What Are Asset-Based Approaches to Community Development?

How do we build strong, resilient, sustainable communities? How can we make sure that the communities that we live in and work in are vibrant, innovative and full of life? How can we ensure that our communities are just, fair, equitable and strong in the face of so much global change? Where do we start in our own communities to make a difference, to make a change towards building the sorts of community we'd like to live in, raise our families in and grow old in?

Asset-based community development approaches help us to begin to open up possibilities for how we begin to make real changes locally, that can benefit people, planet and place for the long-term. In other words, they can help us to build communities that are just, sustainable and resilient. Such approaches are not necessarily new in and of themselves –communities around the world and across the eons of time have come together and built on their strengths. What is perhaps new, however, is that we have found that there are certain common threads – values, methods, ideas – that we hear time and time again when the stories of communities that have done remarkable things are told. These threads seem to be consistent across cultures, and they share remarkable similarities despite the fact that they are being told about communities that diverse and unique in their own right.   Because of these consistencies and similarities these threads have increasingly been pulled together within this new framework which has been termed ''asset-based community development", but is also known by many other names, as will be seen throughout this brief background document.

The Unfinished Quilt

This inquiry process is like an unfinished quilt. It will try to stitch together many different voices, traditions, approaches, practices – some pieces will fit together quite neatly, others may look out of place; there are pieces of the quilt missing and there are many loose threads.

This document and event is our invitation to you to join us in stitching together this quilt. You may have important pieces, you may be able to add colour or stitch in important stories that help to join up the parts. We intend this document to be an introduction and an invitation to the quilt. We will introduce you the reader to some of the threads of asset-based approaches to community development – but we're convinced that if it remains in its current form it will not be strong enough to survive a long journey around the country and across the world.

Documenting this broad range of threads is a somewhat daunting task. Some of the threads have not been connected before, and we're sure that there are many other threads that we haven't managed to weave into this very brief document.

So, we invite you to add pieces, pull threads, patch up holes, stitch in your own experiences and stories and generally contribute to making this an even richer and hopefully more robust quilt. This event is only a beginning...the conversation will continue in many communities, around workplace tables, kitchen tables and at virtual tables through sites such as www.fieryspirits.com.

International Association for Community Development
Association Internationale de Développement et D'Action Communautaires

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CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES

It's almost impossible to find a single definition of asset based community development approaches – one that will sit comfortably across many spaces and different traditions. However, what we can do is to try to piece together some of the common themes so that we have a starting point from which to begin to discuss such approaches. The approaches are frameworks – maps or conceptual scaffolds that help us to understand how local development can be initiated and driven by the communities themselves. Such approaches:

- Begin from and focus on the strengths of a community.
- Suggest that development can be community or outsider initiated as long as it is 'by the community, for the community'.
- Seek to build or release the capacity of community members to continue to drive their own development by starting with what already exists in the community.
- Build on a social justice approach by seeking to build inclusive and resilient communities

- In endogenous or community-initiated development, participation is often built around small, concrete and local realities and geared towards unique local context that people can relate to, therefore commitment to action can be more visible and personally relevant.

Source: Ingrid Burkett and Harvinder Bedi. What in the World…? Global Lessons, Inspirations and Experiences in Community Development. International Association for Community Development, www.iacdgloboal.org, 2005.

What stands out from these definitions? What other perspectives are missing? How would you define asset-based community development? Is it useful to think in terms of asset-based approaches (recoginising many different approaches that can be used?)

Can you think of a situation in your own community where you have seen development that was community initiated? What is the story? What were the elements that made it work or not work?

Definitions of asset-based community development and their sources

- Asset-Based and Citizen-Led Development is an approach that recognizes the strengths, gifts, talents and resources of individuals and communities, and helps communities to mobilize and build on these for sustainable development.

    Source: Coady International Institute, Canada http://www.coady.stfx.ca/work/ABCD/

- Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) is a powerful approach focused on discovering and mobilizing the resources that are already present in a community. The ABCD approach provides a way for citizens to find and mobilize what they have in order to build a stronger community.

    Source: Mike Green, Henry Moore and John O'Brien. When People Care Enough to Act: Asset-based Community Development. Toronto, Canada: Inclusion Press. 2006

- Asset-based community development is based on the principle of community-driven development rather than development driven by external agencies, where communities, public and private sectors work in closer partnership. Yet recognizing that there may also be disagreements between these three 'stakeholders' and that to date it is the community voice that has lost out.

    Source: Kate Braithwaite. Securing Social Justice in Rural Areas. Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development. 2005.

Family Action Centre, Australia

Threads of asset-based approaches

When beginning our inquiry process and through the many discussions of the RARP group, it became apparent that there are many different 'threads' of work being done that could fit into an asset-based framework. Here are a few we identified:

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) referred to as 'ABCD' to differentiate from the broader definition of asset-based approaches to community development used within this document. The term ABCD was coined through the work of Jody Kretzmann and Jon McKnight in the United States and through the ABCD Institute. The ABCD Institute has produced many documents and case studies exploring ABCD in many contexts. Presented here is a very brief summary of the approach.

Three elements that distinguish the ABCD approach are: 1) a focus on 'gifts', 2) associational life, and 3) powering the communities hands (Block, 2007). According to the ABCD approach, community is built by focusing on people's gifts rather than their deficiencies. Simply put, this

declares that if we want to make communities stronger, we should study their assets, resources, and talents.

The second insight from ABCD is about the limitations of systems. Kretzmann and McKnight see a system as an organized group of funded and well resourced professionals who operate in the domain of cases, clients, and services. As soon as you professionalize care, you have produced an oxymoron. According to the ABCD model, systems are capable of service but not care. Talk to any poor person or vulnerable person and they can give you a long list of the services they have received. They are well serviced, but you often have to ask what in their life has fundamentally changed. The option identified by ABCD to a system is what they call "associational life." Groups of people voluntarily coming together to do some good.

That third focus of ABCD is faith in citizens to identify and solve problems for themselves. McKnight and Kretzmann found that most sustainable improvements in community occur when citizens discover their own power to act. Whatever the symptom—drugs, poor economy, displacement, violence—it is when citizens stop waiting for professional or elected leadership to do something, and decide they can reclaim what they have delegated to others, that things really happen. This act of power is present in most stories of lasting community improvement and change (Block, 2007).

This approach continues to lead the thinking on asset-based community development globally. It is important to note that this approach has also been criticised as not being as relevant for the UK/Irish context as it is in the United States.

Citizen-led and endogenous development: The work of citizen-led development and the similar term of endogenous development relates to citizens within communities leading the development process—deciding what it is they want to do and mobilizing to do it (i.e. starting from within).

Strengths-based community work: this approaches focuses on examining strengths and utilising strengths for individual and community development work.

Community planning and place-making approaches: these approaches help communities shape their cities, towns and villages and emphasise the importance of 'place' in our understanding of community development.

What are the criticisms of this and the other approaches listed here? Do you agree or disagree and why? Do you think ABCD is applicable to other settings/locations outside North America? Can you share an example or story?

Case Study: El Zapallo Verde--The Green Pumpkin, Quito, Ecuador

Direct, free and reciprocal. Quite simply, the Green Pumpkin will accept nothing less. Based in Ecuador's capital and second most populous city, this co-operative defies the myth that organic products are an elusive luxury, inaccessible for the masses.

A New Economy

"It is an experience auto managed from the South that tries to construct another economy, another nourishment and another way of relating. It seeks to establish an organizational form that raises a different way of producing, of commercializing and consuming healthy food. It promotes an economy to local scale, which defends the agricultural and cultural diversity. It's all about solidarity - both social and environmental co-responsibility. For this people of the field and of the city have joined to form a cooperative of organic products."

People Of The Field

"As people of the field we are persons, families and associations that produce in a sincere way with the environment. There is particular honesty with ourselves. The producers base is the Guardians of Seeds Network (Red de Guardianes de semillas RGS) and they are an organization without ends of profit. There is a particular dedication to promoting the conservation and use of organic traditional seeds and the associated knowledge in the Tropical Andes.

The people of the city we are persons, families and associations seeking a good nourishment as well as protection for the producer and environment."

Diminishing Consumerism

"We are young teachers in diverse subject matters and always try to practice what we teach. To do this we have constructed an urban space in the middle of the city where we demonstrate the practice that it is possible to live otherwise. We are suggesting that we diminish our consumerism (of energy, of water, of space, etc) and increase consciousness of our footprint in this world."

Fundamental Right

"We are producing and consuming persons and, as leaders, we recognize our fundamental right to accede to healthy and nourishing food. We seek to strengthen the human relations between both realities. We have joined efforts to help ourselves mutually."

Learn More

For further information please visit - **www. zapalloverde.com**

Cooperativa Zapallo Verde, Ecuador

Community Capitals Framework (CCF): examines community change from a systems-level perspective across seven 'capitals'. 'Communities of place and of interest have resources' and these resources can be consumed (used up), stored (not available for use), or invested to create new resources over the long term as part of community-driven development (Flora, 2000; Gutierrez-Montes, Emery & Fernandez-Baca, 2009). In the Community Capitals Framework:

Every community, however rural, isolated, or poor, has resources within it. When those resources, or assets, are invested to create new resources, they become capital (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004).

According to the Community Capitals Framework, capitals can be divided into two main groups the 'human or intangible' and the 'material or tangible' factors. The seven capitals in CCF are examined in the table below:

Human/Intangible Factors	Definition
Social Capital	Social capital is made up of the interactions among groups and individuals such as networks and the norms and trust that facilitate cooperation for mutual support. Includes the sub-set of spiritual capital, which is the aspect of social capital linked with religion or spirituality (Carnegie Commission, 2007).
Political Capital	Political capital is the ability of a community to influence the distribution and use of resources (Carnegie Commission, 2007). Also the capacity to change the structures of power, the ability to inspire policy, and the collective organisation to hold political representatives to account (Wilding, 2009).

Cultural Capital	Cultural capital is the multi-layered world-views and cultural norms/innovations, which inform how we see and interpret the world, our sense of place and belonging, and the future potential we imagine for ourselves (Wilding, 2009).
Human Capital	Human capital refers to the characteristics of 'individuals that contribute towards their ability to earn a living, strengthen community, and contribute to community organizations, to their families and to self-improvement' (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004). The components of human capital includes the emotional, spiritual, aesthetic, and musical intelligences and skills present in people; the interpersonal skills, values and leadership capacity of individuals; the skills, education, experience, and knowledge of the community; and the self-esteem and confidence and capacity to contribute to the wider community (Wilding, 2009; Stofferahn, 2009).

Material/Tangible Factors:	Definition
Natural Capital	Natural capital can be landscape and any stock or flow of energy and materials that produces goods and services. Natural capital includes both renewable and non-renewable material resources (Carnegie Commission, 2007).
Financial Capital	The incomes, savings, credit and loans, which facilitate investment into other assets—adding value (in formal and complementary currencies) (Wilding, 2009). However, when money is spent on consumption, it is not capital but becomes capital when oriented to create other capitals (Flora & Gillespie, 2009).
Built Capital	Built capital refers to the permanent physical installations and facilities supporting activities in a community (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004). It includes transportation networks, communication systems, utilities, protective services, education and health facilities,

Built Capital (cont)	and public and commercial buildings (Stofferahn, 2009). Built capital also includes any fixed assets which facilitate the livelihood or well-being of a community (Carnegie Commission, 2007)

Case Study: Honouring the Past, Valuing the Present and Imagining the Future (St. Dennis, England)

When exploring what might happen to an area or community in the future, and how people will react to the prospect of change, the key challenge is to find ways to see the options in terms of a story of possibilities. –Director, Eden Project Foundation

WildWorks, a community arts company embarked on a project to honour the past, value the present and imagine the future of St. Dennis. St Dennis is a small village situated between the north and south coasts of Cornwall. It has a population of almost 2½ thousand at the last census in 1998. **http://www.new-ground.org.uk/**

There is an intense love of the landscape as shaped by the clay industry in St. Dennis. The two clay tips that stand above St. Dennis, known as 'Flatty and Pointy' which are the names affectionately given to the two clay hill tips that are seen above town (one tip if flat, the other pointy), are seen as meaningful landmarks in the town.

Honouring the Past

The 'honouring the past' part of the project began with children in class 6 examining where they lived by taking a closer look at the town, the history of clay, the landscape, the plants that grow in their town and their own important and secret places. Each student created a poetic map of St. Dennis and the clay.

Next each student prepared for a Tea-Treat, something that occurred quite regularly in old St. Dennis. The children researched whom they wanted to invite to tea, wrote the invitations and devised questions they would like to ask of their visitors. At the tea-party, the children and their invited guests brought their pictures and meaningful memorabilia about St. Dennis and crafted them into a display nestled within an old suitcase. Both the children and older people were surprised at how much they had in common, how much local places meant to them such as the shops, Flatty and Pointy, the carnival, the school and the Downs.

Valuing the Present

The second part of the project included developing a 30-minute film called The Heart of Clay. WildWorks invited 15 community members to participate, representing an age range from 10 to 84. Each

participant took the camera crew on a walk to somewhere they loved. Together they started to map out the emotional territory inhabited by the community: the places and things they love and the aspects of their way of life that make them proud.

Imagining the Future

The future is harder to imagine, especially for children who live in the here and now. We have no pictures of it and nobody to ask who's been there. Each of the children imagined a future St. Dennis. First they looked at the landscape and wrote poems about what they loved and what they would hate not to be there in the future. The children devised questionnaires for parents and relatives and also wrote letters to the future.

Dear Future,

Please save:

Flatty and pointy

The bad tempered bramble

My granny's house

The church spire

The yawning space

The music

Case Study: Integrated Area Planning (IAP) in Ireland

IAP is defined by Tipperary Institute as a practical and participatory process that empowers local people to collect and compile information while developing the skills and structures needed to prepare and implement a plan for a defined geographical area. IAP is a model of collaborative planning—involving communities and citizens most affected by local area plans alongside policymakers and local officials in a partnership that recognises the strengths of everyone involved and that seeks to come to decisions in a participatory way.

There are several principles that guide the IAP planning process. One of the most important is the commitment to action-planning. This model enables people to identify, analyse and address the needs of their own community. It seeks to build local capacity and equip community members with the knowledge, skills and motivation required to mobilise community, State and private efforts in addressing the development of the area.

IAP assumes a commitment to working in an inclusive and participatory way by engaging with all sectors of the community. IAP as a method also seeks to create

plans that are clear and accessible and written in a way that anyone can understand. IAP requires that there are structures in place for implementation of plans once they have been drawn up. The process seeks to engage State agencies fully, in inputting to, and taking responsibility for, relevant parts of the plan and its implementation, in partnership with the local community. Lastly, the IAP process fosters ongoing communication between all the stakeholders involved.

Integrated Area Planning in Action

Ferbane is a small town (pop.1,300) in West Offaly, in the Irish midlands. Tipperary Institute facilitated the preparation of an Integrated Area Plan (IAP) as a partnership between Offaly County Council, the community of Ferbane, Elected Representatives, West Offaly Partnership and local business interests.

Through the IAP process, the steering group co-produced a vision with their community that underpinned their local area plan and stated that:

• Ferbane will be a place that contains a sustainable population that will ensure the town's long-term viability in social and economic terms

• The people of Ferbane will experience the town as a pleasant place in which to live, work and take their recreation

• Those living in Ferbane will be able to access a number of different employment opportunities including those located within the town, those located within its rural hinterland and those located within nearby settlements

• The community of Ferbane will be open, inclusive and welcoming

• Ferbane will be in a position to derive economic benefit from those living and working in its rural hinterland as well as from those who travel through the town.

Since developing the plan through the IAP process, the Ferbane community has undertaken several of the initiatives they laid out in the plan including: the zoning of land for development by the county council, the development of a business and technology park and other new business ventures, the development of a child-care facility, a school amalgamation programme the updating of existing business ventures, the establishment of local transport services, and the provision of additional housing among others.

http://rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/rarp/community_planning/tipperary_institute

Do these threads fit together under asset-based approaches to community development? What other threads are missing? What distinguishes an asset-based approach? What does an asset-based approach look like in the UK/Ireland?

What are assets?

What happens while a caterpillar is hiding away in the cocoon? What is it that begins the transformation of caterpillar into butterfly? It is something scientists have called 'imaginal cells' – cells that have transformatory power when the conditions are right for such transformation. Similarly we may all have 'imaginal cells' – and there are surely 'imaginal cells' in our communities that, when the conditions are right mean that anyone of us could be a part of transforming our community, our world into something beautiful.

Asset-based community development builds upon what the community identifies as 'valuable' and also the people within the community and their strengths and skills to accomplish the community-identified changes they would like to see happen. Assets can be hidden treasures, a certain alchemy needs to happen before the asset become visible, like connecting it with something or someone else, exchanging it, sharing it, and/or reframing it from liability to resource.

In addition, what is valuable to one person in the community may not be seen as valuable to others. Recent work by the New Economics Foundations (NEF) has explored more in-depth the categorisation and value placed on assets within communities.

It is important to note that an asset-based approach does not happen simply by giving a 'positive twist' to an already existing approach. In addition to focusing on strengths, there are several values that underpin asset-based community development:

1. **Local Leadership**: The community leads its own development and community leaders are themselves capable of opening doors to the wider citizenry. Local leaders are therefore defined by the relationships they have within the community, by their social, rather than political or financial capital.

2. **Equality and Social Inclusion**: All community members, regardless of gender, age, ability (or disability), race, culture, language, sexual orientation, or social and economic status have equal opportunity to become engaged in the community development process and are able to access its social and economic benefits.

3. **Transparency and Accountability**: This framework encourages and requires government, NGO and any other outside involvement in community development to be transparent, accountable, and participatory. In turn Communities hold each other to the same values of

transparency and accountability, expecting no less of each other than of external agencies.

4. **Focus on Community Assets:** Community development starts from existing community capacity and assets, building on what we have.

5. **Balance:** Community development builds on a balanced approach that addresses and integrates economic, social, environmental and cultural considerations.

6. **Appreciation and celebration of past successes.** This strengthens people's confidence in their own capacities and inspires them to take action

7. **The recognition of the importance of relationships and its importance as an asset referred to as 'social capital'.** This includes a focus on the power of relationships and informal linkages within the community, and the relationships built over time between community groups and external institutions.

8. **The recognition of the power of association**. In association we join our gifts and strengths together and they become amplified, magnified, productive, and celebrated (McKnight, 2009). Essentially, the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

9. **Participatory approaches to development,** which are based on principles of empowerment and ownership of the development process.

10. **Efforts to strengthen civil society.** These efforts have focused on how to engage people as citizens (rather than clients) in development, and how to make local governance more effective and responsive (IACD, 2007; Braithwaite, 2005), and

11. **A Focus on social change.** Asset-based community development is about change for the better as defined by the community itself.

12. **A focus on local communities**. Asset-based community development is a place-based approach focusing on the assets of an identified geographic area, a place residents describe as 'home'.

> Do you agree with these values? Are there values that are missing? How can we translate these values into practice?

This is the start of our inquiry There may be many holes and pieces that don't quite match up together yet. Please join us in crafting this inquiry by adding your thoughts, stories and experiences.