



Yorkshire &
Humber
Empowerment
Partnership

People, Participation and Power

*How Local Government supports
Community Engagement, Leadership and Voice.*

Report from the 'Champions of
Participation Workshop'

Yorkshire and Humber
Empowerment Partnership

March 2010

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UK presenters:

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Report by Rose Ardron and Tricia Zipfel

Introduction

Section One: Page 4

1. Background
2. The workshop agenda

Section Two: Page 6

International, national and regional context

3. Participation and Democracy in the 21st Century – an international perspective
4. Partnerships and Place, People and Politics – a perspective on the UK national context
5. How to do more of what we do well – a perspective on the regional context
6. Issues and insights

Section Three: Page 12

Politics, democracy and voice

7. Neighbourhood Empowerment in Seattle, USA
8. Coalitions for Change in Nigeria
9. Reflections and Insights from participants

Section Four: Page 17

Connecting communities through effective participation

10. Vibrant Communities in Canada
11. Participatory Appraisal in Jamaica and south London
12. Reflections and Insights from participants
13. Reflections from overseas guests

Section Five: Page 22

The regional legacy for community empowerment

14. Taking stock – progress so far
15. Ideas for Action

Conclusion Page 27

In March 2010, 50 people gathered in North Yorkshire, to consider how to increase participation, empower communities, improve services and put new energy into local democracy across the region. The 3-day workshop was held against a backdrop of parliamentary and local elections and the prospect of public sector cuts due to the economic crisis. This gave added urgency to the questions that participants brought to the event: how to sustain and strengthen participation despite budget cuts; how to involve citizens in decisions, including making tough choices as cuts begin to hit home; how to restore people's faith in democracy and re-connect citizens with the political process. The workshop could not have come at a better time for most of the participants.¹

I. Background

This was the third champions' workshop to be held in the Yorkshire/Humber region. It built on lessons from an earlier event, held in 2008, which explored the challenges of moving from community engagement to genuine empowerment.² The agenda was further developed at a one-day workshop held in September 2009.

Like the previous events, participants were invited from across the sectors - politicians, officials, community activists and voluntary sector workers – as well as representatives of regional bodies and academics. Leading practitioners from the USA, Nigeria, Canada and Jamaica also came to share their experience, provide inspiration and to act as critical friends, offering an outside perspective on UK practice in the light of wider international developments.

Experience had shown that bringing together people from different backgrounds with different perspectives helped to challenge assumptions, break down some of the barriers that divided them and enabled them to explore issues like leadership, representation, accountability, from many points of view. Learning from other countries also helped participants to 'think outside the box' and be less complacent about our own democratic practice, especially when ideas and innovations come from newer democracies in the global South.

“Around the world there has been an explosion of interest in creating more participatory forms of governance. At once seen as an approach to revitalizing democracy, delivering local services and regenerating local communities, participatory governance involves a shift from narrow ideas of local government to broader concepts of community governance, in which multiple actors play a part in public policy and the delivery of public services.”

Professor John Gaventa, IDS, University of Sussex

¹ A framing paper sent out prior to the event can be found at: http://www.yhep.org.uk/webfm_send/244

² See full report: 'From Engagement to Empowerment' and 'Voices – Jan 2009': http://www.yhep.org.uk/webfm_send/94

2. The workshop agenda

In planning this workshop, the Regional Empowerment Partnership wanted to build on the analysis and insights of earlier events and on the **action plans** that had been developed to progress community empowerment across the region. These plans had focused on: improving the way local authorities and other public bodies connected with grass-roots communities; increasing the support for front-line community development; strengthening relationships

between councillors and the communities they represented; using the 'duty to involve' to create 'new spaces' for joint deliberation and problem solving; using participative processes to set budget priorities and make spending decisions; gathering evidence in order to make a stronger case for participation. Previous workshops had also informed the regional strategy for participation and had helped to build stronger learning networks, regional forums and links to key regional agencies.

In September 2009, participants gathered to review progress and set out the **agenda for this workshop**.³ Although good progress was evident, making change happen is never easy, and a number of core questions and issues were identified, providing a framework for this workshop.

Three core questions:

- › How do we strengthen local democracy, voice and influence?
- › How do we improve our practice on the ground?
- › How do we embed participation and ensure that there is a sustainable legacy of community empowerment?

Five themes:

- › **Putting the 'P' back into participation:** Addressing the political dimension of participation and the question of power – who has it and how it is used? How can we develop genuine dialogue, support deliberation, and create 'safe spaces' where dissent and disagreement are accepted as part of the agreement process?
- › **Getting the right balance between participatory and representative democracy:** How can we change the political status quo in favour of more participation and accountability between elected representatives (whether councillors or community representatives) and the people who vote for them?
- › **Learning new skills for participation:** How can we develop new skills, new ways of thinking and new relationships that deepen our understanding of participation and give people the confidence to be able to take some risks, be innovative, do things differently?
- › **Valuing participation and recognising success:** How can we make a solid, 'business case' for continuing investment in participation, based on evidence of impact and wider benefits?
- › **Making sure everyone is being heard:** How can we ensure that the people who are not already 'well connected' are part of the dialogue, and avoid simply working with a narrow group of 'participation experts', whether from the community or the public sector?

Aims of the workshop were:

- › To explore the balance between participatory, deliberative and representative democracy;
- › To identify practical and creative approaches to help overcome challenges to engagement and empowerment;
- › To develop measures that value the wider benefits of participation and recognise success;
- › To build relationships that will sustain participation and engagement into the future

The workshop process was designed to model a participatory approach and to ensure that the outcomes would be owned by participants and useful to them. The intention was to identify practical ideas that would inform local and regional action plans and to inspire changes at a personal level.

■ ³ 'Voices' – Making the case for Participation, October 2009

International, national and regional context

Over recent years there has been an explosion of interest, around the world, in more participatory forms of governance. Despite different national histories and contexts, there is widespread recognition that participation is central to the tasks of revitalizing democracy, delivering local services and strengthening local communities. In the UK, all political parties recognise the importance of participation and the language of ‘empowerment’ has become common place. But what does it really mean? To whom does it apply? How can it be embedded and sustained? The workshop provided an opportunity to draw lessons from experience to date and think creatively about the role of participation in seeking to address future challenges. International, national and regional analysis and reflection offered a forward looking and challenging framework for the workshop discussions.

3. Participation and Democracy in the 21st Century

Jenny Pearce⁴, welcomed the establishment of citizen participation on to the UK mainstream political agenda while flagging up the importance of genuine dialogue to establish what this means and what it might look like in practice. She explored the links between international developments in participatory democracy and the shifts taking place in the UK, suggesting what these might teach us about strengthening participation.

‘Power to the people’? In February, the media suggested that a common political focus was emerging: **“The rallying call of all the political parties this spring will be ‘power to the people’”**⁵. But what does this mean? ‘Power to the people’ can be a call for more personal choice and influence over decisions that affect individuals and their families, or it can refer to the enhanced capacity of a group or community to claim rights, demand service improvements or even to take over running local services or community businesses. It can be seen as a substitute for the state or as a way to make the state more effective. It can be used to retain a sense of public service and public good or to strengthen the private or not-for-profit sphere, or some mixture of the two. As Jenny pointed out, not that long ago **“‘power to the people’ meant something very radical indeed!”**.

She thought we should be cautiously positive about this new cross party enthusiasm for ‘people’s power’, but that we shouldn’t leave it to the politicians to decide what the changes will look like. She was clear that we need a dialogue about the meaning and implications of ‘power to the people’.

Changing the culture of political decision making. Jenny noted that in the UK, interest in the formal aspects of representative democracy was declining while new forms of activism and involvement have developed.

“People are now less deferential to authority, they have access to information on a scale unimaginable in the past, the role of women is radically changed, people are now more interested in issue based and non formal politics, and we have seen new forms of activism develop”

Professor Jenny Pearce

Accepting these new participative spaces represents a steep learning curve and conflict is inevitable. But we should embrace the difficulties because, as more people awaken to the complexity of public decision making and feel they have something to contribute, the more they will see that their individual interests must take on board the interests of others.

Lessons from research. Jenny outlined how we might strengthen participation, drawing on her research in 6 cities⁶ – 3 in the UK and 3 in Latin America:

- › Participation must be meaningful, life enhancing and enjoyable. Participants must be prepared to give each other mutual encouragement and power holders must be willing to concede some control.
- › ‘Democratic intelligence’ should be nurtured. We must support people’s ability to reason, reflect and debate, and encourage their capacity to take on board the opinion and needs of others.
- › Participation must be seen to be ‘legitimate’. The question of ‘who speaks for whom’ is crucial, especially when participants or ‘representatives’ are not elected. We must use power constructively and inclusively and explore a range of methods to encourage broad-based engagement
- › Participation is crucial for mediation. Voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations have the potential to bring people together around mutual interests, but they must avoid becoming the sort of intermediaries between citizen and state that exclude rather than include.
- › Participative structures are needed to ensure that power inequalities are addressed. There is no single model and democratic spaces need to be designed to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

The challenge for the UK. Jenny observed that the UK remains a deeply unequal society. Too many people still live on the edge of society and feel they have nothing to say – they have internalised their own powerlessness. Activism has shifted from working class movements to more middle class, issue-based politics, unlike in the global south where grass-roots activism and popular education are still important.

However, she concluded that building participatory consciousness, having skills and wisdom distributed equally amongst citizens and expecting people to contribute, far from being seen as a threat, is increasingly recognised as the best way forward. It may be the only way to save our planet in the face of climate change, to address the corrosive effects of inequality, to build an economy which generates employment, sustainable growth and innovation, and to build alternatives to violence in human relationships. In short, it may be the only way to create the conditions for a peaceful society.

⁴ Jenny Pearce is Professor of Latin American Politics and Director of the International Centre for Participation Studies, in the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford.

⁵ Observer, February 2010.

⁶ ‘Participation and democracy in the twenty-first century city’ edited by Jenny Pearce. Palgrave MacMillan, 2010

4. Partnerships and Place, People and Politics

A perspective on the UK national context

Davy Jones⁷ set out some of the critical challenges facing the UK, along with the rest of the world – environmental, economic and demographic. He argued that globally we have reached a defining moment in our history and that people’s participation was more important than ever before. While people are being encouraged to become more involved, trust in politics is at an all time low. This has significant implications and Davy argued that participatory democracy is possibly the **only** thing now that can rescue representative democracy. In his opinion, solutions lie in the involvement and agreement of ordinary people and through strong public sector partnerships. Reliance on the usual politics, the private sector and the ‘market’ will not deliver what is needed.

Participation is here to stay. Evidence that participation works means that the momentum for change is now unstoppable. Participation is important in delivering better services and better outcomes. It also contributes to

strengthening social capital and community cohesion. There is broad political consensus on the value of participation and engagement, and legislation is in place to drive this agenda forward.

People want to connect. Evidence suggests that most people have an appetite for some form of involvement.⁸ This trend is driven by the availability of information through the internet, the rise in consumer choice, new forms of social media and social networks, and recognition of the importance of both individual and collective choice and voice.

Participation and place. The notion of place is now central to how we deliver services and organise information. Davy suggested how this could be used to broaden participation through:

- › Local Area Agreements that are genuinely local and agreed with citizens
- › Comprehensive Area Assessments based on self-assessments that have been agreed with citizens
- › a Total Place approach where citizens decide how the money is spent
- › mechanisms for information and accountability that go wider than ‘One Place’ - a web-site can’t deliver accountability, there needs to be discussion and deliberation
- › having front line staff in place and skilled up to involve local citizens.

Widening reform. Finally, Davy Jones argued for three further policy changes:

- › Local finance reform - to end to ring-fencing of government finance and increase local property and land taxes to fund services.
- › Local democracy reform – to introduce proportional representation, restructure into smaller scale units of local governance, and give primacy to citizen decisions over private or 3rd sector providers.
- › Local accountability reforms - to end central government dictating to local services; introduce elected LSPs absorbing the council executive and responsible for all local public sector services; and establish elected assemblies and local forums to undertake overview and scrutiny.

“Citizens do not feel that the processes of formal democracy offer them enough influence over political decisions”

Power Inquiry (2006)

“Citizens often believe that the official mind is already made up, or that it will not listen to the results of participation exercises”

Lowndes et al 2001

⁷ Davy Jones is a free-lance consultant specialising in participation, performance management and strategic partnerships. He does work for the IDeA, the Participatory Budgeting Unit and the Consultation Institute and was formerly a senior policy officer at the Audit Commission

⁸ Recent figures from MORI (2009) suggest that only 20% of people have no desire to be involved. A third are either involved already or want more involvement and 80% want to connect in some way with the decisions that affect their lives.

5. How to do more of what we do well

A perspective on the regional context

Isobel Mills⁹ was upbeat about the work already being done to support participation in the region. She asked ‘what do we do well?’ and suggested that:

- › We face challenges head on. We listen to people who feel alienated and create safe spaces to tackle tough issues like right wing extremism.
- › We innovate – encouraging participatory budgeting and the champions workshops.
- › We learn from our mistakes and we share knowledge and good practice.
- › We stick with the work - the ‘Key Fund’ has just celebrated its tenth anniversary.
- › We want participation to deliver something real, not be an end in itself.
- › We link programmes to get the most out of them (Connecting Communities & the Targeted Support Fund)
- › We know that neighbourhood management principles can deliver disproportionate impact and have given strong support to pilot projects.
- › We have a strong regional infrastructure, with a long term shared memory that enables us to move forward and avoid repeating mistakes.

The first champions workshop talked about moving from ‘Engagement to Empower’ – has this happened and has the pace been quick enough? We are working with many groups and have built some strong alliances, but we need to do more. We need to work across the generations and enable elders to have more influence. We need to engage better with the health sector and with housing colleagues. We have the evidence to make the case for participation, but we are still under pressure to show ‘value for money’ in narrow fiscal terms.

In future these pressures are likely to get worse and we will need to find ways to **do better (rather than more) with fewer resources**. The uncertainty of the future requires community consent more than ever but it also demands new ways of working. Savings can only be made by transforming services, not by cutting them. We need to be more confident about asserting what we know works, more upfront and less defensive. We need strong leadership and clear messaging – language and concepts that are down to earth and relate to people’s everyday lives. We need to adopt new ideas such as ‘Social Return on Investment’ as a tool to demonstrate wider benefits of participation beyond simply the impact on government targets. We need to use powerful evidence like the Leeds research that showed how a £3 million investment in financial inclusion released £26 million into the local economy.

We know a lot about what works:

- › Neighbourhood management can turn places around
- › Inspirational individuals can make a huge difference
- › Sustaining effort and commitment over the long haul is crucial
- › Having a big vision - not being afraid to be ambitious – raises people’s sights.

In future we will need to:

- › Stay close to key 21st century issues like climate change
- › Develop our thinking about public sector reform
- › Focus on commissioning processes and outcomes
- › Build a different relationship between a smaller, smarter state and citizens.

■ ⁹ Isobel Mills is Deputy Regional Director, Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber

6. Issues and insights

Participants worked in small groups to identify the issues that concerned most them, drawing on experience from their own local areas. They also noted insights which they felt might be useful. The feedback was organised in the form of an 'Issues Wall' under six headings, with additional space for anything that didn't fit into this framework.

Identifying issues and insights (I)

Power and influence			Leadership and accountability			Relationships and difference	
Insights:							
If you think small things can't make a difference, try going to bed with a mosquito!			Individuals can make a difference – and if they are physically accessible, they can have even more impact on their community			Good work and trust at local level is undermined when central government overturns local decisions and imposes their own agenda	
Understanding who has power and how they use it is essential if communities are to have influence and be able to make a real difference			Leadership should be a shared responsibility – every organisation needs to play its part in a different way			We need to accept that 'one size doesn't fit all' and design participation that is fit for purpose – be creative and flexible	
Issues:							
Devolution has actually created different hierarchies of power – eg now concentrated in Cabinet/Mayor	There's also a gender hierarchy – local activists are mainly women but men dominate decision-making	Can we connect participation with outcomes – a bit like the X-factor – so that people feel their vote counts?	How do we achieve a simple, clear engagement strategy that all sectors can live and breathe?	A stronger LSP/ corporate lead is needed – to set joint targets even though we have different legal duties etc	We need to build good relationships between partners – get to know each other as people	How do we make sure we reach everyone – what are the pathways?	
Many people feel disempowered – ward councillors, front-line officers as well as residents	We need better deliberative processes to explore complex issues – not just snapshot opinions	Whose voice should we listen to - not just the loudest. How to recognise both political and community voices?	How can we better support and train councillors to be effective community champions?	How do we get beyond the few who dominate and make sure community voices are 'legitimate'?	The language of partnership and participation can be inaccessible and exclude people	Acknowledging every voice can be hard if you don't like their views – how can we handle this?	
How can we create space for people to develop their own solutions?	Just setting up new structures doesn't give people a voice – process and relationships matter	We need greater transparency – that will show that in the end most people want the same thing	Engagement needs to affect decision-making. Outcomes must be clearly communicated	Honest feedback is crucial – explaining why things can't be done as well as what can be done	Trust depends on us listening to what 'you said...' and then being able to say 'we did...'	Motivation is an issue - people feel disempowered if their activism makes no difference	
Not everyone wants change – we need to accept and respect that attitude too.	How do we develop participative democracy + community leadership without detracting from representative democracy?	Commissioning processes create barriers to early involvement in planning – problems of conflict of interest	Strong leadership is sometimes needed to avoid endless debate and no decision	How do we make community engagement integral to our work, not just an add-on?	Build relationships. Too often we try to involve people with government decisions before they are even involved with each other!	Conflicts of interest within the VCS – it's difficult to deliver contracts and also provide a voice for communities	
Existing structures are more about management and control than about open democracy and influence	Where do political parties fit in? Decrease in membership makes potential for new leaders to emerge very difficult	How do we build relationships that lead to genuine power sharing?	The move away from neighbourhood structures is not helpful – neighbourhood management works and builds local leadership	We need to engage on the community's terms not in ways that just suit service providers		Empower local staff to work across services – building local links/shared targets/working relationships/trust	

Identifying issues and insights (2)

Resources - how to do better with less		Evidence – how we value participation		Legacy – how to embed participation and develop it further		Issues we missed
Insights:						
Communities have an inherent capacity to make a difference – providing home grown solutions		We need creative new approaches like the measures used in the Social Return on Investment method (SROI)		We need more participatory democracy in order to rescue representative democracy		
We need to recruit more volunteers – young people/residents – and ask what they want for their area		We should develop clear standards for community development and also for measuring participation		Workforce development is critical so front-line officers understand decision-making processes and can support and advise communities		
Employers should be asked to give people paid time off for community work		The Audit Commission should encourage communities to undertake self assessment with their local council				
Issues:						
Too much red-tape – we need to get things done in the way we do when managing crises like floods!	We need to invest more in front-line staff – they are often also local residents	Good communication is crucial – plain easy to understand language	Funding bodies often define the outcomes they want - that can be too restrictive	Funding restrictions make us focus on the endgame and not the process – not creative enough	The pace of change / reorganisation makes it hard to embed anything	Challenges of working in a 2-tier authority
We need to reduce consultation fatigue – by acting on what people tell us and on what can change	Budgets should be linked to participation – eg using Participatory Budgeting methods	How can regional agencies help front-line workers to hear/ use people’s stories?	Pressure to deliver exit strategies often means communities are not fully engaged in the process	What can replace the organisational base of the working class previously provided by the Trade Union movement?	The informal infrastructure for neighbourliness is disappearing – pubs, post offices...	Do rural communities require a different model?
True partnership ought to enhance resources – but not if we work in silos	How to use asset transfer without ‘dumping’ on community groups	Users should be at the heart of commissioning and of assessment	VCS should be invited to give an independent assessment of service performance	How can we learn new and exciting techniques & tools – use the internet to share ideas...		
Duplication – map existing resources and scrutinise use	Lack of core funding inhibits community development					

Politics, democracy and voice

The ‘political dimension’ of participation was a key theme of the workshop. Community empowerment isn’t just a question of improving access to services and offering more choice to ‘customers’. It goes to the heart of what it means to be a responsible, involved citizen with the ability to influence decisions that matter. It raises questions about power and accountability, about the need to create safe spaces for dialogue and disagreement, about the role of local government and its capacity to facilitate more participatory forms of democracy that complement our existing representative system. Presentations from the USA and Nigeria helped us to think about how local government might work in a different way and about how people at the margins might find their voice and begin to make change happen.

7. Neighbourhood Empowerment in Seattle, USA

Jim Diers¹⁰ worked as a community organiser in Seattle in the early 1980s. Using an ‘Alinsky-style’¹¹, broad-based approach, he helped local neighbourhoods draw attention to the gang problems, drugs, violence and insensitive planning decisions that made their lives intolerable. After many confrontations with City Hall, in 1988 he was invited by the Mayor to head up a new Department of Neighbourhoods.

His approach was to focus on community assets rather than needs, and to move from an adversarial relationship between people and government to a genuine partnership. To achieve this, city government had to become a catalyst for change and civic renewal, while simultaneously supporting strong independent community organisations. It had to avoid imposing ‘top down empowerment’ and instead, open up new spaces for dialogue.

To achieve genuine partnership new attitudes were required on both sides. He had **3 key messages** for local government:

1. Do no harm – make sure that your actions do not undermine the potential within communities themselves
2. Remove the barriers to partnership – such as centralised decision-making, rigid silos, bureaucratic red tape, ‘know it all’ attitudes
3. Build community capacity for partnership – by being broad-based and inclusive, developing local leadership, outreach and networking, and by providing match funding.

i) The Neighbourhood Matching Fund was established in 1989. It cut through the familiar ‘we can’t afford it’ arguments to provide small grants of up to \$15,000 or larger grants of up to \$100,000 which were matched by community contributions.

Initially \$150,000 was made available, but by 2001, the fund had grown to \$4.5 million per annum, supporting 400 neighbourhood projects. Over the past 20 years 4,000 community projects have been supported.

Projects are selected by a city-wide Neighbourhood Council, made up of community representatives from 13 District Councils. The selection criteria reflect a joint commitment to civic participation, diversity, self help, sustainability and collaboration. Successful projects must be community-led and include a commitment to provide in-kind contributions, cash and volunteer labour. Projects must be run democratically and either be neighbourhood based and open to all, or ethnic associations and other groups that are not necessarily based in one neighbourhood.

Greening the city:

It started with a street tree planting project in one neighbourhood – 1,080 trees were planted and 1,000 people came out to help. They then got the city to purchase land for a park which the community designed and built. After that they terraced a disused hillside and created an organic garden that now produces 10 tonnes of food a year. Inspired by these initiatives, 20 community parks have been created by different communities across the city.

ii) Neighbourhood Service Centres: Seattle restructured in order to break down departmental silos and deliver integrated local services across the city. In 13 deprived neighbourhoods, services combined to form ‘mini-city halls’.¹² The city also invested in joint training, so that staff and residents could tackle complex problems and undertake local planning, build relationships and do the community development work needed to identify and strengthen local assets.

Tackling empty homes and derelict shops:

In one neighbourhood a community-based homesteading project worked with a local bank to restore derelict buildings for use by homeless people. They painted pretend stores on a row of boarded up storefronts – the artwork attracted attention and within 12 months real businesses had been re-established in the neighbourhood.

iii) Participatory planning: The experience of running so many community projects led people to demand ‘real power’ to plan for the future. Strategies to build consensus and increase accountability between city planners and local people were developed and a collaborative planning process was implemented with the following features:

- › neighbourhood plans were initiated by the community, not the city
- › the community defined the scope of the work to be done
- › they could hire their own planning advisers
- › communities were accountable to the city planning office for developing detailed and inclusive outreach strategies
- › options were presented to the whole community via an ‘Alternatives Fair’
- › every household was invited to vote – by post or at a meeting
- › public resources were matched by community input.

Over a 4 year period, 48 neighbourhood plans were completed, involving over 30,000 people and generating \$470 million in additional tax income for new projects.

Decentralised local government services:

In order to foster collaborative working and joint implementation of the plans, neighbourhood stewardship groups replaced the Neighbourhood Planning Committees and measures to raise new finance were put to the vote. The city’s investment in democracy during the planning process was reciprocated by residents’ willingness to contribute their taxes to implement the neighbourhood plans and additional funding was raised for local libraries, community centres, parks and open spaces.

How to build a strong partnership

Local government needs to:

- › Recognize that neighbourhoods aren't just places with needs but communities of people with assets and resources
- › Go beyond customer service and citizen participation to community empowerment
- › Never do for communities what they can do for themselves
- › Stop focusing on self-proclaimed leaders and start providing communities with leadership training and assist with outreach and networking
- › Replace silos with a holistic, integrated, community-based approach since the community can't partner with a government divided by functions
- › Recognize that community members have valuable expertise
- › Make information accessible to the community and provide educational opportunities
- › Appreciate the unique character of different neighbourhoods and cultures
- › Delegate as many decisions as possible to the community
- › Recognize and thank community members who are effective partners.

Communities need to:

- › Move beyond blaming government and take a share of the responsibility
- › Think and act as citizens rather than just as taxpayers
- › Never wait for government to do what could better be done by the community
- › Make it worth government's while to partner with the community by making it a priority to build broad and inclusive participation
- › Work collaboratively within the neighbourhood and with other neighbourhoods since government can't partner with a community divided by factions
- › Recognize that government staff have valuable expertise
- › Keep government informed and coach staff on how to work effectively with the community
- › Keep the big picture in mind
- › Recognize government's role in setting policy and meeting the needs of the community as a whole
- › Recognize and thank government officials and staff who are effective partners.

¹⁰ Jim Diers teaches community organizing and community development at the University of Washington. He is also a faculty member of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute and the author of 'Neighbor Power: Building Community the Seattle Way'.

¹¹ Saul Alinsky pioneered community organising from the 1930s in Chicago. Barack Obama started out as a community organiser. In the UK, this approach is used by London Citizens and Change-Makers in Manchester.

¹² The population of Seattle is 585,000. 'Neighbourhoods' were defined 'organically' by the people who lived in them and tended to be areas of about 5,000 people.

8. Coalitions for Change in Nigeria

Amina Salihu¹³ outlined how political and democratic change in Nigeria is supported through the Coalitions for Change (C4C) programme. The political context of Nigeria is that people are emerging from a period of entrenched political unrest and violence. The forthcoming elections offer hope of a democratic alternative. However, although the 'right to be involved' is recognised in law, it has yet to be fully implemented or tested. Women make up almost 50% of a total population of 150m, and there are 20m people with disabilities – but these voices are rarely heard. Nigeria's biggest single challenge is to increase participation so that the elections deliver democratic reform. Without participation there can be no real accountability, no lasting change.

Coalitions for Change: C4C creates the space where people can connect with each other and speak out with confidence. It fosters partnership between government and non-government institutions by identifying issues of

common concern. It brings together people from diverse sectors to tackle these issues by pressing for policy changes and taking direct action. C4C involves community-based organisations, government and the media. It negotiates agreements between partners that recognise the different strengths that each one brings. The process can generate conflict, but this is often helpful, enabling change to happen.

Women's Voice: Although there have long been civil society women's groups in Nigeria, C4C has brought them together and given them more momentum and visibility in their discourse with government, and this partnership has given women a stronger political voice. The C4C coalition brings together the technical expertise of civil society organisations with the political strength of female legislators, and has helped to mainstream gender concerns within legislation.

100 women's groups have been established to support female candidates in the forthcoming elections. Each woman contributes 1p per week towards the group's activities. A women's political list is now out in the open and more men are working positively with women to help them get elected. In addition a gender analysis unit has been established in the National Assembly.

Disability rights: Fighting for a rights-based approach to issues relating to disability is another key area of work.

In Nigeria, there are over 19 million **people with disabilities**, but their needs are dealt with through welfare or charity rather than a rights-based approach. Nigeria is a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. So using this framework, C4C identified 'champions' who understood the issues and were passionate about change. A coalition was formed including community leaders from a wide range of disability groups, with representatives from the National Assembly, the Human Rights Commission, other key institutions and civil society organisations. The coalition has helped improve the work of the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities and has ensured that disability groups have a strong voice and can influence policies that affect them.

Youth Leadership: C4C has also developed programmes to identify a cadre of new young leaders and strengthen their capacity to play a part in the future democratic governance of Nigeria.

Mentoring for change – young people with leadership potential are able to shadow expert professional and public sector leaders for a period of 6 months, and then maintain the links longer term. This enables young and old to work together, learn from each other, gain mutual support and build lifelong friendships.

Amina emphasised that participation is not an end in itself. Everyone needs to know that when they work together, there is something in it for them. They must be able to see results, so timing is important - communities need to be heard at strategic policy moments when change is possible. She encouraged participants to create space for people to learn together since this always builds trust. And although people are our most important asset, it is important not to be naïve - people can build new systems; they can also destroy them. Finally she told us not to ignore the private sector. In Nigeria companies are required to invest 5% of their profits in community development as part of their corporate responsibility. Holding some of them to this commitment is not easy - like the oil industry in the Niger

Delta. But many understand that a thriving economy requires strong communities plus a healthy democracy, and that any investment they make will be mutually beneficial.

“Through C4C, we analyse power and vested interests, we identify and nurture ‘change champions’, we scrutinise progress and demonstrate that a participative approach can help to share responsibilities and make problem-solving less complex.”

¹³ Amina Salihu participated in the first champions’ workshop in 2007. She is a human rights activist, policy adviser and currently coordinates the Coalitions for Change programme (C4C) in Nigeria.

9. Reflections and insights from participants

Reflecting on these presentations, participants highlighted the following points:

- › We need to remember how valuable a small-grants programme can be to stimulate community initiative and strengthen participation. The simple **match funding programme** in Seattle was used to leverage in additional community resources and to tackle issues that the city was not well-placed to resolve. In the UK we tend to see ‘Community Chest programmes’ as peripheral, rather than part of a core strategy that can bring significant added value.
- › But to realise that added value, a partnership is needed where the local authority **removes red tape, minimises bureaucracy and takes some risks** to support local people. In Seattle, the city ensured that community projects got the support of independent accountants. They also encouraged a ‘can do’ attitude amongst front-line staff, and gave them considerable scope for local discretion.
- › It is important to **start small** in order to connect with the energy and priorities of local people and help communities grow in confidence until they are able to drive further changes. In Seattle the city worked with **small informal groups**, not just groups that were already well organised, or what Jim described as ‘the grim and determined’.
- › A strong **community development approach** is crucial, with good communication, regular feedback and follow through. Initiatives should be genuinely **community-led**.
“Never do for the community what they can do for themselves... be willing to take risks and don’t micro-manage”
- › We need to pay more attention to the **balance of power** within partnerships and also address the **gender imbalance** in the UK, especially in relation to decision-making and projects with significant budgets.
- › We need to **integrate engagement** across all agencies and convince service **commissioners** of the value of participation, so that it can be build into contracts and become an integral part of the way we work.
- › We should pay more attention to the **private sector and local businesses** and involve them as champions of participation. Small and medium local enterprises need economically strong communities and a vibrant market in order to thrive. The problem of poverty is complex and therefore everyone needs to be part of the solution.

Connecting communities through effective participation

Another workshop theme was the question of how to translate a deeper understanding of participative democracy into good practice and embed it across all sectors. This would involve new skills, new ways of thinking and new relationships. It would also require a strong case for investment, based on evidence of the benefits of participation, and an ongoing commitment to working with the most marginalised groups whose voices are rarely heard. Presentations from Canada and Jamaica, via south London, helped participants explore some of these issues.

10. Vibrant Communities in Canada

Liz Weaver¹⁴ described the Vibrant Communities programme and explained how it seeks to engage citizens in inspired action, and to work and learn together to create and realize bold visions for the future. **“Shaping – Not Simply Enduring – Our Communities’ Future”** was their slogan. Their approach was based on ‘3 big ideas’ for building strong communities and tackling poverty:

- › Strengthening Social Capital
- › Connecting the Dots, Untying the Knots
- › Resilience & Sustainability

She argued that the key ingredients for a better quality of life were ‘strong relationships plus civic activism plus local institutions’.

i) Strengthening social capital:

In order to build social capital Liz argued for wider recognition that people in poverty are struggling to cope with very complex problems. It isn’t simply the number of factors involved but the dynamic relationship between them that makes them so difficult to deal with.

Poverty magnifies the impact of every problem. They are so tightly interlocked that one reversal can produce a chain reaction with results far distant from the original causes. A rundown apartment can exacerbate a child’s asthma, which leads to a call for an ambulance, which generates a medical bill that cannot be paid, which ruins a credit record, which hikes the interest rate on an auto loan, which forces the purchase of an unreliable used car, which jeopardizes a mother’s punctuality at work, which limits her promotions and earning capacity, which confines her to poor housing...

New attitudes and practices are required that enable service providers and others to work together to improve the decisions and actions they take. They also need to find better ways to involve communities themselves in understanding the problems, and in defining and delivering the solutions.

ii) Connecting dots and untying knots:

In order to tackle complexity and break the poverty cycle, an integrated approach is required involving:

- › comprehensive thinking and action
- › multi-sectoral collaboration
- › community learning and change
- › community asset building.

This approach links poverty reduction, citizen engagement and neighbourhood development as key elements for effective change. It recognises the inherent strengths of every community and uses a sustainable livelihoods framework

to track assets and measure impact in relation to personal, physical, social, human and financial assets. (see diagram below) In one community Vibrant Communities was able to identify 262,594 assets – benefits derived by people on their journey out of poverty. In this framework a single intervention might account for multiple assets and therefore would be counted multiple times, reflecting more accurately the benefits to families and the wider community.

iii) Resilience and sustainability:

The Vibrant Communities programme seeks to instil these qualities into local communities. Resilience is about developing community capacity ‘to anticipate risk, limit impact, and bounce back rapidly through survival, adaptability, evolution, and growth in the face of turbulent change.’

The key ingredients for resilience are:

- › **People:** Residents’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour in matters of leadership, initiative, education, pride, co-operation, self-reliance, and participation.
- › **Organisations:** The scope, nature, and level of collaboration within local organizations, institutions, and groups.
- › **Resources:** The extent to which the community builds on local resources to achieve its goals, while drawing on external resources strategically.
- › **Community Process:** The nature and extent of community economic development planning, participation, and action.

Sustainability is about ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. It isn’t necessary to sustain everything. All initiatives have a natural, ‘eco-cycle’ including the opportunity for growth, a high functioning phase, a creative destruction phase and so on.¹⁵

¹⁴ Liz Weaver is a member of the Vibrant Communities team at Tamarack – an Institute for Community Engagement, based in Ontario, Canada. She works with communities across Canada to assist them develop strategies for poverty reduction

¹⁵ A sustainable livelihoods framework is represented diagrammatically in Liz’s presentation to the workshop; see http://www.yhep.org.uk/webfm_send/77

I I. Participatory Appraisal in Jamaica and south London

Teddy Noble¹⁶ first developed a ‘Community-based Performance Management Programme’ (CPMP) in Jamaica. Over the past 18 months, he has been adapting it for use in the UK, while on placement with a London borough. In developing good practice, he emphasised the need for reflection - self-awareness in order to understand who **we** are, our sources of power and how these affect our interactions with communities. We have multiple identities and this affects how people perceive and react to us. Just as we are complex people, so too are the values and ideologies that drive us. We need to understand this so we don’t become our own barriers to change.

He addressed 2 questions:

- › How do community generated indicators, criteria and evidence from ‘participatory appraisal’ impact on policy, power and performance?
- › What impact might this have on sustainable social and institutional change?

Tackling health inequalities: His work in the UK involved undertaking a ‘**Rapid Participatory Appraisal**’ of health inequalities’ in relation to physical activity by BME communities. The diverse needs of the local population created huge pressures on the NHS, yet local leisure facilities were not being well used by BME groups.

The project involved:

- › establishing a design team and a reference group with organised communities
- › asking ‘who are we missing?’ and doing outreach work to connect with those people
- › targeting the most vulnerable, least heard, through focus groups
- › training council staff and local people in the ‘scorecard method’¹⁷
- › sharing results with communities as well as with senior people in the council
- › holding joint meetings between service providers and communities to explore issues and agree solutions
- › producing an action plan and monitoring
- › feeding the lessons back into corporate policy via the Council’s Strategy Unit.

They discovered that the presence of security cameras at the local swimming pool was a major barrier preventing Somali women from using the pool for exercise. Changes were made and more Somali women began to use the pool.

The project influenced the borough’s Physical Activity and Health Inequality Strategies and a stronger partnership was established between communities, the Council and NHS Departments to implement specific proposals to improve access to council facilities. New services were co-designed with marginalized groups and an analysis of costs and benefits strengthened the business case for increased funding for physical activity. Finally the project was nominated for the Council’s Annual Team Star Awards!

Perspective on partnerships: As an outsider looking in, Teddy was able to share his critical reflections and draw useful lessons. Some of the problems he observed were that:

- › The LSP had strong mechanisms in place but weak capacity for collaboration
- › Politicians and the state dominated community processes – they chaired community meetings and they dominated the scrutiny role
- › Communities were incorporated into council run systems. Food and money were offered as incentives and led to weak participation. Many communities were jostling and competing for grants
- › Knowledge management processes were unclear – data was often unreliable
- › There was low level support within the council for an action research approach
- › Organisational restructuring, staff turnover and other changes created a chaotic atmosphere
- › There were competing priorities within the local authority
- › There was inadequate joining up within the partnership.

“Deepening empowerment will not only come by engaging people and giving them a voice. It also involves strategic alignment, positioning, negotiating, brokering, bargaining, championing and navigating the tensions between local and institutional realities”

Teddy Noble

Achieving change: Teddy identified 7 critical factors:

- › Internal change is essential to 'get your own house in order'
- › Intentionality – having a clear purpose
- › Cross-sector teams – joining things up
- › Deliberative spaces – having a problem-solving approach
- › Information sharing – openness and evidence-based approach
- › Immediacy – getting results, making a difference
- › Joint planning, action and monitoring – being systematic and self-critical
- › Conversation and discourse – building relationships, understanding and trust.

He emphasised the importance of understanding that there are different sorts of spaces for participation including:

- › invited spaces – which the authorities controlled
- › closed spaces – bringing together selected individuals or groups
- › claimed spaces – which local communities initiate and 'own'
- › consensual spaces – where power is shared and real partnership work is possible.

The skills and capacity of local authority staff to operate within this complex matrix is a key issue. It is dangerous to assume, as many local authorities do, that 'anyone' can do community development and that the participation process can be 'managed' – in reality it is often very messy!

¹⁶ Teddy Noble is a graduate student at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. Before coming to the UK, he worked on citizen engagement and policy reform at the Cabinet Office in Jamaica.

¹⁷ 'Community Scorecard' as developed in Jamaica – for more information see: http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/94570/Tanz_1103/Ta_1103/TheCommunityScoreCardProcess_Nov03.pdf and <http://www.sasanet.org/documents/SM/Books%20&%20Articles/SM%20Ar5.pdf>

12. Reflections and insights from the participants

Reflecting on these presentations, participants identified the following insights:

- › Focusing on *community assets* rather than deficits is the best way to engage, energise and enthuse people and to tap into the core economy as reflected in everyday neighbourliness and acts of kindness.
- › What sort of *incentives* should we use to persuade communities to engage in an ongoing dialogue? We seem to have created a culture where people expect a 'reward' for attending meetings. In many countries the resources for this simply don't exist. But in the UK, many people expect something in return for coming to a one-off meeting, while remaining reluctant to get involved further.
- › *Community resilience* is what matters, especially when faced with the possibility of reduced funding. If people are asked to help identify priorities, protect core functions and find creative ways to avoid negative impacts, the process forces them to agree what's important and this can make the community stronger - even when faced with tough choices.
- › The public sector should create *new spaces for participation* but not seek to fill those spaces. It should be able to respond to *the community's agenda* rather than always expecting them to dance to the government's tune.
- › Sustainability is important but not everything needs to be sustained. Projects have a natural '*eco-cycle*' - they come and go and ultimately are less important than relationships, support networks, real community engagement and the sustained involvement of key stakeholders.
- › The *culture of local government* makes it difficult to break through the 'silo's' and address complex problems at all levels. Although public sector staff must work within a system, at the front-line in particular, they need to understand how to make it work for people and be empowered to do so. But a workplace

culture based on hierarchy and line management controls does not help.

- › We need to *understand the complexity* of issues like poverty and inequality and how community participation can make a difference. We need different and better ways to value and measure those changes at local level – not just to assess benefits in financial terms, but also by capturing and sharing the personal stories that demonstrate change and have the *capacity to inspire*.
- › Participants acknowledged the importance of personal development and the potential benefits that a more *reflective approach* to their work might offer. Individually people could build this into their daily routine, but good organisations should also encourage institutional reflection, ideally including staff and ‘service users’.¹⁸

■ ¹⁸ Google ‘Reflective practice’ to find out more about this methodology.

13. Reflections from overseas guests

After nearly 2 days of listening to discussion about the UK and comparing experiences, we invited our overseas guests to share their reflections. They all commented on the similarity of issues and experience shared by people all over the world, who are working to strengthen participation, give people voice and influence and through their involvement to tackle poverty and inequality. For most people this was a task that grabbed both heart and mind. It was reflected in the passion and tenacity that drives community change and in the intelligence, memory and pragmatism that allows new approaches to emerge from prior efforts to change things.

The following reflections stood out:

- › Before seeking to involve people with government, work to involve people with each other – rebuild community.
- › Remove labels and focus on the gifts that every individual has to give. Don’t treat anyone as simply a client with needs, but as a citizen with strengths.
- › Work with all communities, not only those we have labelled as disadvantaged. Everyone needs community and democracy needs everyone!
- › Intergenerational organising is very important – we must empower the young.
- › Reframe how we think about power. Help elected officials to understand that power is not a finite resource and help communities to understand that they have their own power - this is not a ‘zero-sum’ game.
- › Start with the community’s agenda, not with the government’s.
- › Think big but start small. Begin with pilots so you can refine your approach and demonstrate results.
- › Work as a broker – filling the gaps between community and government, helping them to connect for their mutual benefit.
- › Respect and preserve the organic, autonomous and independent character of community groups. The state can easily dominate the space they need to resolve their own issues and formulate their demands. Government needs to be prepared to pull back.
- › Take time for personal reflection – we need to understand our own motives, the attitudes we bring, the impressions we make and the values that inform the way we work.
- › The ‘ladder of participation’ is not a very helpful image. It is too simplistic and does not reflect the fact that we may need to have a number of different goals.
- › Value ‘hierarchies of imagination’ rather than ‘hierarchies of power’.
- › True partnership is based on ‘power with’ not ‘power over’ people.
- › We have to transform local social capital into national political capital.

The regional legacy for community empowerment

It has become clear over the last 2 years that the benefits of YHEP are primarily about 2 things:

- › Increased and improved cross sector and cross locality networking and relational capital
- › Increased opportunity for strategic approaches across the region with regard to engagement and empowerment programmes – the linking of activity under Empowerment, Active Citizenship and Cohesion programmes.

In the final part of the workshop, participants took stock of progress, as reflected in the Audit Commission's regional assessment and also based on direct evidence of developments on the ground. They asked what more could be done to embed good practice and ensure a lasting legacy for participation and empowerment in the region.

14. Taking stock – progress so far

Working together on the improvement agenda – embedding, sustaining and challenging.

Understanding the indicators: An analysis of data from the NI-4¹⁹ assessment scores for last year provides useful and sometimes surprising insights into the factors that affect performance ratings²⁰:

Key findings form MORI/Urban Forum research:

- › Differences in NI-4 scores are pre-determined to a large extent by population and place. For example:
 - in areas with higher levels of ethnic diversity and in-migration people tend to feel they have more influence,
 - each region is different – the NE tends to have relatively high scores,
 - urban areas tend to have lower scores.

These factors account for 63% of the variation in scores between different areas. So no matter what actions the local authority might be taking to encourage involvement, two thirds of their NI-4 score is pre-determined by the area profile.
- › Involvement in decision-making isn't necessarily empowering – it depends how it is done – real empowerment is complex.
- › People's prior experience of involvement affects their attitude to participation.
- › Three factors are crucial if people are to feel they have some influence:
 - being kept well informed
 - quality consultation which means being really listened to and seeing that action results from the views they express
 - institutional responsiveness as reflected in the attitudes of local authorities and partners, and relationships with front-line staff.
- › There is no statistical relationship between feelings of influence (NI-4) and conditions for a thriving Third Sector (NI-7).
- › It was significant that only **40% of elected members** felt they could influence decisions in their area!

This analysis raises the question of what we need to do better or more of, in order to turn around low scores in the region. It also suggests that better indicators are needed, if the wider benefits of participation are to be recognised in performance monitoring and valued when it comes to making decisions about future investment.

Embedding good practice: Theresa Stearn, Head of Diversity at the Audit Commission, explained that the role of the Audit Commission, as an independent watch dog, was “to follow the public sector pound and assess how it is being used locally to deliver results.” The aim is to understand what is really happening on the ground and look for continuous improvement rather than specific results. There is a belief (and hope) that more accessible information about local performance will lead to more people being interested in this and as a result to more direct public accountability.

The Audit Commission recognises the need for a better assessment process and hopes to achieve this:

- › through local conversations that measure trends and deepen understanding
- › by connecting more directly with local communities since that’s where the wealth of experience is concentrated
- › by directly involving the third sector in the assessment process
- › by extending access beyond a limited range of local authority and other officers
- › by ensuring that councillors are more involved in future
- › by helping local authorities and their partners to cope with the growing pressure to deliver ‘more with less’.

“The Audit Commission is really only interested in the difference you are making.”

Theresa Stearn

¹⁹ National Indicator 4 measures the % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their local area

²⁰ ‘Citizens and local decision making: what drives feelings of influence?’ Rachel Newton, Anna Pierce, Liz Richardson, Matt Williams. Urban Forum 2010. Copies at www.cdf.org.uk/nep

15. Ideas for Action

i) Politics, democracy and voice

Key message: Participation is meaningless without the power to make a difference. This means changing the relationships between those in power – at central, regional and local levels - and those who put them there. It implies a new way of working that gives ordinary people a voice and enables them to contribute directly to solving the problems they care about. It means establishing genuine partnerships, empowering front line workers, and embracing a style of leadership that is more open, responsive and accountable. Essentially it means reforming our politics in order to get a better balance between participatory, deliberative and representative democracy.

Ideas for action:

- › **Ensure that more people are heard by:**
 - extending the scope of our work to include younger and older people and supporting *inter-generational work*
 - tackling the gender gap by using tools like Oxfam’s *gender power analysis*

- seeking *new spaces* for engagement, creating more options for people to engage and responding to their demands to work in different ways
- encouraging dialogue, promoting active *listening skills*, being open to different viewpoints and improving our problem solving skills.

› **Value the power inherent in communities by:**

- encouraging colleagues to see *communities as a resource* not a problem
- reviewing strategy and practice to help *communities mobilise* and take the initiative rather than stifle them in bureaucracy
- using *community development* work to build strong communities
- using the *media and IT* to reinforce positive messages about communities.

› **Build strong relationships by:**

- *connecting people* within their own communities before expecting them to deal with government and others in authority
- developing a mutually supportive *workforce engagement network*
- strengthening *partnerships and networking* and valuing different contributions.

› **Learn from each other by:**

- improving our own practice through *workforce skills training*
- *mapping* what is already being done and mainstreaming good practice
- seeking *joint learning opportunities* that also help build good relationships
- creating *shadowing opportunities* between public agencies and VCS groups
- promoting opportunities to learn from *overseas experience*.

› **Empower front line workers by:**

- tackling unhelpful *power dynamics* in the work place and encouraging creativity and imagination
- giving front line workers *more flexibility* to respond to local issues.

› **Develop representative and accountable leadership by:**

- supporting *elected members* and including them in joint training
- strengthening *women's leadership*, especially among elected members
- requiring *senior managers* to spend time on the front line.

“It would help managers to remember where they have come from, if they spent two weeks each year experiencing other roles - walking in others' shoes”

› **Demonstrate that participation can make a difference by:**

- being clear about the purpose and intended *outcomes of engagement*
- *communicating* the evidence clearly to residents and through the media
- encouraging people to play a bigger role in the *scrutiny process*
- responding to people and giving *feedback*
- inspiring people to believe in the *potential for change*.

“We need to respect the community's contribution, knowledge and commitment and to be able to say to them: “You said -> we did” or “You said -> we helped you to do”

ii) Effective practice and implementation

Key message: The challenge in future will be to ‘do better with less’. This means using the tools and techniques we already have more effectively; collaborating and combining resources to better effect; and focusing investment in capacity building and skills development very carefully. We need to make better use of the legislation we already have, to be creative and open to new ideas, and prepared to take more risks in supporting community empowerment.

Ideas for Action:

› Work smarter by:

- integrating and coordinating *community engagement strategies* and working together consistently
- making *better use of programmes* like Connecting Communities and the Targeted Support Fund by finding flexible and creative ways to link them
- making better use of the existing *legislative framework* – duty to involve, duty to promote democracy, equalities legislation, national indicators like NI4
- using *neighbourhood management*, including Neighbourhood Agreements, to support participatory planning and development
- encouraging strong local leadership and sensible *risk taking*
- incorporating participation into the *commissioning* process and service contracts.

› Learn from good practice by:

- building *personal reflection* into our work routine – eg through learning diaries
- developing *mentoring and shadowing* opportunities
- encouraging our own institutions to be more self-critical and reflective through annual *strategic reviews* that include workers, members and service users
- sharing learning and using the experience of *front line workers*, like Community Health Champions, to train workers across all services.

› Mobilise community assets by:

- *starting small* and building slowly
- connecting with *informal groups* of willing people not just those already well organised
- providing accessible, *small grant* programmes to support neighbourhood initiatives, and by encouraging volunteering and time banking
- reviewing the *incentives* we use to encourage participation and make sure they do not devalue people’s contribution or longer term commitment.

› Use tools and techniques to innovate by:

- being pragmatic as well as creative in how we use *tools* we already have in ways that make them ‘fit for purpose’
- sharing *new ideas* and good practice – such as: participatory budgeting, community planning, residents consultancy, village design statements, buddying schemes, community scorecards, community asset mapping, 100 Women’s Group...
- using tools like *participatory budgeting* to strengthen local planning processes and help generate community match funding
- developing our use of *ICT tools*, graphic facilitation and other creative ways of communication.

› **Involve the private sector by:**

- including them in *partnerships* because ‘everyone is part of the problem, so everyone needs to be part of the solution’
- tapping into the *corporate responsibility* commitments that are important to many commercial companies
- linking up with small and medium enterprises that have a vested interest in improving the *local economy*
- using the ‘*Leaky Bucket*’ concept to increase understanding of how money flows in and out of local communities and to explore how small businesses can be retained in order to help sustain the vitality of a community

iii) *A sustainable legacy for the future*

Key message: Future funding restrictions mean that efforts to create a sustainable legacy for participation will depend heavily on the strength of the relationships we have built up over recent years and on our capacity to for effective collaboration. We also need to make a stronger business case for investment in participation and to embed good practice across public sector and VCS organisations. In doing this we need to collect evidence that reflects the wider benefits of participation and challenge narrow definitions that fail to acknowledge important issues like happiness and well-being.

Ideas for Action:

› **Capture the evidence for participation by:**

- taking into account the *wider benefits* of participation and using tools such as *Social Return on Investment* to gather evidence that demonstrates ‘value for money’ in a more holistic way
- using *community score cards* to gather and analyse data in ways that empower communities in the process
- sharing *stories* to capture personal experience and achievements that can inspire others as well as evidence real change
- using the ‘*most significant change*’ methodology²¹ to identify greatest impact
- *celebrating achievements* and seeking *media* publicity – eg through ‘ideas fairs’, oral history projects linking young and old, murals to instil community pride, community gardens to beautify places and grow food.

› **Embed participation by:**

- *implementing CAA* in ways that enable much greater community participation and ensure they are engaged at the beginning of the process
- *communicating evidence* about participation from the CAA on line and in other accessible, ‘snappy’ ways that grab people’s attention
- supporting *local champions* in order to maintain the drive, tenacity and passion for this agenda across the region
- extending our *networks* and spheres of influence and finding others, across all sectors, who will work with us to champion participation
- *building relationships* that will sustain participation and engagement into the future.

■ ²¹ See: Most Significant Change technique: <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf>

The community empowerment programme is due to end in 2011. Inevitably, participants were asking ‘what sort of legacy are we leaving?’ ‘Is participation sufficiently embedded across the region to ensure that community empowerment will remain strategically important?’ Judging from the enthusiasm, energy and ideas that they generated, the answer was an emphatic, ‘yes!’ There was a strong conviction that participation was here to stay, that the benefits were clear and that the relational capacity that had developed throughout the programme – between communities, ‘champions’ in local government and in other services - provided firm foundations for the future. However, given the political and economic uncertainties, no-one was under any illusion that the next few years would be easy. There was clearly a lot more to do – to gather the evidence, persuade the cynics and keep making the case for investment. There was also more to do to break down political barriers and encourage people to think creatively about what a more participative form of democracy might look like.

Participants left the workshop with a big agenda, but with a real appetite to implement what they had learned. They had been challenged and inspired by empowerment work with communities in other countries; they had shared their own issues, insights and ideas for action. And before leaving, they had each written a ‘postcard to self’ noting what they personally hoped to have achieved in 3 months time. Among the practical points was one reminder that summed up the feeling of the workshop:

“Don’t forget how inspired you felt!”



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