

PILLARS newsletter March 2005

Entering a new phase

Change is in the air, as the official pilot of PILLARS draws to a close and Tearfund and its partners enter a new phase of using the guides that are now available in over 30 different languages, and of making PILLARS more of an integral part of our work. The last six months has been a time of looking back at the learning of the pilot, culminating with the PILLARS conference, and of looking forwards to ways in which the guides can be used more strategically and effectively with the help of the new Facilitation Skills Workbook and an emphasis on thinking and planning more contextually...

The PILLARS conference

The purpose of the conference was to bring together Tearfund partners, consultants and staff to share experiences of producing and using PILLARS Guides, and to be further equipped to take PILLARS forwards. 29 delegates, from 11 different countries, attended this event, which was held at the Bethel Bible Institute in Chiang Rai, from 26th January to 4th February 2005.

The conference sessions allowed participants to reflect on and consolidate the learning of the past few years and to develop a vision and strategy for PILLARS. These need to be relevant both to their own organisations and to the wider context of international targets on education, literacy and development. The sessions also addressed the question of where PILLARS fits within an organisation, and how organisations can be strengthened to better manage and implement PILLARS, in order that it is effective and sustainable. Later sessions looked at the skills required for using and producing PILLARS Guides, and ways in which aspects of PILLARS can be monitored and evaluated. The final sessions focussed on financial sustainability and networking, and throughout the week there were

opportunities for hearing about how the guides are being used and the impact they are having on the social, economic and spiritual lives of user groups.

All delegates benefited from the insights shared by participants working in very different contexts to their own, and from the space to reflect and to plan together with others from their region. This process of coming together was likened to making bread, or being stirred together in a melting pot, with participants' differing experiences, perspectives and strengths being mixed and moulded together.



If you would like more information on the conference, including country-specific plans for developing PILLARS, a report can be found on the PILLARS pages of our website, www.tearfund.org/tilz. Alternatively, if you would like to receive a copy by email or by post, please contact us at pillars@tearfund.org.

PILLARS: where are we now?

Tearfund has come to the end of the official pilot of the PILLARS process. The training process has been implemented by over 10 organisations, and the guides have been produced in over 30 national and local languages. Six trained consultants are now available, in different regions of the world, to support any organisation wishing to embed the PILLARS approach into their work. A Facilitation Skills Workbook has been produced, to provide ideas for training

people who are facilitating group discussions using PILLARS Guides, and a new CD ROM will soon be available, with design files for all the existing PILLARS guides and training materials, and ideas for use and translation.

We are receiving encouraging stories of the impact of PILLARS on particular user groups. In Burkina Faso, women's groups have set up income generating activities based on ideas found in the guides, and are using the Bible studies at home, with significant changes resulting in the spiritual lives of their families. In Thailand, Siam-Care has used *Building the capacity of local groups* to strengthen the leadership skills of those working with people living with HIV/AIDS. In Myanmar, the same guide is being used with community groups to teach basic principles in participatory community development, and as supplementary reading material for a post-literacy programme, to strengthen the reading and writing skills of people who are newly literate.

Plans for the future

As we look back over the life of PILLARS, there is a lot to celebrate! However, there is always potential for growth and development... April marks the end of the PILLARS pilot but the beginning of a new phase of ensuring that the guides now available in many different languages around the world are used in a way that will be genuinely empowering for the user groups and will stimulate positive changes in their lives. Tearfund and its partners are seeking ways to embed the production and use of PILLARS guides into wider organisational vision and strategy, so PILLARS is not an add on, but is used to strengthen and support existing work with local communities in the areas addressed by specific PILLARS guides.

From the beginning of April 2005, the post of PILLARS Co-ordinator comes to an end, with the culmination of the PILLARS pilot. Tearfund will continue to support PILLARS through the regional teams,

with the help of the six regional PILLARS consultants, and with ongoing assistance from our Resources Development Group. The PILLARS inbox will still be in use for queries or comments regarding PILLARS, so please do write to us at pillars@tearfund.org. You will also find the following information on the PILLARS pages of Tearfund's International Learning Zone, which we hope will be extremely useful to you in your PILLARS work:

- Sample pages of the PILLARS guides
- Ideas for translating, writing and using PILLARS guides, including training materials and a list of the languages in which guides are already available
- A list of consultants who are available to help facilitate workshops or advise on other aspects of PILLARS work in your region, such as planning, strategy, monitoring and evaluation
- Reports of previous PILLARS workshops, the PILLARS evaluation, and of the PILLARS conference
- The latest PILLARS newsletter

Until the end of April, these pages can be found at www.tilz.info/pillars. From the end of April, these can be accessed via www.tearfund.org/tilz/pillars.

The PILLARS network will continue to function as a tool for supporting organisations and individuals producing and using PILLARS guides, by enabling learning, good practice, news and prayer requests to be shared via the PILLARS newsletter. This network will be managed by the PILLARS consultants, who will take responsibility for compiling any contributions you may wish to make to the newsletter, and for sending this out on a quarterly basis.

Please do send an email to pillars@tearfund.org if you do not wish to remain on the mailing list for this newsletter, or if you wish to make any recommendations as to how the newsletter could be improved, so that it is more relevant to your needs and priorities.

New publications

Now available:

- *Facilitation Skills Workbook* – English
This workbook provides training sessions to enable people to develop their skills in facilitating group discussion. The training can be done within an organisation by arranging regular training sessions over several months. Alternatively a five-day workshop can be planned.

Shortly available:

- *Facilitation Skills Workbook* –French, Spanish and Portuguese
- *PILLARS CD ROM*
This new CD ROM comes with the design files for the PILLARS guides and training materials, and ideas for use and translation.

Should you wish to order any of the above resources, please contact us at the address below.

A closing word from the Co-ordinator

It has been an enormous privilege to be a part of this work. A vision that several people have had of PILLARS is that of light shining in the darkness, bringing understanding and new ways of seeing oneself, one's environment and our Creator.

At its heart, PILLARS is about building relationship between members of a group, and encouraging and equipping people to participate more actively in the life and development of their community. It is about including those who are so often marginalized from discussions and activities relating to their own development, either because of their ethnicity and language, lack of education, geographical location or lack of resources.

As such, PILLARS in some senses involves going beyond: beyond those places and people who are normally included to those who are marginalized;

beyond those places in which we feel comfortable, into new approaches to our work, in the form of communication for development. We may feel inadequate before the task, as we translate, write, facilitate, plan or monitor and evaluate perhaps for the first time. But if we join with others who share that vision and desire to serve in this way, and offer what we have to God, He can and does do miracles, multiplying our little to bless others. It has been a blessing to catch glimpses of this, as I have worked with people of great courage and faith, who have offered their time, energy and skills to God, and have seen new guides and a new vision and confidence being born. It is my prayer that God will continue to inspire and bless this project as it enters this new and exciting phase.

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