

## Chapter 1

### **Putting Community Capacity Building in Context**

by

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*This chapter examines the ideas of community development and community capacity building, and the links between them as well as their differences and similarities. Following this, there is a brief consideration of the key ideas presented in the subsequent chapters, namely the role of community capacity building in the areas of health, housing and re-generation (Chapter 2), the contribution which meaningful community capacity building can make to local economic development (Chapter 3), and, finally, the growing awareness of the ideas of environmental justice and sustainable development and the importance of community capacity building in fostering these. (Chapter 4) The chapter concludes by bringing together the major findings and conclusions of each of these chapters in order to identify the issues which may hinder meaningful community capacity building, and those elements which are central to successful community capacity building.*

## Introduction

Although relevant to all communities in principle, community capacity building (CCB) is often applied to communities that are considered to be disadvantaged and which have suffered negatively from the consequences of economic restructuring and social changes, increasingly driven by the globalisation process and, more recently, by the global financial and economic crisis.

Community capacity building and community development strategies have been carried out mainly in some of the most developed countries; however, community capacity building has, in recent years, been bolstered in other parts of the world, including within the emerging democracies of east and central Europe, as well as in many developing countries.

Despite considerable variations in the definition of community capacity building, a review of the existing literature reveals that it is, in essence, a process of enabling those living in poverty to develop skills and competencies, knowledge, structures, and strengths, so as to become more strongly involved in community, as well as wider societal life, and to take greater control of their own lives and that of their communities. Community capacity building has, in the space of less than two decades, become a ubiquitous term, found in a wide range of policy contexts, including social development, economic development and environmental development. Taken together, these three perspectives represent the core of much of the work of local and national governments. The following chapters analyse the evidence in relation to each of these contexts.

In this short introductory chapter, the idea of community capacity building and the debates which have developed around the idea will be briefly explored. Following that, some of the key lessons emerging from the differing policy contexts will be drawn out, and general conclusions from the three parallel analyses noted.

## Community capacity building and community development

Up until around fifteen years ago, the term “community capacity building” was rarely used in the policy literature. Arguably, the term was introduced as part of a political fashion, but in practice it was difficult to distinguish it from the practice of “community development”. It has been argued that that this led to a situation whereby the widespread use of community capacity building could be

seen as a failure of governments to properly promote “bottom-up” development. Rather, a “deficit” model of communities was used which failed to engage properly with the skills, knowledge and interests that communities have, and helped to obscure the structural reasons for poverty and inequality (Craig, 2005).

### **Understanding “community”**

In the year 2000, a UK report described CCB as “the New Holy Grail”, noting that the government’s major national regeneration programme contained more than 3 000 separate CCB initiatives. Increasing use of the term seemed, however, to raise more questions than it answered, despite the fact that, as one observer noted, “any mention of civil society seems to include the term ‘capacity building’” (Duncan and Thomas, 2000). To understand the meaning of CCB, it was (and still is) important to address, albeit briefly, the contextual language associated with it, particularly the use of the term community. In the past, community had become a concept meaning “all things to all people” – a concept loaded with contradictions and ambiguities; but particularly, in the language of policy and politics, it appeared to be a concept used where politicians wished to engender a sense of well being and consensus. The idea of “community”, along with other key concepts such as opportunity, accountability and responsibility, has been central to the development of “Third Way” approaches to social and economic policy, steering a line between the policies of the Old Left (characterised by excessive state control and collectivism) and those of the New Right (marked by excessive individualism). As argued, however, the continuing focus on small “deprived” areas, labelled as “communities”, “can run the risk of diverting attention away from the wider political economic forces which cause and maintain concentrations of poverty and unemployment there” (MacLeavy, 2008).

Those writing about, and practising, community development have similarly struggled over the past fifty years to define what “community” means for their practice. In the current global discourse about community development, “community” has three basic meanings: a *geographical community*, a *community of identity*, and *issue-based communities*. These different understandings of community are significant when the differing policy contexts in which CCB is applied are discussed.

### **Community development**

The concept of community development has also been used to cover a range of differing understandings of practice and outcome. The history of community development can be traced back to the 1950s at least but in the late 1980s/early 1990s, many governments and international organisations “re-discovered” community development, although not always labelling it as such. Thus the World Bank viewed community participation as a means for

ensuring that Third World development projects “reached the poorest in the most efficient and cost-effective way, through the promotion of self-help” (Craig and Mayo, 1995). The United Nations Development Programme commented similarly in 1993 that it had “people’s participation as its special focus ... as ... the central issue of our time”. In reality, however, these international and national agencies gave scant attention to issues of social justice, mutuality and equality, or to people’s right to participate in decisions which affect them, principles underpinning the philosophy and practice of community development as it is understood by practice-based organisations.

A wide-ranging definition of community development, the Budapest Declaration, was agreed on at a conference convened in 2004 by international community development organisations, with delegates from more than thirty countries. The definition highlights the fact that community development promotes local “voice”, encouraging the ability to be critical of established policy and political contexts and thereby serving the interests of local communities. National and international “community development programmes” frequently do not allow this political space, and therefore are often not really *community* development programmes, because they allow little control by the community itself. Rather, “top-down” policy prescriptions take precedence over “bottom-up” community analyses. They also fail to understand potential divisions within communities with which community development workers have to work.

According to the Budapest Declaration, community development is therefore not only a practice, involving skills, a knowledge base, and a strong value base, but also has the goal of developing, or building the capacity of, communities. This challenged the general idea of CCB (as opposed to community development) and led to some critiques addressing the linguistic (and ideological) shift from community development to CCB. Firstly, given the marginal differences between the proclaimed goals and methods of community development and CCB, it was considered superfluous to introduce a new concept into the policy lexicon. According to a previous review of the definitions, scope, measurements and critiques of CCB (Craig, 2005), the use of this term was possibly accelerated by the political fashion of new governments wishing to promote new policy programmes and to distance themselves from previous governments. Secondly, the concept of CCB was applied unselectively to a very wide range of activities, many of which had little to do with the development and the *community* control of the skills, knowledge, assets and understanding of local deprived communities; something which lies at the heart of the definition of community development provided by the Budapest Declaration. Thirdly, those working with local communities questioned the motives of those promoting CCB “from the top”. CCB was seen as being pursued by powerful partners to incorporate local communities into established structures and mechanisms, rather than having to face the challenges to those

existing structures which effective work with deprived communities presents. The final critique was that “cultural difference was viewed as a weakness and not a strength, a capacity deficit to be rebuilt or a problem to be ‘solved’” (Tedmanson, 2003), and that communities were deficient in skills, knowledge and experience. This “deficit” approach to CCB assumed a social pathology approach to communities which lack skills and abilities: these qualities would allow local community residents to be “good citizens” in 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” (Beazley, Griggs and Smith, 2004).

Such an 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 misses the point, as the analyses in the following chapters demonstrate. Communities have skills, ideas, capacities but these are often latent or unacknowledged. Local and central governments often come with their own agendas which they attempt to impose, however subtly, through partnerships, or more crudely, directly on local communities, often using funding as a lever for compliance. The task for powerful partners in these kinds of CCB partnerships should be to listen to communities’ demands and respond appropriately rather than continuing with predetermined goals and programmes, even where what local communities are demanding may be in conflict with external agendas. 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 many governments’ understandings of CCB are linked to their desire to have more stable, organised communities with which they can more easily engage to pursue their own ideas of community cohesion, community safety, child and family policy, and criminal justice. In the territories of social, economic and environmental development, however, this might act to suppress the ability of local communities, whether organised in terms of geography or interest, to express their own needs.

### **Community capacity building**

CCB has been effectively used in much the same ways as community development. Under this new umbrella term, however, not only has a similarly wide range of activities found shelter, many of which have little to do with the goals and values of community development, but many of the old tensions and difficulties of community development, including the manipulation of communities, misappropriation of terminology, co-option of activists, conditional funding and state controlled power games such as divide and rule,

have also emerged. Local, regional and national governments and international bodies, particularly those of a centre-right disposition, have been able to obscure the structural reasons for continuing poverty and inequality and garnered the political space to enable them not to respond to the demands of the dispossessed. To respond effectively to local communities' demands would mean giving up much of the power which these bodies enjoy. Who therefore 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 should look like?

CCB is essentially, therefore, not a neutral technical process: it is about power and ideology and how these are mediated through structures and processes. As with the terms *community* and *community development*, the term CCB might be used to hide a false consensus about goals and interests and to give a false sense of community ownership and control.

## **Community capacity building and social policy**

The second chapter by Gary Craig considers the practice of community capacity building in the context of three areas of social development, namely housing, health and community regeneration.

Analysing the role of government, as the major dispenser of social policies, Craig stresses the fact that its actions can often create tensions with CCB processes. These tensions emanated from two different elements: governments' declared willingness to involve citizens in processes (in order to limit the democratic deficit) and, at the same time, governments' tendency to drive "top-down" CCB initiatives. As pointed out in this chapter, assessments on the role of governments in CCB are very different. On the one hand it is stressed that governmental approaches to CCB tend to imply a limit to the capacity of communities to create networks, as they often assume that communities have no capacity for self-governance. On the other hand, CCB initiatives are considered as a "service" to the citizen, aimed at improving the performance of local governments and increasing agencies' cohesion. These latter initiatives do not always address the issue of giving communities greater control.

Health communities are also concerned with the issue of delivering services and the relationship between health users and providers. Despite the fact that health policies, by preserving basic human rights, are deemed fundamental, it is important to acknowledge that there is no single, general model of welfare. Notwithstanding pressure to reduce investment in welfare, there has recently been a growing trend toward investments in the health sector and its modernisation. Yet it has been suggested that, with modernisation, control seems again to have been taken away from the community in favour of a more scientific/bureaucratic model. Craig stresses that there is a need to

introduce mechanisms which enhance users' involvement in health matters, which would also be useful in avoiding governments' health policy to become simply "a technology of legitimization" (Harrison and Mort, 1998; Harrison, Dowswell and Milewa, 2002). Another problem related to the democratisation process of health policies is linked to the fact that market solutions are often prioritised over social or community ones. As pointed out by Crowley (2005) and Chau (2008), this has caused problems to those people who cannot easily access healthcare services, therefore emphasising the inequality gap.

Social policies are fundamental in order to promote the role of capacity building in healthcare. According to Craig it is necessary to improve interventions at the community level in order to involve different groups of people and identify a community's characteristics and needs. Policy legitimacy should be pursued both in terms of the individual as a consumer and of the community as a user. However, there are often contradictory or confusing interpretations of efficiency related to government policies (Calman, Hunter and May, 2004). To tackle this problem, the attempt of a Canadian community developer to create indicators and guidelines to assess CCB potential in the promotion of health has been useful. Certainly positive for the development of CCB are the observations on its economic values and on the potential it has for improving and encouraging the access of marginalised groups to health services, particularly if they are supported by successful examples. In his chapter Craig presents a series of examples related to users' control and self-organisation in the field of mental health work and community health issues (programmes, projects and research studies). The role of CCB in the promotion of health is enhanced by the potential day-to-day relationships which take place at the community level, therefore underlining the most appropriate solutions for the specificity of the community itself, given that needs change from place to place. Craig highlights this through examples ranging from those of Australian indigenous peoples to cases based on UK experience.

In terms of CCB, health issues are often interconnected with issues arising from housing conditions. It is difficult to define social housing, as it changes according to different countries; however, it can generally be thought of as a public intervention in order to meet the housing needs of people who cannot access the private market. The value associated with social housing is often a reflection of the necessity of cohesion and integration of the groups which tend to be socially excluded. Social housing is deeply rooted in the recent history of European countries, including eastern European ones. It has been widely used during, and particularly after, the First and Second World Wars to address serious housing shortages. Governments, such as that of the UK, have often tried to enlarge the participation of tenants in decision-making processes. In the UK, after the dark period of the 1980s (when social housing was under most attack from government), there has been an increase of housing

associations assisting minority groups or people facing different difficulties, and co-operatives where members could self-manage have also grown in numbers.

The value of tenants' participation in the planning, provision and evaluation of services has led to it being encouraged through such things as training projects and more formal invitations by landlords. Even though most of the participation in the 20th century can be identified as top-down, Craig presents positive examples in terms of access such as in Germany and Sweden, and points to the Netherlands as a country where traditional contracts tend to be more flexible and engage with the tenants' needs. The situation in Australasia tends to mirror the European one, although countries' particularities and the needs of indigenous peoples have resulted in diverse outcomes. Generally speaking, it is agreed that CCB has confronted difficulties in the area of housing, but that it has also been acknowledged that tenants' participation and skills should be promoted together with good practice.

Housing is highly connected with the issue of community regeneration policies, generally intended to ameliorate the social economic and environmental conditions of so-called "run-down areas". Renewal has been promoted through multiple projects, both by governments and private agencies, and applied in neighbourhoods (a term which does not always apply to the same situation in every country). These projects range from those trying to support community leaders to those aiming to involve minority groups in the community through upskilling and employment support. However, they have not always been successful due to the fact that it is necessary to respond to diverse community sectors with proper and context-appropriate measures. In order to assess community capacity in terms of regeneration, it is necessary to involve tenants in social housing, direct services at deprived areas, tackle the problems of the so called "zones of transition", encourage interaction, strengthen civil society, and improve access to health and employment services. Neighbourhood renewal is therefore a complex goal to achieve, both at an urban and rural level. Difficulties are often encountered in communities, where there are ethnic divisions, where communities lack support or where there are familiar barriers to participation, such as political or bureaucratic interference. Problems can also arise if policies are unrepresentative, modest or delivered in a tokenistic way, and are therefore more oriented at justifying governmental action rather than truly trying to tackle problems identified by communities themselves.

In conclusion, Craig's chapter offers a rich series of examples of CCB in relation to social policy areas such as health services, social housing and community regeneration. Historically, CCB seems to have been more successful in relation to social housing. Yet CCB approaches have to be further encouraged: firstly, there is often a problem of linguistic confusion (which may be exacerbated by the misappropriation of key concepts) both in terms of identifying capacity building actions and in defining the situation in which



they play a role. Secondly, another major problematic issue is the exercise of power, in particular the balance of power between government, private agency and local communities. As noted by Craig, factors which might prevent CCB from succeeding are both internal and external. While the former may reflect, to some degree, the presence of different groups of people, poverty, a lack of knowledge, skills and control over resources; the latter may be due to the attitude of partners and their lack of real interest in the community agenda and development.

## **Local economic development and community capacity building**

In Chapter 3, Andy Westwood considers the relationship between community capacity building and economic development. He explores the inter-relationships between the social economy and different actors in local communities for the explicit purpose of economic development in deprived areas. The chapter investigates how social capital in communities can be developed so that sustainable economic development is also achieved. Finally, Westwood addresses what strategies should be pursued in order to maximise both social and economic development and, crucially, the inter-relationships between the two, sometimes competing, goals.

This is an important area to consider for two reasons. Firstly, Westwood argues that much literature on community development and the stimulation of social capital exaggerates the connections to the social economy and the third sector at the expense of other vital contributors. Secondly, with the onset of worldwide, negative economic growth, the relationship between social capital and economic development changes significantly. The important question of how social capital and community capacity building help to promote economic growth should also be reconsidered amidst a different economic situation. The chapter therefore considers how the inter-relationships between different sectors can help to preserve economic activity, to capture and sustain economic activity and develop resilience amidst deteriorating conditions.

As in other chapters, the literature demonstrates how problematic it is to differentiate between the terms “capacity building”, “community capacity building”, and “community development”. This chapter considers some of the relevant definitions and strategies for community capacity building and how they relate to policies and ambitions for economic development in deprived areas. It argues that social capital improves the environment for economic development to take place, both within communities and between partners trading at a distance. In particular, the chapter describes how workplaces and the private sector are vital generators of social capital and community capacity. Robert Putnam’s bowling leagues often stemmed from the office or the factory, mineworkers across Europe formed sports teams and social groups as did

trade unions, chambers of commerce and many private firms. In many places this workplace generated capital has also endured after employers and industries have long since disappeared and after individual workers have left or retired. In the UK, colliery brass bands and male voice choirs have continued long after their mines were closed down. So too have sports team from local pubs and bars that are also disappearing from communities throughout the world.

As suggested by several commentators, the chapter sees the social economy as a vital builder of capacity within any community (Noya and Clarence, 2007). Others have suggested that the social economy is not a sector in itself but rather a blurred economy existing across more traditional sectors (Murray, Mulgan and Caulier-Grice, 2008). No single sector has a monopoly position in the social economy; all sectors contribute significantly to it and through it, to improve overall capacity in any given community. What most distinguishes the social economy sector is its emphasis on returning the profits made from enterprise back to the community, rather than to private, and usually external, hands.

Across all sectors, the chapter describes how important it is to increase activity, but also to retain economic benefits within a community. By locking in growth, whether through social firms, grants, third sector or local enterprises, poorer communities will more rapidly build both economic and social assets. The chapter explores and describes a range of activities that can achieve this, concentrating on those that deliberately seek to grow or to link people and local organisations to economic activity and growth. The chapter considers time banks, the co-operative movement, credit unions and schemes that promote local trading and currencies. It also explores how social economy and local governments are exploring these, and other innovative models, to lock in economic benefits to an area.

Westwood considers several practical examples of how the coming together of social economy activities and the private sector have generated high community capacity and better economic conditions. In Chicago, local foundations and the city authorities have developed a franchise partnership. Franchising offers the benefits of entrepreneurship but through a structured process. By buying into a business with a national brand and a proven business model, the local entrepreneur minimises their risk. In Leeds, Birmingham and North East England, the leading UK supermarket, Tesco, has partnered with local community groups to open stores staffed by local people who had been previously unemployed for long periods of time. In Barcelona and Stockholm, the city authorities have attempted to create thriving new communities with strong private sector economies in run-down, isolated neighbourhoods within each city. Both processes have deliberately and successfully placed community development and quality of life issues alongside strategies for economic development.

The co-operative movement that emerged in the UK in the early 19th century is now a major example of how social goals and community development can be harmonised with economic development. In the UK, the Co-operative Group now has over 1.5 million members, 87 000 employees and an annual turnover of GBP 9.4 billion. All of this stemmed from a small group of shopkeepers, traders and farmers in Rochdale, a small cotton mill town. In 1920s Canada, farmers in the Prairie Provinces of Alberta and Manitoba set up “wheat pools” and co-operative grain elevators. They are now major international businesses. In Italy, Conserve Italia was founded in 1976 by fourteen different co-operatives, to produce under the brands “Valfrutta” and “Cirio”. Today, Conserve Italia is one of Europe’s largest agri-food industries, bringing together over 50 co-operative associations. Its turnover in 2006/07 was EUR 1 billion and it employs nearly 7 000 people on top of the individual farmers and their workforces. Another successful example of the agricultural co-operative impact on local economy is Melinda in Trento. Melinda is a consortium of 16 co-operatives specialising in the growth and production of apple based goods in the Trentino region.

In conclusion, the chapter describes how policy makers should pursue as broad an approach as possible to stimulate community capacity and activity, maximising the inter-relationships between the social economy and other sectors, as well as following policies that boost either private sector entrepreneurship or the third sector in isolation. Complementarity should apply to policies operating at the local level but also to the relationships between local policy and organisations and to nationally delivered policies and services in a local area.

## **Community capacity building and the environment**

In the chapter by Maria Adebawale and Lovleen Bhuller, the potential of CCB to support environmental sustainable development and to transform the idea of environmental justice into reality is addressed. Nowadays, communities have to face several environmental challenges, from climate change, flooding and desertification to excessive consumption of raw materials. Adebawale and Bhuller present a range of case studies drawn from the European, Australasian and American experiences in the chapter and explore the elements which have determined their success and the difficulties encountered by communities. On the basis of these observations, clear policy recommendations are provided as to how community capacity building in an environmental context can be made effective.

Before entering into the specifics of case studies, the authors clarify the context in which concepts such as sustainable development and environmental justice belong. A useful instrument to define these two ideas is represented by the

Brundtland Report, a document in which the need to safeguard the environment for the future generation and support for communities subject to “environmental bads”, are considered values to be pursued at a global level. Given that the majority of environmental degradation is the result of human activities, and particularly those of the wealthy countries, CCB is seen as an effective means to provide communities with access to requisite resources and knowledge to address the problem.

In Europe, the main environmental challenges are the result of human activity and natural disasters (often associated with climate change). To show how CCB can sustain environmental development, Adebowale and Bhuller use two examples: the first one relates to a community affected by flooding near the River Humber estuary in England, while the second one refers to the Nyikò Valley in Romania where villages were devastated from flooding. In both cases, one of the first measures undertaken to tackle the problem was to activate a transfer of knowledge from central government, agencies or non-profit organisations to the communities. Another important element was to enhance the participation of stakeholders in decision-making processes and to stimulate their discussion and confrontation. Yet, both projects encountered difficulties: in the first case, the problems related to the political context in which it took place; while the second case suffered from scarce participation of the most vulnerable people and a lack of strong leadership.

Examples from Australasia demonstrate the importance of including and involving all members of communities. In Australia, there is a clear commitment to promote CCB among indigenous communities with regard to resource management. This is the case of the North Central Catchment Management Area programme, under which an indigenous Australian became a member of the Victorian Catchment Management Council and promoted the potential of indigenous people as resources managers due to their special relationship with nature. In order to share the knowledge between indigenous people and landowners, the initiation of forums and the encouragement of recognition and respect were fundamental, although this should not detract from the context of political inequality in which the project took place. WasteBusters is an example from New Zealand that shows how communities' actions can have a positive impact on waste management and recycling. Results were achieved because of the collaboration between local communities, councils, WasteBusters and the Zero Waste Trust and the willingness to work with communities and to become fully embedded in the community.

In the USA, pollution represents one of the major environmental challenges. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has involved communities in projects to tackle different pollution problems that seem to be affecting, in particular, the poorest areas of the cities. An example is the EPA's Environmental Demonstration Projects activated in Barrio Logan (San Diego). In this case, the

knowledge transfer to the people of the communities has been fundamental, although it is recognised that such issues will only find a solution in the long run. Similarly, the Atlantic Coastal Action Plan was enacted by Environment Canada to protect the coastal ecosystem from pollution: knowledge spreading was again considered amongst the most important values. CCB projects are more likely to be successful if organisations (governmental and non-governmental) manage to create a partnership with the communities. Adebowale and Bhuller also consider Canada's example for the Joint Action Group for Environmental Clean-up of the Muggha Creek Watershed, where community engagement was sought through round tables, community meetings and knowledge transfer. Mexico City is also considered in the chapter, in particular with reference to Green Vision, a project for the preservation of the Los Dinamos forest which had been suffering from over-exploitation. Despite initial hostility from the local people, thousands of trees were planted, training was offered to locals and strategies to attract people to the forest were undertaken.

In conclusion, the case studies used by Adebowale and Bhuller highlight the way in which the empowerment and participation of communities is fundamental to achieve environmental sustainable development. The success demonstrated in the case studies can be seen to be the result of good organisation and co-operation, efficient monitoring and an awareness on the part of policy makers of the need to engage meaningfully. CCB processes have to be inclusive ones, despite the difficulties which may exist in involving vulnerable groups. Leadership and political influence also play a determinant role, as they are involved in the majority of actions to obtain financial resources.

## **Major findings**

The importance of community capacity building in local development, paying particular attention to its social, economic and environmental dimensions, will be examined in the following chapters. However, it is useful at this point to present the major findings, key messages and conclusions of the chapters.

### ***The importance of community development and capacity building***

The discussion has been framed around an outline of the development of the idea of community capacity building. One of the results of this analysis, across all of the chapters and contributions, is that if the notion of community capacity building has much in common with that of community development, there may be ways in which they can be distinguished. Largely, for a certain period and by most commentators, they have been used in an interchangeable way and have been seen as pursuing the same broad objectives – the

empowerment of communities (Budapest Declaration, 2004). Where differences emerge, it may be less in what sort of language is being used, but rather in the way in which change is promoted, who is promoting it, what legacy is expected to be left in communities and the extent to which communities may own that process and the outcomes of change. Community development and community capacity building, in whatever sphere of public policy, can both be promoted from outside or inside a community but the goal in both cases should be (but often is not) a process by which communities take ownership of the process and whose final results include the empowerment of the community.

There may be subtle differences in understanding as to how the two approaches work and may differ, although these may be marginal compared with the over-riding similarities between the approaches. Thus, community development can refer to broad investment in facilities, services, as well as economic development and also to policies that improve human capital, employment levels and business investment or location, but it does not intentionally discriminate between these aims and the effect of these on the “capacity” of the community itself. The language of community capacity building more often points to an explicit intention to improve the capacity of and within communities themselves, so there is a deliberate attempt to shape services and develop institutions that increase social capital, autonomy and the overall capacity to drive change from within a community.

There are important and considerable overlaps; thus, measures that improve the individual educational levels of residents will form an important part of both approaches. So too would measures to increase job opportunities and the number of businesses and enterprises in an area. CCB might be considered by some to go further and invest specifically in community leadership and the types of jobs and businesses that are developed by local people or that trade within a local area in order to capture economic benefits within the locality. In economic development terms any increase in jobs or businesses are likely to be a good thing – however, in CCB terms, there are objectives to increase the number of locally owned businesses or local people working in newly created jobs.

Community development has a long history and it has been the cradle of community capacity building. In fact many practices, particularly those promoted by government, nestle within both areas of practice and some, unfortunately, appear to have little to do with the real empowerment of local communities and the development of local community control (however community may be defined) over policies which affect them. Indeed, it has been suggested by many commentators that governments often use the language of community capacity building to manage or control local communities in line with wider political and ideological objectives, rather

than empower them; the term CCB, like community or community development, had been “sprayed on” to a wide range of projects and programmes, many of which had little to do with real community empowerment; and, finally, that cultural difference was often perceived by governments as a weakness. This has been particularly the case in countries with a high degree of centralised policy making and delivery rather than those with more devolved structures. In reality, in both instances, many communities – even those labelled as most deprived – had skills, knowledge, experience and strengths but institutional barriers erected by major policy partners, particularly state agencies, often prevented these capacities from being expressed and realised.

The chapters in this report show that, in certain instances, it is possible to separate out community capacity building as an evolution from broader ideas and theories of community development as well as those concerning economic and social development. Capacity building entails specific characteristics and definitions that help us to refine and test policies and approaches aimed at improving economic and social conditions in a deprived community. It is suggested that the best policies are those that improve conditions across a broad front, but that also deliberately aim to build autonomy, knowledge, resilience and leadership within the community at the same time.

### ***Using community capacity building for local economic development***

The chapter on community capacity building and economic development suggests that this helps to define and shape the interventions designed to increase economic activity by emphasising those that lock in skills, jobs and economic benefits into an area. The author also argues that the approaches that are best combined with existing community networks and organisations are those most likely to take root and ultimately succeed. The chapter describes how policy makers should pursue as broad an approach as possible to stimulate community capacity and activity, but must intentionally maximise the inter-relationships between the social economy and private sector entrepreneurship. It is important to increase economic activity across all sectors, and also to retain economic benefits within a community. By locking in growth – whether through social enterprises, grants, third sector or local enterprises – poorer communities will more rapidly build both economic and social assets. Those policies which promote community owned and based enterprises alongside policies that promote inward investing firms, provide a good mix of activity. Furthermore, efforts should be made to tie inward investing firms into communities through the use of the social economy, local job guarantees and financial support.

Broadly, the more economic “assets” in a community and the greater the local ownership, the better the overall capacity for development is. This is a crucial message to policy makers in the current economic climate, where it is

vital that economic activities are sustained during recession. It is expected that those communities with the strongest ownership or connection to firms will prove the most resilient.

### **Social policy: The challenge for community capacity building?**

The review of social development interventions in the fields of housing, health and regeneration underlines that community skills and experience exist, albeit unevenly across the three fields. In the territory of health, “community” is a more complex concept than in other contexts since it applies to the “community” of health service users, a community which might be divided by a wide range of measures, such as geography, age, ailment (including both physical and mental illness – and indeed many users such as pregnant women who have no ailment in any case), ethnicity, and so on. The struggle here for community capacity building is essentially a struggle for health service users to have more control over health service policy and practice, in particular over the process by which health services are delivered. The community seeks to improve the way in which services are delivered. This goes beyond simply improving information flows, for example, to challenging the organisational framework of health service delivery to make it far more responsive and sensitive to individual and community need. Health service delivery provides many examples of shallow initiatives to “involve” service users which have offered little real engagement with, or control over, the policy process. The organisation of health services often appears to be organised on the basis of what suits managers and clinicians rather than those dependent on health services for their well being.

In the housing area, there is by contrast a territory which is capable of little professional mystification (although housing allocation procedures have occasionally been regarded as arcane) and where there has been a very long history – of 100 years or more – of campaigns by the users of social housing to have greater control of housing policy, including the day-to-day minutiae of repairs and maintenance, and broader issues of allocation and development, through to strategic questions of the disposal of social housing to the private sector.

Regeneration is a social policy practice which emerged most strongly in the post-Second World War period, initially to respond to the damage caused by war but since that time, to engage in the systematic revitalisation of housing and neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood regeneration has been focused on small, usually deprived communities and thus has been a particularly appropriate context for community development interventions or, in more recent years, for those labelled as community capacity building. Of these social policy interventions, those in the field of housing and regeneration



(which have often been coterminous) have thus offered a far greater body of experience than has the field of health policy.

The general analysis points to some common themes emerging from the study of social development community capacity building initiatives. In all three fields of activity, language was often used in confusing ways, obscuring goals and objectives of programmes, and many interventions which were being driven by government were often misleadingly regarded as being owned by the community. This applies equally to programmes for tenant participation where an increasingly widespread infrastructure masks the extent to which tenants have real control over housing policy; to health service delivery where service users confront the political and professional strength of clinicians before even beginning to establish users' rights to a voice in policy and service delivery; and to regeneration, where a plethora of community-based renewal programmes have failed to deliver real community control over the process of improvement of neighbourhoods.

The issue of power here is crucial. Disparities of power between government and other statutory partners on the one hand, and local communities on the other, mean that communities are often structurally disadvantaged when it comes to working in partnerships or to contesting control over resources or the ways in which those resources are to be used in CCB programmes. These disparities in power are particularly marked where communities are characterised by poverty, divided, or are disproportionately associated with marginalised or less powerful groups, such as black and minority ethnic groups, young or elderly people.

### ***Sustainable development and environmental justice: The role of community capacity building***

In relation to environmental development, although debates about sustainable development do go back to the 1970s, these are all rather more recent issues to explore in the context of this study and discussions about the right of poor communities, in particular, to participate in processes and decisions which affect them in the environmental area are only now beginning to emerge with some force. It is only fairly recently, for example, that the impact of environmental and climate change affect poorer communities more disproportionately has been understood. Capacity building within the environmental context may have been at the root of sustainable development for upwards of thirty years but the understanding that environmental protection has to go hand in hand with social and economic development has also only more recently taken root at local "community" level. This is increasingly linked to an understanding that environmental degradation has strong links with the social and economic concerns of local communities, particularly of poverty and inequality.

Thus, whilst tenant participation has a history in most OECD countries stretching back fifty or sixty years (or more in some cases) it is really only in roughly the past thirty years, albeit now at a rapidly accelerating rate, that concern about the environment and environmental aspects of community life, has been translated into policy and legislative instruments in many countries. Alongside social and economic well being, environmental well being is now coming to be recognised as an equally important field for government intervention at both national and local levels (as well, of course, as international levels). Even more recently, however, has been the recognition that community responses to these interventions should be regarded as legitimate. Understanding the relationship between capacity building and environmental inequality is thus becoming of increasing public concern.

An analysis has emerged at local, national and international levels which points to the fact that the costs and benefits of environmental change are not falling equitably upon communities and indeed, that poor communities bear a disproportionate share of the costs. This operates at all levels, from local to international, with some poor southern Pacific territories likely to be swamped by rising sea levels, the consequence of climate change driven by the polluting industries of the North, whilst the direct effects of that pollution may be felt by neighbouring deprived communities. This represents a particular challenge in terms of developing “community” responses since some communities bearing the costs of environmental change may be physically many miles away from the sources of their difficulty. There can be little doubt however that increased levels of local, national and international responses to environmental change will be seen over the coming years. There is, of course, another major structural problem in developing strategic community responses to environmental issues which is that the influence of private sector profit-driven organisations is much stronger here than in the fields of social policy for example (although private housing and health providers are increasingly drawn into debates about user or community control).

The social concerns relating to the unequal impacts of human behaviour identified by eco-sociologists have, however, rarely been tackled until recently and most environmental organisations are only just beginning to incorporate a social justice dimension into their work. Mainstream campaigns and environmental programmes by non-governmental organisations have tended to concentrate on ideological debates, such as environmental protection *versus* economic development. People most affected by the consequences of environmental decision making were not only alienated from an increasingly narrow debate but were insufficiently protected by environmental or economic policy. In order to address this problem there is a need for governments, and others, such as funders, to support community capacity building which has both social and environmental equity elements.

As with the evidence in the territory of social policy, it is clear that issues of disparate power (including access to resources and information) – between community actors and the more powerful statutory and private sector interests facing them – are highly significant. As noted, the language of community capacity building has yet to fully penetrate the field of environmental campaigning although there are certainly questions as to the extent of real participation of deprived communities – the same communities campaigning around health, housing and regeneration – in shaping local environmental strategies. Including communities from the very beginning of collaborative processes is therefore critical if participation is to be meaningful.

Nevertheless, as the chapter on environmental issues demonstrates, this picture is changing. The 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development helped to shape the theoretical understanding of capacity building as part of social and environmental justice strategies, linked to growing understandings that socially and economically excluded people were least likely to gain “environmental goods” – clean water, unpolluted land – and most likely to receive – “environmental bads” (for example, air pollution, desertification), just as the “goods” and “bads” of housing, healthcare and regeneration were unequally distributed. Capacity building in the environmental sector thus meant, as it does elsewhere, concentrating on supporting or providing accessible information, participative decision-making processes and supportive legislative and political structures facilitating real control by local communities over political and policy processes. Effectively, dealing with environmental challenges and the potential complexities which they raise, is heavily influenced by mechanisms; potential and capacity to support community level participation within environmental decision-making processes; and, the systems (legislative and policy) that enforce or support community voices. This is again a very similar message to that emerging from work in the social policy field.

The chapter on environmental capacity building argues strongly that the objective of capacity building should not simply be restricted to the creation of the potential within a community to access information and/or to participate in the decision-making process. Rather, its effectiveness depends on the ability to harness that potential for the long-term achievement of results.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, community capacity building, whether starting from social, economic or environmental issues, therefore has to be informed by what has been described as a three-dimensional framework, recognising social, economic and environmental aspects of development. Capacity building needs to be seen as an endogenous process where external agencies, such as governments,

civil society and businesses, act merely as a catalyst, facilitator (including providing resources) or knowledge broker for the communities. Whilst undoubtedly much capacity building can be criticised because of its failure to recognise the pre-existing capacity (knowledge, skills, experience, information, expertise) of communities, as well as only rhetorical commitments to community empowerment. The ultimate goal of a capacity building initiative should be the development of local leadership and increased local engagement and control over programme management, policy development and service delivery. The effective, real, empowerment of communities should allow them to build networks and partnerships, which will enhance their ability to ensure the sustainability of decisions that influence their quality of life, in social, economic and environmental spheres.

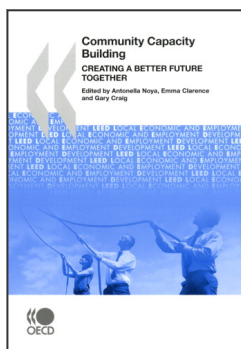
The substantial volume of evidence amassed in this publication suggests that there are conditions under which community capacity building can be enhanced – leadership, knowledge, skills, experience – or impeded (usually the institutional barriers erected by powerful partners) and one task for the future is to systematise this evidence to support the process of CCB in the interests of local communities. The key message for government – whether at local, regional or national levels – is to create the political space (and resource it) to enable communities to take greater control of the way in which they are empowered – regardless of whether it is termed community development or community capacity building. This political space implies a recognition of the capacity already inherent in communities and the encouragement of the development of new capacity in a way which embeds power over the development of communities within those communities themselves. Too often CCB programmes, community development, partnership working driven from above have a tokenistic commitment to community empowerment which fades as soon as communities demonstrate that they are capable to identifying needs which may be at variance with those of government. Governments then retreat to tired old formulae, characterising communities as pathological and the groups which represent them as, in fact, unrepresentative. A real commitment to capacity building, in whatever sphere, means taking risks, risks which will pay off handsomely if governments can cope with the potential conflicts and disagreements which emerge along the way. What communities lack essentially, is effective power to express their views and have those views accepted, and the resources to underpin work to structure and give voice to their concerns. Governments have to let go of power and provide adequate resources to communities; if they don't, the CCB experiment will eventually fail, and communities will be blamed for that failure.

This leads to the final point that it is also possible to now think about ways in which the effectiveness of CCB – its longer-term impacts – can begin to be assessed and measured. There are some, albeit limited examples, of

groups beginning to think seriously about the evaluation of the effectiveness of CCB and this points to an urgent need for more work in this area. This might help government to understand the process of CCB more clearly and to perceive the very real long-term benefits that it can bring.

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**From:**  
**Community Capacity Building**  
Creating a Better Future Together

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264073302-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

Noya, Antonella and Emma Clarence (2009), "Putting Community Capacity Building in Context", in Antonella Noya, Emma Clarence and Gary Craig (eds.), *Community Capacity Building: Creating a Better Future Together*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264073302-2-en>

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