

The Community Development Challenge: Where we stand three years on




Introduction

In 2006, the Community Development Foundation (CDF) led an Advisory Group in an assessment of the current state of community development (CD) in England. The Advisory Group brought together the leading figures in CD, including the two other national CD organisations, the Community Development Exchange (CDX) and the Federation for Community Development Learning (FCDL), as well as practitioners, academics, and partners from local authorities. The resulting report, *The Community Development Challenge*, outlined six key recommendations as to how CD organisations can work together to raise the profile – and effectiveness – of CD across the country.

Three years later, there has been some significant progress, but many of the obstacles identified in the report still remain. There are also new challenges thrown up by a worsening economic climate that have raised the prospect of local communities having to do even more to meet their own needs. At a time when empowering local communities is on every political agenda, a greater investment in CD and the CD workforce is more important now than ever. An early investment in CD is a step toward better equipping our communities to prevent decline. This paper presents an update on how the recommendations of *The Community Development Challenge* have advanced, and how the work will continue in the future.

How this document works

Each recommendation is tagged by a traffic light signal indicating progress:

-  Recommendation achieved
-  Work in progress
-  Most work still to be done

For each recommendation, the **Where we are** section summarises the achievements to date. **Where we're going** outlines what remains to be achieved, and what the CD field is doing about it.

The **Resources** section shows you where you can access information on various aspects of CD practice.

Recommendation one: Definition and status of the occupation



Policymakers and practitioners alike should commit to a consistent, concrete and rounded definition of CD and its outcomes, and ensure that this is reflected in the relevant National Occupational Standards (NOS) and other core sources.

Where we are:

In 2008–9, CD practitioners came together, under the direction of FCDL and Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), to establish revised NOS for CD (available at www.lluk.org/national-occupational-standards.htm). The NOS provide a guiding framework for community development practice.

Where we're going:

CDF, FCDL and CDX will work together to publicise the Standards through national and regional events. This will increase awareness, and ensure the NOS are embedded in CD practice. To help promote the NOS more widely, FCDL and CDF are producing a summary and practical guide for CD workers and their managers (to be published in the spring of 2010).

The NOS are also being used to develop new Evaluation and Qualifications Frameworks (see Recommendations two and six).

Recommendation two: Improving the evidence base



Government and CD organisations should conduct research to highlight the impact and outcomes of CD work. The CD field should lobby all levels of government to include indicators of stronger communities in their performance management instruments.

Where we are:

In 2008, CDF and CDX published *The Community Development Challenge: Evaluation*, an assessment of the challenges and opportunities of evaluating CD. In the same year, CDX held a conference on how to evaluate empowerment which resulted in the practice sharing report, *Empowering evaluation: Evaluating empowerment*. CDX have also run training and other events to share good practice on evaluation.


CDF, CDX, FCDL and Groundwork North West are currently working together to draft a common

evaluation framework based on the CD NOS 2009 for CD practitioners and their managers.

Where we're going:

Progress has been patchy and knowledge gaps remain. Further consultation and research is still required to build a complete picture of the impact of CD work across Britain. CDF is currently investigating building a 'business case for CD' – to offer policymakers, funders and practitioners alike proof of the impact and importance of CD to achieving government and community goals.

Recommendation three: Creating a strategic approach across localities and establishing regional support



All public agencies and regional bodies should support CD. The government's framework for community capacity building, *Firm Foundations* (Home Office, 2004), should be adopted in each locality.

Where we are:

The Community Development Challenge: Strategies, published by CDF and CDX, offers guidance on developing CD strategies within a local area. A second publication, *The Community Development Challenge: Democracy* demonstrates how CD can make decision-making processes more inclusive, participatory and sustainable. Progress has also been made by regional CD networks in joining up local activity, and demonstrating its importance to local authorities and partnerships:

- **Regional CD networks** are building regional support for CD workers. Regional networks share good practice and demonstrate the value of CD to relevant agencies. For more information, visit www.fcdl.org.uk/regions/index.htm.
- The **National Empowerment Partnership** (NEP) aims to improve the quality, coordination and evidence of community empowerment across England. The NEP has funded several guides to creating a strategic approach across localities, (see Resources section).
- The **Regional Empowerment Partnerships** (REPs) are working toward the goal of regional coordination. In each of the nine English regions, the REPs bring together the main public and third sector bodies focused on empowerment to better align strategy.

Where we're going:

The adoption of strategic approaches to CD remains uneven among public and regional bodies, and many have yet to be convinced of the importance of CD. Not all regional networks are resourced, and some do not have a strategic function. Much work still needs to be done on joining up efforts on the ground. CDF will look at the mechanisms needed for improving local and regional strategic support for CD during 2010–11. In the final year of NEP (2010–11), CDF will be working with REPs to help them consider how to develop an ongoing strategic role in supporting CD and empowerment.

Recommendation four: Funding



CD funding should be adequate across the nation and especially in disadvantaged areas. To ensure this is the case, government, local government and other public agencies should commit to long-term funding structures, and allocate some of their budget to CD for all policies which invoke community empowerment.

Where we are:

Investment in CD remains inadequate, both in terms of statutory funding for CD, and funding for smaller scale, local community activity (which CD workers often help to grow). The success of grants programmes such as Grassroots Grants demonstrates the impact of local funding on small scale community activity, and what could be achieved on a wider scale if a greater commitment is made to improving funding for CD.

Where we're going:

CDF will continue to lobby policymakers and funders to develop funding schemes which specifically support local CD activity.

There is an urgent need to argue the case for local authorities to invest in CD. CDF's 'business case for CD' should help provide CD workers with the tools and evidence to effectively influence their organisations to better support a CD approach.

Recommendation five: Management and delivery



CD should be managed and delivered to the highest standards. Management guidance for CD should be developed, together with management training

modules. Job descriptions and person specifications should include both an understanding of the CD theory and practical fieldwork experience.

Where we are:

CDF and CDX published *The Community Development Challenge: Management* to provide managers with guidance on establishing high standards in CD practice. In addition, the revised NOS for CD require that managers of CD workers must hold the same values as CD workers themselves.

Where we're going:

The NOS practical guide (see Recommendation one) will help managers write effective job descriptions that incorporate CD values and practice. However, more needs to be done to help managers with little experience of CD to better understand the work of their staff.

Recommendation six: Training, education and recruitment



Greater efforts must be made to raise the profile of the CD profession and identify how it can work with other professions. Guidance should be provided to the education sector to promote CD as a career. Special attention should be given to developing the skills and capacity of marginalised groups to become involved in CD.

Where we are:

In addition to the revised NOS for CD, the Improving Reach project run by FCDL went some way to developing the skills of CD trainers from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. A Homes and Communities Academy report assesses how CD practitioners can spread community empowerment skills to other occupations (see Resources section).

Where we're going:

A broader strategic vision needs to be put in place to ensure the progress on this recommendation is not piecemeal. There is a pressing need for commitment and resources from government and the learning and skills sector to ensure that appropriate qualifications are available.

Work has started on a Community Development Qualifications Framework, based on the new NOS and relevant to England, Wales, Scotland and Northern

Ireland. This will identify a clear progression route for CD practitioners and enable both qualifications and practical experience to be properly recognised and accredited. A major two-day national conference in April 2010 will review the draft framework and develop a qualifications action plan. CDF, CDX, FCDL and the England Standards Board are working together to ensure appropriate qualifications and training are available to CD workers from autumn 2010.

Conclusion

The work of the CD Challenge Advisory Group to date has proved that by working together in partnership, a great deal can be achieved. However, challenges still remain. CD has a central role to play in helping local communities address new challenges rising from the economic recession – particularly when cuts in national public spending make it difficult to achieve strategic regional and local coordination and funding recommendations. The NOS, the CD evidence base, and a new training and qualifications framework are among the projects building a solid foundation from which to meet the challenges ahead. It is essential that national organisations continue to work together to ensure the value of CD is recognised by the voluntary and statutory sectors and local and national government, and that a skilled and respected workforce is in place to deliver it.

Resources

For a detailed breakdown of the recommendations, see the full report:

CDF, CDX, FCDL & CD2 Working Group. (2006). *The Community Development Challenge*. Available at www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitydevelopment

For updated information about CD learning and qualifications see:

The England Standards Board
www.EnglandStandardsBoard.org.uk

The Federation for Community Development Learning www.fcdl.org.uk

For more information on the evaluation of CD, see:

CDX. (2008). *Empowering evaluation: evaluating empowerment*. Available at www.cdx.org.uk/files/u1/empowering_evaluation.pdf

Chanan, G. (2009). *Evaluating Empowerment: reconciling indicators with local experience*. Available at www.creatingexcellence.org.uk/ceimages/Evaluating_empowerment_booklet.pdf

Chanan, G. (2009) *Valuing community empowerment: Making the business case*. Available at www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/publication?id=69013

London REP. (2009). *Developing quality in community empowerment: An evaluation model*. Available at www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/publication?id=69449

Longstaff, B. (2008). *Community Development Challenge: Evaluation*. Available at www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/publication?id=22892

For further guidance on strategy, see the following publications:

CDX. (2008). *Empowerment in Action*. Available at www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/publication?id=15304

IDeA, NAVCA and the Urban Forum. (2009). *Developing your comprehensive community engagement strategy*. Available at www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/publication?id=15289

Longstaff, B. (2008). *CD Challenge: Strategies*. Available at www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/publication?id=22854

For more information on Grassroots Grants, see:

www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/news-headline?id=180106.

For guidance to local authorities on developing a strategic vision of how to use CD, see:

Bowles, M. (2008). *Community Development Challenge: Democracy*. Available at www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/publication?id=22475

For management guidance, see:

Miller, C. (2008). *Community Development Challenge: Management*. Available at www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/publication?id=22537

For a framework for developing empowerment skills, see:

HCA Academy. *Empowerment skills for all: Analysing gaps and constructing a learning framework*. HCA Academy. Available at www.hcaacademy.co.uk/empowerment-skills-for-all

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