



In simple terms, community development is a process. It is a way of working together to bring about a positive change in people's lives. In order to understand what community development means, it may be helpful to first look at the two terms separately.

What is Community?

The term 'community' has two meanings:

- A group of people who live in the same area - a geographical community
- A group of people who have something in common such as gender, religion, etc - a community of interest or identity

It is important to remember that while people may have something in common which gives them a sense of community identity, it does not mean they are homogenous (all the same). Even within communities, people may have differing needs and circumstances.

What is Development?

The term 'development' means progressive, positive change. Development can be about any aspect of people's lives - their environment, relationships, employment, housing, health, etc but it does mean improving the quality of life.

Defining Community Development

The definition of community development below demonstrates the emphasis on empowering people to take ownership and control over their own lives and bring about a positive change.

'Community development is essentially about enabling or empowering people who are socially excluded or marginalised, to actively bring about social change and shape the society of which they are a part. It is a collective process that helps people to identify and articulate their needs, and influence the processes and structures that impact on their everyday lives.'
Combat Poverty Agency, 1998.

Activity – What does Development Mean to you?

In any community, the decision to take action jointly with other people depends upon having clear and common goals and values. It is important for the community group to discuss and agree its common goals and purpose. This is an important first step for any new group. It is also beneficial for established groups to revisit their goals and purpose. The activity below will help the community group to do this.

1. You will need a sheet of plain paper for every member of the group, coloured pencils or similar.
2. Ask each person to draw a picture or diagram that illustrates for them the most important aspects of development within the community. The picture can relate to any aspect of life. Examples could include a recent development that they feel has been of positive benefit or an area/issue that they feel requires development.
3. Ask them to form small groups of three to four, share their pictures and explain what they are trying to illustrate.
4. When they have finished explaining their pictures, ask them to draw out some of the priorities and values of development that may have emerged during their discussion. For example, a value might be that local people's views should be taken into consideration when planning a new development.
5. Next form a large group again and invite the members to share their most important ideas about development. Record these on flip chart paper.
6. From the ideas on the flip chart paper, identify and agree the common values and goals that the community group has identified.

Values and Principles of Community Development

Principles can be described as personal beliefs and values. Our beliefs and values shape what we do and how we do it. Similarly the principles of community development influence our goals and our practice.

Collaboration and Partnership - Working Together

Groups and agencies should seek to work co-operatively based on trust, respect, equality and true empowerment.

Equity

We should aim to challenge issues of social exclusion, sectarianism and racism etc.

Promoting a Shared Vision

We should work towards a shared vision of what we want to achieve. The vision should be realistic and include shared responsibility.

True Empowerment

We should work towards building the skills and abilities of groups and individuals to create greater confidence within communities.

Sustainable Development

We need to think about the long term and build evaluation into our work to inform this.

Quality

We should build on and promote successes in policy and practice.

Targeting Need

We should encourage participation and ownership of decisions relating to the targeting of need.

Practical Steps in Community Development

In order to bring about positive change and effect some improvement in the quality of people's lives, it is necessary for a community group to identify:

- The problems/needs in the community?
- What causes these problems/creates these needs?
- What actions can be taken to address the causes and overcome the problems



Issue	Group's Response
1 Identifying Needs In order for a community group to be confident that it is responding to the needs experienced within the community, it needs to find out what the community itself sees as the problems and what they feel needs to change.	Survey/questionnaire, door to door interviews, interviews with groups, gathering information from other studies. Resources on undertaking community audits will be helpful in planning this activity (See Community Audit Fact Sheet).
2 Identifying Causes This is a critical activity for a community group in order to understand why the problems/needs exist. Being able to understand why the problem exists will help the community group to decide what the best course of action is.	Use the 'But-Why' activity to get to the root causes of the problem. For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor diet – low incomes – economic causes • Isolation of pensioners – no transport – political causes • Refusal of grants to groups -funders imposing unacceptable conditions – cultural/social cause
3 Identifying Actions At this stage, it should be possible to identify a number of actions that will respond to the need identified. The community group needs to identify and agree which response is most practical and appropriate for them to take on.	Possible actions by the group in relation to the above examples might include:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a food co-op • Community transport scheme • Awareness raising meetings with funders

Reflecting On Your Practice

There is a great deal of value in taking some time to reflect on your group's practice and consider just how much the principles of community development guide the way you work. By taking time to reflect on what you do, you can begin to see how you might improve on the practice. Once you know what you want to do to build your practice, you can identify what you require to help you put this into place. For example, you may need more resources or training.

Group Activity

In small groups of two to three, consider the following questions.

1. How well do you feel your group works in partnership with others?
2. What would help your group be more confident about challenging discrimination?
3. What is your group's vision for your community?
4. How do you share your vision with others?
5. How do you build skills and confidence within your group?
6. How secure is the long-term future of your group? Is this dependent on money?
7. How do you know you are doing what the community needs and how well are you meeting these needs?

After each small group has considered these questions in some detail, the full group should come together and share responses. Once you have taken everyone's feedback, break up into small groups again. Taking each of the areas above, consider how the community group could improve on the situation and brainstorm ideas to make it happen. The ideas generated can form the basis of a Community Development Strategy for the group.

The 'But Why?' Activity

This activity is a simple way of digging deeply into an issue to move beyond the symptoms and reach the root causes of the problem.

'Mary missed school today'

'But why?'

'Because she is in hospital with dysentery'

'But why?'

'Because she has been drinking water from a local car wash'

'But why?'

'Because she is a Traveller child and she lives on an unserviced site'

'But why?'

'Because there are no serviced sites provided in this area'

'But why?' and so on