

# role of community development

the role of community development in tackling poverty

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Community development is a key strategy for tackling poverty. It is a process of working with communities to improve their living conditions and to empower them to take control of their own lives. Community development is a key strategy for tackling poverty. It is a process of working with communities to improve their living conditions and to empower them to take control of their own lives.





# The Role of Community Development in Tackling Poverty

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# 1. Introduction

The Combat Poverty Agency has, since its establishment in 1986, advocated community development as a means of overcoming poverty. The Agency has defined community development as a *'process whereby those who are marginalised and excluded are enabled to gain in self-confidence, to join with others and to participate in actions to change their situation and to tackle the problems that face their community'*.<sup>1</sup>

The objective of this paper is to set out the Combat Poverty Agency's view of the principles and benefits of community development and to define the Agency's understanding of community development as a key component in the struggle against poverty. By doing this, the Agency hopes to encourage greater understanding of the potential of community development among policy- and decision-makers concerned with the problems of poverty and social exclusion.

The promotion and support of community development, specifically as a means of overcoming poverty, is part of the Agency's statutory obligation under the 1986 Combat Poverty Agency Act.<sup>2</sup> This role is particularly important in the current public policy context. The Agency believes that the current policy directions – towards decentralised services, devolution of decision making, increased partnership between sectors and integration of programmes and services – will be enhanced and will contribute more effectively to participatory citizenship for disadvantaged groups if they are built on community development principles and actively promote community development practice.<sup>3</sup>

The Agency acknowledges that community development, on its own, will not eliminate poverty from our society: 'One of the main lessons that proponents of community development should have learned from the

experience of the 1970s and 1980s is that community development is not the solution to poverty. There is a danger that, by focusing too much on the local level, the major causes of poverty (excessive wealth and inequality) will be ignored and the necessary radical policies to tackle it will be avoided'.<sup>4</sup>

But it can make a valuable contribution to a broader anti-poverty strategy that addresses the fundamental structural inequality which gives rise to poverty.

A broad, multi-dimensional strategy to tackle poverty includes a focus throughout public policy on bringing about a fairer distribution of resources and power. This can be done through social and economic policies, fiscal policies, environmental policies, public service provision, health, education, transport and so on. In this way poverty and social exclusion are tackled by developing policies and expending resources to ensure that individuals have a right to an adequate income, access to employment, fair taxation, educational opportunities, housing, health and other services. Community development principles and activity can support and inform the development of such public policies.

However, one difficulty facing policy makers is that community development is a term popularly used to describe a broad range of activities that take place in a variety of settings with a variety of objectives, methods and value-bases. It spans the work of community development projects, women's groups, anti-drugs groups and youth projects through to community enterprises, credit unions, local tourism initiatives, partnership companies and tidy towns committees.

Amid the proliferation of community based activity and what is popularly referred to as

'community development' it is clear that there is not just one common understanding of what community development is, what its intended outcomes are and what it looks like in practice. The agency's focus is on community development, specifically as a means of overcoming poverty.

This paper does not offer a theoretical exploration of the concept of community development or a comprehensive overview of the field. It draws on work published by the Agency and others over the past couple of decades and represents an attempt by the Combat Poverty Agency to promote an understanding of community development as part of an anti-poverty strategy. It is targeted at those who are new to the area, particularly those in the statutory sector, attempting to put into practice their new obligations under the Government's National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

**Combat Poverty Agency**

February 2000

**Community development can make a valuable contribution to a broader anti-poverty strategy that addresses the fundamental structural inequality which gives rise to poverty.**

<sup>1</sup> Combat Poverty Agency Strategic Plan 1993-1995 (1993)

<sup>2</sup> The Act states that one of the functions of the Agency is the initiation of measures aimed at overcoming poverty (4.1.b) and the Agency's role includes assisting, encouraging and giving information on community development as a means of overcoming poverty (4.2.c) and fostering and assisting projects of community development and activities to overcome poverty. (4.2.d)

<sup>3</sup> 'The Role of Community Development in Building an Inclusive Society' by Hugh Frazer in *Community Development, Democracy and Citizenship*; Community Research and Development Centre, University of Ulster (1997).

<sup>4</sup> 'Community Development - A Response to Poverty in the 1990s', Hugh Frazer, in *Lost Horizons New Horizons: Community Development in Northern Ireland (1989)*; edited by Seamus Deane, Workers' Educational Association in association with the Community Development Review Group, Northern Ireland.



Community development is about working for change at three levels:

- personal
- community
- public policy

## 2. What is Community?

The term 'community' usually refers to groups of people who live in geographical areas that provide some kind of common bond or identity – a single housing estate, a parish or village, a scattered suburban area on the edge of a city or town, a street or a townland. But a community can also consist of a group of individuals who come together on the basis of some other interest or who have a common identity for instance, women, Travellers, lone parents, people with disabilities, students, lesbians and gay men, older people, young people, or religious groupings.

This broad understanding of community is important, because geographical communities, even if they are very small, are usually not homogenous. A variety of diverse groups make up local communities, some of which may have needs more in common with others outside of their local community than with those who live alongside them. Many locally based groups will organise around a common agenda for their community. Minority or other groups within that community may want to organise either in addition to or separately from their local group. Sometimes minority groups can face the same kinds of discrimination and difficulties within their local community as they face in the wider community, creating for them a 'double disadvantage'.

## 3. Defining Community Development

The Combat Poverty Agency's definition of community development as set out in the Introduction to this paper, sees it as essentially about people working collectively for social change which will improve the quality of their lives, the communities in which they live and/or the society of which they are a part. It is a collective process, with an emphasis on 'process' i.e. how change is achieved, as well as outcome, i.e. what is achieved. It helps people to identify and articulate their needs, and influence the decision-making processes and structures that effect them, their communities and wider society. In an anti-poverty context, community development is about enabling and empowering those who are disadvantaged, to participate in this work for change.

### Three Levels

*Community development is about working for change at three levels:*

- personal
- community
- public policy

Community development, that is about change at these levels, can involve a variety of strategies and activities, including research, analysis, reflection and action aimed at personal development, community empowerment and social change<sup>5</sup>. Community development, aimed at tackling poverty, uses these strategies and activities to attempt to change the social and economic conditions affecting disadvantaged communities. This can range from activities to

improve the local environment like getting a children's playground or a safe crossing in an estate; to providing welfare advice to individuals in a community and, on the basis of that 'grassroots' experience, arguing for an important policy change in the social welfare system.

### Two Arguments

There are two distinct, but related, arguments for a community development approach to tackling poverty. The first is concerned with greater social inclusion. Many of those affected by poverty find it difficult to act and work for change in their lives or in the lives of their communities because they lack resources, or feel demoralised and disempowered by their poverty.

People living in poverty are often confronted with barriers when trying to participate in society, to exercise initiative or choice – or simply to be 'active citizens'. These barriers include lack of self-confidence, loss of skills, isolation, powerlessness, as well as debt, joblessness, bad health, lack of money, discrimination or poor access to training and education. They are tangible impediments to action – After all, it's hard to change the world if getting by each day is a struggle; or your children are constantly sick because your flat is damp; or you're stuck in the house because you can't afford a baby sitter; or you're fed up queuing and filling up forms. To overcome these barriers people need practical support, resources and encouragement.

The argument for community development, from a social inclusion perspective, is rooted in a broad understanding of citizenship that sees people as having a right to influence and participate in the decisions that affect them and to have their views and experiences listened to and acted on. Community development is potentially a means or process whereby people can achieve this right.

The second argument is a pragmatic one, which emphasises efficiency and effectiveness. Policies, programmes and services intended to reduce poverty or disadvantage are much more likely to be efficient and effective if those with direct experience of the problems or those who live in communities affected by these problems, are involved in the design and implementation of solutions.

## 4. Background to Community Development in Ireland

There is a long tradition of community development activity in Ireland. This history can be traced back to the rise of the co-operative movement more than a century ago up to the development and expansion of the Community Development Programme by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) since 1990.

It includes the work of Muintir na Tíre in the 1930s, the development of community social services councils in the 1960s, the European Poverty Programmes of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the emergence and development of community work practice at health board and local authority level, the work of the Community Worker's Co-operative in the 1980s and 1990s and the inclusion of community development within the Local Development Programme.

The history of community development encompasses a variety of different philosophies and approaches. Many of these were not primarily about tackling poverty (though this

<sup>5</sup> Kelleher, P. and Whelan, M. *Dublin Communities in Action: A Study of Six Projects*, (1992) Combat Poverty Agency and Community Action Network (CAN)



does not necessarily mean they did not impact on poverty), but about strengthening community solidarity, generating local enterprise or delivering and developing local services.

Reflecting on the emergence of community development, O'Cinnéide and Walsh<sup>6</sup> identified four distinct strands in the emergence of community development practice over the 25 years up to 1990. Not mutually exclusive or necessarily chronological in order, they provide a context for understanding the varying emphases and approaches associated with community development – in particular for understanding the evolution of community development as an anti-poverty strategy.

Firstly, the authors identified the community development co-operatives in the 1960s which provided a practical alternative to state models of development. Within the co-op structure the local community sought to control and benefit from local natural resources e.g. tourism, local handicrafts. Based mainly in the west coast Gaeltacht areas these co-ops had a commercial focus and were supported by direct state assistance. They declined considerably in the 1980s.

Secondly, there was the emergence of community-based social services operated by local organisations in the 1960s at a time when direct state welfare service provision was underdeveloped. There were 300 community service organisations in 1978. The best known was probably the Kilkenny Social Service Council. The role of these councils has effectively been eroded since the establishment of health boards in 1970, with their remit to deliver community care services, and also the increasing focus in the 1970s on community action involving those affected by poverty.

Thirdly, they identified the growth of community unemployment projects, particularly in the 1980s when unemployment was a growing phenomenon. These groups were concerned with job creation, training and welfare rights but also with wider issues of community solidarity. This focus is also seen in the evolution of Partnership Companies in the local development programme in the 1990s – a programme with the very specific brief of tackling unemployment and social exclusion on an area basis.

Finally, they identified community anti-poverty projects which were rooted in the 'rediscovery' of poverty in the early 1970s and the establishment of the National Committee on Pilot Schemes to Combat Poverty in 1973. Together with the first EU Poverty Programme in the seventies, they explicitly linked a structural analysis of poverty with community development principles arguing that to tackle poverty there was a need to address the 'powerlessness of poor communities'. This mirrored developments in the US 'War on Poverty' and in Britain at the time.

### A Changing Context

Since 1990 the context for community development has changed significantly. Changes since the eighties can be summarised as follows:

- The establishment of the Combat Poverty Agency in 1986 and its role in supporting and promoting community development.
- The establishment of the national Community Development Programme by the DSCFA in 1990.
- The inclusion of community development as a measure and an approach in the Local Area Partnership Development Programme, and in other programmes.

- The greater emphasis on partnership and community involvement/consultation in public policy development and the involvement of a Community Pillar<sup>7</sup> as a social partner.
- The development of strong national anti-poverty networks supporting a community development approach to tackling poverty and their involvement in Community Platform<sup>8</sup>, a member group of the Community Pillar.

### The Establishment of the Combat Poverty Agency

The establishment of the Agency in 1986 was an important development, as it provided a statutory support role for community development. Given the Agency's other statutory functions, i.e. providing policy advice to government, research and public education, this support for community development has been set in the context of arguing for a broad anti-poverty strategy within which community development is an important component.

### The Community Development Programme

The Community Development Programme was established by the DSCFA (then known as the Department of Social Welfare) in 1990 on the recommendation of the Combat Poverty Agency, as a way of tackling poverty at a local level. The CDP was the first nationally funded programme of community development. Projects are given a three-year funding commitment, which provides for core costs such as staff and overheads. The number of funded projects has increased from fifteen in 1990 to over ninety in 1999 and the programme has an annual budget of about £8 million. The Combat Poverty Agency, the Community Workers' Co-operative and Area Development Management are involved in an advisory capacity to the Minister on the development of the programme.

In addition direct support for participating projects comes from a number of specialist support agencies which focus on specific themes such as violence against women, drugs or Traveller's issues, and regional support agencies which support the more generic work of community development projects in the programme<sup>9</sup>.

### Local Area Partnerships and Other Programmes

Community development has been practised within a wide range of state programmes and initiatives other than the CDP. These include the Local Development Programme, EU Community Initiatives and the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.

The primary focus of Local Development is the development of area-based interventions to complement mainstream or structural policies addressing long-term unemployment, economic marginalisation and social exclusion. Community development is a specific measure under the Local Development Programme, but its principles also inform the overall approach of many area-based partnerships.

### Emphasis on Partnership at Policy Level

The strengthening of social partnership since the Programme for National Recovery in 1987 has consolidated the position of the social partners as a voice in national policy making. In 1997 social partnership was extended to include the disadvantaged sector, through the nomination of the 'community pillar' by government and their involvement in the negotiation of Partnership 2000.

The Government's National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), and the Green Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, both published in 1997, are two key examples of policy documents which manifest greater political and

<sup>6</sup> 'Multiplication and Divisions: Trends in Community Development in Ireland Since the 1960s', Seamus O'Cinnéide and Jim Walsh in the *Community Development Journal*, Volume 25 No. 4, Oxford University Press (1990).

<sup>7</sup> The Community Pillar is the fourth pillar of social partnership, the other three being employers, trade unions and farmers. The groups making up the Community Pillar were nominated by Government to participate in the negotiations for Partnership 2000. They included the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, the National Women's Council of Ireland, Protestant Aid, Irish Congress of Trade Union Centres of the Unemployed, Conference of Religious of Ireland, Society of St Vincent de Paul, the National Youth Council of Ireland and the Community Platform.

<sup>8</sup> The Community Platform is one of the community and voluntary groups nominated to participate in the Community Pillar. It includes a range of anti-poverty organisations and community groups in its membership.

<sup>9</sup> For more detailed information on the CDP see *The National Community Development Programme, Facts, Profiles, Aims; United Against Poverty*, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (1999).



administrative commitment to the principles and practice of partnership and consultation in arriving at public policy.

NAPS, introduced in 1997, represents a significant attempt by government to include the reduction of poverty as a goal in every area of public policy. The NAPS obliges government departments, state agencies and local authorities to include the reduction of poverty in their objectives and planning. It explicitly acknowledges the role of community development as a key element in the 'rejuvenation and mobilisation of local communities, and those affected by poverty and social exclusion, in the process of regeneration'.<sup>10</sup>

The Green Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity*<sup>11</sup> acknowledges the role of the voluntary and community sectors in the areas of 'combating poverty and community development' and suggests a framework for the future development of the relationship between the State and this sector. The Green Paper asserts that state agencies are becoming increasingly aware of the need to consult with local groups in developing appropriate responses to many social and economic problems and tries to explore how state services and local community responses could work together in an integrated way. The paper represented an explicit acknowledgement on the part of the state of the need to create a more participatory democracy that fosters active citizenship.

### Networking within the Anti-Poverty Sector

The 1990s has seen increased networking and alliance building within the anti-poverty sector, many of these groups being committed to community development approaches. For example, the Community Workers' Co-operative (CWC) which was beginning to emerge as an important voice in the promotion

of community development approaches to tackling poverty at the end of the 1980s and has developed a strong membership network since then. The CWC has played an active role in the development of community work practice and its relationship with public policy on social and economic issues. It is involved in the advisory Committee to the DSCFA Community Development Programme and is a member of the Community Platform.

Community development principles are also being drawn on in the work of citizens' information centres, Money Advice and Budgeting Services, neighbourhood youth projects, women's groups and networks, tenant participation groups, anti-drugs groups, disability groups, adult education groups and so on.

In summary, this decade has seen a growing focus on partnership with the State. While not without inevitable difficulties and tensions, the 1990s has presented new opportunities for community development to exert much greater influence on the process of policy making. This changed context has helped move community development from a role of opposition or working on the margins (which characterised much community development activity in the eighties) into the potential for a mainstream role in the struggle against poverty in the nineties and the millennium.

NAPS is a significant mainstream development that provides an agreed government definition of poverty for the first time. This definition addresses the issue of social participation, not just income and resources, and thus provides a solid basis for the support and encouragement of community development by mainline government departments and agencies<sup>12</sup>.

### Northern Ireland

There is also a strong tradition of community development in Northern Ireland where it has played a particularly important role in providing a channel for active citizenship outside political structures. 'Community development is the process which underpins collectivist approaches to education, economic development and the delivery of services in a situation in Northern Ireland where, for various reasons, there have been few opportunities for communities to participate in the democratic process'.<sup>13</sup>

The Community Development Review Group in 1991 concluded that community development was a process that involved various types of activity including community organisation, community action and community work.

In the course of their review of the evolution of community development in Northern Ireland, a range of community development values and principles attracted consensus support. Community development, it was agreed, was about participation, empowerment, community control and about a belief that change is possible and worth campaigning for. The community development process included elements of co-operation, consultation, accountability, a sense of community and of community self-help.

The Review concluded that the principal and intended beneficiaries of the community development process were those 'who live and work, suffer and triumph in disadvantage, relative powerlessness and often alienation,' commenting that:

*The intrinsic benefits of community development lie in underpinning democratic structures more effectively and articulating more effectively the needs of communities... Equally important, for Government and other*

*statutory agencies there are the additional benefits arising from effective community development approaches. These include more effective approaches to combating disadvantage and poverty as well as the more effective use of resources... This principle applies further to the day-to-day activities of central and local statutory agencies in communities and localities.*

In February 1993, the then Northern Ireland Secretary, Sir Patrick Mayhew, announced the Government's Strategy for the Support of the Voluntary Sector and for Community Development in Northern Ireland.<sup>14</sup> A key element within that strategy was the establishment of a Voluntary Activity Unit within the Department of Health and Social Services – regarded as a major step forward in confirming the commitment to community development within government. This was followed by a considerable injection of funding through a Community Infrastructure Measure of the Physical and Social Environment Programme (PESP) of the Structural Funds '94-'99 and the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties 1995–1999. This programme promotes economic and social development, community regeneration, reconciliation and cross-border co-operation. The involvement of the Combat Poverty Agency and Area Development Management Ltd in the South, and the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust, in the North, as intermediary bodies delivering funds, has ensured as strong community development dimension to the activity around the programme. The programme provides rich potential for mutual learning between the two parts of the island about the role of community development in tackling poverty.

10 Government of Ireland: *Sharing in Progress, National Anti Poverty Strategy*, The Stationery Office, April 1997, page 17

11 An interdepartmental Steering Committee (with some representatives from the community and voluntary sector, the NSSB and the Combat Poverty Agency) is currently working on the development of a White Paper.

12 'People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living, which is regarded 'as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources' people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society.' (NAPS definition of poverty, p. 3 *Sharing in Progress*, 1997).

13 *Community Development in Northern Ireland: Perspectives for the Future*, Community Development Review Group, published by Workers' Educational Association, Belfast (1991), edited by Ken Logue

14 Strategy for the Support of the Voluntary Sector and for Community Development in Northern Ireland, Feb 1993



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## 5. Community Development Activity

Community development activity does not occur in neat stages, nor does it have a beginning, middle and end, but is integrated and ongoing. However, much community development activity often begins with the personal and evolves over time to include a community and then a public policy role, as individuals and the community consolidate and develop confidence. Work at each level involves:

- **Personal** – developing the self-confidence and skills of individuals, fostering their empowerment and creativity. Many individuals benefit significantly at this level. Self-confidence and skills can be the first step out of poverty for individuals and their families. Examples of community development activity at this level include the development of adult education opportunities, personal development or assistance for individuals with welfare rights.
- **Community** – regenerating and revitalising disadvantaged communities. Community development brings people together to work for change in their own community. Self-confidence and skills are often developed by individuals in a community development context through community activity with benefits that flow out to many others. At this level, community development is involved in drawing resources, services and facilities into an area, for example through the development of tenants' organisations, drugs prevention or treatment work, local

action plans by and for the community and community based services such as crèches, homework clubs, community centres, primary health care, peer support groups and rural transport initiatives. Community development contributes at community level through the provision of amenities or services, and through the creation of a positive community self-image.

- **Public Policy** – influencing wider policies and programmes in favour of the disadvantaged. In a community development context, community activity focuses on change, initially at local level. Valuable lessons are learned from local activity and ideas emerge which provide new ways of responding to community needs. Groups reach out and develop links with others, form coalitions and work for change at national and regional levels.

The operation of community development, at this level, has evolved more explicitly over the last ten years. Community development groups have contributed to bodies and initiatives like the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and the National Economic and Social Forum, as well as taken on direct lobbying roles themselves at budget time or when local facilities or services are under threat or new ones are required. The development of the Community Platform and the Community Pillar illustrates the contribution that community development type groups can make to public policy.

## 6. Essential Features and Principles

There are three essential features of community development, which distinguish its approach to tackling poverty. These are:

- A focus on empowerment and participation;
- A collective rather than an individual approach;
- A social analysis and understanding of the causes of poverty and disadvantage and a commitment to equality and social justice.

### Empowerment

Community development is about promoting positive change in society in favour of those who benefit least. However, it is also about how this is done:

*'There is no ready-made model of empowerment. But there is one thing that existing experience does suggest. Empowerment does not follow from a set of rules or procedures. It is a process. This process enables us to make the connection between our private troubles and public policy. It makes possible the journey from our own personal needs to influencing and changing attitudes, values, policy and practice that affect them'.<sup>15</sup>*

Community development draws on the notion of participative democracy – that citizens have a right to participate in the decision-making processes that affect them. Participative democracy is not an alternative to representative democracy but is complementary to it. Achieving genuine and meaningful participation and representation is a difficult process. Within any

community only a minority tend to be involved in community organisations and there can be a danger of an unrepresentative few taking over. While this is obviously a possibility within local community development direct participation is attempted through an approach which emphasises the sharing and building of skills, knowledge and experiences from the 'bottom-up'.

Community development aims to empower those living in poverty and or experiencing disadvantage, to bring about change. This 'bottom-up' approach acknowledges that those affected by poverty are often powerless or excluded from participation in society – either because they as individuals have lost confidence, or because prejudice, discrimination, lack of resources or power prevents them. Community development recognises that those who are disadvantaged need support and resources to be empowered and to identify and argue for change to improve their lives and the lives of their communities.

Empowering people is, therefore, not just about saying that *in principle* people have a right to a say in how things are run or decisions are made. It has to be about transferring power by providing the appropriate resources, support, training and access to information that enable people experiencing disadvantage or poverty to act effectively.

### A Collective Process

Community development is fundamentally about enabling people, especially the marginalised and excluded, to play a role in shaping the society of which they are a part. It is a collective process aimed at bringing about social change.

This recognises the interdependence of people living in society. It also recognises that while

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<sup>15</sup> *Citizen Involvement: A Practical Guide for Change*, Peter Beresford and Suzy Croft, 1993, British Association of Social Workers/ Macmillan.



**Community development has a lot to offer to the policy making process. Policy makers and service providers endeavouring to engage in collaborative consultation with those affected by poverty could usefully draw on community development principles and approaches in making that engagement work**

individuals, especially those experiencing poverty or disadvantage, may be powerless to bring about change, they are more likely to improve things (if they act together).

### Analysis

The community development approach also involves an understanding and analysis of the causes of a particular problem, and not just its consequences. It stems from a belief that it is not enough to treat the symptoms of poverty and disadvantage – it is also important to understand and address their causes. This does not mean that community development activity never involves delivering services such as crèches or adult education, in fact it very often does. But it does so in the context of a broader analysis of the causes of poverty and the development of strategies to bring about change at three levels, personal, community and public policy.

### Principles

Community development is guided by principles, which embrace empowerment, social analysis and collective action. These include:

- Promoting the empowerment of individuals through collective action;
- Emphasising the importance of process as well as task (in other words how things are done as well as what is done);
- Focusing on disadvantaged individuals, groups and communities;
- Advocating and promoting an integrated and holistic approach to development that recognises the interdependence of economic, social and cultural issues;
- Promoting innovation and fostering creativity;

- Working towards equality, challenging prejudice and discrimination and promoting respect for difference and diversity and;

- Emphasising participation, openness and inclusion (as opposed to competition and exclusion).

## 7. Conclusion

Clearly, the opportunities for community development to impact on poverty and the lives of those who are socially excluded are greater than ever.

The late 1990s saw the policy formulation and implementation process of government change significantly. The Strategic Management Initiative in the civil service and the Public Service Management Act have created the potential for public policies to be more integrated, longer term and strategic. At the same time, the political and administrative processes have demonstrated much greater willingness to engage with 'stakeholders' in society about the best or most appropriate policies to follow. Community development has a lot to offer to the policy making process. Policy makers and service providers endeavouring to engage in collaborative consultation with those affected by poverty could usefully draw on community development principles and approaches in making that engagement work<sup>16</sup>.

The potential benefits of community development are self-evident to many of those involved in community development. However it is worth identifying and noting them:

- Community development builds self-confidence and empowers individuals who

become a key resource and sometimes leaders of the development process.

- Community development builds community structures and promotes participation. It also fosters greater openness and access and leads to increased engagement of community organisations with other local bodies.
- Community development addresses isolation and reaches the excluded in a way which statutory and private agencies often cannot.
- Community development promotes collective responsibility and mutual solidarity and so contributes to overcoming isolation.
- Community development promotes collective political development through encouraging people to work together for change.
- Community development challenges excessive centralisation through its emphasis on working from the bottom up.
- Community development empowers through fostering an integrated and holistic approach. This challenges compartmentalisation through focusing on the needs of the whole person and the whole community.
- Community development promotes the rights and autonomy of marginal groups. It does this by fostering inclusion, which enhances the economic, social and political power of groups in subordinate positions in society such as people with disabilities, Travellers and women experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

- Community development reduces dependency by promoting new models of service delivery, which break down barriers between statutory agencies and the community and help to overcome scepticism, antagonism and conflict.
- Community development contributes to better policy-making, locally and nationally, by bringing local knowledge and experience into the policy making process and by challenging stereotypes.
- Community development increases command of local communities over resources, both by bringing new resources into the community and by mobilising resources, which lie dormant within the community<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> For further information on this point see Combat Poverty Agency Submission to the Green Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity (1998).

<sup>17</sup> Hugh Frazer, op.cit., 1997.



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