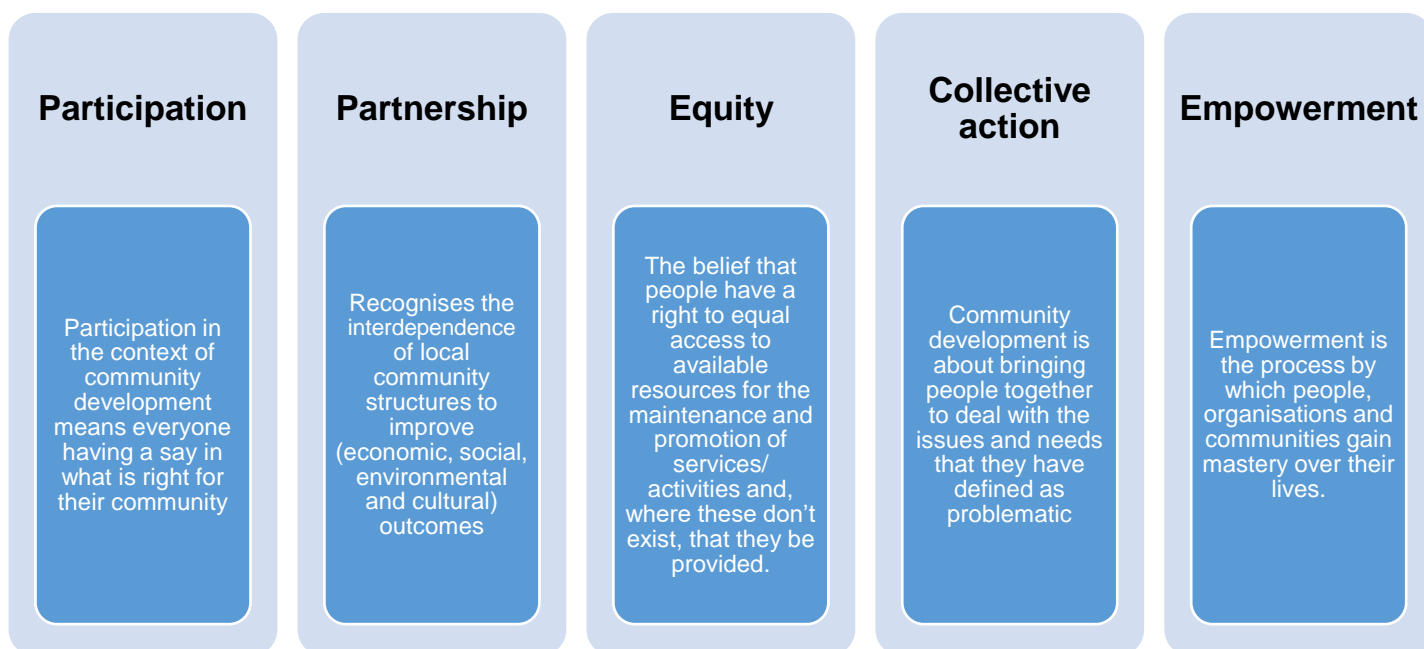


An understanding of the theory and practice of community development can help in identifying where a particular community 'is at', in understanding how it may respond to the opportunity of community benefits, and how it can best be supported to do so.

1 Community development - definitions, principles and practice

Community development is a long established process, that is essentially about making communities better places. It is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental outcomes. It seeks the empowerment of both geographical communities and communities of interest or identity. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organisations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies to work in dialogue with citizens, to shape and determine positive change in their communities. The following principles will, to varying degrees, ideally underpin the practice of community development:



Promoting Participation: Participation in the context of community development means everyone having a say in what is right for their community:

- Creating structures to encourage participation
- Influencing local policy
- Developing skills for participation
- Increasing access to information

Promoting Partnership: Recognises the interdependence of local community structures to improve (economic, social, environmental and cultural) outcomes:

- Encouraging joint working
- Breaking down barriers between professionals and local people
- Crossing voluntary and statutory boundaries

Promoting Equity: The belief that people have a right to equal access to available resources for the maintenance and promotion of (economic, social, environmental and cultural) services/activity and, where these don't exist, that they be provided:

- Seeking to eradicate inequalities in the experience of health (and other determinants of quality of life)
- Providing services that people want
- Delivering services that promote equal opportunities
- Challenging practices that discriminate against individuals on whatever basis: colour, disability, language, sexuality or age
- Including people who feel excluded because of poverty, disadvantage and isolation

Promoting Collective Action: Community development is about bringing people together to deal with the issues and needs that they have defined as problematic. It is about:

- Working from expressed needs and aspirations
- Helping create structures in which individuals are not powerless
- Helping people organise to take effective action together
- Encouraging people to become involved in such collaborative social action.

Promoting Empowerment: Empowerment is the process by which people, organisations and communities gain mastery over their lives. One definition suggests that it "*provides individuals (usually disadvantaged) with the tools and resources to further their own interests as they see them*"¹.

The empowerment process involves:

- Acknowledging people as experts in their own lives
- Seeking autonomy and self-determination as goals in their own right
- Emphasising abilities and building on them
- Raising the esteem of individuals and communities through valuing their knowledge and experience
- Supporting people to become competent participants in community activities
- Promoting confidence by enabling the development of new skills and opportunities
- Supporting the emergence of leadership from within the community²

A related concept is **community 'capacity'**; the ability and readiness of a community to take action for itself. Things such as volunteering levels, the existence of any paid development or support staff, the remit and sophistication of existing community

¹ Nicolson, N., 1995, Encyclopaedia Dictionary of Organisational Behaviour, Oxford: Blackwell

² Adapted from Dalziel, Y., 1999, *Community Development and Primary Care*, NHS Lothian Health Promotion Department

organisations, how well they collaborate on local matters and respond to outside opportunities or threats, and local political awareness, all comprise a community's capacity.

Building on this theory and practice, **Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)** is an approach based on identifying and mobilising individual and community 'assets', rather than focusing on their problems and needs (i.e. 'deficits').³ The 'deficit-based' approach "*focuses on the problems, needs and deficiencies in a community... It designs services to fill the gaps and fix the problems. As a result, a community can feel disempowered and dependent; people can become passive recipients of services rather than active agents in their own and their families' lives.*"⁴ Conversely, they state growing evidence underpinning ABCD that shows when community development practice begins with a focus on what communities have (their assets) as opposed to what they don't have (their needs) "*a community's efficacy in addressing its own needs increases, as does its capacity to lever in external support.*"⁴

The Asset-Based Community Development approach⁴ is underpinned by a set of principles as set out in Box 1.

Box 1: Asset based Community Development Principles and capitals (or asset classes)

ABCD is a set of values and principles which:

- Identifies and makes visible the health-enhancing assets in a community
- Sees citizens and communities as the co-producers of health and well-being, rather than the recipients of services
- Promotes community networks, relationships and friendships that can provide caring, mutual help and empowerment
- Identifies what has the potential to improve health and well-being
- Supports individuals' health and well-being through self-esteem, coping strategies, resilience skills, relationships, friendships, knowledge and personal resources
- Empower communities to control their futures and create tangible resources such as services, funds and buildings.

ABCD contends that a community's assets include the following:

- The practical skills, capacity and knowledge of local residents
- The passions and interests of local residents that give them energy for change
- The networks and connections – known as 'social capital' – in a community, including friendships and neighbourliness
- The effectiveness of local community and voluntary associations
- The resources of public, private and third sector organisations that are available to support a community
- The physical and economic resources of a place that enhance well-being.

³ Originally developed and espoused by John MacKinight and Jody Kretzmann at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

⁴ Foot, J. & Hopkins, T., (2010), *A glass half-full: how an asset approach can improve community health and well-being*, for Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) Healthy Communities Team.

Community development should not be confused or conflated with **community engagement**, which is a process or series of activities used to involve a community in how a service, project or policy that affects them is developed and delivered.

[Community Development Alliance Scotland](#), a member organisation that brings together networks and organisations at the national level to promote policy and practice that supports community development, provides a useful monthly bulletin of the latest developments in the sector.

Building stronger communities is a long term process requiring the building of trust and confidence – between individuals, between local community groups, and between those groups and public sector bodies. Those involved in advising communities on discussing, designing and managing community benefits funds need to have a grasp of the key principles involved in community development. Ideally, they will also have some experience of community development on the ground, either in their own community as a volunteer or through providing support to other communities.

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