

The Banquet

In a land renowned for its community gatherings where villagers shared feasts, picnics and parties, things were beginning to get a little stretched. The local cooks had lots of skill in creating great dishes out of very few ingredients ... but they could do with more plates, more kitchen helpers and more training in cooking a variety of dishes. Recipe collectors from the governor's kitchens had been to visit many of the village cooks; they saw how they were coping with very few resources and reported back to the governor's top chefs.

"There must be a way to help all the cooks get everything they need for all the people they cater for in their communities," said the recipe collectors. "How about a project that will help them identify themselves what it is they need to prepare and run their events efficiently? Then they can tell us what they've found out and how it can all be managed better." "Aha!" the top chefs declared, "Let's ask them to prepare a banquet! We shall send out a menu and this will be their guide. The villages will have to share their trained chefs and serving staff and combine all their tableware in order to serve up a quality catering experience for all."

The menu for the banquet was sent out to the head cooks of each village. The villagers liked the idea of a banquet – well, they had always held parties and feasts anyway – but they were a bit unsure about the instructions and the menu, "What's tableware?" "What's a catering experience?" "What on earth is a terrine of eggplant?" There were tokens to spend on ingredients, but some of them had already expired. And as for the date

of the event... well, it was all a bit unclear, "Do we have to plan the banquet or actually hold the banquet by the end of the year?" Nobody could give them a straight answer.

Each of the villages and cooks approached the banquet in their own way.

Some sat down and planned everything carefully. They sent out questionnaires asking who had what to contribute and who wanted what.

They called in food specialists who advised on the puzzling terminology in the recipes: drizzling, sizzling, wilting... They worked out all the estimated weights and measures, drew seating plans, made out the guest list and included everyone's personal dietary requirements. Everything was

planned in theory.

Some already had an idea of the kind of food that their villagers liked, so they cooked some of the dishes and held tasting evenings. They went out into the community inviting people to try the dishes and say which they preferred. From this they were able to find out exactly what people wanted and needed. Some used the banquet resources to stock up on regularly-used ingredients that they knew were in short supply but that would be needed; they also bought some new spices that they thought would add a bit of flavour to the more everyday dishes.

Half way through the year the villages were all at different stages of preparation for the feast. Suddenly, they received a message from the governor's chefs; there were new dishes to add to the menu, new people to invite to the banquet and some



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recipes required seasonal variations and different ingredients.

There were also rumours about a team of "banquet engineers" appearing over the horizon who might or might not be able to help them...

The village cooks were a bit put out: nobody knew what these new people liked to eat and now not all of the dishes would be able to be made in time. Some of the chefs began to wonder if it was really all worth the fuss...

As the date of the banquet drew nearer, the villagers got together to discuss final plans. After all the confusion and hard work, they finally felt they were getting somewhere and were quite excited about the forthcoming event. After the meeting they chatted over cups of tea.

"You know I do dancing as well. I could organise a dance group for the banquet entertainment. I'm not sure about music though..."

"I reckon we could probably scratch together a band between us: we've got a singer, a drummer, a keyboard player and I know someone with a great sound system. Shall I ask them if we can use it?"

"We're good at making costumes - there are plenty in our store - we could all dress up for the occasion!"

The more they chatted, the more they realised that they had other things to offer, not directly to do with preparing the food for the banquet, but surprising skills, talents and resources that they could share.

"If we hadn't met over this banquet preparation we would never have known all these people and all the ways that we can help each other," they all agreed.



KEY MESSAGES

- Consortia were creative in how they developed their LIDPs by consulting with their community in a variety of ways.
- Research methods varied from written questionnaires and 1:1 interviews to pilot projects as action research.
- Some consortia had already gone through extensive consultation exercises and therefore knew what was needed in their communities, so were able to extend their existing programme of work through adding ChangeUp funded projects. The process of meeting as a consortium has been positive in itself. People have made good connections, deepened relationships and shared information and skills.