

Community Development and a Community Development approach to Service Provision

Community development has been seen as emphasizing self-help, mutual support, the building up of neighbourhood integration, the development of neighbourhood capacities for problem-solving and self-representation, and the promotion of collective action to bring a community's preferences to the attention of political decision-makers. However, community development and community development work are concepts that can be hard to narrowly define. However, community development is probably best seen as ...an occupation (both paid and unpaid) which aims to build active and influential communities based on justice, equality and mutual respect (Community Development Exchange (CDX))

CDX go on to make clear the purposes of community development work and what it means in practice. Community development work is done in ways which challenge oppression and tackle inequalities. It involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and people in positions of power, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives.

Community development work involves working with communities to; identify their strengths, needs, rights and responsibilities, plan, organise and take action, and assess the effect of any actions taken. It also involves working with agencies to increase their capacity to understand and work with communities.

Terms such as 'community development', 'community capacity building' and 'community involvement' are similar in the sense that they can all refer to processes of helping community members develop skills and confidence so that they can have more influence on the issues that affect their lives. However, terms such as 'community involvement', 'community participation' and 'community engagement' usually refer to attempts to encourage communities to get involved in the work of an outside agency or organisation. This type of work is more likely to start with the needs or targets of the agency, rather than the needs of the community. Community development is different to other community-related work because it involves a commitment to; starting with the issues which people in communities identify as being important to them, rather than starting with the issues that an outside agency wants to tackle, helping people understand why the issues they want to tackle have come about, and why some groups have more power or resources than others, and working towards changes which reduce inequality and poverty.

Taking a community development approach requires being committed to; collective working (working together towards common goals, forming networks and making connections to help people collaborate and come together in groups), equality and justice (challenging discrimination and working alongside those who are powerless, and raising awareness about inequality and how things can be changed) learning and reflecting (recognising that everyone has skills and knowledge, and learning from mistakes as well as successes), participation (helping individuals to get involved and sharing power throughout communities, and increasing people's influence over decisions which affect their lives), political awareness (raising awareness of communities' concerns, and linking local concerns to the bigger picture), and sustainability (working with and investing in the capacity of people and groups so that change lasts, and using environmental resources responsibly)

At a practical level we have involved ourselves in community development in the course of our evaluation work, primarily by involving local people in the data collection and data analysis process. To find out more about how we incorporate community development and capacity building into our project evaluations please visit our [home page](#).