

An IACD Position Statement.

Approved by the Board: July 2016



Community Development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Introduction.

IACD's Vision and mission

IACD's vision is to promote human rights, equality and social justice, participative democracy, and sustainable development through the promotion of good quality community development policies and practice

Our mission, as the recognised international professional association, is to support our members around the world and more widely the discipline of community development to work towards this vision.

At the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030.

As a part of our work representing members and the wider community development field, the International Association for Community Development (IACD) has consultative status with the United Nations (UN). Although we do not have staff in New York, IACD members were able to attend several UN-NGO consultations during the SDG design process. IACD representatives also attended the UN when the SDG targets were announced.

As an association with global interests and impacts, we have expressed our support for the SDGs. As a result of a four-month consultation process with

our Board and membership, we have agreed that support for the SDGs implementation will be our main area of priority over the coming years.

The purpose of this Position Statement, is to help governments (at all levels), non-governmental organisations, the business and scientific sectors understand that without prior and ongoing community development work, that assists citizens at a local level to participate as active and informed partners in their implementation, the goals will be far harder to reach. This Position Statement has also been developed to help IACD members and the wider Community Development field to explain to governments (at all levels) non-governmental organisations and others the contribution that development supports at grassroots levels can bring.

There are many features in the agreed implementation process that we support, for example, National plans should:

- have a longer term orientation;
- be open, inclusive and participatory;
- be people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and focus upon the poorest and most vulnerable;
- complement and build upon existing strategies and plans and avoid duplication;
- be evidence-based;
- require capacity-building support.

In relation to all of these features, we believe that IACD and the community development world can make an important contribution. Through our information services, conferences, continuing professional development exchanges and publications we shall support members to do so.

Overview of the SDGs



The Sustainable Development Goals, otherwise known as the Global Goals, build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) eight anti-poverty targets that the UN committed to achieving by 2015. The MDGs, adopted in 2000, and supported then by IACD, aimed at an array of issues that included poverty, hunger, disease, gender inequality, and access to water and sanitation. Enormous progress has been made on the MDGs, showing the value of a unifying agenda underpinned by goals and targets. Despite this success, the indignity of poverty has not been ended. For example, the World Bank estimates that 702.1 million people were living in extreme poverty in 2015, down from 1.75 billion in 1990.¹ UNICEF estimates half the world's children (or 1.1 billion) live in poverty.²

These challenges affect every country in the world

The SDGs, and the broader social, economic and environmental sustainability agenda, go much further than the MDGs, addressing the root causes of poverty and the universal need for development that works for all people.

Unlike the MDGs, which focussed upon developing countries in the Global South, the SDGs are as pertinent to the challenges of ending poverty, fighting inequality and injustice, and tackling climate change in all countries.

¹ ["Global Monitoring Report: Development Goals in an Era of Demographic Change"](https://www.worldbank.org/gmr/) (PDF). [www.worldbank.org/gmr..](https://www.worldbank.org/gmr/)

² Ernest C. Madu. ["Investment and Development Will Secure the Rights of the Child"](#).

These are the 17 SDGs.

- 1) End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- 2) End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
- 3) Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages
- 4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- 5) Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- 6) Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- 7) Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- 8) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all
- 9) Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and foster innovation
- 10) Reduce inequality within and among countries
- 11) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- 12) Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- 13) Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- 14) Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

15) Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss

16) Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

17) Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

How might community development agencies and practitioners get involved in this fifteen year agenda?

Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11 and 16 relate to the social development dimensions of sustainable development. Goals 6, 13, 14 and 15 relate to environmental development dimensions (although clearly impacted upon by industrialisation and pollution). Goals 7, 8, 9 and 12 relate to economic development dimensions. Goal 17 is related to process, i.e. working in partnership.

The UN recognises that each impact upon each other. For those working in community development, it will be the social development goals around which most will be more familiar and have years of experience. Fewer community development practitioners and agencies will have experience at dealing with the environmental development goals or the economic development goals. And fewer still will have had in depth experience of dealing with all three dimensions of sustainable development. This will need to become a higher priority.

Let us first remind ourselves of some of the key underpinning principles behind a community development approach:

First, we need to look at these challenges in an holistic way.

Much of this will be familiar territory for those working in community development, but probably not in the holistic and co-ordinated way now called for - especially with regards to tackling such a broad agenda of social, economic and environmental development work at the local level.

What are the links between the SDGs? Is it likely that certain geographic communities or communities of identity are more or less vulnerable to more than one of these challenges? Research over many years clearly confirms that the poorest people are also those most likely to face hunger and nutrition problems; they are less healthy; they have less access to education; they are more likely to have less gender equality; they have less access to affordable and sustainable energy and clean water and sanitation; they are more likely to be unemployed or on low wages; their poverty is primarily linked to structural inequality within the wider society; they are more likely to live in less safe, peaceful communities, whether urban or rural; they are more likely to be faced with more damaged ecosystems and biodiversity loss. Understanding the relationship between these issues is a common and critical community development approach.

Second, we should understand that the causes of these problems do not primarily lie within the most vulnerable communities.

Poorer communities face multiple problems and are as a result less resilient. The poor are the most vulnerable to almost all of the challenges highlighted by the SDGs. Those working in community development will know that the primary causes of poverty and the multiple challenges the poor face are caused by structural inequality. Whether in so-called developing or developed countries there are huge social class inequalities. This varies from country to

country but the trends are similar, the majority of capital assets such as land, building, wealth are inequitably distributed and the majority of the damage caused by 'man made' industrial and consumption patterns are not caused by the poorest communities although they are the most vulnerable across all sustainability indicators. Subsequently, any programme to successfully reduce poverty and its interlinked problems requires financial investment and the commitment of those with power and opportunity, to work together to share that wealth and opportunity more equitably. In other words it requires a bridge between the powerful and the poor.

Third, we should recognise that whilst the poor are victims in many situations, they can become active players in designing and developing solutions.

Poor communities contain human assets such as local wisdom on how to use the land or how to fish in a more sustainable way, we need to harness. This local experience can easily be lost, but in community development work we know that if we look we will find people within such communities who have indigenous knowledge and skills to help address the SDG challenges.

An underlying feature of the SDGs is the extension of democracy and citizen participation. This is also a central principle of community development work, building a more participative democracy and knowing how to engage less powerful, more vulnerable people. Community development is about designing ways in which vulnerable people have voice and can be authentic partners around the table, designing the programmes that can address the SDG challenges at the local level.

Fourth, we know that there will always be conflicts of interest in any society, but community development practice seeks to find ways of building consensus and partnership at a local level.

A community development approach tries to build consensus between conflicting interests. Community safety is an obvious area where there is a need to have a trusted community policing approach to tackling crime. Many communities around the world face violence and corruption and are places where the police are seen as part of the problem and not the solution. In communities where there is racial or religious conflict, there is a need for peace building and truth and reconciliation approaches. Where there is great inequality and a tiny minority with wealth there is a need to develop a culture of personal and corporate responsibility. The need for the redistributive income and wealth taxation necessary to create greater equality lies outwith the remit of community development work, but through community education we can raise people's awareness and through community organising support campaigns for responsible taxation.

Fifth, we need agencies and community representatives to collaborate and plan at a local level and recognize that sustainable development takes time.

National planning and top-down sustainable development programmes will not alone solve the SDG challenge, although clearly they have a vital role to play. The participation of civil society and the general public in all countries is critical. If we are to assist and to mobilise people, especially those in the most vulnerable communities, then development agencies whether governmental, non-governmental, educational or private sector need to develop ways of working together and with local people at a local community level. Community planning and co-production are approaches whereby different agencies and disciplines agree to work in a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary. This requires a high degree of co-ordination of planning and resource allocation. But for community planning to be successful then local people and their elected representatives need to be part of the decision-making processes, they need to be the co-producers of the programmes to combat the multiple issues

identified. There is much evidence to show that where local people, including young people, feel ownership then it will be more successful.

A significant weakness of many community development programmes in the past has been their short-term nature. Far too many have been funded for less than five years and the gains not consolidated. Governments operating at all scales, from national to local, need to invest either directly (or through funding non-governmental organisations) in funding community development work as part of the SDG implementation plans over the full fifteen year period.

Sixth, people in vulnerable communities need freely available technical assistance to address these challenges – this includes money and expertise not available within their community.

Community development practitioners, regardless of their job title, should be good community educators with expertise in running educational programmes that raise awareness and develop skills and confidence. Many community development practitioners may also have other professional expertise - in health, literacy work, local business development, engineering, architecture, forestry management or sustainable farming; or they should know how to access such technical expertise from others to assist local people. The SDGs are complex challenges which local communities cannot solve themselves. Upper and middle class communities can purchase professional technical assistance; poorer communities cannot and will need assistance as locally and as cheaply as possible. They will also need money and here is a role for the community development worker, identifying grants and other financial support. Access to technical assistance also covers ITC and access to new technologies such as the mobile phone. We have a long track record of promoting the use of appropriate and inexpensive technologies and new technologies will be an ever essential tool for communities to help tackle the SDGs.

Seventh, community development is about designing collective responses to challenges that people face in common.

In order to play their part in tackling the SDGs, vulnerable communities will need to organise. These challenges are too great to be tackled by self-help and individual actions such as a change in personal behaviour, although individually we all will have a role to play. Community developers know that by organising local communities much more can be achieved through collective and co-operative action. There is huge evidence of the multiplier effect that good community development work can have in supporting vulnerable communities to have the organisational capacity to address these challenges.

Eighth, without community development there is no sustainable development.

It may at first seem that some of the goals lie outside the remit of community development. Let us take SDG 9 - build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and foster innovation; or SDG 14 - conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. But on closer examination the contribution that a community development approach can make through community education and organisation is just as relevant here as it is to the other goals.

Governments, multi-national companies, research institutes and professional 'experts' can have the money to design smart alternatives and innovation. But local people themselves can come up with solutions, often from past practice that work and are more resilient. Community development and education work needs to encourage that and get those ideas around the "partnership table."

Across all of the SDGs there is a need to support and mobilise the most vulnerable communities, who are at the brunt end of climate change and socio-economic inequality. If communities are not educated and organised to

play their part then the challenges will not be met. Governments, non-governmental organisations, scientists and the private sector cannot do this alone. It needs citizen action.

Conclusion

This IACD Position Statement sets out what we feel are the main features necessary if community development agencies and practitioners are to play their part in tackling the SDG agenda, based upon years of collective experience from the field around the world. It is that:

- 1. We need to look at these challenges in an holistic way.***
- 2. We should understand that the causes of these problems do not primarily lie within the most vulnerable communities.***
- 3. We should recognise that whilst the poor are in many senses victims, they can become active players in designing and developing the solutions.***
- 4. We know that there will always be conflicts of interest in any society, but community development practice seeks to find ways of building consensus and partnership at a local level.***
- 5. We need agencies and community representatives to collaborate and plan at a local level and recognize that sustainable development takes time.***
- 6. We know that people in vulnerable communities need freely available technical assistance to address these challenges – this includes money and expertise not available within their community.***
- 7. We know that community development is about designing collective responses to challenges that people face in common.***
- 8. We know that without community development there is no sustainable development.***

IACD believes that the SDGs present a huge opportunity to profile and position the vital importance of effective community development support at local level. Without that support, vulnerable communities will be far less resilient, prepared and able to deal with the huge sustainable development challenges they face now and will face over the coming years.

We urge national and regional community development associations and practitioners across the world to engage with the SDG implementation process at national and local level. The eight points we have highlighted in this Position Statement, will enable IACD members to be able to explain more fully why investment in community development by governments (at all levels), non-governmental organisations and the business sector is so vital and what community development support can bring to the SDG implementation table.

Over the coming years IACD will be highlighting practical examples of from around the world of how effective community development is strengthening the SDG implementation process at local level.

We recognise that the scale of the global challenge means that community development practitioners and managers will require continuing professional development to play their part and, community development teachers and students in training to become community development practitioners will require more learning about the importance of the SDGs.

In October 2016 we will be launching our *Global Community Development Exchange* of teaching and learning resources in this area, to help community development practitioners, teachers and students.

