

# **Community capacity-building: Definitions, scope, measurements and critiques**

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## **1: Introduction: the nature of ‘community’**

The term ‘community capacity-building’ only entered into the lexicon of policy-making a very few years ago. Like all terms associated with the much-abused term ‘community’ it has been used – or misused – by a very wide range of policy and political interests. In this paper, I aim to try and offer a clear understanding of what it does and does not mean and what its aims are. I will be focusing on the experience of more developed countries but will draw in evidence from developing countries where it may be of relevance. I have had to rely on secondary sources without being able to evaluate the validity of claims made.

First, however, we have to address some of the contextual language associated with community capacity-building (CCB). We need first to be clear about the term ‘community’. This is to be found everywhere in the language of policy and politics, particularly where politicians wish to engender a sense of wellbeing, but it remains a term with little clarity to it. The American sociologist Hillery (1964) examined the literature almost fifty years ago and found several hundred meanings for the word. Margaret Stacey wrote – at about the same time – a very influential paper entitled ‘the Myth of Community’ in which she challenged the notion that there might be an entity which sociologists could recognise as a ‘community’. More mundanely, a writer on community development in the early 1980s viewed the-then enthusiasm within many national governments for the word ‘community’ as a cynical and superficial gloss on policy programmes, describing community as a ‘spray-on additive’: certainly, its usage within very many policy programmes – in community safety, community policing, community health, community education, and so on, suggests that governments hope it will come to be associated with such comfortable, uncontentious notions as motherhood and apple pie.

I am writing from the perspective of one who has been very active in the field of community development for many years – a field which relates, as we shall see, very closely to that of CCB - and therefore I define the term community in this context. For me, then, it has three basic meanings: first it may refer to a *geographical community*, one whose boundaries lends itself to the practice of community development (which I discuss below). We talk here of people living within a fairly well-defined physical space. This space is, for example, a discrete housing development, a neighbourhood, a rural village or a refugee camp. Although we talk of the European Community, which is indeed physically bounded (despite the fact that its boundaries have steadily grown over the past twenty years), the EU is in reality an economic or political community and not one which would lend itself to the practice of community development. Community development is practiced within it although the nature of that practice may well differ from one national jurisdiction to another. Perhaps the most unhelpful use of the term community is in the phrase ‘the international community’ which is a political construct of dubious validity since it refers simply to an aggregation of some

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(powerful) states which have a particular ideological interest in appearing, at times, to act together: currently it appears most commonly to be a consortium of those who support the so-called 'war on terror' or the actions of the IMF and its sister organisations.

Community development workers from both North and South however, came to recognise in the 1960s and 1970s that seeing 'community' simply as a geographical entity did not adequately deal with the reality of conflict – or simply tensions between different interests – within geographical communities. (Craig 1989) These tensions might take the form of religious or ethnic conflict, disagreements based on class or age, or the need for some groups to assert their own specific needs based perhaps on sexuality, gender, ethnicity or disability. Community may incorporate diversity and this diversity may generate conflicts. The second cross-cutting form of community is thus a *community of identity*: within and between geographical communities there might be a wide range of communities of identity. Looking at the example of Northern Ireland or Bosnia for example, we can see geographical communities fractured by different interests where religious conflict was a major fault line but where gender – in the form of women's groups in Northern Ireland for example – played an important role in striving for peace across the so-called (geographical) peace line.

Thirdly, community development workers have often found themselves engaged in relatively short-term work, focused on particular issues such as improving housing conditions, improving road safety at school crossings, or protecting aspects of the environment such campaigns around river or air pollution. Groups which form around these kinds of issues may be quite ephemeral and fade away again after a campaign has been successful. These constitute *issue-based communities*. These are the three major understandings of community with which community development workers now work.

There are other definitions of community which are less relevant to this paper; for example Plant's (2004) non-detachable but positive evaluative meaning that accompanies references to particular groups: for example the 'community' of scholars.

## **2: The practice of community development**

Again, as with the term 'community' this term has been much used to cover a range of differing understandings of practice and outcome. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, many governments and international organisations re-discovered community development (or social development as it is often referred to in the South). Thus the World Bank viewed community participation (promoted by community development) as a means for ensuring that Third World Development projects 'reached the poorest in the most efficient and cost-effective way, sharing costs as well as benefits, through the promotion of self-help'. (Craig and Mayo 1995) World Bank programmes, better known for fiscal conservatism than for political and social risk-taking have frequently led, however, to the undermining of local community social and economic structures whilst at the same time appearing to advocate the importance of 'community'. This is but one example of the confusion which surrounds this term. The United Nations Development Programme, a few years later, commented in its 1993 Report (UNDP 1993) that it had 'people's participation as its special focus. [It] is becoming the central issue of our time'. (Craig and Mayo 1995) In reality, some at least of these international and national agencies have given scant attention to issues of social justice, with respecting the dignity and humanity of the poorest, with their right to participate in decisions which affect them or with mutuality and equality: all principles which underpin the philosophy and practice of social and community development.

The most wide-ranging recent definition of community development, as a practice, was that agreed at the conference convened in Budapest in April 2004 by the International Association for Community Development, in association with the Combined European Bureau for Social Development and the Hungarian Association for Community Development. This Budapest

Declaration, as it is now known, is significant because it was drawn together by delegates from more than thirty countries, mostly from North, South, East, West and Central Europe but also from Asia, Africa and North America. It has since been endorsed both by the European Commission and the Council of Europe as in accord with their views on the role of community development. A similar Declaration was agreed by delegates from a further thirty-plus countries from Africa at Yaounde, Cameroon, in April 2005.<sup>2</sup>

The Budapest Declaration defines community development in the following way:

Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organisations and networks; and 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. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. It has a set of core values/social principles covering human rights, social inclusion, equality and respect for diversity; and a specific skills and knowledge base.

The Budapest Declaration incorporated a programme of demands made of local, regional and national governments, included as an Annexe to this paper. It demonstrates the many issues with which community development may be concerned in differing contexts. The context is important, however: to serve the interests of local communities, community development must incorporate the ability to be critical of government, of established policy and political contexts. Government 'community development programmes' often do not allow this political space and the programmes are not really *community* development programmes. Additionally, as Development Aid organisation Oxfam notes (2004), although 'bottom-up' community development came from the 'realisation that development decisions made by professionals and those in power have not really worked, often misunderstanding or oversimplifying issues ... and so devising inappropriate solutions' the use of community-led development can also be flawed by an assumption that 'communities are homogeneous and work automatically towards the common good.' Much community-led development still 'ignores diversity issues within a community and many community management structures over-represent the dominant elite'.

Community development is thus a method, a practice which involves a set of skills and a knowledge base, but also has a strong value base. It should privilege the role of ordinary communities themselves in identifying and organising to meet their needs. Through this approach to social change, ordinary people – and particularly the most powerless and deprived – should be offered the real basis for their empowerment. Community development is also a goal: this is self-evidently the development of communities or, as it is now fashionable to describe it, building the capacity of communities. This leads us to the issue of community capacity-building, CCB, itself.

### **3: Community capacity-building: scope and definitions**

The earliest sustained and explicit references I can find to capacity-building in the literature date from the early 1990s, from the work of UNCED (1992), Agenda 21 and the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNDP 1991), although some commentators have claimed its origins lie within Europe (KirkleesMC 2004). The UNDP definition focused on the role of the UN itself in supporting capacity-building. As one commentator suggested,

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<sup>2</sup> The text of the Yaoundé Declaration is available at [www.iacdglobal.org](http://www.iacdglobal.org); it has been remitted to the African Union.

(McGinty 2002) this was then seen as to do with ‘building capacity for the formulation of plans and strategies in support of sustainable development in areas such as health, industry, education, the environment and human settlements.’ The original UNDP definition was constructed in the context of water sector capacity building and another contemporary commentator talked about it as ‘building the capacity of cities and urban areas to handle their environments,’ covering ‘human resource development, organisational development and institutional and legal framework development.’ (Srinivas 2005)<sup>3</sup> UNCED (1992) suggested that capacity-building ‘encompasses the country’s human, scientific, technological, organizational, institutional and resource capabilities’. As McGinty later argued, however, ‘the acknowledgment that the UN needed better capacity in its interface with communities was the point at which the discussion and models of community capacity-building for provider organizations and government shifted to a more participative mode’ and, almost in passing, the links with community development acknowledged. Capacity-building slid at this point in the policy language towards community capacity-building.

The UN (1996) defined CCB thus:

The process and means through which national governments and local communities develop the necessary skills and expertise to manage their environment and natural resources in a sustainable manner within their daily activities. The main concepts behind this concept are the following:

- Strengthening people’s capacity to achieve sustainable livelihoods;
- A cross-sector multidisciplinary approach to planning and implementation [which presages the current emphasis on partnership working - see below];
- Emphasis on organisational and technological change and innovation;
- Emphasis on the need to build social capital through experimentation and learning; and
- Emphasis on developing the skills and performance of both individuals and institutions.

In Europe, the first major allusion to CCB came with a report to the European Commission (EC 1996) regarding strategies for community economic development in areas of ‘low economic activity whose members have lost the ability to compete in the labour market’. CCB then became a precondition for community economic development. Banks and Shenton (2001) argue that the approach in the North initially relied heavily on US experience, following the Community Investment Act which facilitated access by community-based organisations to advice and training in ‘the market’. This US experience focused, it appears, more on the provision of business skills to individuals. It was also, they suggest, influenced by the development literature where (often) top-down project work was increasingly replaced by a recognition of the need to ‘strengthen people’s capacity to determine their own values and priorities and organise themselves to act on this.’ (Eade and Williams 1996)

From these confused origins, the concept has been adopted in a wide variety of national and policy contexts and we can now review some of the more important of these within which it has come to be used. It is critically important however to distinguish between these early references to ‘capacity-building’ which were used then, and have continued to be, as concerned with building the strengths and capacities of *organisations* (often, but not always, those which worked with ‘communities’) and the more specific notion of ‘community capacity-building’, that is building the capacity of *communities* themselves. The latter is the focus of this paper although boundaries continue to be blurred: thus, building the capacity of organisations within deprived communities is seen to be part of community capacity-building. For example, Ahmed *et al.* (2004) in talking about capacity building for faith communities as part of regeneration, define it as to ‘strengthen groups’ organisational capabilities to enable them to sustain themselves in order to play a fuller part in civil society and community cohesion and engage more fully with public authorities.’ Examples of the use of the term capacity-building are common

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<sup>3</sup> More recently, a paper has described a forest as the focus for a community capacity building initiative: see Morris, J. and Urry, J. (2005) *Growing places*, Lancaster: University of Lancaster.

in the development literature from both North and South. For example INTRAC, a development aid consultancy has published papers on mechanisms for 'building capacity to mainstream HIV/AIDs internally' (i.e. in Malawian development non-governmental organisations - NGOs) (James and CABUNGO 2005) and on capacity building in the NGO sector in Spain (Hursey 2005) as well as an early account of impact assessment of *organisational* capacity building. (Hailey *et al.* 2005) This again reminds us of the importance of the value base of CB, CCB and community development: 'to effectively assess the impact of capacity building .... it is necessary to reach some consensus about the wider process and purpose of capacity building.'

By 2001, the use of the term CCB had become widespread within many Northern countries, so much so that it had become the target of sceptical humour. At one conference of UK activists, it was described as 'developing local skills in a way that ensures people are able to know what is missing' (Baker 1998) and another writer likened it to public participation, defined by Arnstein as like eating spinach, because 'ultimately it is good for you.' (Beazley *et al.* 2004) The UK government nevertheless regarded it as a 'Key Idea'. (SEU 2000) but as Stoker and Bottom (2004) noted, 'with every new policy area [and New Labour introduced hundreds], there is a new jargon to be invented and learnt ... this perspective applies with particular force in the area of community capacity building'. Their analysis of the 'problem' leading to the need for community capacity-building included 'a lack of formal engagement in politics, lack of capacity to engage in institutions of democracy, reflecting social exclusion, lack of basic infrastructure to support community life, and the need to support individuals so that they can become full members of society.' (*Ibid.*) By 2000, a UK research report described CCB as 'the New Holy Grail' (Duncan and Thomas 2000); this noted that the UK government's major national regeneration programme contained more than 3000 separate (community) capacity building initiatives. The increasing use of the term raised more questions than it answered, however, and indeed one commentator noted in 2004 that 'any mention of civil society seems to include the term "capacity building". But this term has come to convey such a range of meanings that it may increase confusion rather than clarity, leading some in the development field to suggest it should be dropped altogether. However, an examination of the broad ideas and activities described as "capacity building" reveals that they are essential in eliminating poverty' ([www.developments.org.uk/data/14/ms\\_capacity.htm](http://www.developments.org.uk/data/14/ms_capacity.htm))

The key point here is again about values: that is, if the use of the term is confusing, it is important to uncover what the values are which drive a community capacity-building programme, just as it is with community development. And as with community development, the policy context is critically important: for example, in the UK, CCB has become clearly very closely linked with debates about community development whereas in the USA, CCB is much more strongly associated with management literature in both government and non-government arenas. For example, the US Improving Philanthropy Project has published a major study entitled 'The Capacity Building Challenge' (Foundation Center 2004) on how to improve the effectiveness of 'non-profits' (i.e. NGOs).

The confusion in the UK led to a major review of existing research evidence. (Chapman and Kirk 2001) More recently, a study covering six neighbourhoods endeavoured to establish 'who are the capacity-builders'? (Humm 2005) It addressed the questions of whether CCB and community development were the same thing but although, as with others, it concludes that community development might be seen as a slightly wider term incorporating CCB within it, the 'capacity-builders' responsible for CCB were, in most important sense, generic community development workers. The UK Charity Commission, which regulates the activity of charities, decided shortly after – and reflecting increased interest in the term over the previous few years - to include 'community capacity-building' in its very limited list of charitable aims (education and the relief of poverty were the other two, these dating from more than a hundred years ago): the importance of these aims are that they entitle organisations holding them as their legal objectives to a range of taxation benefits. The Charity Commission defined communities both in terms of geography or interest, noted that they could be overseas as well as in the UK but they were to be limited to socially and

economically disadvantaged communities. The Commission finally defined CCB (Charity Commission 2000) as

Developing the capacity and skills of the members of a community in such a way that they are better able to identify and help meet their needs and to participate more fully in society.

This is extraordinarily close to – if rather shorter than – the definition of community development above. It is the case that the UK Charity Commission debated for some time as to whether to use the term community development instead of CCB. What this might then mean for local community members was described generally as ‘empowerment’ but specifically this might involve:

- Equipping people with skills and competencies which they would not otherwise have;
- Realising existing skills and developing potential;
- Promoting people’s increased self-confidence;
- Promoting people’s ability to take responsibility for identifying and meeting their own and other people’s needs; and
- In consequence encouraging people to become involved in their community and wider society in a fuller way.

This definition was taken to cover all kinds of contexts and communities. A few years later, the UK government department concerned with rural affairs published a report (DEFRA 2003) on ‘community capacity building and voluntary sector infrastructure in rural England’. This argued that ‘rural is different’ in terms of the needs of communities and ways in which these needs might be met because of dispersion of population, [in]accessibility of services, small communities, high costs of delivering services and higher levels of self-help and community delivery of services. Interestingly, however, the report does not define CCB except where it points out that, to help build organisational capacity – that is, voluntary sector infrastructure to support smaller communities and community organisations – rural areas need ‘generic community capacity building workers – i.e. long-term community development workers.’ This report saw the outcome of CCB as leading to strengthened communities, increased levels of volunteering, targeting social exclusion and greater community involvement in local service delivery. The perspective of improving service delivery has found its way more generally into the language of UK local government. For example, one Scottish local authority suggests that CCB aims to support communities to ‘influence decision making and service delivery; and provide and manage services to meet community needs.’ (East Lothian 2004)

This last view should be seen within the context of a more widespread debate about the motives behind the growing emphasis in government – in the UK and more widely - to using the voluntary and community sectors<sup>4</sup> to deliver public services, which, many critics have argued, is essentially about providing such services ‘on the cheap’. (Craig *et al.* 2005) The requirement for voluntary and community sector organisations to build their organisational capacity in order ‘to expand their role in the provision of public services’ (Cairns *et al.* 2005) both brings us back to the idea of capacity building as a technology of organisational management but also to the latent conflict between the goals of community organisations for themselves and the goals of government for such organisations.

The former Home Secretary, David Blunkett (2002), whose department was one of the main UK government players promoting CCB, himself had no time for the niceties of definition: ‘building capacity – when I was a lad we used to call it community development!’. His department

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<sup>4</sup> In the UK a distinction is made between voluntary organisations which are non-statutory organisations, generally funded by a mix of grants from the state and other, charitable, sources and typically having a number of paid staff; and community organisations which are usually representative bodies for particular communities, usually without external funding or paid staff.

described 'building the capacity of both individuals and groups within communities as central to the process of civil renewal'. The Home Office, in its review of 'civil renewal' ('a review of government support for community capacity-building and proposals for change') defined CCB as:

Activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills and abilities of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their communities.

This accords well with the Charity Commission's definition, in that it focuses on the importance of participation, community development and the strengthening of skills and abilities. The review of civil renewal which is featured also within the Home Office's Crime Reduction Strategy, suggests that CCB should be based on the values of social justice, participation, equality, learning, co-operation and environmental justice, the broad value base in fact which is generally accepted to underpin the practice of community development. Within the UK voluntary sector, there are also examples of identity-based CCB initiatives: for example, the Hindu Forum of Britain, the largest Hindu umbrella organisation ([www.hinduforum.org](http://www.hinduforum.org)), has a CCB committee but this actually focuses on strengthening the organisational base of the Forum and its member affiliates rather than Hindu communities more widely; this raises a common tension, reflected in the discussion below which is the inappropriate identification of organisations providing services, including what are described as CCB services, to communities, with the needs and aspirations of those communities themselves.

A major review of community involvement in urban policy including regeneration, (Chanan 2003) was also conducted for the government's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This equated 'involvement' with 'participation' (in public decision-making, in general community activity, and in the provision of services by community and voluntary organisations), and noted the key role played by community development in creating and sustaining involvement but made no mention – in more than 100 pages of analysis – of the concept of CCB. Clearly, in the UK at least, CCB has come to mean different things to different government departments, another example of the linguistic and ideological confusion surrounding these terms.

In Canada, a similar definition offered by the Institute of Public Administration in the context of rural development, is that community capacity is 'the combined influence of a community's commitment, resources and skills that can be deployed to build on community strengths and address problems and opportunities'. (Bruce 2003) CCB is thus:

Any activities which the community undertakes (on its own or with the help of others) to improve or build its own collective commitment, resources and skills.

This definition of capacity incorporates information, knowledge, skills, resources, processes and 'how-to's'. Human Resources Development Canada has developed both a toolkit and a framework for facilitated workshops on understanding CCB. (LMLDU 2000). In Canada, the process of 'strengthening communities' is often described as establishing 'resilient' communities (CCCE 2000).

In Australia, the term CCB has been adopted as enthusiastically both by statutory and voluntary interests. The State of Victoria has a Department of Community Activities covering a wide range of policy initiatives under the umbrella of CCB ([www.dvc.vic.gov.au](http://www.dvc.vic.gov.au)) An explanatory comment from the Stronger Families Learning Exchange notes that 'community capacity-building has become a central objective in a wide range of public policies and programmes in

Australia. Most analysts and practitioners in the human services field would count this as a positive development despite the fact that the concept of “community capacity” is seldom precisely defined in

... [and] measures to indicate whether or not it has been “built” are only in the developmental stage.’ (Hounslow 2002) Various definitions are offered here from the Australian experience which cover, for example:

- The ability of a community to develop, implement and sustain actions which allow it to exert greater control over its physical, social, economic and cultural environments;
- The ability of individuals, organisations and communities to manage their own affairs and to work collectively to foster and sustain positive change.

In the field of health promotion in Australia, CCB is, however, associated officially with building infrastructure, building partnerships and organisational environments, and building problem-solving capability in communities and systems. (Hawe *et al.* 2000) Mission Australia, a Christian faith-based agency, suggests in a wide-ranging review of the term in Australia (2004), that it covers, at the Federal level, community economic development, community business partnerships, social entrepreneurs [another jargon word: these used to be called community leaders], and fostering micro-businesses. Helpfully, it reminds the reader to distinguish between ‘genuine community ownership of organisations’ as opposed to seeing CCB as a means of ‘growing the organisation’.

Experience from elsewhere has not been much more helpful either in distinguishing CCB from community development, or in dealing with a continuing confusion in the use of the term. In New Zealand, for example, a high profile national initiative in CCB focuses on the mechanism of partnership working (see below) between communities and local and central government; it is recognised locally as CCB but talks instead of ‘strengthening communities’ ([www.waitakere.govt.nz/ourpar/strengthcomm.asp](http://www.waitakere.govt.nz/ourpar/strengthcomm.asp)) In a study of local NGOs in Northern England (Banks and Shenton 2001), many respondents said they failed to see any difference between the terms ‘community development’ and ‘CCB’, although the authors suggested that it might be possible to see CCB as a more narrow feature of a broader community development process. This understanding is however inverted in the work of Allavida, ([www.allavida.org](http://www.allavida.org), see also [nicucuta@terrasat.ro](mailto:nicucuta@terrasat.ro)), a development NGO working in East and Central Europe. Here, its community capacity-building programme incorporates not only community development but also individual and group empowerment, avoiding or overcoming dependency, networking and outreach, individual and organisational development and building an inclusive civil society. CCB is taken here to mean the wider concept but this framework tends in any case to mix methods and goals. This linguistic confusion is similar to that in the use of the term community development, in that CCB, as we have noted, does not always seem to be concerned in reality with working directly with deprived populations themselves but is focused on organisational management and development. For example, the State of Virginia, USA has an Office of Community Capacity Building ([www.dhcd.virginia.gov/cd/occb](http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/cd/occb)) within the Department of Housing and Community Development which describes its role as providing ‘capacity building assistance to Virginia’s community development and housing partners’, i.e. to organisations that serve deprived areas rather than the deprived populations themselves. Its goal is said to be ‘to increase the capacity of organisations to improve their communities’ without any indication of whether these organisations are owned by their ‘communities’ (which are also left undefined). The kinds of assistance offered include organisational assessment, training, technical assistance and core operating grants – to organisations. This continues the confusion about the term community: here these organisations are identified closely, in the official view, with their ‘communities’ i.e. presumably the communities to which they offer services. Seen from the vantage point of local residents of deprived communities, these formal organisations may not be seen as closely identified with their needs nor do local residents appear to exercise control over their



programmes. In short, this appears to be a classic case of a ‘top-down’ instance of CCB (or community development) posing as a ‘bottom-up’ form.

An interesting example of a CCB programme based around an issue rather than a geographical community is the San Francisco Tobacco Free project ([www.sftfc.globalink.org/capacity.html](http://www.sftfc.globalink.org/capacity.html)). This addresses the problems of addressing smoking also through top-down initiatives (such as changing individual behaviour) by calling for the need to ‘mobilize community members and agencies to change environmental factors’ (such as tobacco advertising, promotion and illegal access to tobacco by minors). The process of community capacity building is, however, ‘asset based and builds on the strengths or capacity of a community to create change from within and mobilize community members and agencies ...’ It describes a series of steps, familiar to community development workers, including choosing the area of focus, undertaking a community diagnosis, selecting an action and training participants (developing skills, increasing knowledge, building capacity). A similar approach is taken in New Zealand by the Alcohol and Public Health Research Unit in its work with the indigenous Maori population in order to reduce some of the effects of the greater exposure of Maori people to alcohol-related crime such as drink-driving (Casswell 2001). This is an example of working with a community defined by both identity and interest.

Some local governments provide support for very specific forms of CCB. For example, the Borough Council of NewtownAbbey in Northern Ireland runs training courses and workshops for community groups in the Borough to address the question of how to run events. This was part of a wider programme to enable groups and individuals ‘to play a fuller and more active role in the economic and social development of their Borough’ in order to ‘provide skills and opportunities’ to enable local residents and groups to ‘take increased ownership of projects and programmes’ ([www.newtownabbey.gov.uk/community/communityservices/capacitybuilding.html](http://www.newtownabbey.gov.uk/community/communityservices/capacitybuilding.html)).

There are a few examples of higher education institutions offering CCB training and education as such (although there are many offering community development courses). In the Central and Eastern European context, the Development School ([info@development-school.org](mailto:info@development-school.org)) provides an accredited Master’s degree in Social Development which includes analysis and supported practice in the field of ‘capacity for development and acting in the social world’. In South Africa, UNISA, ([www.unisa.za.ac](http://www.unisa.za.ac)) through its Centre for Development Studies, offers a Certificate course in CCB: this is aimed at NGO, government and private sector workers operating in the fields of empowerment training, community development forums, water committees and other grassroots development projects. The course aims to

- Give students an understanding of the situation of poverty
- Provide basic knowledge of the community development process
- Provide insight into the role of the community development worker/leader
- Provide basic knowledge of and competency in skills necessary for the process.

At the University of Technology, Sydney, short courses (one to three days) are offered at the Centre for Popular Education, on ‘creative community capacity building practice’. These are aimed at professional workers – in the fields of community development, health, youth work and community arts – working broadly in the field of community development. In this course, CCB is taken to encompass, for example:

- Fostering more participation in community initiatives
- Creating more opportunities for and developing capacity to exercise local control
- Strengthening organisational structures
- Encouraging and supporting members of local communities to recognise that problems exist in the first place
- Resource mobilisation
- Building social and organisational networks

In all these examples of education, CCB appears effectively to be contiguous with community development.

There are other examples of CCB in relation to communities of identity. For example, the government of Western Australia, Department of Local Government and Regional Development, ‘has a specialist role in working with indigenous communities [i.e. the Aboriginal Koori people] on capacity building initiatives and on strengthening relationships between local governments and indigenous people.’ ([www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au/regionDev](http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au/regionDev)) This work includes:

- Initiatives to bring local governments and indigenous communities together;
- Encouraging service agreements between local governments and indigenous communities;
- Supporting indigenous capacity-building and governance initiatives;
- Encouraging greater indigenous participation in local government and regional development;
- Providing support for indigenous local government councillors.

Although some of this work is clearly to do with partnership working and bringing indigenous groups into the sphere of local governance, there are elements of skill and knowledge building. Within New South Wales, in Australia, the Department of Criminal Justice’s Aboriginal Unit, addressing the over-representation of Koori young people in detention, has argued that the better direction of existing resources to help build capacity amongst Aboriginal communities is important as a preventative approach. This would help ‘young people [to be] able to develop and build on their strengths.’ ([www.aic.Gov.au/conferences/2003-juvenile/Anderson.html](http://www.aic.Gov.au/conferences/2003-juvenile/Anderson.html)) Although the Department argues that there is no one single strategy, what is clear is that ‘in any capacity building strategy, the Aboriginal community must be leading the responses to issues they have identified’. However, many Black and minority groups worldwide argue that, although CCB is a key issue for their organisations, structural racism and discrimination often means that they have limited access in reality to funding and sources of expertise on their own terms. (Chouhan and Lusane 2005) We return to this criticism later.

Elsewhere in Australia, the Victoria Foundation for the Survivors of Torture in Melbourne ([www.survivorsvic.org.au](http://www.survivorsvic.org.au)) provides CCB programmes working with refugees and asylum-seekers to:

- Restore a feeling of safety;
- Enhance control over life;
- Reduce fear and anxiety;
- Restore connections to other people;
- Provide emotional support and care;
- Restore a sense of meaning and purpose to life; and
- Restore a sense of dignity.

This is an example of a programme which offers very specific understandings of CCB to a vulnerable community of identity with clearly-marked needs.

Within the USA, CCB techniques have also been used in an environmental context by the Department of Energy, to ‘help poor and disadvantaged communities improve their ability to participate in environmental decision-making processes.’ Here the relevant community is one defined by its interest – primarily as consumers - although there are clearly overlaps with geographical communities. The DOE claims to be committed to promoting environmental justice and argues that better levels of participation of citizens will produce decisions on energy policy which are ‘faster. Cost-efficient and just.’ (Downing and Hudson 2001) Here the argument appears to be that the interests of ‘consumer community’ and ‘producer’ are exactly aligned, a claim which is of doubtful validity.

In Belfast, Northern Ireland, a CCB programme specifically addresses the history of conflict and distrust between two religiously-defined communities (a notion which incorporates the dimensions of geography, identity and interest). The North Belfast Community Action Unit's programme for community empowerment in the area incorporates the need to build links to establish trust, through mechanisms which promote positive interaction between communities. (NBCAU 2003)

There is some limited experience of the borrowing of the concept from North America, Western Europe and Oceania in other contexts, quite apart from the development literature. In Japan, the issue of the needs of the ageing population in the south of the country, alongside a declining tax base and labour force, are being partly addressed by CCB initiatives. These initiatives aim to create a 'elder-friendly community' through the provision of more community-based care provision. In Vietnam, a study from the Farm Systems Research Institute at the University of Cantho, in addressing the causes of rural poverty in the Mekong Delta suggested that access to social capital was critical in addressing poverty even where villages had access to other forms of capital (human, financial etc) and that therefore mobilization of the community as a whole and building its capacity was critical. In Mexico, in partnership with OECD's LEED (Local Economic and Employment Development) programme, the government of Mexico organised a conference in 2003 on partnership working and CCB. ([www.oecd.org/topic/0,2686,en\\_2649\\_34417\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_37429,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/topic/0,2686,en_2649_34417_1_1_1_1_37429,00.html)). This argued that the difficulty with the approach of partnership building as a form of local governance is the 'uneven capacity of the partners'. In particular, NGOs often are represented on a volunteer unpaid basis: one of the key roles of larger, more powerful and better resourced partners might therefore be to 'help build the capacity of the weakest partners'. This again focuses on organisational capacity rather than on that of local deprived communities.

This critique has been applied more widely of partnership working, a popular form of local governance emerging more or less simultaneously alongside the enthusiasm for CCB. There is disagreement as to whether it is appropriate for the stronger partners – who often tacitly or explicitly set the policy agendas for the partnerships in question – to support the weaker ones. (see Craig and Taylor 2002) As Banks *et al.* (2003) argue in the context of UK partnership working, there is a significant 'mismatch between their [NGOs' and particularly community groups'] structures and processes and those of more formal institutions such as local authorities or large voluntary organisations. Partnership working, especially when this involves people from different sectors, requires skills and strategies for building the working relationships and understanding that enable communication and cooperation across these [partnership] boundaries. (see also Pearson and Craig 2001)

The NGO partners in these instances often tend, however – in the context of NGOs more generally – to be amongst the better-resourced and more organised elements of the voluntary sector and not the smaller, representative, community groups with which community development workers typically operate. This form of CCB is thus pitched at a rather different level. The difficulties that smaller community groups have in the UK in becoming fully involved – on their own terms – in community regeneration programmes has been addressed in a wide-ranging research programme funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (1999) This argues that community groups should be involved as early as possible in partnership working, should be effectively resourced and supported to participate on a long-term basis, and that structures and relationships should be made clear before community involvement work starts. This report offers a range of examples of projects where good practice has been recorded. A later review by the Foundation (JRF 2000) suggested that although a range of agencies were now resourcing CCB, provision was neither comprehensive nor well-coordinated and, in many programmes, not only was community development not a priority but that the level of community development provision had been declining. Partnership working has in fact increasingly been criticised for building the capacity of the powerful and

not the weak, or for building the capacity of the weak only insofar as it accords with the interests of the powerful. (Banks and Shenton 2001)

#### **4: Evaluating the effectiveness of community capacity-building**

How do we know that community capacity has been built? As some writers have commented, there has been little work done to establish measures of community capacity, or evaluate its effectiveness. There is agreement that, like community development, CCB – however delivered - should be concerned with the needs which deprived communities define for themselves. However, there is now a growing literature on the evaluation of community development and this has to act as the best proxy for indicators of community capacity-building.

A major review of the evaluation of community development work (Craig 2002) notes that critically, community development, with its emphases on empowerment and participation, is not only concerned with *what* happens as the result of a particular intervention, but also *how* it happens; i.e. not only with meeting need but meeting it in a particular way. Outcomes thus have to be linked also to process goals. Programmes that, for example, improve certain health indicators by ‘top-down’ interventions but which do not provide local people with the knowledge and skills to be able to maintain improved health in a way acceptable to them, may meet certain outcome goals but would fail to do so in relation to process goals. Thus the kinds of performance indicators often reflected in government funding programmes, based on data that are relatively easy to collect and count, are likely to be misleading. For example, a measure of improved participation by local people might be defined in the context of community development work as an appropriate performance indicator. But improvements in this performance might more easily be achieved by focusing work on those local people already involved in community organisations. The involvement of the most (previously) unorganised might take much longer but would be a better measure of the long-term effectiveness of community development work. The key issue facing evaluation now, particularly relevant to areas of work such as community development that seek qualitative improvements in people’s lives, is therefore perhaps best expressed thus: to make the important measurable, rather than (as is too often the case with the focus on performance indicators) to make the measurable important.

Many measures used within community development are open to quantitative assessment although, as suggested, qualitative indicators are more likely to be appropriate in a community development context. This relationship – between quantitative indicators and qualitative ones – can sometimes be a very subtle one for, as Harding reminds us, ‘the creation of an objectively verifiable indicator does not turn a qualitative assessment into a quantitative one even if some quantification is involved ... [for example] ... the existence of a neighbourhood committee where none existed previously would appear to signal an improved potential for community development. However, the creation of committees is not an end in itself but a means to an end, that of community self-management and self-sufficiency’. (1991: 298) Damodaram provides a detailed discussion, in a Third World social development context, of how the achievement of key quantifiable outcomes (occupational mobility, terms of credit, conditions of wages, improvement in living conditions, and ability in decision-making) can be used as a ‘reference for studying the multi-dimensional nature of qualitative improvement as a result of change in these situations’. (1991: 287ff.) The key qualitative changes to be observed here were awareness, confidence, leadership, independence, bargaining capacity, and a desire for better living – none of them easy to measure with numerical certainty.

A framework for evaluating community development – or community capacity-building – needs to draw on a very wide range of data. Numerical data is important but alongside this,

one needs to place case study material, feedback from ‘consumers’ of community development work through interviews, surveys, and group discussion, documentary analysis, policy analysis and organisational analysis, together with other relevant contextual material (e.g. what other policy initiatives are going on) and, of course, the views of other partners. As Russell (1996) notes, many programmes, including community development work, have begun to develop innovative measures which, reflecting the values of community development, have the following attributes. They

- ◆ are devised and validated by local people;
- ◆ are collective measures rather than aggregated individual ones;
- ◆ are positive measures of well-being rather than negative ones; and
- ◆ acknowledge the need for diversity and difference in community life as well as cohesion and solidarity.

On a European basis, there has been some work to measure empowerment indicators in relation to the concept of social exclusion (Walters *et al.* 2001). This identified eight key indicators from a much wider range identified by local community representatives and project managers and funders. These were:

- Skills acquisition
- Confidence
- Resources for help
- Control of choices
- Supportive relationships
- Ability to analyse needs
- Understanding of others and their values
- New working relationships

This list contains reference to the familiar categories of skills, knowledge and understanding but also focuses on relational aspects of an *individual’s* competencies. In the UK, what is described as ‘a new approach to assessing community strengths’ has also been applied to judging the extent to which communities are strong enough to act on their own behalves in partnership working and exerting policy influence. Here (Skinner and Wilson 2002), the focus is on voluntary and community groups and contains two major elements: levels of community organization, and levels of support available. The authors argue that the approach focuses on what the community has to offer – its assets – rather than measures of what it does not have, (particular shown through measures of deprivation), and provides a framework for planning capacity-building which is highly participative. Strengths-based work has also been undertaken with some of the most disempowered groups worldwide including refugees and asylum-seekers (Butler 2005). The notion of *asset-based* community development (which may become the next major linguistic fashion in this policy area) is beginning to emerge fairly strongly in the literature. Bruce’s framework (see above) analyses a ‘capacity framework’ in terms of the assets that a community has, including economic capital, human skills and abilities, social capital (networks and relationships of trust) and natural resources. The valued outcomes which the CCB processes should lead to include:

- Economic prosperity
- Social and political inclusion
- Environmental stewardship
- Social and self-worth
- Health
- Safety and security
- Social cohesion

These outcomes then in turn may become new community assets.

Work to develop an evaluative framework for community development practice has emerged in recent years from the growing theoretical base of community development since the 1970s. (Key *et al.*, 1976; Harman 1982; CDJ 1991) This has in part been a (defensive) response to the more general drive for the evaluation of public services but has also been a more positive search to promote the effectiveness of community development. The literature also provides more detailed ways of thinking about what the goals of community development – and capacity-building - should be. Thus Barr *et al.* (1995: 18-19) suggest that the outcomes of community development should be assessed using eight measures of communities that are (more): knowledgeable, skilled, empowered, participative, self-sufficient, organized, and materially improved. This framework is remarkably similar to the kinds of definitions used for the goals of community capacity-building. Later work by Barr *et al.* (1996a; 1996b) identifies ten building blocks for community development, four to do with community empowerment and six with the quality of community life. They suggest a range of information which can be collected for each of these building blocks as indicative of ‘evidence of change’.

Other models for assessing the effectiveness of community development work are expressed in the form of questions to be addressed to differing aspects of that work such as the activity of organisations, the impact of their intervention, or at the effect on individuals; in some instances, a combination of all these approaches would be appropriate. Barr *et al.*'s (1996b) typology of community empowerment analyzes the core dimensions in terms of the individual (personal empowerment), the community (positive action and the development of community organisations), and the community in its wider political context (power relationships and participation). A study of the meaning of community also identifies a framework for measuring ‘community’ (and hence presumably strong and ‘developed’ communities). (Chanan 2002) This includes measures at the individual (self-determination, concern with locality, level of community activity), community involvement (both internal and external – i.e. links to the wider policy arena, local assets, inclusion, diversity and cohesion), and local infrastructural provision. Carley (1995) offers a set of criteria by which an organisation’s approach to participation can be assessed – is it:

- ◆ *representative* - providing an opportunity for participation by all interested persons and groups without exclusion?;
- ◆ *consensual* - in terms of a common view of what the problems are and the ways forward?;
- ◆ *effective* - enabling things to be done, including negotiating good deals for the community and institutional partners?;
- ◆ *internally legitimate* - generating continuing support from the community?; and
- ◆ *externally legitimate* - being acceptable to external partners and stakeholders?

This last question, relating to external partners and stakeholders, might be particularly problematic for participants who lack formal recognition by external agencies or who dispute the perspectives brought to the partnership by more powerful partners, such as governments. The question of external legitimacy may reflect feelings of disempowerment handed down by legacy or culture; and this lack of recognition by external partners may be carried over into partnership working.

Flecknoe and McLellan (1994) provide a typology of criteria with related outcomes for evaluating neighbourhood community development work. The criterion of increased opportunities for social interaction and collective activity, for example, leading to the development of more caring, co-operative and vocal community networks, might result in the growth of local organisations, informal skill-sharing organisations and campaigning activities. Other criteria include improved information and educational opportunities within the neighbourhood, improved material resources, and evidence that local people are taking greater individual and collective control of their lives and that they are influencing external

decision-makers. The latter relates to a (qualitative) outcome of 'raised pride', itself an interesting subject for evaluation. Importantly, these are all broadly collective goals. Servian's (1996) approach is unusual in that it offers an approach to analysing ways in which the effectiveness of an individual's participation within community organisations can be assessed. The questions an individual might ask of him/herself might include, for example, these inquiries:

- ◆ how often has your participation led to real change?;
- ◆ is it just as likely that nothing or something will happen when you participate?;
- ◆ what has the effect of the success or failure of your interventions been on the frequency of your attendance at meetings?;
- ◆ who do you perceive as controlling what happens?; and
- ◆ do you feel it is your fault if nothing happens?

None of these typologies are exhaustive but they do suggest complementary ways in which questioning with differing actors can tease out the impact of community development/ community capacity-building at different levels in the community.

Given the emphasis on much policy development on partnership working, there has been relatively little exploration of what kinds of capacity-building might be needed to promote effective partnership working by 'weaker' partners. One UK study (YF 2000) argues that 'if there is to be effective representation of communities, then there needs to be community networks/forums through which community members and community groups can support each other and build their own accountable structures.' This study developed benchmarks for capacity which again focus on the elements of resources, support, skills, confidence, the development of assets and enhanced control over decision-making processes.

Breitenbach (1997) refers to the long timescale that may be needed to see through effective long-term interventions based on community development work, which should work at a pace determined by the capacity and the needs of those who are the subjects of the programme. The issue of sustainability is also critical. Sustainable local community influence over relevant public and social policy – community empowerment - requires both outcome and process goals. The structures, processes, and mechanisms that are the target of empowerment work must contribute to the goals of community development work beyond the initial impetus that establishes them.

Craig's review of the evaluation literature identifies key elements that can be regarded as the most important building blocks for the evaluation of community development – or building community capacity - and these can be seen as providing the outlines for a simple model against which new approaches can be tested. Fundamentally, evaluations of community development have to reflect the value base of community development and the goal of individual and community empowerment. Such evaluations, like community development itself, have to be processes which that are sensitive to the need to demystify and challenge the power of those who hold resources on an inequitable basis. The tools critical in promoting this approach include the following:

- i) The stress on *participation* (which is not tokenistic) must be present in all stages of CCB/community development programmes.
- ii) The process of defining measures of success – including both short-term outputs and longer-term outcomes – should privilege qualitative indicators, but use them in ways that complement and illuminate quantitative ones. Most local communities may not have access to quantitative data sets, but they can identify which ones are relevant and which not, and they can, by thinking about appropriate qualitative measures, illuminate the *how* and *why* of the process of change.

- iii) Evaluators of community development – or CCB - need to have a strong awareness of the importance of process goals alongside output and outcome goals. Much ‘top-down’ social change often fails because the process is not owned by local communities. Local ownership – the thinking through by local communities of how change might come about, who might be involved, what goals and targets are – is critical in ensuring sustainability.
- iv) Just as empowerment is concerned with sustainable change, so also should be the process of evaluation. Involving local communities throughout this process, and in shaping key features of it, will be the best route to ensuring that local communities can ‘engage in continuous organisational learning’. Communities need to have more control not only over their own empowerment, but how that process is understood and measured. One endpoint of evaluation should thus be increased understanding by the community of the methods and benefits of evaluation itself.
- v) Finally, although empowerment is about building local community power to influence change, the evaluator has to be alert to the issue of power within communities. This means for example, recognising that communities - of whatever kind - often have disparate and potentially opposing interests within them; trying to build consensual collectively-held views of goals and outcomes whilst acknowledging the need to respect individual and group difference and diversity; and being alive to differing ways in which local communities might wish to express their will.

## **5: A critique of community capacity-building**

It is hardly surprising, given the linguistic and ideological confusion surrounding terms such as community, community development and now community capacity-building that there should be a growing critique of the use of the latter term. This critique has at least four different dimensions. The first is that, given the barely perceptible differences between the goals and methods of community development and CCB, there seems little point in introducing the new concept into the lexicon of community development. The origins of the term have been described above and it seems quite likely that the slow elision between the two concepts, from capacity building’s initial focus on developing the strengths of organizations into a catch-all term covering a range of activities at some sort of ‘community’ level, was accelerated by political fashion: new governments wishing to introduce new policy programmes (or to appear to do so) often adopt new terminology to distance themselves from the programmes of their predecessors. It seems indisputable that this has been the genesis of the current focus on CCB. Amongst the literature on CCB, there is a frequently occurring reference to the fact that, as one commentator put it, it ‘...has its roots in a much older movement called community development’ (McGinty 2002 *op. cit.*), or, in the words of another ‘that the ideas behind community capacity-building are not new ... from the 1970s there has been a strong community development school in the not-for-profit sector ..’. (Hounslow 2002 *op. cit.*)

The second, related, critique is that, as with the term ‘community’, the concept of community capacity-building is applied uncritically – as the ‘spray-on additive’ - to a very wide range of activities, many of which have little to do with the development of the skills, knowledge, assets and understanding of local deprived communities – which is at the heart of the key definitions of the concept. We have noted the origins of the term but it is used in a contemporary context by organizations such as the World Bank (2001) to describe what are effectively ‘top-down’ interventions where local communities are required to engage in programmes with pre-determined goals – such as the privatization of public services – as a condition for receiving funding, as well as by many other transnational, national and local governments in other, similar, ways which are far removed from ‘bottom-up’ community development interventions.



The third critique is then based on a challenge to such governmental organizations from those working with local communities who question the motives of those promoting CCB 'from the top'. For example, Beresford and Hoban (2005) argue that 'capacity building to develop people's confidence, self-esteem and understanding supports their empowerment and participation. It is not the same as skill development to equip people to work in the way that agencies traditionally work': i.e. that CCB is seen by powerful partners as incorporating local communities into established structures and mechanisms rather than facing the challenges to those existing structures which working with deprived communities presents. Diamond, in the context of UK regeneration initiatives notes that 'whilst these [community capacity building] initiatives use a new language, they are steeped in old practices. Changing structures, does not of itself alter the power differences inherent in local neighbourhoods where community groups are cast as "dependent" by regeneration managers seeking to meet performance targets'. (Diamond 2004) Diamond notes that the capacity-building approach of several local authorities studied actually marginalize alternative views to those in the mainstream, sought to co-opt local activists and through existing practice, individualized rather than collectivized the experience of local communities.

In a similar vein, Mowbray (2005) analyses the CCB programme of the Government of Victoria in Australia. He is less critical of the way in which the activities within this initiative are developed than of the way the government 'restrains their scope and rhetorically reconstructs their character and impact'. In particular, the government made funding available in effect only to those communities with pre-existing well-established structures, ensured that any activities which might be regarded as political (such as advocacy by community members) were excluded from the framework of the initiative, and claimed credit for the action plans of participating communities. Essentially, the ability of the community to act on its own behalf, to work on issues which it identified, and at a pace and in a manner which it determined itself, was seriously compromised by the government's own political need to promote its own agendas.

This is a story which is familiar to very many community development workers and those in the communities – in North and South - with which they have worked. In response to the UK's government's review of its support for CCB, the body representing community development training argues (FCDL 2004) that

the experience of many communities is that 'community capacity-building' programmes (with a myriad of titles), have been imposed on them; with perceived needs, desired outcomes and preferred methods part of the package which they have not had the opportunity to identify, develop or agree. ... the 'community' (often not self-defined) is exhorted to play its part in an environment where inequalities of resources, power, information and status are not even acknowledged, never mind addressed.

The FCDL goes on to argue, echoing Mowbray's analysis, that the impact of CCB has been to increase inequalities between established communities and those struggling for resources.

Based on a study of CCB projects working with Aboriginal Koori people in Australia, Tedmanson (2003) notes that

This new capacity building jargon signifies an entrenchment of notions of what constitutes capacity, who defines capacity and what constitutes the relationship between the dominant culture *capacity builders* and those identified as *capacity deficient*. ... The term community capacity building will have little if any meaning to, for example, the Anungu peoples of Central Australia where concepts such as Yerra ... are cited as encompassing reciprocity and community obligation. Supporting, helping, sharing, giving of time and resources, cultural affirmation and taking care of country are responsibilities not viewed as special individualised effort but as cultural competencies. ... discussions of community capacity building in

indigenous contexts must avoid the paternalistic construction of a 'deficit' in the Aboriginal domain.

The author goes on to cite an Aboriginal respondent

To restore capacity in our people is to be responsible for our own future. Notice that I talk of restoring rather than building capacity in our people. After all, we had 40 to 60,000 years of survival and capacity. The problem is that our capacity has been eroded and diminished [by white colonialists] – our people do have skills, knowledge and experience ... we are quite capable of looking after our own children and fighting for their future.

The fundamental argument here – perhaps highlighted in the case of all aboriginal people but equally appropriate, as we have seen, to groups representing the powerless in any context - is again that 'cultural difference is viewed as a weakness and not a strength, a capacity deficit to be rebuilt or a problem to be "solved".' This is the most fundamental critique of CCB, that it is based on the notion of communities being 'deficient' – in skills, knowledge, experience.

Beazley *et al.* (2005) provide an analysis of the weakness of the 'deficit model'. First, 'it pays no attention to the capacity of institutions to overcome inherent barriers to engagement' i.e. the problem lies not with communities but the institutions, structures and processes which affect them; and secondly, definitions of community capacity-building built on the deficit model 'give no indication of an endpoint. What is capacity being built towards or is it an end in itself?' This is a question that has plagued the theory and practice of community development. Essentially, although it is possible to identify the characteristics of 'strengthened' or 'resilient' communities (skills, knowledge, organisation etc), the fundamental aim of community development is – consonant with its value base - to ensure that greater political power lies with local communities. The endpoint might thus be 'less comfortable, more empowered and awkward but self-determined communities.' (*Ibid.*)

Partridge (2005) argues further that CCB is a 'term invented by social managers. It explains the lack of "buy-in" to their regeneration schemes by implying a lack of skill on the part of members of deprived communities ... neighbourhoods are deprived and regeneration schemes don't work because of an analogous lack of "capacity" in the inhabitants. A nice form of blaming the victim'. He suggests that the term might be seen as useful only where it applies equally to the lack of capacity in neighbourhoods and to the lack of capacity of powerful partner agencies to listen to, engage with and share power with communities effectively. Do such powerful agencies have the capacity to 'lose face, cope with residents' decisions going against them?' and so on. This 'deficit' approach to CCB, it is argued (Beazley *et al.* 2004), assumes a social pathology approach to communities which lack skills and abilities: these qualities would allow local community residents to be 'good citizens' in the terms identified by government and 'for those in power, this model of capacity building is useful. It poses no threat. It is top-down, paternalistic, and deflects attention away from the need to change the existing institutional and economic structures. It is a view that serves and supports the status quo.' (*Ibid.*)

This analysis of CCB from the perspective of the values of community development, would suggest that a view of communities as somehow deficient in certain skills and capacities to enable them to engage effectively with other actors in local governance in any case misses the point. Communities have skills, ideas, capacities: these are often latent. (Taylor 1995) Local and central governments often come with their own agendas which they then attempt to impose, however subtly, through partnership working or more crudely, on local communities. The task for powerful partners in this kind of CCB partnership working is to listen to communities' demands and respond appropriately, most of all when what local communities are demanding may be in conflict with external agendas; not to continue with their predetermined goals and programmes. This may not just be difficult for powerful partners, it may be precisely what – despite the rhetoric of CCB – they are not interested in. For example,

there can be little doubt that the UK government's understanding of CCB is linked to its desire to have more stable, organised communities with which it can more easily engage in order to pursue its own ideas of community cohesion, community safety, child and family policy and criminal justice. (Rodger 2005) The 'carrot' of funding is of course quite key here in getting local community groups to 'buy in' to government agendas and much CCB at a local level can be seen as a way of creating local structures which fit with government funding requirements. (Macdonald 2005) These structures may not, then, be ones which most effectively facilitate the expression of local community interests nor may they enable local communities to build on their own capacities.

## **6: Conclusion**

What can we learn from this review of the literature and of local communities' experience? It seems clear that CCB is broadly none other than our old friend community development but that, under this new umbrella term, not only has a wide range of activities found shelter, many of which have little to do with the goals and values of community development, but that many of the old tensions and difficulties of community development – of manipulation of communities, co-option of activists, conditional funding and state-controlled power games such as divide and rule – have emerged. The most cynical commentator might argue that local, regional and national governments and international bodies thus buy themselves continuing political space which enables them not to respond properly to the demands of the dispossessed and disempowered. To respond effectively to local communities' demands would mean giving up much of the power which these bodies enjoy. We may well continue to ask: who defines the capacities which communities need and why? What control do local communities exercise over the capacity-building process? And who defines what a strong community would look like? As Banks and Shenton (2001: 296) put it, 'we need to question whose purpose capacity building is serving and ensure that local residents are not mere puppets in the regeneration game played out by large national, regional and local agencies. "Community development" may be a more acceptable term and a more useful approach to promoting social and economic change in neighbourhoods.'

Essentially, what you understand by CCB depends on your own ideological perspective towards how communities are labelled as deprived and what should be done about it. CCB can serve government interests alone; or it may support local communities to press for their own interests. Community capacity-building is essentially, however, not a neutral technical process: it is about power and ideology and how these are mediated through structures and processes. As with community development, the term CCB is used to hide a false consensus about goals and interests. In reality they are both arenas for political struggle.

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## **Annexe**

### **The Budapest Declaration**

Delegates attending the March 2004 Budapest conference, representing civil society organisations, governments, donor agencies and community groups, acknowledge the priority now being given by the European Union to strengthen civil society and emphasise the important role which community development can play in supporting that process and protecting the human rights of all. They request the EU, national, regional and local governments - as appropriate - to commit themselves actively to build a socially and economically inclusive, diverse, environmentally sustainable and socially just society, and to ensure the structures, policies and mechanisms are in place to support dialogue between the EU and members states on the one hand and civil society on the other. This will require both moral and practical support for community participation, and appropriate legal, institutional and material conditions, but with specific support for community development itself.

Delegates wish to stress the importance of community development in building mechanisms to promote the inclusion of all residents of Europe – whether permanent, seeking permanency or migrant. They reject both the increasingly explicit manifestations of racism and xenophobia and the implicit racism manifested in those current immigration policies, which lend credence to the notion of ‘Fortress Europe’. They also acknowledge the strengthening of social, cultural and economic life, which will be consequent on the enlargement of the EU.

Delegates wish to emphasise the importance of developing mechanisms which could facilitate the sharing of best practice both within the EU but also between the EU and those many countries and institutions outside the EU (including other European countries) where community development has played a significant role in addressing poverty and social exclusion, including in situations of conflict and peace-building. Finally, they also wish to stress the need to understand the differing ways in which poverty, social exclusion and marginalisation may impact upon cultural and national minorities, on migrants and on those living in rural as well as urban areas. Delegates emphasise that the practice of community development strives to endorse and give voice to minority perspectives on policy and practice development; the distinct experience of Black and Minority Ethnic communities should be an integral part of the development of policy and practice.

***A key conference objective was to agree a common statement on community development in Europe, to be directed to the EU, national governments and other key stakeholders. The following is the text of this agreed statement. The conference commends the Declaration to you and urges support for the proposals below.***

- **Community development policy and legislation at European, national and local levels of government**
- 1. The EU Director General for Employment and Social Affairs should take the lead in publishing a cross-EU policy statement in 2005 highlighting the necessity of community development in facilitating citizen participation and in building social capital. The role of community development should explicitly be recognised in this process, and coherent and sustainable funding streams be made available through the 2007 EU Structural Funds for local, regional and European networks and through better coordination with and between independent trusts, foundations and NGOs.
- 2. All national governments should consider the appointment of a Minister with specific responsibility for creating and implementing community development policy, by 2006. That Minister should have a cross-departmental remit. We also ask that national governments should consider introducing a statutory responsibility for community development.

3. Regional and local authorities should publish from 2007 and implement annual action plans which outline the relevant special measures including investments, monitoring and evaluation of community development in facilitating effective citizen participation. These plans should be formulated on the basis of extensive community consultation.

□ **Community development training**

4. For community development to make the most effective contribution to building civil society, the EU needs to facilitate a common framework for training and learning for community development based on core community development values, knowledge and skills, with training materials based on best practices. The development of training is at present quite uneven but good experience should be used to suit local conditions.
5. This common framework for learning and training needs to be resourced and adapted for use in each member state, based on dialogue with all stakeholders, and developed from the 'bottom up'. The common overarching framework should not be used to export any one particular political or economic perspective.
6. Learning and training for community development and for active citizenship must be part of a continuum for lifelong learning and critical reflection – from citizenship education for children and young people through to community activists and volunteers, professionals working with communities and decision-makers at different levels. There should be pathways for progression through and across different levels of learning and training.

□ **Community development theory and research**

7. EU and national governments to the process of research as a vehicle for participation and the development of research skills within communities should give more attention; research should be as much a tool for communities as for policy-makers.
8. To promote ownership and mutual commitment, an active dialogue should be fostered between research and practice involving all stakeholders; this will require a greater degree of reflectiveness on the part of researchers as to how their skills can be made available to local communities
9. Research policy at EU, national and local level should be responsive to these needs and principles and direct funding to support them.
10. The EU and national governments should build on research, which has demonstrated the effectiveness of community development; and create more effective mechanisms for sharing and exchanging the findings of research relevant to the needs of local communities.

□ **Community development and rural issues**

11. Rural community development should be a specific and explicit priority within national and EU community development, social and economic programmes.
12. National governments and the EU will need further to activate and sustain voluntary and community action in rural areas. This should be based on a well-developed rural infrastructure; access to services for all based on need; and effective and appropriate training and support for rural community development.
13. At the EU level, it is necessary to establish a framework for rural community worker competence standards.



14. Recognising the specific challenges facing rural communities, EU and national policies should provide incentives to rural communities to mobilise their members and their resources to address local problems, strengthening their capacities to do so. As part of this process, the EU should encourage working partnerships between communities and local authorities, and between communities themselves, and ensure that appropriate government and EU mechanisms are created to respond to local initiatives.

□ **Community development and urban regeneration**

15. Whilst aiming for the common goal of an inclusive and socially just civil society, to achieve effective urban regeneration through community development, it is necessary for governments and the EU to be aware of and acknowledge differing national contexts (political, cultural, historical etc) and to respond appropriately.

16. All people in areas subject to regeneration should have the right to participation at every stage in its regeneration and future, with a special focus on socially excluded groups and those who traditionally have not had a voice in these processes.

17. Sustainable and inclusive urban regeneration requires that all involved players are open to change and accept it as a learning process; this requires that community development must play a key role in the process of regeneration.

□ **Community development, sustainable development and the environment**

18. Starting from a recognition that an environmentally sustainable society cannot be built without healthy and active communities (and *vice versa*), the EU should support the production of a handbook, which identifies and disseminates good practice for sustainable, ecological development and community development efforts both within Europe and outside it.

19. The EU should provide support for the establishment of a European community development network, which can disseminate better knowledge of sustainable projects, for example through a European Ideas-bank. The Bank should map experiences and support information exchange in ways, which will enable it to reach a broad public.

20. The EU or member states, as appropriate, should extend financial support in particular to local projects, which seek to integrate sustainable ecological, social, economic and community development.

□ **Community development, lifelong learning and cultural development**

21. Adult education should extend beyond vocational training and should be seen as a right and provided on a non-commercial, not-for-profit basis.

22. Lifelong learning should be defined in policies as including community-based and citizenship education. By a community-based model, we mean building on local skills, resources, strengths and needs, and recognising issues of gender, cultural diversity, sustainable development and inclusion; in short, offering 'access to diversity and diversity of access'.

23. There is a continued need for experimentation, within a secure and sustainable funding framework at local, national and EU levels. This implies a commitment to medium and long-term funding and provision. Programmes such as Grundtvig should be further developed with increased budgets and should prioritise trans-national mobility for community activists and local groups alongside community development professionals.

□ **Community development, local economic development and the social economy**

24. Every national action plan – including plans to combat poverty and social exclusion - should be required to include a section, which addresses the role of the social economy and local community economic development.
25. The EU should seek to disseminate existing experiences and practice both from within the EU and from outside it; networking of this social economy experience should be stimulated and supported within the EU with a specific focus on the acceding countries and those seeking accession in the near future.
26. Local communities should be recognised as active and legitimate partners in the development of plans, structures and policies for local economic development.

□ **Community development, minorities, migration, racism and discrimination**

Whilst all of the issues listed above need to focus on the needs of differing minorities, there are also additional specific issues related to their needs.

27. The EU should ensure free movement of all EU citizens accompanied by social protection, promote cohesion and solidarity for host communities, migrants and communities of origin, and combat racism and discrimination in all its forms.
28. In support of these goals, the EU and member states should create and support structures and agencies, which pursue the aims of racial equality and cross-cultural understanding and awareness. The EU and member states should at the same time emphasise the positive aspects of a wider and more diverse Europe.
29. The EU and member states should acknowledge, through policy and funding development, that community development has a critical role to play in engaging people in increasingly diverse communities through inclusive methods. This may be done by building bridges between majority and minority communities, including in situations of conflict.
30. The EU, national governments, donors and community development organisations and agencies need to work collaboratively to promote cross-border and national co-operation in relation to the position of minorities and the particular challenges they face within specific local contexts.