

## Session 2: Resource-Based Approaches & Creative Tools (11:15–12:45)

### Objective

Introduce and practice positive, creative methodologies that advisors can use to engage communities in change. While previous sessions focused on managing problems and resistance, this session flips the perspective to opportunities and strengths. Participants will learn about **Appreciative Inquiry (AI)** – an approach that starts with what is working well and envisioning a desired future – which can generate enthusiasm and hope in change processes. They will also explore **Resource Mapping** (identifying local assets and capacities that can support change) and **Visualization techniques** (helping people mentally and visually picture the benefits of change). These tools are especially useful in agroforestry to get stakeholders excited about possibilities (for example: a future landscape full of trees and life) and to empower them by acknowledging existing knowledge/resources. The session includes an interactive exercise using AI or visioning, so participants experience the difference of a positive inquiry. By the end, advisors will have alternative methods to the traditional problem-solving approach – methods that can create a safe, inspiring space for people to embrace change by building on strengths rather than focusing only on deficits.

### Key Topics

#### Appreciative Inquiry – Focusing on Strengths

Introduce Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a philosophy and method for organizational or community change that contrasts with problem-centric approaches [cabidigitallibrary.org](http://cabidigitallibrary.org). Instead of asking “What’s wrong and how do we fix it?” AI asks “*What’s working and how can we get more of it?*” Explain the core idea: every individual or community has something that works well, and change can be catalysed by amplifying those strengths. This approach generates positive emotions – people feel valued and motivated – which are fuel for change.

Outline the **4D cycle of AI** (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny):

- **Discovery:** People share stories of **when they felt most successful, proud, or satisfied** in their work or community. In an agroforestry context, even if agroforestry is new, they might share any experience of a positive change or accomplishment on their farm (for example: “*The year I tried a new crop variety and it doubled my yield,*” or “*We formed a cooperative and it improved our marketing*”). The aim is to uncover the factors that made those successes possible (community cooperation, openness to learn, a supportive policy, personal determination, etc.). This highlights existing **resources and strengths** – like skilled farmers, strong neighbourly help, local knowledge of trees, etc.
- **Dream:** Based on those strengths, people are invited to imagine an ideal future for their farm or community without constraints. “Dream” big: “*It’s 10 years from now and our agroforestry initiative has been wildly successful – what does our village look like? What is happening?*” Encourage vivid details: e.g., “*I see green corridors of trees along every field, birds are back, farmers have diversified income from timber and fruits, youth are employed in tree nursery businesses...*” This future visioning taps into people’s hopes and creates a shared vision. It is essentially a positive version of the “vision” step we talked about with Kotter, but co-created by the community.
- **Design:** Now, how to move from “what is” to “what could be.” In this phase, stakeholders design practical proposals or projects to realize parts of their dream, leveraging the discovered strengths. For example, if in Dream they envisioned every farm having fruit trees, in Design they might come up with: “*Set up a community fruit tree nursery powered by local youth (since we discovered we have enthusiastic 4H club members and unused land by the school).*” Or “*Establish a farmer-to-farmer mentor system because we have some early adopters – pair them with those starting out.*” The design should still feel exciting and rooted in positive core (not “*we must fix X deficiency*” but “*we will build X because we have Y asset*”).



- **Destiny (or Deliver):** This is about implementation and sustaining momentum. Communities make commitments, form teams, and set things in motion. The energy from Dream/Design propels action. Importantly, AI often results in voluntary, community-driven action because people feel it is *their* dream, not an external mandate.

Emphasize how AI could be applied by advisors: For instance, when starting an agroforestry group, instead of beginning with “*What problems do you face?*” you might ask “*What successes have you already had in farming that we can build on?*” or “*What do you value most about your farm and community that agroforestry might enhance?*” – questions that lead into a constructive conversation and get people thinking about how change aligns with their values and achievements.

### Resource Mapping (Asset-Based Approach)

This tool complements AI by explicitly identifying existing resources that can support the change. It is sometimes called Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). Explain that often communities focus on what they lack (money, equipment, etc.), but taking stock of what they *have* can reveal surprising support for change. Resources can be:

- *Human resources:* knowledgeable elders (perhaps someone in the village knows a lot about trees or herbal plants), enthusiastic youth, skilled labour, local leaders who can influence others.
- *Natural resources:* existing trees or forests nearby that can provide seeds or seedlings, available land that can be used for demonstrations, water sources for irrigation, etc.
- *Social resources:* farmer groups, cooperatives, women’s groups or local NGOs – any community organization that can mobilize people.
- *Institutional resources:* local extension office (the advisor themselves is a resource), government programmes (like grant schemes or technical training), research institutions that might partner (a nearby university doing agroforestry trials).
- *Financial/resources:* maybe a community fund or a well-off community member who can sponsor a small project, or existing tools/machinery that can be repurposed.

A resource mapping exercise might involve drawing a simple map or table of these assets. For example, on a flipchart, draw circles for different resource categories and brainstorm what fits in each for a given community. Draw an actual map of the district/village marking out assets (e.g., “*Community Hall – can host meetings; River – could irrigate trees; School – students who can help plant trees as learning,*” etc.).

Highlight how an advisor did this in practice: *Case snippet:* In a region of Ireland, to promote a forestry project, the facilitator first did an asset-mapping with villagers and found out there was a long-standing tradition of communal labour exchange (called a “*meitheal*” in Gaelic). They tapped into this by organizing a communal tree-planting day using that tradition, which made implementation much easier – people were previously used to helping each other for harvests and applied it to planting. The resource mapping also revealed a retired forester living locally (a human asset) who became a key technical advisor. This approach raised confidence: villagers said, “*We realized we actually have a lot to work with, not just problems.*” That mentality boosts change readiness.

Suggest that resource mapping can be a group exercise early in a change project – it shifts focus from “*we need external help*” to “*we have power and assets here.*” Advisors should still help fill gaps (like linking to external resources where truly needed) but empowering communities to use what they have fosters self-reliance and motivation.

## Visualization and Creative Visioning

While we touched on vision in a rational sense, here we encourage creative techniques to help people see and feel the change:

- **Guided Visualization:** The advisor can lead a short guided imagery session in a workshop. For instance, *“Close your eyes and imagine your farm 10 years after implementing agroforestry. Walk through it in your mind: What do you see? What do you hear (birds, wind in trees)? How do you feel about it? What are your family members saying about the farm? What are your income sources?”* This can be powerful especially for those less vocal – it engages senses and emotion. Afterward, ask a few to share what they imagined. Often, people articulate very motivating images (*“I imagined that my well has water year-round because of more trees...”*).
- **Drawing or Collage (Vision Boards):** Provide paper, markers, or even old magazines for a community meeting – have small groups draw the *“future farm”* or *“our village in 2030 if the project succeeds.”* This is a fun, inclusive activity. When groups present their drawings, there are usually common elements (more trees, healthy animals, better roads, whatever). The advisor can note these and help the group form a coherent vision statement afterward. The visual aspect helps communicate the vision back to everyone in a non-technical way. Hang these drawings up as a reminder during the project.
- **Spatial Mapping:** Using tools like GIS or simply transparent overlays on a map: show current land use vs. a scenario with agroforestry. If you have any tech like simple computer sketches or even just coloured pencils on a map, it can help people literally see where trees could be and discuss it. This can also surface practical considerations (like *“Oh, trees here might block that neighbour’s view – maybe better along this border instead”*). It makes the planning more interactive and real.
- **Role-Playing Future Success:** Another creative idea: have someone play a journalist from the future interviewing farmers about the successful agroforestry initiative. Participants, in role, speak as if change has happened: *“Yes, back in 2025 we started planting, and now our yields have improved....”* This playful approach can boost confidence (*“we can talk like it happened, so maybe it can happen”*).

The point of these creative methods is to **engage emotions, imagination, and a sense of possibility**. Data and logic alone rarely inspire people; seeing and feeling a better future does. For farmers who have only known one way of doing things, physically visualizing an alternative landscape can be the first step to believing it is possible.

## Combining Creative with Analytical

Note that these positive/creative tools don’t replace analysis, they complement it. One might do an appreciative inquiry to set a vision and then still need to do a risk analysis and training (Day 1). The difference is the energy and engagement level – by starting with positive images and existing strengths, the community is more energized to tackle the small detail planning and problem-solving. Advisors can weave these approaches at different stages: e.g., kick off a project with an AI workshop to build enthusiasm, use resource mapping to plan, handle resistance with communication skills, etc.



### Activity – Appreciative Interviews (20 min):

To let participants experience a taste of AI, do a paired interview exercise:

- Pair people (try to pair from different regions to get diversity). One is interviewer, one interviewee for 10 minutes, then swap.
- Interview question (Discovery stage): *“Can you tell me about a time you were part of a successful change or project in your community or work? What happened and what factors made it successful?”* The interviewer’s

job is to listen and then ask probing questions to get at success factors: “*Why do you think it worked so well? What did you value in that experience?*” They should take notes on key factors/strengths mentioned.

- Next question (Dream stage, a mini version): “*Based on that, what do you dream could happen with agroforestry or sustainable farming in your community? If everything aligned perfectly, what change would you love to see in 5-10 years?*” Let them be imaginative.
- After both rounds, have each pair briefly report one insight: one strength they heard and one element of their partner’s dream. Write strengths on one flipchart (“*Our strengths*”) and dreams on another (“*Our visions*”).
- It is likely that you will hear strengths like “*strong community spirit*”, “*we trust each other when someone leads*”, “*innovative young farmers*”, etc., and dreams like “*farms full of fruit trees and happy families prospering.*” Highlight how focusing on these positive elements felt.

Many will say the conversation was pleasant, energizing, and they learned something new about their partner’s community that is admirable. Contrast this with a typical conversation about problems which can be draining or contentious. Doing appreciative interviews among farmers can reveal surprisingly useful knowledge (maybe one farmer quietly solved a problem others struggle with – AI brings that out for all to learn) and it puts farmers in a mindset of “*we have done good things, we can do more.*”

If time allows, do a quick **vision drawing** in groups: give paper and have the groups sketch one combined vision for “*an agroforestry-rich community.*” Even 5 minutes to doodle and 1 minute per group to show it can lighten the mood and show how creative expression yields common goals (for example: the sketches might have trees along fields and smiling farmers – a sign that deep down many want similar outcomes).



### CASE STUDY: Appreciative Approach in Action- Successional Agroforestry & Community Innovation (Finland/Italy)

Kähkönen, T., Den Herder, M., & Finch, J. (2025). Successional silvoarable agroforestry and community supported agriculture. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18489559>

AF4EU technical materials include examples of successional agroforestry and community-supported agriculture systems, where innovation builds on existing farmer knowledge and local strengths. Instead of focusing on problems, advisors facilitated discussions around what farmers were already doing well—such as diversified cropping or local marketing. These strengths were then expanded into agroforestry systems that combined trees, crops, and value-added activities. This approach reduced resistance and created a shared vision rooted in local identity and success.

#### Key takeaway:

Focusing on strengths and existing successes creates positive momentum—showing that **change is more effective when it builds on what already works rather than what is lacking**. The appreciative, strength-based start created local pride and motivation rather than defensiveness, unlocking cooperation that a problem-focused approach might not have achieved.

**Tip for Success:** “*Celebrate every step forward.*” – A resource-based approach means also recognizing and celebrating the positive at each stage. When a small win happens, appreciate it publicly (thank the contributors, mark the occasion). Use creative means to celebrate – harvest festivals under newly planted trees, social media posts highlighting farmer champions, etc. Celebration and appreciation feed a virtuous cycle: people feel their efforts are valued, which encourages them to continue actively supporting the change.