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Skills for Rural Community Development

A guide for practice

About this guide

This guide aims to provide a framework for understanding how community development approaches and skills can be beneficial in supporting rural communities to be sustainable, viable and supportive of a good quality of community life, at a time where such communities confront several challenges: economic, environmental and social. It is built around the characteristics of 'dynamic, engaged, vibrant, sustainable rural communities' as identified in the Carnegie Charter for Rural Communities, and the model of community development is based on the earlier work of the Skills Consortium across the UK and Ireland. In preparing the guide we conducted eight studies of a range of community development interventions across rural Scotland. All of these had either been involved in other aspects of the work of the Carnegie Rural Commission, or had been supported through the Scottish Community Action Research Fund.

The guide is organised in eight sections as follows:
1. The vision: what sort of rural community? A community development perspective on the rural commission vision
2. Approaches to change: models of community development and their use
3. Starting with evidence: assessing issues, stakeholders and community capacity
4. Community empowerment: components of strong and effective community organisations
5. Community planning and engagement: effective relationships for change
6. Looking to the future: towards sustainability and resilience
7. Roles and skills for rural community development: where investment is needed
8. Appendix – rural community development in practice

The guide was originally prepared as part of the 'Skills' theme of the Rural Action Research Programme of the Carnegie UK Trust. It has been written by Stuart Hashagen of the Scottish Community Development Centre, with contributions from Alex Downie of Linked Work and Training Trust.

The Vision: what sort of rural community?

This guide takes the Charter for Rural Communities[1] as its starting point for considering the skills needed to advance rural community development. The Charter advocates a vision of 'dynamic, engaged, vibrant, sustainable rural communities' and sets out a series of ideas and recommendations for action. The Charter also makes it clear that the transformation of rural communities is expected to depend on the effectiveness of three enabling factors, which are:

- growing the capacity of local people, agencies and professionals that support rural communities
- enhancing community assets through building capital
- increasing the scope and quality of community planning

Each of these enabling factors, and in particular the first, require the development and application of skills: hence this guide. These skills are needed both by community members and by the professionals who work in communities. The ten characteristics of engaged and sustainable rural communities in the Charter are as follows, along with a note on their implications from a community development perspective for the development of relevant skills.

Optimising assets
'The vibrant rural community of the future will display an assets-based approach rather than concentrating simply on needs, will use financial and other instruments to take ownership of community assets and will manage assets responsibly and actively over time for public benefit'.

Although this is set out as the first of the characteristics of a sustainable community, from a community development point of view it is better understood as a final aspiration – for example on the well known ladder of citizen participation[2], community control is the highest rung, and only realistically attainable if the community has the motivation, confidence and capacity to acquire, develop and manage the asset responsibly.

Achieving fairness for everyone
'The vibrant rural community of the future will be open, diverse, inclusive, demonstrating a concern for equity and care for each other. It will work to redress and alleviate poverty and disadvantage.'

Working within an equalities framework is a central value of community development and embedded in good practice. It requires that community development effort should be focused on situations where significant sections of a community are adversely affected by inequality or lack of fairness or justice in the distribution of resources. Such inequalities include:

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[1] http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/getattachment/a2d7553b-3457-4567-b51a-f01c5a2d8cd6/A-Charter-for-Rural-Communities.aspx
[2] http://partnerships.typepad.com/civic/2004/11/ladder_of_parti.html

- Deprivation or multiple deprivation: communities where there are concentrations of disadvantage and few opportunities or resources
- Prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability or other 'equalities' issues
- Inequality on the basis of lack of community infrastructure, social capital or political influence

Empowering local governance

'The vibrant rural community of the future will have the capacity to play an active role in shaping its own future through a revitalised system of elective and participative governance at local level.'

In line with current policy on governance and participation, community development becomes effective when local governance works in collaboration with community interests. This is the basis of community engagement and leads to more effective and valued service delivery as well as direct benefit to communities.

Increasing financial resources for community benefit

'The vibrant rural community of the future will have capacity to access investment from the EU, central and local government, the business sector, lottery distributors and trusts, and from a directly raised precept.'

The challenge for community development here is to marshal the evidence and present a convincing case that it is in the interests of funders to operate in this way. In a period of economic downturn this can be particularly challenging. The case to be presented is that investment in community infrastructure and capacity can unlock 'hidden' assets in the form of social capital, civic participation and community provision that will in the long term reduce dependence on the public purse.

Enjoying locally relevant services

'The vibrant rural community of the future will enjoy equity of access to essential services and have the ability to shape additional public, private and third sector services that are locally relevant.'

In the Scottish policy landscape, this is a primary purpose of community planning as noted above, and community engagement is seen as the way in which a dialogue between service providers and community recipients can be established, in order to help shape more relevant services. The challenge for community development is to help create and support the conditions in which such dialogue can be initiated and sustained.

Enriching social capital and well-being

'The vibrant rural community of the future will display high levels of volunteering and social action, high social trust and neighbourliness, and a welcoming ethos that attracts people to remain or to move into the area.'

One of the main purposes of community development is to help establish or re-establish trust and neighbourliness where these do not exist. Social capital is closely related to the

idea of community capacity, and to a significant degree, working on one will have an impact on the other. As well as attracting and welcoming new people, social capital and capacity make for soundly based inward investment.

Valuing local distinctiveness
'The vibrant rural community of the future will thrive on its local distinctiveness; the attractiveness of its landscape and culture encouraging people to stay in a place they love and be welcomed into the area.'

Not all rural communities enjoy a distinctive or attractive landscape and culture, and there is little doubt that the effects of a global economy tend to threaten that which remains. Where communities are in the fortunate position of having a heritage or landscape that is attractive to others, it can be seen as an asset of benefit to the community if it can either own the asset or be able to supply goods and services that enable visitors to enjoy it.

Developing reliable infrastructure
'The vibrant rural community of the future will play a role in the development of a reliable infrastructure including transport, broadband connectivity, energy and water, and a range of affordable housing to rent or buy.'

Big scale policies and investment priorities over transport, connectivity, energy and housing are decided in places where individual rural communities have little or no voice. Nevertheless such decisions can have a profound effect on the sustainability and quality of life of those communities. The ability to bring together and express community opinion on such matters will normally involve building stronger alliances across a range of interests and geographies, and using this to build political support and influence. Where the rural lobby has found voice, we need to be careful in identifying whether such a voice represents sectional or powerful interests, or the interests of the disadvantaged or excluded.

Enhancing environmental capacity
'The vibrant rural community of the future will adapt to the needs of a low carbon economy by reducing its carbon footprint, nurturing its biodiversity assets and reaping the potential of community owned   renewable energy generation.'

Community development aligns itself with the need to develop more sustainable ways of living that are consistent with ensuring that reduced consumption and energy use does not impact adversely on the life chances of the most disadvantaged.

Supporting a dynamic local economy
'The vibrant rural community of the future will see farming integrated into a wider and more diverse rural economy, breaking out of the low skills low wages loop – in part through the growth of local social enterprises and the entrepreneurial development of local assets.'

While there can be little doubt that a more diverse rural economy would be of benefit to communities and in particular to those on low wages with low skills, it is a considerable challenge where technological and market conditions mean that farming may be the only way to extract value from the land. The contribution community development might best be able to make might be to help communities envision the potential impact of economic

trends on their quality of life, and identify whether viable alternative models might be available.

Overall

The ten characteristics of a vibrant rural community as discussed set out a useful framework on which rural communities can assess their position, identify what they need to achieve, and work out how best to achieve the change they need. It is not hard to find rural communities that do score highly on many and sometimes all of the characteristics. The community development task is to focus attention and work on situations where the majority of these characteristics are not in place, and to help build the capacity of the community to achieve positive change whether directly though their own actions, or through more effective engagement with public and other bodies.

Community resilience assessment framework

Drawing on the discussion above, the table below suggests some indicators to help assess the extent to which a rural community is vibrant and sustainable. It also suggests in the final column, which of the characteristics may be addressed through community development intervention. The conditions shaded in the darker grey represent situations that should be addressed urgently to support the development of the community, and where community development resources might best be targeted. Conditions in light grey mean that the conditions of vibrancy are already being met and intervention would be unnecessary. In between, and marked in mid-grey, are conditions that may require intervention with community development working alongside other supports.

Few communities are likely to 'score' consistently within any column, but it should be possible to map the condition of any community across the given indicators, thus providing an assessment of strengths and weaknesses to be taken into account when planning and conducting interventions for change. Ideally, a cross section of people with an active interest in the future of the community should be involved in such an assessment, although it is important to acknowledge that the absence of such interest is a strong indicator of weakness.

Table 1: Community Resilience Assessment Framework

	Low level indicators	Medium level indicators	High level indicators	Community Development leverage
Optimised assets	Few assets available to community; little public benefit	Mixed economy with community management of some assets	Responsible, active asset management for public benefit	High
Social capital and wellbeing	Divided, contested, inactive, individualist ethos	General contentment but largely passive ethos	Social action, trust, collective ethos	High
Fairness for everyone	Persistent exclusion of certain groups; culture of secrecy and conspiracy	Tolerance and acceptance in most areas	Openness, diversity, inclusion, caring, redress on disadvantage	Medium
Empowered local governance	Traditional and formal authority	Consultative approaches within larger structures	Elective and participative governance	Medium
Locally relevant services	Centralised and standardised services; no consultation with recipients	Some initiatives responsive to particular local circumstances	Equity of access, ability to shape services	Medium
Local distinctiveness	Absence of cultural identity and heritage	Culture and heritage acknowledged but not exploited	Landscape and culture valued, preserved and accessible	Medium
Environmental capacity	Conspicuous and wasteful consumption; lack of defence against environmental challenges	Consumption and recycling patterns close to national norms	Proactive action on carbon use, climate change, renewables, biodiversity	Medium
Financial resources for community benefit	Investment draining from community: deterioration and neglect of community resources	Community benefit maintained but not enhanced	Capacity to access investment for development and change	Low
Reliable infrastructure	Basic services (transport, broadband, energy, housing) expensive, unreliable, poor quality	Basic services intact	Services in place, good quality and enabling other developments	Low
Local economy	Lacking viability; dependent on vulnerable sectors	Mixed economy; adaptable skills	Wide and diverse, high wage, high skill, social enterprises	Low

Approaches to change

A number of approaches are available in community development practice. These can be seen as both a set of value-driven approaches to change, or more pragmatically as a way to identify possible responses to a given set of community issues. In this section we propose a model for community change, and outline approaches that may be appropriate at each stage.

Community development values and their importance

Good practice in community development starts with a clear understanding of the context, of cultural and economic factors, of social needs and issues, of the assets that a community has, drawing on the perceptions of residents, professionals and policy-makers. Once the various assets within the community have been recognised and the needs and issues have been identified, consideration must be given to what changes are needed, and how such change may be secured. This is a key component of the community development task, and is best understood by breaking it into related functions. The concept that is cited most frequently in the studies is sustainability. There is a widespread agreement that the overall goal of rural community development must be sustainable communities. This is understood as:

- economic sustainability, so that the adverse effects of demographic change and economic decline can be reversed
- social and community sustainability, so that the interests of 'old' and 'new' communities can be mediated, and cohesion and integration can be promoted
- environmental sustainability

But sustainability also implies the development and maintenance of communities that are active and organised, and the development of good relationships between communities and the organisations that support them, provide services to them, or whose activities will affect them. Thus sustainability needs to draw together the three interrelated functions of community empowerment, effective engagement and sustainable solutions.

It must be recognised that community development alone cannot address all the structural and cultural challenges that rural communities face. It can however help to establish an infrastructure within which issues can be identified and explored, and within which remedial action may be identified.

The framework is presented in the diagram below, and explored in more detail in the sections that follow.

Community empowerment

- promoting learning and skills
- promoting organisation and leadership
- promoting equalities and integration
- promoting participation and influence

Effective Engagement

- working inclusively
- involving communities
- working in partnership
- enabling community initiative
- developing sustainability

Key purpose: to develop policy and implement practice leading towards sustainable rural communities

Sustainable solutions

- managing people
- managing projects and programmes
- resourcing change
- managing organisations
- evaluating and learning

The core of the framework is the overall purpose of rural community development, described as: to develop policy and implement practice leading towards sustainable rural communities.

The framework is based on a model of change based on the following assumptions:

First, that in order for communities to achieve beneficial changes in their environment, economy or social conditions, they need to have the capacity to do so. This means that skills are required, that organisation needs to be in place, that equalities are being considered, and that involvement and influence are built. This is explored more fully in the 'community empowerment' section of this guide.

Second, for change to occur, some engagement is normally required between the community and the political or financial systems that enable such change to occur. For the community, this means that it must be able to exert sufficient influence to motivate resource-holders to review and change their decisions or ways of working. For resource holders it means recognising that engaging with communities can lead to better and more sustainable solutions. Good engagement is thus based on effective dialogue. This is discussed more fully in the 'community planning and engagement' section of the guide.

Third, any change must be both beneficial to the community as a whole, and be both environmentally and economically sustainable. Such change will of itself enhance the capacity of the community and create the conditions in which there is the best chance for continued action for community wellbeing and benefit.

At each stage in the model there is a role for community development requiring a skilled approach. Building capacity needs an assessment of existing strengths, and well as an

understanding of the resources and supports that may be available to support skill development and organisational development. Engagement often requires an intermediary to help create the conditions in which dialogue can be encouraged, while sustaining change includes a need to be aware of changes in the environment and a recognition of new opportunities or threats.

Within this general framework a number of approaches to change may be adopted according to the nature of the change needed, and of the culture and motivation of the community.

Community planning

The community planning approach is firmly embedded in policy and practice in Scotland. It proposes that the key interests in a geographical area, and key themes of common interest are brought together to understand and agree the areas in which change is needed, and then to coordinate the investment and actions required to achieve the change. There is a recognition that community involvement in both identifying issues and developing solutions is of central importance, and for this reason, engagement with communities is integral to the process. However it is also recognised that both communities and public bodies can find it difficult to create the conditions in which the necessary dialogue can take place, and for these reasons the National Standards for Community Engagement[3] were developed and promoted as a model for achieving effective engagement.

For communities, the choice over whether to pursue the community planning route will depend on the nature of the need or issue being experienced, the robustness of local structures, and the relationships between the community and key decision makers. Where the need or issue is on the public agenda, where there is a willingness for change, and where the community is recognised in the structures, the community planning route can be a very effective way of establishing solutions that are sustainable and which have broad support. However, in circumstances where the need or issue is not widely acknowledged, where structures are weak, or where community interests are not sufficiently recognised, the community planning route may not be the best option. Indeed, a community organisation may need to work hard and effectively over a period of time on community issues to become visible at all at community planning level.

The underlying theory of community planning is governance and reform, resting on a set of assumptions that there is a common set of interests between the holders of power and the community; that dialogue and debate are the best ways to reach agreement on the most effective ways to address problems; and that citizenship and social capital can best be enhanced in this way.

Asset-based community development

This is a widely accepted model for community change. However, there are two distinct meanings for the term, which should be distinguished carefully. One meaning is essentially an approach to development work in communities, and holds that the starting point has to be a recognition of the assets that a community has, whether human assets in the form of knowledge, skills and energy, the organisational infrastructure, financial and economic

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[3] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/94257/0084550.pdf

supports, or the information, intelligence and relationships that exist. Work for change is based on making connections between these assets so that the community has greater capacity to achieve change in its own terms. The approach is contrasted with the 'deficit' model, whose starting point is the problems of the community and their effects, whether this is poverty, low attainment, disorder or other negatives.

The second meaning is the proposition that the more infrastructural assets such as land or buildings a community has in its ownership, the more resilient and self-sufficient it will be, and the more directly community needs, as opposed to the needs of distant resource owners, will be met. These assumptions underpin the movement in Scotland towards community land ownership, community facilities being placed in community ownership, the transfer of services to community ownership and the community-based housing movement. The forthcoming legislation (at the time of writing) on community empowerment and renewal is expected to enshrine this thinking.

As options for community change, we should look at both meanings separately. In the first meaning, to focus on assets rather than deficits has clear attractions, as it does not 'blame' the community: rather it seeks solutions within the capabilities of the community itself and is thus empowering and developmental. At the same time however, deficits or perceived deficits are often a painful reality for communities, and as such are often the trigger for community action. Furthermore, in asset-poor communities there may never be the capacity to take effective action for change.

Good practice takes both assets and deficits into account. Both need to be understood as part of a profile of a community, and community development actions should focus on building on assets in order that deficits can be addressed.

In relation to the second meaning, taking over a resource of land or service can be an effective means towards resources being managed more efficiently and in the interest of community benefit. This can be a strong driver for change, and has led to many innovative and imaginative developments that would not have happened otherwise. However, communities embarking on this route should be aware of the risks associated with the approach. The key risks are that an apparent asset may in reality be a liability that will drain resources away from the community rather than bring them in; that the legal and management obligations that surround taking responsibility for a service, building or land may be too onerous or risky; and third, that community ownership can be as unaccountable, excluding or divisive as private ownership - unless great care is taken to embed inclusion and accountability into legal and operational structures. In light of this, communities seeking change will need to give careful consideration to the merits of other possible approaches.

Asset based approaches rest on the assumption that community control, sustainability and self-determination are the primary values. Therefore the issues for the practitioner or community leader to address include:

- How much of an asset or potential asset is this?
- Whose idea is it to hand the asset to community control? If it is a public body are the motives genuine?

- What community needs will the asset meet?
- Who will benefit from the use of the asset
- What will the costs be – of acquisition, improvement, compliance, management
- What will be the source of income to maintain the viability of the asset?
- Are there alternatives that would meet community needs better – for example people often simply want a decent level of public provision for which taxes are paid, rather than the risks and responsibilities associated with an asset
- Do people in the community really have the motivation, energy and capacity needed to realise the opportunity
- How strong is leadership and how solid is community support?
- What will be the regulations to cover the access to and use of the asset – will these exclude certain groups and interests in the community, or be closed to outsiders?

Issue-focused action

A trigger for community action can often be a decision or proposal that is controversial for a whole community, or divisive where different community elements have different interests or values. Such triggers can include the removal of a resource, such as the closure of a rural school, clinic or shop; or the introduction of a controversial development such as a windfarm, road, pylons or quarry. Such changes can often trigger concern or anger, and this can readily transfer into organisation and protest.

This approach is recognised as a sound strategy for community development where a community is not well organised or active. Indeed much community development activity has been based on the identification of contentious issues that the community can coalesce around, even where the community may not itself have recognised the issue or the possibility of organising around it. It can lead to the emergence of strong local bodies that may subsequently become involved in much wider activity, having been persuaded that change is possible if people organise collectively.

Conversely, issue focused action is almost inevitably bound to exacerbate conflict between a community and the political system, with the community – and often their support workers being labelled as troublemakers or worse. This can then threaten funding arrangements that may be in place or lead to the discrediting of the community organisation. Communities pursuing this route must be aware of the risks involved, and work in particular to ensure they have mobilised widespread support and solidarity within their communities, in order to challenge any challenge to their legitimacy or authority.

Issue based action is based on the assumptions that the interests of communities and those in power are not always reconcilable, and that the political intelligence and skill that communities gain from contesting adverse decisions is an important part of their resilience and protection. The approach is best adopted where there is an issue of concern to the community that is not recognised by government, or where the issue is created by government.

Community building

This is the term we use to describe what can be seen as the bread-and-butter routine of community life. It includes coffee mornings, youth clubs, fetes and fairs, celebrations, and

many other social activities. These can be the most important means of maintaining the culture and traditions of a rural community, of bringing people together and building networks, and of providing basic mutual care and support. Where these things are in place they contribute immensely to the quality of people's community life, and keep a community vibrant and attractive.

Community development may intervene where such supports are not in place, or where they are in place but denied to a significant section of the community. In some rural areas there can be division between 'newcomers' and the more indigenous population that can lead to conflict; or there may be an influx of migrant labour that can unsettle established traditions. In such circumstances community building activity may be needed to help bring together different cultures, traditions and perceptions, and to help build cohesion and value diversity in the community.

Intervention in these areas is driven by values of equal opportunity and inclusion, and a recognition of the value of building social capital through stronger connections and understanding between different interests. Social capital is a good in itself, and equally a prerequisite for community engagement in wider development and change.

Community learning

The learning led approach to change rests on the assumption that people in adverse circumstances can best be helped achieve positive change in their individual and community lives through a process of learning through which greater understanding, skill and confidence will be achieved and applied. A learning based programme of community change would start with encouraging people to come together, in the first place to be helped to understand the forces that shape their lives and impose barriers to change. With this understanding, it would move to a recognition of the possibility of change, and the planning and provision of learning opportunities to build the skills and organisation needed to achieve the change.

Such an approach clearly is interventionist, although its aims are to leave skills and understanding in the possession of the community. It is thus resource intensive and therefore best targeted where there is a clear absence of community motivation or infrastructure. Community learning as described here should not be confused with the more common provision of adult learning opportunities based on recreational, literacies or job-readiness training. Such adult learning opportunities can however be built into a programme of community learning if and when it is clear that they will be of benefit to community sustainability or influence.

All practice approaches should be underpinned by an explicit commitment to equalities, and actions to ensure that equalities issues are being addressed should be embedded in all plans. Equalities factors can exclude the groups affected from participation in the civic and cultural life of the community, or can lead to 'subcultures' that may operate in conflict with each other and with the 'mainstream'. The role for community development is to identify which groups are excluded, the impact of such exclusion on the group and the wider community, understand the barriers to involvement and work to address the barriers.

Which approach to choose?

Some approaches to community development are strongly driven by one or other of these sets of assumptions. A more pragmatic and mature approach would be to identify the approach, or combination of approaches that would be most appropriate in the prevailing circumstances. Some approaches require intervention from the outside, while others do not. Some are most valuable at an early stage of development, while others more appropriate to longer term change. Some are focused on capacity and process, others on results and tasks. In the following table we suggest which approach may be most appropriate to a number of typical community scenarios.

Underpinning such choices however, will include consideration of the nature of the community, the nature and impact of the problems being faced by the community, and the interests and attitudes of the people or institutions that hold power or control over the issue. These questions are explored in the next section.

	Community building	Community learning	Issue focused	Asset based	Community planning
Disengaged / inactive community	√	√			
Community conflict / division	√	√			
High community concern / no community initiative		√			
High community concern / poor public agency response			√	√	
Public agency concern / poor engagement with the community					√
High community concern / active community initiatives				√	√
Community and public agency concern / further collaborative work needed					√

Starting with the evidence

Change is based on effective planning, and good planning is based on a sound understanding of the critical factors that can trigger or block change. With such understanding, decisions can be taken to use resources to best effect. The critical factors to consider are:

- Understanding community issues and ambitions – to understand the nature of community issues and their impact on people, and have some insight into the causes of the issues and their susceptibility to change
- Understanding stakeholders and how they can be influenced – because many interests may have a 'stake' in the issue and be open or resistant to change
- Understanding the community and its capacity to achieve change – how skilled, organised and recognised is it?

We look at each of these in turn and suggest some frameworks that can assist the understanding.

Understanding community issues and ambitions

It is important that those involved in rural community development – whether as residents, development staff or service-providing agencies start with a sound and clear understanding of the nature of the issues to be addressed. Ideally, this should be done in a way that encourages all those with an interest to contribute their perspective, and reach a shared understanding of the scale and impact of the issues. There are many ways to go about establishing what community needs and issues are, including community profiling, village appraisal, and many others. Such appraisals will be helpful if they can capture local information that can be compared with regional or national averages. Beyond statistical data, it will be important to get a sense of what the community, and different interests in the community, believe to be the most important issues, and their understanding of what causes and maintains these issues. At an early stage it is be important to look widely and broadly at the condition of the community, to try to get beyond what are often expressed as the main issues into some deeper understanding of the community, its psychology, its culture and anticipated future threats as well as current strengths and weaknesses. If undertaken seriously, an attempt should be made to capture such insights from the different interests in the community, as well as from external sources, for example health, education and economic development perspectives. It will be useful to check whether any public agencies have done recent surveys or profiles, or whether local services have been inspected or audited by the government as well.

Where needs and problems are identified, an attempt should be made to find out what their impact is, on whom, and with what consequences. It should also be clear which issues are identified by the community itself, as opposed to those identified by professionals or politicians.

The Scottish Community Action Research Fund (SCARF)[4] was used by a large number of rural community groups to gather this sort of information.

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[4] http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/community-led-action-research/scarf/

A good understanding of community conditions and prospects can be recorded and used as a baseline against which future changes can be measured. It is also a very good basis for deciding how best to set about working for change, or indeed realising that you are being too ambitious or unrealistic in your expectations.

Understanding the stakeholders and how they can be influenced

As well as understanding community conditions and ambitions, it is important to have an understanding of the various people and organisations that may have an impact on the community, or an interest in community issues. Because these people and groups can be said to have a stake in what happens, they are often referred to as stakeholders, as we do here.

There are three broad types of stakeholder:
- those who stand to benefit or lose out directly as a consequence of the issue or any change – this is usually the community itself;
- those who have some control over the issue and who will need to be influenced if change is to happen – in other words public bodies, investors or landowners;
- those who may be able to assist in helping change happen – including development staff, funding bodies and perhaps some voluntary or church organisations.

Within these broad distinctions there may be several different institutions with different attitudes, and it may be that some of the resistance to change may be in the community itself, or that some institutions that hold power may equally be willing to assist the community. So it is not a hard and fast classification, but it is helpful if one then asks questions of each stakeholder. The questions are:
- What is the motivation of this stakeholder – why would it seek change or resist change?
- What interests does the stakeholder represent and how powerful are these interests?
- In what ways might they be persuaded to change their attitude and are there any aspects of their function that it might be in their interests to change?
- What is the policy and legislative framework that determines the focus of the agencies and its workers, an what might be the potential to them from being involved?
- What is the capacity of the stakeholder – does it have the power to achieve or resist change? They may be highly motivated towards change, but lack the ability to achieve it, as is often the case with community groups. Conversely a large and powerful organisation would be well placed to encourage or resist change and may be difficult to engage with. We say a bit more about capacity in the next section.
- What opportunity is there for change to take place? If an issue is already on the policy agenda, there will be good opportunities to make a case and perhaps gain funds. The issue of climate change and the Challenge Fund is a good example of this sort of opportunity. But press reports, official visits or dramatic events can all be used to present the community case and build alliances for change.

The analysis of motivation, capacity and opportunity for each stakeholder will help you think about who needs to influenced, to what end, and how best to exert influence. In some cases this will be to build the strength of existing 'allies'; while in other cases the question will be how to persuade a resistant institution to change its mind.

Understanding the community and its capacity to achieve change

The third area for investigation is the capacity of the community to work effectively for change. Building Stronger Communities (SCDC 2012) invites the community to consider four aspects of its ability to be effective. The four elements are: building organisation; building skills; building equalities; and building involvement.

Building organisation is about the development and activity of community groups and organisations and how well they work in the interests of the community.

Building skills is about ways in which groups can build the skills, knowledge and confidence of the members to enable them to be effective in achieving their aims and to fully participate in and benefit from community activity.

Building equality reflects the extent to which community and voluntary groups are inclusive, and work to build equality in their communities.

Building involvement is about the extent to which community organisations encourage local involvement and influence decision making and change.

An honest assessment of each of these factors should help the organisation to understand its strengths and weaknesses as a vehicle for change, and enable decisions to be taken on the areas of skill and capacity that may need to be improved.

In conducting the range of assessments described above, it should be noted that it is important to distinguish between assessments led by communities themselves, those led by community development professionals, and those conducted by public bodies or academic institutions. They may each have different starting points and differing purposes. In a well supported engagement process, all assessments will be shared and their implications explored with all the stakeholders and interests.

Such assessments should be used to set a baseline – to record conditions, assets, needs and deficits at the start of a process of change. This can be measured again at agreed intervals and using the same methods, in order to gain evidence about what change may have occurred and what the impact of any action may have been.

Community empowerment

In this section we explore how and why certain communities seem to be resilient, sustainable and successful, while others appear helpless in the face of decline. There are many good examples of rural communities that have taken initiative, that have established innovative projects and become well known (and much visited) in the process. What is less clear, is how these communities have managed to succeed. Is it from a strongly motivated, entrepreneurial leader or from a well-organised and representative community organisation? Is it a response to a threat or opportunity, or the product of a careful analysis of the situation of the community, its current condition and the future it can anticipate? Where innovation and change has taken place has it truly been in the interest of the whole community or for one particular section? What values have driven the change – economic, environmental, social or a combination of these? And if we can begin to answer these questions, what are the implications for practice or the lessons for other communities?

We should start with a definition of community-led change. In their Community Empowerment Action Plan the Scottish Government and CoSLA have defined community empowerment as:

"a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them." (Scottish Government 2009)[5]

This is a helpful definition in that it brings together the concepts of change, power and working together. The action plan goes on to emphasise the importance of focusing on those communities experiencing disadvantage or inequalities, for example in relation to race, disability, and those most in need of greater capacity, when prioritising and resourcing communities. This is important when we are trying to distinguish between rural community development and the broader concept of rural development. Whether the instigator of change has come from within the community, from a public body, from a company or from a charitable or voluntary organisation, the critical question is the extent to which the instigator has engaged and worked with the community to ensure that the plan is indeed community-driven rather than externally. For those agencies concerned to promote community empowerment, the resistance or disinterest in change within communities can be the most stubborn barrier.

How and why it starts
What motivates people living in rural communities to want to achieve change?
In the fieldwork we encountered examples of:
- change driven by a highly motivated and effective development worker employed by a community organisation initially established by the same worker
- change driven by a resident – in many cases an incomer
- change driven by local group recognising an opportunity and a need, with substantial community development support from the local authority

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[5] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/264771/0079288.pdf

Change may also be sparked from some external factor, for example a new policy to support community led development in specific areas, the climate challenge fund being a good current example; by some perceived threat to the stability or environment of the community, or even by 'outsiders' coming into rural areas as they see them as a suitable canvas to experiment with alternative lifestyles or economies.

Who are 'leaders' and how can they be identified

From the evidence of our field visits, our conclusion is that in most cases, rural communities – in particular disadvantaged or declining communities that have achieved sustained change have done so because of the presence of some external intervention, or because a motivated 'outsider' has moved into the community.

In relation to initiating rural community empowerment, this raises different questions depending on the type and level of leadership in place. Where change is being driven by a motivated individual or small group, the key problem is to build wider community 'buy-in' and motivation. Where there is little leadership, and where a community is losing out because of its absence, the goal of any intervention would be to encourage the emergence of community leadership. In both cases, the longer term aim would be to turn individual leadership into a sustainable community infrastructure. A critical issue for policy is therefore the training, supply and distribution of experienced development workers, whether professional or not. At present there is an uneven and probably unfair distribution of such people, with the consequence that certain communities are advantaged, while others are not.

Either way, the process of building sustainable community organisation should include the following stages:
- Exploring the issue and the need for change
- Assessing helping and hindering factors
- Engaging community and building support
- Building and presenting the argument
- Thinking and acting tactically

Here are some of the questions that could be addressed at each of the stages above.

Exploring the issue and the need for change

Here it is important to be clear what the organisation will be about. What is it that needs to change, and why does it need changing? What community, or section of the community will the work focus on, and how are they intended to benefit? Be clear why and how your organisation is relevant to them, and be able and ready to explain what benefits you think they should get.

You will need to have some confidence that there is an active commitment to the proposed organisation or project from the community on which it will focus. It is unlikely that change will be possible or valued if the people who are intended to benefit and need to be involved are not interested. If your plan is to work, you need their active interest from the start. So you will need to establish a good level of active interest and commitment.

What do you anticipate to be the impact of your plans on the community and the way it is seen? Here, your thinking needs to consider how your approach will:

- build on the interest of the people in your community and involve them in activities
- build the skills and confidence of your group and wider community members
- get more people involved and active in your community
- influence the way your organisation works
- influence the policies or practices of other organisations that affect the community
- improve your community and its image
- include everyone in your community

Assessing helping and hindering factors

You may already have carried out the assessments suggested in the previous section. If you have done so, you will now be able to consider how the different stakeholders are disposed to what you are proposing. Your aim will be to engage the fullest possible support of those stakeholders who support what you are seeking to do, while trying to identify and address the factors that may be preventing others from providing support. The more you can persuade stakeholders that your actions will assist or complement their purpose the more likely will you be to win them round.

Engaging community and building support

There is plenty of evidence in our stories from the field that success breeds success, and that the more engaged and involved the local community is, the more success there will be. So a key priority for all community organisations is to build local knowledge, encourage as wide an involvement as possible, and encourage people to take an active role in what is going on. This will demonstrate to the outside world the importance of what you aim to do, and will also demonstrate your community's capacity to play an active role in whatever is to happen.

What are the skills available to you and where is additional development required?

You should consider the skill levels of those who will be involved in your work and identify any further support and training that will be needed to be successful. Also, think about how the skills developed though the project might be transferred to others within the community.

How will your activities demonstrate an inclusive approach? Community projects should commit to supporting equal opportunities for all. Any project must therefore demonstrate that it is committed to achieving this principle in its community. Consider and plan for how you will try to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the project. This will include noting any barriers that you think particular parts of your community may experience and how you will seek to overcome them.

Building and presenting the argument

If you have worked your way through the stages suggested above you should have a clear understanding of what you need to do to next. You should have a good understanding of the issue or opportunity you are working on, you should know who would support what you plan to do; you should be reasonably confident that what you propose to do will in fact address the issue effectively, or take advantage of the opportunity. What you do with this information and analysis will largely depend on the nature of the issue or opportunity. It

may be something that can be done simply though the efforts of your group – in which case you will only need to do some planning and supporting. Often you will need to secure some funding or in-kind support from outside to help resource whatever it is you want to do. In such cases the work you have done, if well written up and presented, should be the basis of a reasonably convincing proposal for grant funding or other support. In other cases though, you may be looking for changes in the policies of public bodies or in the way they provide their services, and this can be contentious or difficult. Simply providing a well-written case will help, but you will also need to win friends and influence people.

Whichever route you are taking, you should think about who is the key audience for the project and how you will present your case to them. You should consider the form of reporting and communicating that will be used and how the community will be engaged in considering the findings and taking action in response.

Thinking and acting tactically

Tactics become important where the change you seek requires action from others, who may be resistant or opposed to taking such action. The aim should always be to get to a point where some form of negotiation is possible, and where solutions are achievable. To reach this point you should try to understand the issue or opportunity from the perspective of each of the interested parties or stakeholders. The stakeholder analysis described in the previous section will help achieve such an understanding.

To prepare yourself for such a negotiation, you should first of all re-evaluate your case and your evidence. Is it robust and convincing and could you deal with any objections that you can anticipate? Can you convince others that what you propose will benefit a wide range of people, that it will be cost-effective and that it will reach those in need of the benefit? Who 'owns' the issue or opportunity and what needs to be done to influence their thinking – either directly or indirectly? Does your case challenge or threaten established interests, and if it does how will you deal with the resistance that you can expect and turn it to your advantage?

In thinking though these questions you may well be able to find reasons for your case to be supported. For example:

- It may be something where the responsible body is not in compliance with their own policy, with health and safety, with equal opportunities or with their own performance or quality rules. If any of these are the case you would have strong ground for arguing that it would be in their interest to address your case.
- It may be that you will be able to bring to the attention of the responsible body a previously unrecognised issue or need that falls within their area of responsibility and which they would be under obligation to address
- Your proposals may be a more cost-effective or innovative way to deal with an issue of public policy concern, for example climate change, health improvement or community safety. In such cases it can often be to the advantage of the responsible body to be seen to be working innovatively and in partnership with community interests

To get an analysis of where you may be placed in relation to these questions it can be useful to conduct a 'SWOT' analysis. This is a familiar but helpful way to identify what you consider to be the Strengths and Weaknesses of your case, as well as the Opportunities there are for change, and the Threats that you can identify. Again, if you have done the assessment suggested in the previous section you should have plenty of material for a SWOT assessment. Such an assessment should help you to identify what you can realistically do yourselves, what assets and resources you have, what advice / assistance you need and whether it is it available? It should also help you think about who might support your argument - and whether they know about you and what you are trying to change.

Community planning and engagement

The second function of rural community development in our model is **effective engagement**. Community engagement is essentially the relationship between communities and the programmes and plans of the public and other agencies that provide services or development support. In many cases this service delivery or development support is provided through some form of partnership. If such partnerships are to be effective, in other words responsive, focused and collaborative, it is a role of rural community development to advise and support such partnerships or mechanisms to engage effectively with communities.

From the point of view of rural communities, a good engagement process is an effective way to raise concerns, have them explored from a variety of perspectives, and come up with appropriate solutions. From the point of view of public and other bodies, engagement brings the benefits of more innovative and targeted service solutions, more sustainable improvements and strengthened local capacity and citizenship.

Although in an earlier section we described community engagement as one of several approaches to community development we explore the approach in more detail here. This is because, whatever approach to building the capacity of the community has been adopted, and whatever has been done in the community by community effort, there normally comes a point where the development of sustainable community change requires the involvement of public, private and other agencies alongside the efforts of the community itself. This is because sustainable change almost inevitably involves change in the behaviour, policies or investment patterns of the various institutions that provide services to the community, or could support further community-driven action as complementary to their own interests.

What we mean

We suggest that the definition of community engagement in the National Standards for Community Engagement is taken as the starting point. This is the definition accepted by the Scottish Government and endorsed by a wide range of public bodies and voluntary / community organisations. The definition is:

'Developing and sustaining a working relationship between one or more public body and one or more community group, to help them both to understand and act on the needs or issues that the community experiences'.

It is important to emphasise that community engagement is thus essentially about establishing and maintaining a productive dialogue and process, and that – importantly – this should be based on the 'needs or issues that the community identifies'. It is therefore not meant to be about 'top-down' intervention, nor does it mean that communities should always have things their way. The Standards are intended to govern the relationship between public bodies and communities, but also extend to the relationship between community organisations and their constituencies – not least because if communities are to engage with public bodies they should be able to demonstrate that they are relating to their constituencies in the same way that they would expect public bodies to relate to them.

Equally, the Standards can be used by community organisations to help them engage with their community.

Although community engagement is essentially about process of dialogue and the development of workable partnership solutions, it remains the case that a good process should lead to good outcomes that will be acknowledged to have been reached in a proper way, even where not all interests are met.

Definitions and ladders of engagement

Community engagement is best understood as a type of relationship that can be placed on a continuum and related to others. The ladder of citizen participation, a simplified version of which is below, illustrates this. At the lowest rung of the ladder the relationship is manipulative, for example a consultation exercise carried out where there is no intention to change anything in light of the findings. Informing is a one-way process without dialogue, while consulting invites feedback but control over decisions rests with the initiating body. The levels of 'sharing decisions', 'sharing action' and 'supporting communities' are where engagement as defined above occurs. It is important to be aware of these definitions and how they are understood because some organisations would describe any sort of contact with service users or the community as 'engagement', where it would fail to meet the definition agreed in the Standards.

- **•supporting communities**
- **•sharing action.**   Involving
- **•sharing decisions**

- **•consulting**
- **•informing**

- **•manipulation (non-participation)**

Although community engagement has been embedded in community planning and wider policy for some years, many community and voluntary organisations have experienced barriers to becoming engaged in the decision-making process. The National Standards for Community Engagement were commissioned to encourage good practice, asking all partners to work together to ensure that:

- all the people with an interest in the focus of the engagement are identified and involved
- any barriers to such involvement are identified and overcome

- evidence is gathered on the needs and available resources, and this is used to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken
- the methods of engagement to be used are agreed and fit for purpose
- agreed and clear procedures are used to enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently
- necessary information is communicated between the participants
- there is effective work with others with an interest in the engagement
- the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants is developed actively
- the results of the engagement are fed back to the wider community and affected agencies
- the process is monitored and evaluated to ensure the engagement meets the standards and achieves its purposes

The key competences underpinning good practice in community engagement are:

- Working inclusively – effective engagement needs to ensure it is reaching out to, and involving all those actually or potentially affected by a programme or a development. Working in this way includes addressing inequalities in service delivery for particular groups, challenging discriminatory behaviour, or encouraging collaboration to promote cohesion
- Involving communities in planning services – this includes responding to community concerns, identifying issues to be addressed, agreeing priorities and targets, explaining and reflecting public policy, and encouraging communities to undertake their own planning at a local level
- Working in partnership – which includes developing multi-agency responses and strategies responding to community needs, developing partnerships that include community activists or groups, or supporting joint work between officers and community representatives
- Enabling community initiative – creating the conditions in which communities can be encouraged to design and develop their own solutions to issues, and have the resources and advice to do so. It may also involve developing an active role for communities in making public services more effective, for example through monitoring delivery, sharing premises or combining efforts.
- Developing sustainability – this builds on the other four dimensions to ensure that there is a process of learning, continuing improvement and quality. It includes:
  - Using participatory evaluation, in order that both communities and delivery agents track the impact of what they do, learn any lessons, and revise their approach accordingly.
  - Developing and sustaining leadership, and the encouragement of leadership in what can be complex partnership arrangements
  - Addressing conflicts and supporting change
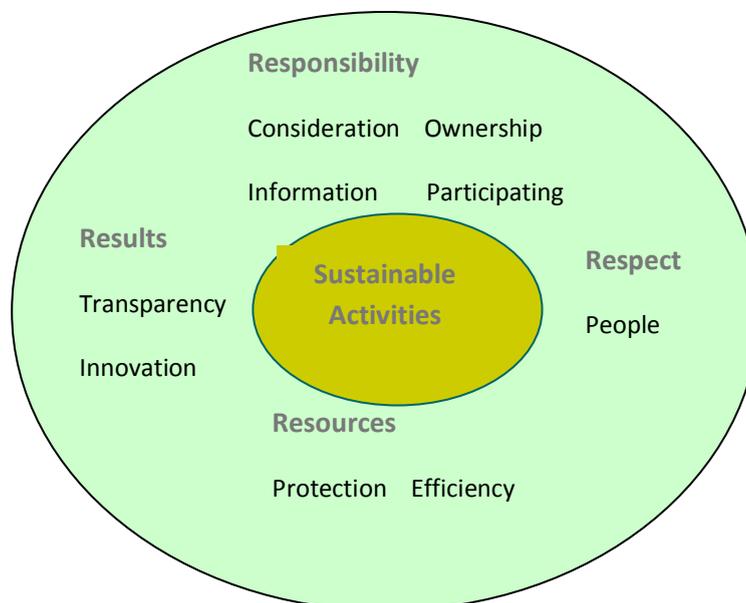 - Supporting people and organisations to learn together

The VOiCE practice tool[6] helps those planning community engagement to work their way through a series of critical questions which encourage a critical analysis of why engagement is needed, who should be involved and what outcomes are expected. It takes users through all the stages of assessment, planning, action and evaluation to help ensure that best practice is applied. All information entered into the VOiCE database is recorded and can be used as a basis for planning and evaluation, as well as a simple record of what has happened.

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[6] www.voicescotland.org.uk

Looking to the future: towards sustainability

The third function of rural community development involves supporting **sustainable solutions.** The question of sustainability is the key challenge and issue for many rural communities, in light of the economic, demographic and cultural threats they experience or anticipate. In one sense, sustainable solutions are the product of community empowerment and effective engagement, because these will help create the environment and climate within which pressures and challenges can be identified, visions and expectations clarified, and strategies for change devised and evaluated, and any necessary resources secured or sought.

Sustainable solutions, are also the product of activities and process in rural development; managing people, projects, programmes and organisations; resourcing change and evaluating and learning.

Responsibility

Consideration   Ownership

Information   Participating

Results

Sustainable Activities

Respect

Transparency

People

Innovation

Resources

Protection   Efficiency

The above sustainability model is based on work done by the London Sustainable Development Commission[7]. The model highlights the key characteristics of sustainable activities. Sustainable activities should:
- **Respect** people, places, diversity and demonstrate vibrancy.
- They should use **Resources** efficiently, with prudence, accountability, protection and recycling in mind.
- They need to show **Results** and be innovative, transparent, seek improvement, be accessible and consider well-being.
- Finally they demonstrate **Responsibility** through consideration, shared ownership, being participative and involving and thinking long term.

The field examples described in the appendix illustrate what is achievable where rural action is based on a clear understanding of community need; where there has been leadership,

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[7] London Sustainable Development Commission (2004), *Making your plans sustainable: A London Guide*, London: Greater London Authority

drive and direction; where the right partners have contributed the right supports; where it has been possible to attract the resources needed to sustain change; where there are clear, demonstrable results; where people, place and diversity are respected and where actions and processes are undertaken responsibly and inclusively.

So what can we learn about the skills and competences needed to sustain viable communities in rural areas? From our studies, from others across the UK, and across such a wide range of issues, the competences need to include:

- The ability to reach and communicate a sound understanding of the needs, issues and causes across economic, cultural, social, political and other domains.
- The ability to develop and maintain relationships with individuals, groups and partners
- The ability to envision approaches to issues and expectations that are sustainable and feasible. This is likely to involve imagination and creativity – and the idea of 'sustainability proofing' to check the practicality of proposals. There is also the need to be entrepreneurial to spot opportunities to develop sustainable solutions based on an understanding of the social, economic and physical assets of the community
- The ability to develop and promote community empowerment to enable rural communities to take action to influence decisions, manage and own assets deliver services that impact on the quality of individual and community life.
- The ability to manage projects, programmes and organisations and social enterprises
- The ability to attract, conserve and improve resources, whether human, economic, social or technological, which is at the core of sustainable development
- The ability to evaluate and learn from experience

These competences clearly relate to the achievement of the Carnegie 'vision'. For rural communities the goal of achieving sustainable community development depends on a higher order of skills in organisational development and management, which are probably best thought of as business and enterprise skills rather than community development skills. They include the following components:

- The ability to recognize opportunities, to be creative and innovative
- Competence in business planning and financial management
- Compliance with legal, regulatory and reporting requirements
- Organisational governance and development, including strategic visioning, and management of operational, financial and human resources
- The ability to attract and retain necessary resources; grants, contracts, assets, services, control and conservation
- Accountability and transparency in relationships with the community and all partners
- A commitment to improvement through investing in skills, development and relationships
- Demonstrating effectiveness and values.

Roles and skills for rural community development

It is important to understand the relationship between skills and competences, and between the skills and competences required by the different constituencies within rural community development. It may be helpful to try to distinguish what the core competences of each constituency are, while acknowledging that there is a common skill base that all constituencies need. This highlights the important distinction between a skill and a competence. Competences are relatively broad, and draw on a wide range of skills, so for example the competence in driving a car involves skills in perception, interpretation, co-ordination, and many other areas. Similarly, competence in establishing a rural community organisation requires a wide range of skills, including information gathering and assessment, communication and listening, leadership, and management.

In the following section we seek to define the core competence areas for each of the constituencies, and define where these relate to skills.

Rural community action is defined as the whole range of actions that are, or which could be taken by people living or working in rural areas to maintain or improve their economic, social, cultural and economic quality of life. It includes small scale and informal groupings as well as more established institutions. We distinguish four significant groupings of interest and contribution:
- Local leaders and community organisations
- Rural community development workers
- Intermediaries and service planners
- Policy makers and funders

In relation to the three functions of rural community development in this report, the competences can be summarised as follows:

Competences for local leaders and community organisations
Community empowerment is most effective where it is based on learning and skills, builds stronger organisations and stronger leadership, reflects and promotes the principles of equalities and integration, and seeks to establish participative and influential relationships with the wider world. The essence of rural community action can thus be seen as the vehicle for enhanced community capacity and cohesion. For rural community action to be successful local leaders and community organisations should have competence in:
- Understanding local needs, issues and relationships
- Envisioning the future and planning strategies for this
- Building and managing community organisations
- Engaging and involving community members
- Representing community interests and raising issues

In relation to effective engagement, local leaders and community organisations should be able to develop competence in:
- Shaping the understanding of needs and issues and the vision for change
- Working collaboratively with others

- Contributing to decisions on plans and programmes
- Advocating and lobbying for change
- Advising and supporting engagement with excluded groups and interests

In relation to sustainable solutions, local leaders and community organisations are likely to need competences in:
- Project design and development
- Resource attraction
- Resource management
- Continued partnership work

Such competences clearly depend on a high level of skill across a range of contexts. While it is dangerous to generalise, the evidence is that these competences are not generally found in rural areas, particularly in the more remote and disadvantaged areas. Delivery mechanisms for learning and skill development were found to be weak, and long-term planning was severely compromised by uncertainty about funding arrangements and policy shifts.

Competences for rural community development workers

This section relates to the core competences associated with the role of the rural community development worker (RCDW). This is most readily defined as the worker (or organisation with workers) who lead in enabling or facilitating the work. In other words, the RCDW:
- Supports the empowerment of geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives.
- Works to strengthen the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organisations and networks;
- Works to strengthen the capacity of institutions and agencies (public, private and non-governmental) to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities.
- Promotes the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.
- Reflects and promotes a core set of values that include human rights, social inclusion, equality and respect for diversity.

The essence of the competence of rural CDW is as a facilitator and catalyst for change. Rural CDW contributions are required in all three functions of the rural community development model – community empowerment, effective engagement and sustainable solutions.

In community empowerment the worker is expected to support the development of the capacity of communities to engage in change, and to develop sustainable solutions to community problems. In these functions, the core competence areas are:
- Supporting the emergence, development and sustainability of community groups, organisations and networks
- Facilitating the acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills and confidence among community members and organisations, and where necessary, in order that they will be better equipped to recognize and deal with community needs and issues

- Encouraging and advising community groups and organisations on issues of equality and inclusion, and on the other values and principles underpinning community development
- Supporting community-led action for change, helping groups and organizations assess needs, build their case, raise awareness and debate, and negotiate for change

In relation to community engagement, the CDW will be expected to act as the facilitator and catalyst for building strong collaborative relationships, promoting constructive dialogue, and acting as a bridge between the community and the agencies providing services or support to the community. To perform these functions the competence areas are:
- Promoting inclusive ways of working, for example by identifying and focusing attention on inequalities in service delivery for particular groups, challenging discriminatory behaviour, or encouraging collaboration to promote cohesion
- Facilitating the involvement of communities in planning services – this includes assisting the community to raise concerns, and assisting others to respond; facilitating dialogue about priorities and plans, helping explain and reflecting public policy
- Encouraging partnership working, by helping set the agenda for multi-agency responses and strategies responding to community needs, developing partnerships that include community activists or groups, or supporting joint work between officers and community representatives
- Enabling community initiative – creating the conditions in which communities can be encouraged to design and develop their own solutions to issues, and have the resources and advice to do so.
- Developing sustainability by focusing on learning for experience and encouraging changes in light of those lessons, encouraging the development of leadership in what can be complex partnership arrangements, addressing conflicts and supporting change, and supporting people and organisations to learn together

In relation to sustainable solutions, the core competences required for the CDW are:
- Creating and sustaining a reflective and learning environment in which all sections of the community can reflect on their traditions, experiences and expectations, identify strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities, and establish plans for sustainable change
- Supporting the acquisition of material, human and cultural resources, and support their deployment
- Encouraging creativity and forward thinking
- Advising on and assisting with promotional and developmental activities

The skills required of the effective community development work in a rural context are very broad, and require some familiarity with all listed skill and knowledge areas. However the overarching competence for the CDW is to enable or support others to acquire, develop and exercise this skill and knowledge.

There is a lack of consensus on the extent to which rural community development workers do in practice have the skills and competence required for these complex and demanding

roles. From a range of somewhat contradictory evidence it is perhaps possible to draw out the conclusions that:

- Rural CDW practice and training tends to emphasise the community empowerment / capacity building roles, while the roles in relation to supporting engagement and sustainable solutions are less developed
- There are issues of recruitment and retention, including difficulties in attracting good quality candidates to rural CDW posts, while conversely other posts may be occupied by the same person for a long period of time
- There is evidence that rural community development is perceived as of lower status and value than urban or regeneration-focused practice

All rural community development practice needs to acknowledge the characteristics and challenges of working with communities in rural areas, for instance:

- having to work with a large number of very small communities over a wide geographical area,
- having intermittent contact with the group,
- working with mixed groups (for example in terms of class and age),
- being a generalist where the specific issues may be highly specialist,
- managing the expectations of highly competent and experienced professional people who tend to emerge as community leaders,
- working across social, economic and environment issues

Competences for intermediaries and service planners

The term 'intermediaries and service planners' is used to cover the wide range of public and voluntary sector agencies that provide services to communities, or whose operations may affect the quality of life in communities. Some of these organisations may already adopt a community development approach to their activities, whilst others may not. However all these agencies are potentially resources to rural community development either in the way they work, or in the services they provide.

The core function relevant to this grouping is to be able to engage effectively with communities and community interests, and their secondary function, consequent to the core function, is to support certain sustainable solutions, for example by working in partnership with a community organisation, or refocusing their service in light of feedback from community interests. Intermediaries and service planners are less likely to be involved in the function of community empowerment, but may from time to time be called on to support it.

The core competences for this grouping are thus:

- Working inclusively – as with the equalities and integration dimension of empowerment, effective engagement needs to ensure it is reaching out to, and involving all those actually or potentially affected by a programme or a development. Working in this way includes addressing inequalities in service delivery for particular groups, challenging discriminatory behaviour, or encouraging collaboration to promote cohesion

- Involving communities in planning services – this includes responding to community concerns, identifying issues to be addressed, agreeing priorities and targets, explaining and reflecting public policy
- Working in partnership – which includes developing multi-agency responses and strategies responding to community needs, developing partnerships that include community activists or groups, or supporting joint work between officers and community representatives
- Enabling community initiative – creating the conditions in which communities can be encouraged to design and develop their own solutions to issues, and have the resources and advice to do so. It may also involve developing an active role for communities in making public services more effective, for example through monitoring delivery, sharing premises or combining efforts.
- Developing sustainability – this builds on the other four dimensions to ensure that there is a process of learning, continuing improvement and quality. It includes:
  - using participatory evaluation, in order that both communities and delivery agents track the impact of what they do, learn any lessons, and revise their approach accordingly.
  - Developing leadership, and the encouragement of leadership in what can be complex partnership arrangements
  - Addressing conflicts and supporting change
  - Supporting people and organisations to learn together

As before, the skills required to exercise these competences are varied, and generally call for a high level of understanding and ability. The essential skills are in the area of partnership working: in other words, ensuring that the right people are involved, that there is clarity about needs, issues and plans; that effort is co-ordinated, that links with communities are made and enhanced, that there is investment in skills and understanding, and that progress is regularly monitored and the lessons applied. These skills are applicable whether one is considering a single service, or a multi-agency partnership approach to a defined set of needs.

Some of the skills that apply in this area include:
- Policy analysis – interpreting, analysing and communicating policy
- Networking and relationship building – up and down
- Communication
- Organisation maintenance & development
- Fostering positive relations with communities
- Strategic support - improving relationships across sectors and partnership work

It is difficult to assess the general level of competence and skill among this sector. There is no doubt that in certain places there are examples of high quality, partnership-based collaborations between communities and public bodies. These will most often be found where there is a project or programme that has focused on encouraging collaboration and community engagement over development and change. In other places, intermediary bodies and public agencies still see themselves in a primarily service provision and management role, and do not understand the value of engaging with communities or the

methods by which this might be done. This area is one in which investment in development support may be particularly helpful.

Competences for policy makers and funders

Policy makers and funders have the core function as custodians and advocates of a vision or direction, which they can exercise through their ability to apply (and withdraw) investment, or set the criteria by which decisions are made. They are also able to advance particular interests or principles, and to support delivery by investing in capacity, in systems, in learning, and in intelligence in order to create an environment in which it is easier to achieve change.

In rural community development the functions of policy makers and funders can thus be seen to work across the three functional areas of community empowerment, effective engagement, and sustainable solutions. In relation to all three, the competences of policy makers and funders would include:

- Developing an understanding of overall needs and issues
- Establishing and maintaining systems to encourage dialogue and discussion with all stakeholder interests
- Communicating a vision and encouraging 'buy-in'
- Designing and operating robust resource management systems to enhance capacity, encourage collaboration, encourage the application of CD values and principles
- Advocate the needs and interests of rural community development across government and public policy interests

The skills that policy makers and funders should demonstrate include:

- personal and professional security – to be open, flexible and willing to engage
- being intelligence driven – able to identify needs and trends
- writing effective policy – not isolated from experience or from other disciplines
- brokering effectively – between the immediate and the long term
- being creative and innovative – to join up and meet challenges
- promote understanding & engagement of community in the policy process

The balance of evidence however is that there is no clear acknowledgement that policy makers or funders recognise the importance of understanding their role in supporting rural community development, or in developing their skills in working collaboratively with other stakeholders to address the issues. It is important that policy makers and funders can be persuaded to ground their programmes on a clearer understanding of rural issues and to steer their investment towards skill development and learning support.

The framework set out above indicates the areas of skill and competence that should be in place across the range of relevant actors in rural community development. It is developed from a community development perspective, as community development input is the key to encouraging rural communities to work together to improve their circumstances.

Appendix: Rural community development in practice

In preparing this report we visited eight rural community organisations and explored with staff and volunteers their experience of community development, and the skills and competences required. In this appendix we describe the achievements of three of these organisations, along with their views of what factors assist, and what ones hinder effective community development in rural areas. Please note that the fieldwork was conducted in 2008 so the information while correct at that time may no longer reflect the position today.

Ormlie: a disadvantaged community in a rural setting

Ormlie Community Association has become the hub for community development in this estate on the edge of Thurso. It is a good example of what can be achieved in a disadvantaged setting through a well thought-through programme of community development, but also provides a clear illustration of what such communities are up against and how in the final analysis, some form of intervention may always be required to maintain progress.

There is 'huge stigmatisation' in Ormlie. Initially populated by incoming workers for Dounreay, the original families moved out and up and were gradually replaced with other families - mainly a settled traveller population from another part of the town. The original residents are probably now in a minority. There will always be vulnerable people who need support. Alcohol is a big problem and children 7-14 a main focus for tackling underage drinking. Thurso has a very mixed population with huge impact of Dounreay, the nuclear power station nearby.

Since its establishment in 1997 the community association has been successful in making dramatic changes to the look of the area, with safe streets, innovative play areas and arts and sculpture. It has also managed to lift the area from within the worst 15% of data zones in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation to being at the 26th percentile – in other words 26% of data zones in Scotland are now 'worse' than Ormlie, whereas in the past less than 15% were in this position. Working with young people has been a major focus of the association's concern. A serious attempt was made to bring new assets into community ownership, in the form of a renewable energy project but in the event this did not succeed. The association was runner-up in the BURA awards for community development in 1996.

Despite all this, the critical core work of the association is making time for people, giving them attention and praise, and helping them into jobs. A personal example is a former prisoner referred to the association through social work, whose is now doing small jobs across the community and whose life has turned round. The importance of community association as a place where people aren't judged and where confidences are not divulged is paramount.

To get to this point required particular skills and qualities that have been challenging to acquire and retain. Staff appointed in the early days did not have the right experience or approach despite being local, and the community association lacked a clear focus despite its energy. It tended to be opportunistic.

Community development skills are recognised to be fundamental to building the community – the ability to work at all levels across the community and staff. But it can be hard to identify, recruit and retain people with such skills, suggesting that community organisations need the good skills in that human relations and recruitment that are critical to getting people with good community development understanding and approach.

The view of the association is that community engagement is not done effectively by most public bodies – and is often seen as onerous by Council officers. Community engagement is critical to community gain and quality of life, yet statutory bodies don't really understand how to deal with communities and vice-versa. The [National Standards for Community Engagement](#) are helpful but not applied enough, not used in a structured way, or not at all. Skills in public bodies of how to deal with communities are critical.

The factors that are seen to have contributed to the success of the association are:
- establishing trust, good working relationships, and being open and honest
- getting in early – being aware of opportunities and ready to exploit them
- being energetic and informed
- having a committed and persistent chair
- strong leadership and a driver is crucial, whether from a worker or a local person

A critical question is where such drive, energy and leadership can be found. In Ormlie, local people have built skills and confidence but not to the extent that they could confidently run things, co-ordinate and organize. A driver or leader is needed, and may well need to come in from outside. This raises important questions about the supply of such people, the training they receive, and their willingness to work at community level when their skills could well command much greater reward in more conventional settings.

Looking to the future, the challenges for Ormlie Community Association reflect these ideas. The first challenge is recruiting skilled staff. Community members in a disadvantaged community such as this do not generally have developmental skills although they clearly have skills in many other areas. The second challenge is sustaining the funding. The association could potentially deliver some services on behalf of the council but this would depend on the council taking a view that this would be the most effective way to deliver public services, and there would be a danger that this would take the association away from its developmental mission into a servicing function. A more interesting possibility is raised by thinking about a social accounting perspective – what would be the consequences if the project was not there? If a clear understanding could be reached of the savings to the public purse in health, care, safety and environmental spend through the work of the association, some longer term funding might be negotiable. But this is a large intellectual challenge as well as a political one.

The question of sustainability is also interesting from the perspective of the association. For them, sustainability is really about sustaining people's lives; providing support, a decent environment, recognition and self-respect. This is an important challenge to those who see sustainability simply in economic terms, or as an environmental issue.

Caithness Partnership

In remote rural areas many services and supports that would normally be the responsibility of the local authority or other public bodies are often developed and managed through the voluntary sector. The Caithness partnership brings together and supports a number of voluntary organisations that provide such services, but is finding that its ability to do this is threatened by an array of forces including centralisation, cutbacks in funding and support services from public bodies, and a general decline in community capacity.

As an example, the rural transport scheme is important in connecting remote communities to important services and supports. It is mainly run by volunteers and was formerly supported by the local authority. Now it is expected to be 'sustainable', in other words self-funding, as the relevant Scottish Government transport funds have been devolved to councils and are no longer ringfenced, which has meant that the funds have gone elsewhere. In the case of the rural transport scheme, the real issue not the sustainability of the service itself, but its function as a key aspect of the sustainability of fragile communities that might otherwise go under. Because of geographical and political marginalisation, there is a lack of voice or influence over such decisions and the edge of all budgets tends to get trimmed. Fragility is caused by withdrawal of government funding and of government funded services such as coastguard, lighthouse staff etc.

In such circumstances the role of the community and voluntary sector can be highly significant, but it requires support that may be difficult to access. It was noted that the voluntary sector contributes more to the local economy than other sectors. There is a vibrant first level voluntary sector in Caithness: 700 local groups in a population of 20,000 and 28 village halls running all sorts of events, but for many there is an emerging bureaucratic 'nightmare' caused by OSCR, compliance, health and safety and other conditions. To run a social event now costs £300 for a license and somebody is required to spend a day training in compliance.

Setting up businesses and jobs locally is important – also social enterprises. There is a lack of confidence – people need ideas and business heads, and more often than not, the two are different. They also need the ability to get community support around initiatives. Confidence is needed to take risks and skills are needed to be able to respond to officials. Not much can be achieved without engagement at some level. Community leaders and advocates are found in most communities but sustaining it is a problem – fewer people are doing more and more. But the idea of 'leadership' would put people off as a training initiative: it would be better to call it 'sustaining rural communities'.

The indigenous population is declining and young people leave – older people and non-indigenous people remain and the non-indigenous ones often leave before long. Tourism mainly involves elderly people, while crofting has declined. One community response is to identify the right people at a young age and get them involved. For example the chair of one community council is 25. Community work needed to do this: work with young people and there is a stronger chance they will come back. Working on local skills, passion and pride is particularly important.

The attitude of public bodies to community and voluntary activity seems to have changed. People seem demoralised and decisions are more centralised. Community development support is poor, although communities need such support. People seem to have come in from different teams with no understanding of how to work with communities. Big budget, high profile projects drive the agenda, not local people and their needs.

Communities have lots of skills but they are not always applied. To become more sustainable the view is that communities need:
- Good information
- Public bodies being trained in rural community development
- Attitudes are a key barrier
- Control of assets and resources

In general, the organisations involved in the discussion identified centralisation as a core issue. Everything is said to be Inverness focused and attitudes have got worse.

Strathfillan

Strathfillan is located at the northern end of Loch Lomond, and it includes the two small villages of Crianlarich and Tyndrum. It forms the north-western boundary of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and there is a local population of 385.

Strathfillan Community Development Trust was established in 1997 after a detailed community consultation as to vision and priorities. Although the Community Council was very active, because of its constitutional status it was unable to tackle local problems such as the lack of affordable housing directly as a provider. It was unable to apply for funding to get projects off the ground. By becoming a charitable company limited by guarantee the Trust successfully won funding for a variety of projects to the value of around £950,000. This enabled the Trust to take forward several projects that help ensure the viability and sustainability of the community. Examples include:

- Crianlarich Railway Houses: four ex-British rail houses purchased, renovated using local labour, and rented out using the Trust's own allocation policy.
- Community Woodlands: a 4 hectare site planted by children and families and; a 100 hectare extension adjoining Caledonian Forest remnant, planted using contractors.
- Tyndrum Play Park: designed and funded locally, now managed by Council.
- Breadalbane Virtual Learning Centre: joint mobile IT and learning project with neighbouring communities in Breadalbane area of National Park. It provides access to broadband in Tyndrum Hall, and runs regular internet cafes mostly used by migrant labour. The project owns laptops and printers, and runs classes in primary schools and village halls in partnership with the council and colleges.
- Lunch Club: Helped volunteers set up senior citizens' monthly Lunch Club. Trust provides treasurer and dish-washer.
- Youth Group: Instrumental in re-starting Youth Club after three years of nothing for young people. The club now has in excess of 40 members from age 8 to 18.
- Crianlarich "Pretty Up": Grass cutting, bulb planting and environmental improvements to Crianlarich. Working alongside the National Park volunteers, local residents have been giving their time to clearing and opening up the car park in

Crianlarich. Flower tubs have been sited in the village making a much improved visual impact.

- Tyndrum Kickaround: Working with local families and Stirling Council the Trust has been able to provide a safe kickaround pitch for the local children. This has allowed the Primary school to play team games outdoors and helped new teams to be formed locally.

The group has needed a high level of business and land management skills which fortunately are available within the community. Where specialist skills and knowledge was required it was brought in. As time has passed local people acquired skills and the need to bring in specialists decreased.

The biggest challenges the Trust has faced have been to do with bureaucracy. It was a big effort required to get approval under the Woodland Grant Scheme for the community woodlands. The failure to attract investment in the increasingly competitive grant market and slow progress with leases and approvals required.

Each agency seems to have its own objectives, way of working and timescale of decision making.

The main motivation and biggest issue was housing. They wanted to give people who had grown up in the village the opportunity to stay and not have to move away just because of the need to find affordable housing or jobs. They also wanted to increase leisure and recreational opportunities for visitors and locals, boost the local economy, improve the natural and physical environment and making the area more attractive.

General lessons from the project, as identified by the Trust include:

- Democracy - the need to be accountable and to have credibility and legitimacy
- Decisions - decide and agree what you are trying to achieve as a community
- Delegation - in order to carry the work forward on a broad front and not rely upon one or two individuals
- Dedication - you've got to have a passion for it
- Determination - provides motivation to overcome obstacles
- Demonstration - you need to be seen to be getting somewhere- 'scalps on the belt'

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