



REFLECTIONS ON ASSETS-BASED DESIGN: A JOURNEY TOWARDS A COLLECTIVE OF ASSETS- BASED THINKERS

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ABSTRACT

- Assets-based design is an approach that focuses on identifying the assets and strengths of users, and using them to achieve sustained social change. In this presentation, we explore the commitments and principles that underpin assets-based design, drawing on two case studies of working with vulnerable populations in the US and Nepal. We highlight the importance of trust-building, fostering an interdependent collective, and taking incremental steps towards transformation. We also discuss the implications of these commitments, including the need for designers to embrace slow, reflective work and see technology as an intermediary in the ongoing journey of assets-based design. Overall, This presentation aims to offer insights and recommendations for designers interested in using assets-based approaches to create positive social impact.

LITERATURE BACKGROUND

- The field of Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) has long recognized a socio-technical gap complicating the design of technologies that can sustainably meet social needs. traditional design focuses on identifying the problems or needs of a community or population and designing solutions to address those needs. In contrast, asset-based design focuses on identifying and leveraging the existing strengths, resources, and capacities within a community or population to design solutions that build upon those assets.

POPULATIONS TARGETED

- The research paper targets the vulnerable population.
- In the first case study Marisol conducted the study on immigrant mothers living in low-income communities in the United States.
- In the second case study Aakash Gautam conducted the study on sex trafficking survivors in Nepal.

GOAL OF STUDY

The goal of the research paper is to present assets-based design as a sustainable approach for achieving social change, based on the experiences of two case studies with vulnerable populations. The paper highlights the importance of trust-building, collective formation, and incremental transformation for success. It also urges designers to acknowledge the effort needed before starting the work, use technology as an intermediary, and embrace reflection and action.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- "How can asset-based design support designers in creating more inclusive and empowering products for vulnerable populations, specifically in the context of sex trafficking survivors and low-income Immigrant women?".



CASE STUDIES:

Our assets-based design approach has been tested in two different contexts:

Latin Immigrant Parents Group in the US:

- The project aimed to empower immigrant parents to become agents of change in their communities.
- Designers worked with the group to identify and build on their existing assets, including cultural knowledge and language skills.
- The group went on to develop a series of workshops for other parents in their community, using their assets to support others.

CASE STUDIES

Sex-Trafficking Survivors Community in Nepal:

- The project aimed to support a community of sex-trafficking survivors to rebuild their lives
- Designers worked with the community to identify their existing assets, including their resilience and resourcefulness
- The group went on to launch a social enterprise to support other survivors and raise awareness about trafficking

These case studies illustrate how assets-based design can be applied to diverse communities to achieve transformational change.



KEY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design of this paper is based on a qualitative approach, using case studies as the research method. The sample size for each case study was relatively small, with Marisol's study including six immigrant mothers and Aakash's study including ten sex trafficking survivors. The data was collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The studies were conducted in low-income communities in the United States and Nepal, respectively.

STUDY 1 :

Marisol and her team conducted a series of activities during their assets-based design project with immigrant parents in the US. Some of the activities they undertook include:

- Engaging with the community: Marisol and her team engaged with the immigrant parents to understand their daily routines, their needs, and their assets.
- Asset mapping: They conducted asset mapping activities to identify the existing assets of the immigrant parents, such as their cultural practices, language skills, and community networks.
- Community events: Marisol and her team organized community events, such as potluck dinners and cultural celebrations, to build trust and relationships with the parents.



STUDY 1:

- Co-design sessions: They conducted co-design sessions with the parents to co-create solutions that build on their assets and address their needs.
- Iterative prototyping: Marisol and her team created iterative prototypes of the co-designed solutions and tested them with the parents to get feedback and make improvements.
- Capacity building: They provided capacity building activities, such as training on financial literacy and job skills, to help the parents build on their assets and achieve their goals.



STUDY 2:

Aakash and his team conducted the following activities in their assets-based design project with sex-trafficking survivors in Nepal:

- Building trust with the community: Aakash and his team spent several months building trust with the community of sex-trafficking survivors. They did this by spending time with them, listening to their stories, and understanding their needs and aspirations.
- Identifying assets: Aakash and his team identified the assets that the sex-trafficking survivors had, including their resilience, strength, and determination to rebuild their lives.

STUDY 2:

- Co-designing solutions: Aakash and his team worked with the sex-trafficking survivors to co-design solutions that leveraged their assets. For example, they designed a training program that taught the survivors tailoring and embroidery skills so that they could start their own businesses.
- Incremental transformation: Aakash and his team recognized that transformation would take time and that progress would be incremental. They worked with the sex-trafficking survivors to set achievable goals and celebrated small wins along the way.
- Continuous reflection and improvement: Aakash and his team engaged in continuous reflection and improvement throughout the project. They regularly sought feedback from the sex-trafficking survivors and adjusted their approach accordingly.

COMMON COMMITMENTS

Common Commitments:

- Embedding trust-building elements throughout the journey.
- Facilitating the formation of an interdependent collective.
- Making moves towards incremental transformation to contend with future issues.

These commitments were identified in two assets-based design projects with vulnerable populations in the US and Nepal. They can support participants and designers in developing a critical understanding of their assets, how they work in relation to their larger contexts, and how to expand them for pursuing transformational goals. Embracing these commitments can help designers achieve sustained social change and positive impact through assets-based design.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGNERS

Acknowledge the significant effort needed in work before the work:

- Take time to build trust and rapport with the participants.
- Learn about the participants' culture, values, and needs.
- Engage in ongoing dialogue to ensure the design process is inclusive and respectful.

See technology as an intermediary facilitating the ongoing journey:

- Use technology to help facilitate communication and collaboration.
- Create digital platforms that allow for easy sharing and access to resources.
- Ensure that technology is used in a way that is accessible and inclusive for all participants.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGNERS

- Embrace slow incremental work toward reflection and action:
 - Allow time for reflection and iteration.
 - Encourage participants to take small steps towards achieving their goals.
 - Celebrate successes along the way and learn from failures.

By following these implications, designers can create more effective and sustainable assets-based design projects that truly meet the needs and aspirations of the users.



CONCLUSION

- The study uses case studies to showcase the effectiveness of this approach in promoting community empowerment and social inclusion. Through the asset-based design approach, the researchers found that involving the community and recognizing their skills, knowledge, and strengths can lead to sustainable and impactful solutions. The study suggests that designers should shift their focus from solely addressing problems to building on the community's existing assets and capabilities.



MY THOUGHTS ON THE PAPER

- While asset-based design can be a powerful tool for promoting equity, it is important to ensure that it is not used to further marginalize these populations or perpetuate harmful stereotypes.



THANK YOU

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