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## **WHO IS DRIVING DEVELOPMENT?**

### **REFLECTIONS ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract**

*Arising out of a critique of needs-based approaches to development, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) offers a set of principles and practices to mobilize and sustain community economic development. This paper draws attention to the connections between these principles and practices and (i) current interest in sustainable livelihoods as a conceptual framework, (ii) the concept of social capital, (iii) the social psychology of mobilization, (iv) the enhancement of capacity and agency to engage as citizens with the entitlements of citizenship, (v) the role of multiple stakeholders; and (vi) the issue of control over the development process. Finally the paper, points to the challenges for NGOs employing an asset-based, community-driven approach given the needs-based, problem-solving paradigm in which they operate.*

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**WHO IS DRIVING DEVELOPMENT?  
REFLECTIONS ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF ASSET-  
BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

In order to be involved in, or be a guide to, the transforming of the present into a future state — the essence of our work — one must have the skill to do this in such a way that the object with which one is working is not violated, but is *transformed according to its own laws*.

*Kaplan (2002, p.140)*

The Coady International Institute runs a five month educational program in Community-Based Development, in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada. The majority of our participants are from the global South, typically working in mid to senior level management positions in the NGO sector. In 2002, we posed our participants a challenge:

*Write a "story" about a community development initiative that was initiated and driven by members of the community, drawing on the community's own resources, with little or no outside assistance from external institutions.*

At first, the participants struggled with this challenge. Despite espousing participatory rhetoric, they had been used to thinking about community development as something their organizations planned and implemented. *They* were the change agents. However, once they started to think about genuine community-driven development — often drawing on examples from communities in which they lived — it was difficult to stop them. We collected 52 stories about communities all over the world where citizens had linked and mobilized various community assets to bring about positive change.

What stands out in these stories is the role of particular individuals who catalyze the process of development in their communities, and the strong base of associations or social networks that are mobilized in such a process. These catalysts may be traditional leaders, or they may be leaders who emerge because they have had some formal education or they may have travelled or worked elsewhere and returned with new ideas. Such leaders (whether men, women, or youth) are able to stimulate a sense of pride and possibility. They recognize the potential within the community, as well as in "sons or daughters" living elsewhere. They recognize opportunities available through making connections and linkages with agencies interested in investing in communities that can demonstrate that potential.

The stories illustrate a wide variety of ways in which the assets of communities were combined and channelled towards realizing a community priority. Roads, bridges, and schools were built; tracts of land were reforested to guarantee fuel and water supplies; land was secured for co-operative commercial cash crop production; campaigns against factory owners that were polluting the environment were organized; homes for HIV-AIDS orphans were found. The list is long. Many of these initiatives started out very small, built some

momentum, then grew into more ambitious endeavours. Notably, external institutions only got involved *after* communities had already demonstrated their organizing and mobilizing capacity.

The purpose of this exercise was to recognize and learn from spontaneous, endogenous community-driven development. This in turn can help us answer the question: What can be done to stimulate such a process where it is not taking place? Turning to the principles and practical suggestions of *Asset-Based Community Development*, we began to consider its applicability to community-level realities and its complementarity with current theoretical frameworks.

### Asset-Based Community Development

The work of Jody Kretzmann and John McKnight of the Institute of Policy Research at Northwestern University grew out of two years of seeking, discovering, and analyzing similar kinds of stories of endogenous community development in low income urban neighbourhoods in the United States, culminating in their 1993 book *Building Communities from the Inside Out: Asset-Based Community Development*. The premise of this book is that communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing (but often unrecognized) assets, thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunity. Such unrealized resources include not only personal attributes and skills, but also the relationships among people that fuel local associations and informal networks. Mobilizing such social assets can activate more formal institutional resources such as local government, formal community-based organizations, and private enterprise. In this way, the community development process is sustained and scaled up, while continuing to recognize local associations as the driving force — the vehicles through which all the community's assets can be identified and then connected to one another in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness.

The reasons for successful community-driven development shed light on the paralysis of other community development efforts. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) challenge the well-intentioned efforts of a number of actors — universities, donor agencies, governments, and the mass media — that have focused on the needs, problems, and deficiencies of low-income communities, and the emergence of a layer of agencies with a problem-solving mission (see also Brock, Cornwall, & Gaventa, 2001, p. 5). Kretzmann and McKnight argue that the consequences of a needs-based, problem-solving approach can be devastating: leadership that denigrates the community by emphasizing the severity of problems in order to attract resources; and people in these communities internalizing a view of themselves as incapable of initiating positive change, leading to a pervasive feeling of hopelessness. Communities become further weakened by a reliance on outside institutions to solve their problems, and perversely those institutions develop a vested interest in maintaining this dependency (see also Fowler, 2000). Finally, Kretzmann and McKnight argue, viewing a community as a list of problems and needs leads to a fragmentation of efforts to provide solutions. This denies the breadth and depth of community wisdom which regards problems — and the community's own problem-solving capacities — as tightly intertwined.

As an approach to development, Asset-Based Community Development takes as its starting point the existing assets and strengths of community, particularly the strengths inherent in community-based associations and other social networks. As a strategy, it is shaped by a distinctive set of principles and these, in turn, inform field-based methods and practices. Although no blueprint exists, these methods might include: interviews to elicit examples of successful community initiatives and to identify hidden and unrecognized assets; "asset-mapping" when the full range of assets on which the community can draw are comprehensively recorded and documented; mobilization of a core group of community organizers; initiation of a community activity that requires no outside assistance; and a progressive scaling up of such activities, as linkages to external institutions are called upon to invest in community-driven development initiatives.

Our own work over the last two years has involved making the shift from a problem-based focus to an asset-based approach in our thinking, in our practice, and in our educational courses at the Coady Institute. To some degree this has meant reasserting our heritage in the Antigonish Movement and the teachings of Moses Coady, who emphasized the inherent capabilities of people who needed to be "remotivated" to take control over their livelihoods, not "remade" (Alexander, 1997, p.156). We have also found that it strikes a chord with the experience of development practitioners who attend our educational programs. This is partly because they have witnessed the disempowering effects of problem-focused development agency practice, but also because an asset-based approach appears to be more consistent with the dynamism, fluidity, and differentiation of the diverse communities with which they work.

We have also found that this approach integrates much of the innovative practice occupying centre stage in development literature, such as that on sustainable livelihoods, the role of social capital, democratization via decentralization, governance and civil society, and psycho-social strategies for community mobilization (see Mathie & Cunningham, 2002).

In this paper, we elaborate further on two aspects: the fit between an asset-based approach to community development practice and the analytical framework provided in the literature on sustainable livelihoods; and the implications of an asset-based approach for the role of the external agency. The central message is that the transformation of the external agency is essential for the transformative potential of an asset-based approach to be realized.

### **From Analytical Framework to a Mode of Practice: Assets, Capitals and Capacities**

As promoted by the British Department of International Development (DFID) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the sustainable livelihoods approach has three essential features. Firstly, as a framework for analysis, it draws attention to the full range of assets that people draw upon to compose a livelihood, namely human, natural, financial, physical, and social and/or cultural assets. Secondly, as an instrument for policy and program design to reduce vulnerability, it emphasizes a holistic understanding of development so that an adequate asset mix can be created, sustained, and transferred from

one generation to the next, a feature which has now translated into policies and programs dedicated to asset-building for sustainable livelihood outcomes. Thirdly, it puts people in the community squarely at the centre as the principle agents of development, acting through community based organizations to collaborate with various other agents such as local government, NGOs, and the private sector (DFID, 2001; UNDP, 1997). We will explore each of these in turn before demonstrating how an asset-based approach provides a means of operationalizing the sustainable livelihoods framework at the community level.

Illustrating the use of the sustainable livelihoods approach as an analytical frame, Bebbington (1999) shows how agrarian Andean communities that had been narrowly viewed as "non viable" (i.e. deficient in the natural assets necessary for peasant agricultural production) were in fact able to sustain themselves. They did so by an astute use of their social, cultural, financial, human, physical, *and* natural assets that allowed them to combine an agrarian livelihood base with remittances from family members working in towns; some household members hiring themselves out as seasonal labour; family farm amalgamation and capitalization; and rural industrial development and commerce. In other words, the asset-base is in a constant state of flux as some assets are used, some replenished, and some created anew in the process of creating and sustaining livelihood strategies.

Bebbington (1999) goes on to argue that assets are more than just resources with instrumental value for economic purposes. Drawing on the work of Amartya Sen, Anthony Giddens, and Jurgen Habermas, he makes the case that assets also give people the capacity or potential to act, and thus are a source of meaningful engagement with the world. In other words, people's sense of identity and purpose is bound up in the various assets or capacities that they have. In a related sense, assets are also the basis on which people take action; they can empower people to challenge the structures that determine the way in which resources are allocated. However, these assets cannot be activated without *access* to them. Social capital is therefore a particularly important asset because it provides access to other assets, and it is access that is the most critical resource of all (p. 2002).

As the key to a people-centred approach, the critical role played by social capital has been well documented in a large and growing literature that attempts to both define and operationalize it. There is broad agreement that social capital is present in the networks, norms, and social trust inherent in associations whose members work together in concerted collaborative action (Frankenburger & Garrett, 1998; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). More specifically, social capital is the store of goodwill and obligations generated by social relations. Looked at in this way, networks, norms, and social trust are all evidence of social relations in which social capital has been generated. Thus, as Woolcock and Narayan point out, the adage "It is not what you know, but *who* you know," refers to the potential support that arises from social relationships that have been created through collaborative activity, or have been inherited through family or class membership. Like other forms of capital, social capital is a *latent* asset, and individuals can increase or deplete it depending on where they stand in the reciprocal exchange of social support and obligation.

Woolcock and Narayan (2000) provide the useful distinction between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital. Bonding social capital is evident in the close knit relations of friends and

families who can be depended on for basic survival in times of stress. It is bonding social capital, for example, that will be drawn upon by a family with insufficient food for survival, or by a woman whose husband is sick and unable to contribute his share of labour (see also Haddad & Maluccio, 2002). By contrast, bridging social capital provides leverage in relationships beyond the confines of one's own affinity group, or even beyond the local community. Educated relatives in the town may, for example, guarantee a larger loan to accelerate the growth of a small enterprise run by extended family members. Relationships cultivated by a community with local authorities might influence the decision about the location of a road to facilitate marketing.

Regardless of whether social capital is used to bond or to bridge, the aggregate value of social capital to local economic development is now widely recognized. Putnam (1993), for example, demonstrated the relationship between regional variations in economic performance in Northern Italy and the degree to which people were involved in voluntary civic associations. These associations provided the connections and the experience of collaborative effort for the individual and collective good, which spun-off in local economic growth. More recent studies point to the way in which collective activity contributes to social capital — for example, peer group micro-finance schemes create co-operation and trust that contribute to social and economic benefits beyond the loan access itself (Szabo, 1999). Dupar and Badenoch (2002), in a recent collection of case studies on decentralization in South East Asia, show how high stocks of social capital result in more effective partnerships with local government, and stronger partnerships in turn result in more effective local resource management. The synergy in these partnerships occurs because communities with stocks of social capital (and therefore stronger interpersonal levels and expectations of trust) are able to demand greater responsiveness from local institutions; at the same time, local institutions are likely to view that stock of social capital as a reason to invest in the community. A particularly vivid example of this kind of synergy is evident in the attitude of the municipal authorities of Curitiba, Brazil (under the leadership of its dynamic mayor) towards the potential and initiative of community groups within municipal boundaries — communities were not seen as a burden draining local resources, but as sources of human and social capacities to revitalize the local economy.

This synergistic relationship between social capital and mediating agency is of particular relevance to the discussion that follows later in this paper on the implications of an asset-based approach on the role of the external agency. Krishna (2002), in his recent study on social capital in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, provides insights into this relationship. He points out that social capital by itself only represents a “propensity for collective action,” whereas various institutions of the state and the market provide “incentives or disincentives for collective action” (p.170). For social capital to be activated a mediating agency is required (parties, unions, interest groups, trade associations, etc.) to help citizens make the necessary connections with state and market organizations. Without these mediating agencies, and without the leadership to make these connections, “social capital and institutional incentives remain disconnected, and societal performance suffers” (p. 171). Associational life therefore requires the catalyzing influence of leadership in many guises — traditional leadership



making social capital productive for the purpose of community peace, and “new non-caste-based political entrepreneurs [to] activate the stock of social capital for achieving benefits related to economic development and participation in democracy” (p. xi). The question then remains how external agents can provide the “minimal external stimulus” (Bergdall, 2003, p. 2) for internal leadership to emerge and to activate social capital where this does not occur spontaneously.

### **Asset-Based Community Development: The Practical Application of Sustainable Livelihoods Frameworks and Social Capital Theory**

In their assessment of “community development in sustainable livelihood approaches,” Brockleby and Fisher (2003) lament the absence of discussions about community development practices that could translate the sustainable livelihoods approach to action on the ground. Explaining this absence, they argue:

The normative frameworks of analysis that sustainable livelihoods embody, which are so obviously embedded in northern technocratic discourses, tend to focus on the technical nature of development (Moser and Norton, 2001, p.7), ignoring or rejecting the transformative aspirations, values, and principles underpinning much current community level development practice. (p. 194)

Against the background of the analytical framework provided in the sustainable livelihoods approach, and the concerns about on the ground practice raised by Brocklesby and Fisher, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) appears to offer (i) a practical means of operationalizing the approach at the community level, while (ii) challenging the technocratic decision-making process that critics have associated with the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA). This claim is based on the following four complementarities of ABCD and the SLA approach.

First, the ABCD approach takes as its starting point the position that people have strengths and capacities, and that uncovering these is a key motivator for taking action proactively. This does not mean to say that proponents of ABCD and other strength-based approaches deny the existence of problems, or the need to solve some problems urgently. However, they argue that other problems may lose their urgency, or be solved indirectly when an unrelated change in activity takes place that galvanizes people’s interest and effort. In this way, the energy that was focused on the problem becomes re-focused on, for example, renewed collaborative action based on existing strengths and capacities (Ashford & Patkar, 2001).

This uncovering of assets occurs inductively — stories are told of successful community endeavours (which might include coping strategies in times of crisis). They are analyzed collectively, building up an inventory of assets that range from the personal/individual (incorporating elements of human capital), through associational (incorporating social capital), to assets in the local economy (physical, natural, financial capital). Affirmation of those assets plays a key role, as Bebbington (1999) notes, in giving each and every person a sense of capacity and purpose. While structural inequalities and differences in power and

status are recognized, they are not necessarily presented as obstacles. The ABCD approach is designed to recognize the attributes and potential contributions of all — irrespective of age, gender, or class — and to show where opportunities for collaboration exist for mutual gain. As the examples drawn from participants in the Coady Institute’s educational programs illustrate, the emergence of a new cadre of social entrepreneurs mobilizing community effort, the demonstration of capacity, and the capacity building that is experienced in the process may all contribute to reshaping these power asymmetries.

Second, ABCD stresses the key role played by formal and informal associations, networks, and extended families at the community level, and by the social relationships that connect local initiatives to external windows of opportunity. In this way, while all types of assets are taken into consideration in the ABCD approach, particular importance is attached to identifying, strengthening, and mobilizing social capital located in this associational base, precisely because, as Bebbington (1999) points out, this is the key to accessing the other assets needed for community economic development. An ABCD approach highlights how and why associations in the community have been able to mobilize people for change in the past, pointing to the voluntary nature of (non kin-based) associations, the trust and reciprocity that characterizes relationships among members, and the characteristics of leadership in essentially horizontal (rather than hierarchical) organizations. If each and every individual participates in several associations and social networks for different purposes, the traffic of social connections inside and beyond the community is potentially huge.

Third, the ABCD approach provides practical tools and methods that can be used by community members to identify and link assets. These include tools for mapping assets and analyzing the local economy, illustrating the potential linkages among assets to optimize local economic opportunity for both exporting out of the community and plugging the leaks that lead to unnecessary draining of resources. Mapping techniques also provide the means for putting value on skills, talents, and capacities that might otherwise be taken for granted in conventional economic analysis, ensuring (for example) that natural, social, and cultural assets are also taken into consideration. It is thus necessarily holistic in its orientation. Just as the sustainable livelihoods approach encourages practitioners to “think holistically, act sectorally,” an ABCD approach encourages community-level activity that optimizes that community’s asset-base, while conscious of that activity’s interconnections with other aspects of community life.

Fourth, the ABCD approach is not only people-centred (as in the sustainable livelihoods approach), but is a *citizen-driven* approach. The logical consequence of focusing on assets, capacities, and capabilities is to encourage a proactive role for the citizen, replacing the passive, dependent role of client in the welfare service delivery model of community development practice. The active citizen mobilizes (or is mobilized) at the associational level. As associational life gains momentum, it builds up the capacity over time to leverage external resources, and to claim rights and access to services to which community members are entitled by virtue of state or global citizenship. For example, a group of artisans may need to draw on local resources to ensure a sustained product line. It will also need linkages with external agencies that can help in the design and marketing of its product. ABCD can be an

effective mechanism for establishing those internal linkages and mobilizing social capital within the community (sources of raw materials, credit, traditional designs, child care provisioning, an effective water supply) while identifying external resources that can be tapped, such as a producer cooperative, a transportation network, or a source of credit on which the group can draw for marketing purposes. At the same time, the capacity of this artisanal group may be strengthened as an advocate for the community as a whole. For example, it may lead the effort to draw on local government support for a more accessible water supply, serving both domestic and artisanal needs. In sum, external resources are accessed to serve the *community's* agenda.

Serving a community-driven agenda, although consistent with the rhetoric of an SLA approach, may prove challenging to the technocratic decision-making that pervades the institutions that communities have to negotiate with. In the next section, we argue that the transformation of clients to citizens requires the transformation of the role of these institutions.

### **A Question of Agency: Transformation in the Role of NGOs**

The dramatic changes in the political, economic, and institutional context over the last two decades have reshaped the roles of various development actors in community development worldwide. This in turn has influenced the degree to which people in marginalized communities have the capacity to act. Thirty years ago the state was the major "driver" and funder of community development activities. Through the 1980s, under a global neo-liberal economic regime, the public sector was scaled back under fiscal and ideological pressure, and private sector agencies and civil society organizations (such as NGOs) became the main intermediaries between communities and both public and private funders. In the last few years there has been a shift in sources of funding, including the emergence of local foundations seeking to invest in local communities (e.g., see Dupree & Winder, 2000), as well as direct assistance by private corporations, and the decentralization of national state functions down to the local level. The niche for NGOs is now less in direct intervention and more in strengthening civil society to mediate between market and state.

Examples are legion of the disastrous consequences of economic globalization and liberalization in communities struggling for survival and stretching their assets to unsustainable levels. Yet there are also examples of communities that are able to take advantage of new opportunities provided in the new economic and technological climate, and to claim and retain the rights and entitlements of state and global citizenship threatened by unchecked market forces. Edwards (1999) argues that civil society can play an important role here — that of "humanizing capitalism." Two important functions are integrated in this humanizing role: the first is the nurturing of social and economic assets that exist in even the poorest communities; the second is advocating for, and holding governments accountable for, the redistribution of more concrete assets through redistribution of land, employment opportunities, public facilities and services to which the poor are entitled. In addition, through humanizing capitalism, civil society can generate "the less tangible assets that enable

people to bargain, negotiate and advance their interests" (p. 147) that ultimately leads to "self-belief, human ingenuity, and independence of thought" (p. 148).

An ABCD approach at the community level can therefore be seen as the actualization of this role for civil society in general. In a sense, ABCD occupies "the middle ground where the logic of competition meets, and mixes with, the logic of co-operation" (Edwards, 1999, p. 162); this in turn activates the social capital required for community driven initiative, for collaborative partnerships with external institutions, and for claiming the rights and entitlements of citizenship. For the NGO, this means a retreat to a much more responsive, brokering role at the local level, helping local communities navigate their way through a myriad of possible "investors." As Kaplan (1999) points out, this "plays havoc with bureaucratic organizational styles," because it requires a flexibility of approach "which is simultaneously very 'hands on' and 'hands off'. Rigorously 'present', although with a very light touch" (p.23) This is very different from the conventional style of operation with its tidy logical frames and results-based planning and management. It requires an institutional ability to deal with uncertainty, and to plan inductively. As Uphoff (1998) discovered, "We had to alter many of our ... assumptions about the nature of reality; human nature; and how we can best learn, plan and act. We had to appreciate that things exist not in their essence but in their contingency" (p. 456).

### **Learning from an Asset-Based Community Development Approach**

The Coady Institute is currently exploring asset-based approaches to community development in two related areas of inquiry.

First, in collaboration with partners overseas, examples of ABCD-like citizen-driven development are being explored to find out the mix of various assets and the role of different actors in mobilizing these in particular contexts. Continuing a solid tradition in documenting best practice (e.g. Hirschman, 1984; Krishna, Uphoff, & Esman, 1997), this research seeks to draw out lessons on how policy can create the enabling environment for such citizen-driven development, and how practice may be modeled on these endogenous initiatives.

Second, agencies wishing to shift their practice to an asset-based approach have been invited to be partners in an action research initiative (e.g., ongoing in The Philippines and about to start in Ethiopia and Kenya). Less "research," more "learning through on-going monitoring and evaluation," the process of implementing an ABCD approach is being documented as it unfolds, paying attention to: (i) local adaptations of the approach that maximize its effectiveness in stimulating community-driven development; (ii) the key enabling and constraining conditions at macro- and micro-levels that affect the application of this approach; and (iii) lessons learned about the optimal role for the NGO in the community, and its relationship to other external actors, particularly local government, when introducing this approach at the community level. The overarching research goal of the action research is to discover the extent to which a sustainable improvement in livelihood can be realized when people cease being *clients* of NGOs and government agencies and instead act as *citizens*.

It will identify the policy environment conducive to community development opportunities being created from "the outside in," while identifying critical elements of an asset-based strategy that can build linkages from the *inside out* (Bebbington, 1999; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), strengthening civil society while stimulating sustainable community economic development.

### Conclusion

In courses that we have conducted at the Coady Institute and overseas in Asset-Based Community Development and its variants, there is often an "Aha!" moment, when "the shift" takes place. This is when participants, locked into a problem-solving, rational-deductive mode of reasoning, suddenly allow themselves to think differently about the communities with which they work. Although it can be liberating and refreshing to make this shift, it can also be disorienting and threatening, as they begin to realize the implications of an asset-based, citizen-driven approach. Sometimes the concern arises from a sense of vulnerability if the NGO sector is indeed expected to retreat. Sometimes, this concern about relinquishing control is voiced as skepticism: Does citizen-driven mean led by men/landowners/the-rich-and-powerful? Who should drive this so-called "community" development?

We recognize that any community, regardless of its coherence and sense of identity, is characterized by different interests and aspirations, or even "plagued by endogenous sources of incivility" (Keane, 1998). As an introduced process, an asset-based approach attempts to counteract this by uncovering the strengths that exist in the shadow of the obviously powerful within the community, and bring them into view. It assumes there is an ebb and flow of initiative and leadership with social relationships formed and reformed; class, gender, and ethnic divisions modified in the process. Power "to" and power "with" are encouraged, while power "over" is challenged. Women, for example, who have been involved in an association (such as a peer group savings group) can no longer retreat to the same level of subordination; the recognition of their capacities as financial managers and entrepreneurs changes household relations and their role in other social networks and associations at the community level. Community-driven development may not necessarily be the collective action of all in a geographically circumscribed area, but it is activity that is based at the community level and is conducive to building active participation in, and a sense of responsibility for, the prosperity of the larger community. This could include the development of infrastructure (such as roads) to enhance economic potential, the establishment of a community foundation, or a community mechanism for storage and marketing of local produce. Or it may be, as women's self help groups in India so amply illustrate, the emergence of networks of women's groups across their respective communities, each of which contributes to community level prosperity.

Who is driving development has implications for who is held accountable for results. Many development practitioners work in hierarchically structured environments where development practice is not only NGO driven, but driven also by a donor agenda. Planning, monitoring, and evaluation are consumed by the need to be accountable "upwards." We

understand this — our own work is similarly influenced by the requirements of our principal donor and its preoccupation with results-based management.

In an arms-length role the NGO requires a different kind of practice: a shift away from the controlled "development project" towards a relationship that is flexible, sensitive to community level interests. Consequently a different kind of reporting is required — description and analysis of what is taking place at the community level, the process of community-driven development as it unfolds, the interactions with other actors, as well as specific ways in which the NGO has facilitated the linkages for communities to sustain their own development. The shift in NGO practice is a necessary one — vacating the space for stronger relationships between citizens and other actors at the local level including government and the private sector — while continuing to fill the gaps in a civil society that mediates between state and market.

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## Notes

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The Coady Institute ([www.stfx.ca/institutes/coady](http://www.stfx.ca/institutes/coady)) is internationally recognized for the training and capacity building programs it has offered to international leaders in community-based development since its establishment in 1959. Building on its philosophical roots in the Antigonish Movement — a people's movement for economic and social justice, inspired by Moses Coady and Jimmy Tompkins, which reshaped northeastern Nova Scotia (Canada) in the 1920s and 1930s — the Coady International Institute has demonstrated a strong commitment to participatory approaches to development, with a focus on people's organisations and their federations as the key vehicles for mobilizing community assets. The Coady Institute's most recent educational offering is a new Certificate in Community Driven Development: The Asset-Based Approach.

### **Defining Community-Based Development**

From the experience of the Coady International Institute, community-based development works towards social and economic justice by strengthening the collective power of the disadvantaged and drawing on the strengths of the larger community of which they are a part. Community-based development is therefore grounded in the belief that the common good is best served by opportunities for all to live well and responsibly, within the bounds of environmental sustainability.

Fundamental to a community-based approach is people organizing for change in their communities. Today, the possibilities for the combined efforts of local organizing to have a global reach are growing exponentially. A program for action for community-based development is therefore one that:

- (i) addresses the economic and social conditions of people's lives;



- (ii) initiates and strengthens the various institutional forms of people organizing at a local level for effective control over their livelihood;
- (iii) links local initiatives to regional, national, and global institutions that further local level interests; and
- (iv) leads to a restructuring of economic and political systems that prejudice those interests.

Communities are acknowledged to be fluid, dynamic, and differentiated, rather than static and homogenous. However, within any spatially or administratively circumscribed community, voluntary associations and social networks are relatively homogenous.