Our first task in approaching another people another culture another religion is to take off our shoes for the place we are approaching is holy.

else we may find ourselves treading on another person’s dream. More serious still we may forget that God was there before our arrival.

Max Warren
then the potential beneficiaries of a project will passively allow the project to limp along and eventually die out.

Then there is collaboration. The brothers would need to be aware of all the various religious congregations, Non-Government Organisations and Community-Based Organisations working in the locality. The brothers could learn much from the experience of such groups and work at networking with them for future projects. Rapport with local leaders and other gatekeepers is also a must to ensure that we have their buy-in for projects that we are planning.

Community engagement is built on the value of empowerment. By taking the community engagement approach we build up the skill sets of the people, and we instil a sense of confidence in the people so that they feel competent to take over the running of a project. By empowering people, the Brothers are effectively activating their exit strategy and thus ensuring sustainability. When the local people feel sufficiently empowered, the Brothers are ready to go to a new place where we are needed instead of remaining where we are wanted!

A final element of community engagement is that of celebration. When the local community has worked together in improving the quality of their lives, and have experienced the power of partnership, there is a moment of real celebration, of acknowledging what has been achieved through the involvement of all members of the local community. Celebrations are vital not only at the end of a long process, but also at key intermediate moments. By celebrating small successes, people become energised to reach for the stars!

Community engagement involves a movement from the ‘head’ to the ‘heart’ on the part of those entering a local community to live and work there. If I operate mostly from my head then the dynamic will be dominated by questions and answers – mine and those of the local community. Many of the questions cannot be answered at that point in time and so a sense of limitation and lack of progress can result. Whilst there will be time for questions, it is certainly not where to start.

Where to start is in the ‘heart’. If the Brothers and the members of that local community can build good relationships and mutual trust then much can happen. As the heart is the source of our capacity to love, then with a ‘heart-centred’ approach there are no limits to what is possible within that local community in terms of change for the better.

Though Community engagement is the approach of mission in the new communities, a Brother can adopt its principles in any ministry (including education, formation and leadership).

Do I spend quality time listening to the people I work with, fitting in with their pace, not mine?

Do I include people (even children) that I work for/with in key decisions?

Can I collaborate with other groups or individuals to make my ministry more effective?

Can I empower others to do what I am presently doing so that I am free to move to another place where am needed?

“If you have come to help me you are wasting your time; but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

Lila Watson