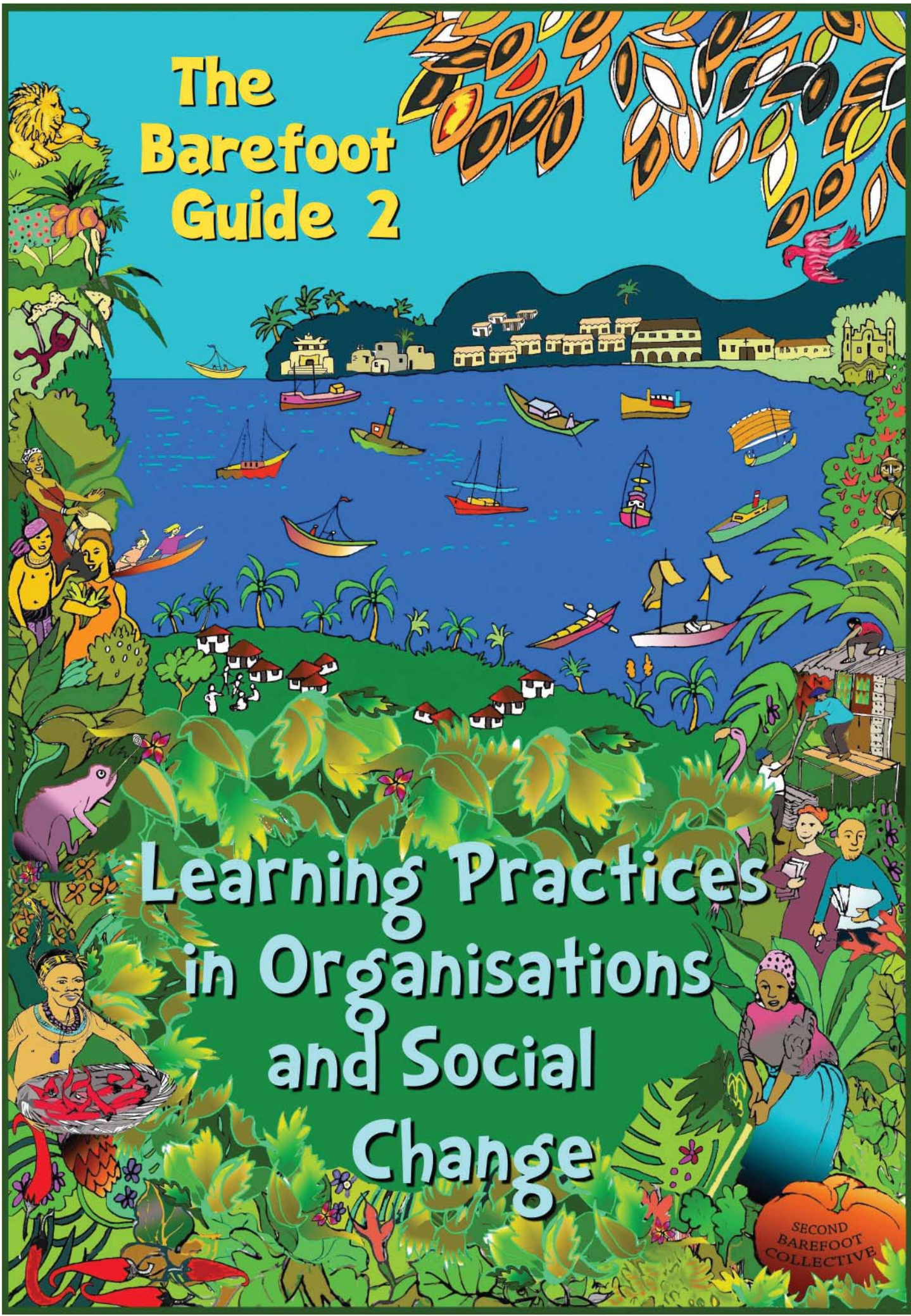


The Barefoot Guide 2

Learning Practices in Organisations and Social Change

SECOND
BAREFOOT
COLLECTIVE



Made possible by the valuable financial contribution of



The
Barefoot
Guide

to learning
practices
in
organisations
and social
change



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The Second Barefoot Collective:

Aissata Dia – Action Aid - Senegal

Akke Schuurmans – PSO Capacity Building in Developing Countries – Netherlands

Alfred Kuma – Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) – Ghana

Arja Aarnoudse – PSO Capacity Building in Developing Countries – Netherlands

Doug Reeler – Community Development Resource Association (CDRA) – South Africa

Jan van Ongevalle – Research Institute for Work and Society (HIVA/KULeuven) – Belgium

Malcolm McKinlay – International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – Thailand

Maria Cascant (Kas) – The International Reflect Circle (CIRAC) – Spain

Marianne Brittiijn – Cordaid – Netherlands

Martine Koopman – International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) – Netherlands

Nomvula Dlamini – Community Development Resource Association (CDRA) – South Africa

Pamela Atieno-Olwal – EASUN: Centre for Organizational Learning – Tanzania

Philippa Kabali Kagwa – Namutebi and Associates – South Africa

Quang Ho Sy – Medical Committee Netherlands-Vietnam (MCNV) – Vietnam

Sandra Hill – Community Development Resource Association (CDRA) – South Africa

Tony Saddington – Independent – South Africa

Tracey Martin – Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) – Thailand

Tripti Rai – Action Aid – Nepal

Editorial team:

Arja Aarnoudse – PSO Capacity Building in Developing Countries – Netherlands

Doug Reeler – Community Development Resource Association (CDRA) – South Africa

Tracey Martin – Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) – Thailand

Illustrator: Meg Jordi

Layout artist: Paula Wood (Paula Wood Design)

Copy editor: Judy Norton

Proof-reader: Siobhain Pothier (Community Development Resource Association)

Website: Doug Reeler (Community Development Resource Association) and Paula Wood (Paula Wood Design)

Administration: Marlene Tromp (Community Development Resource Association)

Contributions:

Shelley Arendse (Community Development Resource Association) and Ray Gordezky gave valuable input

Contact: Please contact us via email – contact@barefootguide.org

This book can be freely downloaded from: www.barefootguide.org

The Barefoot Guide Resource Centre

You can find a growing collection of exercises, readings, handouts and case studies that accompany the *Barefoot Guide* at www.barefootguide.org.



Written by the
Second Barefoot Collective
Illustrated by Meg Jordi
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The Community Development Resource Association (CDRA)



PSO Capacity Building in Developing Countries



Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)

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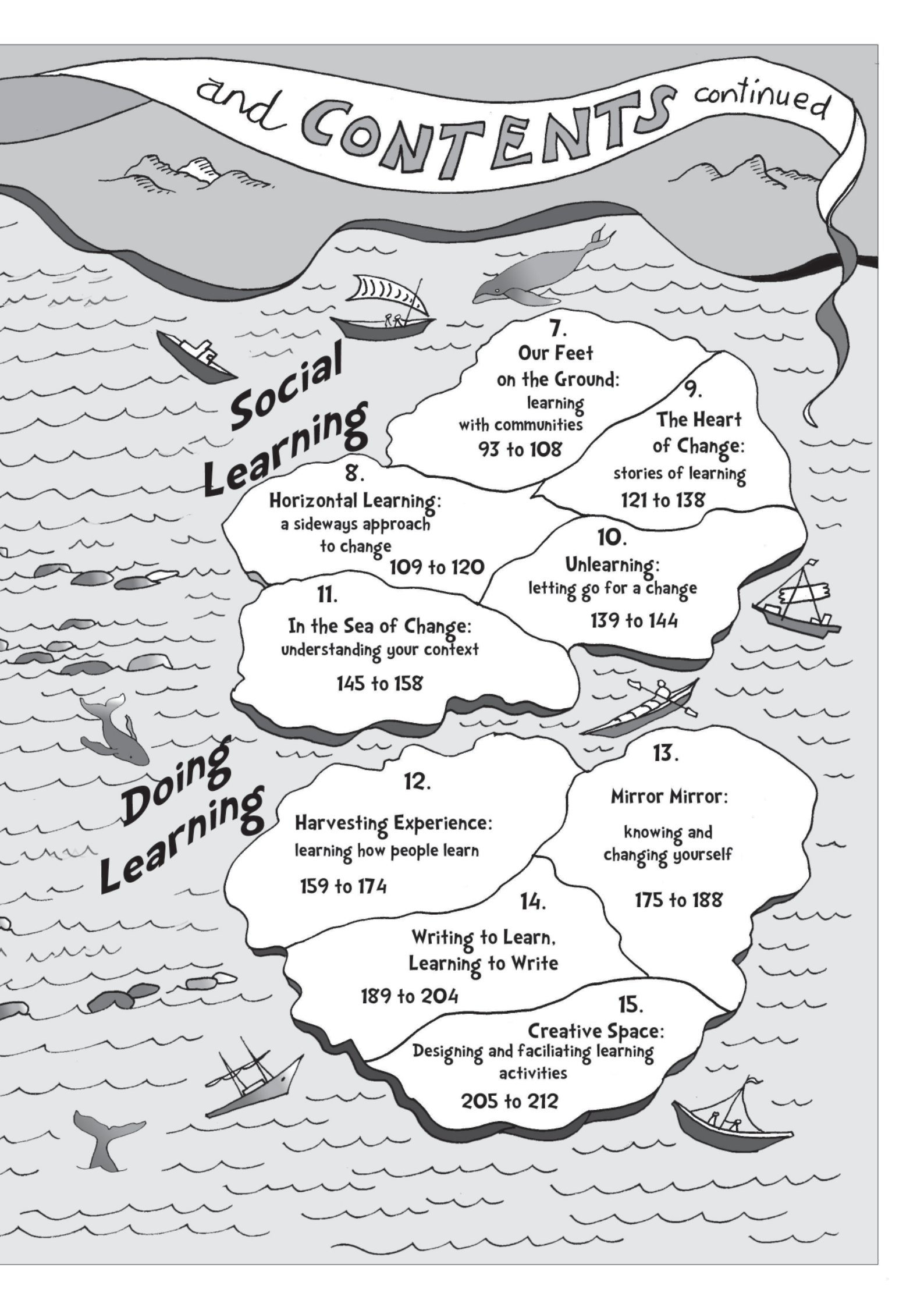
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Doing Learning



What is learning?

It's not a package tied with string,
or a machine with precise instructions.
It doesn't obey rules or masters.

No-one can patent it though many have tried.
It's never been captured and bottled,
or dissected, defined or delivered.

It has many colours and scents,
many flavours and textures,
it can speak in every language.

And every time people tell a story
and others give their whole selves
to listening, it can happen.

And every time someone asks real questions
and honours unexpected answers
then acts on them, it happens.

It's out there in the field, waiting for you,
like a juicy red fruit or a pale blue flower, or the raindrop
you can catch in your hand because you watched as it fell.

By Tracey Martin

Welcome!

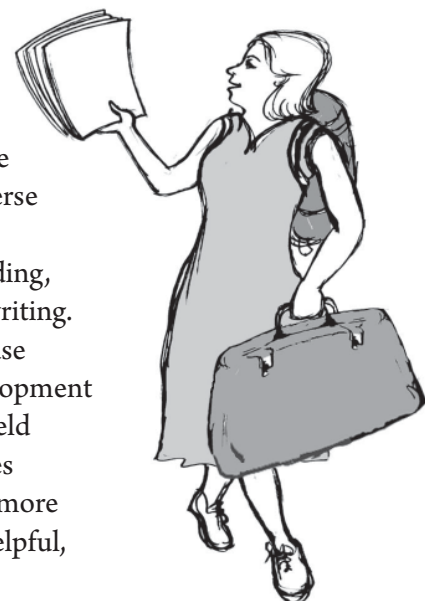
...to the Barefoot Guide to Learning Practices in Organisations and Social Change

Wamkelekile!

This is a practical resource for leaders, facilitators and practitioners wanting to improve and enrich their learning processes. It is intended for individuals, organisations and for social change practice in the field.

This is not just another book on organisational learning and social change. It is different in that it was not written by one person. Neither is it a collection of essays written by different people. This book is the joint effort of a group of development practitioners from across the globe. It was designed and written during three intensive, participatory writing workshops known as 'writeshops'. Through this process we have created something to help us and others to start, and continue, a more fruitful journey towards learning and social change.

We (the writers) are all passionate about learning and have brought our different experience and expertise to the book. It includes topics as diverse as community mobilising and development, adult learning, funding, evaluation, facilitation, and creative writing. In writing this book, we have tried to use accessible language and to avoid 'development speak'. We hope community leaders, field workers, NGO staff and donor agencies struggling to make their organisations more learning-oriented will find this book helpful, inspiring and thought-provoking.



Writing this guide has been a learning journey for us. Most of us haven't really been writers in our professional lives – although we happened to have some poets amongst us. Most of us had never met before going to Kleinmond (South Africa) for our first writeshop. And few had ever written a book together with others. To get acquainted and build trusting relationships, we shared our personal learning stories and practised the very values this book tries to inspire – knowing ourselves, creating safe spaces, losing our defenses, taking personal responsibility, creating reflection in action and celebrating diversity. We learned to develop our writing voice and to give each other honest feedback on our chapters. We even painted each other's portraits and learned to drum – all to get our creative energy flowing. Over time, we grew stronger as a team and felt less resistance about letting go of certain parts of our chapters ('killing our darlings') and integrating various chapters into new, exciting pieces of work. This was a real collaboration.

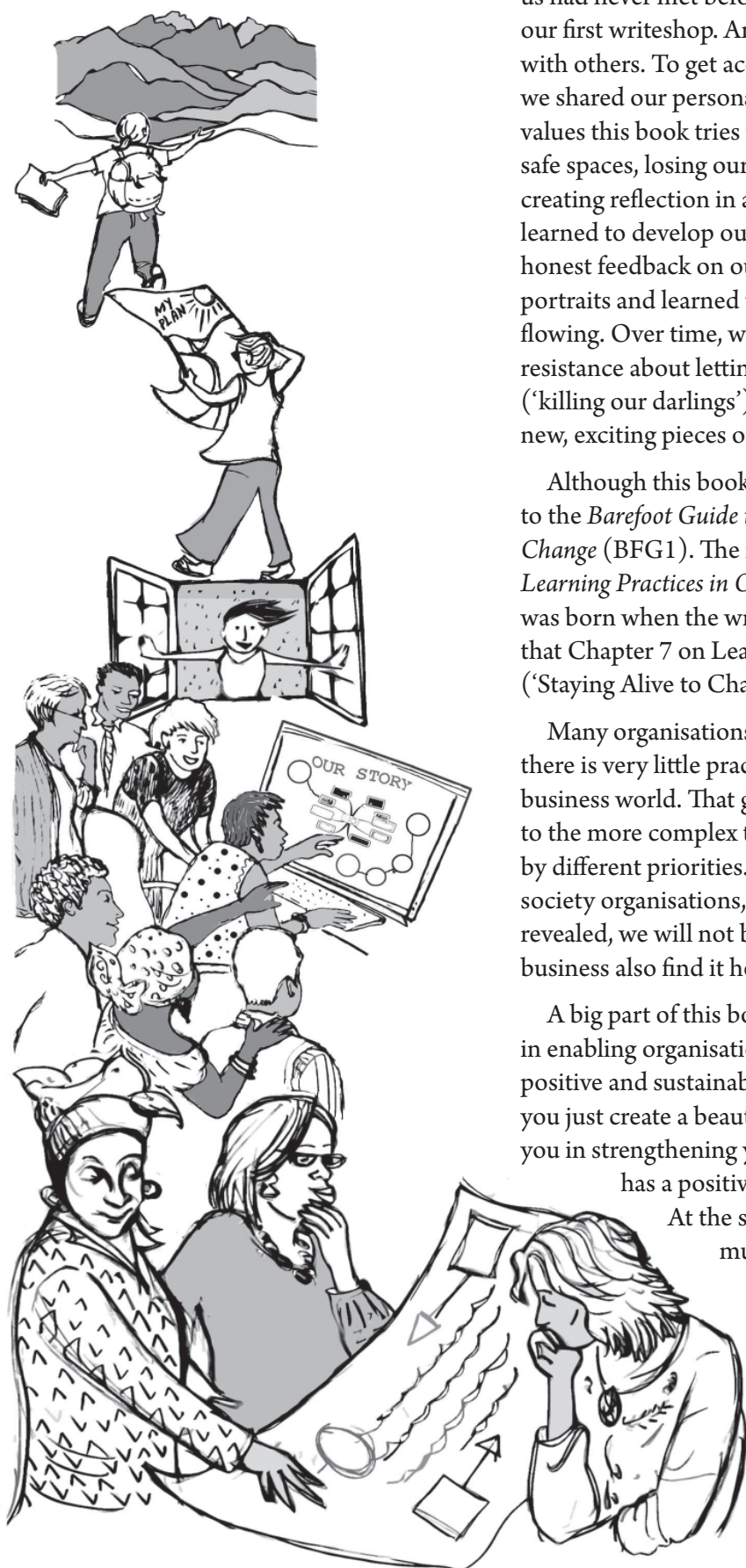
Although this book stands on its own, it is closely connected to the *Barefoot Guide to Working with Organisations and Social Change* (BFG1). The idea to write a second *Barefoot Guide on Learning Practices in Organisations and Social Change* (BFG2) was born when the writers of the first *Barefoot Guide* recognised that Chapter 7 on Learning and Innovating in Organisations ('Staying Alive to Change') could easily be a book in itself.

Many organisations aspire to be 'learning organisations' but there is very little practical guidance available, except from the business world. That guidance is difficult to interpret and apply to the more complex terrain of social change, and often guided by different priorities. This book seeks to fill that gap for civil society organisations, and, as the feedback about the BFG1 revealed, we will not be surprised if people in government and business also find it helpful.

A big part of this book is about learning and its importance in enabling organisations to contribute more effectively to positive and sustainable social change. Our aim is not to help you just create a beautiful Learning Organisation but to assist you in strengthening your organisation and its work, so that it has a positive and lasting impact on its surroundings.

At the same time, social change is a diverse, multifaceted phenomenon. We can't think of any social change which does not have learning at its heart.

Learning is not a technical thing. We want to encourage you to embrace the strangeness. We hope to inspire you to not just wonder if you are doing your job in the right way, but to also ask the more



philosophical and political questions. We don't want to mainstream any 'best practice' – in fact we strongly believe that the idea of a global best practice is quite colonising! We each must develop good practices for our unique contexts and be open to learning from others in this process. We are aware that a lot of learning is already taking place in communities, organisations and social movements. Our aim is to appreciate what is already there and to enable organisations to learn even better. We want to contribute a new flavour to what is already good.

This book is filled with real-life stories, images and ideas, and while it will not always answer your questions it will, we hope, help you to ask better ones. It will not tell you how your organisation ought to be but it will support the path towards becoming more effective and reflective. Towards more positive and sustainable social change.

You probably won't read this book from cover to cover. You will need to make your own unique journey through it. But don't worry; there are plenty of signposts to help you. Remember that the end will just be the beginning – for you, for your organisation and for your relationship with the people you are working with to bring about social change.

We have used many stories – our own learning stories and stories that others have told us. We are aware of the fact that stories are very powerful. However, their power can have both positive and negative consequences. There is a danger in telling a single story, as it easily leads to generalisations and stereotyping. We know that in telling stories, we are always selective. We make our own stories depending on our world view, our interpretations and our assumptions. Especially when working with other people's stories, we have a great responsibility to tell them and use them with care and respect. We hope we have managed to tackle this ethical question in a responsible way, by using only stories that we know people have told us in good faith.

Finally, this book is humble in its aspirations. We know we have only touched upon a small part of knowledge and experience existing among the many development practitioners around the world. To build on the BFG2 and continuously expand it, we strongly encourage you to contribute your own learning story and experiences to the book or website, and to connect with other people and organisations that have similar questions to yours. It is our desire that the content of the book is continually evolving and enriched. Our learning journey has only just started and we encourage you to take it one step further!



We'd like to hear your feedback

1. Has the *Guide* inspired any changes in how you do something or approach your work? It would be helpful if you could tell us a brief story of how you have used it and what responses it has had.
2. Which chapters have been particularly helpful? Why?
3. Is there anything else that you would like to see in the *Guide*?
4. Is there any part of the *Guide* that you have found difficult to understand?
5. Is there anything that you disagree with? Please tell us why and feel free to contribute alternatives.

Send your feedback to feedback@barefootguide.org.

Contribute your tools and resources

We also welcome additional materials for future editions and for the website. These could be activities, readings, case stories or even poems or images that you have found useful, and that might be useful to others. We can't promise that we will always include them, but each contribution will be seriously considered and acknowledged, if used. Email your contributions to contact@barefootguide.org.

