often serve to exclude and undermine the participation of community stakeholders in their own processes of change. The Guides are freely downloadable, in several languages – see www.barefootguide.org.



Chinese



Swahili



English



French

Our guides have been downloaded more than 500.000 times since 2010 and are used by practitioners, policy makers and universities alike. Frequently heard feedback is, that the guides give insight in the realities on the ground through the narratives produced:

"I have learned so much from the Barefoot Guides as I heed my calling to walk with grassroots movements and community-based organizations, which are the true engine of social transformation wherever you are in the world. The folks and the contributors demonstrate that collaborative and mutual learning is for us all!"

"Proud of the Barefoot initiative which helps people to dig deep to find their source of inspiration, and gives practical handles for transforming self, organisations and the wider society".

2. We innovate Barefoot Guide Practices

Participants in the Writeshops have found that the method can be used for a wide range of creative processes, including strategic reviews and planning, multi-actor dialogues, alliance-building etc. Indeed, we have come to see that various forms of Writeshops can bring people together to learn and co-create in the kind of transparent, visible and participative social processes that should lie at the heart of genuine deliberative democracy. Besides the writeshops, the content, tools and online peer processes we have assembled and developed, provide opportunities for offering support to more structured learning processes and courses for social change practitioners and leaders to improve their own practice.

How are the Guides produced? We bring together experienced practitioners from around the world, into face-to-face and online *Writeshops*, to share experiences, and to rethink and to recreate practices that are more effective and sustainable.

b) Publishing helpful tools, exercises, readings:

Whereas the Guides contain deep practices and approaches to change, there is still a need for sharing more practical resources. Our website contains a growing library of freely downloadable resources (tools, exercises, frameworks, readings etc.) to support the design and facilitation of workshops, meetings, personal and leadership development and other vital processes of change.

a) Writeshops:

We are continually refining the Writeshop approach to share with the world, to enable others to design and facilitate for their own purposes. One of the most significant learnings from social movements and alliances over the past decades is that if we want to work together more effectively we can best do so through learning together more effectively. Horizontal learning, using tools of collective intelligence, is key. Disciplined writing, within creative, collaborative learning processes makes experience and thinking more visible and enables a depth of learning and relationship that make possible more effective working collaborations.

b) Other approaches to collective intelligence.
There are other powerful approaches and tools of collective intelligence and many yet to be discovered. The Barefoot Guide Alliance intends to be a laboratory of innovation for these, to be shared with the wider world.

c) Curriculum and materials to support adaptable local face-to-face courses.
We have developed a 5-day foundational organization development course, which can be downloaded, with manuals and resources. A “facilitating community process” course is under

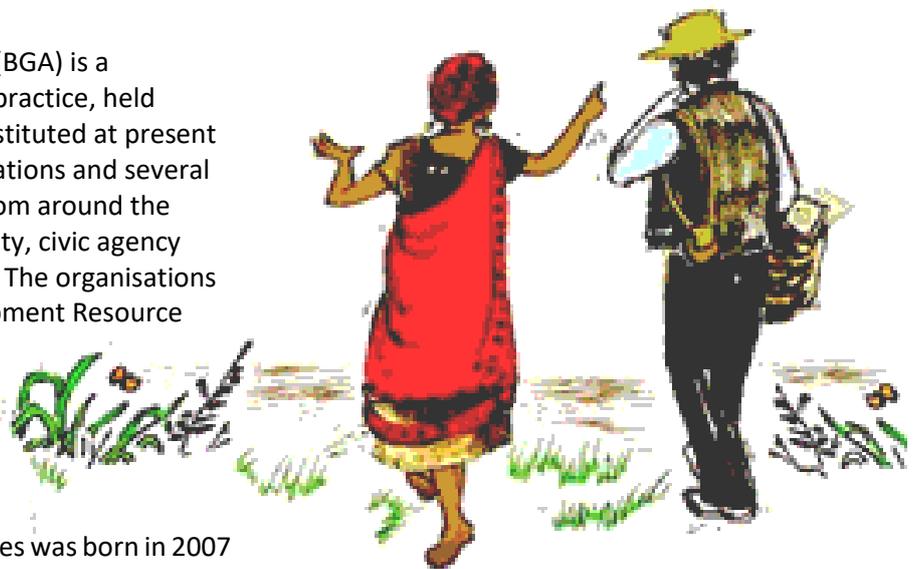
development. We will produce more of such courses for each Barefoot Guide.

d) Massive and Tiny Open Online Courses (MOOCs and TOOCs).

With the significant content we have already developed we are researching and developing MOOCs and TOOCs. The first TOOC on “Seeding Change from Within” is to be launched in October 2016, as a collaboration with Organisation Unbound, using Facebook as the learning platform.

Who are we?

The Barefoot Guide Alliance (BGA) is a transnational community of practice, held globally by its members, constituted at present by five social change organisations and several independent practitioners from around the world, grounded in civil society, civic agency and community experiences. The organisations are: The Community Development Resource Association (CDRA - South Africa), Ekta Parishad (India), F3E (France), COTA (Belgium), MCNV (Netherlands & Vietnam).



The idea of the Barefoot Guides was born in 2007 from a group of practitioners, initially CDRA and then a wider community of practitioners (the Barefoot Guide 1 Writer’s Collective), wanting to meet the growing demand for accessible resources on social change. Since the publication of the first guide, *Working with Organizations and Social Change*, in 2009, requests for additional guides have continuously come in allowing a guide to be published every 2 years: The Barefoot Guide 2 (BFG2) on *Learning Practices in Organizations and Social Change* was published in 2011; in 2013 the first Barefoot Guide, written by an external group was published: *Mobilizing Religious Health Assets for*

Transformation; and in March 2015, the BFG4 *Exploring the Real Work of Social Change* was launched in the World Social Forum of Tunis. A total of 243 development practitioners have already collaborated in the writing of the first four Barefoot Guides.

Several more Barefoot Guides are now in the pipeline, held by a variety of groups: Transformative evaluation; Inclusive Development; Seed Sovereignty are already in motion. In early conception are Guides on Generative Leadership; Climate Change; The Creative Classroom; Conflict and Resilience.

What do we need?

The activities of the Barefoot Guide Alliance and Connection are mostly voluntary or funded by small collections. With good funding we can go beyond this pioneering phase into a more disciplined, substantial and effective work process, mobilising on the good experience gained thus far.

Write to us at contact@barefootguide.org for more information.