This initial session, a world café process facilitated by Corrie Melanson and Janet Rhymes, set the stage for an insightful weekend. It served as both an icebreaker and a thought provoking foundation for the meeting as a whole.

The facilitators arranged the meeting room before participants arrived. Three large pieces of paper with unfinished graphics were taped on the wall and large sheet of paper covered seven tabletops. There were six chairs at each table. Participants were asked to appoint one person at each table as their host and recorder. This individual would remain at the table for the duration of the session while the other five would disperse to different tables twice during the evening.

The facilitators reviewed the Guidelines and the Role of the Host as outlined on the first graphic on the wall. The tablemates were to act as dialogue groups and their discussion was intended to be seeds of change, which developed during the session by focusing on one of three questions. These three questions had been written on the large sheets of paper on each of the tables: 1) what has been most inspiring in your life and work this past year; 2) what innovative approaches and opportunities are emerging; and, 3) what are your ideas for a positive future. The groups were asked to apply their discussion to tangible community interests, individuals were asked to contributes their thoughts, speak with both their mind and heart, link and connect ideas, and listen for patterns or commonalities and deeper connections.

During the three fifteen minute sessions each participant met and/or spoke with at least a dozen other individuals. At the end of the third dialogue participants remained at the the tables they were at. As host/recorders verbally reviewed the dialogue that had gone on among the three sets of people who sat at each their tables the facilitators wrote key words and phrases associated with the first two questions on the second sheet of paper on the wall entitled “Inspired Change in the World Café”.

Within a few minutes responses to the first two questions surrounded the spinning global drawn in the center of the sheet. Included were phases such as: think outside the box, dare to speak up, communicate in an open dialogue, turn bad into good, build solidarity, build on different strengths, develop dialogue with others, build networks, build cooperation on differences, work towards accepting challenges, try new meeting methods, reach out to other groups, welcome new individuals, work with people of different ages, become aware others working in the same area (geographic, focus), search out the strength in groups. Words included: changes, dialogues, opportunities, developing, diversity, solidarity, cooperation, coordination, conferences, concern, hope, leadership, connections, and enjoyment.

When it appeared aspects of inspiration, and approaches or opportunities had been adequately reviewed the facilitators moved on to the third sheet of paper, entitled
“Inspiring Changes”. The graphics on this sheet consisted of a light bulb, a heart and two open hands with the words idea, action, and attitude written below. Participant’s responses to the third question “What are your ideas for a positive change” were recorded under one of the three categories. Under ideas the list included: connect with youth such as was done First Voices, practicing what we preach, importance of listening to voices from the South, intergenerational learning, following personal connections, work/life balance, hope, and natural relationships. Placed under action the list included: valuing/supporting partners from the South, valuing both youth and elders, connect directly with other people, we must use stories (individuals, peoples), focus on core human values, listen, be honest. Under attitude, symbolized by the open hands, the list included: dialogue and collaboration, document stories of change, communication and community building, courage to say what is different, specific focuses (such as Oxfam focus on youth).

The session ended with the facilitators noting some of the threads observed in the discussions. They hoped the commonality of purpose apparent during the evening might serve as the beginning of a very successful conference.