

Spring 2013

Practice Insights



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Issue 2: Community
Empowerment

About IACD

IACD is a global network of community development organisations, practitioners, researchers, activists and policy makers who are committed to issues of social justice.

What do we do?

IACD links people to each other. We facilitate learning and practice exchange, both virtually and face-to-face. We work with partners to deliver regional, national and international events, study visits and conferences. We document the work that our members are doing around the world by collecting case studies, tools and materials on community development, and sharing these through our website, publications and ebulletins. We carry out research projects, drawing on international experience.

IACD aims to give its members a voice at the global level, advocating for community development principles and practice in

international forums and consultations. IACD has consultative status with the UN and its agencies.

Contributing articles

Our international Practice Insights publications are issued twice a year, each one focusing on a particular theme of relevance to community development. If you would like further information or to contribute to future editions, please contact gill.musk@iacdglobal.org.

Alternatively, IACD members are welcome at any time to contribute news items, research, case studies or other materials to our regular ebulletins and to the IACD website.

Further information

For full details and to join, go to www.iacdglobal.org/join-us.

Benefits of membership include:

- Regular ebulletins and email updates
- Access to restricted areas of the IACD website, with opportunities for learning and practice exchange
- Opportunities to participate in study visits and other face-to-face learning events
- Discounted rates at IACD conferences
- Discounted subscriptions to the Community Development Journal
- Opportunities to share your work and experiences with a global audience, through our website, ebulletins, newsletters and other publications

Non-members can sign up to our free ebulletin by following the link on our homepage.

Members also have the opportunity to nominate themselves or others to serve on the IACD Board of Directors. Read some of our current Board members' views on community empowerment on pages 18-19 of this edition.

www.iacdglobal.org



The views expressed in this publication are primarily those of the respective authors and not necessarily those of IACD.

Editorial

Ingrid Burkett

Community empowerment' is a term that has a long and sometimes contentious history in community development. The articles in this issue of Practice Insights draw on this history but also explore how the term is applied in practice around the world.

Community empowerment is fundamentally about ensuring that people have the opportunities, information, resources and capacities to play an active role in developing and shaping their collective futures. It is not a thing that is done 'for' communities, nor can it be granted 'to' communities. Community empowerment is about creating spaces and opportunities in society so that people can lead – not only participate in – the creation of their futures.

The articles in this edition are diverse, offering reflections from around the world, and from different perspectives – practitioners, academics, policy makers and community members. What they highlight is that 'community empowerment' is a dynamic and diverse concept. It is a concept that refers both to the processes and practices needed to ensure participatory development and to the need to ensure that structures and institutions are indeed enabling and supporting opportunities for community-led development.

Community empowerment is about creating spaces and opportunities in society so that people can lead – not only participate in – the creation of their futures.

Early conceptualisations of community empowerment were often framed around political power in particular. The focus was on ensuring that people were able to participate in local governance structures and that these structures gave them a collective platform to raise their voices on the broader political stage. However, over time there has been a realisation that organising and agitating in and of themselves don't actually result in lasting possibilities for change.

So, it is now recognised that community empowerment is as much about opportunities around economic power as it is about political power. It is about opportunities for ownership of community assets, income generation through enterprises, financial independence

and control over resources for creating local futures. This is highlighted in stories from Scotland, New Zealand and the Democratic Republic of Congo in this edition.

Community empowerment is as much about opportunities around economic power as it is about political power.

Community empowerment is also about claiming cultural power – of wresting the stories about communities away from mainstream media or from external bodies so local people recreate these stories, opening possibilities for building community futures, not merely accepting externally prescribed inevitabilities. Community empowerment is therefore about opening spaces for meaning-making within communities, so that local voices and stories are heard amongst the maelstrom of global cultures. The power of this is outlined in the story of 'World Comics', which highlights how creating opportunities for telling local stories can become the foundation for profound change at a community level.

Some of the articles start from a critical perspective of community empowerment, suggesting that it can be overused and manipulated, but then also unpacking outcomes that point to 'real' empowerment. For example, Ian Cooke from the Development Trusts Association Scotland highlights the empowering potential of community ownership, development and management of assets, not for the sake of it, but as a foundation for a coherent approach to community-led regeneration.

Community empowerment is also about claiming cultural power... not merely accepting externally prescribed inevitabilities.

There are also links made between community empowerment and the empowerment of individuals within communities – so, for example, a story from New Zealand about a financial learning program highlights how a comprehensive community-led approach to addressing unsustainable debt has had positive flow-ons for individuals faced with mounting debt issues. We have tried in this publication to

More thoughts on the themes raised in this publication...

Moving beyond participation towards leadership: community empowerment is less about participation in externally defined processes, and more about leadership and ownership of both processes and resources. This means that rather than limiting the conversation to how we can ensure greater levels of participation of community members in processes, we could start to ask about what foundations can be built for community-led processes?

Building empowering partnerships: community empowerment is about robust and transparent partnerships between different stakeholders, including but not limited to community members, government, business and local organisations. Partnerships that are 'empowering' are also demanding – they demand honesty of engagement (naming when a partnership is not a partnership), confidence (to do the naming in the face of power relations and funding agreements), and learning (to understand and enact the bedrocks that can help people to build authentic partnerships in their own organisations and contexts). Real partnerships also demand accountability – both ways, including not just accountability upwards (from community organisations up to government funders for example) but down and across (democratic accountability, and accountability across the community, between organisations and stakeholder groups).

Resourcing empowerment and sustaining resources: empowerment is about recognising the internal resources of a community (i.e. starting with the strengths and assets that exist within every community), but also acknowledging that often in the process of working for change there is also a need for engagement of external resources. The timing and the process of engaging external resources requires thought, as does their sustainability over time.

Creating enabling environments: community empowerment is both a process and an outcome. As a process it is about how we build and sustain collective, inclusive and organised processes at a community level so that people can create positive futures. As an outcome, it is about understanding the conditions under which people take ownership and control of their futures. What is clear in the articles in this edition is that 'community empowerment' is not something that can be mandated. We cannot legislate to enforce empowerment! What is possible, however, is the development of frameworks that open opportunities for community empowerment (for example, making it legally possible and attractive for community organisations to own and manage community assets). Governments can certainly create enabling environments for community empowerment. Corporates can equally open opportunities for corporate-community engagements that empower communities rather than disempowering them.

give a flavour of the richness of practice that lies inside a concept such as 'community empowerment' and the importance of considering both the contestations and the possibilities that it opens up for practice, policy and research. We hope you are stimulated by the diversity of approaches highlighted here. Please see this as an opportunity to continue the conversation by sharing your experiences through IACD's blog, facebook page and ebulletins. www.iacdglobal.org ■

Ingrid Burkett is President of IACD. She runs a social business in Australia and specialises in local and international community economic development. Ingrid is interested in links between community development, community economic development and community cultural development. She has practised, taught and researched community development for over 20 years.



Community ownership: a catalyst for community-led regeneration

Ian Cooke

As a community development practitioner for over 30 years I have always been uncomfortable with the use of the term 'community empowerment', relying as it does on contested notions of power and invariably used glibly to mask sloppy thinking and justify all sorts of activity.

The community development challenge, as I see it, is how we can help create and support the kind of strong and independent community organisations which enable local people to begin to address some of the challenges they face and, in the process, build resilient and sustainable communities. This article explores the concept and experience of 'community ownership' in Scotland, within that framework.

Four years ago, I moved from being a community-based practitioner to take up a post with the Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS), a national organisation which promotes, supports and represents development trusts. This has given me a unique opportunity to engage with communities throughout Scotland and see at first hand how they are using the development trust approach to take control of what is happening in their community, and leading (rather than participating in) local regeneration processes. DTAS has over 200 members – development trusts in rural, island, small town and urban communities throughout the country.

Throughout Scotland, these development trusts are achieving some remarkable results, often in adverse circumstances, and invariably, the community ownership of physical assets is the key element within the regeneration activity taking place. It should be stressed that communities do not seek to own assets for the sake of it! They do so as part of a coherent approach to community-led regeneration which involves the development of 'community anchor' organisations which are:

- community-led and owned, and working to a community agenda
- working across the economic, social, environmental and cultural agendas to take a holistic approach to regeneration
- committed to partnership working, but partnerships which they initiate, with identified partners for specific purposes

- committed to reducing their dependency on grant income through the development of an "independent" income stream(s) from trading and social enterprise activity.

While the structural nature of many problems remains, what is taking place in communities throughout Scotland... gives renewed grounds for hope.

It is generally when working to this latter principle of becoming more enterprising, that community organisations tend to acquire, develop and manage assets themselves. Does community ownership empower local communities? The ownership of assets can certainly give local people a renewed sense of pride in their communities and a real sense of a stake in the future of the places in which they live and work. For some community organisations, working towards asset ownership can be a fantastic catalyst for the development and maturing of their group. The community ownership of assets also has the potential to increase the financial sustainability, independence and status of local organisations. These physical assets can host services and activities and/or generate an independent income stream. In some cases, such as community-owned wind turbines or hydro schemes, potential income generation is the primary purpose of community-owned assets. Community groups with their own assets also become players (rather than tokenistic or peripheral partners) within regeneration processes. In some cases, the acquisition of an asset simply provides the foundation from which to launch community-led regeneration.

The notion of community ownership can be traced back to the struggles of various groups of people from as far back as the 17th century (the Levellers, the Ranters and the Diggers being perhaps the most well known). But more recently the development of community ownership in Scotland has been influenced by the wave of community-controlled housing development which took place from the 1980s onwards, the series of community land buy-outs which have occurred over the last 15 years or so, almost exclusively in the western highlands of Scotland, and the increasing number of communities who have acquired public amenity-type assets, taking over shops, post offices and other local businesses to safeguard vital local services. These developments have been paralleled by a rapid growth of community enterprise (and social enterprise) within Scotland, and it is the fusion of this commitment to enterprise, coupled to asset ownership, which offers a dynamic and creative basis for communities to reclaim some control and initiate their own regeneration processes.



One of Gigha's 'dancing ladies'

This activity has, unsurprisingly, generated an increasing level of interest in community ownership within Scotland – from politicians, public bodies, and communities themselves – and prompted DTAS recently to set out to establish the extent of community ownership in Scotland. The findings of this work are now available in a 'Baseline Study', published in 2012. The study shows that there are an estimated 75,891 assets owned by a total of 2,718 community-controlled organisations in Scotland, with an estimated combined value of just over £1.45 billion. Collectively these assets comprise 463,006 acres in area, equivalent to 2.38% of Scotland's land area. The vast majority of this land (95%) comprises 17 large rural estates which are now under community ownership. 73,151 assets in community ownership are units of housing owned by 84 community-controlled housing associations, housing co-operatives and rural development trusts. The remaining 2,740 assets are what might be termed 'community assets': those that bring benefit to, or can be accessed by, the whole community they are intended to serve. The study estimates that the combined value of these community assets is just over £0.65 billion.

Much community work literature suggests that, historically, community development has been a relatively marginal activity, partly due to the structural nature of the kind of issues and challenges which many communities face. This can, understandably, lead to communities feeling overwhelmed and pessimistic about their prospects of being able to effectively address the issues and challenges which they face. While the structural nature of many problems remains, what is taking place in communities throughout Scotland, partly evidenced by the scale of current community ownership above, gives, I would argue, renewed grounds for hope. There is a growing, and largely organic, groundswell of community activity which has arisen from a combination of necessity (private and public sector market failure) and opportunity, which throws down a challenge to the community development and regeneration certainties and practices of the past.

The island of Gigha, situated off the west coast of Scotland, illustrates what can be achieved through community ownership and community enterprise. Just over 10 years ago, Gigha was one of the fastest de-populating islands in Scotland, the local school was threatened with closure and 90% of the housing on the island was classified as below tolerable standard. The island was bought and sold in a succession of property deals, with islanders powerless to do anything about it. All that changed in 2002 when Gigha again came up for sale, and the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust



The island of Gigha, off the west coast of Scotland

was established. This time islanders voted for a community buy-out, and raised and borrowed sufficient capital to buy the island outright.

Following the successful purchase, the community quickly erected three second-hand wind turbines (the first community in Scotland to do so) and soon these began to generate a sizeable income which was immediately invested in addressing the poor housing conditions – houses were renovated and new houses were built. The community own and run the only hotel on Gigha, small farms have been created, and new activity generated to diversify the local economy. The fortunes of Gigha have been turned on their head. The population is almost double what it was 10 years ago – and still growing! Crucially, with housing and employment opportunities available, young families have moved back to the island and the primary school has had to be expanded to accommodate the number of children.

It would be misleading to suggest that all this has been achieved without a huge investment of time and energy by local people, and without external support from a number of key partners. Like all remote rural communities, Gigha still has its challenges to face. But for the first time in hundreds of years, islanders are no longer part what was effectively a feudal relationship with whoever happened to own the island. The community ownership of Gigha means that homes are no longer bought and sold over the heads of the islanders, and the future of Gigha is now firmly in the hands of local people.

While Gigha provides one of the most inspiring and starkest examples of what can be achieved through the community

ownership of assets, there are communities all over Scotland (from some of the most disadvantaged communities to some of the most remote) who are using the acquisition of key local assets (land, buildings, businesses) as the catalyst for regeneration. In doing so, they are creating community anchor organisations who not only own key assets but provide local services and run community activities. Through the application of enterprise they are generating independent income which they are re-investing in the community. They are unleashing the undoubted creativity which exists within local communities and identifying synergies often missed by cumbersome public bodies, often working in silos. In doing so, they are redefining the relationship between local communities and local authorities (and other public bodies). Community ownership invariably means that local people are no longer passive consumers of public services, but genuine regeneration partners. ■

Ian Cooke is Director of the Development Trusts Association Scotland: www.dtas.org.uk.

For information on the Community Ownership Support Service go to www.dtascommunityownership.org.uk/.

Access an online version of the baseline study at www.dtascommunityownership.org.uk/sites/default/files/Community%20Ownership%20in%20Scotland%20-%20A%20Baseline%20Study.pdf.

For information about the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust visit: www.gigha.org.uk/index.php.

Photographs courtesy of Andy Oliver and the people of Gigha.

Community to community empowerment: the story of the AusCongo Network

Ingrid Burkett

This is a story of community empowerment. It is the story of how one community has begun to use their own resources to build their future. It is also an international story of how people working together across vast distances can start to break down barriers, share resources and redefine what community empowerment means.



A bread oven in Mbuji-Mayi

It is the story of the AusCongo Network (ACN), a community organisation based in two communities – one in Brisbane, Australia, home to a large number of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), and one in Mbuji-Mayi, the fourth largest city in DR Congo.

ACN was founded by Constantin (Costa) Bengankuna Mukendi. After fleeing DR Congo's civil war, Costa and his family spent many years in a refugee camp in Zambia, eventually resettling in Brisbane. Costa has a vision of creating more empowering and sustainable development processes, both in DR Congo and amongst the Congolese community in Brisbane.

I met with Costa and Australian community worker Cassandra (Cassie) Sheppard, and together we skyped Mbuji-Mayi. The team there – 82 local leaders and community representatives – had pooled their resources to hire a local

to one another, so we always send money home to our families. Many see this as a solution, but for me it is a problem because it creates poverty on both sides – for those who are receiving the money and for those who are sending it. So I said we need to find ways to help our relatives in a sustainable way, so we can be independent not dependent.

“Our vision is that people become agents of their own development, not depending on the outside. To reduce poverty in a sustainable way through the use of our remittances, and understanding that remittances don't just have to be about money – they are also about sharing social capital, networks, experiences, knowledge, our shared power. There [in DR Congo] we have a colonial past and there is a spirit of poverty that says that capital comes from outside. Even though there is a lot of wealth, people are still poor because people wait for resources from the top down and from the outside. If people begin to organise themselves and see the resources they have within, then poverty can become history.”

“... there is a spirit of poverty that says that capital comes from outside... If people begin to organise themselves and see the resources they have within, then poverty can become history.”

hall to tell their story for this IACD Practice Insights.

The story begins with Costa's realisation of the fundamental flaws of both international aid and the system of remittances:

“We Congolese who are refugees are from a communitarian society... we are bound



Managing livestock with the aid of a micro-loan



A group meeting

Remittances: more than money

When Costa went to Mbuji-Mayi to explore the possibilities for changing what he saw as the flawed system of remittances, he didn't take money. He took a laptop, a film camera and a battery charger. To open up the idea that remittances were more than money, it was vital to connect the teams in Brisbane and Mbuji-Mayi. A space was leased in Mbuji-Mayi; a partnership formed with a local NGO, Caritas Congo/Mbuji-Mayi; and a community development manager, Jean Calvin Tshibuabua was hired. Cassie takes up the story:

“We talked with Jean Calvin via skype and asked him to see himself as a resource and to see the building as a resource. We asked him to open the door, to go outside and invite people in and just see what happened. We didn't know what was going to happen.”

“Fifteen people came and they talked. They talked and we talked with them on skype, and then we asked the fifteen to bring three more people each to the next meeting. Within less than a month 300 people were attending. After four months there were more than 800. What was just an office became a 'centre'. Even though we had nothing to give, what we had was an affirming philosophy: that just because

“Even though we had nothing to give, what we had was an affirming philosophy: that just because you have no money doesn't mean you have nothing.”

you have no money doesn't mean you have nothing. We started using an asset-based community development framework because we are not there – they are there, and they have the resources in the community to create the change. We used this framework to work together.”

The team developed some basic training materials and collected resources, which were translated by a community member. More and more people joined for weekly skype meetings and training events. Over time Jean Calvin worked with people to form groups, and a roster of group meetings. The work grew, changes began to happen and people began to develop their own solutions to a complex array of issues.

Cooperative groups

Community members have developed cooperative groups focused on economic activities. A group of 120 agricultural workers have explored cooperative approaches to food and land management and organised permaculture training (by a local trainer) to increase their yields. Another group has borrowed money from the community fund to improve livestock management. A sewing and knitting group is creating products cooperatively and sharing resources. Other groups include one exploring community-based health initiatives, a small business group working to improve their products and marketing, and a cooperative of diamond diggers.

Two women from an agricultural group, Clementine and Veronique, tell their story: “Before, we were working individually, we were not strong. Now we are working together and we are stronger. Also, before we would have one crop – we started with okra, and it failed. Then we did

permaculture training. Now we plant all different things together – beans, maize, pumpkin, okra. We learnt about mixing and complementary crops where one plant helps another. Working together we are doing much better.” One of the women told us that, as a result of implementing permaculture methods, she can now feed her children and send them to school.

Microfinance

The community has also formed savings and loans circles. While initially some argued that people had no money and so needed money from the outside to get started, eventually people began saving what money they had (starting from two US cents per week) until there was a pool of local savings. The groups have been self-organising in terms of rules, structures and focus, but all aim to improve income-generating activities.

The network at this point realised that some outside investment was really needed as a show of faith in the Mbuji-Mayi community. AUD\$500 was provided to create a pilot business loans scheme. This has since been lent in rotation to around 150 micro-enterprises.

They now recognise that bigger loans are needed, but that these must actually empower rather than cause indebtedness. For this reason ACN has delivered a series of skype-based business development training sessions, and formed a small team of volunteer business mentors, to build on the entrepreneurial skills of local people and ensure preparedness for larger loans.

Empowerment: joining up resources

What is clear from the ACN story is that empowerment begins with recognising the resources that people have – their skills, energies, assets. This means people see themselves as agents of development, as resources in creating positive futures. However, there are moments in the process where outside resources can help to leverage the resources of the community. So, empowerment can mean the addition of new resources – new information, new knowledge, new capital – at appropriate times in order for things to keep developing and improving.

As one of the women from a sewing group told us: “When I was working individually I was not improving. When we received the training at the centre it helped us to start working in a community way. Now we have combined, we sew as a group and we have orders coming to us through the centre. We are also working on marketing. Things have improved a lot.”

“Now our challenge is that we do not have good sewing machines – they are old and

keep breaking. We work one day, the machine breaks down, we lose a day because we have to take it to the repairer. Then the clients run away. We could grow but the machines are keeping us from growing. The challenge we have is to modernise our equipment... but we do not have the resources to change this ourselves."

A small amount of outside investment, if properly structured, could help bring about further change. However, the timing and focus of the investment are key. Any new resources need to build on the foundation of the people's resources, not displace them; to leverage people's energy and resources, not swamp them in ways that mean they become dependent on ongoing external support.

Jean Calvin summarises: "We started with small resources, we shared trainings. We recognised that we have resources in ourselves. We mobilised people. We formed small groups. We made some rules for each group. We put the trainings that we did through skype with Australia into practice, chapter by chapter. We formed a community fund, we saved, we made loans to enterprises. Things are changing as we work together."

This is international community-to-community work, people-to-people, using the resources of the group in Australia, and those of the group in Mbuji-Mayi, and leveraging one from the other. Technology increasingly makes this sort of work possible and much more common, particularly amongst diaspora networks.

The AusCongo Network is still young. Certainly the work could be scaled and could grow with better funding, and the group is exploring options for this. But it is important to acknowledge what has already been achieved and to recognise what this story tells us about the potential of changing the use of remittances so that they lead not to dependence, but to community empowerment. ■

Thanks to Costa and Cassandra for facilitating the interview, and to the group leaders in Mbuji-Mayi for sharing their inspiring stories. For further information, visit the ACN website at www.auscongo.org/

Community leadership and empowerment in Portugal: a brief summary of a research project Tiago de Seixas

This participatory research project was inspired by a partnership between a Portuguese community-based organisation (CBO) working with culture, recreation and sports organisations, and a university. It aimed to provide insights on community leadership across the spectrum of community-based organisations in Portugal. The participatory process produced data to guide the discussions of community empowerment and the implications for community development.

The research used a community-based methodology, which covered all phases of the work. Having community members as research partners, with their deep knowledge and experience of communities' backgrounds, contributed to the effectiveness and relevance of the research.

Genuinely collaborative research means that participants are involved as partners in all phases of the research, from the initial definition of the aim and scope, to information gathering, the interpretation and dissemination of results and the discussion of its implications. One goal of this research was to implement a research process that was meaningful to the community organisation involved in the project, starting with defining the concept, so that community members had the opportunity to choose a theme with most relevance or interest. The research partnership was structured to create an environment that allowed researchers and community representatives to reflect and work together to produce choices and take control of the overall investigation. The validity and usefulness of the results were increased through this collaborative approach.

The relationship between the community-based organisation and the university

developed through the need to connect the Portuguese associative movement to academia. Through this partnership came the idea of conducting a collaborative study that allowed a deeper knowledge and understanding of the nature of community leadership.

Initially, it was suggested that the study should create the opportunity for community leaders to enrol in an undergraduate course where they would have the chance to receive theoretical training on issues linked to the study. The collaborative group created a scholarship scheme and two organisations (a cooperative bank and a foundation) took up the opportunity. A group of students – adult community leaders, some already retired – were for the first time able to integrate into a university course.

From this starting point a research team emerged, composed of the student group and other researchers appointed by the university. A series of meetings was held, to define the research tools and data collection methods, and to analyse and discuss the results. The first data collection was through focus groups with members of the community-based organisation, with the purpose of identifying possible answers. Following this, an interview guide was created and applied by community leaders to a sample composed of other community leaders from a wider range of community-based organisations. The collective knowledge from these interviews and from further discussion helped develop a national survey, which was then applied to a random sample of community leaders.

The findings were presented and discussed through presentations at academic conferences and at national gatherings held by the CBO. This process allowed the project's organic spirit to be maintained

and contributed to the systematic monitoring of progress by the CBO board.

The final results do not only help us in the understanding of community leadership. They also illuminate the collaborative process. The project allowed bridges of influence to be created in both contexts – academic and communitarian – so that the knowledge obtained could be integrated into actions to improve the wellbeing of community members, empowering the research participants and their communities.

The results highlight the importance of the use of a participatory research style. A research department inside the CBO is now being developed in order to implement new projects and thus contribute to a stronger and renewed associative movement in Portugal.

Collaboration between universities and community organisations can strengthen the process of empowerment. The collaborative model could also contribute to promoting community empowerment in a way that could enhance a community's ability to identify, mobilise and address issues to improve the overall wellbeing of the community. ■

Tiago de Seixas is a Board member of IACD based in Lisbon, Portugal. He has an academic background in Community Development and a Masters degree in Community Psychology. For over six years, Tiago worked in and researched homelessness in Lisbon, fostering collaboration processes based on a psychosocial model of integration. He has also worked as Assistant in the Community Development Programme at the University Institute – ISPA, Lisbon.

Download a more detailed description of the project at www.iacdglob.org/publications-and-resources/cd-research.

COMMUNITY is the answer

This major event will explore some of the most significant local and global questions we face today in the context of the answer: community.

How will we address the challenges of poverty? Of growing inequality? Of the environmental crisis? Of the failure of our institutions?

Community is the answer will showcase community-based solutions from Scotland and around the world. It will allow community members, activists, practitioners, researchers and policymakers to come together and examine what actually matters to people, how to measure it and how to place it at the core of what we do.

Over three days, parallel tracks will allow participants to choose from a range of academic presentations, seminars, practice-based learning events and field visits. There will be a full social programme and the opportunity for overseas delegates to take part in extension programmes supported by Scottish community learning and development practitioners.

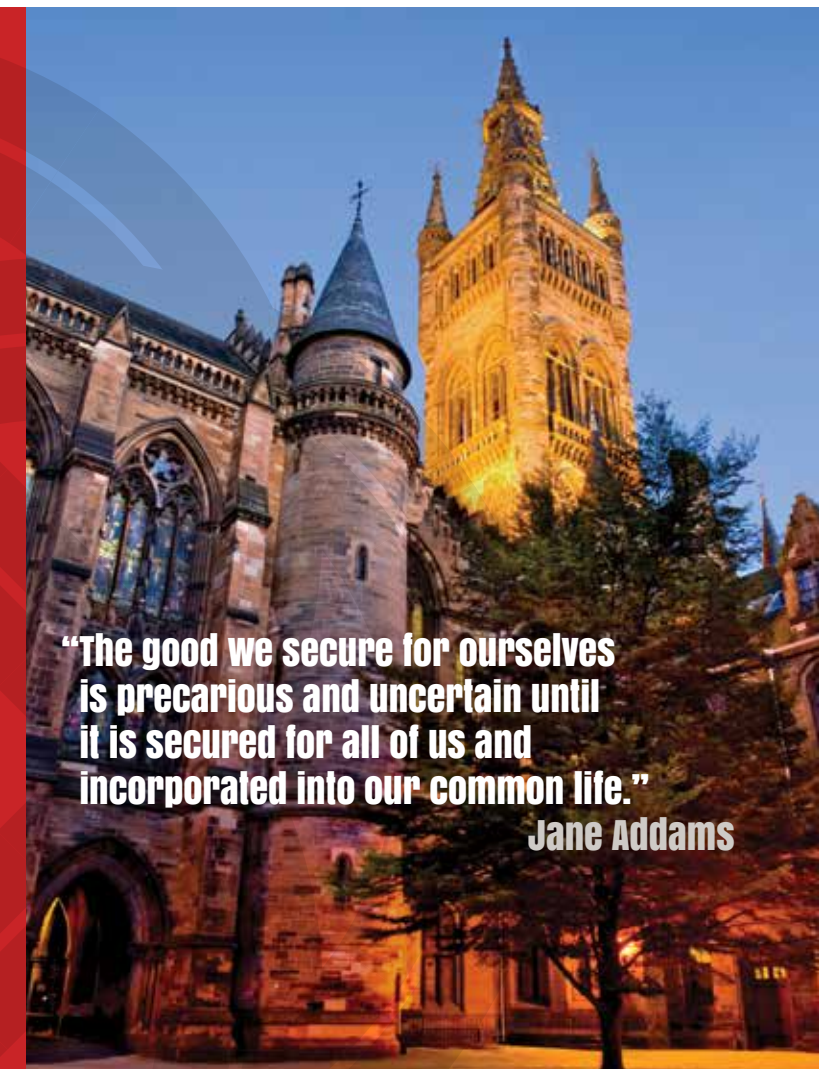
The conference will explore these themes:

Health: How we create, sustain and measure health and wellbeing – and the role of community

Wealth: How we cultivate and harness the "common wealth" of our communities – human, social, cultural, physical, financial

Power: How we ensure our institutions embody our values and the societies we want to create – exploring issues around governance, citizenship and collective action.

Celebrating our common wealth: an international gathering
9-11 June 2014, Glasgow, Scotland, UK



"The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life."
Jane Addams

Jane Addams (1860–1935): pioneer settlement worker, leader in women's suffrage and world peace, Nobel Peace Prize winner 1931.

Taking place in the beautiful, historic campus of the University of Glasgow in the run-up to the Commonwealth Games, **Community is the answer** is expected to attract several hundred Scottish and international participants. The gathering is a collaboration organised by the International Association for Community Development (IACD), the University of Glasgow and the Standards Council for Community Learning and Development for Scotland, with the support of the Scottish government.

visit: www.communityistheanswer.org





Visual voices: World Comics Network

Ingrid Burkett

Community empowerment is a multifaceted process. For one international organisation that started in India and has now spread globally, an important first step is for people to express themselves, tell their stories and raise their voices about things that matter to them. World Comics Network is an NGO that has developed and promotes the use of grassroots comics – written by local people, for local people.

Grassroots comics provide opportunities for people to share their perspectives, their thoughts about issues that affect them, their stories and their voices, with others in their community and beyond. The founder of World Comics Network is Sharad Sharma, a political cartoonist and journalist who from very early in his career was motivated to hear and present the voice of people's movements in India. He started by drawing and writing stories about these movements and the local issues that sparked them. He soon realised, however, that his stories and cartoons captured only aspects of the people's voice, and so he began to teach people to draw their own comics to express local stories.

Sharad Sharma had a profound realisation of the power of illustrations and comics as communication tools. At the same time, he came to understand the limitations of using only professional illustrations to portray local stories: "I realised that people have so many stories to share, so much wisdom. It's a myth that people coming from the cities need to 'teach' rural people about everything. They have problems, yes, but they also have solutions at the local level. What you really need to do

is to provide a tool – a medium – and provide them with the confidence to share their own stories."

Grassroots comics are about education, spreading messages, expressing yourself – not about superheroes or external popular culture.

And so the idea of grassroots comics – drawn by local people themselves, reflecting on the issues that are important to them in their own communities – was born. The power of people determining the issues that are important to them and finding their own voice to express these issues cannot be underestimated. Media (whether it be mainstream media or educational materials produced by NGOs or development agencies) often rely on the perspectives of so-called 'experts' who decide what is important and what the people need to know or be educated about. It is a one-way flow of information, and the limitations of such mass

communication strategies for social change are slowly being recognised. Such strategies are often expensive (particularly if the materials are produced in colour on glossy paper) and, because of the cultural diversity in huge countries such as India, the characters, stories, humour and content are not always transferable across regions.

Grassroots comics turn this one-way flow of information on its head. They argue that local communities need a medium for expression that is cost-effective, that can be reproduced locally, with content that is created at a local level by local people. A grassroots comic is a four-frame comic strip, produced by local people, in local language, with characters that local people recognise and can relate to. When they are pasted up in local communities, the comics generate interest in ways that externally produced media do not – people start to engage, to ask questions, to engage in dialogue around the content. The comics are drawn not only by literate people but, importantly, are accessible to all people, all age groups and at all literacy levels, unlike the majority of mainstream media. The comics can also help 'outsiders' – at agency level, in mainstream media, at policy levels – to understand local issues. Sometimes, the grassroots comics are also picked up by local



Grassroots comics – a focus for discussing key community issues

newspapers, meaning that local people's voices have been shared more broadly.

Sharad gives an example of how the process can work: "We ran one workshop where there were 70 participants, all male. I said, 'Where are the girls?' And they said 'No, nobody sends girls outside.' I said, 'No, I'm not going to run this workshop unless, until you bring some girls here.' So they brought five or six girls to the workshop and we began. We decided to have a theme in the workshop of why people don't send girls outside. They identified 22 issues about gender discrimination and they produced 105 comics. That was fantastic. We photocopied the comics and exhibited them on the main street. More than 2000 people saw them in just half an hour. And people started to ask, 'Can I get a copy of this comic, I have the same problem in my village, I want to paste it all over my village.' It is very effective when someone is asking for information. Most of the time NGOs' and development agencies' material is just distributed to communities and no one is really interested in it. But if somebody is asking for information, if someone is buying your information material, that's really important because they will use this



Community members are not just audiences: they are creators

information, they will post this information in their own places."

The workshops that World Comics has developed teach people some basic comic skills, and introduce the four-frame story format. People choose to focus their comics on themes that are important to them, or a story from their own lives. The workshop focuses on sharing basic drawing skills and building the confidence of people to express and draw their stories. Sometimes a workshop includes a large number of people who are illiterate, who may never have held a pencil or pen before. The first hurdle to overcome is that of people's lack of confidence in their drawing skills. It is important for participants to realise that the power of comics lies in the story and the message – not in the perfection of artistic skills.

"...it's not only about drawing comics, it's also about an opportunity to discuss the themes."

However the workshops are not merely about drawing the comics. When people develop their ideas they share their stories with other participants. They then write their stories in a few lines. Then each person reads their stories aloud to the rest of the group, and the trainer and other participants discuss, encourage and provide feedback. This is an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning, as Sharad shares: "When there are 20 participants they will write stories about 20 different issues, or there will be 20 different aspects of the one issue, if the workshop is issue-specific. Then you have 20 opportunities, 20 times you will discuss this issue, again and again and again. So the session helps people to understand the issue better, just by simply sharing



Sharing the results of a comics session

their story, giving their opinion. At the end they agree on something – 'this kind of violence is wrong', or 'what kinds of solutions can we look at?' So it's not only about drawing comics, it's also about an opportunity to discuss the themes."

There is more opportunity for dialogue and peer-based learning when the comics are completed and they are pasted as an exhibition for all participants to read each other's comics in a review session. Finally, the stories are publicly pasted in communities for other community members to engage with the comics, critique, comment, question and debate about the stories and themes. Very often the comics are reproduced locally (with a photocopier) and many local people purchase copies of the comics to share more widely, so it becomes a form of vernacular media. Grassroots comics are about education, spreading messages, expressing yourself – not about superheroes or external popular culture. Local community members are not just comic audiences: they are comic creators.

The link to community empowerment is clear. It represents a challenge to top-down approaches to awareness raising or capacity building about externally defined issues. It is about people themselves identifying what is important in their contexts, and then developing a story, a message, and expressing their opinions. These stories become the foundations for community-based learning and action. ■

World Comics has many localised networks around the world. The original World Comics website, with publications and video links is at www.worldcomicsindia.com/.

This article captures only a snapshot of the organisation's work. IACD members can hear Sharad Sharma talk more about World Comics in a podcast, available at www.iacdglobal.org/publications-and-resources/podcasts.

Our thanks to Sharad Sharma for participating in the interview and supplying photographs.



A Good Cents workshop

Good Cents makes good sense

Peter Mitchell, Matt Crawshaw and Mary-Jane Rivers

Completing a Good Cents financial learning programme has had many benefits for Kay. A \$2,000 debt with New Zealand's tax department has been reassessed; she has managed to repay other outstanding debts with two loan companies that were costing her \$110 per week; and perhaps the main benefit – she has regained confidence in herself.

Kay was not alone. There were many others in her community that were suffering under the burden of high interest, short-term loans.

New Zealand regional community services provider Wesley Community Action (WCA) first noticed the problem when their Porirua based food bank experienced increases in demand for emergency food parcels, even in apparently good economic times (2007).

Talking to the people seeking emergency food revealed that many needed emergency food because they were paying up to 400% interest per annum on short-term loans they had taken out for family emergencies, such as car repairs or paying funeral expenses.

Initially WCA thought the problem could be handled by a combination of budget advice and debt consolidation. However it soon realised that solution needed a more comprehensive community-led approach.

The process

In 2009 and 2010 Good Cents hosted a number of community forums, where we asked the questions:

What would it be like if there wasn't a high level of crippling debt in our community?

What is it that we could create together for our future that we can't create alone?

From these conversations the Good Cents initiative emerged as a locally grown response to concern about debt. It has grown into a community-owned initiative that is focused on transforming systems and structures in our community that create unsustainable debt. Good Cents is about working collaboratively, across the whole community, to identify how together each of our contributions can make a difference.

After listening to the community, the Good Cents initiative set itself some strategic goals and action plans for the period 2011-16:

1 Develop the financial wellbeing of individuals, families and community by developing a financial learning course to enable people to create change for themselves. Part of this

programme included growing a peer-led approach by enabling past participants to support others.

2 A lending sector that supports the long-term financial stability of clients and the community by fostering a local network of lenders with regular meetings looking at responsible lending initiatives and peer-based accountability.

3 Community groups participate in and lead initiatives that increase financial stability of their communities by developing a partnership with the Pacific Church community with an emphasis on creating a response or programme in that community to increase financial stability.

4 Grow collective awareness of the issue of debt and its impact on the wealth, health and wellbeing of the community through stories in the local media and using social media to communicate and shift thinking around financial wellbeing.

Strategy into practice – experiences

Network of Lenders

Right from the start the Good Cents team was concerned that lenders and lending institutions could be seen only in a negative light and as possible causes of financial problems in their community. Shifting thinking to appreciate, instead, that lending institutions may also be part of providing solutions was important.

Early meetings involved several banks and, as we progressed, representatives of local banks and 'second tier' local lending institutions became involved.

From these meetings we were fortunate to find a senior local bank official who grasped what the Good Cents initiative was all about and was keen to support. He is now a member of the Good Cents leadership team and a strong advocate for the work among his peers in the banking sector.

While it is fair to say this aspect of our work has been challenging, achievements to date include:

- Simply having the conversations and building solution-focused relationships with the financial sector is an achievement.
- There is a growing appreciation amongst some lenders that loans need to be sustainable and not put the community at risk.
- Lending organisations have helped produce and promote a credit card sized "need help in understanding your loans" brochure that is widely available in our community.
- Current work on planning a collaborative event around 'good cents makes good sense'.

Community groups – connecting with Pacific Churches and more

A recent stock-take of all the work, by many groups, aimed at 'improving financial wellbeing' in Porirua has revealed some critical gaps that undermine gains in other areas. There is a lot of good work being done, but there is very little focus on the effect of consumer lending today reducing what people have available to spend in the future. Good Cents is actively working to increase awareness that wealth which is drained out of our community in turn creates other social problems.

Good Cents is actively working to increase awareness that wealth which is drained out of our community in turn creates other social problems.

The team's conversations with local churches focus on developing effective relationships and, for a time, Good Cents employed a 'community facilitator' to work with the churches. For many churches a focus on wealth creation for their congregation is seen as more important than advocating for the reduction of harmful lending. This means that conversations to explore and develop the common ground continue.

Working with community groups and churches is an ongoing priority. As a result the Good Cents approach is starting to spark wider attention and recently the GEM (Growing Enough Money) group in Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand, indicated an interest in working with Good Cents to progress their mutual goals – a very positive step.

Learnings

During this journey, the Good Cents team have spent much time listening and reflecting on what can be learned from the community. This has also been done nationally at learning forums hosted by Inspiring Communities, an organisation committed to deepening practice in community-led development between different communities. In doing this some learning and reflections surfaced that challenged assumptions and informed their direction:

1 Widespread issue

Trouble with managing money and debt is a very widespread issue. Our community research showed this and it is confirmed by national and international research.

2 Causes sense of shame and overwhelming isolation

A struggle with debt causes families significant shame and a sense of isolation. The isolation cripples people into a denial that stops them from dealing with the issue or moving forward. The sense of relief for people is very tangible when they are able to share their troubles and realise they are not alone.

3 Not just a technical issue – many factors – need for holistic approach

No matter how much effort is put into solving this as a technical issue it doesn't go away. In addition to people improving their financial education, they need to extend their support networks, their trust of others, their confidence.

4 Relationships are key to a way forward

Relationships play an important role in enabling families to get out of debt and move forward. As relationships develop, so does the ability to work together to problem-solve.

5 Not just a debt problem – also about "Good Cents"

Realisation that either focusing on debt, or focusing on getting rid of it was not the whole picture. We have begun to focus on notions such as "What is wealth?", and "How can it be nurtured, reframed and built up to enable a hopeful future?"

6 Borrowing from our future makes us poorer

We started thinking that high interest lending was one of the key things that needed to be addressed. We've learnt that in fact any form of borrowing "from our future" (consumer lending etc) makes people poorer. We're now focused on how people can invest in their future.

7 The Unique Strengths of culture

Our sense is that 'generosity' is integral to the solution. We are aware that generosity is a strong cultural value for many cultures and hence there is significant strength and potential within these collective traditions to spark creative systems change.

Kay's experience with Good Cents is typical of the community-led approach of Good Cents. "While other courses tell you what to do, Good Cents helped to put me in charge of my money, so it was me making the decisions, not someone else." ■

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Matt Crawshaw is Good Cents Coordinator at Wesley Community Action.

Mary-Jane Rivers is Director of Delta Networks and a Board member of Inspiring Communities (www.inspiringcommunities.org.nz).

¹ For more information, see: www.cometauckland.org.nz/webfiles/CometNZ/files/058_TAMAKI_GEM_FinancialLiteracyReport_FINAL_2012.pdf

One Village One Product: empowering one woman at a time

Shakeel Abro

One Village One Product (OVOP) is a concept from Japan that has been introduced in many countries, with different names and methods, or with modifications. These include One District One Product in Shanghai, China; One Region One Vision in the Philippines; One Parish One Product in Louisiana, USA; and One Tambon One Product in Thailand. The primary objective of OVOP models is to alleviate poverty in rural and peri-urban areas by supporting rural micro and small enterprises engaged in the production of non-farm goods.

The OVOP movement encourages local economies through a participatory process, in which each village or town is appreciated and motivated by identifying its own assets and developing a specific product or service in which they may have the best comparative advantage. The products are then promoted countrywide and internationally so that the particular area or vicinity where they are produced will be known by the name of the product. The model is community-centred and adds value to goods produced using locally available resources.

In Pakistan, OVOP is known as Aik Hunar Aik Nagar (AHAN). It was introduced as a special initiative by the government of Pakistan in May 2006, as a way of meeting the goal of halving poverty by 2025, by creating diversified non-farm sources of income in rural areas.

Furthermore, rural-urban migration rates were placing pressure on the urban infrastructure and environment, increasing the need to provide non-traditional work opportunities in rural areas.

Within the short period of just one year, AHAN had actively started working in all four provinces of the country, in collaboration with provincial/district governments, rural support programmes, microfinance institutions, designers and other stakeholders. AHAN is now a not-for-profit company and governed by a Board of Directors with representatives of both public and private sectors. The AHAN head office is based in Lahore with regional offices in all four provincial headquarters: Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta. Last year AHAN opened up its own chain of stores with the brand name of "Handmade by AHAN", where products handmade by artisans are available.

AHAN ensures the participation of artisans, craft persons and poor producer

groups – especially women – in all their projects. Since its inception, AHAN has initiated 79 projects nationwide. Of these, 46 projects are exclusively focused on assisting women artisans of region-specific textile hand embroidery. Domestic violence has declined due to the financial empowerment of women in AHAN project locations, and people with higher incomes are in a better financial position to cope with inflation. Over 30% of the women are self employed and highly motivated to create sustainability in their businesses.

...community development and economic development have gone hand-in-hand to facilitate empowerment, particularly for women in Pakistan.

AHAN adopts a holistic approach at the grassroots level by creating synergies through a network of rural enterprise initiatives. Coordination with partners, such as rural support programmes and development organisations, has enabled

them to increase market access and foster industry linkages to enterprising communities, along with social interventions in education and health, and small-scale infrastructure projects.

Moreover, community development and economic development have gone hand-in-hand to facilitate empowerment, particularly for women in Pakistan. ■

Shakeel Abro is the Regional Head of AHAN Sindh and an IACD Board member. Shakeel manages the AHAN regional programme and budgets and represents AHAN with government bodies and NGOs, creating market linkages between artisans nationally and internationally. For more information about AHAN, visit www.ahan.org.pk.

Interested in learning more about women and economic empowerment? This was one of the themes of IACD's 2012 Practitioner Dialogue in Maharashtra, India. Read about participants' experiences and view footage from visits to women's Self-Help Groups at www.iacdglobal.org/practitioner-dialogue-2012.

Jado's Story

Jado Leghari is a good example of this. A young divorcee living with young children and no income in a remote village of District Dadu, in the Sindh region of Pakistan, Jado made quilts to sell in the village. She earned the equivalent of barely £10 per month, meaning she was unable to provide her family with education or adequate health care. Identified as a potential artisan, she was given the opportunity to attend a training course in Karachi, run by a famous design company. Jado then replicated the training in her village with other fellow artisans. After a year she was invited to attend a special advanced course in the Indus Valley School of Arts and Architecture. Following this, she became involved in sample development by AHAN and, based on the samples, she started to receive a steady stream of orders. Jado now works independently, earns a fair wage and is a symbol of encouragement for other artisans.

The photo shows Jado Leghari (on the left) and Yasmeen Dadu at a recent exhibition in Islamabad



Reflections on two decades of 'community empowerment'

Gary Craig (with Marjorie Mayo)

Almost twenty years ago, we edited an international reader on community empowerment¹ which brought together contributions from many different parts of the world, including the UK, Germany, Bangladesh, the USA, Australia, Nicaragua, Brazil, the Philippines and South Africa. Our editorial introduction concluded that the term community empowerment was becoming more critically important and yet more problematic in the face of increasing poverty and widening inequalities all over the world.

Although there had been a growth in the numbers of types of organisations practising various forms of community development, the terms community empowerment and community participation were increasingly being hijacked by national and international organisations to badge programmes which had little commitment to the empowerment – i.e. the increasing control of power and resources – by and for local communities. The World Bank, for example, saw community participation as a means for ensuring that Third World development projects reached the poorest in the most efficient and cost-effective manner, whilst the range of structural adjustment and anti-poverty projects imposed on national governments actually involved the poorest in making ever greater contributions to financing those programmes, for example in terms of fees for housing, health and education.

The range of contributions to the book demonstrated that, whilst the language of empowerment was becoming ubiquitous, the reality for the poorest communities was very far removed. Empowerment was something of double-edged sword, then, encompassing top-down agendas that were being dressed up in terms that would have resonance and appeal for local communities and those working alongside them, as community development workers.

This situation has worsened in the past twenty years, in many ways, particularly when it comes to considering the motivations of organisations and agencies pursuing the interests of the wealthy, in the global North. A succession of 'aid' and 'development' projects, from the

rich countries to the poorest, has had little impact on inequalities both within and between countries. Indeed aid and development appear to have much more to do with the growing desire on the part of rich countries either to have markets for their finished products (usually at heavily unequal trade terms) or access to the raw materials located in poorer countries (such as the uranium in Niger, coltan in DR Congo or offshore oil down the west coast of Africa), often under the cover of anti-terrorist strategies. The French and UK intervention in Mali raises questions in these respects.

Meanwhile the language of community empowerment continues to be reinvented by governments, organisations and agencies committed to pursuing neo-liberal agendas to further the interests of the global North. This use of the term empowerment has been in order to suggest that something new and *really* about the empowerment of local communities is being offered. The recent fashion to talk about community capacity-building both in the UK and worldwide is one good example of this, although claims for it being a new approach were demolished in an article which one of us wrote a few years back.² This concluded that 'It seems clear that community capacity-building can be seen as none other than our old friend community development. Under this new umbrella term, however, not only has a similarly wide range of activities found shelter, many of which have little to do with the goals and values of community development, but many of the old tensions and difficulties of community development – of manipulation of communities, misappropriation of terminology, co-option of activists, conditional funding and state-controlled

power games such as divide and rule – have emerged.'

Community capacity-building is essentially not a neutral technical process: it is about power and ideology and how these are mediated through structures and processes. As with the terms community and community development, the term community capacity-building is used to hide a false consensus about goals and interests. In reality they are all arenas for political contestation. And, as with these earlier terms, it has been manipulated by governments to give a false sense of community ownership and control. This echoes worldwide experience with the term empowerment.

...the language of community empowerment continues to be reinvented by governments, organisations and agencies committed to pursuing neo-liberal agendas to further the interests of the global North.

This is clear from the English experience of the past ten years. Although the government introduced a major social policy programme for England in 2000, called the New Deal for Communities, this turned out to be far from a new deal. As soon as local communities organised to get control of the substantial resources that

these projects represented, government moved to institute tighter top-down managerial regimes which gave local communities little scope for control. Nor was the programme geared towards tackling underlying structural inequalities, such as those arising from deeply unequal access to jobs and affordable housing. Unsurprisingly, as a result, the national evaluation of the programme gives little sense that there was a significant and sustained impact on inequalities or on local poverty levels.

This programme was followed a few years later by a government publication called 'Communities in Control'³, which was a million miles from anything vaguely representing a manifesto for poor communities to take charge of their own lives (not that such a top-down initiative ever could have done that). This publication disappeared pretty much from view, though, as the UK Coalition government was elected two years later. This government, whilst proclaiming the importance of local participation and empowerment through its Big Society agenda⁴ in England, through localism policies and the appointment of so-called community organisers – who are actually centrally controlled and having after a year to raise their own salaries – has steadily cut all the major organisations representing the community development tradition.

The Community Development Foundation which, whilst significantly controlled by government agendas, offered some political space for community development to be heard in national government, has had its budget shredded; the Community Development Exchange, a federation of local community-controlled groups and thus the nearest thing to an authentic voice for community development in England and Wales, has had all its funding removed and has been forced to close. Most community workers employed by local authorities are now existing – if at all – in a very precarious situation as councils, in the face of the deepest cuts in public expenditure, are streamlining those services such as community development which they regard as marginal.

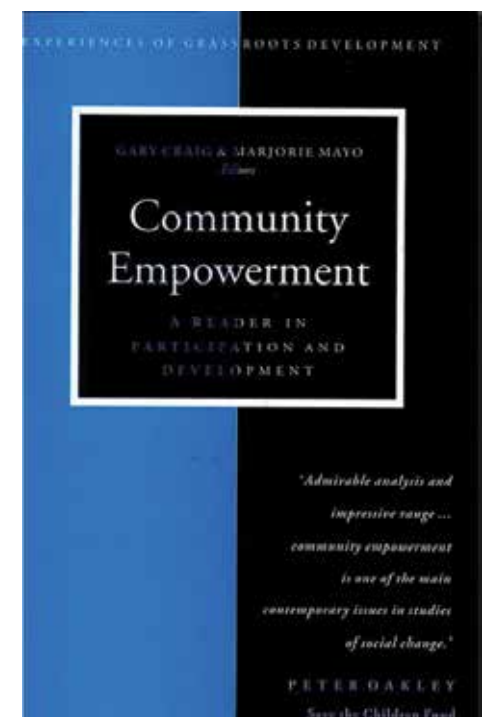
Nevertheless, across the world, including in the UK and countries like it, communities have been mobilising in their own ways. There have been broad based campaigns against the government's austerity policies, and community-based responses to take over and run key services such as local libraries on a voluntary basis – whilst continuing to campaign for public resources. People with disabilities have been amongst those particularly active in local and national responses. And young people have led the way in challenging multinational companies that fail to pay taxes, thereby reneging on their responsibilities to contribute to the

societies in which they are making handsome profits. Many people are taking the call for empowerment into their own hands, not trusting the calls of the government that they will give them power.

At present, the picture in England may still be bleak, then, but there are also lessons to be shared from community-based initiatives in response. And this is true, to some degree, all over the world. IACD, as the international voice for community development, continues to provide mechanisms for sharing these experiences and analyses, as it did with the report 'What in the World...?', published a few years ago, and with its website, publications and events. The Practitioner Dialogue in India in August 2012, for example, provided inspiring lessons, sharing ways in which local communities were responding, challenging the sources of their increasing marginalisation and dispossession. In addition, IACD provides a global voice, arguing for the values and principles of community development as critical in ensuring that the poorest have an effective voice for their concerns and a means for building a power base to ensure that voice is heard. Through such initiatives as the Budapest Declaration⁵ – which brought together 31 countries in 2004 to reaffirm the importance of community development and to remind us of the bottom-up basis of its values, and similar Declarations emerging from later international gatherings in Hong Kong and Brisbane – it continues to confront the mystification and the undermining of community empowerment promoted by national governments and international organisations.

Many people are taking the call for empowerment into their own hands, not trusting the calls of the government that they will give them power.

In doing so, these initiatives echo yet again the conclusions of our book. The interlocking crises in terms of poverty, environmental stress and communal violence posed 'as we come towards the 21st century', Korten⁶ argued, 'a threat to human civilisation that is now more real and more important in its implications than the threat of nuclear war.' Now we have got to the 21st century, and in response to these threats, the case for the importance of developing alternative strategies to the free market approach, which appears to dominate the world economy and societies, is more pressing than ever before. In developing such strategies, the importance of democratic approaches to social and



economic planning, drawing on the values and experience of community participation and movements to promote empowerment, is more important than ever. These values are inherent in the struggles of people across the world, from Myanmar to Tunisia, East Timor to Kashmir and community development has both much to teach these movements and much to learn from them. ■

Gary Craig (gary.craig@durham.ac.uk) is former President of IACD and still closely involved in the work of the Association.

Marjorie Mayo (m.mayo@gold.ac.uk) is a current IACD Board member.

A note on definitions

Defining "the United Kingdom" can be tricky, even for people who live there! The UK government (currently a coalition of two political parties) is responsible for some areas of policy-making – foreign policy, for example. Other policy areas have since 1997 been in the control of devolved authorities – the Scottish Parliament, and National Assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland. The Scottish government leads policy-making related to community development in Scotland. Many of the initiatives referred to in this article are relevant in England only.

1. G. Craig and M. Mayo (eds.) (1995) *Community Empowerment*, London: Zed Books.

2. G. Craig (2007) 'Community capacity-building: something old, something new?', *Critical Social Policy*, August.

3. Department of Communities and Local Government (2008) *Community Empowerment – Communities in Control*, London: DCLG.

4. M-S. Abbas and R. Lachman (2012) *The Big Society: the Big Divide?*, Bradford: JUST West Yorkshire and Oxfam.

5. <http://www.iacdglobal.org/publications-and-resources/conference-reports/budapest-declaration>.

6. D. Korten (1990) *Getting to the 21st century*, Conn: Kumarian Press.

International perspectives on empowerment

For this issue of Practice Insights we asked some of IACD's Board members to reflect on the question "What does community empowerment mean to you?" Here are their answers...



Prof. Muhammad Bello Shitu, Kano, Nigeria

"Community empowerment is a situation in which community members and/or their genuine representatives recognise that they have a voice on/in matters that concern them, they have the ability/capacity to utilize the voice, making a contribution to their development, being accountable to self and the community, recognising the need for leaders to be accountable, having the ability to make leaders accountable, making demands on behalf of the community, getting their demands met/addressed and enjoying sustainable positive change in their livelihoods and wellbeing."



Rod Purcell, Glasgow, UK

"Put simply it's about people taking greater power over their lives, and that of their families and community. An example of this for me was the women I met in Dharavi in Mumbai, India. They were saving to give their family a financial safety net, working together to provide mutual support and taking collective action in various campaigns to improve the health (through water, sanitation and food) of their families and to force the city authorities to respond to local demands over services, housing and redevelopment.

"These changes were based on critical reflection and knowledge, backed up by organisation, action and claiming power. Empowerment is a combination of all these things."

James Calvin, Ph.D., Baltimore, USA

"Community empowerment is engaged people and group interests that may lead to the manifestation of greater capacity within a community as it becomes more capable of providing and meeting its daily sustenance and life needs as improvements or new assets. Community empowerment is simultaneously a community-based process of influence where citizens and groups discuss, share and act together on conditions and other factors, and on identity and decisions that impact and shape their lives (and sometimes external people and/or resources are a part of the process as facilitation and not as owners).

Community empowerment in another phase progresses to a level of community ownership in order to navigate economic, social and political change."



Stewart Murdoch, Dundee, UK

"I have never been persuaded that community empowerment is a gift of governments and the work of community developers. Communities are empowered by their experience and their collective voice. They can become powerful when they choose to use this and we have more powerful democracies when government encourages that voice to be heard. The role of community development workers is to work in communities and with government to create the conditions and provide the opportunity."



Mary-Jane Rivers, Wellington, New Zealand

"Empowerment is about individuals, neighbourhoods and communities having or taking more control over all aspects of their lives. It may happen in small ways such as an individual getting out of debt and beginning to create their own wealth (see www.inspiringcommunities.org.nz: Good Cents), or slightly bigger such as a small town in NZ of 2,500 residents turning itself around through creating, among other things, a community garden feeding 60 families and contributing produce to freshly cooked meals in people's homes - and creating a local small business to prepare the meals (see www.inspiringcommunities.org.nz: Mataura). Or it may be larger scale with Canada's multiple communities reducing poverty (see www.vibrantcommunities.ca). It always involves people working together from all sectors of the community, programs that support empowerment rather than build



dependence, building on strengths and adopting a reciprocal approach that is based on 'giving and receiving'."

Keith Cossey, Halifax, Canada

"Community empowerment is essentially a process but also an outcome of the engagement and empowerment of individuals in the social, cultural, economic, political and environmental factors that affect their lives. It is an important attribute of a democratic society involving transformative leadership development and community capacity building. That is, building capacity to

- make decisions that make a positive difference in their lives,
- be inclusive, especially of those who have not participated or benefited in the past,
- gain access to information and resources,
- increase skills, knowledge and confidence,
- generate options other than yes/no, either/or,
- be co-operative."

Randy Adams Ph.D., Virginia, USA

"Community empowerment is the capacity for self-determination. However, that does not necessarily mean self-sufficiency, nor an exclusionary vision of community without social justice and equity! There is an interdependence dimension to development. Today the concept of assets based community development certainly focuses on the internal strengths of community, but it still also recognizes that there are challenges which a community cannot address directly with its own resources, i.e. technical specialization, funding, governmental policies, etc. However, communities can develop the capacity to seek out those resources to complement their own and understand how to manage them to serve the community's interests and their vision for an improved quality of life. Certainly, in the United



Shakeel Abro, Sindh, Pakistan

"Back in 1996 when I started my work in the rural and downtrodden communities in Sindh, this phenomenon of community empowerment was new to them and even for me this whole CD approach was new. I remember my first contact in the village community of A B Ballal where the community was facing lot of problems - of poor community organisation, low quality education, health issues, joblessness, law and order, women's mobility and so on... At that time community foresightedness, willingness and acceptance paved the road for development in their area and a process of development was initiated through dialogues, training, interventions in education, health and women's development. Later on many NGOs started their work in this village but it took almost a decade to evolve the local leadership who take control of their own lives now.

"Rehmat Ullah Balal was one of the activists at that time. He went through a continuous process of capacity building, networking and community trust building. He is now leading the education rights movement and recently brought a petition to the Supreme Court of Pakistan demanding action on "fake" or "ghost" schools [schools which are closed and often occupied by animals, though teachers continue drawing a salary]. As a result Pakistan's Chief Justice has ordered a nationwide investigation. After a decade the community now sees the results of community development processes... this is the real meaning of community empowerment."



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States the concept of "regionalism," a cooperation among business, civil society, and government across multiple communities or states, has been gaining favor over the past decade as an applied example of that interdependency. So, whether we are talking about individuals, groups, organizations, communities, regions, or countries, the global economy and its interdependencies - for whatever subdivisions that entails - existed long before that term was coined, and such interdependency has actually been more comprehensive to include the exchange of the full range of human learning and development across communities and societies.

"From a theoretical perspective, then, community empowerment is assisting individuals, organizations, and communities build the *competence* to address not only their needs but also other issues affecting their overall quality of life. As competence is enhanced and expanded, individuals, organizations, and communities gain *confidence* in their own competence to then commit to the implementation of the local solutions they develop to meet their needs and build their assets. As the former Executive Director of a national rural development assistance NGO, this was illustrated to me when a small rural community we had worked with before called our office asking if the processes we taught them in building a potable water system were applicable to the development of other community infrastructure. In responding, 'Yes,' and asking if they needed further assistance they said, 'No, we understand the process and know how to do those things. We just wanted confirmation. We can do it on our own now!'"

“...people have so many stories to share, **so much wisdom**. They have problems, yes, but they also have **solutions at the local level**. What you really need to do is to provide a tool – a medium – and the **confidence** to share **their own stories**.”

“Community empowerment is about **creating spaces and opportunities in society** so that **people can lead** – not only participate in – **the creation of their futures**.”

“Communities are empowered by **their experience and their collective voice**. They can become powerful when they choose to use this **and we have more powerful democracies when government encourages that voice** to be heard.”

IACD's Practice Insights are published twice a year and aim to provide perspectives on community development practice and policy from across the world. Back issues can be downloaded here: www.iacdglobal.org/publications-and-resources/IACD-publications



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