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12 thoughts on working with communities

These lessons learned are from collaborative design projects in partnership with indigenous communities in Yucatán, México. In these projects, we explore and test how design can be used as a tool and strategy for communication and development. The intention is to provide some insight, based on our experiences, into how one can work in marginalized communities everywhere.

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- 1 **partnerships = respect**
work with people as partners, without hierarchies and titles, with mutual opportunities and benefits, create positive and open interactions to increase potential for success
- 2 **good work requires empathy**
understanding the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of others; being in someone else's shoes
- 3 **experience lived realities**
learning about many different experiences and practices, including what it's like for a family to live on less than \$5 a day compared to our \$50 a day
- 4 **everyone needs access**
to education, information, resources, mobility, and credit – the internet is a good thing
- 5 **communication = culture**
figure out how people communicate {language, medium, tone} and what they want to share and know in order to create effective exchanges and communication
- 6 **commitment builds trust**
trust is necessary to work effectively and hard to earn; show people a return on their investment {roi} when they work with you – delivering is a good way
- 7 **collaborations = the unexpected**
you can't possibly know everything; so build an interdisciplinary team of experts to enable you to work holistically on a problem or project
- 8 **being there**
personal interactions build deeper, more meaningful relationships; working together in the field fosters dialogue and understanding
- 9 **forget what you think you know**
explore first and suspend natural instincts to analyze and evaluate people and situations – things aren't always what they appear to be; {think ethnographically}
- 10 **work from the ground up**
nothing works unless the people you work with will participate – they know best what they need
- 11 **show tangible results**
people understand what they see and feel – the tangible thing helps them "get it"
- 12 **empower everyone**
and you build new capacities for all involved; raise people's expectations of themselves and they can rise to meet them