The Community Development Challenge

Evaluation

Establishing an outcomes and evidence base

by Beth Longstaff
The Community Development Challenge: Evaluation
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Evaluation

Establishing an outcomes and evidence base

by Beth Longstaff
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The Community Development Challenge
Series Introduction

Empowerment: the essential contribution of community development

Empowerment, under one name or another, has been an objective of social policy for several decades, but it has never had such a specific and high profile commitment in policy agendas as now. It is being promoted as a key concept in the way forward to a more healthy, inclusive and fully-functioning society, and is being included in policy developments applied to the whole population.

How can a major increase in empowerment be achieved? What practical action has to be taken, locality by locality, to bring it about? No single discipline will be enough to achieve the major increase which government is seeking. But it is essential that strategies to accomplish this objective take particular account of the one discipline which has community empowerment as its foremost aim – community development.

This new policy focus on empowerment is an unprecedented opportunity for community development, a discipline with the skills, analysis, methods and experience to engender community empowerment at its very core. Yet for community development to lead the way in this move towards social change, it will itself need major development in order to help address the scale of current policy expectations.

The original *Community Development Challenge* report* posed a dual challenge: to government, local government and other agencies to make better use of community development to achieve empowerment; and to the community development occupation to raise its sights and increase its demonstrable effectiveness.

Community development principles are fundamental to the major issues of our times – social justice and sustainability. But its practice is often limited to local projects and fails to reach its transformative potential in a wider collective context. Where conditions have been favourable, however, it has played a major role in movements for change. For instance, the credit union movement as an anti-poverty strategy began as local community development projects which reached out, supporting and training other communities across the UK, linking with the worldwide credit union movement which aims to eliminate loan sharks and develop local economies.

The government’s empowerment objectives are focused on a particular measure: an increase in the number of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality. This has been designated as the core indicator of empowerment, both at local and national level in England, within the local government performance framework for 2008–11 (National Indicator (NI) 4).† NI 4 links community development purposes for the first time into the main management framework for local and national government. However, the aims of community development are much more far reaching than can be captured in this single indicator.

Aspects of community development method, particularly strengthening community groups, have spread through their practical usefulness to workers in health, education, safety, youth, faith and support for the role of local councillors. But most community development literature lacks material on strategic issues and questions of infrastructure, issues which are crucial to achieving a more universal impact. How can community development be funded, deployed, managed and evaluated across the whole population of a local authority? How can peripheral approaches be integrated into a highly skilled holistic approach? How can community development approaches most effectively be mainstreamed? This series of reports begins to explore these key questions.

In its first report (see * above), the Community Development Challenge group set out the basic values and principles of community development, with a practical definition, examples of outcomes,
discussion of dilemmas, and recommendations on how to raise its visibility and effectiveness to a higher level. In the further work reported here the group looks in more detail at the strategic developments that need to be addressed to achieve this improvement. We hope subsequently to address the matter of how community development is being and should be used in relation to social issues such as health, safety, housing and sustainable development.

Community development has traditionally focused on intensive work with small clusters of exceptionally motivated activists. Sometimes the cumulative effect of these has amounted to a huge impact, for example within the anti-racist, anti-poverty, women’s and peace movements, and in green, gay and lesbian and disability lobbies – movements that have changed life as we see it. Large numbers of people have also benefited indirectly from the activities of small groups, through acquisition of new amenities, through negotiated improvements in public services, through a raised level of social capital and community cohesion in the local community. But most people and even most public agencies would be unaware of the development work behind these improvements.

In order to construct effective local engagement strategies it is important that local authorities and their partners, including communities themselves, draw deeply from the well of community development principles and experience. We hope that this small series of studies will open the door to aspects of this experience which have hitherto been largely in the shadows.

Gabriel Chanan and Margaret Ledwith
for the Community Development Challenge group
CDF is a leading source of intelligence, guidance and delivery on community development in England and across the UK. Our mission is to lead community development analysis and strategy to empower people to influence decisions that affect their lives.

CDF's key aim is to spread ways of building engaged, cohesive and stronger communities and a more effective community sector. We work with government departments, regional and local public agencies and the community and voluntary sectors. We also operate at a European and international level.

We are a non-departmental public body sponsored by Communities and Local Government (CLG) and a charity registered in England and Wales and recognised in Scotland.

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CDX
(Community Development Exchange)

CDX is the UK-wide membership organisation for community development.

CDX’s mission is to be a strong and effective voice for community development. It is a diverse membership-led organisation, aiming to bring about positive changes towards social justice and equality by using and promoting the values and approaches of community development.

Its membership base is varied, including local authorities, policy-makers, academics, non-profit organisations and 'grass roots' workers throughout the UK. They represent a range of interests, experience and perspectives whilst sharing a belief that a clear set of values and commitments should be at the heart of developing active and sustainable communities.

CDX acts as a catalyst for change by sharing information, experience and practice through a variety of means including conferences, networks, newsletters, website and research.

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Executive summary

The Community Development Challenge report (CDF et al, 2006) recommended that government and community development (CD) organisations work together to establish a CD outcomes and evidence base, so that the effects of CD practice are more easily identifiable and more effectively analysed. The hope is that this will lead to better planning and more stable investment.

This short piece of preparatory work shows that enthusiasm within some parts of government to understand better the impact of CD is matched by many practitioners’ desire to evaluate their work more effectively.

Summary of findings and recommendations

1. The steering group identified a range of reasons or drivers for improving evaluation practice in the CD field, including:
   - demonstration of impact and value
   - accountability to communities and funders
   - learning and reflection to improve practice.

Recommendation

- Future work on CD evaluation should balance the need for evidence that supports demonstration and justification with the role of evaluation in learning, reflection and accountability to communities. This may involve a wider appreciation of what counts as valid evidence.

2. A commitment to empowering community members informs the approach to evaluation taken by many CD practitioners and managers. Wherever possible they use participative and inclusive techniques, seeing evaluation as something that should be ‘done with’, rather than ‘done to’, community members. However, they are aware of their accountability to funders and other stakeholders, and recognise the complexities of these sometimes conflicting stakeholder demands.
Recommendations

- The National Empowerment Partnership should facilitate dialogue between decision makers, practitioners and researchers to encourage mutual understanding of each group’s needs and expectations around evaluation and evidence.

- Work to develop CD evaluation practice should include discussion of power differences and how to make evaluation processes and products more inclusive.

- A programme of support for CD practitioners and managers should be delivered to increase understanding of the links between evidence and policy, and how to use evidence to influence decision makers.

3. The research shows substantial evidence of a need for support and guidance with evaluation among CD practitioners, managers and others taking a CD approach to their work. Survey respondents’ experience and published research show that there are considerable challenges in evaluating complex community processes, including issues of attribution, timescales and articulating theories of change.

Recommendations

- A programme of evaluation support should be developed which builds skills, awareness, understanding and confidence in evaluation methods and approaches best suited to CD.

- This support should include awareness raising around the distinctions and connections between evaluation, monitoring and quality assurance, drawing on the expertise of specialists in each.

4. The survey of current evaluation practice suggests that practitioners are not routinely specifying the distinct outcomes of CD and evaluating their work against these. There are some frameworks of CD outcomes (i.e. changes that CD in particular is expected to bring about), most notably ABCD (Barr and Hashagen, 2000). Other frameworks have been derived from ABCD, but these are not widely shared.

^ For example, a framework identified in the Management report in this series (Miller, 2008), which is based on the ABCD community empowerment dimensions, and an unpublished reflective practice framework commissioned for CDF’s Rural Inclusion Practitioner Exchange.
Recommendations

- Further participatory work should be carried out with the CD field to share and explore the usefulness of existing CD evaluation frameworks and outcomes.

- Agreement on broad CD outcomes should be sought within the CD field in order to facilitate planning and evaluation.

5. It is not easy to locate reports of evaluations of CD projects, but those we reviewed include valuable learning about CD achievements, tensions, project design and management.

Recommendations

- Resources should be made available for further searches for existing CD-specific evaluations and to draw from them available learning and evidence of the achievements of CD.

- There should be a strategy for collating CD evaluation reports and sharing the learning from them with practitioners, managers and policymakers. One of the national CD organisations should take on this role.

6. As with other types of community processes, there is often a mismatch between the long-term impacts of CD and the reality of most evaluation timescales. Communities, practitioners, funders and policymakers need ‘interim assurances’ and indications of the differences that CD is making in the short, medium and long term.

Recommendation

- Work should be undertaken within the CD field to explore the ‘routes of influence’ between CD interventions and long-term outcomes, so that intermediate outcomes or milestones can be identified, demonstrated and evaluated.

7. Programme evaluations carried out for other community initiatives suggest that evaluation of CD should not be limited to experimental designs that seek a straightforward measurement of ‘$x$ intervention produces $y$ outcome’.
Executive summary

Recommendation:

● Further work should be undertaken to build understanding and appreciation of alternative paradigms for learning about and demonstrating ‘what works’ in CD, including those developed to address open and complex systems, such as complexity theory (Gilchrist, 2004). Work by the CD Challenge Group or the National Empowerment Partnership to establish evidence of what works should not be limited to experimental or ‘before and after’ models.

The rest of the report provides further details of the research and discussions which informed these findings and recommendations.
The Community Development Challenge report (CDF et al, 2006) recommended that government and community development (CD) organisations work together to establish a CD outcomes and evidence base, so that the effects of CD practice are more easily identifiable and more effectively analysed. The hope is that this will lead to better planning and more stable investment.

This preparatory study was undertaken to assess current evaluation practice among community development (CD) practitioners. A reference group was established to guide the research and develop subsequent work. The group met twice during the research, and also communicated by email. This chapter outlines some of the key discussion points raised.

**Drivers and motivation**

Members of the reference group had different reasons for their interest in evaluating CD. The group identified three broad sets of reasons for pursuing better evaluation practice in the field – demonstration and justification, accountability and learning.

*Demonstration and justification*

Practitioners and those supporting them need to be able to argue convincingly for investment in CD, to raise the profile of its achievements and increase understanding of its processes and professional status. This notion of demonstration and justification provides a way to unpack what is meant by the need for a ‘robust evidence base’, by prompting questions about what is required as evidence in different situations. For example, different types of evidence will be required to support a local funding bid for a CD project, national lobbying around a piece of legislation, or a local authority team arguing against downgrading.
Chapter 1: Learning from the reference group

Accountability

As individuals and organisations we need to be accountable to the communities we work with as well as to funders. This includes being able to assess whether we have done what we set out to do and what differences we have made, whether intended or unintended.

Learning

To improve practice and relevant policymaking, we need to reflect on and learn from CD practice – as practitioners, communities, organisations, policymakers and funders. Reflective practice and encouraging communities to learn together are key roles identified in the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Community Development Work.¹ Tools and frameworks for CD reflective practice exist but they are not widely used, and managers, employers and practitioners do not always appreciate the need for time and space for reflection.

Planning, outcomes and evaluation

Another key issue identified by the reference group was the importance of linking evaluation to planning. As in many other fields of practice, difficulties with evaluating CD are often linked to problems with planning, such as failing to articulate what is specific about taking a CD approach and the intended impact of the project or approach. Practitioners will struggle to assess whether they are achieving what they intended unless they can articulate the difference they want to make and plan for how to achieve it. They will also struggle to convince others of the value of their work if they cannot explain what difference it makes.

In light of the practitioners’ survey findings (see chapter 2), the reference group felt there is a need for the CD field to discuss the broad outcomes of CD work – the types of changes that CD is intended to bring about. This is discussed further in chapter 5.

¹ Available from LLUK: www.lifelonglearninguk.org/standards/3126.htm
Transferable tools and processes

Another point raised was the need to identify or develop evaluation methods that can fit within or alongside the evaluation of broader programmes, such as regeneration or health initiatives, which often include CD workers, and have their own evaluation frameworks. Rather than taking on a separate and additional CD evaluation framework, these practitioners are more likely to need to be able to plan and evaluate the CD aspect of their work within the structure in which they are working.
Learning from practitioners and managers

To assess current evaluation practice among community development (CD) practitioners, the Community Development Exchange (CDX) sent out a brief questionnaire (see appendix B) to practitioners via a number of CD networks. Fifty voluntary and statutory sector (VCS) practitioners and managers from across the UK responded.

Empowering evaluation

The responses suggest that CD practitioners are using participatory and accessible techniques for gathering information to inform their evaluation processes, in line with the principles and purposes of CD practice. One respondent described these as ‘tools that require minimum resources apart from time, and that the vast majority of people regardless of educational achievement can use.’

Alongside more established visual and participatory techniques such as Planning for Real, photography and graffiti walls, respondents had developed their own visual methods such as ‘chuff charts’ and ‘feeling faces’. Respondents also mentioned techniques that focus on personal stories, conversation and narratives to show respect for community members’ ability to reflect respect for community members’ ability to reflect on how the CD processes in which they have been involved have impacted on their life stories:

‘In terms of case studies, the participants themselves give me the content, I just type it up. Together we evaluate and reflect on the process and highlight benefits, pitfalls and areas for improvement.’

Other approaches that help gather narratives include video box, conversations and interviews:

‘Talk to people about what has been gained – confidence, knowledge, sense of having power.’
One respondent described how her CD team is supporting users to form a working group to feed back directly on the service and help shape improvements.

The survey responses thus suggest that CD practitioners gather information about the impact of their work in ways that reflect the values and approaches of CD. They look for techniques that are accessible to a wide range of participants, and approach evaluation as something that is ‘done with’ rather than ‘done to’ community members. Techniques are chosen that respect participants’ experiences, increase their skills and build relationships. As one respondent suggested, evaluation requires CD practitioners to:

‘get out there and meet people and form new relationships; this adds to sustainability and will allow local people to take responsibility.’

For some respondents, action research provides the most appropriate and valuable way of evaluating CD work, although they acknowledge that it requires considerable resources. In this approach community members are participants rather than subjects of research, and help set evaluation questions, gather data and analyse findings. As one respondent described:

‘It enhances the community development – it supports personal and group development and essentially it keeps control within the community development participants themselves so they are doing the research and not the subjects of it.’

In the words of another respondent:

‘The beneficiaries - community members - are the agents of their own process of development, and learn from the action they take. They must therefore own and conduct the evaluation, and must learn from and own the results.’

**Dealing with quantitative data**

The respondents also demonstrate an awareness of the need to provide quantitative measures of impact. This seems to reflect a pragmatic recognition that quantitative data can sometimes be more acceptable or
Chapters 2: Learning from practitioners and managers

persuasive (‘questionnaires lend themselves to analysis in a way that funders find reassuring’), but also a desire to find ways of standardising information about impact in order to make comparisons over time or between projects.

Respondents described a number of ways of generating quantitative measures of the impact of their work. One has used a ‘visual analogue scale’ to measure change in an individual between the time they joined the CD project and one year later. She described it as a difficult process requiring statistical analysis, but said, ‘we did get some very interesting and strong results showing the benefits of the community development process’.

Another respondent described using a ranking process against agreed indicators of ‘soft outcomes’ such as confidence in trying new activities. Measurements were gathered at the start of the project and at six-month or annual intervals.

Other respondents use standardised indicators of social capital (see appendix B) to measure the impact of a CD project or approach. One respondent has adapted indicators and questionnaires produced by the World Bank to explore dimensions of social capital, including groups and networking, trust and solidarity, social inclusion and cohesion and collective action and cooperation. Another uses social capital indicators developed for use by the VCS in Northern Ireland and recognised as a valid tool by the NI government.

While by no means rejecting the need to provide quantifiable measures of impact, survey respondents had a good understanding of the complexities and challenges involved. As one respondent said:

‘It’s hard to quantify what is often a deeply human process.’

Another identified a trade-off between ease of measurement and relevance:

‘… the challenge of identifying indicators that are measurable and relevant – the more relevant they are, the harder they tend to be to measure.’
In addition to the challenges posed by trying to quantify the impact of CD, practitioners also described the challenge of attribution: how to isolate the factors or interventions that have made a difference in complex social processes:

‘The whole nature of community development means that it is difficult to isolate the impact of a particular intervention.’

‘As community development is about working holistically with communities it is difficult to evaluate just the input that community development workers make.’

Another respondent referred to ‘the complexity of measuring attitudinal change at a community level and establishing causal links’. This has also been raised by experienced evaluators working on national community programmes (see chapter 4).

In the CD field the problem of attribution is not only a technical or theoretical question, it can also be a core practice issue. One of the key challenges identified in *The Community Development Challenge* report is that, because CD practice is about enabling, facilitating and building communities’ skills and confidence, practitioners are often reluctant to raise their own profile. As one survey respondent said:

‘Communities should not be made to think that our work has created their success.’

However, the same respondent also gave an example of how practitioners are finding creative ways of responding to the need to demonstrate their own impact while not taking credit away from the communities they have supported:

‘We have an award scheme to which we encourage communities to enter projects they have undertaken. Then we can give small cash prizes as recognition for their achievements and as seedcorn funding for future schemes. This means that communities with which we have been in contact are keen to tell us of their progress, and it allows us often at early stages to add value to their work. It
gives us a way to present these successes without us obviously taking the credit. We can then quietly report back to funders what wonderful results there have been for their investments.'

**Dealing with timescales**

Another challenge identified is the issue of the long-term nature of CD combined with the requirement for shorter-term evaluation:

‘In working with people you do not always see the effect of your inputs until in some cases years later. This makes real evaluation quite difficult at times.’

However, survey responses suggest that by establishing ongoing relationships, practitioners are able to gather information about the impact of their work some time after a project has ended:

‘We tend to put most weight on stories and feedback we get from people, often years after the event.’

‘Talking to people six months after the period of engagement has been the most helpful thing.’

**Identifying CD outcomes**

While the survey responses indicate that practitioners are using a range of techniques to gather feedback on the quality of their work, there was less evidence of attempts to draw out or evaluate the impact of CD itself. While respondents indicated that they are carrying out general monitoring and project evaluation, this sample did not appear to be drawing out the specific difference made by taking a CD approach.

A very small number of respondents identified this distinction. For example:

‘Community development is core to all our programmes, and is not usually an end in itself, and it is sometimes hard to draw out the impact of the community development approach as opposed to other actions taken.’
‘We do record our contacts with communities and their achievements but this is different to demonstrating the value of community development.’

Similarly, another respondent noted that one feedback method she uses with communities is ‘only useful for evaluating events, not CD’.

However, most respondents did not distinguish between general project evaluation and identifying the specific impact of CD. This lack of clarity is reflected in responses that ask for support with defining the key elements of CD in order to evaluate it:

‘Training in all aspects of community development, starting with basic principles, would be a benefit. How can you measure impact if you don’t have the basics?’

‘[We need help with] defining the components of community development so we know what is to be evaluated.’

Lack of resources

By far the most frequently mentioned barrier to evaluating CD work was a lack of money and time:

‘My worker and I try to adopt a community development approach, but we monitor and evaluate our delivery in a quite simplistic way really … We don’t really go through it from a community development perspective. I suppose therefore a barrier is that it takes more time.’

‘Good admin support to do good evaluation costs money and we focus the limited funds on delivery.’

Need for support

Given the challenges of quantification, attribution and timescales mentioned above, it is perhaps not surprising that almost all survey respondents indicated that they were struggling with evaluation and would benefit from more support. For example:
Chapter 2: Learning from practitioners and managers

‘We have found it really difficult to find tools and frameworks that meet the needs of our service delivery. It is also something that we are aware that we are not doing enough of … We know we need to do better.’

‘I think there is a huge gap here and I would love to receive information on what models there are out there.’

‘I tried my best to learn from what is out there, and found precious little.’

Only a minority of respondents mentioned using a specific (i.e. named) planning or evaluation framework (these are listed in appendix B).

The survey responses also indicated diverse understanding of what it means to evaluate. Many of the techniques or frameworks mentioned could be described as performance management or customer satisfaction measures rather than evaluation tools. This provides further evidence of the need for support in understanding the different purposes, approaches and tools involved in, for example, evaluation, performance management and quality assurance in the CD field.

A significant number of respondents noted that they are in the process of, or about to start, developing their own evaluation framework, having searched for but not found one suitable for their needs. As one respondent stated:

‘As an organisation we are meeting regularly to work on an evaluation process for the organisation … and it’s really difficult.’

This difficulty is captured well in the following quote from a respondent who has clearly put considerable thought into dealing with the complexity of evaluating CD:

‘Complexity theory provides us with an understanding of how communities work and how change happens (and how difficult it is to pin down!). Learning organisation theory provides us with a vision of what we’re trying to achieve – a learning community.

PQASSO² (as refined in our own Quality Mark) describes our day-to-day work with groups and provides us with some measure of progress. A certain amount of counting and numbering gives us a certain quantitative basis (but it’s very unreliable) and stories, anecdotes and observing how things change over the years provide us a more solid picture. This is what works for us – although I would like to see us do something more rigorous.”
A second aspect of this work was reviewing a small sample of reports of external evaluations of community development (CD) projects. The aim was to look at what approaches are being taken to evaluating CD activity and what information is available for building an ‘evidence base’ (rather than to examine the findings of the evaluations, although this would be a very useful exercise).

Appendix C provides a summary of six evaluation reports that deal with projects that explicitly relate their work to CD and attempt to evaluate different aspects of it.

Key points

- It was difficult to locate examples of evaluation reports that specifically addressed CD projects or the CD aspect of a project. This may be due to the lack of time available to carry out this review, but it is also because none of the national CD organisations appear to keep an archive of CD evaluations.

- Three of the reports reviewed were evaluations of New Deal for Communities (NDC) projects. There may be more analysis of the outcomes associated with CD among evaluations of individual NDC projects or the NDC programme as a whole.

- The evaluations include useful learning about what contributes to the successful design, management and delivery of CD projects.

- They also contain evidence of CD outcomes, although these are not generally compared with baselines.

- The evaluations use a range of frameworks to identify the levels at which they should look for evidence of CD impact. These include four levels identified by CDF, three identified by Banks et al (2003), and a framework of ‘community interactions’.
4 Learning from programme evaluations

An additional strand of this workstream has been to draw on work already undertaken for various government departments to evaluate the impact of community engagement and community involvement initiatives. These analyses, although not focusing specifically on community development (CD), provide important learning for attempts to establish a CD evidence base at national level.

One issue raised by these reviews is that the type of evidence and evaluation material that tends to be generated from community involvement initiatives is often unsuitable for the ‘experimental’ approaches frequently used to evaluate community interventions (using ‘before and after’ measurements of some aspect of the area to assess effectiveness). For example, after conducting a large-scale review of evidence of the impact of community engagement and CD, researchers commissioned by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) concluded:

‘The evidence about community engagement … uses a variety of methods. Only a relatively small segment of it deals with effectiveness. It addresses a very wide range of topics, mechanisms and activities. Much of it is descriptive and based on single case studies. There is little trial data and there is a heavy emphasis on process. … the causal pathway from activity to outcome … is much more highly attenuated than in many other areas with which [NICE] deals.’ (Kelly, 2007)

There is also often a lack of fit between the timescales of community involvement and typical evaluation practice. This tension is reflected in practitioner concerns revealed in our survey. One reason that many evaluations are undertaken early, particularly at national level, is the political imperative to be seen to be delivering results:

‘Part of the difficulty of course is that government wants to see the results of its investment fairly quickly and this is often at odds with
Chapter 4: Learning from programme evaluations

the longer term over which development takes place’. (Wilson and Heeney 2005, p. 70)

There is also a lack of fit between community involvement initiatives and traditional economic cost-benefit analysis. One paper for the NICE review, for example, concluded that ‘economic modelling, as it is traditionally pursued … is neither appropriate nor feasible’. (Carr-Hill and Street, 2007, p. 11)

There are a number of possible responses to this lack of fit between the types of data typically generated by community involvement or CD programmes and the historically dominant ‘x intervention will lead to y outcome’ evaluation design. One is to address the evaluation design. As Barnes et al (2003, p. 265) note:

‘There is now widespread acceptance that exclusively experimental models are inappropriate for the evaluation of complex policy initiatives that seek multi-level change within individuals, families, communities and systems.’

Another issue raised by reviews of evaluations in this area is the need to develop more explicit ‘theories of change’, or reasons why a certain intervention or approach is undertaken, at the start of projects. Without an explicit theory of change it is hard to assess whether projects have been successful even in their own terms and if not, why not. The gap between the intervention or ‘input’ and the expected outcomes is therefore so large and involves so many other factors that it is very hard to design effective evaluations. ‘Theory based’ evaluation is recommended, whereby the assumed relationships between interventions and effects are identified or ‘surfaced’. As noted in the ABCD framework in 2000:

‘Given that community development is largely concerned with wider outcomes that it cannot control, the relationship between the outputs that it can influence and the wider outcomes is crucial to understand.’ (Barr and Hashagen, 2000, p. 25)

In the context of the NICE work on community engagement, Attree and French (2007, p. 12) begin to unpack the possible ‘routes of influence’ between different engagement mechanisms (such as
informing, building social capital and partnership working) and improved health:

Attree and French go on to describe the different mechanisms and expected outcomes associated with each element of community engagement outlined in the diagram.

By helping to understand the processes between ‘inputs’ and ‘outcomes’, this type of approach could help address the issue raised by the following survey respondent:

‘Corporate management and fund holders do not appreciate the impact that something as simple as having the confidence to participate in a meeting can have on an individual’s life. This creates a problem in getting the message across about the real impact.’

The benefits of taking this type approach to CD evaluation therefore include providing new ways of communicating what is distinctive about CD and how it works, and also bringing CD theory and practice closer together. This is reflected in advice from one respondent:

‘Soft outcomes are not the poor relation to hard outputs. Develop your methodology logically and clearly so everyone can understand why you identify the measure you chose as significant, and what you are achieving by tracking it.’
Chapter 4: Learning from programme evaluations

It is also an approach that has a good fit with CD’s commitment to address power relations in that:

‘It is likely that in surfacing these theories the picture will be complex and inconsistencies and logical flaws may become apparent. So too will fundamental disagreements among stakeholders. As evaluators we cannot ignore these or wish them away. Nor should we ignore the political realities of power differentials among the different stakeholders advancing these claims.’ (Burton et al, 2006, p. 309)

While going some way to exploring the complexity of community interventions, these ‘theory of change’ approaches still specify how actions will lead to outcomes in a linear fashion. Barnes et al (2003) found in their evaluation of the Health Action Zones initiative that, while these approaches were valuable for individual projects, at programme level they ‘cannot embrace the way complex systems actually work’. An alternative is to draw on ‘complexity theory’ (e.g. Gilchrist, 2004) to analyse programmes where context is as important as interventions. As one respondent commented:

‘I think while we’re still working with linear models we won’t be able to understand community development. We need to shift to a way of thinking which is in line with complexity theory.’

Of course, evaluators readily acknowledge that evaluation studies which focus on the complexity of systems and contexts are unlikely to provide policymakers with straightforward conclusions of the type ‘x intervention will lead to y outcome’. However, evidence shows that policymaking is rarely affected by research evidence in a straightforward way:

‘Despite the claims made in official publications, the social programmes discussed in the full policy paper are not strongly evidence based. There is a gap between the rhetoric of evidence based policy and what happens on the ground, which is a great deal more complicated.’ (Coote et al, 2004, p. 3)

Burton et al (2006) agree that the process of policymaking is more complex than might be suggested by government’s repeated calls for a
'robust evidence base’. They describe policymaking as ‘a process that is ongoing, iterative and often mysterious to all involved’ and add that ‘policy decisions are often shrouded in uncertainty; it is not always clear that a decision has been taken, it is sometimes unclear what the decision is and who has taken it.’
5 Articulating community development outcomes

In order to address the challenges identified with evaluating community development (CD), the evaluation reference group agreed that a key priority was to strengthen the identification and recognition of outcomes for CD. This recommendation is borne out by the lack of planning for CD outcomes suggested by the responses to the practitioner survey, and the lack of clearly identified CD outcomes in the evaluation reports reviewed briefly in chapter 3.

Planning and evaluating around outcomes is relatively new within the voluntary and community sector (VCS) as a whole, but is increasingly expected by funders and has become the standard way of expressing results in arenas such as local area agreements. Organisations including Charities Evaluation Services and the Performance Hub have offered training programmes for the VCS in outcomes working.

Some parts of the CD field have resisted the move towards outcomes working, arguing that it is incompatible with CD values and working practices. But perhaps there is a need to make it clearer that we are talking about identifying broad outcomes associated with CD. Within agreed CD outcomes, individual communities and projects can of course develop and specify the outputs, outcomes or indicators relevant to their particular context.

By identifying a set of outcomes associated with CD as an occupation or way of working, the field can be more assertive in planning and evaluating CD work on its own terms, better able to make the links between CD outcomes and outcomes prioritised nationally or locally, more confident in communicating what is distinctive about CD and better able to identify ‘good’ CD practice. The aim is perhaps to balance the need to articulate CD outcomes in general with protecting the right of communities to identify the outcomes that matter to them:

‘In my view the future funding support for community development depends on its ability to show that it makes a tangible difference.'
But it has to defend the principle that the difference it makes reflects the interests of the communities with which it works.’ (Barr, 2005, p. 6)

The most widely recognised framework for evaluating CD is ABCD (Achieving Better Community Development), published in 2000 by the Scottish Community Development Centre. It sets out four ‘community empowerment dimensions’ which, it argues, are ‘critical and non-negotiable’ for CD initiatives:

‘All community development programmes should be able to demonstrate that they understand each dimension, how they use it to understand the level and profile of empowerment in their community, how they are working to advance it, and how they will know what changes.’ (Barr and Hashagen, 2000, p. 25)

The four dimensions have associated processes and outcomes, against which CD work and CD approaches can be planned and evaluated. The framework can be used for self-evaluation or external evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal empowerment</td>
<td>Actions through which people gain the knowledge, skill and confidence they need to take action on things that matter to them</td>
<td>People are more confident, have the skills and understanding they need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive action</td>
<td>Actions which bring people together to recognise and challenge inequality and exclusion</td>
<td>People accept the principles of social justice and opportunities for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organisation</td>
<td>Actions which support and strengthen the range and quality of organisation in communities</td>
<td>Thriving community groups and networks in which people are active and involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation and influence</td>
<td>Ways in which the empowered community interacts with the outside world to achieve change at a local level</td>
<td>Strong, democratic, effective community organisations, responsive services and governance structures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5: Articulating community development outcomes

Many practitioners have received training in the ABCD framework, and the community empowerment dimensions are used by a number of CD evaluators and facilitators. Given this, it is perhaps surprising that ABCD was so rarely mentioned by survey respondents. Some practitioners have suggested that they perceived the development of ABCD as part of a ‘top down’ state agenda, and others that it is simply too technically complex and time consuming to implement.

However, there is evidence that the community empowerment dimensions of the ABCD framework – those aspects seen as fundamental to CD – are being used as a basis for defining, planning and evaluating CD in a range of contexts. For example, Stockport Council and partners are implementing a planning tool based on the dimensions, and the national learning framework for ‘Active Learning for Active Citizenship’ broadly corresponds to the four community empowerment dimensions. Recent work supported by the National Empowerment Partnership introduces a new framework derived from ABCD, DiCE, which provides a CD perspective on empowerment (CDX et al, 2008).

Other attempts to communicate outcomes of CD can be found in Firm Foundations (Civil Renewal Unit, 2004, p. 34) and The Community Development Challenge (CDF et al, 2006). These outcomes are compatible with those suggested by the community empowerment dimensions of ABCD, and could easily be mapped onto them. For example, outcomes identified in Firm Foundations include a higher level of trust and cooperation amongst local people, a wider, stronger, better networked, more varied, accessible and inclusive local community sector and greater capacity amongst community groups and organisations to engage in joint working with public authorities. Outcomes identified in The Community Development Challenge report include reduction of isolation and alienation, people learning new organising skills and agencies, authorities and professions becoming better able to engage with communities.

3. The national framework for active learning for active citizenship, including principles, case studies, good practice advice and guidance on how to run citizenship learning programmes for adults. Online only at www.takepart.org
Appendix A

Sample questionnaire

Evaluation and community development – help us to help you!

● How do you demonstrate the impact of your community development work?
● How do you know whether you are making a difference?
● How do you and the communities you work with learn from what you do?

CDX would like to find out more about how community development practitioners currently evaluate, assess or demonstrate what they do. Please take a moment to answer the questions below to help us learn more about current evaluation practice.

The case for community development has always been difficult to ‘prove’. Many existing approaches to evaluating community change mask the specific contribution of community development, or are at odds with community development values and approaches. But the need to demonstrate the impact of community development and learn from our practice has never been greater.

This initial research will improve current community development evaluation activity by sharing information about the tools, approaches and frameworks which are best suited to community development evaluation. We hope it will also provide a basis for further work to help practitioners, communities, funders and policymakers better understand the contribution and impacts of community development.

Please send us as much information as you can to help us build a picture of current practice.

Thank you for your time.
Beth Longstaff
Research and Policy Officer
Appendix A: Sample questionnaire

Your name:

Contact address:

Email:  

Telephone:

Please tell us about any tools, frameworks or approaches you have used to evaluate, assess or demonstrate the impact of your community development work. Please give as much detail as possible about what you did, the names of any tools or frameworks etc. and information or links to where we can find more info.

Of the things you have used, which have you found most helpful and why?
The specific contribution of community development is often overlooked in general evaluations of community activity. Of the things you have tried, which tools, frameworks or approaches have been useful in drawing out the benefits or impact of community development in particular, and how?

What difficulties or barriers have you faced when evaluating your community development work?

Any other comments on the subject of community development evaluation:
Appendix B

How do community development practitioners evaluate their work?

Details of the frameworks and methods respondents used in their ‘work to evaluate their community development practice’.

**ABCD**

Community development planning and evaluation framework from CDF

http://www.proveandimprove.org/new/tools/ABCD.php


**Assessing community strengths**

A systematic approach to community-led capacity building strategies


http://jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/242.asp

**Building practitioner strengths**

A framework to guide practitioners reflecting on their practice.


**Church Urban Fund (CUF) Project Reflection Workshop tool**

Guidance and materials for planning and evaluation workshops.

http://www.cuf.org.uk/page18551856.aspx
‘Evaluating your community development activity’
Guidance/framework from Community Development Cymru.

www.cdcymru.org

‘How good is our community education and development? Self evaluation using quality indicators
Quality indicators from HMI Education Scotland.

www.hmie.gov.uk

Learning Evaluation and Planning (LEAP)
Planning and evaluation framework from Scottish Community Development Centre.

www.leap.scdc.org.uk

National Occupational Standards for CD

www.lifelonglearninguk.org/standards/3126.htm

Planning Triangle
Charities Evaluation Services (CES) ‘planning triangle’ and associated guidance for planning and evaluation.

http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/index.cfm?pg=124

PQASSO
A quality assurance tool from CES.

http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/index.cfm?pg=42
Appendix B: How do community development practitioners evaluate their work?

Visible Communities

Quality standards for multi-purpose community organisations, from Community Matters.


Social capital indicators

Two sets of social capital indicators were mentioned:

- Those developed by the World Bank, which identify dimensions of social capital such as:
  - groups and networking: their structure, membership, diversity, how they function
  - trust and solidarity: towards neighbours, within social networks and in the institutions of governance
  - empowerment and political action.


- Those promoted by the Northern Ireland Executive (developed by Charities Evaluation Northern Ireland): ‘they show how the community has bonded with one another, with other communities and with decision makers. Now recognised by government as a valid tool, so it makes it easier to prove the value of CD work.’

  http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/toolkit_to_measure_the_added_value_of_voluntary_and_community_base_activity.doc
Appendix C

Examples of evaluations of community development projects or approaches

Community Development Practice: Tackling health inequalities (2007)

Christine Horrocks, Nancy Kelly and Sue Perry

Report prepared for the Eastern Wakefield Primary Care Trust (PCT). Eastern Wakefield PCT has made considerable investment in CD activities, and recently commissioned independent research into the nature and impact of this CD work.

The objectives of the research were to:

● provide a detailed overview of CD work currently taking place in the Eastern Wakefield PCT area
● assess the nature of CD working and its role with regard to tackling health inequalities
● explore the implications CD work might have for transforming lives and communities.

The researchers used a framework of ‘community practice’ to look at work taking place at community, organisational and societal levels. The research is qualitative, based on desk research and interviews with practitioners and participants. The research report includes narrative case studies detailing individuals’ participation in CD projects and the impact this has had, interpreting it in terms of concepts such as community empowerment, social capital and sustainability.

The research found individuals’ and communities’ participation in CD activities had had a number of outcomes, including psychosocial impacts, outcomes around training and education, healthier lifestyle choices and some health-related results, through signposting community members to specific health services.
Appendix C: Examples of evaluations of community development projects or approaches

Building New Lives in the Community: The Derwent Refugee Community Development Support Project evaluation and end of project report (2006)

Gail Pringle, Gersh Subhra, Caron McLoughlin and Andrew Jackson

This is an end-of-project evaluation funded by Derwent NDC. Evaluation support was provided by the University of Derby, but was ‘not the traditional external and so-called “objective” evaluator facility but rather a capacity building and enabling role’.

The evaluators took an approach which:

- aimed to encourage the project to self-evaluate throughout its term, using tools and techniques complementary to a CD way of working with communities
- brought in views from local stakeholders, including local residents and partner projects.

The evaluation approach is set out in a resource pack developed by Gersh Subhra at the University of Derby and Derbyshire, ‘Reclaiming the Evaluation Agenda’ (Subhra, 2004).


Sarah Banks and Andrew Orton

This evaluation report and article in the Community Development Journal (CDJ) provide different ways of reporting the findings of an external evaluation of Durham County Council’s (DCC) Community Support Unit (CSU). The CSU carried out various CD roles and helped to implement the council’s community development policy and strategy.
The evaluation was carried out by researchers from Durham University’s Community and Youth Work Studies Unit over three years: 2001-2004. It was based on evidence from quarterly monitoring returns submitted by Community Support Officers (CSOs), other relevant reports and documentation, interviews with CSOs, other DCC officers, councillors and a limited number of community group members and staff from other agencies.

The evaluation report provides a national context to developments in local government, places the work of the CSU in that context, identifies the CSU’s achievements in relation to the council’s CD policy and strategy and makes a series of recommendations around the role of the unit’s staff, work with councillors, work with local communities, strategic and policy-related work, monitoring and evaluation and promotion and publicity.

The CDJ article offers a further theoretical and conceptual context, and uses the Durham evaluation as a case study to examine issues such as changing organisational cultures, modernising local government and tensions between strategic and CD work.

**Bangor Community Development Project evaluation (2004)**

*Rural Resources*

This evaluation of a CDF project was commissioned by CDF as part of the project’s Community Fund grant. The evaluation, which ran from 2003 to 2004, had two main aims:

- drawing out learning to inform future project design and CD practice
- assessing the project’s success in meeting its objectives.

The evaluation report provides lessons and recommendations in areas including funding, project planning, design and management, monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder perceptions, CD work and community work, developing CD practice and the relationship between CD and community enterprise, economic development and capacity building.
Appendix C: Examples of evaluations of community development projects or approaches

The report was written four months before the end of the project and it is not clear if there has been a subsequent impact study. The evaluator notes that it may have been too early to assess the full impact of the CD elements of the project.

The evaluation methodology included workshops, interviews and community awareness surveys and generated mainly qualitative data. It was carried out from a CD perspective. It presents outputs against the project objectives, but does not discuss outcomes or impact.


Susan Hampshaw and Faye Dunbavan, Doncaster NDC Evaluation Unit

This evaluation of the resident support workers (RSWs) was one of the first schemes to be funded by Doncaster NDC. The project ran from 2002 to 2005 and involved the recruitment and training of five NDC residents as CD workers. Its aim was to target, engage and develop the capacity of residents and communities to engage positively in regeneration.

The evaluation was carried out by the Doncaster NDC Evaluation Unit from April to September 2004. It says, ‘we have taken the view that the emphasis should be on improving rather than proving’. The evaluation assesses:

- the success of the project in achieving its aim of recruiting and training local people to become CD workers
- the extent to which those workers have been carrying out CD work.

The evaluation looks at the extent to which the RSW team worked within a framework of CD using definitions such as that used by Thomas and Duncan (2000). They look at whether the project has addressed four different levels of CD work: with individuals, with local groups, with networks of groups and with public authorities and other agencies.
Examples of evaluations of community development projects or approaches

The evaluation provides examples of each element of the RSWs’ work, the role of the team leader, grants officer and admin team. It considers relationships between different parts of the team, between the team and its host in the council for voluntary service, and between them and the NDC as a whole. It identifies ‘pressure points’ and ‘frustrations, tensions and conflicts’ which must be addressed, and makes recommendations for how impact and effectiveness can be maximised.
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