

CDF Independent Expert Panel on Community Development Lorna and CDX Members Response to Panel Paper One

Dear panel members

I've greatly enjoyed reading your responses to the first panel paper. Many of my thoughts echoed yours, and reflected issues raised by 11 CDX members who have emailed in their comments. Below I have added my reflections on the paper and comments and issues from CDX members. Because I have included comments in full this response is rather lengthy.

The key points from CDX made below are as follows.

- Panel Paper One was welcomed and highlighted issues which we could relate to.
- We feel that there is a need for the process to draw on a wider evidence base (outside of CDF related research) and would welcome more critical perspectives being presented in the panel papers.
- We felt that a huge gap in the first panel paper was that there was no mention of CD values.
- There is interesting work occurring in relation to an asset based approach - perhaps for further discussion in relation to the second panel paper.
- There is a lot of work taking place to build the skills, confidence and understanding of non-CD officers in the public sector, using CD approaches. This is important to us and is part of CD work today.
- The panel should think more widely that CDF have done in paper one in relation to what constitutes the CD field. The focus on the CDF survey of workers and managers is misleading and ignores a lot of volunteer and community activist views.
- It could be a good think that there is now strategic co-ordination of CD! But we would like more networking.
- We challenge the claim in paper one that *'throughout the New Labour period, CD practice has become more aligned to government policy priorities'*.
- We think that there is a lot more activity around evaluation than the paper suggests.
- We agree with issues raised in the paper around CD skills and training.
- We share concerns with other panel members in relation to individualisation, markets, the state and civil society.

We have a request to CDF and the panel:

- **We would like CDF and the panel to tease out key questions for wider debate**

We would like to further engage CDX members in the discussions which will help to widen the contributions beyond the panel members, however we need a summary of key discussion points as the panel paper hasn't sufficiently excited our members.

Comments on panel paper 1 overall

CDX member Theresa Kennedy from Birmingham City Council feels the paper is quite comprehensive, providing some very cogent issues, pertinent to the organisation of community development and community development worker principles and practice. She said that she could identify with the points made.

CDX member Mark Woodhead, a Community Development and Health Worker for NHS Wakefield District feels that this is an interesting piece of work and *it is important that this work is being done at a time when for some of us it would be tempting to keep our heads down and concentrate on a mixture of on the one hand very small scale, day to day concerns (legitimate though they are) and on the other hand worrying about the future - will I be on the shortlist for redundancy? Will the PCT that employs me be scrapped? Will crass, big business-sycophantic approaches to public health undermine work that I and my colleagues are doing?*

CDX member Sue Shaw feels that the paper by Melanie outlines the key strands and it may be interesting to speculate that the Tory proposal for Community Organisers is a reaction to the diffuse nature of current CD practice, and may in the end give CDWs impetus to return to the more politicised form of CD that started us all off on this trail. Sue thinks it is unlikely that Cameron et al truly realise how political and challenging the real Community Organising process is. Neither is it realistic to simply pull 5000 Community Organisers out of the woodwork!

CDX member Val Woodward is pleased with the inclusive way that CDX are approaching involvement in the panel. Her main feelings about the CDF report *is that it too carefully avoids the contested and sometimes conflictual political and theoretical debates surrounding the history of community work and community development. It contains more description than analysis. Looking at the history of CDW pre the Labour Government suggests there was little breadth of agreement to underlying values despite claims to such consensus. How CD/CW can contribute to improving relationships between the state and citizens, and what this means, has always been a particular stream of disagreement related to differing political analyses. This continued throughout the attempts by the Labour Government to include CD and CW in its policy and practice development. And is highly relevant to current debates about the 'Big Society' and the influential role of several people claiming to practice CD and or CW on that emerging agenda.* In this respect Val said that she didn't find the first panel paper particularly helpful or illuminating.

CDX member Sheila Whittle, from Stockport PCT said that she agrees with most of what's been written in the paper. She feels that as a profession we need to take a long term view. When the dust settles [from public sector cuts and changes] there will still be our local residents needing help to kick-start activism as there has always been. There may even be some of us left to help out (who knows?) so just in case there is we have to re-address the key issues in the identified challenges. Sheila feels that *if the self-identification of the profession's qualities and scope is still being contested then we have little or no hope of persuading others of the benefits of community development skills and approaches.*

CDX member Professor Gary Craig from the University of Durham reflected that the questions posed in the paper aren't *extraordinarily innovative political questions: many community workers addressed them in the 1970s and 19780s, for example, and it might be rather useful if a paper of this kind were to dwell on the lessons of the past including, perhaps, those which community*

development has learnt from the past fifty years of state involvement. There have been relatively few high level enquiries into the nature of community development since the Gulbenkian reports of the 1960s and this might have been a good opportunity at least to digest experience since then. This is particularly the case as there are now significant issues – such as the use of community development in rural areas (and the almost total absence of training for this work), the role of community development in relation to racialised minorities, gender issues in community development, the relationship between community development and social movements, or the tensions inherent in government community cohesion, for example - which have emerged in the past twenty years but are not addressed.

CD values

Panel member John Low (Joseph Rowntree Foundation) has commented that the paper ‘*doesn’t do enough to show what the ‘CD profession’ actually is, and what its core values and practices are, and what it is trying to achieve’.*

CDX member Shamsheer Chohan, of Communities Inc, feels that *another challenge is around values and principle in practice. Sometimes those employing CD approaches are out of synch with their employing bodies who wish to give lip service but not offer any real engagement or influence to local communities. From my experience this is why certain public bodies do not like CD as it offers something they are not willing to give i.e. control to communities. Rhetoric vs. reality issues at play. This is sort of covered on page 4 with bottom and top drivers but could be more pronounced given the value base of CD is one of its defining features.*

CDX member Gary Craig feels that: *surely the starting point for any discussion of the practice and future role of community development, particularly where government has quite deliberately muddied the waters by representing a range of activities as community development which have, in fact, little connection to the value base of community development.*

Here Gary directs us to:

- The widely used values <http://www.cdx.org.uk/community-development/community-development%E2%80%99s-values> (now updated in the NOS)
- and the Budapest Declaration of 2004 (<http://www.scdn.org.uk/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/budapestdeclaration.pdf>)

Gary continues: *Given the confusion about the way in which the language of community development is often hijacked by government, and the various ways in which practice has been manipulated and colonised by government over the years, a fundamental statement about the value base of community development seems to me to be a sine qua non for an inquiry of any sort. This is urgent as, as the various recent surveys of community development workers have shown, although there appear to be thousands of people practising what is called community development, most have had no formal training in the area, and very many are managed by people who have had no community development training or themselves practiced in the field. No wonder there is some confusion about what community development actually is and the government can get away with labelling much as community development which is far from being the case. Those concerned with community development have to avoid being co-opted into that process. The paper does at least recognise that this leads to a process of dilution but needs to go much further in*

distancing itself from many of the ways in which government has sought and clearly continues to seek to adapt the language and practice of community development to suit its own political agenda.

Policy Landscape (p2 of Panel Paper One)

CDX member Mark Woodhead has commented on what is said in the paper about asset based approaches and co-production. He is involved in a piece of work being done in Wakefield District PCT and Joint Public Health Unit on an asset based approach to joint strategic needs assessment – he says *maybe that will and should become joint strategic asset assessment.*

Mark said: *in all this business of supposed asset transfer - references to disused schools, etc. - we need to look very carefully and analytically at what is meant by assets in different contexts. We need, I think, to be clear that we are not using an accountant's notion of assets, that goes something like this - something is an asset insofar as, at some point in the future, you might cease to have a use for it and might want to sell it. We also need to distinguish, crucially, between an approach that is asset-based and an approach that is resource-led. Far too often in my experience and I suspect others' experience as well, we find ourselves talking to people with a mindset of 'we have got this building (or computer, or minibus, or canal boat, or whatever) - what can we do with it'. The tail starts wagging the dog. This is not an asset based approach. We need to start with vision, and aims, and in looking at assets we need I think to pay particular attention to people - skills, experience, stories of struggles and successes, ideas, etc. I am indebted for this understanding of assets and an asset based approach particularly to the work of Kretzmann and McKnight at the ABCD Institute.*

Mark also mentioned some good, interesting discussions about related matters on Fiery Spirits – he can provide an invite if anyone is interested in accessing this.

CDX member Professor Gary Craig highlights a lack of critical engagement with the context described in our panel paper. His comments include:

... the commitment of New Labour to empowerment and community participation is taken as read and at face value: this ignores the growing evidence from, for example, the New Deal for Communities programme which, whilst predicated on community empowerment, actually morphed into a programme for the management of communities in which local community representatives were given an increasingly marginal role in key aspects (such as financial control, appointment of staff, direction of travel and so on) (see for example the writing of Dinham and Diamond).

Nor is the DCLG rhetoric on empowerment challenged in terms of evidence on the ground; indeed the government appeared to equate empowerment with local people's ability to become involved in the delivery of public services. This is not what empowerment is about; it is about local people having the political ability to determine what kinds of services they want and to struggle to ensure that they are provided by providers on an equitable and high quality basis. Indeed, New Labour has, as a result of its approach to empowerment, opened the way for the Coalition government to take this process further and, not only cut public services, but require local volunteers to deliver

more and more themselves. This of course, will simply ensure that existing inequalities in the quality and scope of services are exacerbated.

CD's place in the landscape (pp2-3)

I agree with Melanie's observation that CDWs increasingly operate at the interface between communities and public agencies required to improve their engagement with communities, providing support to both. I don't see this as necessarily a bad thing, though as I didn't start working with communities until 1997 perhaps I am unable to appreciate the significance of this shift. I feel that my work in Dudley in recent years and my involvement in the Black Country Take Part Pathfinder has demonstrated the importance of working with public agencies. It feels to me that there is a missing element to my work if this aspect of activity is ignored. I have found it incredibly useful to locate activities in one or more of the three areas which we focus on in the Black Country Take Part Pathfinder:

- developing active, critical citizens;
 - developing empowered and empowering community organisations and networks;
 - developing empowered and empowering public agencies
- with an interesting space at the centre of these for discussion around barriers to people being active in community and public life.

I am saddened that CDW posts and salaries have been downgraded and that CD teams have been disbanded. I think that we are also reaching the end of a period in which investment in initiatives such as Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) resulted in CDW posts being created. I work in a local authority area which, to my knowledge, has never had a dedicated CD team in the local authority. There are lots of people carrying out work/voluntary work which I feel is underpinned by CD values, and there are a number of people in posts with titles such as Community Development Officer. And yet I feel optimistic about how a CD approach is developing in Dudley Borough. We are developing ever stronger and wider networks of people keen to improve the ways that agencies and communities work together, and open to learning about how this can be carried out in ways which are empowering for all involved. There is support at a strategic level across a range of agencies for this work, and active involvement from officers and volunteers from a breadth of teams and fields of work. While many of these people don't have a remit to support community activists and the development of community groups (which I would expect CDWs to), they are people who panel member John Low identifies – those with other roles that can help to sustain good outcomes in deprived neighbourhoods. I think that therefore we all benefit if they have opportunities to consider different ways of doing their work.

At CDX we feel that it is very important that we have CD officers within the local state - as it can be easier for them to access decision-makers and decision-making spaces and create opportunities for others to be involved. I think that CDWs also have something to offer colleagues within public sector agencies in relation to thinking about how they can be more empowered.

Work that I have been part of in Dudley and which was supported by CDX and the National Empowerment Partnership has been around the development of a tool (echo) for public agencies to use to consider how open they are to community influence, in relation to their potential to respond to that influence. It helps (any) officers to consider what the barriers are and what they might be able to do to remove them. I think that tools such as echo are much more meaningful if they are being related to the work of CDWs and their role working with communities. (See the

following for information about echo: <http://changesuk.net/resources/axis-of-influence-series-voice-and-echo>)

Range of organisations employing CDWs (p4)

As our panel chair, John Bennigton (Warwick Business School), has suggested, we could extend our definition of CD to encompass others in addition to paid professional CD staff – including front-line workers and volunteers in a range of settings and informal activists. I wholeheartedly support this, and as a result feel that the information in our panel paper in relation to this offers only one small part of a much wider and more diverse context.

CDX member Shamsheer Chohan has responded likewise:

I think there is a point to be made around who does CD, I know the research focussed on workers but most people that say they are doing CD are volunteers or community activists and therefore would be under the radar outside their immediate areas of concern or work. I think a lot of CD work is invisible which makes it harder to recognise when there has been a parallel professionalisation of CD. I would like to think regardless that the values remain the key to successful CD work whoever does it. Thus the lack of funding would not be a barrier as mentioned on page 5. Think there needs to be a greater recognition of the informal CD work that most people do as volunteers and so it is not seen as an occupation as such but an approach.

Strategic co-ordination across localities? (p5)

I appreciate the point made in the paper about CD being difficult to recognise from the outside, and I'm interested in the idea that there might be 'something inherent in CD itself which makes it resistant to strategic co-ordination'. This reminded me of a book called *The Starfish and The Spider* by Rod Beckstrom and Ori Brafman.

The title metaphor conveys the core concept: though a starfish and a spider have similar shapes, their internal structure is dramatically different-a decapitated spider inevitably dies, while a starfish can regenerate itself from a single amputated leg. In the same way, decentralized organizations, like the Internet, the Apache Indian tribe and Alcoholics Anonymous, are made up of many smaller units capable of operating, growing and multiplying independently of each other, making it very difficult for a rival force to control or defeat them.

From <http://www.starfishandspider.com>

I rather like the idea of CD being resilient to control or defeat due to an inherent characteristic. So it makes me wonder whether we should embrace and celebrate a lack of strategic co-ordination. However I am concerned about the statistics from the CDW survey presented on page 10 of the panel paper which tell us that many people taking part in the survey aren't linked to regional or national CD networks. It feels to me as though our starfish-like capability might be threatened by this lack of connectedness at some level.

CD's adaptation to policy aims (p5)

Regarding CDWs, teams and projects *adapting practice to prevailing policy currents* I wonder to what extent we would find the same in other fields of public sector and voluntary sector work. If it

is prevalent across many fields is it perhaps as a result of more effective command and control by government? And is it to do with what funders increasingly seek? Melanie asks whether such survival tactics have backfired because of the fact that CD remains so insecure. I feel that looking only at evidence from a group of 'professional' CDWs and manager skews the picture somewhat. There is no doubt a lot of activity led by CD activists which isn't aligned with policy, indeed might be against current policy objectives, and should be considered as part of any thinking about CD's 'insecurity'.

Here are more related and helpful challenges from CDX member Gary Craig:

The claim that 'throughout the New Labour period, CD practice has become more aligned to government policy priorities' needs at the very least to be examined in detail; and we need to ask the question why, if it is the case, this is so? But it is also redolent of a perspective from the centre: there are many CD workers who would actually challenge this assertion. Their difficulty is that they are trying – as CD workers have done for many years - to promote other perspectives in the face of government's (of whatever stripe) refusal to listen to them or accede to their communities demands and priorities.

To take another important example, we know that funding for autonomous BME community organisations has always been disproportionately small compared with the needs presented by these communities, and that funding for community work with such populations has been circumscribed, the more so since community cohesion policy has been introduced. The present rounds of cuts will exacerbate this situation substantially but the paper lacks any kind of analysis to suggest that this might be the case or how institutional racism, reflected both in community cohesion policy and more widely in many aspects of government policy and service delivery, underpins this situation.

Community cohesion indeed, rather than reflecting, as the paper suggests, a desire to enhance 'community-based approaches' is an approach which seeks to obscure the racist basis of much policy-making. It is certainly not driven by a concern with racial justice, one of the underpinning values of community development. Where programmes have been constructed apparently to deliver racial justice, as I found in an evaluation of the Department of Health's Delivering Race Equality programme, in reality the focus on work with BME groups has remained quite marginal to the concerns of those delivering mainstream services. There can be little doubt that the present and future rounds of expenditure cuts will bear down disproportionately on minority groups, amongst others; this suggests important roles for community development in defending marginalised groups, arguing against broad brush programmes of public expenditure cuts and the privatisation of public services, but this approach is not addressed substantially in the paper.

Measuring and demonstrating impact (pp6-7)

Panel member John Low finds what is presented in our panel paper in relation to evaluation methods worrying. CDX member Gary Craig has suggested that our panel paper doesn't reflect a full picture. He points us towards the following for their perspectives on how the impact of community development might be evaluated (I found the links, so I hope they are useful).

- Alan Barr – developed the LEAP framework which seems to be used a lot in Scotland:
http://leap.scdc.org.uk/leap-framework/?sess_scdc=dc2da5d1b078b2c12d074c457681e868

- COGS - <http://cogs.uk.net/index.php?page=Evaluation>
- Marilyn Taylor - <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1859354157.pdf>
- Gary Craig - <http://www2.hull.ac.uk/fass/wise/people/honorary-fellows/professor-gary-craig.aspx>

My experience of working with CD specialists **changes** has also helped me and my colleagues in Dudley to use CD based planning and evaluation frameworks, such as DiCE and Voice (<http://changesuk.net/resources/dice/> and <http://changesuk.net/resources/axis-of-influence-series-voice-and-echo/>).

I also wonder to what extent in this area of discussion may we consider self-reflection and group reflection to be helpful evaluation tools. In relation to this and also for wider evaluation we could consider the application of frameworks such as the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for CD – though I recognise that some people find the NOS overly complex.

I feel that the above offer opportunities to consider the quality of the CD intervention, though I appreciate Melanie's point that there doesn't seem to be anything specifically focused on evaluating CD intervention, and area which CDX and others are currently working on.

Rebuilding the relationship with grassroots groups (p7)

At CDX we are concerned about CDWs new to the field lacking a critical and political approach in their practice, and so would concur with the issues raised about their practice and ability to adapt when faced with the realities of community concerns and priorities.

CD skills and training (pp8-10)

CDX member Shamsheer Chohan comments: *Re. supporting skills for CD, with values being a core part of this is there something to say that you either have these values or not? Can you really teach values? I think you can through learning from case studies and examples of good work but I feel there is an element of even the most experienced CD workers operating too much from a top down perspective. How does this get addressed?*

CDX member David Randall, Coordinator of Vital Kingston, is new to CD and concurs with the findings of the paper about the fragmentary nature of CD work and the lack of a formal system of entry into it and coherent progression routes through it. David started his CD career this year (at the age of 49).

He said: *I recently got interested in developing places for social interaction because I believe that these are hubs or anchors for community, but I am finding that mapping and visualising a realistic career path through this work is a real challenge. With a family of 4 to feed I can't afford to do it all just as a volunteer, and if I was working full time I feel I wouldn't have the energy for this complex and demanding work.*

I have a very good post grad and PhD education already and a clear idea of what I want to achieve, but it feels as though there isn't any area that I can work in in the regeneration world without having to go back to school. The CDF advised me to keep an eye on sector publications like New

Start, Regeneration and Renewal, and Third Sector for vacancies but I haven't seen any opportunities that would utilise my managerial and business experience.

CDX member Andrew Pilley, a Community Development Manager at Chichester District Council agrees. Andrew is an experienced CD Worker, Manager of CD workers, Activist, and Ba (Hons) Student of CD currently. He said: *I do strongly agree that the lack of a professional structure or skills accreditation to the profession is an issue to employers (and staff), especially in the public sector. As a result of the continuing strategic ambiguity as to what CDWs actually do and are qualified to achieve, causes confusion and lack of understanding amongst employers and communities. To many it retains the 'fluffy' image of do gooders helping out, rather than being seen as an essential service for deprived communities. Whilst this can be clarified by practice and outcomes, it often prevents CD from being adopted as a process in the first place in many regards, so minimising opportunities.*

It has the knock on impact (highlighted in the paper) of not encouraging new recruits into the profession so increasing the average age of CDWs, reinforcing a low, underpaid / valued and misunderstood profile for CD work, and of making CD easy pickings in the face of the austerity cuts being faced. 'Professional' CD will always struggle to be taken seriously in this regard without such a structure as set against social and youth work professional processes and competencies.

Boundaries between civil society, the state and the market

Our panel chair, John Bennington, has raised the issue of the public being defined as individual consumers and users of services, and a resulting need to (re)create a sense of identity as also being something communal. Panel member Marj Mayo has also raised the issue of individualisation and made some comments which I found interesting in relation to transnational forms of citizenship and the context of globalisation.

CDX member Gray Craig raises a related issue: *Apart from the most obvious criticism of the market, which is that it does not deliver social justice but rather leads to increasing inequalities and thus places itself in direct opposition to the fundamental values of community development, it seems clear that the proposed marketisation of community development activity demonstrates little understanding of what CD is actually trying to do.*

The panel and evidence

CDX members Gabriel Chanan and Colin Miller are anxious that the panel and evidence include people from outside the CD practitioner circle itself, and critical voices. I feel that CDF are involving non-CD practitioners in the panel and I am keen to discuss with CDF, through the panel, the opportunities to involve others in a wider debate. I understand that CDF and the panel chair have been discussing ways to do this.

Gabriel and Colin also offer 'Practical standards' and other papers (including *The Big Society: How Could it Work?*) as contributions to the new debate about CD – available from <http://www.pacesempowerment.co.uk/pacesempowerment/Publications.html>

Issues around the independence of our panel

Mark Walton kindly took the time to respond to issues raised by CDX members which I posted on CDX's blog (see this page <http://bit.ly/aDvktH> and Mark's responses posted on this page: <http://bit.ly/bLBs0g>).

Mark said that CDF wanted to *"set up a panel process that was 'independent' in that it would not contain or be delivered by staff from CDF and would draw in voices outside the CD practitioner circle"*. I think that while CDF have taken steps to achieve this, we can't ignore the fact that CDF staff and CDF research are framing the focus of our discussion. CDX member Professor Gary Craig has noted that 9 of 10 references listed in our first panel paper are from sources associated with CDF. And much of the paper drew on CDF's 2009 survey of CD practitioners and managers.

I hope that CDF will support us as a panel to make critical challenges to their papers, as I feel we have been doing, and over time I hope that a wider evidence base will be drawn on. I feel that it is our role as panel members to bring wider evidence to the debate and I trust that we will continue to do this.

Warm regards

Lorna Prescott
CDX Chair

30 August 2010