

Effective community development programmes: A review of the international evidence base

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Effective community development programmes

A review of the international evidence base

John Bamber, Stella Owens, Heino Schonfeld
Deborah Gbate and Deirdre Fullerton

This review was commissioned by the Department for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs. Its purpose was to seek important lessons from the international evidence base about effectiveness in community development type programmes. It is aimed at those interested in and responsible for effective performance in publicly funded community development-type programmes.

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Foreword

Vibrant communities are essential to the well-being of individuals and society, but changing demographic and economic conditions mean that effective support for communities in both urban and rural settings has never been more needed.

That is why I warmly welcome this report from the Centre for Effective Services (CES), arising from a wider review of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme and the Community Development Programme. In 2008, the Department asked the Centre – an independent centre established in a partnership between the Government and Atlantic Philanthropies to promote evidence-informed policy and practice – to review the design of the two programmes.

The lessons drawn from research and evaluations in countries with jurisdictions similar to Ireland and with significant government funding for community development, were used to benchmark the two programmes against the principles of good practice found in the international evidence base.

The report's findings provide a valuable insight into the approaches and practices that are likely to lead to improved outcomes for individual beneficiaries and communities, and they have helped in the design of the successor to the two former programmes, the new Local and Community Development Programme.

As the Centre for Effective Services continues to advise and support the Department in its improvement activities, the report's findings will also inform our innovative plans for the national evaluation of the Local and Community Development Programme.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Carey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Pat" and the last name "Carey" clearly distinguishable.

Pat Carey, T.D.
Minister for Community, Equality
and Gaeltacht Affairs
September 2010

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Acronyms used

ACOA	Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
CBDC	Community Business Development Corporations
CDF	Community Development Foundation
CDP	Community Development Programme
CDB	County or City Development Board
CDM	Community Decision Making Entity
CED-Q	Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions
CENI	Centre for Evaluation Northern Ireland
CES	Centre for Effective Services
CF	Community Futures Programme
CFO	Community Futures Organization
CFP	Community Facilitation Programme
CH/SFSC	Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative
CLD	Community Learning and Development
CSSP	Centre for the Study of Social Policy (Washington)
CTC	Communities That Care Programme
FedNor	Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario
HAZ	Health Action Zone
HCN	Higher and Complex Needs Unit (New Zealand)
HLC	Healthy Living Centre
IC	Industry Canada
IPH	Institute of Public Health
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
LDSIP	Local Development and Social Inclusion Programme
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
MCCC	Montgomery County Collaboration Council
NDC	New Deal for Communities Programme
NDP	National Development Plan
NIF	Neighbourhood Initiative Foundation
NMP	Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Programme
RBA	Results Based Accountability
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
SAN	Social Audit Network
SCP	Single Community Programme
SIM	Social Inclusion Measure
SIP	Social Inclusion Partnership
SRB	Single Regeneration Budget
SSLP	Sure Start Local Programme
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
WD	Western Economic Diversification Canada

Executive summary

The Centre for Effective Services (CES) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation funded jointly by Atlantic Philanthropies, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and the Department for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (formerly the Department for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs) in Ireland. It is part of a new generation of intermediary organisations across the world working to apply learning from the emerging science of implementation to real world policy and practice concerns. The overarching mission of the Centre is to connect the design and delivery of services with scientific and technical knowledge of ‘what works’ in order to improve outcomes for children, young people, and the families and communities in which they live.

Shortly after it was established in 2008, the Centre was asked by the Department for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to review two important community development programmes in Ireland: the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and the Community Development Programme (CDP). Between them the two programmes accounted for €72.64 million funding directly from government in 2009. Both were run by locally based not-for-profit companies or groups that work within their communities to identify needs and link people to local services. The 2008 outturns estimated that in excess of 400,000 people were supported under the programmes. Beneficiaries are located in urban and rural settings, and include those who have been unemployed for long periods, lone parents, young people, people with disabilities, people from the Traveller community, and

new migrants, as well as many other groups in local communities. Because national priorities are addressed by the programmes, central government involvement is required to ensure consistency and coordination.

Part of the review's purpose was to seek important lessons from the international evidence base about effectiveness in community development type programmes funded by central and local government, or other large-scale institutions such as major charitable foundations. This led us to formulate the following research question:

What does the international evidence base tell us about key principles of effective policy and practice in publicly funded community development programmes?

The term 'programme' implies a degree of coherence and integration around structure and governance, design and service content, implementation and delivery, and monitoring and evaluation. For this reason, evidence was sought in relation to the issues, challenges and promising responses associated with these four overarching aspects of programme management.

Key findings

Regarding 'structure' and 'governance', for example, how should commissioners or others with overarching responsibility engage local communities in devising and implementing renewal, or work with partner agencies in delivering change? A common challenge with respect to programme 'design' is the tendency for commissioners and practitioners to identify too many goals with ill-defined objectives that are incapable of being monitored and evaluated. In terms of 'implementation and delivery', there is a reliance on structured collaborative activity at local level to realise the intentions of policy, although the degree of variability at local level can be counterproductive for adherence to effective practice standards, and may also militate against local accountability to national priorities. A pressing issue in relation to the evaluation of publicly funded community development programmes concerns how to assess at a national level the results of work in different localities. Programmes that vary substantially at local level also become very challenging (and sometimes impossible) to

evaluate using orthodox scientific methods. This in turn renders them non-accountable for outcomes and cost-effectiveness, eroding political and public buy-in. More generally, monitoring and evaluation processes will be counterproductive when the balance is wrong between them and if they require disproportionate amounts of time.

There are, therefore, many challenges for public policy administrative structures. It is a key message from the literature that complexity must be managed, and to some extent constrained, if large-scale programmes are to be effective and be seen to be effective. Principles underpinning effective programmes can be elaborated in relation to the four overarching aspects of programme management.

Structure and governance of programmes

Structure refers to the way that commissioning bodies and local management and delivery bodies relate and are accountable to one another nationally and locally. Governance refers to the principles and processes by which programmes are overseen and regulated by commissioners or others with overarching responsibility for their performance. There is clear consensus across the literature that structure and governance in community development type programmes have a major determining role in whether local delivery results in desired outcomes. Key points are:

- There needs to be a clear and consistent lead from government (or the commissioning agency if this is not government). Frequent changes of emphasis or direction from the top dislocate local processes and undermine the potential for good outcomes.
- In spite of the importance of a strong lead from the top, ‘top-down’ approaches to management tend not to achieve good results in this field. Better results are achieved when localities are able to engage with the policy agenda and allowed latitude to interpret it locally. However, to ensure congruence with public policy objectives, good communications and dialogue between the centre and the localities are needed throughout this process.
- There is overwhelming consensus across developed countries with mature community development sectors that the Partnership model favours good outcomes, whereby local groups of stakeholders collaborate through more or less formal structures to

agree and deliver community development inputs at the local level. Partnerships would generally report to a wider national structure that may provide support as well as governance functions.

- There is no evidence to suggest that micro-management of local activity by funders produces good results. Whilst there needs to be joint working between the centre and the locality in agreeing the broad agenda for action, the details of how policy is interpreted at local level are best delegated to local partners.
- Funding needs to be more than a ‘commissioning’ relationship and should be seen as a negotiated, long-term investment in community capability. It should allow for participation at the local level with a reasonable degree of flexibility allowed to local partners to determine allocations between constituent activities and to vary between headings within overall budgets, and reasonable stability of funding over time to allow longer term priorities to be achieved.
- Good governance in this field requires careful attention to the clarification of the specific roles and remits of partners and funders. Different jurisdictions may manage this in different ways, but early establishment of clear Terms of Reference for partnerships and Service Level Agreements between funding bodies and delivery agents is a common principle of strong governance. Given the imperative to be responsive to local change in this field, the facility to review and reformulate these from time to time should be in-built.
- Regarding arrangements for governance, community engagement is of central importance in addressing democratic deficit, in modernising government, in building community cohesion and in terms of plans to improve programme design and service content.

Programme design and service content

Programme design refers to the principles and processes by which the overall shape of a programme, in terms of its constituent elements, is determined, within an agreed framework. Service content here refers to the specific nature of services provided at the point of delivery to service beneficiaries – in other words, what local community development entities actually provide to communities. Key points are:

- A ‘systems’ (or ‘ecological’) approach to programme design has proved helpful in many jurisdictions. It helps to elucidate how the constituent elements (society, community/ neighbourhood, school, family, individual, etc) are related within an integrated system within which there are many interacting factors, and provides a framework for design by focusing on the levels at which different activities can be targeted and different outcomes might be envisaged.
- Programme design is most likely to be robust and effective when it is underpinned by a clear theoretical framework, which makes explicit the expectations around why providing Input X should lead to change in Outcome Z. This should be formulated with reference to existing theory about how community needs arise and how change is achieved.
- Service content should be determined with reference to a clearly articulated description of the expected mechanisms of change, which makes explicit the expectations around how Input X should lead to change in Outcome Z, perhaps by way of Output Y.
- Combined, these two approaches are sometimes described as a ‘theory of change’ and can be used to specify a ‘logic model’ that sets out the various inputs, outputs/activities and outcomes that the programme hopes to achieve and how these are conceptually and practically linked. Providing this logic model is agreed by all parties, it can then be a useful tool for monitoring programme and/or service progress over time.
- Programme design makes most sense when it is needs-informed. This implies initial needs analysis, carried out at local level, at the very least to confirm the local situation in relation to nationally determined priorities for action. The analysis helps to establish a baseline against which it is possible to measure progress towards achieving goals.
- Needs analyses can be carried out utilising a combination of existing administrative and demographic or epidemiological data, new surveys of local residents or services, and public and professional consultations, and need not be expensive or

lengthy. In high-quality programmes, needs analyses are not used simply as ‘gap-analyses’ or ways of identifying local or community deficits; they are also used to identify strengths and clarify the opportunities for building greater community resilience.

- It is a well-established principle in many fields of human services that effective programme design is generally ‘outcomes-led’ or results-driven. This implies that broad outcomes should be identified before programme design begins and that specific indicators of success that are measurable must be clarified as part of the process of specifying service content.
- A focus on outcomes can help to avoid the situation where performance is being measured in the abstract. In this approach, required actions and activities can be projected backwards from the desired results rather than forwards from a longer term or aspirational goal.
- Some literature suggests it may be helpful to conceptualise outcomes in the community development field as a sequence of phases such as ‘preliminary’, ‘intermediate’ and ‘end’ outcomes, and apply critical appraisal skills to the question of the level or phase at which it is really feasible to expect community development programmes to operate and deliver results.
- Given the wide potential scope of community development activities, effective programmes generally have to restrict the number of priorities for change that they address through their programme design, focusing in on a carefully selected group of feasible activities and bearing in mind local resources and other capacity issues.
- Within this, the evidence from related community-based fields and from successful community development programmes, such as Communities That Care, is that multi-dimensional designs, with service offers that draw on a menu of approaches to support different learning styles, tend to be associated with the strongest outcomes. The involvement of multi-disciplinary teams at both the design and the implementation and delivery stages is a feature of successful programmes internationally.

Implementation and delivery of programmes

Implementation and delivery refer to the principles and processes by which programmes and services are put into action ‘on the ground’. Without effective implementation processes and high-quality front-line delivery to service beneficiaries, even the best-designed and best structured and governed programmes will fail. Key points are:

- A principle of effective implementation, flowing from the notion of partnership working utilised by many effective community development programmes around the world, is the involvement of many partners in delivering the programme activities at the neighbourhood level. Partly this serves to operationalise and ‘make real’ the concept of multi-agency partnership; partly this ensures that the multi-dimensional ‘systems’ or ‘ecological’ approach required to deliver effective services to communities, as noted above, is supported.
- The most promising approaches in this respect involve collaboration between central or local government and the local delivery agents in determining how the programme should operate and how outcomes should be achieved by means of a negotiated process.
- The evidence is clear that collaboration is not an end in itself. Instead, collaborations can play an important role in building up the local infrastructure, including support and umbrella bodies, networks and forums, in order to develop long-term assets and endowments and enable dialogue between communities and the authorities.
- This work requires active community engagement at different levels and in a variety of ways in policy-making and decision-making processes.
- Enabling partnership activity and community engagement to fulfil its potential, and facilitating active participation, requires appropriate resources and skilled professional support.
- The critical role of the team/project leader or ‘champion’ at local level has been documented as a major factor predicting success, with the most effective leaders being skilled in a number of different areas as well as in leadership, and having intimate local knowledge and strong local credibility.

- Close attention to training and development of front-line workers and volunteers is a key feature of successful programmes, both to build and retain a competent workforce to deliver complex work with often high-need communities and to ensure that work is delivered to a high standard.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are terms that are often (counter-productively) conflated in the literature and debates on community development. Monitoring is a counting (or accounting) process concerned with the assessment of whether agreed inputs have been made as per Service Level Agreements and whether key targets for service uptake have been achieved. On its own, monitoring does not generally provide information on the impact or effectiveness of a programme, only its throughput and resource utilisation. Evaluation is a process that involves the systematic investigation of pre-determined questions preferably using scientifically robust (transparent and replicable) research methods, and assesses processes, outcomes and impact of a programme or service. Key points are:

- Successful programmes generally find ways to collect robust monitoring information that utilise data already collected routinely by the programme, bearing in mind that the collection of accurate data for monitoring processes should not require disproportionate effort on the part of the service managers and front-line workers or volunteers.
- It is widely accepted that a key requirement for robust evaluation of both implementation and outcomes is that evaluators should be intellectually and practically independent of those who deliver the programme.
- There is evidence from the international literature that various forms of self-evaluation (also sometimes called ‘action research’) can be helpful in promoting learning and reflective practice at the front line.
- However, local involvement and participatory research is not a substitute for independent scientific evaluation and effective programmes develop an appropriate combination of internal and external processes, with the latter being an ethical imperative

when significant public expenditure is involved and large numbers of people are exposed to the untested effects of the programme.

- Evidence suggests that partners and communities can and should be productively involved in all types of evaluation to ensure that there is local ‘buy-in’ and that external researchers do not overlook key issues that may affect the results or the interpretation of results.
- An important message is that monitoring, evaluation and feedback processes are of particular value when they contribute to learning and development in programmes.
- Mechanisms and tools (including standards and benchmarks) for ‘quality control’ of front-line work are highly developed by successful programmes to ensure that work stays close to the agreed objectives of the programme or service and conforms to principles of effective delivery (in as far as these are clear).
- Documentation or ‘manualisation’ of what, precisely, the programme and its constituent services or activities consist of is likely to be a key principle of effective practice since without it, monitoring and evaluation cannot take place and replication of successful approaches is thus prevented.

Conclusion

The evidence from this review is clear that community development programmes are not ‘quick fixes’ for entrenched social problems. Effective programmes take time to mature. However, given strong and not over-complicated structure, good governance, careful design, high-quality delivery standards and proper monitoring, evaluation and feedback, they can achieve important positive changes for local communities. The particular nature of community development, however, requires close attention by funders and evaluators to capture the wide range of potential benefits of work in this complex field. It means recognising that a focus on ‘end outcomes’ alone (for example, numbers of people removed from the unemployment register) may be too simplistic as an indicator of effectiveness. The process by which outcomes are achieved via preliminary and intermediate outcomes (e.g. becoming better informed about employment opportunities, and

acquiring skills that increase employability) may also be a key aspect of effective work. If disadvantaged people are involved in decision-making processes when previously they were not, their participation is already a desired outcome.

Introduction

The aim of the review

The Centre for Effective Services (CES) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation funded jointly by Atlantic Philanthropies, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and the Department for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (formerly the Department for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs) in Ireland. It is part of a new generation of intermediary organisations across the world working to apply learning from the emerging science of implementation to real world policy and practice concerns. The overarching mission of the Centre is to connect the design and delivery of services with scientific and technical knowledge of ‘what works’ in order to improve outcomes for children, young people, and the families and communities in which they live. The Centre’s work is guided by three aims:

- to promote and support the application of an evidence-informed approach to policy and practice in child, family and community services
- to promote the development of collaborative joined-up working that is outcomes-focused across research, policy and service-providing organisations
- to build capacity within Ireland and Northern Ireland to take this work forward in the longer term by developing knowledge, skills and competencies.

Shortly after it was established in 2008, the Centre was asked by the Department for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to review two important community development programmes in Ireland: the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and the Community Development Programme (CDP). Between them the two programmes accounted for €72.64 million funding directly from government in 2009. Both were run by locally based not-for-profit companies or groups that work within their communities to identify needs and link people to local services. The 2008 outturns estimated that in excess of 400,000 people were supported under the programmes. Beneficiaries are located in urban and rural settings, and include those who have been unemployed for long periods, lone parents, young people, people with disabilities, people from the Traveller community, and new migrants, as well as many other groups in local communities. Because national priorities are addressed by the programmes, central government involvement is required to ensure consistency and coordination.

Part of the review's purpose was to seek important lessons from the international evidence base about effectiveness in community development type programmes funded by central and local government, or other large-scale institutions such as major charitable foundations. This led us to formulate the following research question:

What does the international evidence base tell us about key principles of effective policy and practice in publicly funded community development programmes?

The lessons were to be used to compare and contrast the LDSIP and CDP with what is known about best practice. Both Irish programmes had been reviewed and evaluated previously, especially the LDSIP, but neither benchmarked in this way. The results of the evidence review and the benchmarking exercise were to inform the development of a new programme focused on improving outcomes for communities and ensuring that the programme could be robustly evaluated in future years. The overall review project was also intended to build experience and capacity within the sponsoring government department to utilise new kinds of evidence-informed approaches to programme review, design, delivery and evaluation. The term 'programme' implies a degree of coherence and integration around structure and gover-

nance, design and service content, implementation and delivery, and monitoring and evaluation. For this reason, evidence was sought in relation to the issues, challenges and promising responses associated with these four overarching aspects of programme management.

Challenges in programme management

Regarding ‘structure’ and ‘governance’, there are important issues concerning the way that commissioning bodies and local management and delivery bodies relate and are accountable to one another nationally and locally, and there needs to be clarity about the procedures by which programmes are overseen and regulated. How, for instance, should commissioners or others with overarching responsibility engage local communities in devising and implementing renewal, or work with partner agencies in delivering change?

Programme ‘design’ refers to the principles and processes by which the constituent elements of a programme are shaped and determined within an agreed framework, and ‘service content’ refers to the specific nature of services provided at the point of delivery to beneficiaries – in other words, what local entities actually provide to communities. Common challenges here revolve around commissioners and practitioners identifying too many outcomes, having inadequate data to inform a thorough needs analysis, and setting ill-defined objectives that are incapable of being monitored and evaluated. The consequence is that resources can be spread too thinly to achieve transformational change.

‘Implementation and delivery’ refer to the principles and processes by which programmes and services are put into action ‘on the ground’. Often there is a reliance on structured collaborative activity at local level to realise the intentions of policy, especially where these structures have the capacity to bring a range of statutory, voluntary and private agencies together to focus on local needs and issues. According to the Audit Commission (2009: 8), however, local partnerships:

- bring risks as well as opportunities, and governance can be a problem
- do not guarantee value for money, so local public bodies should question whether and how they engage in partnerships
- need to be accountable to one another and to the public.

Ensuring fidelity to the intentions of national policy is a key concern for commissioners, while authority to tailor provision to local needs and circumstances is crucial for local partnership entities.

‘Monitoring’ is a counting (or accounting) process concerned with the assessment of whether agreed inputs have been made as per Service Level Agreements and whether key targets for service uptake have been achieved. It is distinct from ‘evaluation’, which is a process that involves the systematic investigation of pre-determined questions preferably using scientifically robust (transparent and replicable) research methods, and assesses processes, outcomes and impact of a programme or service. A pressing issue in relation to the evaluation of publicly funded community development programmes concerns how to assess at a national level the results of work in different localities. More generally, monitoring and evaluation processes will be counter-productive when the balance is wrong between them, if they require disproportionate amounts of time and if accountability takes precedence over the substantive work of the agency. In this case, monitoring and evaluation may contribute little to learning and development.

To draw lessons from the evidence base in relation to these four overarching aspects of programme management, the review analysed literature from jurisdictions with political, social, economic and welfare features similar to Ireland, where these types of programmes are relatively well-established. As explained in Part 2 of this report, particular attention has been given to the findings from large-scale national evaluations of publicly funded community development type programmes, especially where these have been conducted by researchers using standard social scientific methods. In addition, lessons are also drawn from relevant literature reviews and from practical-technical reports from government or other reputable sources. Taken together, these sources constitute the evidence base for this report.

A Technical Report (<http://www.effectiveservices.org/projects.php>) accompanies this main report and details the data accessed during the review process. It is intended that the information and resources contained in both reports will be of use to a range of people involved in publicly funded community development type programmes. This will include policy-makers, decision-makers and senior officials, managers and practitioners, as well as interested academics and people in com-

munities. It is hoped that this main report will provide a foundation for systematic reviews, involving more detailed studies concerning effectiveness in publicly funded community development type programmes. Further research might usefully focus in more detail on each of the four aspects of programme management. It may also, for example, concentrate on areas such as: evidence of impact, finance and funding, the place of volunteers, initial and continuing training for the workforce, management in community development type programmes, the nature and impact of the wider socio-economic and political context, or interdepartmental coordination.

A note of caution about ‘effectiveness’

A note of caution is necessary given both the rapidity of the review and the particular state and character of the available research evidence in this field. In this report, the concept of ‘effective’ practice does not refer to principles that have been established beyond doubt, by social scientific methods, to cause specific outcomes. More often it refers to practice that has been carefully inspected by authoritative commentators and has been adjudged to be plausibly related to particular results. This process may or may not have involved extensive research and may (or mostly may not) have involved testing the results against a ‘counter-factual’ – that is, for instance, exploring whether the observed changes in communities might have happened without the additional input provided by the programme under consideration. Moreover, it is not likely to have involved testing out different approaches to community development to determine which are superior. For these reasons, we use the term ‘effective’ in the sense that the term ‘promising’ is used in other fields with a larger social science base.

Structure of the report

Part 1 of the report defines the key terms that informed the parameters of the review: ‘community development’, ‘programme’, ‘outcomes’, ‘evidence’ and ‘what works’. The methodology for searching and analysing data is outlined in Part 2. In Part 3 the results of the analysis are elaborated in four sections corresponding to the overarching aspects of programme management:

- 1 **Structure and governance**
- 2 **Design and service content**
- 3 **Implementation and delivery**
- 4 **Monitoring and evaluation**

Each section begins with known challenges associated with this aspect of programme activity. Promising responses to the challenges are then discussed with particular reference to the primary evaluations of programmes. Each section also contains additional material from literature reviews and information and ideas from other credible paper and web-based sources, including government departments, academic centres or leading social policy ‘think tanks’ and institutes, where these provide a useful insight into the issues or practices discussed. A summary of lessons from the evidence base is provided at the end of each section.

The report concludes in Part 4 with some broad messages about effective practice in publicly funded community development type programmes.

Part 1

Concepts and definitions

Defining ‘community development’

Definitions of community development are many and various, but in professional and academic literature common ground can be detected around a set of core ideas (see, for example, *Towards Standards for Quality Community Work, an All-Ireland Statement of Values, Principles and Work Standards*, Community Workers’ Co-operative, 2008; *National Occupational Standards for Community Development*, Lifelong Learning UK, 2009; *Community Development in Europe*, Hauteker, 2002). These ideas suggest that the practice of community development is concerned with promoting human rights, democracy, equality and social justice. In essence, it is about tackling poverty and disadvantage. This is often taken to mean:

- involving people in decision-making about what, and how, things happen in their community
- fostering opportunities and processes for informal learning which is directed by people according to immediate needs and interests arising from their experiences
- working for progressive change through collective forms of action
- tackling barriers to democratic participation and social inclusion by challenging discrimination in all its forms
- increasing people’s power to influence the decisions that affect them, both individually and as a community
- ensuring that services and resources are available to communities in ways that are accessible and appropriate to meeting their diverse needs and aspirations

- building on the inherent capacity and rights of communities to take action to achieve shared goals or defend against a common threat.

How the above are interpreted and applied in practice, however, depends on circumstances in a given context, the nature of the presenting issues and the desired outcomes. More recently, for instance, there is increasing attention to environmental issues. Community development may also be different in rural and urban settings. Similarly, the characteristics of target populations will also influence practice in terms of its style and pace. This means that some ideas would be privileged over others in any given context and by different sets of actors.

Notwithstanding the above caveats, community development can be understood as a broad approach to working in ways that are empowering and participative. There is a focus on the most disadvantaged sections of the population, who may be defined by age, gender, ethnicity, disability, economic status or other such categories. Provision might be universal or targeted, potentially working with the whole community or a particular group such as young people. It may be open-ended or prioritised to deliver given policy outcomes relating, for example, to health, community safety, livelihoods or environmental protection. It can take the form of unpaid active citizenship with community members organising themselves and taking on leadership roles. Increasingly, it is a discrete practice undertaken by paid workers in mainstream services such as education, health, housing or specialist agencies located in the statutory or voluntary (third or independent) sectors. Community development is frequently embedded in large-scale publicly funded programmes, such as the aforementioned government-sponsored LDSIP and CDP in Ireland. These types of programmes have policy commitments to involving communities as partners in the design and delivery of projects and services, to enhance well-being or to improve local infrastructure.

In practice, an emphasis on empowerment and participation means that community development is fundamentally concerned with decision-making processes affecting users, community-based agencies and services. It is premised on a ‘bottom-up’ approach, which means enhancing the capacity of communities to determine goals and to

pursue issues of importance to them, and to make decisions affecting, for example, the direction of services and the allocation of funds. In the broadest sense, community includes members of particular communities of interest and place, as well as those statutory, voluntary community-based agencies and entities with a remit to improve quality of life and to address disadvantage in those areas. The essential components of community development, in terms of its role and its intended outcomes, have been usefully summarised in an English context by the Community Development Challenge Group, as shown in Table 1 (CDF, 2006: 17).

Community groups operating independently can agitate around self-identified issues and work to achieve their own goals, which may or may not coincide with the intentions of the central or local state. An example here would be organised objections to the closure of a local facility such as a school, or to plans to construct a motorway through untouched countryside. Where the central or local state funds community development, however, there can be tension between the ‘bottom-up’ processes of community development and the ‘top down’ intentions of policy decided through representative democratic processes and implemented by public servants who are responsible for disbursing public monies (Boydell, 2007: 10; Rugkasa, 2007: 11-14). This means that professional community development practitioners can find themselves occupying a middle ground between competing forces.

Although there is inevitable tension in this position, the self-identified needs of communities can also coincide with and need to inform policy-making, for example, with regard to increasing employment in economically depressed areas or making neighbourhoods safer. In this case, practitioners employed by the state may enable community groups to develop their own ‘voice’ in order to put pressure on local authorities or politicians to fulfil their responsibilities and commitments. This is a form of advocacy that can be seen as complementary to the local political structures that are fundamental to effective representation because, as Chanan (1999: 4) puts it: ‘The overall democratic framework needs to be supplemented by many informal or semi-formal channels which give opportunities for various groups and sections in the locality to extend communication and exercise influence.’ In short, through such advocacy and a range of other means

Table 1

Roles and outcomes in community development

roles	outcomes
1 Help people see that they have common concerns about local or other public issues that they could benefit from working on together under their own control.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction of isolation and alienation • increase in social capital and cooperation
2 Help people to work together on those issues, often by forming or developing an independent community group, supporting them to plan and take actions and encouraging evaluation and reflection as a way of improving effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creation or improvement of bona fide community groups • increase in opportunities for activity in the community • more effective community activity
3 Support and develop independent groups across the community sector, not directly but within an ethical framework, and increase networking between groups.	<p>Increase in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community sector • volunteering • mutual aid and autonomous services • learning between groups • improvement in conditions in the locality
4 Promote values of equity, inclusiveness, participation and cooperation throughout this work.	<p>Increase in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation • social capital • cooperation • community cohesion
5 Empower people and their organisations to influence and transform public policies and services and all factors affecting the conditions of their lives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase in community engagement and influence • improvement in dialogue between community and authorities • improvement in coherence and effectiveness of public policies
6 Advise and inform public authorities on community perspectives and assist them to strengthen communities and work in genuine partnership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased capacity of agencies, authorities and professions to engage with communities • improvement in delivery of public services • increased resources for the community sector

Source: CDF (2006: 17)

and methods, publicly funded community development seeks to harness all the potential resources at the disposal of communities by working with and bringing together the people, groups, agencies, voluntary and statutory bodies to make a positive difference to endemic or temporary social problems and issues.

Theoretical basis of community development

The theoretical basis of community development is eclectic. It is commonly based on social scientific understandings drawn from the disciplines of sociology, economics and politics to explain that complex problems, such as poverty, are interlocking and the result of systemic inequalities. Key concepts include the state, class, racism, sexism, power, injustice, inequality, rights, democracy, participation and empowerment. There is a strong commitment to the notion that injustice and inequality can be addressed by promoting human rights, equality of opportunity, social justice and democracy in anti-discriminatory, collective and collaborative ways. Along with this commitment, there is a conviction that desired social change is more likely when people are involved in decision-making about what and how things happen in their community. In turn, learning to achieve such change is seen as being more powerful when it connects with the needs and interests that arise directly from people's individual and collective experiences. Finally, a cycle of development is seen as central to a process in which practitioners work with people to analyse situations, determine needs and draw up strategies for change, with results feeding back into analysis to start a new cycle of action and reflection.

Defining a community development 'programme'

The term 'programme' in this report refers mainly to community development initiatives funded by central and local government, or other large-scale institutions such as major charitable foundations. It is an umbrella term, generally used to describe a collection of services, often organised and delivered on an area basis, with local management and delivery bodies that operate with varying degrees of autonomy from a central structure such as a government department. The term implies a degree of coherence and integration around structure and governance, design and content, implementation and delivery, and monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanisms and processes,

although the extent to which integration and coherence is reflected in reality varies.

In general parlance, the term also refers to a wide range of interventions in particular communities or with predefined target groups. At one end of the spectrum, such programmes focus on a particular theme, such as parenting, and involve face-to-face interactions between people with expertise and recipients. They can be highly prescriptive and systematic in employing predetermined activities, or curricula, in a certain sequence and within given timeframes. This is not what is meant by ‘programme’ in this report and such examples are not included. Large-scale and more complex interventions do feature, however, because they exhibit many of the essential characteristics of publicly funded community development programmes.

The programmes featured in this report are mostly promoted by central or local government in jurisdictions similar if not identical to Ireland, and result from representative democratic procedures that provide a mandate for social and economic policy, a legislative framework, fiscal measures and accountability mechanisms. Commonly, responsibility for all aspects of programme delivery ultimately lies with the sponsoring department or major funding body. Publicly funded programmes, however, often involve a middle tier at a more local or area level, which may be in the form of local government with much the same features as central government. There may also be alternative structures, such as regional consortia or local area-based companies, set up for the purposes of the programme. Whatever form the overall structure takes, across all the jurisdictions covered in this report a prominent feature of such intermediary bodies is their delegated powers to enact and interpret central or local government policies within a given geographical area.

Intermediary entities may be responsible for development, facilitation, coordination and/or direct service delivery, and they often employ practitioners with a remit to develop and support work across the whole area for which the entity is responsible. Within this area, publicly funded programmes may also support local activity in specific neighbourhoods where individual agencies or projects employ workers to interface with community groups and individuals to assess needs and to provide appropriate opportunities for development.

Publicly funded programmes, therefore, typically operate on three levels:

- 1 The first level involves a major funder that is interested in large-scale social change. Examples here are central government seeking to raise nation-wide academic achievements in the schooling system or reducing the overall level of unemployment.
- 2 The second level involves an intermediary agency charged with developing and delivering the overall policy objectives in a defined area. There is usually a managing group, such as a Board, that approves annual and longer term plans. Typically there are working groups focusing on particular projects reporting to the Board.
- 3 A third level is characterised by practitioners acting on behalf of the intermediary organisation to define needs in the area, or to support local agencies, or who provide development opportunities for local people.

All programmes seek to achieve outcomes that may be centrally or locally determined, or both.

Outcomes in community development

An outcome is generally understood as a change at the level of an individual, a family, a neighbourhood or community or some other structure or entity, such as a school or a service-providing agency, that comes about as a result of something else. In this report, ‘outcome’ means change that occurs as a result of activities and opportunities associated with a particular programme. Because it is often the case that many small changes need to be achieved before large changes occur, it helps to conceptualise outcomes in community-based initiatives as both multi-level and staged, such as a sequence of phased changes with ‘preliminary’ and ‘intermediate’ outcomes leading towards ‘end’ outcomes (Learning Connections, 2007: 27). Sequencing does not have to imply linearity in time. Multiple changes, at multiple levels, may happen in parallel in the complex reality of community-based initiatives.

Outcomes are the result of inputs involving materials, buildings, money and staff time, and the informal and developmental learning processes that such resources make possible. Inputs and processes

lead to outputs in terms of a range of activities and opportunities for adults, young people, children and families, and to support for networks and agencies. In turn, inputs, processes and outputs may result in desired policy-related changes for individuals, for groups, for communities and ultimately for society. Connell and Kubisch (1999: 20) have categorised such outcomes broadly as referring to:

- The well-being of populations of children and families and of neighbourhoods, including health, education, employment, income, housing and neighbourhood safety.
- Elements of community efficacy, including civic and democratic engagement, neighbourhood empowerment and policy/advocacy successes.

According to Learning Connections (2007), in most cases it is not reasonable for people working in community development to be wholly responsible for outcomes at the level of societal change. It is more appropriate to look for societal change as the overall result of large-scale, interacting social and economic factors. Community partnership structures can realistically contribute to micro socio-economic change in the areas for which they have some responsibility and in relation to clearly defined targets that are particularly relevant in terms of national priorities. These might concern, for example, unemployment, learning and education, promoting involvement in democratic processes, or outcomes relating to health or community safety. Collectively the work across a range of communities can contribute to change at a societal level. Community development processes can be said to be effective or ‘work’, therefore, when they lead to the sorts of outcomes described above.

Defining ‘what works’ in community development

One simple criterion for ‘what works’ is that desired outcomes are achieved. Connell and Kubisch (1999: 16) note, however, that making the case about what works in community-based initiatives is a multi-stage process involving a combination of methods and data sources, both qualitative and quantitative. The point, they assert, is not about making incontrovertible cases, but making a credible claim that the activity made a difference. Most of the featured publicly funded programmes aim for desired changes, with particular goals and objectives,

where effectiveness is a function of the combined activities of government departments (level 1), local area-based development organisations (level 2) and agencies and practitioners operating in particular neighbourhoods or with specific communities of interest (level 3). This report refers to all three levels of activity in considering factors vertically in terms of the relationships between levels 1, 2 and 3 through management practices, as well as horizontally with respect to performance within levels, for example, practitioner-led activity at level 3. Particular sources cited in this report, however, may only refer to evidence at one or other of these levels. But what is meant by ‘evidence’?

What is ‘evidence’?

In general, the debate about what constitutes ‘evidence’ in social science is a lively one and space precludes a detailed discussion of the various positions that can be taken. Nutley *et al* (2003: 128), after careful consideration of the attendant issues, suggest that knowledge based on research can offer insights and ideas and new understandings of practice, for example, by questioning premises and the issues that are identified as problematic. According to these authors, it works best when professionals ‘do not simply apply abstract scientific research but collaborate in discussions and engage in work practices that actively interpret its local validity and value’ (*ibid*: 133). One of their key messages is that practitioners need to be engaged, interested and involved in organisational change.

In reviews and other distillations of information about what works in areas where the evidence base is more substantial, it is now common to rank evidence according to the quality and type of methods used to generate the findings. There are now a number of well-respected systems for this purpose, including the Scientific Maryland Scale (SMS) (Farrington *et al*, 2002). These systems share a common starting point, in that they regard evidence generated by robust quantitative methods, particularly via randomised controlled trials (RCTs), as superior to other forms of evidence for the purpose of judging the impact of an intervention. In RCTs, people are allocated at random (by chance alone) to receive one of several interventions, with one of these being the standard of comparison

or ‘control’. In the UK, information and support concerning systematic reviews have been provided by the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) since its inception in 1993 (<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/>).

Moreover, within the health and education fields, programmes that can be fully accredited as ‘effective’ must have evidence of their impact drawn from a number of separate RCTs. This sets the bar very high, but the key principle that underpins this position is that, providing they are properly designed and properly implemented, RCT methods allow for a high degree of confidence about not only what changes can be observed in service recipients, but *whether those changes can be reliably attributed to the intervention under consideration*. This involves methods that can ‘control’ for the many other competing explanations of what gives rise to change for individuals, families and communities, and these are generally agreed to be the only methods that can confirm a causal relationship between an intervention and an outcome.

Randomised controlled trials are, however, rare in the field of community development research, if they exist at all, and even the ‘next best’ methodologies such as ‘quasi-experimental’ designs are extremely uncommon. Furthermore, although robust quantitative methods provide the most conclusive evidence in terms of whether a programme or intervention ‘worked’ (i.e. its impact), they rarely explain a great deal about how programmes or services work (i.e. about their process and implementation – which can either promote or inhibit positive impact). Other types of investigation are required, especially those using qualitative, interpretive methods.

Even with respect to qualitative and interpretive methods, community development in general is a relatively under-investigated field compared to many others, which means that there is a considerably smaller empirical evidence base from which to draw. Moreover, there is a dearth of research focused specifically on publicly funded community development programmes. Programme design and implementation in this field, therefore, has often been undertaken without the benefit of a clear guide about what is likely to be most effective in achieving positive change. Nevertheless, effective (or ineffective) practice at the programme level has features in common with other community-based services and initiatives, especially where these operate through partnership structures and involve local people in

determining needs and planning processes. Examples can be found in the areas of child development and family support, housing, community health promotion and work with young people. There is the possibility, therefore, of a certain degree of ‘read across’ from other fields with relatively more established evidence bases. In this case, thinking about community development programmes can benefit from a multi-disciplinary perspective on ‘what works’.

In this report, then, the terms ‘what works’, ‘evidence’ and ‘effectiveness’ have been used with some latitude. Although the emphasis is on the data generated by research studies carried out by professional research practitioners, and within this on studies that use robust methods and have been published after peer review, other sources have important things to say about publicly funded community development programmes. Examples include government departments, academic centres and leading social policy ‘think tanks’ and institutes, the observations of authoritative observers and commentators, or practitioners’ perspectives on their work (‘practice wisdom’). It is important to distinguish these latter from rigorous research studies since they are almost always conducted on a much lower scale, using less systematic methods and for a different purpose. Accounts emanating from individual community development agencies, for example, often seek to learn from doing for particular reasons and in a specific context. They may also be caught up in the need retrospectively to justify funding or to make a case for future funding. For this reason they are generally not intended for replication elsewhere. Nevertheless, practice that is documented in a self-critical way can offer useful insights into common issues and problems, and can be helpful in building a realistic picture of what is possible in this field.

Part 2

Methodology

The purpose of the review

The purpose of this review was primarily to inform a larger project to re-model two existing government-funded community development programmes in Ireland. The aim was rapidly to survey the international (Irish and other) literature on community development programmes with a view to isolating commonly agreed principles of effective practice and policy that would be relevant to the Irish context. The principles identified were later used to ‘benchmark’ the existing programmes (i.e. to assess the extent to which they were currently designed and implemented according to commonly accepted principles of effective working) and to underpin thinking in relation to the development of a design for a re-modelled integrated programme in Ireland.

The review had to be conducted within particular policy timescales and, in our view, needed to take a ‘broad brush’, but focused and pragmatic approach to what should be included. We were not only interested in what works (what leads to good outcomes), but also in why and how it works. This approach is in contrast to other types of reviews (for example, systematic reviews, where the review process uses a standardised and prescriptive methodology and focuses exclusively on particular types of research studies that use methods considered to conform to the highest standards of scientific rigour). As can be seen below, this review drew upon a far greater range of sources than a systematic review would regard as appropriate. We believe this eclecticism to be a strength given the purpose for which the work was carried out, but it is also important to be aware of limitations to the approach.

The research question

The overarching research question we set out to answer was:

What does the international evidence base tell us about key principles of effective policy and practice in publicly funded community development programmes?

Within this, we aimed to explore the extent to which there were commonly agreed key principles in four specific dimensions of programme functioning: structure and governance; programme design and service content; implementation and delivery; and monitoring and evaluation.

Types of sources included

At the outset it was agreed that the review should take in a wide range of potential sources, not limited to ‘research studies’ in the usual sense. We therefore included some sources that would not generally be considered in other types of review (for example, technical reports and opinion pieces). Given the parameters of our task, and especially given the ultimate intention to use the findings of the review to inform the design of a new programme, we considered that these could be helpful in informing our wider thinking around practice and policy. The types of literature included can be divided into the following categories:

- 1 large-scale **national evaluation studies** of publicly funded community development type programmes, conducted by researchers using recognised social scientific methods
- 2 smaller scale **local evaluation studies** of individual or local projects
- 3 extensively researched **literature reviews** concerned with community development issues, approaches, or aspects of community development activity such as community engagement
- 4 **practical-technical reports** from government or other reputable sources, including major charitable foundations and research centres, providing resources, information or technical advice in relation to particular areas of activity, for example, on the process of evaluating community development
- 5 **opinion pieces** in journals and books, offering comment on issues and developments.

The following programmes and initiatives were the subject of the literature review in the five categories listed above:

Australia

- Stronger Families and Communities

Canada

- Community Futures
- Vibrant Communities

Europe

- European Structural Funds

Ireland

- Local Development Social Inclusion Programme
- Community Development Programme
- Social Inclusion Coordination Mechanisms

United Kingdom

- Healthy Living Centres
- Sure Start
- Sure Start Plus
- Social Inclusion Partnerships
- Community Facilitation
- Children's Fund
- Health Action Zones
- Local Strategic Partnerships
- New Deal for Communities
- Neighbourhood – JRF
- Pathfinders
- Guide Neighbourhood
- Single Community
- Single Regeneration Budget

USA

- Communities That Care

The first two categories (and especially the first) – national and local evaluation studies – constituted the core of the evidence base for this review. Within these two categories, studies were further sorted into groups reflecting the type of methodological approach taken. We emphasize that this was not undertaken with the intention of excluding studies because they did not meet key methodological criteria (as would be done, for example, in the preparation of a systematic review). Because of the relatively small number of evaluation studies in the community development field that would meet the highest standards of methodological rigour, this would have left us with a very restricted range of evidence for consideration and would not have been helpful in meeting our aims. Rather, the sorting was undertaken to allow the reviewers to take account of the relative weight that could be attached to different conclusions and to ensure that emphasis was placed primarily on higher quality studies, where they existed.

Studies in categories one and two were therefore sorted as follows:

- randomised controlled trial (RCT) whereby participants/communities were systematically randomly assigned to either intervention or control groups and followed up over time (i.e. baseline and follow-up data are collected for both intervention and comparison groups)
- quasi-experimental study where participants/communities were assigned to intervention or comparison groups using other methods and followed up over time (i.e. baseline and follow-up data are collected for both intervention and comparison groups)
- ‘before’ and ‘after’ designs without a comparison group, where baseline data were collected before the intervention and again at different intervals after the intervention (i.e. baseline and follow-up data are collected for both intervention groups only)
- retrospective design only – where data are collected at one time point only, after the participants or communities have been exposed to the programme (i.e. no baseline data are collected).

Search strategy

As is usual in a review process, to make the search task feasible within the study’s practical constraints, we set some conditions for what could be included. These were that the literature should be:

- reported in the English language
- conducted in an industrialised country, where community development is a well-established field – specifically Ireland, Northern Ireland, Britain, other European country, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand
- published since 2000.

To locate published and unpublished literature relating to community development programmes, three inter-related approaches were adopted. The first involved searches of databases of published articles including: Articles First, ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts), British Education Index, ChildLink, Cochrane Library (including DARE), Campbell Database, CINAHL, ERIC, IBSS, Ingentaconnect, PsycInfo, PubMed/Medline, Sociological Abstracts, Swetswise, and Web of Knowledge.

The second approach searched unpublished ‘grey literature’ databases such as Intute and Canadian Evaluation Society. A number of academic experts and practitioners were contacted and relevant government and research centres’ websites searched. In addition, Google and Google Scholar search engine searches were carried out with a limited subset of the keywords. Citation searches were conducted of relevant papers using Google Scholar and Web of Science. Searches of all the reference sections of all relevant papers were also carried out. Specific searches were undertaken to identify evaluations of large-scale national programmes.

The third approach aimed to capture country-specific literature and drew on our own professional knowledge networks. With the help of various experts working in the field in Ireland, we identified relevant Irish papers and reports, and copies of evaluations of local projects and initiatives. The third approach also involved five meetings with practitioner groups in Ireland. In addition, a draft version of the report was presented to a cross-section of 60 practitioners from across Ireland in a feedback event. Participants were asked to forward any relevant reports to the authors and further sources of literature were identified by means of this process.

Keywords and descriptors were adapted according to the conventions of each specific database searched. The keywords used for the database searches were:

community development

Community AND (development OR initiative OR scheme OR project OR programme OR activity OR partnership OR coalition)

OR

Local area AND (initiative OR scheme OR project OR programme OR activity OR partnership)

AND

national programme

“Publicly funded” OR “Government” OR “National Programme” OR Federal

AND

effectiveness

“What works” OR effective OR evaluation OR outcomes OR impact

Results of the search strategy

The search strategy described above identified 216 literary sources for inclusion in the review. Titles and abstracts were imported from the different searches and entered into Endnote bibliographic software, and two reviewers grouped the papers as follows:

- 1 evaluations of national or local programmes (n=55, reporting on 23 programmes)
- 2 literature reviews on the topic of community development or social inclusion (n=19)
- 3 discussion papers on issues in evaluation, or practical-technical papers on evaluation designs for community development, or papers reporting on individual projects (n=47)
- 4 practical-technical reports and papers on structures, methods of working, standards or practice guidelines, measurement, outcomes and indicators in community development (n=75)
- 5 discussion papers on the politics of community development or theoretical debates (n=20).

The full text paper was obtained for each included source and the content analysed in relation to the four dimensions of effective practice detailed above. More information about the research methodology involved in each of the featured evaluations, literature reviews and other cited sources is included in Section 2 of the accompanying Technical Report (<http://www.effectiveservices.org/projects.php>).

Part 3

Lessons from the evidence base

Section 1: Programme structure and governance

This section considers what the international evidence base tells us about key principles of structure and governance in publicly funded community development programmes. The term ‘structure’ refers to the way that commissioning bodies and local management and delivery bodies relate and are accountable to one another nationally and locally. ‘Governance’ expresses the principles and processes by which programmes are overseen and regulated by commissioners or others with overarching responsibility for their performance.

It is a notable feature of the international evidence base relating to effectiveness in publicly funded community development type programmes that it has at least as much to say about what does *not* work as it does about what works. For instance, the extensive evaluation of the *New Deal for Communities Programme* (NDC), which is a key component of the UK government’s National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, details the trenchant and multi-faceted challenges and problems experienced by community development programmes. According to Lawless (2005), the local NDC Partnerships evidence a number of problems, including:

- difficulties in employing (and keeping) sufficiently skilled and experienced staff
- perceived cliqueness of Boards
- history of resentment between residents and statutory agencies
- inter-community strife
- new or transient populations (lack of continuity)

- being asked to do too much too soon (assess baselines, define goals and strategies and select/design interventions)
- weaknesses in commissioning and learning from evaluation programmes
- tensions between NDC and other ‘rival’ agencies – complex organisational landscape.

The large-scale evaluations of the Sure Start programme launched in 1998 in England show that many such problems relate directly to questions of structure and governance.

The need for clarity of purpose from the top

Although Sure Start is not primarily a community development programme, some elements of its structure and operation are relevant in the context of this report. For example, Sure Start is area-based and brings together statutory providers such as health, social services and early education, as well as voluntary, private and community organisations and parents themselves, to provide integrated services for young children and their families. A major lesson from the Sure Start evaluations concerns activity at national, policy-making level where stable and sustainable structures in governance and management/leadership are required (Tunstall *et al*, 2002; Wiggins *et al*, 2005). Programme effectiveness is limited when there are unexpected or frequent changes in vision at national level and when there is a lack of clear national guidance. A lack of clarity from the top makes it difficult to establish a consistent and recognisable identity at the local area level. In turn, credibility suffers, which makes it more difficult to build relationships and to create a high profile in communities and with other agencies. As a result, mainstream services might not be as flexible or adaptable as needed in relation to initiatives.

Another lesson from Sure Start is about the need for good working relationships between the constituent levels of a programme. This depends in large part on all involved being clear about the purpose of the programme and about their particular role in supporting it. These types of issues were identified in the *Irish Study of Community Participation in the RAPID Programme* (Cosgrove, 2005: 16), which notes that: ‘In three of the four areas examined, there was a lack of clarity among stakeholders ... about responsibilities and roles of agencies in relation

to targeting the estates and neighbourhoods where there was an absence of community activities, for community development work.'

This message concerning the need for clarity resonates with findings from the evaluation of the English Health Action Zones, which were established in 26 areas in England to identify and address public health needs of the area, to increase the effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness of services, and to develop synergetic partnerships for improving people's health and relevant services. The evaluation noted that: 'Throughout the lifetime of HAZs, beginning in the very early days of the initiative, the issue of whether central government was conveying clear and consistent messages to HAZs, and adequately supporting local efforts, was raised time and time again by project managers' (Bauld *et al*, 2006: 433). Achieving such clarity is assisted when policy-makers set out a small number of high priority goals and a limited number of related objectives.

Policy enactment through local interpretation

Having clear programme goals expressed in terms of realistic objectives, however, is only one part of the formula for success. Equally important is the manner in which the goals are to be achieved. In *Finding out what works: Building knowledge about complex, community-based initiatives*, Coote *et al* (2004) warn that micro-management from the top is not a characteristic of effective programmes. A major conclusion is that policy enactment works best when the broad intentions of the funding body are interpreted locally in particular contexts and in line with perceived community needs. This is supported by research into the workings of the major Single Regeneration Budget Programme in England, which found that: 'It is nearly always the case that policies that evolve at one spatial level (national) need to be customised in their delivery to reflect circumstances on the ground' (Rhodes *et al*, 2003: 1418).

Partnership – a strategic engagement between government and local entities

In its study of relationships between government, the private sector and civil society, the Centre for Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) highlights the partnership mechanism as a means of delivering modern integrated services in ways that reflect realities on the ground

(Morrissey *et al*, 2002: 2-3). The authors (*ibid*: 7) argue that policy enactment through local interpretation requires a particular kind of relationship between the parties, stating that: 'The rationale for funding the community and voluntary sector shifts in a diverse and changeable environment in which partnership is a key component of the governance system.' In their view, providing an allocation to the funded organisation is best understood as a transaction, whether in the form of a contract or a grant allocation or core funding (*ibid*: 7). Such allocations should be seen as negotiated, long-term investments in community capability, which requires a transformation of the protocols and models for evaluating those allocations. An effective partnership, they argue, requires a strategic engagement between government and projects about programme development, targets and outcomes, and appropriate forms of monitoring and evaluation. The thrust of their message is that partnership requires more than a commissioning relationship between the central state and the local area body. Instead, the relationship should be based on mutual respect and reciprocity.

Even so, the relationship is conditioned by the fact that government needs to be sure that once clarified, its intentions are realised through the delivery mechanisms that it supports, while agencies and communities also want to make a difference to locally perceived problems and issues. In the worst-case scenario neither party is satisfied, and in the best case both see their priorities achieved. According to Turok (2001: 10), the local area-based partnership companies in Ireland provide a necessary meeting ground between central and local governance because: 'The partnerships are ultimately concerned with informing, influencing and reforming established government departments and agencies. They want them to be more responsive to local needs and better coordinated to provide enhanced services and facilities.' These kinds of entities are not simply one player amongst others with an interest in interagency working. Their brief is to bring public, private and voluntary sector agencies into play in pursuit of joint solutions to common issues and problems in that area.

In managing themselves to achieve optimal performance, such partnerships need to extend beyond the relationship between commissioning officials and practitioners to include local people. As observed in the CD Challenge Group Report (CDF, 2006: 21), the distinc-

tive character of community development is its commitment to working with communities to determine their own agendas and to take action to meet their own identified needs. One reason for this is that the empowerment agenda in community development means that involvement is a condition of the work itself and of intrinsic value. As a corollary, when people are engaged in discussions with policy- and decision-makers, community development has already fulfilled one of its aims. This is one arena in which the process itself is also an important outcome. A further reason for involvement, however, is to protect the interests of local people in complex situations where there are other and often more powerful contending interests. One illustration of this in an American context is the case of private-sector leaders having great influence in some collaborations and demanding massive local public investments that are at odds with the wishes of local communities (Lowe, 2007: 39). Whatever the case, community involvement carries significant implications for community involvement in policy formation and decision-making processes.

From government to governance

Writing in an Irish context, O’Keefe (2008) notes in *Local Governance: The Case of Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown*, successful community involvement requires a change in the mindset of key players. O’Keefe conceptualises the change in mindset as ‘a transition from government to governance’, where governance ‘involves combining elements of the top-down and the bottom-up where representatives of both can come together to promote agreed strategies’ (*ibid*: 7). ‘Governance’, in O’Keefe’s terms, necessitates building social capital so that members of communities can move up from the basic ‘information’ level, which means merely commenting on an agency’s intentions, through consultative and representative stages, to the ‘participation’ level involving continuous engagement in decision-making (*ibid*: 28). The author acknowledges that achieving this highest level of activity, however, is not without its difficulties.

Such difficulties are considered in a larger study in England: *Public Officials and Community Involvement in Local Services* (Ray *et al*, 2008a). This qualitative case study of community engagement within the London Borough of Haringey focused on the experiences of public officials across three large public sector bodies: the local authority,

police and a primary care trust (*ibid*: 66). In the Summary Report, the authors concluded that (2008b: 3):

In forums where participants were seen as ‘stakeholders’ or ‘partners’ there were fewer tensions because participants were valued for their skills or expertise rather than their representativeness. Structures that were unclear about community members’ roles – and their legitimacy – could result in tensions between the expectations of different parties. Better training could provide greater clarity for those involved in designing community engagement processes. However, these issues also need to be negotiated in a collaborative way between different participants on the ground.

The reference to negotiation in the above quote is important because of a tendency for officials to view community engagement as ‘practices that they initiated in order to listen to, debate with or work with the community, rather than about devolving power or control’ (2008a: 19). The evaluation report by McCabe *et al* (2007), *Learning to Change Neighbourhoods: Lessons from the Guide Neighbourhood Programme*, offers a much more constructive account of the potential contribution of communities. The report portrays neighbourhoods as ‘important in plans to improve service delivery and in addressing democratic deficit, modernising government and building community cohesion in an increasingly diverse society’ (*ibid*: 16). According to the authors, the programme achieved the important outcome of helping the client neighbourhoods to ‘move beyond their (justified) anger and oppositional stance to recognize the value of building collaboration with public sector partners and understand the place of local action within wider policy contexts’ (*ibid*: 7). A major point made in the report is that (*ibid*: 7):

The findings reinforce those of previous regeneration initiative evaluations. Engaging and empowering residents is crucial – but it takes time and adequate funding if local residents are to participate in regeneration as equal partners. Equally, the increasing pressure on community organizations to deliver local services on behalf of statutory agencies alongside the emphasis on local level democratic structures require longer

term investment to build the skills and knowledge necessary for good governance and accountability at the neighbourhood level.

Positive engagement between levels of governance

Although top-level officials may be hesitant about embracing the full potential of partnership structures in opening up to community involvement, there are many examples from across the world of positive engagement between programme levels. One such example comes from the Vibrant Communities' initiative in Canada, which is concerned with building an enabling environment for comprehensive, multi-sectoral approaches to poverty reduction (Leviton-Reid, 2007). In this publicly funded programme, local communities and national sponsors are directly involved in efforts to change the wider institutional context in ways that better support 'joined up' strategies for countering poverty. The 'Policy Dialogue' project, for example, involved representatives from eleven federal government departments, three provincial governments and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Communities, participating over 18 months in a series of meetings. The dialogue served to orient policy-makers to the key ideas associated with comprehensive community initiatives as well as the opportunities and challenges related to government/community collaboration. As a follow-up to the Policy Dialogue, the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, and Human Resources and Social Development Canada have initiated a Government Learning Circle to explore more deeply how all three orders of government can work together in support of comprehensive, multi-sectoral approaches to poverty reduction.

Support for policy-makers

If understanding, accepting and then enabling the involvement of local people in policy and decision-making processes is a challenge for practitioners, it would appear to be a particular challenge for policy-makers at all levels. With regard to enabling different orders of government to work together effectively, useful reference can be made to the work of the Centre for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) in Washington, DC (www.cssp.org/). The CSSP addresses the need for clarity and good working relationships between different programme

levels, by producing a detailed and comprehensive series of *Learning Guides* for local governance board members, their community partners and staff. The guides are intended for a broad range of people, including local elected officials, business people, staff of local service organisations (both public and private), representatives of the faith community, as well as parents and other lay citizens involved with helping children and families. An equally important audience is state officials who are supporting local governance partnerships from executive and legislative branches. The six guides cover the following areas:

- theory and purpose of local decision-making
- working with members
- setting a community agenda
- strategies to achieve results
- financing and budgeting strategies
- using data to ensure accountability.

Box 1 provides brief information about a web-based resource developed by CSSP to assist policy-makers.

Box 1

A website for policy-makers

PolicyForResults.org is a web-based initiative to help policy-makers govern more effectively by providing the up-to-the-minute, high quality research and evidence they need to enact policies that measurably improve the lives of children and families. In the American context, the website gives politicians, central and local government officials and those who advise them clear examples of why particular policy directions are important for children and families based on evidence of effectiveness. It alerts people to what policies are succeeding in other places and how to tailor policy to their own particular conditions. The website provides:

- a step-by-step guide to making effective policy decisions
- data that show how a State's children and families are doing
- examples of how other policy-makers make a difference in children's' lives
- ways of learning about policy, financing and strategies that work.

Source: <http://www.policyforresults.org>

Programme structure and governance

Summary of lessons

This section draws from the international literature to consider a number of interconnecting issues concerned with structure and governance in publicly funded community development programmes. There is consensus that structure and governance in community development type programmes have a major determining role in whether local delivery results in desired outcomes. Key points are:

- There needs to be a clear and consistent lead from government (or the commissioning agency if this is not government). Frequent changes of emphasis or direction from the top dislocate local processes and undermine the potential for good outcomes.
- In spite of the importance of a strong lead from the top, ‘top-down’ approaches to management tend not to achieve good results in this field. Better results are achieved when localities are able to engage with the policy agenda and allowed latitude to interpret it locally. However, to ensure congruence with public policy objectives, good communications and dialogue between the centre and the localities are needed throughout this process.
- There is overwhelming consensus across developed countries with mature community development sectors that the Partnership model favours good outcomes, whereby local groups of stakeholders collaborate through more or less formal structures to agree and deliver community development inputs at the local level. Partnerships would generally report to a wider national structure that may provide support as well as governance functions.
- There is no evidence to suggest that micro-management of local activity by funders produces good results. Whilst there needs to be joint working between the centre and the locality in agreeing the broad agenda for action, the details of how policy is interpreted at local level are best delegated to local partners.
- Funding needs to be more than a ‘commissioning’ relationship and should be seen as negotiated, long-term investments in community capability. It should allow for participation at the local level, with a reasonable degree of flexibility allowed to local partners to determine allocations between constituent activities

and to vary between headings within overall budgets, and reasonable stability of funding over time to allow longer term priorities to be achieved.

- Good governance in this field requires careful attention to the clarification of the specific roles and remits of partners and funders. Different jurisdictions may manage this in different ways, but early establishment of clear Terms of Reference for partnerships and Service Level Agreements between funding bodies and delivery agents is a common principle of strong governance. Given the imperative to be responsive to local change in this field, the facility to review and reformulate these from time to time should be in-built.
- Regarding arrangements for governance, community engagement is of central importance in addressing democratic deficit, in modernising government, in building community cohesion and in terms of plans to improve programme design and service content.

There is a widespread investment in publicly funded community development type programmes in local partnership structures reporting to a wider national structure. Such entities require clearly defined delegated powers to realise the intentions of government policy in geographical or thematic areas. In large part, this authority is exercised through decision-making about programme design and service content in planning for a preferred future.

Section 2: Programme design and service content

This section considers what the international evidence base tells us about key principles of effective programme design and service content in publicly funded community development programmes. ‘Programme design’ refers to the principles and processes by which the overall shape of a programme, in terms of its constituent elements, is determined, within an agreed framework. ‘Service content’ here refers to the specific nature of services provided at the point of delivery – in other words, what local community development entities actually provide to communities in pursuit of a preferred future.

In planning for a preferred future, according to Connor and Kadel-Taras (in Leviten-Reid, 2007: 15), it is often the case that: ‘Funders and communities are weighed down by past ways of working – such as fragmented problems, fragmented resources, uncoordinated public policies and turf protection – that are no longer very helpful.’ Along similar lines, the interim evaluation of the New Deal for Communities Programme in England detects problems with partnership entities typically identifying too many outcomes, with some ill defined, vague and incapable of being monitored. Reporting on the English Health Action Zones Programme, Judge and Bauld (2006: 341) also record ‘too many hugely ambitious, aspirational targets were promulgated’ because they were ‘encouraged to set themselves impossibly ambitious goals to transform the health of their communities’. A key lesson, therefore, is that goals need to be realistic in the sense that they can be achieved in a specified timeframe and within the resources available.

With respect to achieving such clarity, the *Overview of the Social Inclusion Partnership Programme in Scotland* offers a number of useful pointers (ODS Consulting, 2006). The overview found that there was a general lack of meaningful local baseline data which SIPs or the consultants carrying out the evaluations could use to measure performance or the progress which had been made, and that apart from a small number, SIPs were poor at determining whether the projects that they funded were delivering the agreed outcomes (*ibid*: 9). The overview notes that lessons have been learned from the SIP experience: the outcome-based approach is more rigorous, there is a clear flow from local activities to local indicators to local outcomes, and the local outcomes are related to national priorities (*ibid*: 13).

Although the SIP Programme was intended to encourage innovation and to foster the development of new ideas and good practice, there was no effective learning or knowledge transfer process established to support the programme (*ibid*: 15). There was no systematic way of measuring the impact that the SIP Programme had across Scotland, while the information about projects was piecemeal and could not be aggregated to a Scottish-wide level. A particular problem was the lack of consistent information about a number of important issues including the impact of partnership working, the development of shared priorities and changes to the work practices and cultures of service providers (*ibid*: 21-22). The authors concluded that there is a need for a few outcomes that can be regularly measured and that fit with the Scottish Executive's overall priorities (*ibid*: 22).

The above points about the SIP Programme appear to confirm findings from the evaluation of the *Guide Neighbourhoods Programme* in England, in which McCabe *et al* (2007) comment on what they see as a fundamental shift in funding regimes over recent years, with money being increasingly tied to the achievement of 'hard' policy objectives, such as crime reduction or educational attainment (*ibid*: 82). A consequence is that: 'Groups need to be better at relating their ideas and objectives to key local and national targets – and being precise in how their activities will help the funding body achieve their own objectives.' They conclude that: 'New and emerging organisations need to be clear about the consequences of accessing public funding in terms of developing management systems which enable them to report back regularly and accurately to sponsoring bodies' (*ibid*: 82).

The importance of needs analysis

Given this need to focus, SQW (2008) recommend that a strategic delivery plan should be prepared each year, defining a limited set of priorities and setting out key activities and milestones. Clearly identifying and assessing needs is the first prerequisite to any such delivery plan. This finding about needs assessment confirms earlier work in the evaluation of the New Deal for Communities, which stated that: 'It is difficult to overestimate the importance of establishing an accurate baseline at an early stage: unless Partnerships know the nature of the problem they are facing it is hard to see how they can make reasoned decisions regarding strategic priorities' (Lawless, 2005: 268).

One small-scale example of community profiling in an Irish context confirms the value of data in relation to needs. In a *Community Profile of Supports and Services for Older People in Galway City*, Lally and Mortimer (2006) focus on the needs of 11,000 people older than 55. The profile is drawn up by professional researchers who gathered and analysed primary and secondary data, accessed detailed area socio-economic indicators, population characteristics and information about local services, and incorporated resident and practitioner views about community needs. The result is a comprehensive picture of priority issues and areas for development, as can be seen in Box 2.

This kind of profiling will be considerably assisted by recent research in Ireland reported in *New Ways of Mapping Social Inclusion in Dublin City* (Gleeson *et al*, 2009), which shows how statistical profiles can be provided for areas as small as 65 households. This is done by drawing information from existing national and local sources in ways that can be analysed spatially and at scales that reveal the

Box 2

Determining the needs of older people in Galway City

- The stretched and under-resourced services, particularly some of the health/social care services, are not supporting this stage of life change in a positive, empowering manner.
- The lack of primary care teams in the community is seen by many service providers as a problem, as is the lack of co-ordination and liaison between services.
- Different parts of the city present different needs for older people.
- Loneliness and isolation are highlighted as key issues for older people. Service providers feel that older people could be more active, more involved in the community, more self-reliant, but the ‘for the elderly’ label stops people from getting involved.
- The lack of societal connections in the community, and the fact that support structures are breaking down, were recurring themes.
- An increasing number of older people present with addiction problems and associated conditions such as depression and other mental health issues.

Source: Lally and Mortimer (2006: v)

micro-geography of social inclusion and deprivation (*ibid*: 5). It holds great potential for targeting resources and services on those ranking highest in terms of social exclusion.

Being clear about preferred outcomes

One theoretical approach to targeting resources is Results Based Accountability (RBA). According to Friedman (2005), RBA is about the ways in which the results wanted for children and families, or other defined groups and populations, can drive action planning (<http://www.raguide.org/>). It involves identifying indicators in relation, for example, to health and school readiness. Establishing baselines helps practitioners to know whether conditions are getting better or worse, and working out the ‘story’ behind the baseline helps to explain the causes and forces at work. Success can be gauged by the amount of progress when seen against these baselines. Crucially, in Friedman’s schema, success depends on identifying and involving the partners who can help to improve the situation, and best thinking about what works (or could work), in terms of measurably improving the well-being of groups, draws on the contributions of the partners, research, experience in other communities and practitioners’ own experience. In RBA, strategic planning takes from the most powerful of these ideas and those with the greatest leverage, including no-cost and low cost actions.

In the UK, the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government commissioned a small study to examine the early impact of RBA. The study looked at the extent to which it contributed to changes in culture, planning and accountability which are likely to lead to more effective services (McCauley and Cleaver, 2006). Two County Councils, one City and one Borough Council, and one national children’s charity were selected to participate on the basis that they were in the process of applying the ideas of outcomes-based accountability and where the adoption of the approach was known to be at varying stages of implementation. The main conclusion was that although the organisations were at different rates of change, they were all developing more systemic ways of working and establishing a more accurate picture of how, why and in what ways they were making a difference with people and in communities (*ibid*: 17).

Realistic community development outcomes

Although being clear about intended outcomes is crucial for strategic planning purposes, it is often considered to be difficult due to the multiple, multi-faceted and long-term aims that are a feature of this field. That it is possible to clearly articulate outcomes can be seen from the summary of the *Evaluation of Healthy Living Centres (HLCs) in Northern Ireland* by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH, 2007). The summary quotes from a manager of a HLC based in a rural area with over 6,000 users, 60% of whom are regular users, who said that she could provide (*ibid*: 5):

... endless examples of the impact the HLC has had on individuals which can be backed up with statistics: breast feeding rates have increased locally; home accident numbers reduced following home safety checks campaign; more families are supported; there is evidence from schools of improved attendance; ... fewer call outs to the area and social services fewer referrals; there has been an increase in the numbers nominated for Community Volunteer awards; increase in numbers attending courses; individuals are said to be more health aware with fewer pregnant women smoking and a number of people who attended the centre with mental health problems are now employed.

From this account of results, it would be a small step to furnish indicators for each of these outcomes, assuming that the data were available in such a form.

In a Northern Ireland context, Morrissey *et al* (2002: 13-14) also show what is possible by developing a set of outcomes in relation to a range of typical community development goals. Box 3 contains a slight adaptation of their work. The authors propose indicators and evidence of achievement for each of the goals listed, such as the following case of empowerment.

empowerment

Indicator: intended participants have increased confidence to participate in community activity.

Evidence: numbers participating in personal development courses; survey of participants to assess changes in attitudes and behaviour.

Box 3

Specifying outcomes in community development

goals	outcomes
empowerment	participants have confidence, skills and leadership capacity
infrastructure	participants engage in organisations and projects, which are representative and inclusive.
connectedness	participants are well connected with community – trusting, sharing and working toward shared goals
engagement	participants engage with other communities and sectors through involvement in relationships and networks
accessibility	participants influence structures and processes to make their community accessible to outside communities and sectors
innovation	participants are open to new ideas and solutions facilitating their community to adapt to change
resources	participants have access to people and institutions outside the community with power and resources
influence	participants have representation on local and regional public fora at which their interests are articulated

Source: Adapted from Morrissey *et al* (2002)

In a similar attempt to set out outcomes, a Scottish report entitled *Delivering Change, Understanding the Outcomes of Community Learning and Development* (Learning Connections, 2007) puts forward the view

that it is not feasible for people working in community learning and development (CLD) to be wholly responsible for wider societal level changes, such as improved levels of health across the nation. It is more reasonable to look for such 'end' outcomes as the product of macro social, political and economic factors. In the Scottish case, the report suggests that it is better to think of CLD as contributing to end outcomes that are particularly important to the Scottish Government. These might relate to the economy and unemployment, to learning and education, to getting involved in democratic processes, to health, and to wider outcomes such as community safety or celebrating people's identities and differences. The report proposes that it is more helpful to concentrate on the 'intermediate' or micro socio-economic changes at local levels that practitioners, managers and people taking part will be most likely to achieve and be able to identify and record where this is appropriate (*ibid*: 11).

The report also argues that CLD cannot be defined just in terms of outcomes since crucially the work is about processes. The principles underpinning such processes are set out in the report *Working and Learning Together* (Scottish Executive, 2004) in terms of empowerment, participation, inclusion, equality of opportunity and anti-discrimination, self-determination and partnership. The principles determine an approach to work in three national priority areas for CLD. The following is a short example of how outputs, processes and outcomes relate to these priorities (Learning Connections, 2007: 6):

Priority 1: achievement through learning for adults

Example: adult learners taking part in a numeracy group may become more confident (and, hopefully, better at understanding and using numbers).

Priority 2: achievement through learning for young people

Example: young people campaigning for a local skate park may become better at working together.

Priority 3: achievement through building community capacity

Example: a network of community groups in a local area might take action together on the issues that are important to them.

Identifying appropriate processes that are more likely to lead to such outcomes, therefore, is a key aspect of programme design and service content. It is in this connection that conceptual models (e.g. 'systems'

and ‘theory of change’ approaches to planning) and practical tools (e.g. logic models) can be relevant and helpful. For instance, the Vibrant Communities initiative in Canada is premised on the understanding that complex problems, such as poverty, are structural and interlocking and that communities can only hope to make progress on them by collaborating across organisations and sectors. Their response is to adopt a systems level (or ‘ecological’) approach, which specifies five key themes to be explored as an integrated set of actions for countering poverty. These five themes are (www.vibrantcommunities.ca):

- 1 Poverty reduction**
to reduce poverty rather than simply alleviate its hardships
- 2 Comprehensive thinking and action**
to address the interrelated root causes of poverty rather than its various symptoms
- 3 Multisectoral collaboration**
to engage a broad spectrum of sectors and organisations in a collaborative effort rather than have each work in isolation
- 4 Community asset building**
to emphasize the presence of community assets on which to build rather than deficits to be overcome
- 5 Community learning and change**
to embrace a process of continual community learning and change rather than respond with relatively short-term, narrow interventions.

Within the Vibrant Communities initiative, ‘Trail Builder’ communities put these themes into practice through multi-faceted, multi-year poverty reduction projects undertaken in their local settings, and each Trail Builder develops a ‘theory of change’ articulating the key ideas guiding the initiative in its work. The theory sets out the project’s understanding of poverty and poverty reduction, the goals it is seeking with respect to community capacity building, household outcomes and systemic changes, the specific strategies to be pursued and the role that the collaboration will play in the poverty reduction process. This ‘theory of change’ constitutes a conceptual framework allowing local and national partners to define the thinking behind the work.

An attempt to surface the thinking behind the work can be seen in the 2004 report *The Community Facilitation Programme* (CFP),

produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The CFP, which ran between July 2001 and April 2004 in England, deployed community facilitators to undertake conflict reduction and resolution work in 34 areas that were identified as showing signs of high inter-ethnic community conflict and tension. One of the objectives of the evaluation was to enable stakeholders to surface and describe why and how the programme worked (*ibid*: 5). The result was that the evaluators were able to identify three linked theories of change (*ibid*: ix):

- **Facilitation and mediation**: the underlying idea behind these projects was the belief that open, structured and honest discussion is the basis of responding to conflict effectively.
- **Structures and resources**: the belief here was that infrastructures and networks can ensure effective conflict resolution, reduction and prevention.
- **Community development and cohesion**: the notion here was that a broad base of public and community awareness is crucial.

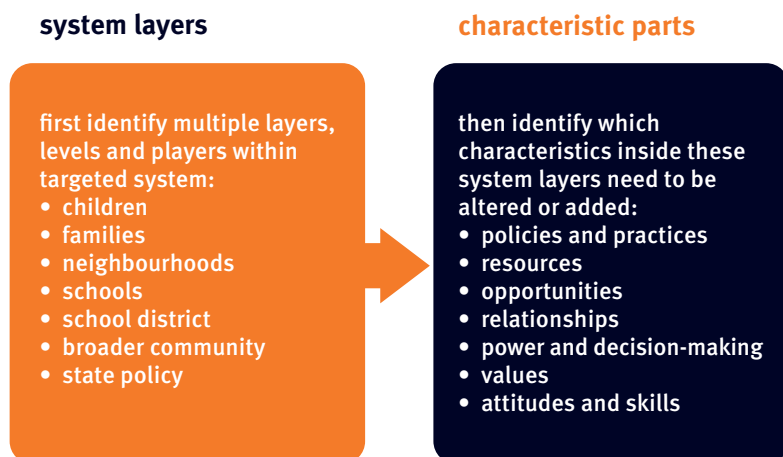
One conclusion drawn by the evaluators was that the three theories of change are essentially linked, overlapping and complementary, and combine to constitute a process model underpinning the CFP projects. Instead of there being one right approach, what matters depends on what is most appropriate to a given situation and what the practitioners or community groups want to achieve. The idea here is that several theories of change can coexist simultaneously.

Foster-Fishman *et al* (2005) have considered the utility of change theory in relation to a systems level approach. They suggest identifying the layers involved in the system under consideration, after which it is possible to then identify the particular intervention points for proposed change (see *Figure 1 overleaf*). The idea is to examine how the component parts of a system are linked together since root causes are situated within these interactions and interdependencies, and to seek a sustainable improvement or shift in the pattern of interrelationships.

The potential utility of logic modelling

According to the Program Development and Evaluation Unit at the University of Wisconsin in the USA, the approaches to strategic planning just described can find useful expression in a logic model (Taylor-Powell and Henert, 2008). Logic models are most useful for graphically

Figure 1
Analysing systems



Source: Foster-Fishman et al (2005)

expressing the essential elements in any systematic attempt to organise resources around achieving particular goals and objectives. Logic models can provide a summary and overview of these elements and capture the results of a rigorous strategic planning process in a simplified way. Models can be used internally, for example, as a tool for monitoring the work, and externally as a way of summarising the overall purpose and activities of an organisation to outsiders. They can also be a useful document in discussions with funders and others commissioning the work. To illustrate this point, work produced by Learning Connections (2007: 27) in Scotland has been adapted in Box 4 to show the links between inputs, activities, outputs, intermediate and end outcomes.

The English *Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Programme* evaluation also provides an example of a logic model of proposed activities and what they are intended to lead to (SQW, 2008: 48). In this case, the activities are about ‘bending’ service provision so that it is more suited to the needs of local people:

Box 4

A logic model for community learning and development



Source: Learning Connections (2007: 27)

Information and advice from residents enable service providers to make changes, such as re-allocating, reshaping, joining-up and improving access.

The changes lead to:

Improvement to services outcomes in terms of being more accessible, targeted, responsive, better quality, sufficient in quantity and efficient.

In turn, these improvements lead to:

Desired impacts on the neighbourhood in terms of: lower crime and anti-social behaviour, cleaner streets, better housing, higher educational attainment, healthier people, higher household incomes and stronger community networks.

Being explicit about the ‘logic’ of interventions can help those involved to maintain focus on the desired changes, concentrate efforts on the agreed goals, avoid duplication of work across agencies and set appropriate standards for the work. Adherence to a logic model is not inconsistent with flexibility and responsiveness, since good planning is more of a process than a one-off event. Good planning provides a basis from which to react to unexpected events, take advantage of emerging opportunities and be creative in meeting needs.

Community strategic planning

One systematic and tested evidence-informed programme that brings together many of the elements considered in this section so far is the Communities That Care (CTC) intervention, developed by Hawkins and Catalano in the USA. This programme enables a community to plan strategically to prevent common and often serious behavioural problems in youth, including violence, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, school drop-out and mental health difficulties, and to promote positive and healthy development. CTC is theoretically based on the Social Development Model of the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington. Information about the research group is available at <http://depts.washington.edu/ssdp/>. The programme has been subject to a variety of evaluations, including randomised control trials (Quinby *et al*, 2008). It has been implemented extensively across the USA, as well as in the UK, the Netherlands,

Box 5

Phases in the Communities That Care Programme

- 1 Community readiness – which involves a readiness assessment to ensure that the community is ready to start the CTC process.
- 2 Community mobilisation – organising, introducing, involving – building the coalition of individuals and organisations to involve.
- 3 Developing a community profile – collecting community-specific data and constructing a profile from the data which allows the community to analyse its own strengths and challenges.
- 4 Creating a community action plan.
- 5 Implementing and evaluating the community action plan.

Source: <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/features/ctc/resources.aspx>

Australia, Canada and Cyprus. As shown in Box 5, there are five linked phases in the CTC process.

To evaluate the degree to which communities are true to the five phases of CTC, the developers have devised a Milestones and Benchmark instrument. Milestones are the specific goals that the community is to meet (e.g. developing an evaluation plan) and benchmarks are actions that the community members take or conditions that have to be met to achieve these goals (e.g. using a survey to measure progress). Milestones and benchmarks can be used to decide what needs to happen in the planning process, as a checklist to ensure that all necessary steps are taken and as an assessment and evaluation tool to identify changes or technical assistance needs.

A UK study by Crow *et al* (2004), however, sounds a more cautious note about the efficacy of CTC, concluding that little impact has been identifiable in the two and a half year period of the evaluation (*ibid*: 62), but acknowledge that the aims of CTC may only be realised over the

period that it takes for a generation of young children to grow up (*ibid*: 62). In fact, the authors suggest that CTC may be better understood as a process rather than a programme. Some important learning points emerge from the evaluation (*ibid*: 66-72):

- CTC UK needs to recognise the diverse starting positions and develop different implementation models for different types of communities, which will create opportunities to build on communities' strengths while recognising their weaknesses.
- There is a need to ensure critical players are fully engaged in the process throughout at strategic, management, operational and local community level.
- Good communication and transparency over decision-making, especially between local communities and senior politicians and policy-makers, is critical.
- Consultation processes are essential to ensure that all parties are fully informed, aware of decisions and able to avoid conflict. This is fundamental for relationships between communities and decision-makers.
- There is a need to develop guidance material on good practice in designing and implementing an action plan.

Programme design and service content

Summary of lessons

This section has discussed how programme design and service content can come together in strategies that link overarching policy goals to particular needs and specified actions by providers. Ideally the connection between needs, processes and outcomes is very clearly articulated in planning processes. Key points are:

- A ‘systems’ (or ‘ecological’) approach to programme design has proved helpful in many jurisdictions. It helps to elucidate how the constituent elements (society, community/neighbourhood, school, family, individual, etc) are related within an integrated system within which there are many interacting factors, and provides a framework for design by focusing on the levels at which different activities can be targeted and different outcomes might be envisaged.
- Programme design is most likely to be robust and effective when it is underpinned by a clear theoretical framework, which makes explicit the expectations around why providing Input X should lead to change in Outcome Z. This should be formulated with reference to existing theory about how community needs arise and how change is achieved.
- Service content should be determined with reference to a clearly articulated description of the expected mechanisms of change, which makes explicit the expectations around how Input X should lead to change in Outcome Z, perhaps by way of Output Y.
- Combined, these two approaches are also sometimes described as a ‘theory of change’ and can be used to specify a ‘logic model’ that sets out the various inputs, outputs/activities and outcomes that the programme hopes to achieve and how these are conceptually and practically linked. Providing this logic model is agreed by all parties, it can then be a useful tool for monitoring programme and/or service progress over time.
- Programme design makes most sense when it is needs-informed. This implies initial needs analysis, carried out at local level, at the very least to confirm the local situation in relation to nationally determined priorities for action. The analysis helps to establish a

baseline against which it is possible to measure progress towards achieving goals.

- Needs analyses can be carried out utilising a combination of existing administrative and demographic or epidemiological data, new surveys of local residents or services, and public and professional consultations, and need not be expensive or lengthy. In high-quality programmes, needs analyses are not used simply as ‘gap-analyses’ or ways of identifying local or community deficits; they are also used to identify strengths and clarify the opportunities for building greater community resilience.
- It is a well-established principle in many fields of human services that effective programme design is generally ‘outcomes-led’ or results-driven. This implies that broad outcomes should be identified before programme design begins and that specific indicators of success that are measurable must be clarified as part of the process of specifying service content.
- A focus on outcomes can help to avoid the situation where performance is being measured in the abstract. In this approach, required actions and activities can be projected backwards from the desired results rather than forwards from a longer term or aspirational goal.
- Some literature suggests it may be helpful to conceptualise outcomes in the community development field as a sequence of phases such as ‘preliminary’, ‘intermediate’ and ‘end’ outcomes, and apply critical appraisal skills to the question of the level or phase at which it is really feasible to expect community development programmes to operate and deliver results.
- Given the wide potential scope of community development activities, effective programmes generally have to restrict the number of priorities for change that they address through their programme design, focusing in on a carefully selected group of feasible activities and bearing in mind local resources and other capacity issues.
- Within this, the evidence from related community-based fields and from successful community development programmes, such as Communities That Care, is that multi-dimensional designs, with

service offers that draw on a menu of approaches to support different learning styles, tend to be associated with the strongest outcomes. The involvement of multi-disciplinary teams at both the design and the implementation and delivery stages is a feature of successful programmes internationally.

Taken together the above elements constitute a rigorous approach to programme design and content. A crucial determinant of impact, however, is the ability of all partners to work together effectively in implementing the delivery plan.

Section 3: Programme implementation and delivery

This section considers what the international evidence base tells us about key principles of effectiveness concerning implementation and delivery in publicly funded community development programmes. Because the focus in this part of the report is on implementation and delivery, attention is more on ‘downstream’ activity at area and community levels. The expression ‘implementation and delivery’ refers to the principles and processes by which programmes and services are put into action ‘on the ground’. Because publicly funded community development type programmes commonly feature partnership entities as the principal mechanism for delivery, the ability of such entities to function effectively is central to implementation. In turn, engagement with members of the community is a fundamental aspect of performance in such entities.

The 2006 Community Development Foundation (CDF) report, *Community Development Challenge*, assessed strengths and weaknesses in community development and proposed a range of actions to ensure that it plays a more powerful role in meeting the needs of present-day society. An important message from the report is that (*ibid*: 22-23):

Investment in CD (community development) has to work as part of a network of investments by agencies across the board ... What are needed are neighbourhood-wide, area-wide or locality-wide CD strategies. The aim would not be to regiment the different types of CD input but recognising the necessary diversity, to provide a framework to join up different pieces of activity and allow the components to work together more effectively.

The CDF report suggests that structured collaborative activity at local level is fundamental to realising the intentions of policy where these structures have the capacity to bring a range of statutory, voluntary and private agencies together to focus on local needs and issues. Essentially, partnership is about sharing the vision at the core of programmes. It is a relational activity, in which the apparatus of the state moves away from doing things ‘to’ communities, towards doing things ‘with’ them. This trend can be detected in the national evaluation of the *Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Programme* (NMP) in England (SQW, 2008). The UK Government launched this programme

in 2001 in 35 areas to test and develop how the neighbourhood management process could bring the community and local providers together to address problems and improve services. The evaluation concludes that: 'The pathfinder model of neighbourhood management has proved robust, flexible and appropriate. It represents a relatively inexpensive model for in-depth local engagement and service improvement' (*ibid*: 9). It has led to a new national practice, with the model now operating in over 27% of England's unitary or district level authorities, covering an estimated 4.2 million people (*ibid*: 10).

Based on their assessment of research into the extensive £26 billion Single Regeneration Budget Programme in the UK, Rhodes *et al* (2003: 1414) also state that: 'There is now a considerable body of evidence that delivery mechanisms based on a partnership model offer real advantages to the quality of the regeneration outputs and outcomes achieved.' Collaborative activity is often described as the 'engine room' of community development 'providing the dynamism, project ideas and links into wider networks that make things happen' (Turok, 2001: 11). Making things happen in and through such entities, however, is contingent on avoiding or dealing with a number of common problems, pitfalls and issues.

The Audit Commission's 2009 report *Working Better Together* provides a detailed study of Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) activity in the UK. LSPs exist in nearly all local authorities in England. The study accepts that the state and its partners can deliver better outcomes by working together than they can separately. They can do this, for example, by setting a strategic vision or direction for an area, discussing common concerns, agreeing shared goals and priorities, and monitoring progress. The study also warns, however, that local partnerships (Audit Commission, 2009: 8):

- bring risks as well as opportunities, and governance can be a problem
- do not guarantee value for money, so local public bodies should question whether and how they engage in partnerships.
- need to be accountable to one another and to the public.

The sorts of problems identified by the Audit Commission are discussed in *Partnerships: A Literature Review*, commissioned by the Research and Development Office for Health and Social Care in

Northern Ireland (Boydell, 2007). In noting that the literature on both governance and partnerships has burgeoned in the last decade, Boydell offers the following blunt message regarding partnership working (*ibid*: 3):

People often assume that collaboration will be more effective than efforts planned and carried out by a single organisation, yet there is little evidence that collaboration has improved health status or impacted on health systems. Evaluating partnerships is difficult for various reasons such as the long timescales for achieving impact, different perspectives on what success means, the complexity and variability of partnership interventions, and the different contexts within which partnerships work.

The message is reinforced by a key finding from Boydell's review: 'While there is acknowledgement in the literature that the purpose of partnerships is to achieve important goals in the interest of the public good, there is relatively little consideration of how that change may be achieved' (*ibid*: 12). Further research involving the same author, however, concludes that with 'effective processes and a favourable context, partnership working can lead to a reduction in inequalities' (Boydell *et al*, 2007: 4). A tool based on the model can be accessed at www.partnershiptool.ie/. Although developed in a health context, the tool applies to partnership working more generally.

Effective partnership working

One attempt to clarify what is meant by and involved in effective partnership working can be seen in the Irish report, *Partnership Dynamics – Key Lessons from Local Partnership in Practice* (Pobal, 2006). The report sets out indicators of good practice in local partnership companies and invites self-analysis in relation to a typology of activity described as Progressive, Cooperative and Conciliatory (*see Box 6*).

A clear message from the Pobal study is that effectiveness is not simply a matter of structure; it depends crucially on ethos, approach and a sense of purpose, and requires a level of mutual support and joint activity between members and the groups they represent.

Also drawing on learning about collaborative approaches in the Irish partnership model, Turok (2001: 11) asserts that: 'The nominated officials cannot be mere delegates of their organisations, mandated to

Box 6

A typology of partnership working

progressive

- high emphasis on developing proactive communication strategies and decision-making is open and transparent
- imbalances of power between partners recognised and strategies in place to deal with such imbalances
- partners open to various methods of working and collaborate comfortably on the development and implementation of strategies
- skilled staff available to support the partnership process.

cooperative

- facilitates better planning and sharing of information and resources between stakeholders
- moderate level of trust between partners, medium-level participation of stakeholders and a limited communication strategy
- flexibility, risk-taking and innovative methods of working sometimes not encouraged.

conciliatory

- lack of strategic planning
- low levels of participation and trust between stakeholders
- poor linkages between agencies and stakeholders, weak decision-making mechanisms and poor leadership
- minimal understanding and capacity for carrying out social inclusion work
- lack of commitment locally to pursuing and supporting a social inclusion agenda
- partners are not interested in challenging the status quo.

Source: Pobal (2006: 24-25)

pursue particular policies or to implement national decisions. They need discretion and some autonomy to participate meaningfully and promptly in partnership forums, given the dialogue and negotiation involved.’ Turok’s point is reinforced in the *Report on the 2008 Survey of all English Local Strategic Partnerships* (Russell *et al*, 2009). When partnerships mature, the members develop a degree of commitment to one another and to collectively agreed goals and ways of operating that is stronger than formal requirements to cooperate. As Russell *et al* (2009: 73) state:

The message coming from the survey responses is that accountability within the LSP is perceived to be increasing and is stronger than external accountability. This applies both between the constituent parts of the LSP and the accountability to the LSP of its partners. More than four out of five respondents also thought that the LSP’s partnership working enhances the accountability of local agencies.

Issues of recognition and authority

But positive internal working is not enough by itself, as can be seen from the evaluation in Ireland of the Social Inclusion Measure (SIM) Working Groups (NDP/CSF, 2003). These groups were established under the County and City Development Boards (CDBs) for the purpose of coordinating, at a local level, the delivery of the social inclusion measures contained in the National Development Plan (NDP). The evaluation identified that as the partnership approach is grounded in principles of participation, negotiation and consensus, a fundamental constraint is the lack of authority underpinning the local coordination function as none of the key local stakeholders can be obliged to participate meaningfully in the process. In this case, what is required is a higher level of priority being attached to the objectives and work of SIM Groups by government departments and local delivery agencies, resulting in incentives within the system to encourage and reward organisations that pursue issues around coordination and who seek to eliminate duplication (*ibid*: 62).

Support for collaborative work

Support for those engaged in collaborative working is provided by Atkinson’s (2007a, 2007b and 2007c) three-part guide, *Better at*

Working Together – Interagency Collaboration, to assist managers and front-line workers with regard to partnership working. The guide was created on behalf of the High and Complex Needs (HCN) Unit in New Zealand, which coordinates a national strategy for dealing with children and young people with high and complex needs. The unit supports the development of intersectoral relationships and working at all levels. A conclusion from Part 1 of the guide, a literature review, is that the best predictor of effectiveness is the degree of consensus about needs, problems, solutions and methods, and agreement or clarity on aims, levels of involvement and commitment, and strategy (Atkinson, 2007a: 7). A key message is that while collaborative processes may be effective in the long term, they require a considerable investment in time and resources and there are limits to the capacity of agencies to participate in and sustain collaborative activity (*ibid*: 9).

The second part of the trilogy provides practical advice on inter-agency working. It sets out HCN's conditions for funding as a way of defining what is meant by collaboration. For HCN funding it is expected that agencies will (Atkinson, 2007b: 7):

- make a formal commitment to a joint process
- agree on a lead agency and accountability arrangements
- move beyond the agencies and professional paradigms involved to form a shared view of the issues and the desired outcomes
- jointly develop and agree on a plan that focuses on the outcomes for the child or young person and their family
- be willing to be flexible and to do things differently
- contribute resources (staff time, services, administrative support, funding) to deliver the common plan
- ensure that the results are greater than the sum of the parts.

The final part provides a detailed self-assessment tool for managers and front-line staff, with activities based on six mutually reinforcing principles for collaboration (Atkinson, 2007c: 25-35):

- recognise and accept the need for collaboration
- be clear and realistic about the purpose
- ensure commitment and ownership
- develop and maintain trust

- create clear and robust arrangements to support collaboration
- monitor, measure and learn.

For Atkinson's work, see www.hcn.govt.nz/publications.htm.

In community development type programmes, the purpose of partnership stretches well beyond the idea of professionals and community-based agencies working collaboratively. On one level it includes harnessing the contribution of community groups to achieving preferred outcomes. On another level, it is about the involvement of community representatives in planning and decisions about resource allocation in their own communities. A fundamental aspect of the work of partnership entities, therefore, is to promote active community engagement.

Promoting active community engagement

Wilson and Heeney's (2006) report, *Improving Neighbourhoods and Supporting Active Communities*, provides some useful indications of what it means to involve the community as partners in the pursuit of social change. In essence, it is about facilitating a movement from engagement as a first step, through involvement in activities to full participation. The authors assessed the role of the English Single Community Programme (SCP) in Neighbourhood Renewal, which aims to develop community participation through four strategic goals (*ibid*: 3):

- **governance** – developing a community 'voice' that enables communities to participate in decision-making and increase the accountability of service providers
- **social capital** – increasing the confidence and capacity of individuals and small groups to get involved in activities and build mutually supportive networks
- **service delivery** – ensuring that local communities are in a position to influence service delivery and where appropriate, participate in service delivery
- **social inclusion and community cohesion** – developing empowered communities capable of building a common vision and a positive identity where diversity is valued.

Their study was based in Hull, a major port on the east coast of England, where they found that many voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations were small and community-led and very often

operating through volunteers. As a result they were ‘below the radar’. They also found that because much community-based activity comes from perceived need, it rarely fits into neat thematic boxes. Yet their mapping of the VCS activity shows the significant scale of the contribution that such organisations make to major areas of social policy, including health, crime and learning (*ibid*: 15-20). The study shows the various ways in which the Hull Community Network and Hull Community Investment Fund (CIF) supported such work by having contact with around 860 VCS organisations across the city. The network contributed to the development of social capital by (*ibid*: 21-22):

- acting as a focal point and first point of contact, and signposting for both VCS and statutory organisations
- raising awareness through network forums and publications, i.e. VCS organisations are made aware of funding streams, practice from other groups, at the same time as sharing their own learning and practice
- enabling members to be both givers and receivers of information
- holding network meetings to allow groups to gain a lot of information in a small amount of time
- providing Community Chest grants to ‘kick start’ purposeful community development
- helping members with funding applications.

Wilson and Heeney’s 2006 report contains many examples of good practice and evidence of what works in promoting a truly joint and joined-up approach to tackling endemic social problems.

In considering the support mechanisms involved in enabling the active participation of people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, Taylor *et al*’s (2007) evaluation of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s (JRF) work with 20 neighbourhoods in the UK relates directly to Wilson and Heeney’s categories of ‘governance’ and ‘social capital’. The programme aimed to test out the value of different kinds of ‘light touch’ support to organisations at different stages of development. Examples of the light touch that were deemed to be effective included (*ibid*: 14):

- **development support:** in the form of a facilitator to plant seeds, share information, ask interesting questions or to remind people to keep things on the agenda

- **credit:** small amounts of unrestricted money provided to community groups; for instance, to purchase regeneration magazines and newsletters, marketing/publicity, or to buy equipment such as a laptop, projector, digital camera
- **networking opportunities:** such as joint events between community groups from different neighbourhoods, to share experiences about common themes such as community engagement, funding, diversity, and working with power-holders
- **action planning:** providing a planning framework and evaluation guidelines to help organisations to review local needs and opportunities, map out their future and reflect on past achievements and difficulties
- **brokerage:** mediation with other organisations and power-holders such as the local authority
- **dissemination:** providing a UK-wide platform for groups to discuss the challenges of neighbourhood working with policy-makers from local and central government
- **kite marking:** with groups being able to use the JRF name to promote their profile locally.

According to Taylor *et al* (2007), these measures made a positive difference in terms of assisting a more coherent analysis of local problems, engaging more people in tackling local problems, developing leadership capacity at local level, increasing access to information and ability, and generating knowledge through research.

The Guide Neighbourhoods Programme in England, which ran from January 2005 to March 2007, sought to create synergies between individual ‘guide’ neighbourhoods by connecting residents seeking to regenerate their neighbourhoods with experienced residents from strong, successful ones (*ibid*: 10). Notwithstanding a number of difficulties and problems with the scheme, centering on the failure to establish a truly national identity, the authors point to a range of achievements. These include (*ibid*: 5-6):

- motivating residents to become active in their communities and to have the confidence to persist with their ideas, by seeing the example of successful resident-led regeneration
- building wider organisational capacity by supporting, often quite

fragile, community groups to create a physical presence and change on their own estates

- playing a role in developing greater professionalism and effectiveness within client organisations.
- acting as positive role models and encouraging client organisations to engage in strategic partnership through effecting introductions or brokering positive relationships with public agencies in cases where this has been difficult in the past
- achieving community empowerment outcomes through a focus on improvements in the quality of community life, such as environmental changes, community safety and neighbourhood management initiatives
- reaching hidden communities on ‘forgotten estates’ where little or no funding had previously been received.

The fact that there are considerable difficulties and barriers associated with community engagement, however, is recognised in Bartley’s (2004) *Review of Public Participation in Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Development Plan*. The review finds that communities, and in particular disenfranchised communities, can be better enabled to develop a proactive role in the planning process through ‘incentivised capacity building’ (*ibid*: 40). However, people should not be coerced or otherwise compelled to engage with the planning apparatus at a level which is not appropriate and not in their own interests (*ibid*: 38). Instead, engagement is more likely when issues have a clear or immediate relevance to people’s lives, and the type and level of involvement has to be agreed and should be appropriate to the circumstances of prospective participants. According to the author, involvement options range from ‘informing and consultation’, which are suitable for large audiences because they are less demanding in terms of time, effort and other resources, to ‘negotiation and delegation’, which are more suited to small numbers who are able and willing to commit the time to engage in the process (*ibid*: 38).

Issues that resonate with Wilson and Heeney’s category of ‘governance’ are also considered in the UK report *Empowering Communities to Influence Local Decision Making – A systematic review of the evidence* (Pratchett *et al*, 2009). The literature review aimed to ‘identify, quality assess and subsequently synthesise existing domestic and (where

appropriate) international evidence with a view to drawing out useful policy implications, by attempting to make sense of variable and often competing or contrasting evidence in order to identify which mechanisms empower, in what ways, and in what contexts' (*ibid*: 10). The research team selected six specific mechanisms for more detailed analysis (*ibid*: 10-11):

- **asset transfer** and other facilitative mechanisms for community management and/or ownership of assets and social enterprise
- **citizen governance**, covering the role of citizen or community representatives on partnerships, boards and forums charged with decision-making about public services and public policy
- **electronic participation**, for example, e-forums and e-petitions as a means of offering substantively different forms of engagement and alternative or complementary channels for participation
- **participatory budgeting** as a form of deliberative participation in communities facilitating decision-making on devolved budgets
- **petitions** as a mechanism for citizens and groups to raise issues of concern
- **redress** as a mechanism for citizens to register complaints, have them investigated and receive feedback and response.

According to the authors, identifying criteria to define empowerment and systematically to draw out cause-and-effect relationships allows qualitative researchers to go beyond the usual claims of 'suggest', 'indicate' and 'appear' to identify the conditions for 'empowerment success' (*ibid*: 11). The conditions are said to include (*ibid*: 59):

- the initiative is open to all
- support is provided to participants
- there is a formal link to decision-making
- political and bureaucratic buy-in is present.

Where these conditions apply, the chances of successfully realising the intentions of policy are maximised. The main findings are (*ibid*: 21):

- The community empowerment agenda is still in a nascent stage. Local practitioners are a crucially important resource in developing this agenda and bringing it towards fruition.

- It is important that government clarifies the objectives of empowerment and gives a sustained commitment to an agenda that may take a while to deliver notable successes.
- These simple messages imply the need for developing accessible, inclusive and facilitated strategies for empowerment. The community and voluntary sector, and specifically community development techniques, have an important role to play here.
- It is also important, however, to pay attention to the perspectives of public sector organisations, their staff and elected members. The need for ongoing learning, training and capacity building is clear.
- This research has also shown the importance of integrating mechanisms into an overarching strategy for empowerment that is set within a mainstreamed agenda of building trust with the public at every opportunity.

The findings of Pratchet *et al* (2009) resonate with those expressed by Chanan (1999) in *Local Community Involvement – A Handbook For Good Practice*, which is based on a pan-European survey of work in relation to community engagement. In response to a widespread impression that the lack of investment in local involvement has weakened local development as a whole, Chanan's study set out to show that this 'sector' is objective, measurable and amenable to planned improvement. It argues that as the underlying strength of the community affects outcomes in all aspects of development, policies should intend to build up the infrastructure of the sector, including local support and umbrella bodies, networks and forums, in order to build up long-term assets and endowments and enable dialogue between communities and the authorities (*ibid*: 11). Chanan shares the view taken by Bartley (*see above*) that capacity building should take a holistic approach, recognising a 'pyramid' of participation, with a point of entry for everyone depending on their interests and abilities (*ibid*: 37). The pyramid has five levels:

- 1 representing a network or forum in an official scheme
- 2 helping groups and organisations to form a network
- 3 helping a group/organisation to cooperate with others
- 4 taking a developmental role in a group or organisation

- 5 being a member or user of a community group or voluntary organisation.

Each level feeds into the one above and is affected by the one below, so that capacity at the top depends on the vibrancy of the lower levels. Chanan's main point is about the need to promote participation at every level. The author concludes that building the infrastructure can lead to a number of desirable outcomes, such as (*ibid*: 26):

- community organisations are strengthened
- more people participate at various levels in community organisations
- excluded people have more footholds in local society
- the local community sector has more influence on public affairs
- public authorities take more account of community needs
- innovative local economic initiatives are flourishing
- community representatives on official schemes have clearer legitimacy and lines of communication with local people.

Linking partnership and community engagement

The work of the Montgomery Collaboration Council (MCC) in the USA exemplifies the ideas discussed in this Section and also in Section 2. The MCC's work is an example of a joined-up, needs-led and results-focused approach to community development. Twenty-one board members represent public agencies, families, elected officials, businesses and community advocates. Five committees relating to Executive, Child Well-being, Legislative, Fiscal and Membership functions support this governance and policy-making body. The Child Well-being Committee is at the centre of the collaboration's work. It has three workgroups that focus on three priority areas: early childhood, youth development and children with intensive needs. Board members, service providers, parents and community advocates serve on these committees and workgroups. Members do not simply make recommendations or contribute information. They ensure that their own organisation or agency actively and simultaneously addresses the agreed goals, such as work on reducing truancy levels. In doing so, they may also undertake joint projects with other members. They are also fully involved in planning and evaluating the results of the work.

In 1998 the MCC undertook a wide-ranging consultation exercise, involving service providers, user groups, residents and politicians, to establish *The Children's Agenda* as the vision for the well-being of children and families in Montgomery County (MCC, 2007). This document provides extensive demographic data that is regularly updated in line with the Council's planning periods. Since 1998 MCC understands needs as the gaps between what is currently happening with children, youth and families and the desired outcomes set out in *The Children's Agenda*.

In the planning period 2007 to 2012, MCC has identified 38 community needs organised into its three focus areas: early childhood, youth development and children with intensive needs (MCC, 2007: 15). These have been compiled into A Community Needs Assessment Workbook. Extensive outreach with a wide variety of community groups and citizen advisory commissions was conducted to elicit their input regarding the identified needs. Over 425 surveys were completed, mostly online, by a breadth of community members, including parents, youth and service providers with culturally diverse backgrounds. Using a set of criteria that assessed (1) the importance of each need and (2) the feasibility of making significant progress in meeting the need within the next five years, the Child Well-being Committee then selected those needs in each focus area that the MCC would proactively address. The resulting 22 priority identified needs are found within each focus area section of the plan. The planning process then establishes the links between the identified needs and related strategies and activities, responsibilities, resources and timescales for meeting the needs.

Resourcing partnership and community engagement

The importance and centrality of partnership working and community engagement means that time and resources need to be invested in supporting the work and in resolving the attendant difficulties. This will often mean professional staff acting as brokers and intermediaries between groups and organisations. Their role is to help establish clear and agreed protocols setting out the conditions for membership, to help to build trust, understanding and common purpose. They will also be important in maintaining linkages with other local development initiatives and with strategic bodies at 'higher' levels of decision-making.

Staff employed, for example, by local partnership entities can be expected to provide a wide range of technical assistance to partners in a number of ways, including:

- funding applications
- finance and probity
- advice about employment practice
- planning and evaluation
- governance
- building board capacity.

Box 7 provides an example of technical assistance from the Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative (CH/SFSC) in Washington, DC.

It is clear from this discussion of the need for and nature of technical assistance that much is required in terms of knowledge, skills and commitments from practitioners in community development programmes. Pope (2007: 12), in her study of the Caroline Springs

Box 7

The role of technical assistance

CH/SFSC is an association of more than 40 community organisations, resident groups and neighbourhood leaders working in partnership to build a neighbourhood-based network to promote positive family and community development. The organisation provides a number of community-based services in two divisions: family services and community capacity building. The Collaborative provides a regular programme of training available to member organisations, and others, on such topics as organisational development or more professionally focused issues. The following are examples:

- supervisory solution-focused training – managers
- organisational solution-focused training – directors
- Family Group Conference facilitator training
- Effective Youth Violence Intervention.

Source: <http://www.chsfsc.org/index.php?id=1>

Partnership in Australia, also refers to the crucial role of the lead worker, in this case called a director, in effective partnerships. She argues that success is highly dependent on the person having:

- high levels of communication, networking, facilitation and negotiation skills
- detailed knowledge and understanding of the workings of state and local government
- high levels of community involvement at the leadership level.

Also in the Australian context, in the National Evaluation (2004–2008) of the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004–2009*, Muir *et al* (2009: xi) observe that partnership arrangements in this government initiative were effective when ‘facilitating Partner project managers had the necessary communication, organisational, facilitation, contract management and conflict resolution skills, because the success of the CfC model was highly dependent on the qualifications, skills, experience and personalities of project manager, staff and volunteers’.

The fundamental contribution of leaders and practitioners to community involvement is also captured in the *Sure Start Plus National Evaluation: Final Report*, where Wiggins *et al* (2005) highlight the significance of such factors as one-to-one individual holistic support involving friendliness, informality, accessibility, proactiveness and persistence in support. They also state that it required dedicated staff and community support to reach specific ethnic communities. In some cases, the presence of a dynamic paid coordinator from the outset minimised problems in planning and implementation and inspired respect and loyalty from colleagues and partner organisations (*ibid*: 77).

The role of the workforce

This latter set of observations highlights the central role of the workforce in community development programmes. The range and complexity of functions is captured well in the Irish Combat Poverty Agency’s report *Communities, Voices and Change* (Airey, 2006), which examined the policy work of community development agencies in three government-funded programmes. The report found that (*ibid*: 52) :

Staying abreast of changing policy developments, engaging effectively in policy arenas, offering well-presented, sound arguments for change based on evidence and analysis within these arenas, while networking and building alliances as part of one's strategy in influencing positive change demand a range of competencies and skills in addition to the 'traditional' skills required for community development.

Clearly, a well-trained, well-paid, properly utilised and supported workforce is crucial to effective programme implementation and delivery. This raises questions about the extent and quality of initial and post-qualifying training, as well as continuing professional development support for the workforce. The need for training and support, however, goes beyond the professional cadre of community development workers. In this connection, the previously mentioned Centre for the Study of Social Policy has developed a range of guides to human resource management tailored specifically for welfare organisations. A practical and informative self-assessment tool – *Building a Stable and Quality Child Welfare Workforce* – has wider relevance than the title suggests (www.cssp.org/). It covers 'Promising Strategies' for organisational culture and employee relations, professional development and employee retention, and recruitment.

Programme implementation and delivery

Summary of lessons

The discussion in this section supports the view that the impact of publicly funded community development type programmes is likely to be greater when a range of partners overcome inherent problems and issues in working together, and collectively bring to bear the resources of their own agencies and ways of working. Key points are:

- A principle of effective implementation, flowing from the notion of partnership working utilised by many effective community development programmes around the world, is the involvement of many partners in delivering the programme activities at the neighbourhood level. Partly this serves to operationalise and ‘make real’ the concept of multi-agency partnership; partly this ensures that the multi-dimensional ‘systems’ or ‘ecological’ approach required to deliver effective services to communities, as noted above, is supported
- The most promising approaches in this respect involve collaboration between central or local government and the local delivery agents in determining how the programme should operate and how outcomes should be achieved by means of a negotiated process.
- The evidence is clear that collaboration is not an end in itself. Instead, collaborations can play an important role in building up the local infrastructure, including support and umbrella bodies, networks and forums, in order to develop long-term assets and endowments and enable dialogue between communities and the authorities.
- This work requires active community engagement at different levels and in a variety of ways in policy-making and decision-making processes.
- Enabling partnership activity and community engagement to fulfil its potential, and facilitating active participation, requires appropriate resources and skilled professional support.
- The critical role of the team/project leader or ‘champion’ at local level has been documented as a major factor predicting success, with the most effective leaders being skilled in a number of

different areas as well as in leadership, and having intimate local knowledge and strong local credibility.

- Close attention to training and development of front-line workers and volunteers is a key feature of successful programmes, both to build and retain a competent workforce to deliver complex work with often high-need communities and to ensure that work is delivered to a high standard.

Learning from experience is crucial in terms of reaching the high standards referred to in the last bullet point, and this requires appropriate mechanisms and procedures for monitoring and evaluation.

Section 4: Monitoring and evaluation

This section considers what the international evidence tells us about key principles concerning monitoring and evaluation of publicly funded community development programmes. The importance of appropriate monitoring and evaluation today is universally recognised and cannot be overestimated. In this report, ‘monitoring’ is used to describe a counting (or accounting) process, concerned with the assessment of whether agreed inputs have been made as per Service Level Agreements and whether key targets for service uptake have been achieved. Of itself, monitoring does not reveal if a programme has been successful, only how it used the resources provided. Clearly, robust monitoring processes are a key component of ensuring accountability for public funds, but are not in themselves a sufficient indicator of effectiveness. ‘Evaluation’ is a process that involves the systematic investigation of pre-determined questions preferably using scientifically robust (transparent and replicable) research methods. Evaluations can describe and assess the quality of implementation (process, or formative evaluations) or assess the relationship between outcomes for service recipients and the inputs made by the service (outcome or impact, or summative evaluation).

According to Spicer and Smith (2008), however, evaluation is problematic in complex community-based initiatives, especially in contexts of rapid changes in national and local policy. Their analysis draws extensively on the evaluations of the Children’s Fund, a £960 million UK Government initiative between 2001 and 2008 that established local partnerships in each of the 150 English local authorities to promote children’s social inclusion. The authors state that (*ibid*: 79):

It is increasingly recognised by policy-makers that social problems such as social exclusion and health inequalities have multiple facets relating to poverty, unemployment, family, education, neighbourhood, opportunity and lifestyle. Hence, there can be no simple, causal association between a policy intervention and its potential impacts.

A specific and pressing issue in relation to the evaluation of publicly funded community development programmes concerns how to assess at a national level the results of work in different localities. In their

review of evaluation practices in the voluntary and community sectors in Northern Ireland, McDonnell *et al* (2010: 14) observed:

It is acknowledged that the absence of defined programme level outcomes makes it difficult to connect project activities and outcomes to overall programme objectives. It also makes it difficult to aggregate monitoring and evaluation data generated from individual projects in order to provide an overview of programme achievements.

At the same time, monitoring and evaluation processes will be counterproductive when the balance is wrong between them, if they require disproportionate amounts of time and if accountability takes precedence over the substantive work of the agency. In this case, monitoring and evaluation may contribute little to learning and development. These sorts of issues are confirmed by Ellis and Gregory's (2008) research over a period of two years into how third sector organisations approach evaluation. The research found that all too often performance measurement is used internally by organisations themselves purely as a compliance mechanism. Respondents from different stakeholder groups reported that organisations were often doing evaluation 'just because they have to report to funders showing what they have got for their money' (*ibid*: 88). For such reasons it is used less often to check and challenge the direction of the organisation.

The problems identified by Ellis and Gregory are compounded by the difficulties inherent in attempts to measure outcomes in community development. On the basis of his literature review of over 130 texts relating to evaluations of community development approaches to tackling poverty in Ireland, Motherway (2006: 62) came to the following conclusion:

Setting out to measure the poverty impacts of a community development initiative is always extremely difficult. Impacts are often more related to 'process' themes such as empowerment and activation. Direct impacts on poverty are difficult to measure from a programme perspective, and if measured more globally are then difficult to ascribe to specific policies or interventions. Many impacts are qualitative in nature and an excessive emphasis on quantitative

measurement risks the underestimation of the full positive impacts of community development.

One illustration of this problem comes from a value-for-money review of the Irish Local Development and Social Inclusion Programme, which stated that (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2007: 24):

As articulated by evaluators to date, the greatest weakness of the Partnership experiment is lack of ability to state definitively in an evidence-based manner, after 15 years of implementation, what impact they have had as a programme on the communities in which they are established. Evaluators have generally concluded that, while there is no doubt that the areas have developed over time, it is more difficult to demonstrate what the Partnership's distinct contribution has been over and above what might have occurred anyway because of economic growth or other interventions.

There is a parallel set of issues for academic research in this area. According to Berkowitz (2001), there are multiple methodological problems associated with external evaluations of community-based coalitions. These are said to include (*ibid*: 215-217):

- extraneous variables potentially bearing on outcomes may be both very large in number, difficult to fully specify, and also non-uniform across communities and cannot be controlled
- interactions among extraneous variables may also occur, and may be complex, multiple and frequent, but these will be hard to determine if such variables are insufficiently identified or controlled
- the choice of which particular measures to use (e.g. process and product measures or both, and also specific choices within these categories) is often not obvious; multiple measures may be called for, but their specific selection as well as their potential weighting may not be clear.

Given the potential for flawed approaches, it is important to be as clear as possible about the intended purposes of monitoring and evaluation, and to clarify the mechanisms and processes for internal and external measurement.

A holistic approach to evaluation

The 2009 report by the Audit Commission, *Working Better Together*, stresses the need for a holistic approach to monitoring and evaluation focusing on the parts played by the various actors in delivery. As Box 8 shows, a number of related questions can help those responsible to focus attention on key aspects of the ‘chain of delivery’ that makes up the overall system.

One example of a concise framework that is helpful in holding together the related elements in monitoring and evaluation is outlined in the *Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Programme* report (SQW, 2008). In relation to the core activities of improving local services, learning and development, community engagement and delivering quick wins, the report proffers a number of key evaluative questions (*ibid*: 96):

- 1 What are the resource inputs?
- 2 What activities is the Pathfinder pursuing?
How do these fit into the categories?
What is the sequence of events for each stream of activity?
- 3 What are the barriers, helping factors and issues that influence success in securing changes?
- 4 What improvements are being made to services?
How can these be measured?
- 5 What changes are occurring in the area?
- 6 To what extent are changes in area conditions traceable to the Pathfinder, compared with other external influences?

A consistent message from the evidence base is that there are many different ways of answering such questions and care should be taken to access appropriate methods. Working with lay people and community groups, for example, will require a more engaging and lively approach to secure full participation in the process. One instance of this can be seen in the methodology adopted by the Neighbourhood Initiative Foundation in England (NIF, 2009). Its work on ‘Planning For Real’ helps residents throughout the UK to play an active part in the regeneration of their neighbourhoods and the development of their communities. NIF has developed a systematic approach to work that uses interactive techniques and tools incorporating helpful visual

Box 8

Delivery chain questions

- Is the outcome clearly defined?
- Is the evidence base robust?
- Is there enough capacity, including available resources, to deliver?
- Is there a shared (cross-agency) operational plan describing how services/interventions will be provided?
- Are the objectives supported by a funding strategy?
- Do the different agencies communicate regularly, using reliable information, and at the right levels?
- Are levers and incentives fit for purpose?
- Are the risks to the delivery chain well managed?
- Do performance management systems enable tracking of delivery?
- Is there strong leadership, accountable through clear governance structures, at all levels of the delivery chain?
- Are mechanisms in place for regular feedback and review, supporting continuous learning?
- Have systems to achieve efficiency been built into the delivery chain?

Source: Working Better Together (Audit Commission, 2009: 43)

aids, or models of neighbourhoods, to stimulate debate and contributions from participants.

Another comprehensive approach to internal evaluation has been developed by the Social Audit Network (SAN) in England. According to SAN (2009), the aim is to enable ‘a social enterprise to build on its existing monitoring, documentation and reporting systems to develop a process whereby it can account fully for its social, environmental and economic impacts, report on its performance and draw up an action plan to improve on that performance’. Emphasis is on self-evaluation

in a process that involves a systematic and easily understood series of steps using charts, diagrams and grids to focus attention on all aspects of performance and on impacts. A significant aspect of the process involves setting up a panel of impartial people to authenticate the report. It is based on six underpinning principles:

- 1 Social accounting should engage with and reflect the opinions of a wide variety of people (key stakeholders) affected by (and able to affect) the organisation (multi-perspective)
- 2 Social accounting should cover all the activities of the social enterprise or organisation (comprehensive)
- 3 The organisation should be able to compare its performance over time and also against similar organisations (comparative)
- 4 It should be undertaken regularly rather than be a one-off exercise and become embedded in the running of the social enterprise or organisation (regular)
- 5 The Social Accounts should be checked (audited) by an independent social audit panel, chaired by an approved Social Auditor (verified)
- 6 The findings of the audited Social Accounts should be widely circulated and discussed (disclosed).

Using outcomes and indicators

The evidence suggests that using outcomes and indicators appropriately is central to effective monitoring and evaluation. Outcomes are the results of programme activity such as changes in knowledge, behaviour, practice, decision-making, policies, social action, condition or status. Outcomes may be intended or unintended, and positive and negative, and may fall along a continuum from immediate (initial; short-term) to intermediate (medium-term) to final outcomes (long-term), which are often synonymous with impact. An indicator is an expression of impact in the form of evidence that the impact has or is being achieved. According to the Nexus (2001) evaluation of the Community Development Programme in Ireland, the capacity to focus on outcomes is important because it is necessary to evaluate the extent to which actions are consistent with the environment in which a project operates. Is the project ignoring education in an area of high

early school leaving and where no other response is evident, for example, or targeting unemployment when others are already doing so?

Translating the intent to become more outcomes-focused, however, presents significant challenges. As McDonnell *et al* (2010: 7) observe in a Northern Ireland context: 'The methods and skills to understand, develop and implement outcomes approaches remain largely under-developed at both programme and project levels, with the focus continuing to be on outputs, involving quantitative monitoring data, as opposed to outcome measurement.' In their 2008 report *Delivering Outcomes in Community Learning and Development: Current issues for outcome-focused practice in youth work*, Learning Connections consider the issues involved in reporting outcomes in the context of the Scottish National Youth Work Strategy. Although focusing on youth work, the content of this report applies equally to other aspects of work in communities. In February 2008 the Scottish Government established a concordat setting out the terms of the new relationship between local authorities and Scottish Government. A central proposal was the creation of a single outcome agreement between each council and the Scottish Government, based on 15 national outcomes agreed in the concordat. One of the 15 national outcomes is:

Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Cross-cutting issues regarding evaluation in relation to the national outcomes are identified in the report as confusion about terminology and ability to measure outcomes, working within an output culture, capacity to undertake evaluations and working with new national and local outcomes frameworks. In addition, because of the voluntary nature of participation and the sometimes unpredictable pattern of contact with young people, there is difficulty in establishing accurate baseline information on individuals in youth work. For these and other reasons, the report suggests that there is a need to introduce a more streamlined tool for recording how outcomes are being met. The make-up of the youth work profession, being mostly volunteers and sessional staff at delivery level, also makes outcomes-focused practice a particular challenge. The suggestion is for a simple booklet with a recommended system to use that can be accessible to all staff members, sessional and part-time workers, and more training on the system so

that everyone understands the terminology and the purpose. Two strong recommendations emerge from the Learning Connections report:

- There should be longer-term sustainable funding packages, which help projects to plan for long-term outcomes that meet the needs of communities not determined by short-term funding priorities.
- At the same time, investors, inspectors and decision-makers should work collaboratively to reduce duplication of effort for practitioners, streamlining systems for measuring recording and reporting on outcomes.

The Learning Connections report acknowledges that impact can be long term in community development and therefore difficult to measure. With regard to such difficulties, a report from the Centre for Evaluation Northern Ireland, *Proving and Improving: A quality and impact toolkit for charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprise* (www.proveandimprove.org/new/about.php), states that it is important to choose indicators of performance, quality or outcomes that are within the organisation's scope to measure and use. The toolkit states that indicators need to be:

- 1 **action focused**. Does knowing about this issue help your organisation or its key stakeholders to do things better or more effectively? Is it within your organisation's power to influence it?
- 2 **important**. Is it relevant to your organisation? Is it a priority for a core stakeholder or group of stakeholders?
- 3 **measurable**. Can you get information that tells you something about the effects you've had?
- 4 **simple**. Is it clear and direct enough to be understood by all stakeholders? Is it easy enough to get information without expert assistance if none is available?

According to the Community Development Foundation (2006), the difficulties of measurement can be addressed by taking a strategic view of a whole neighbourhood or locality, and of all community development inputs from all sources into that locality. On this basis it should be possible over a period of time to show measurable indicators of improvement on such things as (*ibid*: 23):

- whether people feel they can influence what goes on around them
- whether people feel their locality is one in which people from different backgrounds can get on well together
- amounts of voluntary activity
- numbers of community groups and numbers of people involved in them
- range of public issues tackled by community groups
- numbers of people benefiting from the activities of community groups
- numbers of people who become skilled in local organising and representing community interests.

The Centre for Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) has also developed a set of 24 generic indicators that have possible utility across a range of community development projects, although they have to be tailored to individual organisations and agencies (Morrissey *et al*, 2002). The indicators are based on a social capital framework involving transactions with funders (linking capital), connecting members of communities with other communities (bridging capital) and engaging people with each other in their own communities (bonding capital). The indicators need to be prioritised, which means variation across agencies, and some could be selected for particular attention in any one timeframe.

Issues in reporting

Reporting in a timely and accurate fashion on performance and progress is a major aspect of effective monitoring and evaluation processes. There are particular issues in organisations involving many partners while drawing from a number of funding streams, and then having to collect data and provide separate reports for the various parties, as well as to different funders. Increasingly, however, there are software systems available to enable data collection and analysis, and use the information for reporting purposes. Recent work by FSG Social Impact Advisors indicates progress in developing shared systems (Kramer *et al*, 2009: 7):

Concerns about duplication and the lack of collaboration within the non-profit sector are nothing new. What has been missing, however, is the availability of inexpensive

performance reporting and outcome measurement systems facilitated by independent staff. When organisations dedicated to similar objectives have voluntary access to comparative data and the opportunity to meet regularly with the support of trained facilitators, our research suggests that they gravitate over time toward more coordinated and aligned strategies, without the drawbacks of artificially forced partnerships.

Another issue is the cost of such software systems, but there are now examples of tools being made available to local groups by larger bodies, such as local authorities, that could be emulated elsewhere. One such tool is the Boston Indicators Project which aims to ‘democratize access to information, foster informed public discourse, track progress on shared civic goals, and report on change in 10 sectors: Civic Vitality, Cultural Life and the Arts, the Economy, Education, the Environment, Health, Housing, Public Safety, Technology, and Transportation’ (www.bostonindicators.org). Through The Metro-Boston DataCommon, the project provides access to an online mapping tool providing data about the region and each of its cities and towns. It is an open resource for anyone wishing to better understand how the region and its communities are changing, and is designed to help residents, planners, educators, city and town officials, amongst others, to explore options and make informed decisions (<http://metrobostondatacommon.org/html/about.htm>).

The 2009 Audit Commission’s report concerning local strategic partnerships (LSPs) presents a useful case study in England about one LSP that commissioned the county council to develop area profiles based on the Audit Commission’s quality of life themes. These themes include factors such as community cohesion and involvement, community safety, and education and lifelong learning (*ibid*: 71-73). The county council produces a summary profile called the ‘Quilt’, with 33 key statistics for each community. Colour-coding of performance and outcomes gives LSP members and local managers an at-a-glance comparison of all the areas and performance issues, supported by underlying statistics and more detailed analysis.

A related issue in terms of reporting concerns levels and frequency. In England, the Audit Commission sets out a clear rationale for different layers of reporting (*see Table 2*).

Table 2
Reporting layers

Governance layer	Frequency	Type of data	Purpose
strategic	3-4 a year	key changes, reportable performance indicators (outputs and outcomes), LAA indicators and other LSP-related data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • challenge performance: examine and respond to trends, steer partner activity • give an account to partners
executive	6-12 a year	management data (input and process)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitor performance; adjust activity to bring it back on track • report exceptions to plan • give an account to strategic level
operational	12-52 a year	performance data (input and process)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take immediate action • report exceptions to plan • give an account to executive level

Source: Audit Commission (2009: 65)

The range, complexity and severity of issues, problems and challenges associated with monitoring and evaluation in relation to publicly funded community development programmes raises significant questions about organisational capacity and support. Optimally, robust internal systems would dovetail, with appropriate independent and external evaluation processes, to provide accurate and timely data as a basis for assessing effectiveness and learning from experience. In this connection, a useful information guide to the associated issues that is likely to be of value to local and external evaluators, and for those with key responsibilities in this area, can be found in a recent UK report *Supporting local information and research: Understanding demand and improving capacity* (Smith *et al*, 2009).

Reporting levels and arrangements for accountability will vary depending on the size of the agency and the terms of the financial transaction. Example options are: a site visit, a one-page quick report,

an agency's own annual report and occasional full-scale inspections. CENI have produced a resource entitled *Prove and Improve – A Self-Evaluation Resource for Voluntary and Community Organisations*, which provides a coherent, systematic step-by-step approach to evaluation, with a particular focus on outcomes given the increasing emphasis on this aspect of evaluation today (Swanton and McIlldoon, 2008).

Combining internal and external evaluation

There is consensus in the literature that evaluation processes in publicly funded community development type programmes need to combine internal and external approaches requiring interactions between researchers and practitioners. In this regard, it is interesting to note Ellis and Gregory's (2008: vi) point that: 'The previously predominant model of an expert carrying out evaluation at project completion is giving way to increased self-reliance and also to partnership between external evaluators and internal staff, with work carried out at the project start, and a combination of internal and external methods.'

To illustrate the benefits of combining internal and external processes at the level of a local partnership entity, useful reference can also be made to *Partnership in Action*, which is an impact analysis of the work of the PAUL Partnership in Limerick, Ireland (O'Brien, 2006). This analysis, covering the period 2000-2006, exemplifies in a number of ways how organisations stand to benefit from rigorous monitoring and evaluation. The Partnership availed itself of independent research expertise to include quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the impact of the work regarding services for the unemployed, community development and community-based youth initiatives, all three reflecting government priorities in a particular programme funding stream. Significantly, the Partnership added a further area to take into account generic and cross-cutting activities. The analysis provides the Partnership with feedback about the impact of its work and concludes with over 30 recommendations for developments spread across six key areas:

- communications/public relations
- economic/financial/employment issues
- education and training
- community development

- research and evaluation
- equality.

Clearly, investment is needed in order to develop a wider range of evaluation techniques and to effectively combine multiple methods. To this end, Coote *et al* (2004) argue that extensive dialogue is needed about the challenges of evaluating complex, community-based initiatives, the different functions of evaluation and the range of methods needed to fulfil them. The authors set out a number of key questions with regard to generating evidence, evaluating information and learning for development (see *Appendix 2*).

Another example of the benefits of combining internal and external processes at the level of a whole programme comes from the *Evaluation of the Community Futures Program in Atlantic Canada – Final Report* (ACOA, 2009), which focuses on four areas: programme relevance, design and delivery, success, cost-effectiveness and alternatives. The report notes the national programme's limited degree of influence on indicators measuring the achievement of long-term goals (e.g. change

Box 9

Assessing economic impact in the Community Futures Program

The results are obtained through investment expenditures from commercial projects as well as the direct creation of jobs from these projects. These are called the direct impacts, as they can be attributed to specific projects. Through the CBDCs' direct support to business, the direct creation of jobs can be utilised to estimate the indirect and induced impact on the economy of the four Atlantic provinces. In the analysis, the jobs are translated into a measure of value-added output by economic sector. From the value-added output, the economic impact is estimated using econometric models developed by the Conference Board of Canada for each Atlantic province. In this manner, direct, indirect and induced macro-economic effects, in particular the impact on gross domestic product (GDP), employment, wages and tax revenues, are estimated.

Source: ACOA (2009: 73)

in employment rate, change in employment distribution and change in annual average household income), as well as difficulties with attribution (*ibid*: 69). As shown in Box 9, however, ACOA have developed a means of analysing and estimating the economic impact and benefits of the Community Futures Program in Atlantic Canada.

The final evaluation report shows how the performance of individual CBDCs can be calculated and then aggregated to provide figures at province level. The evaluation report contains a technical appendix describing the method for calculating economic impact. The Community Futures approach is interesting because of its attempt to measure impact at a programme-wide level, which (as noted at the beginning of this Section 4) has been an area of difficulty for publicly funded community development programmes.

One informative example of evaluation at programme level comes from the work of Gore and Wells (2009) in the UK, who draw from the mid-term evaluation of the 2000–2006 South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme (one of the European Union’s main funding streams to support regional and employment policy) to reflect on the role of governance in shaping and framing the specification and implementation of ‘horizontal priorities’ in European regional policy. As Gore and Wells explain (2009: 158), the term ‘horizontal priorities’ is used by the European Commission to denote issues that have relevance across its principal policy domains and refers to priority areas such as opportunities between men and women, environmental sustainability and employment. Their focus is on the implications for evaluation in a programme where more traditional notions of policy implementation through top-down management processes give way to conceptions of governance in which those responsible for implementation exercise considerable discretion in interpreting policy and over activities. In this scenario, programmes develop through networks that are characterised by multi-level governance that cut across management tiers.

The argument is that a more complex system of policy enactment requires a more sophisticated approach to evaluation. Nine criteria formulated for the assessment reflected the main issues set out in the EU specification for the evaluation. This gives rise to a matrix with the six horizontal priorities as axis y, and the criteria as axis z. A scoring system of 0 (no evidence of activity) to 3 (activity fully embedded) was agreed against the criteria, which gave the possibility of comparing

Table 3
Measuring performance in priority areas

priorities	criteria									score 0-3
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
total scores under each criterion										total

Source: Adapted from Gore and Wells (2009)

and ranking progress with regard to the different priorities. Table 3 provides a summary of the main elements of Gore and Wells’s matrix.

In drawing from agreed and publicly available criteria, this type of matrix scoring system offers a degree of rigour in a qualitative process, although quantitative measures could also apply by informing judgments about performance with respect to any given criteria, or forming all or part of individual criteria. The schema could be applied and used for self-evaluation purposes at local level, for example, concerning the performance of local entities in working to national programme goals. Assuming a degree of standardisation in its use, it could also be applied and used for external evaluation purposes by comparing and contrasting performance between different parts of a programme, for example, between local entities engaged in similar work and working to the same national goals. Finally, it could also provide an overall composite picture of programme performance by aggregating the scores from the different parts into a collective whole.

Capturing and disseminating learning

Monitoring and evaluation can lend itself to documenting the work, which in turn enables learning. This point about capture is important

in terms of using the learning that comes from performance and outcome evaluation to inform programme development. In her analysis of policy work in community development programmes in Ireland, Airey (2006: 62) argues for a reciprocal relationship between projects and lead agencies or departments, in which projects analyse their experiences and translate these into policy messages, and lead agencies and departments refine these policy messages and deliver these to appropriate departmental and other policy arenas on poverty. In Airey's view: 'Doing this effectively necessitates analyzing what works and recording reasons why and the existence of some mechanism for the subsequent transfer of that learning to others' (*ibid*: 62).

The Vibrant Communities Initiative in Canada illustrates many of the points about monitoring and evaluation made in this discussion. In return for receiving extra financial and technical support from the national initiative, 'Trail Builders' agree to closely track their lessons and outcomes, and share them with members of the initiative and national sponsors. A learning and evaluation process has been developed to follow the work of each project as it evolves, track the outcomes achieved and identify the lessons learned. This process consists of three main streams. In order to capture the results from their poverty reduction strategies, they have developed two-page descriptions of the specific strategies being pursued. These descriptions briefly indicate the challenge being addressed, the strategy being employed and the results anticipated or achieved. To date, 21 such stories have been documented. These narrative descriptions are also intended to help Trail Builders develop evaluation plans for tracking the results achieved by each initiative, including logic models and research strategies.

Trail Builders provide regular reports that summarise the work being done and the results achieved, and allow for dissemination of findings among Vibrant Communities participants and other interested groups. They also prepare brief mid-year updates and more extensive end-of-year reports identifying key developments in their initiatives, challenges encountered and lessons learned. Included are statistical reports concerning the two main quantitative targets being tracked by the initiative: the number of partners engaged in the local initiative and the number of low-income households benefiting from the work and in what ways.

The work of the Trail Builder communities also highlights the importance of ‘manualising’ experiences in community development, so that learning can be captured and shared with colleagues in similar situations. An exemplar of this, also from Canada, is the Community-Government Collaboration on Policy, which has developed an extensive manual that contains many practical tools and lessons for creating effective government–community collaborations. One example of such a tool is a web-based index of policy measures that is hosted on the Caledon Institute of Social Policy website where it can be accessed by community members and user groups (www.caledoninst.org/).

Standards and benchmarks

The results of learning in this way also make it possible to distil key messages, principles and practices that can enable setting standards for the work, which is another approach to ensuring quality. One example of the use of benchmark standards for design and content purposes comes from the San Francisco Beacon Initiative, which is a public-private partnership that promotes youth and family centres in state schools. The goal of the initiative is to offer opportunities, services and activities that promote the healthy development of children, youth, families and communities. The initiative has developed an assessment tool specifying the required standards for their youth and adult development programmes. The outline of the tool is provided in Appendix 3. It covers compliance, early, intermediate and long-term standards. One interesting aspect of the Beacon standards is the inclusion of research as an outcome area. This is about the organisation’s commitment to using the findings from the evaluations based on the standards to improve overall performance. This signals the importance of documentation in recording findings and learning for wider consumption, and also to spread good practice.

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency has encouraged the Community Business Development Corporations to establish standards, for example, in the areas of hours of service, minimal counselling time, minimal number of meetings with clients and turn-around time for information requests and applications (ACOA, 2009: 68). Setting such standards enables network members to make meaningful comparisons between their activities. The importance of

reporting publicly on activities goes beyond marketing to include venues for communicating their activities or results, for example, by making annual reports available on their websites (*ibid*: 67). The ACOA evaluation suggests the need for a consistent format for annual reports.

Monitoring and evaluation

Summary of lessons

The discussion in this section underlines the importance of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in publicly funded community development type programmes. There is no doubt that evaluation is complex in this field and monitoring, evaluation and feedback processes are of particular value when they contribute to learning and development. Key points are:

- Successful programmes generally find ways to collect robust monitoring information that utilise data already collected routinely by the programme, bearing in mind that the collection of accurate data for monitoring processes should not require disproportionate effort on the part of the service managers and front-line workers or volunteers.
- It is widely accepted that a key requirement for robust evaluation of both implementation and outcomes is that evaluators should be intellectually and practically independent of those who deliver the programme.
- There is evidence from the international literature that various forms of self-evaluation (also sometimes called ‘action research’) can be helpful in promoting learning and reflective practice at the front line.
- However, local involvement and participatory research is not a substitute for independent scientific evaluation and effective programmes develop an appropriate combination of internal and external processes, with the latter being an ethical imperative when significant public expenditure is involved and large numbers of people are exposed to the untested effects of the programme.
- Evidence suggests that partners and communities can and should be productively involved in all types of evaluation to ensure that there is local ‘buy-in’ and that external researchers do not overlook key issues that may affect the results or the interpretation of results.
- An important message is that monitoring, evaluation and feedback processes are of particular value when they contribute to learning and development in programmes.

- Mechanisms and tools (including standards and benchmarks) for ‘quality control’ of front-line work are highly developed by successful programmes to ensure that work stays close to the agreed objectives of the programme or service and conforms to principles of effective delivery (in as far as these are clear).
- Documentation or ‘manualisation’ of what, precisely, the programme and its constituent services or activities consist of is likely to be a key principle of effective practice since without it, monitoring and evaluation cannot take place and replication of successful approaches is thus prevented.

It must be remembered that the process of community development is of itself an outcome, which makes it different from other fields. For example, empowerment is both a process and an outcome. If disadvantaged people are involved in decision-making processes when previously they have been outside of such processes, their participation is already an outcome regardless of the results of such engagement, although any such results may well be significant. At the same time, approaches to measuring outcomes that target past performance may well underplay the more intangible assets that are generated by partnership working (Boydell *et al*, 2007: 19). Examples identified by Boydell *et al* include development of relationships and networks, reputation or credibility, and improvements in competence arising from acquisition of information, skills and experience and exploration of shared values that comes through involvement in partnership working. The importance of this enhanced competence is the capacity to act in a variety of situations to add value (*ibid*: 21).

If the main benefit of evaluation is ensuring good performance and learning from any successes and failures, there is also a need to justify activity to commissioners and beyond this to account to policy-makers and the general public for what organisations do. A major challenge emerging from the evidence base is for monitoring systems to produce the type of data that helps practitioners to have oversight of what they are doing and achieving, while also providing accurate and meaningful information for evaluation and reporting purposes. A connected challenge is to achieve a proportionate combination of internal and external evaluation methods and procedures that enables organisations to relate activities to results and to satisfy objective scrutiny.

Part 4

Conclusions

This report has addressed the following question:

What does the international evidence base tell us about key principles of effective policy and practice in publicly funded community development programmes?

In answering this question, the report began with an explanation of the key terms that informed the parameters of the review: ‘community development’, ‘programme’, ‘outcomes’, ‘evidence’ and ‘what works’. The methodology for searching and analysing data was outlined in Part 2. At the outset it was agreed that the review should take in a wide range of potential sources, without being limited to ‘research studies’ in the usual sense. Sources were therefore included that would not generally be considered in other types of review (for example, technical reports and opinion pieces). The results of the analysis were elaborated in Part 3 in four sections corresponding to the four overarching aspects of programme management:

- 1 **structure and governance**
- 2 **programme design and service content**
- 3 **implementation and delivery**
- 4 **monitoring and evaluation**

Known challenges associated with aspects of programme activity were considered in terms of promising responses and discussed with particular reference to the primary evaluations of programmes from jurisdictions with political, social, economic and welfare features similar to Ireland, where these types of programmes are relatively well-established. The report now concludes with a summary of the broad messages about key principles underpinning effective practice in publicly funded community development type programmes.

Structure and governance

Programmes are more likely to be effective if:

- decision-making from the top is transparent and informed by the views of stakeholders
- there is a clear aim and a limited set of goals from the main funders
- micro-management is not attempted; instead, the aims and goals are interpreted and enacted locally in line with community needs and issues

- there is a strategic engagement between the centre and localities, and communication goes in both directions.

Programme design and service content

Programmes are more likely to be effective if:

- notwithstanding appropriate local variation, there is a degree of consistency across the programme in standards and service delivery
- interventions are focused on achieving realistic outcomes in communities with appropriate milestones and indicators of progress
- timely and accurate data are available and usable for needs analysis and planning purposes
- there is a coherent theory of change articulating the link between desired changes and inputs, outputs and activities, indicators and outcomes.

Implementation and delivery

Programmes are more likely to be effective if:

- partners share the vision and partnership structures are at the heart of complex community-based initiatives
- vertical and horizontal collaboration is a high priority for all partners with a stake in agreed outcomes
- communities are integral to policy and decision-making processes designed to tackle social issues and problems, as appropriate at different levels.

Monitoring and evaluation

Programmes are more likely to be effective if:

- monitoring systems are fit for purpose, light touch and user-friendly in helping end users to improve their work while meeting reporting requirements
- rigorous internal and external evaluation processes dovetail to provide credible accounts of performance
- there is a commitment to capturing and disseminating learning and development throughout the programme and beyond.

Final remarks

The single most significant finding from the international evidence base about 'what works' in community development programmes is the ubiquity of partnership models in addressing social problems and issues. There is widespread belief in the potential of such collaborative structures to deliver significant results in terms of realising the intentions of social policy. Where this potential is realised there are reports of success in tackling otherwise intractable social problems and issues. There are significant obstacles to success, however, and the constituent elements of the programmes need to be managed so that maximum effort is systematically focused on achieving results.

There is no evidence that any of these actions automatically result in progressive social change since there are too many variables at play in societies and communities to guarantee the effects of any intervention. Not least, these variables include the intentions, character, knowledge and circumstances of the individual people and groups of professionals at the intersection of policy and practice. Taken as a whole, however, when actions are properly coordinated, appropriately resourced and are, above all, realistic in their aims, there is promising evidence that they are more rather than less likely to support coherent decision-making processes that in turn can lead to effective and sustainable strategies for local development. The key to success, however, is in managing the constituent elements of the programmes so that maximum effort is systematically focused on achieving results. In contexts where there can be a tendency towards over-diversification and over-complexity, it is important to appreciate that effectiveness in an individual programme is a function of coherence across the whole range of actions related to that programme. Change in any one area will have consequences for others, which means that all elements of activity must be coordinated and kept in view simultaneously. Clearly, this is no easy task, but the results of this review show that with careful attention to the multiple moving parts of complex community initiatives, effective programmes can be designed and delivered.

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Appendix 1

Typical elements in a logic model

Assumptions describe the suppositions made about a range of contingent factors (likelihood of success, stability of the situation, possibility of support, theory of change) influencing planning.

Baseline statements refer to information about the trend, situation or condition prior to a programme or intervention.

Inputs are the resources that go into a programme of work, including staff time, materials, money, equipment, facilities, volunteer time.

Outputs are the activities, products and participation generated through the work in terms of goods, services, activities and opportunities made available.

Outcomes describe the results or changes from the programme, such as changes in knowledge, behaviour, practice, decision-making, policies, social action, condition or status. Outcomes may be intended or unintended, and positive and negative. Outcomes fall along a continuum from immediate (initial; short-term) to intermediate (medium-term) to final outcomes (long-term), often synonymous with impact.

Impact refers to the long-term social, economic, civic and/or environmental consequences associated with the goals of the programme. Impacts may be positive, negative, or neutral, intended or unintended.

Indicator is an expression of impact in the form of evidence that the impact has or is being achieved.

Measure refers to quantitative (data in numerical format) or to qualitative (data in a narrative or text format) information that expresses the phenomenon under study.

Evaluation describes the systematic collection of information about activities, characteristics and outcomes of programmes used to make judgements, improve effectiveness, add to knowledge, and/or inform decisions about the work, and be accountable for positive and equitable results and resources invested.

Monitoring is a counting (or accounting) process concerned with the assessment of whether agreed inputs have been made as per Service Level Agreements and whether key targets for service uptake have been achieved.

Appendix 2

Generating evidence, evaluating and learning

Source: Coote, A., Allan, J. and Woodhead, D. (2004) *Finding out what works: Building knowledge about complex, community-based initiatives*. London: King's Fund Publications.

generating evidence

- Is there sufficient investment in building the evidence base?
- To what extent is the turn to evidence-based practice encouraged within the context of broad-based critical appraisal?
- How is discussion being promoted at all levels about the complex and varied roles that different kinds of evidence can play in helping to plan and implement social programmes?
- How widely is evidence disseminated?
- Is evidence disseminated in accessible, but not oversimplified, forms?
- In what ways are people helped at all levels to acquire skills and techniques for using the evidence base effectively?

evaluating information

- What is the commitment to developing a wider range of evaluation techniques and working out the best ways of effectively combining multiple methods?
- How is the programme meeting the need for dialogue about the challenges of evaluating complex, community-based initiatives, the different functions of evaluation and the range of methods needed to fulfill them?
- What is the extent of practitioner involvement in evaluation and learning from their experience, and what recognition is given to this?
- How are the skills and techniques involved in evaluation processes being developed?

learning for development

- To what extent is the need for a stronger learning culture within government openly acknowledged and addressed?
- What is being done to promote widespread discussion about conflicting interests and competing philosophies, and how these influence the knowledge-building process?
- What efforts are being made to promote shared learning and organisational change at national and local levels?
- What is the commitment to sustained investment in facilitating peer-to-peer and organisational learning, and to bring this learning into the mainstream?

Appendix 3

The Beacon Initiative: Standards for Centers' Providers

Source: <http://www.sfbeacon.org/>

compliance standards

- Safety-Accessibility-Engagement and Collaboration-Participation

early outcome standards

- safety
- accessibility
- visibility
- welcoming
- diverse and well-trained staff
- engagement and collaboration
- comprehensive programming
- participation

intermediate outcome standards

- supportive relationships
- meaningful participation and sense of belonging
- user involvement with the community
- challenging and engaging skilled building opportunities

long-term outcome standards

- increased user competencies in core areas:

leadership	increased youth well-being
educational support	increased positive connections to school
career development	increased school performance
health	increased family support for education
arts and recreation	research outcomes

The standards provide a basis for self-assessment among the Beacon Centers' providers, as well as a shared tool for quality assurance. Levels of compliance to the standard are on a three-point scale: fully met, partially or being met, and not being met. There is also a waiver option for particular cases. The standards cover staff performance and give guidance as to intended outcomes. They also refer to organisational commitments such as the required level of resources. The following is one example under the heading of Safety (San Francisco Beacon Initiative, 2003: 10):

Beacon Center ensures staff-child/youth ratios and group sizes permit the staff to meet the needs of youth participants.

- a Staff-child ratios vary according to the ages and abilities of children. The ratio is no greater than 1:15-20 for groups of children age six and older.
- b Staff plan for different levels of supervision according to the particular activity and the needs and ages of youth participants.
- c Substitute staff or volunteers are used to maintain ratios when regular staff are absent.

The assessment tool can be accessed on the Beacon Initiative's website (www.sfbeacon.org/For-The-Field-Practitioner-Resources/).

Appendix 4

Glossary of key terms

Accountability denotes responsibility to provide evidence to stakeholders and funders about the effectiveness and efficiency of programmes.

Baseline refers to information about the situation or condition prior to a programme or intervention.

Benchmarks refers to performance data that are used for comparative purposes.

Collaboration is the process by which individual agencies and organisations come together to achieve a common end, for example, by joint working or pooling resources.

Evidence base in this report refers to the totality of the texts that met the criteria for inclusion, comprising primary evaluations of programmes, literature reviews and other documents from reputable sources.

Evaluation is a process that involves the systematic investigation of pre-determined questions preferably using scientifically robust (transparent and replicable) research methods. Evaluations can describe and assess the quality of implementation (process, or formative evaluations) or assess the relationship between outcomes for service recipients and the inputs made by the service (outcome or impact, or summative evaluation).

Feedback is the process by which the results of monitoring and evaluation are validated and fed back into the programme management, design and delivery to achieve programme improvements.

Governance refers to the principles and processes by which programmes are overseen and regulated by commissioners or others with overarching responsibility for their performance.

Grey literature refers to materials issued outside the formal channels of publication and distribution, such as scientific and technical reports, government documents and theses.

Impact indicates the social, economic, civic and/or environmental consequences of the programme. Impacts tend to be longer term and so may be equated with goals. Impacts may be positive, negative, and/or neutral, intended or unintended.

Indicator refers to the expression of impact in the form of evidence that the impact has or is being achieved.

Implementation and delivery refer to the principles and processes by which programmes and services are put into action ‘on the ground’. Put simply, it is about the why, what, when, where, who and how of programme activity.

Inputs are resources that go into a programme, including staff time, materials, money, equipment, facilities and volunteer time.

Logic model is the graphic representation of a programme or project, showing the intended relationships between investments, outputs and results.

Manualisation refers to the documentation of what, precisely, the programme and its constituent services or activities consist of. It enables monitoring and evaluation, and replication of successful approaches. The process of documentation may involve the development of standards and benchmarks.

Measure refers to the quantitative or qualitative information that expresses the phenomenon under study. In the past, the term ‘measure’ or ‘measurement’ carried a quantitative implication of precision and, in the field of education, was synonymous with testing and instrumentation. Today, the term ‘measure’ is used broadly to include both quantitative and qualitative information.

Monitoring is a counting (or accounting) process concerned with the assessment of whether agreed inputs have been made as per Service Level Agreements and whether key targets for service uptake have been achieved.

Outcomes are the results or changes from the programme, such as changes in knowledge, awareness, skills, attitudes, opinions, aspirations, motivation, behaviour, practice, decision-making,

policies, social action, condition or status. Outcomes may be intended and/or unintended, positive and negative. Outcomes fall along a continuum from immediate (initial/short-term) including improvements in community, group and individual conditions and circumstances; to intermediate (medium-term) including improvements in micro social and economic conditions and circumstances; to final or 'end' outcomes (long-term), often synonymous with 'impact' in terms of macro social and economic conditions and circumstances.

Outputs are the activities, products and participation generated through the investment of resources. Goods and services delivered.

Partnership usually refers to formal arrangements and structures whereby individual agencies and services work collectively towards a common end.

Programme describes a series of organised learning activities and resources aimed to help people make improvements in their lives.

Publicly funded programme is an umbrella term, generally used to describe a collectivity of services, often organised and delivered on an area basis, with local management structures and delivery bodies that operate with varying degrees of autonomy from a central governance structure. The term 'programme' tends to imply a degree of coherence and integration around funding, structure, design, delivery mechanisms and evaluation processes, although the extent to which integration and coherence is reflected in the actual situation on the ground varies.

Performance measurement denotes enactment of objectives, exercise of responsibility. The ongoing monitoring and reporting of accomplishments, particularly progress towards pre-established goals.

Qualitative data are data in a narrative or text format.

Quantitative data are data in numerical format.

Randomised control trial describes an experiment in which people are allocated at random (by chance alone) to receive one of several interventions, one being the standard of comparison or 'control'.

Rapid reviews aim to use systematic methods to search and critically appraise existing research, but make pragmatic concessions to the breadth or depth of the process by limiting particular aspects as necessary.

Results-based accountability is a system of planning that starts from desired results and works back to the activities needed to achieve these results, which may be contrasted with starting from aspirations or ideals or vague general goals.

Service design and content refer to the principles and processes by which all the constituent elements of a programme can be shaped and made coherent to achieve the intentions of policy. Content refers to community development processes and activities that seek to promote desired outcomes in response to identified needs and in line with the underpinning practice principles and value base.

Structure refers to the way that commissioning bodies and local management and delivery bodies are related and are accountable to one another nationally and locally.

Systems (or ‘ecological’) approach indicates an approach to practice premised on the view that all elements (society, community/ neighbourhood, school, family, individual, etc) are related within an integrated system within which there are many interacting factors. The approach provides a framework for design by focusing on the levels at which different activities can be targeted and different outcomes might be envisaged.

Theory of change articulates the key ideas guiding the initiative in its work, including understanding of the issue or problem (e.g. for poverty and poverty reduction), the goals it is seeking (e.g. community capacity-building, or improved household outcomes), the specific strategies to be pursued (e.g. the role that the collaboration will play in the poverty reduction process) and associated activities. This ‘theory of change’ constitutes a conceptual baseline allowing partners to refine the thinking behind the work.

The Centre for Effective Services is one of a new generation of organisations focusing on the emerging science of implementation in human services. The overarching mission of the Centre is to connect the design and delivery of services with scientific and technical knowledge of what works, in order to improve outcomes for children and young people and the families and communities in which they live. Our daily work is to provide technical and organisational expertise to support the design, implementation and ongoing review and development of evidence-informed services for children, youth and families.

Our aims are:

- to promote and support the application of an evidence-informed approach to policy and practice in child, family and community services
- to promote the development of collaborative, joined up working that is outcomes-focused across research, policy and service providing organisations
- to build capacity within Ireland and Northern Ireland to take this work forward in the longer term by developing knowledge, skills and competencies.

For more information about the work of CES, visit www.effectiveservices.org



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