From Clients to Citizens

Deepening the Practice of Asset-Based and Citizen-Led Development

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FROM CLIENTS TO CITIZENS:
Deepening the Practice of Asset-Based and Citizen-Led Development

Hosted by the Coady International Institute, St. Francis Xavier University, Canada, and co-sponsored by the ABCD Institute, Northwestern University, USA
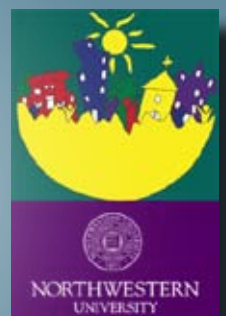

Conversations from the ABCD forum, July 8-10, 2009
Edited by Alison Mathie and Deborah Puntenney

December 2009

This paper is a synopsis of ideas that were shared, and which emerged, in discussion groups and plenary sessions during the forum: From Clients to Citizens: Deepening the Practice of Asset-Based and Citizen-Led Development, which was co-hosted by the Coady International Institute and the ABCD Institute in July 2009.

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Foreword

What happens to the field of community development when its practitioners - community members, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments - start with the assumption that communities have strengths rather than deficiencies, assets rather than needs, possibilities rather than problems? This forum, *From Clients to Citizens: Deepening the Practice of Asset-Based and Citizen-Led Development,* brought together people who are attempting to work with communities on that basis. It gave them the opportunity to share experiences, challenge each other, express doubt, unpack words that have been burdened with over use, think through the implications of working differently, and renew their commitment to social change through local community action and broad-based structural and institutional reform. As such, conversation shifted from the particulars of local leadership and community organizing to fundamental questions of rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The conversation sometimes touched on values instilled through different cultures that inspire mutual self help, and sometimes touched on structural changes needed in our institutions to make such mutual self help operate on local, national and international levels. It sometimes looked at how people in communities could participate in the global economy more on their own terms, and sometimes touched on ways that communities could make themselves less vulnerable to market failure and strengthen alternative means of livelihood in the local economy. In short, as well as celebrating success and possibility, forum participants explored the thorny issues emerging with the growing interest in asset-based and citizen-led development around the world.

This synopsis was generated from notes recorded in discussion groups and plenary sessions and is presented here as a conversation in progress, rather than as a fully developed set of conclusions. As editors, we have attempted to stay true to the substance of the discussions, despite the sacrifice to detail that summarizing and editing entail. Fortunately, the forum website (http://coady.stfx.ca/work/abcd/forum/) has links to video footage of the plenary sessions as well as links to presentations and papers provided by forum participants. In the pages that follow, we integrate these ideas into the ideas recorded by our volunteer rapporteurs in the discussion groups. Where possible, statements or ideas derived from the plenary sessions are attributed to individual speakers by name. In other places, statements and stories from the many breakout session discussions are included, but in most cases are not attributed to individual speakers. Where we have used quotes, we have attempted to capture the essence of what was said, if not the exact words; we trust you will let us know if there are any inadvertent misrepresentations.

Alison Mathie and Deborah Puntenney, December 2009

Introduction

In July of 2009, 101 development practitioners, policy makers, donors, and academics from fourteen countries gathered in Antigonish, Nova Scotia to attend *From Clients to Citizens: Deepening the Practice of Asset-Based and Citizen-Led Development*, a forum hosted by the Coady International Institute at St. Francis Xavier University, Canada, and co-sponsored by the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute at Northwestern University, USA. The purpose of the gathering was to bring together existing networks of the ABCD Institute and the Coady International Institute to share ideas and experiences, as well as to invite new and emerging networks into the discussion. For the Coady Institute, hosting the forum was an important way to mark its 50th anniversary year. Asset-based and citizen-led approaches to community development have resonated with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences, and sometimes wide ranging ideological positions. The forum offered participants stimulating and challenging conversations over three days, and the opportunity to engage with other community development workers, teachers, researchers, policy makers, and donors whose work, in some way, is defined by the principles of asset-based and citizen-led development.

It should be noted that the acronym ABCD was originally coined by the ABCD Institute, standing for Asset Based Community Development. The Coady Institute has since used the same acronym to denote asset-based and citizen-led development, to reflect the idea of people's agency as active citizens as both the means and the end of asset-based community development. The implications of this variation on the original "ABCD" are considered in the conclusion of the report. In the meantime, the acronym "ABCD" is used for both.

Starting off the forum were speakers who were able to put this work into some historical and global context. John McKnight of the ABCD Institute, for example, provided a retrospective on 40 years work at the community level in the US; and Gord Cunningham of the Coady Institute spoke about the insights from a series of case studies, *From Clients to Citizens: Communities changing the course of their own development* (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008), that shed light on communities driving their own development around the world. These presentations set the stage for mixed group discussions in which participants introduced their own work in ABCD and selected key issues from the morning discussion to explore in more depth in the afternoon. Further insights into the state of current practice were provided by Jody Kretzmann, Aloysius Fernandez, Adisa Yakubu and Peter Kenyan in the evening.

On the second day, deeper discussion took place around particular themes in self selected groups, exploring such issues as:
- The role of the outsider
- Documentation, learning and evidence
- Risk taking
- Rights and responsibilities
- Is ABCD a movement?
- Spirituality as an asset
- Power and social inequality v. community.

To me, "citizen" is the word that describes my role in my neighborhood. I was involved because it was my responsbility to be involved and because there were consequences if I didn't fulfill these responsbilities. I was not being selfless; I was working from self-interest. And I only described myself as "just a volunteer" when the "getting paid" people in the picture were trying to unfairly unload their work on me in the cloak of citizen participation.

Janis Foster[1]

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[1]*"Philanthro Media. Downloaded from www.philanthromedia.org/archives/2008/07/response_inspiring_young_people.html*

A second round of group discussions then took place by affinity group. In other words, participants were grouped according to "agency" (NGO, donor, academic, government, MBO) and asked to discuss particular issues from their agency perspective.

Discussions on the second day were interspersed with plenary speakers who described innovative practice on the part of government agencies (the City of Curitiba, Brazil; the City of Seattle, Washington) and donor agencies (Greater Rustenberg Community Foundation, McConnell Foundation, and Grassroots Grantmakers). At a second plenary session in the afternoon, speakers from an academic background challenged our thinking further with insights into innovation in cooperatives and member based organizations; the importance of broadening our understanding and appreciation of the economy and sustaining diverse livelihood streams in paid and unpaid sectors; and identifying innovative ways to collaborate with donors on the question of evaluation.

On the last day, plenary speakers focused on policy issues. Speakers from Vietnam (**Dr. Son** of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development), the U.S. (**Brian Hanson**, Northwestern University), and Canada (**Naresh Singh**, CIDA, and **Chris Bryant**, Provincial Government of Nova Scotia) outlined policy instruments that they had promoted to stimulate asset-building, to cultivate community organizing and action planning, to remove legal obstacles to poverty alleviation, to promote entrepreneurship, and to explore the right balance in the relationship between communities and decentralized government.

This synthesis report begins with a glimpse of the rich exchange of experience of ABCD shared on the first day, followed by summaries of the discussions that ensued on the second and third days. Both a celebration of ABCD initiatives around the world, and an opportunity for sharing and learning, the discussions stimulated a rich array of ideas, questions, suggestions, strategies, and potential partnerships among participants. There was a determination to translate positive experience into forward momentum.

Sharing Experience

To introduce themselves and their work, participants were first asked to briefly describe their work in asset-based and citizen-led development and share these highlights and challenges in small groups. Some of this experience is integrated in subsequent sections of this synopsis and some of the presentations are available in full on the forum website. The following five stories provide a taste of the range of practitioner experience:

Chris Macoloo of World Neighbors, Kenya, gave an account of mobilizing assets for self development among rural farmers in East Africa. The story focused on the promotion of savings and credit initiatives in response to global warming that threatened already precarious rural farming systems and food production. World Neighbors helped the communities recognize that their traditional, informal "merry-go-round" resource-sharing schemes could be expanded into savings and credit mechanisms that would enable members to borrow substantial amounts to invest in viable income generating activities, thus reducing their vulnerability to crop failures and food insecurity.

What do you think? Is there indeed a difference between "citizen-ing" and "volunteering"?

Janis Foster

Roberto Abeabe of the United Way of Canada shared a story about transforming an institution while simultaneously helping communities to transform their lives. Typically a top-down organization, the United Way reversed its usual process and gave the money to communities so they could set their own agendas. Whether working in neighbourhoods accommodating newcomers to Canada, or in more established urban nieghbourhood settings, the Action for Neighbourhood Change program has contributed to building pride in community identity, building community through expanded relationships, and incorporating diversity into community and livelihood activities. By helping people to know one another, local knowledge has expanded and opportunities for creating safer, more secure neighborhoods have been enhanced. One challenge the communities face is creating enough structure so that, as residents migrate into and out of the communities, enough of an organization is left behind so that cohesion can be maintained, while not overwhelming neighbourhoods with new institutions.

Beatriz Battistella Nada of the Health Secretariat in Curitiba, Brazil shared a story about how increasing health costs prompted a new approach to resident health that involved investing in health promotion and collaborating with local communities to set priorities for budget allocations. Through local health councils, residents meet regularly with local government officials to talk about how to access available services and how to build on the strengths of local communities to optimize health outcomes. Through these meetings and public audiences, people express their priorities and develop the budgets to provide these services. What follows is organizing that helps transform the people's voice into law: Brazilian public budgets are formulated through this process of citizen engagement.

Hal Baron of Communitas Charitable Trust shared a story of citizen-led development happening in El Salvador. After implementing a series of external grants related to land development, the community decided to manage without the professional helpers and grow their own network. They ultimately decided that as a peasant movement, they would become an association of 50 communities, but also incorporated their own technical assistance organization with a board of directors that includes nine of their peasant members. The association has become involved in other Latin American countries, and continues to evolve its strategies for peasant governing, self-sufficiency, and developing internal capacity to achieve their individual community goals. Like many communities around the world, these groups share the challenges of retaining younger community members, dealing with power structures and violence, and developing and diversifying their cultural and asset base. However, working purely from their own initiative and resources, they are achieving the kinds of success that resonates with their own communities.

Anselmo Mercado of the South East Asia Rural Social Leadership Institute and Cooperative Business Institute shared a story about how communities in the Philippines have strengthened the business capability of cooperatives in terms of becoming commercially competitive in pursuit of their social objectives. Substituting asset mapping for their old problem identification techniques, farmers and rural communities have developed their own development plans and objectives, and have succeeded in strengthening local associations, expanding democratic leadership, and changing people's attitudes and confidence levels. Projects developed include communal gardens, sustainable agriculture

programs, as well as the transformation of government-owned corporations into cooperatives to deliver basic infrastructure services.

Deepening the Practice of Asset-Based and Citizen-Led Development: Exploring the Issues

This section begins with a summary of points raised about the **basic ideas and principles** behind ABCD and how to communicate these to a broader audience. As discussion groups proceeded to take up particular issues and explore them in more depth, the question of language came up in several conversations. Discussions addressed the different meanings attached to particular words and concepts - such as "assets", "citizen" or "community" - in various contexts. Because of the centrality of associational life in ABCD, associations and institutions and the roles they play are covered next, followed by the ideas generated about how to deconstruct systems of dependency (sometimes constructed by institutions), including the role of story telling in shifting attitudes and mindsets. Finally, the issues raised about the limits of self-help and community mobilizing are outlined.

The subsequent sections address issues that had a broader scope - the links between the practice of **ABCD and local economic development**, the role of **spirituality and religion in ABCD,** the **tension between "insiders" and "outsiders"** and how this influences the **roles of different institutions** in ABCD. Different presenters and discussion groups took on each of these: government, NGOs, donors (of different types), and academic institutions. Raised in all these discussions was the challenge of **monitoring and evaluation.** These various comments are summarized next.

Toward the end of the forum, there was exploration into **broader global trends and policy imperatives that could provide space for ABCD**. Taking place at a time of severe global recession, discussion of how ABCD can focus renewed attention on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship was set in the context of rapidly changing roles of the state, the market, and civil society.

Finally, the forum sparked discussion about the direction that this field of practice is heading, ending with concrete ideas for collaboration among participants.

Communicating the idea and principles of asset-based and citizen-driven development

A unifying sentiment among participants is the shared confidence in the capacities of people to collaborate in communities of place or communities of identity and, starting from a position of disadvantage, establish themselves on a virtuous spiral (Fowler, 2000) towards greater security and prosperity. In such communities, there is vitality and productivity, people take pride in what they can do, and know how they can use their strengths and assets, not just to cope in terms of crisis, but also to move forward, producing a sense of community at the same time as a livelihood.

There is no standard formula for igniting or re-igniting that capability and vitality in communities. People are working in vastly different contexts. They are operating from different ideological positions about how to make the world

In our case, when we started to use an ABCD way of thinking, we started looking at place differently. We looked at our own neighborhood and saw parks, transit lines, old industrial areas and saw potential and opportunity there. We now co-sponsor a public high school where young people are using geographic information systems, investigating environmental issues, and coming up with ideas for enterprises which they have presented to City Council and the State government— garbage recycling as a business, energy efficient housing, etc.

Mary Nelson[2]

a better place, and how to change or resist the political and economic status quo. They work in different religious faith and secular traditions. They work in richer and poorer countries with different degrees of inequality. They differ in their positions on what people ought to be able to rely on as the entitlements of formal citizenship, and what is best achieved through cooperation and mutual self help - informal active citizenship in the strong democratic tradition.

Because ABCD is not a step-by-step process, but a way of thinking about community, it can be especially difficult to convey exactly what it is and how to defend it. While the ABCD "geometry lesson" (comprised of visually illustrating the relationship between circles [associations] and triangles [institutions]) can be useful, more is needed to help describe how ABCD helps build a strong civil society.

What then is at the core of an asset-based and citizen-led development that we can identify, promote and help to set in motion?

Core Principles
The appeal of ABCD is in its simplicity; it resonates with our common sense view of what works, what motivates us, what inspires hope. Yet, as **Katherine Gibson** points out, this simple idea is rooted in a complex psychology. Leaving aside a critical theoretical understanding of what is wrong in the world, which leaves us in a psychological space of low energy and sense of defeat, ABCD relies on "weak theory," an openness to alternative and diverse possibilities and our capacity to contribute to them. Deconstructing the negative, this positive way of thinking is reparative in its essence, energising and emotionally fulfilling in its effect.

> At the heart of ABCD is a recognition and appreciation of gifts and strengths in ourselves and others. The practice of ABCD should therefore induce a fundamental shift in mind-set and an unlearning of labels used in needs-based approaches and deficit models that have informed past practice. **Damon Lynch**, for example, recalls this observation by people he has worked with: "We never knew we were poor until we were told so."

To get past these labels and recognize and appreciate strengths in others and ourselves means opening up to alternative opportunity and possibility. It means questioning with a genuine curiosity, leaving aside preconceived understandings and being prepared to learn more than teach. It is more than cultural sensitivity; it is a deeper exploration, recognizing some of the limitations of language and our powers of communication. For example, the very definition of "leadership" and how it is assumed or conferred, formally or informally, carries different connotations in different cultures. **Francine White Duck** and **Suzanne Robinson** both described how, in many First Nations or Northern communities, leadership is not permanent or fixed, rather it is fluid and emergent, vested in those people who are demonstrating particular skills and talents at particular times.

People need a sense of meaning in their lives. Appreciative Inquiry supports that. With meaning, people transcend themselves and their narrow materialistic needs, and become catalysts and change agents.
Saleela Patkar

The microfinance sector has several examples of building on existing community strengths and linking these with opportunity. **Nanci Lee**, for example, explained how traditional savings groups are some of the oldest and most pervasive forms

of organizing: "There is already a savvy architecture: rules and procedures for membership, savings, and profit distribution." Building financial assets and building on their organizational capacity means they can readily transition into other forms of community organizing. Similarly, **Aloysius Fernandez** emphasized the intangible assets among even the poorest groups: "In our work at Myrada, we discovered that the poor formed small groups. Their asset was their affinity. On this was built a willingness to save. We gave them a place to save." Continuing in the same vein, **Bern Guri**'s conception of endogenous development is one that values traditional heritage and strengths but is not resistant to change. Speaking of the Ghanaian context, he maintains "A central aspect of our traditions is openness. This expresses itself in hospitality but also openness to new ideas."

Uncovering strengths and assets may also mean re-valuing what has been undervalued, such as unpaid and voluntary work, and viewing assets in the context of a diversified economy in which the non-monetary economy supports the cash economy. The iceberg analogy (**Jenny Cameron** and **Katherine Gibson**'s work), illustrates the invisible yet solid foundation of economic life found in the informal, subsistence, voluntary and "caring" economic sectors, on which so many depend, but which are ignored in conventional measures of economic well-being. **Chris Bryant** touched on this later in his reference to Ronald Coleman's application of the Genuine Progress Index in Nova Scotia, showing the value of volunteer work and the economic cost of social and environmental damage - neither of which are taken into account in conventional indices of economic progress, such as GNP.

Language
How do we identify common principles of ABCD but phrase these appropriately in different contexts? In many countries, citizen-led language may be threatening to governments. The idea of "citizenship" may also be contested, even in its informal sense of contributing to community and to positive social change. As **Aloysius Fernandez** notes, the most marginalized in the population have little or no recourse to any entitlements of citizenship, including access to the most basic of institutions, and are so preoccupied with survival that contributing to "community" over and above this survival strategy is unrealistic. Even in a US context, "citizen-led" language may work better in middle-class communities than in poorer communities, and debates about immigration have made the "citizen" language problematic. Nevertheless, despite these cautionary voices, the term "citizen" conveys that sense of active engagement and responsibility to communities at local, national and global levels that is a basic feature of an ABCD approach.

Another language issue is the word "asset." Is it too easily associated with financial or economic assets? In translation to other languages, "asset" may have complex and diverse meanings. As **Adisa Yakubu** asks: "How are the terms and concepts being translated? Is there an important conceptual difference between 'What has God given us?' and 'What are our assets?'"

Likewise, the term "community" can be problematic. It should be questioned seriously. In the Indian context, for example, "community" is associated with caste and religious identity. There is no sense of a village community. The poor have to compete in order to move out of poverty and this goes against the idea

This is the process of changing the relationship between state and citizen, from one where the citizen is passive, begging for resources from a supposedly all-powerful and beneficient state, to a more realistic and empowering relationship, where the state provides a supportive environment, people act on their development, and the state listens to people's views and supports where possible.
Sam Chimbuya

of "common purpose" among neighbours or villagers. Thus, in many contexts, the sense of community has to be restricted to a shared identity with a limited geographic scope.   On the other hand, as we saw in **Katherine Gibson** and **Maria Villalba'**s film "Building Social Enterprises in the Philippines," one of the primary assets that can contribute to local community development comes from the ideas and money of diaspora, a sense of identity that extends beyond the boundaries of place. The idea of community and the interest in building it through ever widening relationships of trust and common purpose is perhaps where an ABCD approach has most to offer. In some places, for example, people are transitioning as new immigrants. There is still scope for community building even if the first place people live on arrival is temporary. Even these transitory experiences facilitate new community building in subsequent locations.

Associations and Institutions
A cornerstone of an asset-based approach is the identification and creation of social connectedness. As such, associational life, where people come together voluntarily to get things done, is the basis of strong communities. **John McKnight** has made a clear distinction between associations and institutions, and highlights the potential disabling and disempowering effect of the role institutions play in communities. While acknowledging that both have their place, he emphasizes that "communities (and the associational base on which they grow) are not an afterthought, but a space beyond the point where institutions are ineffective." A principle of ABCD is to identify and promote these associational spaces as the basis of active citizenship.

Sociology teaches us that people and societies institutionalize in order to give things continuity and coherence. Often, communities are dealing with problems for which a natural response would be to ask what kind of structure would allow for continuity as people move through the situation. The tendency is to design that structure as a formalised institution rather than as some kind of community defined and controlled structure. Asset based community development requires us to ask again and again, who is this for? Why would we want to institutionalize what we are doing?

Nathabiseng Motsemme provides insight into the dangers of institutionalization, through the particular example of South Africa. There has been a rich history of social mobilization and gaining political notice, but some believe that institutionalization that has come with the success of political struggle has resulted in lethargy. The institutional structures in place are not enough to deal with ever increasing problems on the ground, yet it is more and more difficult to ignite social movements to address this gap. Some people are asking "Were we too quick to institutionalize?"

Others felt moved to challenge the portrayal of "institutions" in a negative light as overly simplistic. **Aloysius Fernandez**, for example, showed how institutions have enabled the poor to resist exploitative relationships in the informal and unprotected market. Questioning the assumptions of the title of this forum ("From Clients to Citizens") he reminded us that the poorest people in the world are so marginalised that to be a client of an institution is a step forward rather than a trap; and the idea of acting as a citizen is only meaningful when institutions that work for and with the poor are in place.

Endogenous development emerges from within, with local control. Indigenous resources can contribute to this, spirituality being one example. An indigenous worldview is based on the natural world, the human world, and the spiritual world with the idea of well-being overlapping these three spheres. The idea of "sankofa" —reaching into the past and taking what works to move into the future—is essential to this.
Bernard Guri

An important distinction then is between those institutions developed for and by the poor, such as the example of the Community Based Institutions promoted by Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE) and the self-help affinity groups promoted by MYRADA in India, and those that are part of the larger institutional structure, and less responsive to those with little power to command attention. While it is generally accepted that institutions can become more exploitative and disabling over time, there are many examples of how they have proved to be innovative, responsive, and a collaborator in community building. The emergence of innovative leadership from institutions as having the potential to generate more citizen-led development may lead some to question whether this is a contradiction in terms. Others find hope in the idea of institutions "leading by stepping back," contributing and supporting without demanding and controlling. As a consequence, it is the nature of the relationship, the terms of engagement, between communities and institutions that needs attention and innovation. An example of such innovation is where communities approach institutions with achievements and strengths that act as leverage for investment - such as the Black Business Initiative in Nova Scotia, Neighborhood Matching Funds in Seattle or the youth "Are you MAD? (Making a Difference)" campaign in New Zealand. Innovative institutions are those that invest in communities, and recognize and respond to what communities have already achieved themselves.

As **Damon Lynch** explains:

> The glass may never be full, but it's possible to expand the capacity that already exists. Outside resources are necessary and welcome but as secondary investors.

Mary Nelson puts it more boldly:

> Start with what you've got, then it is easier to get other people to invest. Our church community needed basic housing, but the banks wouldn't give them loans. So we mortgaged the church building!

Innovative institutions with resources to contribute adopt the spirit of accompaniment, neither rushing in with their own agenda, nor suggesting that potential support has a deadline. Expenditure targets, and the rush to reach these before arbitrary year-end accounting, can turn potentially responsive institutions into relentless drivers. Referring to philanthropic organizations, **Janis Foster** argues that philanthropic gestures should not be conveying sentiments of charity, but of investment in people: "Grants should be seen as an invitation, the way people are helped to move forward. Money should be 'patient' - always there, but not a promise." Innovative institutions also need to be patient when it comes to expecting results, and resist the temptation to hold communities to predetermined outcomes. As **Mary Nelson** explains, "We build the road as we travel. With an ABCD approach we just don't know what the outcomes will be." Such sentiments about monitoring and evaluation were expanded in later discussions.

Deconstructing Systems That Encourage Dependency
Meaningful conversations at the community level involve deconstructing the tendency to talk in terms of problems and needs, without neglecting

The "Wall of Fame" in the soup kitchen revealed that all the soup kitchen recipients cooked! At first the good church people would not initially "scoot over" to allow the soup kitchen recipients to cook and serve, but ultimately power and control shifted slightly. Now there is a much different environment with people really contributing.
Damon Lynch

the real constraints that people may be living and working with. A culture of dependency needs to be recognised as more of a barrier than a support, and some risk-taking seen as necessary for growth. The construction of an alternative view of possibility requires leadership of the kind that stimulates and motivates initiative. Leadership in a vibrant community rarely rests with one individual but is evident throughout a community, with leaders coming forward and retreating as energy and passion permit.

The Importance of Stories

It is often through stories that we can start to deconstruct the systems that encourage dependency. With the right kind of questions, community members can uncover and discover stories of resilience, initiative and success from the past that can re-ignite confidence in the capacity to organize again. From the start of a project (using stories to help re-orient the mindset of local people, organizations, and institutions to an assets perspective) through the success of a project (using stories to both convince and excite supporters and funders), stories have all kinds of uses in ABCD work.

Rogerio Neumann described a case in Brazil in which stories told in a community combine to form a shared history, all the more powerful when published as illustrated personal memories, stories, poems, and comics. He talked about senior members of the community accompanying a young person to community meetings and using stories as a way of engaging with the people they meet. The story can be motivating not just in its telling of the results of community collaboration but also in its telling of the process of coming together, how leaders emerged and took particular roles at different times, or in its telling of what a community cares most deeply about.

Still another use of stories is in the process of creating simple action plans. Small groups, especially where there is trust among the members, can literally draw the vision they seek to achieve by crafting the story that describes it. United Way for example has helped communities draw their vision in illustrated action plans (for example, see the artistry in See What You Mean: www. seewhatyoumean.ca).

Saleela Patkar described her experiences in India, a place of natural storytellers. Appreciative Inquiry works well. The community involved in one project produced a long-term vision for its future by developing stories about who they were and what they could accomplish, which was then drawn out through an appreciative inquiry process. Initially the community didn't value their own strengths, but the process of telling their story enabled them to see what their strengths were and how they could use them.

I work with the Korean Association. We want to contribute to the larger society. We work with three levels of government. We don't see newcomers in these planning committees. Building a larger community with the immigrants means building social relationships. The people in the larger community often do not realize the capacities of newcomers.

Nanook Cha

One area in which story telling can be particularly useful is in evaluation. Evaluations may require demonstrable results for accountability purposes, but a qualitative storytelling piece is a learning opportunity that should not be missed. For example, a story can help reveal the change that has actually happened to the communities that created it, and can help illustrate that there has actually been an improvement in well being as a result, whether or not that improvement is "measurable."

Developing good stories can take some effort. Often, the stories don't need to be created because they already exist and it is simply a matter of seeking them out, looking through old stories with an ABCD lens. But often communities do need help in telling their stories in captivating ways. Sometimes a bilingual translator can help take the richness of community stories and derive from them the kind of information that can be used for project reports, or simply to convey the stories to outside audiences. Sometimes translating spoken stories into a quality written document can help give voice to communities so that they can tell their stories as an entry point to discussions, or use the stories to inform policy.

Sometimes a "different" medium can put life back into the same old story and new media has tremendous potential for such revitalization. For example, Information and Communication Internet Technologies (ICTs) - in particular, the Internet - has the unique capacity to disseminate stories and other messages to an enormous audience, especially for a new generation for whom ICTs comes naturally. As **Tim Brodhead** asks,

> Is it possible that new technology is going to make it possible
> to get Ethiopians talking directly to Canadians and ignore
> the bureaucracy in between? People from Ethiopia would
> say to Canada: this works, this doesn't, we are learning, we
> are improvising, we're collaborating. Donors give money for
> technology; people in the community have local knowledge
> and together we cooperate to see how we can make this happen.
> This takes the pressure off of the failing and succeeding and
> puts it into learning.

Limits to Self-help
A purist ABCD approach starts with assets located within the community then moves outwards, building from the inside-out, linking with "outsiders" in ever expanding circles. But the question this raises is how we define local/external; insider/outsider. This in turn makes the question "How far should self-help go?" difficult to answer on definitional grounds. For example, is a member of the diaspora living outside the community considered an insider or outsider, a local, internal asset or an external link? Or both?

Another question that was considered was whether assisted self-help is a paradox. Participants decided that this was not the case. Self-help does not mean forgoing outside assistance. Approaching outside organizations for assistance means seeing what assets they offer that can match the community's own assets. However, to be compatible with ABCD principles, it is important to be clear about what assets are relevant to the community's vision rather than letting the assets offered by institutions determine the community's vision. A community that has identified its assets does not come "hat in hand;" instead, it is bringing something to the table. This is the basis of a negotiation.

Each context presents particular challenges in terms of how community assets are shared and how institutional assets are shared in the community. We have to be aware of power relations that both encourage and distort the notion of mutual self-help. Also, while some reciprocal sharing and mutual self help is done without a clearly specified expectation of a "return," a lack of clarity can

There's been a lot of development work that focuses on rural issues but I think we need to look at urban issues like the squatter settlements and ghettos where I grew up. We need to explore survival philosophies and strategies like "hustling."
Nathabiseng Motsemme

sometimes be problematic. An example was given of misunderstandings that have occurred when community assets are "pooled" and then shared equally rather than in proportion to the contribution.

ABCD and Local Economic Development

NGOs often use the ABCD approach to help revive local economies. This can mean exploring the space between the formal and informal economies, between getting by and getting ahead, between the local economy and bigger economy, or between the non-monetized and the monetized economy. The global economic crisis has brought a lot of attention to these issues and challenged us to think about how an ABCD approach can help to stimulate the local economy and/or help resist the imperative to link to global markets. Sometimes this is a question of how to stimulate local economies to engage with the larger economy without surrendering control over production or over social goals. Individuals combining in cooperative forms of economic activity or other social enterprises is one way this is achieved. For example, The Jambi Kiwa (see "The Jambi Kiwa Story" available at http://www.coady.stfx.ca/work/coady-publications/) cooperative in Ecuador is a local enterprise built on a recognition of traditional indigenous resources, like medicinal herbs. Traditions have been passed down over generations and women organized to use this knowledge to build a cooperative that eventually became successful enough to into world markets for organic teas and herbs. Yet the scaling up of production and the fine tuning to meet expanded market demand means that retaining decision making at the local cooperative level can be a challenge.

Another concern raised was how to stimulate the local economy and maintain linkages with other local economies to achieve synergy rather than destructive competition. An example was given of bamboo cooperatives that found themselves in competition with one another. One answer was to set up an association to communicate and diversify the products; now one organization works on house construction materials; others work on internal decoration so their products don't overlap and force them into unhealthy competition.

An example from Nicaragua illustrates another challenge. An NGO worker from the US wanted to explore how ABCD could overlay a micro lending model in rural areas. Farmers were growing a small sweet potato crop and she asked why they weren't growing more. The farmers indicated the size of the crop was dictated by how quickly they could sell it, as the product withers within 3 days of harvest and they could not market a large crop within that time. The farmers discovered if the crop undergoes a simple process, it has a 45-day shelf life, so they implemented the process and now ship to the USA. With a little help from an NGO, but using their own assets and expertise, a small group of 12 farmers started a venture that is now a cooperative with a membership of 45 farmers. Detractors from this success story expressed concern about export based initiatives given their vulnerability to world markets. Instead, perhaps local development workers - whether NGOs or government - need to help farmers protect themselves against the insecurity of markets. Arguably, an ABCD approach has the potential to both help people to see the possibilities of engaging in the global market, while at the same time reinforcing the importance of maintaining a diverse asset base and vital local economy as insurance against the risk of engagement with the global economy.

CES's position is that if sport is to contribute to community development (individual & community); we have to move from less sport to more sport by making it available to everyone; we have to move from low intentionality to high intentionality (i.e., communities have to see it as a force for good—a public asset). It is through sport that we can address other social issues such as gang violence, teenage pregnancy etc. The True Sport Movement connects communities around these values and principles. Sport is also a tremendous generator of volunteers—volunteers in sport represent the single biggest segment of volunteers.

Paul Melia

In recent years, many NGOs have been getting advice to plan for ten years down the road; as peak oil ends, imported products won't be readily available, so more must be grown and provided locally. In this scenario, it is assumed that emerging economies built around services and products required in the existing global economy may have a relatively short life span. It is increasingly clear that short term opportunities must be set against longer term sustainability issues - an ABCD approach could support this balance, requiring NGO and government commitment to local asset sustainability as well as opportunities for the growth and diversification of local economies.

The Role of Spirituality and Religion

Many people draw their strength from spirituality and religion; it therefore has to be understood and appreciated as an important part of their self-actualization. It can infuse people's roles as parents and as protectors of culture. Religious rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations that bind people together in social relationships provide meaning and sustenance. It is how many people live "as whole human beings." When outsiders, or institutions (such as the education system), ignore this source of strength, this can be interpreted as a rejection of a central aspect of culture.

And yet, in professional life many of us are in spiritual closets, separating spiritual knowledge from, and some would say privileging, secular knowledge. This stems from a classic dilemma in democracy in which we are expected to leave faith in the "private sphere," and remove it from the "public sphere." Yet when public institutions with secular values reach into communities they are often ill-equipped to recognize and put a value on spiritual dimensions of community life; this can lead to a disjuncture. The drug problem, for example, used to be seen as a problem for the police to solve, but now increasingly agencies are seeing the importance of spiritual "redefinition" in order for individual and groups to overcome addictions.

The question of the role of spirituality and religion in community life takes on another dimension when it comes to religious festivals and rituals that use resources that could be redirected toward other activities. Sometimes, people in communities have chosen to cut back on these expenditures and have pooled these resources in order to build physical infrastructure - an irrigation scheme in Peru, for example. This raises the question of what the trade-offs are between "investing" in spiritual/religious life (and the social relationships it fosters) or using those resources for other community building and livelihood initiatives.

Given the diversity of faith traditions, an important task is to identify the values shared in religion, spirituality, and faith that can inform a wider public discourse so that collaboration on common ground is possible (not just collaboration on an incidental common interest). An interesting example is in "kitchen conversations" carried out by the Guelph Civil League which asked questions about morals and values in an effort to start a conversation abut what unifies people in a multi-cultural country. Differences between particular religious doctrines give way to a consideration of the universality of values of mutual support and trust. As **Aloysius Fernandez** pointed out, these values inspired the cooperative movement in Canada: self interest and the maximization of profit were moderated or even set aside in the interests of the common good. To the extent that similar values resonate in all religious

Your gift is the key that unlocks the door to your community.
Damon Lynch

traditions, these have been harnessed to provide the philosophical basis for the notion of the "public good" whether at the level of the community, of the state, or of the global community.

Appreciation for spirituality allows us to see where arbitrary secular barriers are drawn. For example, in many cultural traditions, spirituality is closely linked to environmental issues, to health and well being, and to reconciliation after conflict, even though these are treated separately in a more "secular" understanding of the world. In this context, spirituality is the source of wisdom, not just a set of moral values. Many people believe that the crisis in the natural world has to do with crisis in the spiritual world. And many cultures around the world are insisting that their traditions, including spirituality and religion, are equally as important as more secular ways of knowing, as illustrated in the following remark:

> In Africa, spirituality is part of us, it is one of our assets. For example, in Ghana we still value our ancestors. We believe that there are mediums between us and our ancestors, and we think about how our assets help us build our relationship with our ancestors. We are thinking of assets in terms of how they benefit those beyond us, those before and after us.

How important spirituality and religion are in the developing world can be striking to westerners whose traditions call for a separation. One participant recalled a celebratory meeting that brought together different faith communities. She noted that the unique opportunity to share experiences with people of different faiths allowed her to understand that in parts of Africa, development is actually seen as built on quicksand because its spiritual roots are absent.

One question associated with this discussion is how we honour ways of knowing - for example, religion and spirituality - that are outside mainstream ways of knowing. Spirituality may represent a holistic view, or balance, and is not necessarily represented by specific religious or church traditions. But, spirituality and indigenous knowledge systems are still viewed as suspect by very educated people, or people whose knowledge comes from systems. This raises much deeper questions about how knowledge is created and offers a fundamental challenge to ABCD in terms of opening itself to absorb other knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledge needs to be recognized as an asset and working through indigenous institutions can be a way of honouring spirituality.

The notion of economy as something "out there, doing things to us" needs to be challenged and replaced with the recognition of a diverse economy composed of all the ways in which people survive and build a livelihood—formal, informal, through barter, through personal relationships etc. All these economic practices are assets, not just those activities or elements that are more conventionally described as "productive" or "economic."
Katherine Gibson

ABCD as an idea and field of practice has matured in its growing understanding of what constitutes an asset. Heritage and culture were not included McKnight and Kretzmann's (1993) *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, but are regularly spoken of now as one of the most important elements of a community. Perhaps a new ABCD book needs to be written to include faith, spirituality, and sacred spaces. Most of the ABCD books are case studies and not necessarily tool books; there is an opportunity to produce new literature that reflects faith as an asset, and to provide tools for the religious/spiritual domain.

The Insider/Outsider Tension

The discussion of community insiders and outsiders and their relative legitimacy within an ABCD framework is an ongoing discussion that tends to focus on one of two questions: (a) Are some kinds of outsiders (e.g., government, funders, consultants, other professionals) more legitimate or more able to cross the insider/outsider boundary? and (b) What are the dynamics of outsider/insider relationships? Some practitioners question the use of the term, outsider, and suggest that its connotation is contrary to an assets perspective.

With the terms outsider and insider, come issues of both language and meaning. Of course both are dependent on place and context. In some places, long-term residence of many, many years, does not qualify an individual to be called insider. The meaning of outsider is also dependent on how we define community (e.g., communities of citizenship, diaspora communities), and, given the many interpretations, the outsider/insider line is shifting. For example, the Kenyan diaspora is often given more weight than the insider (the Kenyan living in Kenya). Thus, when an individual is an outsider, it can be very difficult to conceptualize.

Paulo Freire was, perhaps, an early thinker on the role of the outsider. In his idea of conscientization, literacy forms a pathway to understanding systemic oppression, and through literacy training, outsiders may help communities develop the awareness they require to improve their lives. Outsiders' most important role may be holding up a mirror to the community. Rather than becoming insiders, outsiders may be able to help communities look at themselves and their issues with fresh eyes. Outsiders can be critical to the beginning of the development process, but must know at what point to pull away and disengage from the process. Action planning is a way of moving through the timing of disengagement in a way that supports local self-facilitation; after action planning, the role of the outsider/facilitator changes, becoming a coach rather than being deeply engaged.

Outsiders also have serious responsibilities when they endeavour to engage in development work. An outsider (especially a funder) should not simply choose a place and offer funding in the absence of strong connections to that locality. The following issues relating to the outsiders' roles have been identified:

- In entering a community, be aware of what has been happening in that community;
- Listen to a variety of perspectives and use it to further inform their work;
- Be clear about the topics on which they can make a contribution;
- Inventory the good and bad things they bring with them (e.g., biases or special objectivity) to a specific community context so they know when to engage and when to pull back;
- Be aware that interventions can cause damage;
- Enter a situation responsibly in order to avoid leaving behind the dependency syndrome.

While outsiders have the advantage of perspectives and knowledge that the community may not have access to, the outsider must never tell communities that the new ideas they bring with them are the only way to do things locally; outsiders must also be able to maintain integrity when they encounter

In our villages and neighbourhoods, we have the power to build a resilient economy - less dependant on the mega-systems of finance and production that have proven to be so unreliable. Most enterprises begin locally - in garages, basements and dining rooms. As neighbours, we have the local power to capture our own savings so that we are not captives of our notorious large financial institutions.

John McKnight

conflict over assets in the communities in which they work. Outsiders must acknowledge their own agenda and be clear with the community about what that is. This example from Central America:

> When we enter a community, we say up front we work with groups that engage all of their assets, and for us, that translates to mean we expect one third of the participants each to be women, men, and youth. We mean it even though that may not be the traditional way of the community. Most of the time we are sensitive to the cultural norms in context, but sometimes we decline to work with groups that do not want to meet us on certain issues. But this is transparent, never a hidden agenda.

Outsiders also may encounter a variety of issues about leadership. For example, there is hypocrisy in outsiders assuming they can catalyze action when they may really only be encouraging what is already happening naturally. An outsider that makes a real difference understands what people are already doing, takes the time to figure out their own best contribution, and doesn't aggressively take credit for the work that is done. Sometimes a community is simply passionate about issues and does not care who the outsiders are, provided they bring something positive and valuable to the table. Sometimes the issue of facilitator versus leader gets confused; there are different forms of leadership. An outsider like an agriculture extension worker will have a local orientation, and the community may depend on this person and nominate him or her as a leader. The community needs to identify its own leaders and it doesn't necessarily matter if it is an outsider.

Institutional Roles in Asset-Based Community Development
Non-Governmental Organizations
There are a number of challenges in discussing the role of NGOs in asset-based community development, including trying to understand the wide range of organizations and people involved in NGO work, and their scale of operation (ranging from local to the international). There are differences between NGOs, non-profits, and community organizations, and differences in terms of how they think about themselves as outsiders and insiders in the communities where they work. Even if they begin as outsiders, they may consider their roles differently as invited community members, catalysts, or change agents. Critical roles NGOs can play include breaking down barriers between institutions and communities, asking critical questions that can help further the work, and creating a feedback loop for sustaining leadership by providing a sounding board for leaders. NGOs, along with government agencies, can also help to facilitate the flow of information to local communities about opportunities and possibilities, and filter some of the overwhelming amount of information available on the Internet.

NGOs trying to support communities face predictable challenges in terms of helping to sustain leadership, helping a community leverage its assets and relationships, and identifying successes and using those as a platform for building enthusiasm. Sometimes NGOs face obstacles from within the community in the form of having to maneuver around ingrained community hierarchies that are holding the community back; sometimes obstacles are

What is sustainable? What if something dies but out of that grist emerges some of the leaders? Or if an organization is at war with the local community maybe there is a creative tension that is a good thing. I feel increasingly reticent to label [anything] good or bad.

Al Etmanski

external, for example, seeing the government as an asset without surrendering to its standard policies and practices.

NGOs also take on the unique challenges of translating the language of asset-based community development for local contexts, and trying to communicate and apply its principles both locally and globally. Where NGOs have traditionally been seen as providers, applying an ABCD approach has its challenges. Asset-based community development actively suggests there is an alternative way; it says success is "an inside job" - not the cavalry riding in to take care of things.

ABCD deliberately presents no rigid methodologies; rather, it offers guiding principles. Practitioners often find themselves explaining that asset-based community development isn't just about asset mapping; the reason mapping is conducted is to connect people for a purpose and to ask how assets can be mobilized to solve a particular problem or meet an opportunity. In order to do this effectively, communities and their supporters can move along a continuum of activities but in a way that is iterative, responsive and adaptive, not a rigid methodology.

Thoughtful practitioners need to be intentional about growing social as well as technical capacity. NGOs can function as the catalyst for a shift - internally and externally - from the giver/receiver paradigm, and help redefine the NGO role in general as the entity that facilitates linkages of all sorts. They can offer an approach (ABCD) that suggests an alternative to dependency, and helps community groups figure out how to engage with (or avoid) oppressive political systems. One particularly important role is asking provocative questions - but this can only be done once trust has been built with the community. NGOs should be transparent, and not pretend they do not have an agenda. NGOs do have an agenda to change community power structures (where they are oppressive, exclusionary, or blind to the possibilities for progressive change) and broaden leadership, help people form small groups, build up assets, and escape dependency on lenders. NGOs can also help communities understand and manage the agenda of groups coming to provide technical skills. Another key role for NGOs is facilitating local innovation and learning. NGOs have the ability to link communities for learning and exchange - within and across countries, or peer to peer - as opposed to delivering answers. NGOs can play the role of convener, and can link communities to local governments and other resources. NGOs can also play a role in helping make indigenous knowledge visible and credible. Finally, NGOs can help with matching grants; matching with sweat equity or other in-kind contribution.

Provoking much controversy was the practice of paying community members to attend meetings and workshops run by NGOs - essentially paying for people's "opportunity costs" - modeled on the idea of the *per diem* earned by NGO workers. This has become common practice for many NGOs in developing countries as it insures that meetings are well attended and field visits by extension staff are "worth it." The irony of maintaining this practice in an ABCD approach was not lost on participants in this discussion, but it reflects the magnitude of the task ahead to shift from NGO-driven to community-driven approaches.

A lot of time is spent in the Middle East on youth policy. The religious experience of youth is considered to be very important and the redefinition of faith as source of freedom rather then restriction helps define our approach. Many youth begin to see their faith as an asset.

Forum Participant

Hired by individual lawyers, or the state government, I work to prevent the death penalty. I tell the story of a defendant's life in order to persuade a jury to give the defendant life instead of death. Getting to know defendants has proved to be a rich experience in terms of learning how gifted they are. Often they are the most gifted person in their family and they start figuring out how to bring in the food, do things for the family, like putting brothers and sisters through college by running a drug operation.

They don't want the death penalty, but they also don't want to live their lives in prison. An asset-based approach often saves them from suicide. I talk to them about their gifts and what they can do in prison. It's very life-giving.

Ingrid Christianson

Turning now to a particular type of NGO, the array of potential opportunities for religious institutions in ABCD was a topic of discussion, though experience was mainly limited to the Christian faith and its institutions. Some believe that "the faith factor" is what motives people to care about more than themselves, or that religion can be an equalizer among people in those religious traditions that suggest that no person is better than another. Others think that religion provides a pathway for getting beyond the things that divide us. On the other hand religion has sometimes been used as a tactic to organise people, or as a political card in the public sphere, or to define "us" against "them." In a sense, churches act as proxies: "If you belong to the same church (or religion) you share my values; if you don't, then we have different values and you are an 'enemy'." Religious institutions can therefore be both an oppressor of peoples, and the source of a spiritual/religious response to that oppression (e.g., liberation theology).

One perspective suggests that we are at an interesting moment in time in which ABCD can be a way for people to redefine how they launch development and change. Spiritual spaces are an important part of this opportunity, and may represent the best place to start a community development effort. In the larger community development world, most members of religious congregations do not know about ABCD, but ABCD principles actually do reflect their Judeo–Christian traditions, many of which are about the gifts people can contribute.

Like other institutions, the church needs to be retrained and retooled. In Christian ministry, the term "mission" is used to reflect a spirit of service and community outreach, but it is important to get faith communities to shift away from a needs focused charity mode, and engage in community initiatives through more of an asset activation approach. In some cases, members of a local church are playing a role in the economic revitalization of the community, but in many disadvantaged communities, there may be churches on every corner, causing fragmentation of effort rather than finding common community-wide purpose. Like other institutions, churches have often behaved as though they had clients and caseloads. They don't have any other model to follow so they follow the way of the larger institutional world. Churches can be places full of people who want to reinvent themselves and their relation to community, and who want to make a meaningful contribution to community life. Beyond helping to realize the clear practical intentions of these individuals, the church may be able to commit itself and the sacred space it represents to being a sacred community place where people find inspiration and motivation.

Government
Governments and their representatives can be enablers and facilitators of community development, or function as barriers to community work. When individuals and communities think about the government and its role in their work, there is a tendency to generalize and lump "government" into a single category that then obscures the meaning of their response to whatever action government officials are taking. For community members, distinguishing, for example, between politicians, bureaucrats, and civil servants is important when trying to understand the motivations and meanings behind their actions. Additionally, there are various levels of government that must be taken into consideration when trying to interpret or develop an approach to government officials. These include federal, provincial/state, regional, and local/municipal

agencies, boards, and commissions. And within these government categories there are various departments, each with a responsibility for specific policies that are not always consistent across departments.

This tendency to lump government officials into one category can result in community members seeing bureaucrats and other civil servants as "faceless." In fact, they are individuals/citizens themselves; they live in communities and can relate to community projects from the local perspective in the same manner any other resident might. The challenge is to acknowledge what might be called the simultaneous insider (resident) versus outsider (government official) status. The particular hat a government official is wearing at any given moment needs to be clear in order for effective community work to be accomplished. Communities need to separate the message from the messenger, but this also suggests that the messenger (the individual wearing more than one hat) is clear about the role from which their message originates. In defining how they will work with governments, communities need to look for approaches that will motivate civil servants to assist them in what they want to do, rather than looking to governments to provide all the leadership. In a local context, the direct relationship between community residents and government officials with whom they interact is key, and trust must be the primary characteristic of such relationships.

Governments may actually be interested in asset-based approaches to community development, in spite of the fact that government systems are often designed to focus on needs and problems, and communities sometimes feel they are facing a wall when they endeavour to engage with government officials. In a Vietnamese case, for example, an ABCD approach is being pilot tested by the Ministry of Agriculture as a way of stimulating community organizing and initiative through a system that is trying to reverse (or at least moderate) its highly centralized state-led decision-making. Through this approach, the government is attempting to inspire a stronger sense of entrepreneurship to match its gradual economic liberalization, while at the same time preserving a commitment to social protection measures.

Several factors influence how government entities might respond to the alternative an ABCD perspective offers them in their own work. The first has to do with the extent to which the communities they are trying to serve are proactive on their own behalf. If communities organize themselves, identify their own assets, and approach governments with concrete ideas, government entities are better able to offer assistance in implementing community-generated solutions. In spite of the difficulties they may encounter, communities will fare best if they can be part of an ongoing conversation with government. Government agencies do not have answers for every problem, and often appreciate suggestions their community partners offer. Communities working from an asset-based perspective can also help focus/refocus governments on appropriate strategies and results. Asset-based community development can bring innovative solutions and, while systems tend to resist innovation, they are enticed by solutions that focus on results.

Asset-based community development can also play an important role in terms of resources available to accomplish community-building work. Government agencies are often challenged by insufficient resources with which to

We have been piloting ABCD in four provinces in Vietnam, and are now expanding to additional sites. We use ABCD to help local communities identify different kinds of local capital, including the idea of culture and tradition as types of capital. We don't call it ABCD. Instead it is called Village Development Planning based on strengths. We use village mapping and the "leaky bucket" to identify financial inflows and outflows. In this way villages come up with village development plans that are consistent with their own assets and opportunities. The idea is that these can be integrated into government planning.

Vinh Nguyen Duc

accomplish the work they want to do, and are limited in the actions they can take because they have to prioritize how money is spent. Communities that have identified their own assets and resources and bring those to the table may attract government entities who feel otherwise unable to support community initiatives. There can be differences, however, in how governments respond to initiative on the part of communities. In some countries, when people organize and demonstrate themselves as being capable of getting things done on quality of life issues, the government withdraws. In others, as communities get organized and begin to speak up with stronger voices, governments are more likely to become engaged. What explains these differences? Understanding how government agencies function requires a multi-faceted understanding of how organizations develop. An example of this is the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA):

> When the agency started, most of the people who worked there were individuals who had worked in development, people who had worked in religious organizations, and ex-CUSO volunteers who had a passion for development. As CIDA grew and developed internal systems, it increasingly brought in people who were career bureaucrats and the original people were pushed to the margins. As the passion that drove the organization at its inception was squeezed out, and the focus turned to results and money, the character of the organization changed in fundamental ways.

This kind of organization-to-agency development scenario is common, and the same thing happens to all kinds of non-governmental organizations. It does suggest, however, that communities needing to find champions within governments may be able to discover those people remaining in the system whose care and passion drove its development in the first place. When these champions cannot be found, shifting government agencies to act on the side of communities can sometimes require a more aggressive approach. In these cases, strategies involving the media, community militancy (e.g., protests, demonstrations, etc.) that draws attention to an issue, or political advocacy may work. But not always; in some societies and cultures such tactics can backfire or simply fail to have an effect. In other cases, power is distributed differently, and communities may be able to engage the government from a stronger position. As one participant claimed:

We have a literacy project too. Instead of bringing in tutors from the outside the community, a community connector project is looking to identify and build capacity within the community. We talk about what other initiatives can make use of local resources, and started a summer ESL project within housing projects. And the local Tim Hortons has been fantastic working with newcomers to develop job skills.

Jill Koch

> First Nations may be luckier than other [communities] because they have the legal power to make a lot of their own decisions. They have their own provincial and federal governments that recognize jurisdiction; through the treaty process many rights and responsibilities have been identified.

Shifting governments from a needs-based to a capacity or assets perspective can be an enormous challenge because systems are not designed to function in this way, and it is not easy for government officials to see what people can contribute to an issue or how they can take action. To effect such a change, systems must be transformed at all levels; minds must be reprogrammed so that entire teams can understand what is going on and why. In some rare cases, it is actually the government doing the best community work through its actions.

One trap of asset-based community development is that its organizers tend to see government as the enemy, when in fact every community needs government entities to accomplish some things the community is unable to do. There is strength in knowing which things the community does best, and which things the government does best. Communities and governments just need to be clear about which roles are appropriate for each group. As a general rule, pushing as many decisions to the community as possible makes sense, but "don't expect people to pave the roads."

In thinking about the role of governments in community development, particularly from the ABCD perspective, an important question arises: What do you change first, the government and its representatives or the community? Rather than using an either/or approach to this dilemma, a hybrid approach is for the community to move toward a vision of positive results rather than programs/services, while the government alters the way it views people and their capacities. **Jim Diers**' plenary presentation built on these themes. Based on his experience in Seattle, Washington, he argues that building government-community partnerships requires a shift in attitude on the part of both the community and the government. Governments need to recognise that neighbourhoods are not just places with needs but communities with underutilised resources; every effort should be made to nurture the potential for leadership and local citizen engagement through effective outreach and networking. Government inaccessibility, red tape, and "know-it-all attitude" need to go. Communities for their part need to "think and act as citizens rather than taxpayers," and share responsibilities with government. Both need to think and behave more holistically - governments breaking down departmental silos, and communities addressing factionalism that hinders government partnership.

Academia
There are numerous ways academics can engage with asset-based community development, and several roles they might assume. Like representatives of other institutions, however, academics make their most valuable contribution when they are conscious of, and intentional about, how they engage in their educational work. They must be cautious about how they enact their roles in community-based research and learning as it is possible for these to have both positive and negative consequences.

From a positive perspective, academics almost certainly bring numerous competencies and skills to asset-based community development efforts that may be happening in a variety of contexts. Most obviously, they can share their expertise and join with communities in assessment and research, sharing their specific skills in these areas. They may be able to add value in terms of helping to create a critical dialogue about what is possible in a particular context, using their skills as educators to help ensure the discussions move forward in a productive manner. A variation on their contributions in the area of discourse is their ability to "meddle" or stir up community conversations in a manner that challenges people to move to a deeper level of understanding. Academics may also help communities process their experiences and articulate the work they are doing in planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. As part of the process, they may use their skills to provide an added measure of coherence to what people see themselves doing. Academics can also work with communities

These enterprises in the Philippines - Fig Tree and Laca Ginger Tea - use locally available assets, particularly the skills of women… and the plentiful supplies of ginger. Both are also..building on another asset – existing economic diversity. For example, Fig Tree is building on people's…interest in volunteering and gifting. Laca Ginger Tea is building on existing economic and cultural customs [of reciprocal labour exchange, revolving credit, and barter]…When we look at initiatives like [these], they are not regular economic enterprises but what we might call community enterprises.
Jenny Cameron
and Katherine Gibson[3]

[3]*"ABCD meets DEF: Using ABCD to build Economic Diversity" Available from: http://coady.stfx.ca/work/abcd/forum/*

to "diagnose" or identify community strengths and/or issues that may otherwise be overlooked. They may be especially useful in helping a community identify and articulate what it needs in the area of community building tools, and in the actual development of those tools.

In the course of their institutional work, academics have specific roles in the transmission of knowledge and skills via the preparation of students. This institutional role may easily be translated for the preparation of traditional and non-traditional students for community work. For this endeavour, academics can utilize unique approaches, such as a "catch and release" teaching style that brings students together for intensive learning, then sets them free to apply their classroom lessons to experiences out in the community. Academics can provide safe environments in which students can learn and juxtapose these with challenging environments in which students can safely fail. They can offer opportunities for productive dialogue, chances for students to explore their own community experiences in the company of others doing similar kinds of community work. Academics - through the learning process they facilitateare also in a unique position to help establish "habits of the heart" among students as they go forward into community building work.

Good academics must also be cautious about the potential negatives of the power they hold. Via their unique roles - both assumed and ascribed - academics can either mediate or perpetrate the transmission of cultural codes. There can easily be a disconnect between the community from which a student originates and the communities - both academic and experiential - in which the student undertakes his or her educational work. Such students, in returning home from outside educational experiences, may bring with them appropriate skills for applying their learning in multiple contexts (in the best case), or the cultural norms associated with those communities in which they studied (in the worst case). Depending on the pedagogies - both formal and informal - that they choose to employ, academics can empower or disempower students, and broaden or narrow the skills and competencies with which students move ahead in their lives.

Academics also have the unique possibility of influencing the educational institutions in which they work. For example, through their research, teaching, and advocacy, they can help institutionalize the need for professors and programs to be connected to and embedded in the community. Likewise, academics can resist the imposition of the university "expertise" onto communities, and be personally committed to seeing issues with and without their academic hats. Conversely, academics can be part of the negative institutional voice that resists this kind of breakdown of boundaries between educational institutions and the communities in which they exist.

Academics can also have a powerful influence - both positive and negative - on developing students' leadership potential. This influence has many forms, ranging from expanding/stunting leadership potential, to broadening/narrowing interpretations of what leadership consists of, to encouraging fixed/fluid notions of individual and community leadership. Academics may or may not be prepared as individuals and as educators to help develop leaders. While fostering leaders should be one role of education, leadership is context specific and thus requires both sensitivity and awareness, and may be more an organic process than an

We discovered "affinity." It was just a stone in the sand which we happened to kick. We can only take credit for stopping to pick it up and polish it...Affinity groups comprise members belonging to different religions and castes; they share poverty and insecurity and have survived because they depend on and trust each other.
Aloysius Fernandez

academic one. The academy is also unlikely to be the most appropriate place for community leadership capacities to be developed. The many characteristics of leadership may suggest other contexts in which to nurture these skills, with or without the involvement of academics. Characteristics of leadership include: (a) leaders come in several types (e.g., trained or spontaneous); (b) leadership demonstrates different degrees of permanence (e.g., lifelong or situational); (c) leadership comes in many styles (e.g., conventional or unconventional - women, indigenous communities vs. western models); (d) leadership changes for different sized efforts (e.g., large and small activities); (e) the extent of support and recognition leaders require to sustain their efforts; (f) sometimes the best leadership is some variation on "leaderlessness" or the situation in which all participants lead in equal measure. Within the community, outsiders such as academics can play a role in leadership development, provided they are competent to contribute in a context and culturally specific manner.

Donors
Donors are concerned about dependency on grants, building the sustainability of community efforts beyond their grants, and, hence, developing effective exit strategies. Looking at investing in communities from a donor point of view, it is sometimes necessary to hold up funding until the community can demonstrate the capacity for a community-driven initiative. Otherwise it will be a donor-driven and unsustainable initiative.

Donors, of course, come in a variety of types, and the principles donors use in supporting citizen led community development are related to who the donor actually is. For funders, the roles and strategies they may adopt in trying to support ABCD neighbourhood work moving forward are dependant on how thoroughly they are engaged in the work. Having a theory of change that is based on the principles of citizen-led development can help. For example, the understanding that a condition for a vibrant community is that there is space for everyone and all kinds of entities to contribute (e.g., young, old, business, etc.) will support a theory of change that looks different than if this understanding is not in place. Funders which know that creating a supportive coalition and developing roles within it takes time (e.g., bringing people to the table with all voices heard; collecting knowledge to create a learning network; bringing people from the outer circle into the inner circle) have a different understanding about how the work (and their funding support) will progress, than funders working from some other angle.

Asset-based community development is currently focused on practitioners, but needs to be more broadly introduced to funders. Funders may be particularly interested in ABCD because, to a certain extent, it provides the framework to find low cost/no cost solutions by helping to identify things citizens can do themselves. By distinguishing the things communities can do and things outsiders can do, it will become easier to convince funders that their investments can make a difference and that their seed resources can be more widely dispersed. There are, however, also challenges that will present themselves in convincing funders that this is a worthy approach. For some it represents work that is insufficiently serious, too little demanding of rigour, too long term, and capable of generating too little evidence of impact. ABCD provides a new lens and a set of guiding principles but donors themselves often have imperfect

ABCD and "the leaky pot" have faciliated discussions of social topics that were hitherto the preserve of men. The whole process helps people participate in community discussions based on their capabilities.
                    Adisa Yakubu

systems and constraints that interfere with their choices about how to approach investing in community. For example, sometimes funders' own donors designate where they want their money to go, so changing how money is given requires convincing both the funder, and the source of the actual funds.

Effective donors for ABCD work understand that too much of a focus on outcome measurement can stall the work, and that alternative measures may be better if they allow the donor to maintain some kind of results-based accountability. Many donors have used small grants for neighbourhood residents who bring good ideas to the table as a way to draw out potential community leaders. Providing seed money for venture capital can be another good way to fund community work. Whatever the strategy, donors know it is important to be clear with their boards about the risks and amount of time this kind of community support will take. One funder that has taken asset-based development very seriously as an approach to its community building efforts describes their work:

> We've adopted ABCD principles as a basis for making decisions about whom we fund. We look at the type of work the grantee is interested in and whether they will carry out these principles. This has had a big impact - we stopped funding many organisations but have offered to help them make the shift to an asset orientation. This generally means that funding has shifted to smaller organizations working on the ground in communities.

Some advice for donors as they try to support asset-based community efforts is to try to be the "first ones in." This strategy allows the funder to really engage with residents, and get to know them and the community. In this position, donors can also take the lead in orienting the community to an asset-based approach by bringing people together to encourage community conversations. Donors cannot legitimately talk about supporting communities and neighbourhoods if the people there don't know their neighbours or communicate with them. Additionally, a trusting relationship between donors and grantees is key. Donors must be frank, willing to alter their own goals, and put faith in people to accomplish good things. They must allow flexibility and offer permission to fail. They must acknowledge that while there are risks in this approach, there is also the potential for big returns.

Lessons for donors can also be drawn from United Way's (UW) experience. Traditionally UW used to raise money, which it gave to community organizations. Now its funding support builds on community assets: communities have to demonstrate that the community itself is invested. An example is "Action for Neighborhood Change", a place-based program, focused on urban neighbourhoods. Careful not to define a community by boundary, UW uses proxies of social capital and identifies neighbourhoods with low social capital. As explained by **Paul Shakotko** of United Way Halifax:

> We talk to them about our ideas and see who is interested in working with us. Initially, we host conversations. Our role is changing constantly. Our criterion for making grants that range from $200-$5000 is that 5 residents have to agree to do

This caravan park provides housing for many people who are, have been, or would otherwise be, homeless. BIG is assisting these residents to utilize their skills, realize their dreams and passions, and build meaningful and supportive relationships while encouraging active community membership. After initially being concerned that ABCD would not really work in transient park communities, the Caravan Project is learning that it can, and does, work.
Graeme Stuart, Dee Brooks, Cherie Stephens[4]

[4]*"Its Nearly Time to Go: Asset Based community Development with Transient Caravan Park Communities", Parity Volume 22, March 2009. Downloaded from http:// www.newcastle.edu.au/Resources/ Research Centres/Family Action Centre/*

something. We have discovered that people get really involved; they start to talk about their neighbourhood and what it wants to be. Sometimes our role is as simple as creating linkages. Sometimes it is group capacity building.

Governments represent a unique kind of donor, for whom the issues and challenges may be both similar and different. Given the nature of governments, it may be more difficult to tailor the funding to the specific community situation than it is for other funders. For example, the kinds of very small programs in which funds go directly to communities are useful, but may be particularly challenging for a government to develop. Governments can provide support in at least three ways: (a) leveraging relationships; (b) providing funding (e.g., core funding, matching funding); and (c) offering support for community activities such as communication cafés, appreciative inquiry, and training. Governments, like other donors, have the problem of control; they demand results and they demand a certain kind of results. A government supporting ABCD work would have to give up some of that control, but by taking some chances, it is possible to link community, government, and other donors in a way that each partner puts resources in a pot without any one participant assuming all the risk. It is, however, possible to generalize too much about government funding, which is dependent on the specific government in question. One government representative said:

> With our government grants we learned the worst thing was to provide 100% funding. The community can leverage our funding with whatever assets they can bring to the table; we all pool our resources and have a minimal accountability process. Because there is a lot of corruption, we ask the community to play the monitoring role and the quality is improved; that way the government is giving authority to the community at the same time it is providing support.

There is advice for communities too:

> Understand the importance of money, capital, and investment; assess your own economic assets and approach donors for funding with your own assets clearly stated; use donor resources as seed capital, and use your own social capital to multiply that seed capital; use government or donor funds to leverage other resources; explore opportunities to sensitise the private sector.

Investment and Risk: Institutional Responses
In many of the discussions, ABCD was associated with institutions being invited to partner with or invest in communities in an attempt to shake-off patterns of institutional behaviour that have induced dependency. With investment comes risk. In one group the question of how different institutions handle risk was explored, with the following issues and questions raised.

There has been a tendency to be critical of government - instead, we should be thinking about how to work with both government and private sector institutions and recognize what they can and can't do in partnership with nonprofits or with

Myrada's experience shows clearly that in a stratified society, it is not enough to teach people to fish because even after learning to fish they cannot reach the river, and when they reach there they find the fishing rights already captured. The obstacles are too many. Therefore, time and resources must be invested in intangible assets like confidence to come together and speak, skills to discuss,…courage to identify openly why they are poor,.. and time to design a strategy for change; these are the components of "empowerment".
Aloysius Fernandez

communities. For example, the private sector is more likely to understand and accept risk, while in many contexts risk taking is too much to ask of government agencies. Sometimes governments may be willing to fund innovations that are risky, but they are less likely to take risks in their own service delivery functions.

An aspect of government's risk aversion is the demand made for proposal writing and reporting on results, a red-tape burden motivated by a narrow view of the need for public scrutiny that has been increasingly criticized as counterproductive and contradictory in its effects.

Are there different perceptions of risk, or types of risk? Does the idea of risk carry an assumption of failure? In the private sector, risk is associated with financial risk, while in the government sector it is more associated with loss of power and influence. In the case of NGOs/nonprofits, the biggest risk may be loss of reputation - when trust is lost, it can be lost permanently. Doing nothing also carries its own risks.

Ironically, for many funders the best way to mitigate risk is to demand greater honesty. As things are now, there are funding relationships where dishonesty is embedded - both sides are pretending, instead of facing realities. If this is the case, then our language needs to reflect more tolerance of risk and relationships that are committed to engagement, improvisation and flexibility rather than the delivery of specific outputs.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Learning and Accountability
Tolerance of risk, and the demand for greater honesty in funding relationships clearly has consequences for monitoring and evaluation. Discussion of monitoring and evaluation came up frequently during the forum as participants chafed against unrealistic reporting requirements (if they were recipients) or the absence of clear evidence on which to base funding decisions (if they were funders). What is risk of failure to some is opportunity for learning for others. What is "bad" or "good" according to predetermined indicators of success can also be contested as **Al Etmanski** pointed out:

> What is sustainable? What if something dies but out of that grist emerge some of the leaders? Or if an organization is at war with the local community maybe there is a creative tension that is a good thing. I feel increasingly reticent to label [anything] good or bad.

People agreed that there is an important distinction between monitoring and evaluation for **learning**, and monitoring and evaluation for **accountability** purposes. As **Tim Brodhead** pointed out, we are continuously engaging in a "dance of deception" when we report to donors in order to continue to get funding. Both donors and NGOs are doing the dance, pretending that money is the solution, whereas learning is the real objective of monitoring and evaluation. In fact, we should, as Dennis Rondinelli (1983) tells us, treat our work as an experiment, and use monitoring and evaluation to test a hypothesis. With this attitude, there is no failure, only learning, and learning is a much more worthwhile investment than simple accountability for bureaucratic purposes. Nonetheless, for practical purposes, all monitoring and evaluation feeds into decision-making, whether it is a decision about how to improve what we are

[To identify cases of genuine community-driven development] required us to look off the development superhighway – away from government or NGO sponsored projects – and to explore the activities that informal associations of people were undertaking. The more we looked for this, the more we realized how much these community initiatives have to teach development practitioners like ourselves.
Gord Cunningham

doing, how to celebrate achievement, or a decision about what to (and whether to) continue funding. Who the decision-makers are, what decisions they have to make as they put evaluation findings to use, what information they need to make those decisions, and how they use the power they have to shape or strengthen the work on the ground are key questions to consider. (Note: The McConnell Foundation's website, http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca/ is a useful resource for evaluation in the context of learning).

In an ABCD context, a distinction needs to be made between evaluation of the results of community activity, and evaluation of the process of introducing and sustaining sustained organized activity. In the first case, evaluation activities are carried out by communities themselves in a truly endogenous, citizen-led manner. The focus is on whether citizen-led and community building initiatives have been positive from the point of view of the community (and therefore warrant continued effort and investment by the community). It is important to remember that people in the community are constantly learning and evaluating without a formal process for doing so. They are investing their time, so their on-going evaluation can be assumed to be taking place. For other stakeholders, the important question is not so much the community's learning as how to build on that. It is really about three simple questions: "What went well?"; "What didn't go well?"; and "What would you do differently next time?"

The second type of evaluation activity is for the external agency to use to assess results of an ABCD process. Here the focus of evaluation is on whether an introduced ABCD process is genuinely resulting in sustained citizen-led, community building activity (and therefore whether it is worth continuing to support, or whether resources should be redirected elsewhere). In Ethiopia, the strengthening of social relationships through associations, and the capacity to organise and link with outsiders have been useful indicators of this. However, the organic nature of the ABCD process means that the evaluation must ask questions that reveal the unexpected outcomes, and not just those that are predicted. Evaluation should also be the means by which we learn from failure and "embrace error". What doesn't work? For example, there is a certain amount of "evaluation with their feet" - i.e. people no longer interested in participating. We need to know why some activities dissolve like this. We need the capacity and courage to say "Forget it" or "Switch it for something else."

In sum, when funding is generated internally, local accountability mechanisms can be set up that are appropriate and meaningful for those local stakeholders. With external funding there are external accountability and information requirements that feed into the learning and decision-making of that external funder. Unless there is dialogue and a clear understanding of the purpose and audience of evaluation, the community may respond with suspicion, and monitoring and evaluation requirements may feel imposed and without relevance to the community's own learning and accountability needs. Sometimes communities and NGOs get stuck in an "over-advocacy trap" where they promise to deliver much more than they can possibly deliver in order to get funding and then cannot be truly honest about the actual outcomes.

Logic and results-based evaluation models are ever-present among funders. They are based on a theory of change, yet they are often a simplification of theory and do not capture change comprehensively. They tend to be used for management

The community can't partner with a government divided by functions; so [government needs to] develop a more holistic, community-based approach.

Government can't partner with a community divided by factions; so [communities need to] work collaboratively within the neighbourhood and with other neighbourhoods.

Jim Diers

[On volunteerism:]

Most communities can be compared to a football game where 30,000 people who need the exercise turn up to watch 36 people who don't.
Peter Kenyan

and accountability purposes, so care needs to be taken to contextualise everything while using them. This does not mean we have to employ ever more complicated systems of measurement. To the contrary, sometimes it is by asking the simple questions ("Is your life better? In what way?") that we stay open to multiple but context specific responses. The more sensitive we are to local realities the easier it is to identify "vital signs" in each context. The Coady Institute has had some success combining evaluation methods that use key indicators of predicted change at the community level with more open ended retrospective methods (such as The Most Significant Change story-telling technique) to get at the unexpected or the less tangible changes that occur. In this way, more than "learning" and "accountability," there is a "legitimising" purpose of monitoring and evaluation, because the process affirms and recognises actual experience in all its breadth and complexity, rather than simply searching for the realisation of a set of narrow logical results.

Grassroots Grantmakers have learned that funding through small grants needs to be risk tolerant and experimental, the antithesis of the "accountability movement" that is centred on outcomes and promises to deliver. Instead, grants should be seen as an invitation to take risks. In the spirit of "venture philanthropy" community members collaborate with donors in a joint process of learning, inventing and discovery.

Different funders have different expectations. Some want real stories, appreciating the dynamism of community experience, and recognizing the value of simple evaluation exercises. Others are looking for more tangible evidence of "capacity building". With skill, both can be achieved by infusing reports with rich real life stories that engage and excite all stakeholders, including donors. So, for example, it should be possible to take stories and other qualitative data and craft these into narratives, tables, and graphs that suit a variety of different stakeholders.

Practical Suggestions
In the discussions on how to do monitoring and evaluation in a manner consistent with learning, many creative ideas emerged: Community exchange visits, NGO exchange visits, audio and video recordings, simple technology to link communities around the world in discussions about their experience, and making sure that monitoring and evaluation is built in as a deliberate step in the ABCD process after action planning so that it can genuinely contribute to ongoing learning. Ask people: What do you expect to see in three months, six months, one year? The answers are the basis for the community's own indicators.

Sebastian Matthews has thought a lot about the monitoring and evaluation question as it relates to ABCD. His presentation is available online through the forum website http://coady.stfx.ca/work/abcd/forum/). It prompted much discussion about "the balanced scorecard" and about how this might be adapted to assess change in communities where an ABCD approach has been used. Since the forum, he has also been testing out ideas with fellow participants at the Coady Institute about how to conceptualise, as an ice cream cone (figure 1), monitoring and evaluation at community and organisational levels in a way that captures the importance of tracking expected or predicted change while remaining open to learning about "the most significant changes that actually occurred."

Figure 1. Ice Cream Model

Ice Cream Model: A Process of Change

This process model of change suggests that the ABCD *activities* of a community should encourage and measure most significant changes (MSC's) across all stakeholders; and this processs of self reflection ideally transforms the *roles* of the other development partners
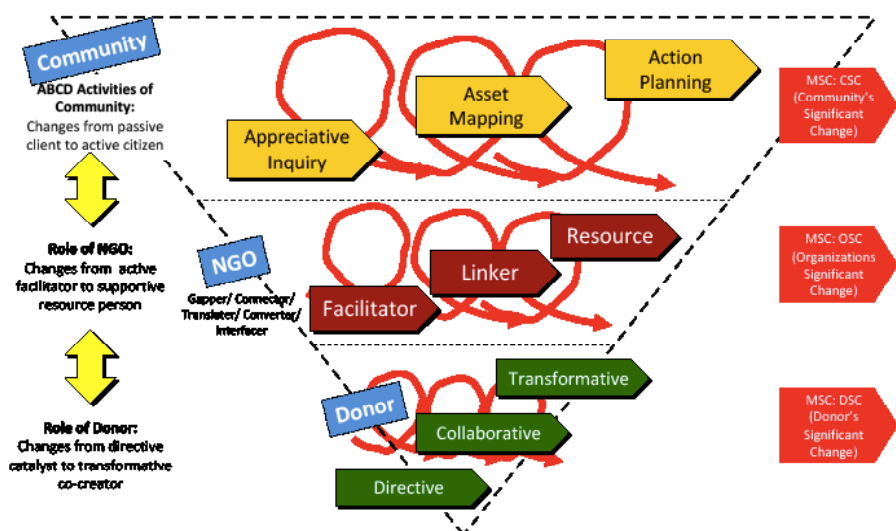
Source: Sebastian Mathews, based on input from participants of the ABCD certificate course, Coady International Institute, September 2009. Reproduced with permission.

ABCD in a Global Context

According to **Brian Hanson**, a review of international development trends since the Second World War suggests that the thinking behind ABCD may well be "an idea whose time has come". Following the Second World War, the first "big idea" was that of centralized state-led development. Keynesian economic policies were adopted on the assumption that state expenditure would stimulate local economic growth. In many places, import substitution strategies encouraged rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. Building nations was the priority, often at the expense of building communities. During the 1980s, the era of big government began to falter - the State began to be viewed as the problem, and the market as the solution. As debt accumulated in poorer countries, structural adjustment programs were introduced to avert bank failures and a global financial crisis, and to reorient the global economy towards accelerated international trade and consumption. This was the second "big idea." For many communities faced with the consequences of structural adjustment (devalued currencies, cutbacks in government expenditures, deregulation, removal of protections against the vagaries of the market, etc.) this spelled social and economic depletion and dislocation. As neo-liberalism took hold, inequalities between rich and poor people, and rich and poor countries, deepened and were worsened by the unequal consequences of climate change.

The financial crisis in Asia in the late 1990s, and the financial crisis and global recession occurring in recent years globally has rocked confidence in the market. Banks have been nationalised, corporations propped up by governments, and government is again resorting to stimulus packages. It is not a return to post WWII rhetoric so much as an absence of a new "big idea." In this situation

In the current programs supported by World Neighbors these individual self-help "merry-go-round" savings groups have been encouraged to come together and operate in a more formal way by encouraging collective action achieved only when different groups come together guided by a common vision. The whole idea of affiliation within a program framework is to enhance mobilization of resources in larger quantities.
Chris Macoloo

there is a search for alternatives, and more space for experimentation with new approaches; there is no battling against a strong orthodoxy. Policy debates are re-examining how incentives can be put in place to help people build a variety of financial and non-financial assets and thereby lessen dependence on social protection measures, while at the same time guaranteeing basic protections under law. Innovations in the way people organise are emerging in the social economy, where the rules of the market are softened by the redistributive mechanisms of cooperative or community-based organisations. Challenges to the global capitalist model are being entertained in the context of debates about peak oil, and the lessons from indigenous world views about sustainable and diverse livelihood strategies. Just as the Ghanaian Sankofa bird looks back in order to move forward, ABCD principles can guide us from the lessons of community resiliency towards further collaborative action. One question for us is how we can get engaged in the policy debate, and what kinds of policies can be put in place that encourage citizens to stay actively engaged as contributors to community building, and as protectors of an increasingly fragile natural world.

It is important to recognise that the contexts in which we work are dramatically different from each other. Supportive social protection is mandated in richer countries, but absent in poorer countries. In poorer countries, economic progress can, as **Naresh Singh** pointed out, "be wiped out by one stroke of the macro-economic pen." Functioning systems of access to justice and the rule of law are also often absent. In fact, according to the recently published report from the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor (2008), "4 billion people are excluded from the rule of law" (p.16). Not only do laws not work for the poor, but there are also laws that work against the poor. One of the first imperatives is to remove these "anti-poor laws" to ensure that people have rights to legal identity, to property, to protection in the work place, and to access to business opportunities. We must remember that the notion of "citizen-led" assumes that everyone has legal identity, while, for many people, this status is denied.

ABCD and Rights-Based Approaches
The Coady Institute has drawn attention to how ABCD can be the way to give the sustainable livelihoods framework "hands and feet," and how it can complement the sustainable livelihoods approach employed now by many development agencies. ABCD can also be complementary to a rights-based approach. People's capacities are related to their access to assets. Communities that organise to claim rights of access to assets are, in fact, mobilising their social and political assets to secure assets upon which to build a livelihood.

Nevertheless, for some, the fit between ABCD and rights-based approaches is not so clear. Seen from an historical and contextual perspective, a rights-based approach is relatively new. The notion of citizenship, and rights of citizenship, is also relatively new. Prior to these egalitarian principles, it was status that was respected (and not the equal rights of all).

From one vantage point, the issue of rights is associated with the ascendancy of the individual in Western culture, replacing communal responsibility and relationships. In this view, the focus on rights contributes to the dissembling of the power of local communities. Communitarians, for example, would challenge the idea of a universal theory or standard of justice, arguing instead that justice

Power was initially understood by the group as mainly being about decision-making. An increase in the group members' perception of their power to own the cooperative has most significantly manifested itself in a growing sense of responsibility for addressing issues, completing tasks and the overall success of the business.

Ted Smeaton

is found in forms of life and traditions of particular societies and hence can vary from context to context.

A middle ground between these two positions is the idea that we have rights as citizens but we also have responsibilities to our communities. The tension prevails, however, in a fast-paced world with highly mobile populations. New immigrants holding down several jobs may have little time for community involvement, especially if they consider their neighbourhood to be a transitioning point before moving to a more permanent location. Institutions provide essential services; they substitute for what used to be done by and for relatives and friends. Institutions are there to provide the services that are rights of citizenship (or new immigrant status).

Some would argue that as institutions get bigger, the responsibilities of communities fall away, and community power is diminished. The challenge is how to build trust at both the community level and the institutional level. At the community level, how is trust built intentionally through face-to-face relationships in our local communities in a commitment to mutual support and collective endeavour? It starts with the smallest of gestures - leaving a key with a neighbor, taking care of a neighbour's children after school.

At the same time how can trust in institutions be built in contexts where corruption and patronage have destroyed expectations of neutrality and fairness, or in institutions that are overzealous and poor listeners? The mark of trust in institutions is shown when people are able to treat strangers as "honorary" friends (see Seabright, 2004), assuming that those strangers working in institutions have a commitment to "the public good." Mediating associations that work (and act as a conduit) between individuals and "big system" institutions may be able to help identify those honorary friends.

We should exercise some caution with any of these frameworks or models. Frameworks can lock us in, tying us to a particular way of categorizing and ordering our world. At the very least, frameworks (such as the sustainable livelihoods framework or the rights-based framework) need to be contextualised, not spread as a uniform view of the world. A respect for different worldviews could go so far as claiming, for example, that indigenous knowledge systems warrant "conceptual rights" as well as cultural rights, because the paradigm for understanding the world is incompatible with dominant mainstream thinking, and should be accepted as such. On the other hand, do such world views then become exclusionary, emphasizing our divisions rather than our common purpose?

Is ABCD Instigating Structural Change?
For some, there is much that ABCD is missing. They believe it doesn't deal with the bigger global realities such as political power, military power, or environmental issues. They see a risk of romanticising ABCD and thereby masking social or political barriers to participating in community development. They cannot identify a common set of assumptions associated with ABCD about the nature of a better world. On the other hand, proponents of ABCD point to the fact that it is all about organising for asserting control over life and livelihood, whether at the local level or the policy level. ABCD has the potential to address social inequality in so far as the focus of practice is with relatively disadvantaged communities (which has been the case) and that the importance

Each time a person moves from isolation to connection our neighbourhoods become safer, our communities more vibrant and our society more cohesive. Given the enormity of the challenges we face in these infant years of the 21st century, building relationships, strengthening human bonds, expanding our capacity to care for one another are crucial acts. Our collective task is to end the poverty of loneliness. It is to learn to care for each other.
Vicki Cammack

of complementary structural or systemic changes at policy or institutional levels are acknowledged and actively advanced. In the assumption of power to act, communities are using the assets they have to be the agents of change to improve their livelihood options. For example, the self help group movement in India was a way in which the financially poor could organise and build strength in numbers so that ultimately the banking system and the government had to respond. The concern about the broader context is reflected in the question of how ABCD is interpreted ideologically. While its proponents are committed to removing the obstacles for people to organise themselves to live their lives with dignity, the question of how structures should change so that people can exercise that "agency" is not answered simply or uniformly.

With a decreasing "piece of the pie" allotted for care and community work due to a struggling global economy, there are some concerns about ABCD potentially being misconstrued and co-opted with the mentality of "let the poor pull themselves up by their own bootstraps." That such interpretation is possible reflects the fact that the role of government, the private sector, nonprofits, and communities themselves; and the relationships between them, are changing rapidly. There are many influences: the economic situation and the speed at which we can interact and communicate with new technology are but two examples. Many people are operating on the assumption that service provision by government is going to decline; there will be a recognition that the way we have operated in the past is not necessarily going to work for the next 50 years. There will be a greater role for communities. The question is: where do we, in our various capacities, position ourselves within that changing reality? How do we strengthen those capacities (and resources) at the community level? What are the positives of this in terms of redefining ourselves and our role in communities? What are its dangers?

What Does an ABCD Community of Practice Look Like?
Why has ABCD not evolved into a movement? Discussion on this suggested it was too soon to be a movement, but that a movement was, by its nature, organic, building on local experience and effective practice, consciousness raising and transformation. The highly contextualised nature of ABCD means it hasn't yet made the leap into a movement - although technology may provide the means to do this. Those of us aspiring to be in a community of practice around ABCD have to consider our responsibilities to "help get the engines started."

One topic that emerged repeatedly at the forum was about the possibility of building a community of practice for asset-based community development. The term community of practice is interesting in itself, originating in the 1990s with research by Lave and Wenger (1991) that proposed the idea of situated learning, or of learning that is embedded within groups that are doing something and learning as they do it. The suggestion of a community of ABCD practice resonated with some participants, but a difference in definition that exists in the conceptualization of communities of practice was also part of what was driving, or not driving, this conversation. Communities of practice exist on a continuum from very formalized to completely informal. In fact, the forum itself was an example of a community of practice, i.e., a group of people involved in doing something that had come together to learn from one another.

Bethel New Life was guided by the question: "What's most important in helping people move out of poverty?" We answered that question with a renewed focus on employment services, job creation, financial education, home ownership, and other asset-building vehicles, and the results have been greater effectiveness and better use of what God has given us.
Mary Nelson

As evidence of the interest in building communities of practice, self-organised group discussions took place during the forum among participants who were interested in pursuing further work beyond the conference with other participants. These discussions have since led to a number of initiatives: an African regional ABCD Network is in its beginning stages; an ABCD conference in East Africa is planned; an international ABCD Listserv has been created; strategies to include and strengthen the voices of youth in an ABCD approach have been devised; and several exchanges have taken place between donors and practitioners about how to more concretely capture the changes that we are witnessing as a result of the ABCD approach around the world. There was agreement that occasional opportunities to gather internationally would be welcome, as would some kind of mechanism to share resources, tools, lessons learned, and best practices. This has been going on for some time through the ABCD Institute, the Coady International Institute, and the Asia Pacific network; and this forum has prompted closer ties between these sources of energy, and those that are emerging in the African region and in the UK through the International Association for Community Development. The Coady International Institute's plans for a joint website with the ABCD Institute, which can experiment with some mechanisms for sharing, are underway.

Into the Future

This forum has initiated several conversations: between practitioners in the North as well as the South; between practitioners and academics and policy makers; and between community members and the institutions with which they work. It is clear that ABCD is resonating, perhaps especially because the core principles of this approach are imbued with the language of hope and possibility. This comes with a confidence in a capacity to act. Participants did not necessarily agree on where community action would lead, but they confirmed two essential elements:

- the importance of collective shared responsibility that is built into the word "community", the starting point of ABCD practice, that can have global as well as local expression.

- that active-citizenship is an expression of identity, not just within the narrower confines of local communities, but within a larger world that has officially recognized the right to live with dignity.

How these responsibilities are shared between communities and the institutions mandated to serve their interests will be the pivotal discussion point in the years to come. As such, the terms Asset-Based Community Development and Asset-Based Citizen-led Development can comfortably share the same acronym: ABCD.

Communities are emerging as powerful producers of desired outcomes – or co-producers with major institutions – of security, health, learning, justice, environmental sustainability and so on….[I am] increasingly convinced that we may be nearing what Malcolm Gladwell called a "tipping point", a whole lot of smaller unrelated happenings which begin to form a pattern, and finally emerges as a full blown movement.

Jody Kretzmann

List of Participants
ABCD Forum
July 2009

Roberto Abeabe, United Way of Greater Toronto, Canada
Laurie Alexander, Nova Scotia Economic Development, Canada
Paul Arnston, Northwestern University, USA
Ammanual Assefa, Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE), Ethiopia
Harold (Hal) Baron, Communitas Charitable Trust/Foundation for Self-Sufficiency in Central America, Central America
Alma Beck, Vibrant Communities Saint John, Canada
Terry Bergdall, ABCD Institute and Institute of Cultural Affairs, Northwestern University, USA
Pedro Bidegaray, EARTH University, Ecuador
Jennifer Birch-Jones, Consultant and Practitioner, Canada
Steve Brescia, Groundswell International, USA
Tim Brodhead, J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, Canada
Chris Bryant, Nova Scotia Department of Economic and Rural Development, Canada
Jenny Cameron, University of Newcastle, Australia
Vickie Cammack, PLAN Institute for Caring Citizenship, Canada
Jim Campbell, Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection, Canada
John Cawley, J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, Canada
Nanook Cha, Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association (MISA), Canada
Sam Chimbuya, Khanya-African Institute for Community-Driven Development (Khanya-aicdd), South Africa
Dacia Chrzanowski, CommUniversity/ABCD Institute, Northwestern University, USA
Holly Clark, HRJ Consulting Ltd., Canada
Emilie Coyle, Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association (MISA), Canada
Mary Coyle, Coady International Institute, Canada
Gordon Cunningham, Coady International Institute, Canada
Phil Davison, Coady International Institute/StFX Extension Department, Canada
Tom Dewar, Aspen Institute, USA
Jim Diers, University of Washington/ABCD Institute, Northwestern University, USA
Bernadette Dolley, Ikhala Trust, South Africa
H. Daniels (Dan) Duncan, United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona, USA
Tim Dutton, Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence (SCOPE), USA
Fiona Eberts, Action for Moringa Nutrition in Ghana (AMONG), UK
Al Etmanski, Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN), Canada
Aloysius Fernandez, Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA), India
Behrang Foroughi, Coady International Institute, Canada
Janis Foster Richardson, Grassroots Grantmakers, UK
Robert M. Francis, Regional Youth/Adult Substance Abuse Project (RYASAP), USA
Bogaletch Gebre, Kembatti Mentti Gezzima-Tope (KMG), Ethiopia
Judi Geggie, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, Australia
Yogesh Ghore, Coady International Institute, Canada
Katherine Gibson, University of Western Sydney, Australia
Mengistu Gonsamo Gobina, Oxfam Canada, Ethiopia
Andrew Gordon, Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington, USA
Lucie Goulet, Oxfam Canada/Coady International Institute, Canada
Sarah Grant, Engineers Without Borders, Canada
Bernard Guri, Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD), Ghana
Brian Hanson, Buffett Center for International and Comparative Studies, Northwestern University, USA
Terry Lynn Holley, East Tennessee Foundation, USA
Wiliber Ibarra, Jambi Kiwa, Ecuador
Peter Kenyon, Bank of I.D.E.A.S./Consultant, Australia
Scott Killough, World Neighbors, USA
Jill Koch, Community Assets for Education (CAFÉ) Institute, Canada

John (Jody) Kretzmann, ABCD Institute, Northwestern University, USA
Iva Lafond, Saskatoon Tribal Council, Canada
Nanci Lee, Consultant, Canada
Yves Lévesque, Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé, Canada
Joanne Linzey, HR Council for the Non-Profit Sector, Canada
Robert Lupton, Consultation Service (FCS) Urban Ministries, USA
Rev. Damon Lynch, III, New Prospect Baptist Church, USA
Pauline MacIntosh, StFX Extension Department, Canada
Chris Macoloo, World Neighbors, East Africa
Ann Makhool, Caledon Institute, Canada
David Martin, Comart Foundation, Canada
Mireille Cronin Mather, Foundation for Sustainable Development, USA
Sebastian Mathews, CIFAL/United Nations Institute for Training and Research, South Africa
Alison Mathie, Coady International Institute, Canada
John McKnight, ABCD Institute, Northwestern University, USA
Paul Melia, Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES), Canada
Anselmo B. Mercado, Cooperative Business Institute (CBI), Philippines
Rewa Misra, Coady International Institute, Canada
Samuel Molla, Oxfam Canada, Ethiopia
Peter Mortimer, United Way (Halifax), Canada
Nthabiseng Motsemme, University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa
Gladys Nabiswa, Community Research in Environment and Development Initiatives (CREADIS), Kenya
Beatriz Battistella Nadas, City Hall of Curitiba, Brazil
Mary Nelson, Bethel New Life, USA
Rogerio Arns Neumann, Odebrecht Foundation, Brazil
Lycia Neumann, Odebrecht Foundation, Brazil
Vinh Nguyen Duc, National Institute of Agricultural Planning and Projection, Vietnam
Tom O'Brien, Neighorhood Connections (Cleveland), USA
Saleela Patkar, Consultant, India
Brianne Peters, Coady International Institute, Canada
Deborah Puntenney, ABCD Institute, Northwestern University, USA
Suzanne Robinson, Inuvik Learning Centre, Aurora College, Canada
Imara Rolstan, Oxfam Canada, Canada
Cormac Russell, Nurture Development, Ireland, and ABCD Institute, Northwestern University, USA
Shelagh Savage, Coady International Institute, Canada
Natasha Sawh, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, Canada
Paul Shakotko, United Way (Halifax), Canada
Naresh Singh, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Canada
Alan Sloan, Alan Sloan Consulting and Facilitation, Canada
Ted Smeaton, Inspiring Communities Pty Ltd., Australia
Dang Kim Son, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam
Christine Spinder, Facilitator, Trainer and Community Artist, Canada
Mary Van den Heuvel, Independent, Canada
Tom Walsh, Just Us! Coffee Cooperative, Canada
Waikwa Wanyoike, Kenya Diaspora for Peace and Development (KDPD), Canada
Byron White, Community Building Institute, Xavier University, USA
Francine Whiteduck, Native Women's Association of Canada, Canada
Jane Worton, Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, Canada
Adisa Lansah Yakubu, Africa 2000 Network, Ghana
Bill Young, Social Capital Partners, Canada

Forum Program

Tuesday, July 7	
Afternoon Governors Hall	Registration and check in
5pm - 6:30pm Morrison Hall	Dinner
7:00pm - 8:30pm Dennis Hall Coady Institute	Forum Welcome and performance by The Irondale Ensemble Project: "The Good Society," a one act play about Moses Coady and Jimmy Tompkins.
8:30pm Marjorie Desmond Oval Coady Institute	Reception

Wednesday, July 8	Asset-Based and Citizen-Led Development: Highlights, insights and challenges from experience

8:30am - 10:00am
Dennis Hall
Coady Institute
	Plenary:
	• Welcome: Mary Coyle, Director of the Coady International Institute
	• Introduction to the forum: Alison Mathie, Coady International Institute
	• John McKnight: ABCD Institute, Northwestern University:
	  - Reflections on 40 years of Asset-Based Community Development
	• Gord Cunningham, Coady International Institute:
	  - Lessons learned from case studies in From Clients to Citizens: Communities changing the course of their own development

10:00am - 10:30am Antigonish Community Foyer Coady Institute	Break
10:30am - 12:30pm Break-out rooms Coady Institute	Highlights, insights and challenges from asset-based and citizen-led experience: Short presentations and discussion in small groups
12:30pm - 1:30pm Morrison Hall	Lunch
1:30pm - 3:00pm Break-out rooms Coady Institute	Small group discussions - facilitated explorations of emerging themes
3:00pm - 3:30pm Antigonish Community Foyer Coady Institute	Break
3:30pm - 4:30pm Dennis Hall Coady Institute	Review of emerging themes and insights from group discussions.
6:00pm - 7:00pm Morrison Hall	Dinner
Evening 7:30pm - 9:00pm Dennis Hall Coady Institute	Public Event: Asset-based approaches around the world • Jody Kretzmann, ABCD Institute, USA • Aloysius Fernandez, MYRADA, India • Adisa Yakubu, Africa 2000 Network, Ghana • Peter Kenyan, Bank of Ideas, Australia

Thursday, July 9	Addressing challenges, identifying opportunities
8:30am - 10:00am Dennis Hall Coady Institute	Plenary Government and donor perspectives on emerging issues • Dixon Yasay, Municipality of Opol, Mindanao, Philippines • Jim Diers, City of Seattle, Washington State, USA • Sebastian Mathews, Greater Rustenberg Community Foundation, South Africa • Tim Brodhead, McConnell Foundation, Canada • Janis Foster, Grassroots Grantmakers, USA
10:00am - 10:30am Antigonish Community Foyer	Break
10:30am - 12:00pm Break-out rooms Coady Institute	Understanding the challenges, seeing the possibilities (1): Small groups self-organize by theme/issue
12:00pm - 1:30pm Morrison Hall	Lunch
1:30pm - 3:00pm Break-out rooms Coady Institute	Understanding the challenges, seeing the possibilities (2): Small (affinity) group discussions
3:00pm - 3:30pm Antigonish Community Foyer	Break
3:30pm - 5:00pm Dennis Hall Coady Institute	Plenary Commentary on group insights: • Anselmo Mercado, SEARSOLIN, Philippines • Tom Dewar, Aspen Institute, USA • Katherine Gibson, University of Newcastle, Australia • Andy Gordon, University of Washington, USA
6:30pm Bus leaves from Governors Hall	Ceilidh at Crystal Cliffs

Friday, July 10	Strategies and opportunities in a shifting policy environment
8:30am - 10:00am Dennis Hall Coady Institute	Plenary Given the shifting policy environment, what do you see as opportunities for asset-based and citizen-led development? •Caroline Moser, University of Manchester, UK •Dang Kim Son, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam •Naresh Singh, CIDA •Chris Bryant, Provincial Government of Nova Scotia
10:00am - 10:30am Antigonish Community Foyer	Break
10:30am - 12:00pm Break-out rooms	Small group discussion: • Elements of a vision • Possibilities for future work
12:00pm - 1:30pm Keating Millennium Centre	Moving it forward: Pulling together ideas from the morning session. Closing Lunch

References

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Kretzmann, J.P ., & McKnight, J. L. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets.* Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G., (Eds.) (2008). *From clients to citizens: Communities changing the course of their own development.* Rugby, UK: Practical Action.

Rondinelli, D. (1983). *Development as policy experiments.* London: Methuen

Seabright, P. (2004). *The company of strangers: A natural history of economic life.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Carbon Footprint Calculations

In the spirit of raising and maintaining awareness of the environmental costs associated with attending international events, we calculated the average per capita carbon footprint for travel to and from this forum, using the carbon footprint calculator used by the David Suzuki Foundation (www.plantair.ca). Knowing that environmental cost considerations will soon become the norm rather than the exception in the way we all do business, we present these calculations here for the record, and for your interest.

Total estimated CO_2 equivalent emissions: **189.99 Tonnes**
Total estimated cost for relative offsets: **$7409.61**
Estimated cost for relative offsets per person: **$74.10**

Igniting Leadership for 50 years, the **Coady International Institute** works with innovative people and organizations to create effective, practical and sustainable solutions to reduce global poverty and injustice. The Coady accomplishes this through leadership education, action partnerships and research. The Institute also engages in initiatives to help young Canadians become active global citizens. Today, more than 5,000 Coady graduates and partners are working with millions of people in 130 countries to build a fairer, more prosperous and secure world.

Established by St. Francis Xavier University in 1959, and celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, the Institute is named for one of Canada's great heroes, Rev. Dr. Moses Coady, one of the founders of the Antigonish Movement and author of Masters of their Own Destiny. To find out more, visit www.coady.stfx.ca.

The **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute** is co-directed by John L. McKnight and his long-time collaborator in community research, John P. Kretzmann. Challenging the traditional approach to solving urban problems, which focuses service providers and funding agencies on the needs and deficiencies of neighborhoods, Kretzmann and McKnight have demonstrated that community assets are key building blocks in sustainable urban and rural community revitalization efforts.

As a result of the widespread interest in the principles and practices associated with ABCD, the institute has developed a faculty of 35 highly skilled practitioners who have worked as consultants, workshop leaders, and speakers for the many and diverse constituencies interested in this approach. Many of these faculty members have contributed to a series of ABCD community-building workbooks and various related publications, which have helped to spread the word and share examples of asset-based community development in action. The workbooks provide practical resources and tools for community builders to identify, nurture, and mobilize neighborhood assets.