



Supporting people who support communities in Scotland

***Community
Development Practice
in Scotland -
The Reality Behind
the Rhetoric***

**Report of engagement with 356 Community
Development practitioners throughout Scotland**

1. Introduction

SCDN is a member led organisation for people who, paid or unpaid:

- Have community development as their main role or part of their remit
- Actively use community development approaches
- Support the values and principles and approaches of community development
- Aspire to use community development approaches in their practice

Membership is open to individuals, groups and organisations who ascribe to the principles and practice of community development.

We currently have around 200 members and a further 250 contacts.

2. When we talk about community development, we mean:

“...a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities and communities of interest or identity and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organisations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies (public, private and non-governmental) to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. It has a set of core values / social principles covering, human rights, social inclusion, equality and respect for diversity; and a specific skills and knowledge base”.¹

¹ <http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/documents/budapestdeclaration4683d.pdf>

Put another way:

“Good community development work is done in ways which challenge disadvantage and tackle inequalities. It involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and people in positions of power. It is not simply about listening to the loudest voices, or doing things the way they have always been done. It is an approach to achieving social change. It is based on the idea that disadvantage and social injustice cannot be tackled by top-down solutions alone”²

3. Why engage with practitioners

As a member led organisation, SCDN feels it is important to engage with a broad range of community development practitioners in order to more effectively reflect their views. In particular we sought:

- To develop a picture of the reality for CD practitioners across Scotland (including unpaid practitioners)
- To analyse this picture in the context of current policy aspirations
- To more effectively capture and reflect practitioners views
- To develop our ‘services’ in response to practitioners’ needs

4. How we engaged

We used a number of methods to gather views, including individual responses via questionnaires and PP voting and discussion and dialogue at a range of events. In total we engaged with 356 practitioners.

Individual responses

We received 25 submissions on our online survey and 57 participants in our PP voting. (Full analysis of responses outlined in appendix 1 to this report)

Discussion and dialogue

We facilitated discussion and dialogue with practitioners across Scotland through delivering events and workshops including:

²

<http://www.communitydevelopmentalliancescotland.org/documents/WhatCommunityDevelopmentDoes.pdf>

- SCDN conferences in 2013 and 2014, attracting a total of 132 practitioners³
- 2 discussion groups at the partnership national conference *What Vision for Community Development in Scotland* in June 2014, where we engaged with 32 practitioners⁴
- Regional events in Glasgow, Dumfries and Galloway, Nairn⁵ and Ayrshire⁶, attracting a total of 110 practitioners.

Geographical areas covered are detailed in Appendix 2

5. Community Development (CD) practice in 2013 / 15

There are some excellent examples across Scotland of communities being supported by community development practitioners to address local needs and build community strengths. However, there is less evidence of work that helps communities to analyse and understand the root causes of the issues that they are working on.

SCDN sought to develop more of an understanding of why this element of CD practice appears to be largely missing from practice on the ground.

Across all of our engagements most practitioners reported that they are operating within a top down environment, with externally determined outcomes and short timescales for CD interventions. They reported that there is little space to nurture independent community activity or to analyse implications of decisions, programmes or policy directives and that grass roots holistic approaches are rare. Practitioners felt that their CD skills are underutilised, with key processes missing and that they are often driven by

³ The State of Social Justice: Community Development in a post referendum Scotland www.scdn.org.uk
BACK TO THE FUTURE? Community Development Roots, Realities and Responses
<http://www.scdn.org.uk/conference-2013/4582727981>

⁴ <http://www.communitydevelopmentalliancescotland.org/cdas-news/community-development-what-vision-for-scotland-what-we-discussed>

⁵ <http://www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/NORTHALLIANCE/index.asp?pageid=592990>

⁶ www.scdn.org.uk

fear and job insecurity. In addition, practitioners feel that there is a general lack of understanding of the complex skills involved in community development. Practitioners feel undervalued, under-resourced and over stretched.

SCDN would suggest that the potential impact of this practice context is that communities are less equipped to really understand the root causes of disadvantage, social injustice and inequalities.

We would raise the question: To what extent, within this context, can communities work collectively to achieve sustainable, positive change?

6. Aspirations of CD practitioners

“We would like to see a Scotland where community development is recognised, valued and resourced and where CD practitioners are supported to work effectively with communities to develop their strength, influence and impact on the issues that matter to them”

SCDN discussion groups: What Vision for Community Development conference, June 2014

In contrast to the realities of current contexts, practitioners highlighted a context which would facilitate more effective and empowering practice. Practitioners would have flexibility and autonomy of practice with space and ability to take risks. The starting point would be at community level where outcomes are developed with communities through discussion, dialogue and analysis. Practitioners would be supported by those who understand and value CD. Practice would be value based with a focus on human rights, equality and social justice. Compassion would be evident in work with communities which would include enabling communities to challenge inequalities and social injustice.

Long term investment in CD would enable more positive and long term impact.

7. Policy / political context within Scotland

Social justice was one of the key central issues within the referendum debate across communities, indicating a strong desire within Scotland to challenge the increasing inequalities, austerity measures and the rolling back of state provided services for those most in need, This grass roots mobilisation and challenge mirrors the increasing focus of the Scottish Government on social justice.

In addition, current policy and statutory drivers including the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill 2015 and Strengthening Local Democracy should be taken into consideration and the critical role community development practitioners can play in the implementation of key policy aspirations.

And yet, grass roots CD practitioners indicate practice environments where there is little space to work with communities in a way that facilitates analysis of the broader context which creates the disadvantage being experienced by them.

The referendum demonstrated that, without the active mobilisation and engagement of grass roots communities, change will be difficult, if not impossible to achieve.

8. Recommendations

Across all our engagements we asked what needs to be done to unleash the skills of CD practitioners in order to support communities to fully and effectively engage with the Scotland's priorities of challenging social injustice and inequalities.

Practitioners identified a number of measures that could develop more empowering practice:

- Value based and informed practice
 - ✓ Practice with integrity and within our values of social justice, human rights and equalities

- ✓ Continually analyse policy developments and contexts to identify opportunities for / potential impacts on communities
 - ✓ Recognise that, whilst community processes might be different from those of public sector agencies, often the desired outcomes are the same
- Creative practice
 - ✓ Take risks and remember why we are involved in CD
 - ✓ Recognise and value small change
 - ✓ Be pragmatic as well as creative
- Network and support
 - ✓ Pool resources together to help more people instead of being protective of own patch / funding
 - ✓ Create alliances across agencies, services and sectors
 - ✓ Stop getting bogged down with issues like “CD is a profession”

SCDN Practitioners identified the way in which SCDN could help to develop more empowering practice:

- Promote Community Development
 - ✓ Promote / raise the profile of CD at national and local level
 - ✓ Consider developing a national CD policy, strategy or manifesto
 - ✓ Initiate discussions with key funders to raise awareness of the long term and preventative nature of CD
- Networking
 - ✓ Support the development of regional networks to feed into SCDN
 - ✓ Showcase effective and value based practice on the ground
 - ✓ Encourage connections across agencies

Government practitioners stated that recognising and valuing CD practice was crucial to enabling practice that empowers communities:

- Recognise and value the role of CD* in achieving national aspirations around social justice and equalities
- Legitimise the work of CD practitioners at grass roots level
- Ensure that CD is explicit across relevant government policies

- Listen and respond to the knowledge and concerns of this skilled workforce

(*SCDN would suggest that more clarity is needed about what CD is and what it is not. Our suggestions in appendix 3)

9. SCDN services

As a member led organisation, we were also keen to explore specific supports that practitioners would like from SCDN and the following key areas emerged:

- News and Information on current CD issues & policy developments, resources and tools
- Collective practitioner voice at national level /policy discussions to promote CD
- Networking / Sharing good practice and information / Opportunities to learn from each other, upskilling and continued practitioner development and support

Practitioners also identified in what way SCDN might help to develop practice:

- Increase knowledge, confidence and motivation
- Learn from each other / reflect on, share and improve practice
- Develop connections and partnerships

When asked what topics practitioners would most like to be kept informed about (in order of prevalence):

- Community empowerment
- Community led regeneration
- Health inequality
- CD practice / values and approaches
- CLD Regulations
- Democratic renewal
- Community Planning

When asked what topics would be most useful to explore to support practitioner development at SCDN regional and national events (in order of prevalence):

- Networking , sharing knowledge and experience
- Analysing political and policy contexts
- Discussing strategies for promoting the value of CD
- Exploring the breadth of CD practice in Scotland
- Examining regulations and occupational standards
- Re-asserting CD values, principles and approaches

10. The Way forward

In response to the findings of our engagements, SCDN will:

- Work with our CD partners to promote community development at national level, including generating dialogue on the development of a national CD strategy or manifesto
- Develop partnerships with other relevant agencies to promote effective and empowering community development practice
- Further develop services to our members
- Utilise responses to inform our action planning and evaluations

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Survey Responses

Appendix 2 – Coverage of Local Authority Areas

Appendix 1 – A Note on Community Development

Appendix 1 - SCDN Practitioners Survey - Individual responses

A total of 25 submissions were received from practitioners throughout Scotland, including West Dumbarton, North Lanarkshire, Glasgow, North and South Ayrshires, Highlands, Dumfries and Galloway, Aberdeenshire and 57 contributions from PP voting at the SCDN annual conference in Perth 2014

1. What would you like to get out of being a SCDN member?	Survey %	PP voting %
News and Information on current CD issues & policy developments resources and tools	37.5	N/A
Collective practitioner voice at national level /policy discussions to promote CD	21	N/A
Networking / Sharing good practice and information / Opportunities to learn from each other, upskilling and continued practitioner development and support	42	N/A

2. SCDN aims to provide opportunities for CD practitioners to share information and experience. In what way might this help you to develop your practice?	Survey	PP Voting %
Increase knowledge, confidence and motivation	21	N/A
Learn from each other / reflect on , share and improve practice	63	N/A
Develop connections and partnerships	8.5	N/A
No response	8.5	N/A

How would you like us to communicate with you?	Survey %	PP voting (57) %
Email	87.5	84
Website	37.5	7
Facebook	30	7
Phone	17	2
Twitter	8.5	0

Appendix 2 – Coverage of Local Authority Areas

We engaged with practitioners from 25 of the 32 Local Authority areas, from public and voluntary sectors and from universities and colleges. Those areas covered are shown in black below, with the remainder in red.

1. Inverclyde
2. Renfrewshire
3. West Dunbartonshire
4. East Dunbartonshire
5. Glasgow
6. East Renfrewshire
7. North Lanarkshire
8. Falkirk
9. West Lothian
10. Edinburgh
11. Midlothian
12. East Lothian
13. Clackmannanshire
14. Fife
15. Dundee
16. Angus
17. Aberdeenshire
18. Aberdeen
19. Moray
20. Highland
21. Na h-Eileanan Siar
22. Argyll and Bute
23. Perth and Kinross
24. Stirling
25. North Ayrshire
26. East Ayrshire
27. South Ayrshire
28. Dumfries and Galloway
29. South Lanarkshire
30. Scottish Borders
31. Orkney
32. Shetland

Appendix 3

A Note on Community Development

Community Development is a deliberate intervention in how people organise themselves on issues of joint concern. It is a holistic process which encompasses the following key components around helping people in communities to:

- Recognise and organise around issues of common concern
- Work together on those issues
- Build organisations which are autonomous, strong, effective, sustainable and accountable to the wider community
- Work within values of equity, inclusiveness and cohesion
- Influence and transform public policies and services
- Build social capital, social economy and community assets ⁷

CD also, uniquely, advises and informs public authorities on community perspectives and assists them to strengthen communities and work in genuine partnership with them.

Community Development Work is often confused with community development approach within other professions / roles.

Community Development is different from learning in the

community Community Development involves learning for community organisations and their members as they work to achieve their goals and is distinct from learning for individuals in the community.

The main focus of learning in the community is the personal development of individuals to help them achieve positive changes in their personal (rather than collective community) life. Recognise that, whilst this has a valuable contribution to make to the development of civil society, it is not Community Development.

Community Development is more than Community capacity building

⁷ A Community Development Vision For Scotland: SCDN Manifesto for Community Development March, '07 <http://www.scdn.org.uk/resources/4582728009>

Community Capacity building is one part of Community Development / Community Work that focuses on working directly with community groups and organisations.