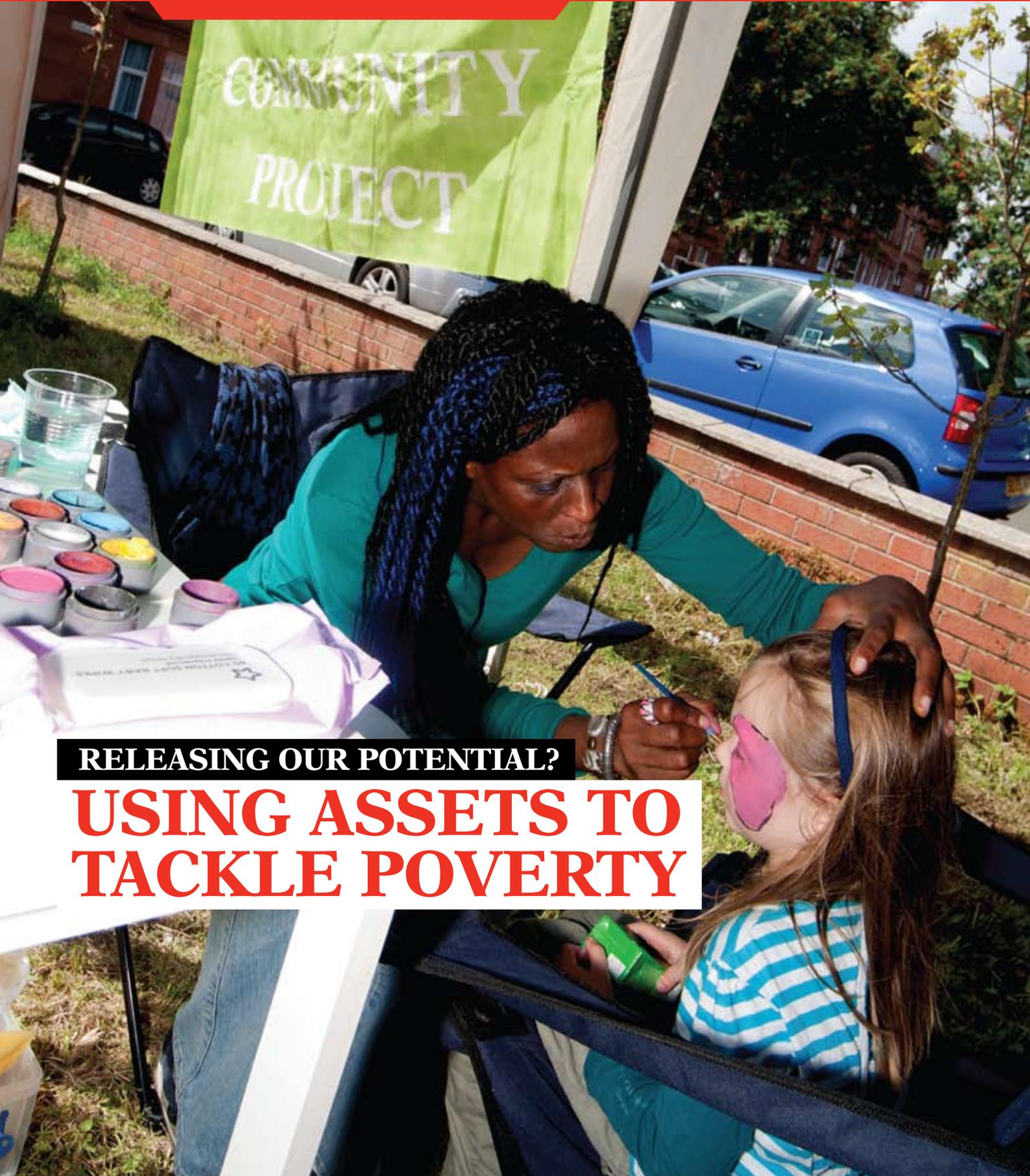


SCOTTISH ANTI POVERTY REVIEW



RELEASING OUR POTENTIAL?

**USING ASSETS TO
TACKLE POVERTY**



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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submissions and comments on the Review are welcomed, please see the guidelines below.

Microsoft Word or text files

Articles: No more than 2500 words (including title, references and notes)

News: no more than 1000 words (including title, references and notes)

Submission and comments are accepted by email to:
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DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in the Scottish Anti Poverty Review do not necessarily reflect those of The Poverty Alliance.

ABOUT THE POVERTY ALLIANCE

The Poverty Alliance is a network of community, voluntary, statutory and other organisations whose vision is of a sustainable Scotland based on social and economic justice, with dignity for all, where poverty and inequalities are not tolerated and are challenged. Our aim is to combat poverty by working with others to empower individuals and communities to affect change in the distribution of power and resources. To do this we:

- Work with people and communities experiencing poverty to empower them to address poverty
- Work with organisations to build a strong anti-poverty network in Scotland
- Support the development of policies which promote social justice and combat poverty
- Raise awareness about poverty and encourage debate

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EDITORIAL:

GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

It is difficult to understate the significance of the crisis we are in. Looking through the news section of this edition of the Scottish Anti-Poverty Review does not make for cheerful reading. Whether it is the news that youth unemployment has passed the 1 million mark, the continuing crisis in the Eurozone or the news that predictions for growth in the UK economy have been cut back even further, it is clear that we are in for a very difficult time and that those who have least will end up paying most. It is not just those who have joined or supported the 'Occupy' movement that see a need for a radical change in the way we organise our economy and society, it is a feeling that is becoming more widespread as the crisis reaches ever deeper.

It is that desire to find alternatives, to change the way we do things, that has led to the renewed focus 'community assets'. The cuts that are being made in public sector budgets is one of the drivers for this new emphasis on assets. But it is not simply a result of the cuts that we see attention being given to this issue. For many years now many working at grassroots level have talked of the need to focus more on the capacities that individuals and communities have, regardless of their income. To focus less on the 'deficits' that communities may be affected by, and more on the potential they contain. At the local, national and UK level, policy makers and politicians have been attracted to approaches that seek to build the resilience of both communities and individuals. They too want to focus more on the potential and skills that they already possess. For some though, this focus on community assets, and individual assets, has been driven by a sense of the apparent failure of state intervention to address the problems that many communities experience. Writing in this edition of SAPR, Angus Hardie of the Scottish Community Alliance clearly articulates the frustration with top-down efforts to regenerate communities over the last 30 years.

The publication of the Scottish Government's new regeneration strategy, and their commitment to legislate around the issue of community empowerment in 2013 further underlines the importance of this agenda. Everyone, it would seem, from the late Cambell Christie, to the Chief Medical Officer Harry Burns, is convinced of the need to have a greater focus on asset based approaches to addressing the social problems our society faces. And it is understandable appeals to asset based approaches have such a wide appeal. As Lynn Friedli writes in this edition "they [asset based approaches] speak to the resistance of deprived communities to being pathologised, criminalised, ostracised", they require the empowerment of individuals and communities and have a resonance for those who come from a community development tradition and for those who not only seek resources, but recognition too.

But while the rhetoric of community empowerment, and of focusing on assets, may come easily to some, it's delivery is far more difficult. Those who have worked in community regeneration will be only too aware of the need for adequate resources to release the potential in communities. In today's financial climate those resources seem further away than ever. However, the need for adequate resources is only one area of the debate about the role of community assets that we must keep in mind. We must not allow the necessary debate about assets to obscure the very real causes of poverty in Scotland and the UK. It is not a failure by communities to realise their assets, nor even the failure to adequately invest in those communities to allow them to do so. Rather, it is the structural inequalities in our society that trap communities and individuals in poverty, and the inequalities in power that maintain this situation. Without real effort to address these underlying causes, and to redistribute power as well as wealth, then our efforts to realise the potential in communities will founder.



UK NEWS:

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT INQUIRY ON THE LIVING WAGE

The Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Regeneration Committee has launched an inquiry into the benefits of a living wage for individuals, families and communities in Scotland. The inquiry will also look at the introduction of a living wage by local authorities and the extent to which procurement can include criteria linked to the payment of a living wage.

Eddie Follan, Campaigns Officer at the Poverty Alliance and coordinator of the Scottish Living Wage Campaign said "This is a significant and welcome development in our attempt to create a Scotland where poverty pay is a thing of the past. Consideration by the Local Government and Regeneration Committee should contribute to the growing consensus in Scotland that paying a worker a living wage is good for workers, employers, communities and the economy. Around 14,000 workers across the public sector already receive the living wage but more progress is required to ensure that all public sector workers do not receive poverty pay and that these benefits are extended, through public procurement, to the voluntary and private sectors." A recent Freedom of Information request revealed that over 18,000 local government workers are paid less than the Scottish living wage of £7.20.

On the first day of the Inquiry evidence was taken from a wide range of organisations including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the London based Living Wage Foundation,

as well as from SCVO, Community Care Providers Scotland, the Poverty Alliance and from trade unions PCS, Unite and Unison. Dave Moxham, Deputy General Secretary of the Scottish Trade Union Congress who also gave evidence to the Committee said "It is heartening to see the committee taking the issue of the living wage seriously. Low pay is at the heart of inequality in Scotland and low paid workers have been the first to feel the full effects of the current economic situation.

The Scottish Government pay the living wage to all of their directly employed staff, including those in the NHS. Until now they have refused to extend this to local government employees although seven local authorities have taken the step of paying a living wage. In their evidence to the Committee the Scottish Living Wage Campaign argued that the Scottish Government could take a more pro-active approach to the policy, including setting up a Living Wage Unit to monitor the policy and recommend the level of the wage. The Inquiry will run through December with a number of oral evidence sessions, including evidence from John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth. The Committee will report in early 2012 and the Scottish Government must then respond to the report.

To keep up to date with progress on the inquiry visit the Committee website at <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/29852.aspx>





NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS THE NEED FOR ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

The latest edition of Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion has warned that the UK Coalition Government does not have a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy, and relies too much on the tax and benefits system alone to encourage people into work, mistakes also made by Labour.

The report, researched and written by the New Policy Institute, calls for there to be a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy across all age groups. The Coalition, like Labour, has a strategy for child poverty only. This ignores the equally high level of poverty among young adults. It also ignores rising poverty among working-age adults without dependent children, which has risen by 1 million in the last decade.

The report finds that millions more jobs are needed in the UK economy. Six million people were under-employed in the first half of 2011 – this includes people who are unemployed (2.5m), working part-time but wanting full-time work (1.2m), and those classed as economically inactive but wanting work (2.3m).

Other changes to Tax Credits now mean that an additional 1.4 million households lose over 70p for each extra £1 they earn. Although the report welcomes Universal Credit as a reform heading in the right direction, it still will not address problems with low paid, insecure and dead end jobs. Without solving these problems, poverty can never properly be tackled – over half of all children in poverty are living with a parent who already does paid work.

Report co-author Tom MacInnes commented: “A conservative estimate is that the country lacks at least four million paid jobs. In this situation, reforms aimed at improving incentives to enter work will increase the number scrambling for vacancies whilst doing next to nothing to reduce poverty”.

Other key findings of this year’s report are:

In the year to 2009/10, the child poverty rate fell to 29%, the second fall in two years. Child poverty fell by around one-seventh under the previous Labour Government.

The proportion of households in fuel poverty has risen significantly since 2003. Almost all households in the bottom tenth by income are in fuel poverty, as are half of households in the second bottom tenth.

The pensioner poverty rate, at 16%, is now around half the rate it was in 1997.

Julia Unwin, Chief Executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said: “Even though the names of the policies may have changed, the means by which the current Government aims to tackle poverty are very similar to those of the previous administration. Whilst we must retain the focus on child poverty, there are a number of areas that remain neglected. The high and rising rate of working-age childless adults in poverty reflects that narrow focus.”

The report can be downloaded at <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/monitoring-poverty-2011>



UPDATE ON THE TACKLING POVERTY STAKEHOLDER FORUM

The Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum, part of the Poverty Alliance's EPIC project, met in Edinburgh in October to discuss, amongst other things the future of regeneration. The Forum meets twice each year and brings together community activists, representatives from local and national Government, although with civil society organisations. Amongst the topics discussed at the latest forum were issues of 'poverty premiums' associated with high interest lenders, the development of the Scottish Government's approach to community empowerment and community assets.

Participants at the Forum agreed that within communities there are real assets, and more should be done to recognise and support this. There are numerous examples of volunteers making a real difference in their communities, but there needs to be a recognition of the support that is required to turn these assets into action. Alongside the recognition of the assets within communities there must be a real commitment to invest the resources required to allow communities to flourish. Some participants noted

that there is a risk if sufficient funding is not available then there is a danger that resources will be ploughed into areas that have best chances of having some return, leaving those communities that are already disadvantaged behind.

The Forum also heard from Frances Wood, Head of Employability and Poverty within the Scottish Government. Ms Wood noted that the Scottish Government will continue to focus on the three social policy (Achieving Our Potential, Equally Well and the Early Years Framework) frameworks in delivering activity to address poverty and inequality. A number of participants felt that the environment had changed significantly since the Achieving Our Potential framework to tackle poverty was launched in 2008. We are still experiencing the effects of the recession of 2008 and look likely to be heading for another one before too long. Despite this Ms Wood stated that the Scottish Government does not intend to refresh the anti-poverty framework. A full report from the Tackling Poverty Stakeholder forum will be available from the Poverty Alliance website.

MILBURN WARNS ON CHILD POVERTY TARGETS

The former Labour Government Health Secretary, Alan Milburn, who advises the coalition on child poverty and social mobility has warned that the UK Government is in danger of missing the statutory child poverty targets. Whilst the most recent figures have showed that child poverty fell over the last two years, it is now expected that this trend will be reversed. The UK Government admitted that child poverty will increase by 100,000 by 2013. In his first speech as advisor to the Government, Milburn has called for increased investment in early years, and has highlighted the gap in spending on services between the UK and those countries, such as Sweden, where child poverty is considerably lower.

He commented in the Guardian that: "If we use the best-known measure of the number of children living below a poverty line set at 60% of median household incomes, the so-called relative poverty measure, there are 2.6 million children in poverty in our country. That is nearly one in five of all children. If we take a narrower measure, those living in absolute poverty, 1.4 million children are in poverty. Those figures should shock and shame us all. That is even more the case when we consider that according to the self-same relative measure, child poverty in Britain is almost 10% higher than it is in countries like



Denmark." Although Milburn has emphasised the need for spending on early years over cash benefits, his comments will underline the urgent need to increase spending on services to support families experiencing poverty. One of the concerning aspects of the recent debates around child poverty in the UK has been the calls from some quarters to revise the measures. This would be a mistake, and would be a signal that the UK Government is not genuinely committed to addressing the problem.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/dec/14/child-poverty-target-alan-milburn>



SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES PLANS FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE INTEGRATION

Nicola Sturgeon MSP has set out the Scottish Government's plan to integrate adult health and social care. The aim of the plan is to improve the quality and consistency of care for older people and put an end to the 'cost-shunting' between the NHS and local authorities that too often ends up with older people being delayed in hospital longer than they should be and not getting the best standards of care. At the heart of the new plan will be legislation to reform the workings of Community Health Partnerships.

Key elements of the new system will be:

- Community Health Partnerships will be replaced by Health and Social Care Partnerships, which will be the joint responsibility of the NHS and local authority, and will work in partnership with the third and independent sectors
- Partnerships will be accountable to Ministers, leaders of local authorities and the public for delivering new nationally agreed outcomes. These will initially focus on improving older people's care and are set to include measures such as reducing delayed discharges, reducing unplanned admissions to hospital and increasing the number of older people who live in their own home rather than a care home or hospital

- NHS Boards and local authorities will be required to produce integrated budgets for older people's services to bring an end to the 'cost-shunting' that currently exist
- The role of clinicians and social care professionals in the planning of services for older people will be strengthened

A smaller proportion of resources - money and staff - will be directed towards institutional care and more resources will be invested in community provision. This will mean creating new or different job opportunities in the community. This is in line with the commitment to support people to stay at home or in another homely setting, as independent as possible, for as long as possible.

Ms Sturgeon said "These changes represent the radical reform that is badly needed to improve care for older people, and to make better use of the substantial resources that we commit to adult health and social care. We are trying to improve health and social care, consistently, for older people in all parts of the country. That is why a cornerstone of our reform will be nationally agreed outcomes that all local partnerships will be required to deliver."

For more information visit <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2011/12/12111418>

NEW SCOTTISH MINISTER FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

With youth unemployment in Scotland continuing to increase the Scottish Government has decided to appoint a new Minister for Youth Employment. Angela Constance has been appointed as the new Minister and an additional £30 million has been allocated by the Scottish Government to help address the problem. The new resources are expected to help deliver the pledge that has already been made to ensure that

every 16-19 year old in Scotland has a training or education place. A round-table discussion involving trade unions, employers and the third sector has been arranged to discuss how best to invest the additional resources. The latest figures on youth unemployment for December showed that the youth unemployment in the UK had reached 1.03 million, the highest level since 1992.



EUROPEAN NEWS:

FIGHTING IN-WORK POVERTY IN EUROPE

A report has been published following a 'peer review' carried out earlier this year which looked at the French RSA (Revenu de Solidarité Active), which was introduced in 2008 as part of efforts to address in-work poverty, to improve the administration of social minima and to remodel the incentive structure so that work (or returning to education) is a more lucrative and attractive prospect. The Poverty Alliance represented EAPN at the meeting which brought together experts from 10 countries (France, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovenia). The peer review examined the RSA and compared it with other policies across Europe that are intended to address in-work poverty.

The previous minimum income system (Minimum Integration Income - RMI) was based on a one for one trade-off of benefit for earned income, so that EUR 100 earned led to a deduction of EUR 100 from benefit paid. Now a "62% taper" is applied meaning that earning EUR 100 only leads to a EUR 38 deduction in benefit paid. Efforts have been made to encourage beneficiaries of RSA into employment, for example with assisted employment contracts and (improved) insertion mechanisms.

In addition, the RSA has simplified the provision of social protection by combining several previously separate schemes into a single sum. A household with no earned income is eligible for the "basic RSA" which is defined at the household level and takes into account the composition of the household. The "in-work RSA" acts as a top-up for people paid less than the national minimum wage (SMIC). Again, the supplement is sensitive to family situation; for a single person the supplement brings the

sum up to the SMIC but for a childless couple the top-up level is 1.4 times the value of the SMIC.

However, there are some notable deficiencies, for example many young people are not entitled to RSA; the minimum benefit for a jobless household is less than half of the minimum wage; and services to help beneficiaries into work are not yet fully operational. It is proving difficult to reconcile the need to ensure a decent income, work incentives and cost efficiency. A national conference will evaluate how far the RSA has achieved its aims at the end of this year.

Some of the key conclusions of the review included:

- The RSA should consider the need to deal with the existence of precarious work in the long-term.
- The quality of jobs is crucial and needs to be safe guarded through legislation and agreements by social partners.
- Implementing measures to prevent poverty is likely to be a more economical strategy in the long run.
- Besides financial incentives it is essential to improve labour market conditions, for example to encourage workers into education or training, or to improve access to good quality services for job seekers.
- There is a need for in-work poverty indicators at the European level to monitor changes over time.

<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2011/building-the-tools-to-fight-in-work-poverty>



EAPN CALLS ON MEMBERS STATES TO DELIVER INCLUSIVE GROWTH

In its analysis of the first round of National Reform Program (NRP) reports the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) has found little evidence that Governments across the EU are taking the commitments to address poverty seriously. This year marks the first operational year of the new Europe 2020 Strategy, which is committed to delivering inclusive, as well as smart and sustainable growth. It would appear that most member States have focused only on growth, and have set aside issues of inclusion.

As part of the Europe 2020 Strategy a European target has been set to reduce poverty by at least 20 million by 2020 which together with the other social targets on employment, education and training are meant to ensure a balanced economic and social approach. The strategy is delivered through the European Semester and the national level with the National Reform Programmes (NRPs). However, these developments have taken place in the context of a deepening crisis, as European Governments struggle to save the Euro and enforce fast deficit reductions through social cuts, as part of the new economic governance package. What chance has such an approach to deliver on the poverty reduction commitments and promote social cohesion?

EAPN's Report highlights the failure to set adequate poverty targets and narrow range of policy responses, whilst macroeconomic policies continue to generate increased poverty and social exclusion. The limited engagement of civil society, including people experiencing poverty and their NGOs is undermining the credibility and ownership of the process.

The Report presents its Key Messages and Recommendations to ensure that Europe 2020 delivers on Inclusive Growth. Amongst the key messages are:

- The macro-economic approach, driven by EU economic governance and focusing on stability and competitiveness, is not promoting inclusive growth, threatens human rights, and is likely to generate increased poverty, exclusion and inequality in the EU.
- The failure to reach the EU poverty target reflects a lack of seriousness about poverty reduction and is unacceptable.
- The policies proposed to combat poverty, are skimpy, inadequately detailed and overly focused on employment, instead of investing in comprehensive, multidimensional rights'-based approaches, backed by strong social protection systems.
- Whilst the Employment target is seen as sufficiently ambitious, severe doubts are voiced about its implementation, the lack of synergies with the poverty target and the failure to prioritise inclusive labour markets.

Gender Equality and the fight against discrimination is largely absent, despite explicit commitments made in Europe 2020 – i.e. to migrants and Roma Inclusion.

- Structural Funds are falling far short of their potential to deliver on social inclusion, with a greater focus on growth-enhancing infrastructure, and an unequal balance between employment, training and poverty targets.

To view the full report visit www.eapn.eu



ENAR PUBLISHES NEW INTEGRATION TOOLKIT

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) has recently published a toolkit to aid organisations working with migrant communities to support their integration, primarily at local and regional levels. It provides guidance on the principles which should underpin projects and aim to achieve integration as “a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of EU countries” (1st EU Common Basic Principle on Integration). It showcases promising practices in migrant integration to inform organisations that are looking for examples of good practice in this area of work. In so doing, this toolkit explains the ways in which migrant integration fits into the bigger picture of social policy and politics operating at the level of the European Union, the Member States, and the concerns of regional and local authorities. The toolkit also aims to influence other countries’ approaches and, crucially, the EU approach, impacting on constructive integration policies nationally and locally.

The toolkit draws on the work of migrant support organisations in six European countries. Each of these groups has, to a greater or lesser extent, considered its work in the context of the European Union’s ‘Common Basic Principles (CBPs)’ on migrant integration. The toolkit will be particularly useful given the increased pressure that many migrant communities will be facing as the economy continues to falter.

http://cms.horus.be/files/99935/MediaArchive/publications/Toolkit_EN_low%20final.pdf



FEATURES:

ALWAYS LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE: THE RISE OF ASSETS BASED APPROACHES IN SCOTLAND

The emergence of 'asset based approaches to address poverty and other social problems has been welcomed by many. However, what are the implications of this new focus for our understanding of poverty and its solutions? In this article Lynne Friedli takes a critical look at the idea and asks whether we may be overlooking to real sources of poverty and inequality in Scotland.

'If the rich could hire others to die for them, we, the poor, would all make a nice living'
Fiddler on the Roof

(The) disparity in outcomes is shaming and shameful in trend terms and makes it clear that 'One Scotland' contains two entirely different worlds in terms of quality of life, opportunities in life and living context.
Making Better Places

Something is happening to the way that deprivation is spoken about in Scotland these days. There's also been something of a sea change in how poverty and inequalities – in life outcomes, opportunities, health and everyday experience – are interpreted. At the heart of this are the growing influence of psychological explanations for Scotland's problems and the absence of critical debate about the implications of this influence. The rise of assets based approaches to reducing health inequalities is a potent example (Friedli 2011). It is of special importance not just because the stories used to explain inequalities matter, but because the language of assets now permeates much of the policy literature on public sector reform, as well as wider debates on social protection and public service entitlement in Scotland.

An Assets Alliance for Scotland was launched by the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) at the end of 2010 to tackle Scotland's 'intractable problems' and to support the 'inner and innate assets' of deprived communities (SCDC 2011). A focus on assets is essentially about recognising and making the most of people's strengths, to 'redress the balance between meeting needs and nurturing strengths and resources of people and communities' (McClellan 2011). Although the concept is described in different ways and draws on different traditions, there are some common features in Scottish conversations about assets. And while they generally focus on the relationship between assets and health, they have much wider relevance. The story, recently summarised in a briefing (McClellan 2011) by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH), goes

broadly as follows. Notwithstanding huge investment and extensive effort, health inequalities in Scotland are widening. As the CMO notes: 'what we have tried to date (although well meaning) has not worked' (Scottish Government 2010). The reason for this failure is seen as twofold. Firstly, that public services have focussed on deficits 'the problems, needs and deficiencies within communities' and secondly, that this focus has engendered 'a culture of dependency'. Assets based approaches are being used both to highlight the failings of the public sector and to reinforce the view that the way in which poor people make use of welfare benefits (income and services) is morally flawed.

'Our three social frameworks (Equally Well, Achieving our Potential and the Early Years Framework) promote an assets, rather than a deficits, approach, to tackling poverty and inequality. This means building the capacity of individuals, families and communities to manage better in the longer term, "moving from welfare to wellbeing and from dependency to self determination".'
(Scottish Government 2011)

Implicit in this discourse are beliefs dating back to the Poor Law, namely that social protection results in moral and spiritual decline and that take up of welfare is driven not by market failure, but by certain character traits – dependency and coping style. The move from 'welfare to wellbeing' also signals that assets based approaches are part of efforts to reduce 'unaffordable demand', to achieve public spending cuts and to promote a DIY response to loss of services and loss of benefits: 'a focus on positive ability, capability and capacity leading to less reliance on professional services and reductions in the demand for scarce resources' (McClellan 2011). Although in theory assets can include social, material and environmental factors, (in which case 'assets' would simply be another term for the societal determinants of health), in practice, assets based approaches largely focus on individual and collective psychological attributes. These include the familiar psycho-social roll call of self esteem, aspirations, confidence, meaning and purpose, optimism and sense of coherence, as well as key features of social capital: social networks, reciprocity, mutual aid and collective efficacy.

A greater focus on psycho-social factors is part of a wider acknowledgement of the non material dimensions of poverty, perhaps most famously in Amartya Sen's call for 'the ability to go about without shame' to be recognised as a basic human freedom



(Zaveleta 2007). People living in poverty, as well as other vulnerable or excluded groups, consistently describe the pain of being made to feel of no account, which is often experienced as more damaging than material hardship. From this perspective, inequalities (the lived experience of injustice) are both stressful in themselves and greatly exacerbate the stress of coping with material deprivation (Wilkinson & Pickett 2006; 2009). What's at stake is the social, emotional and spiritual impact of poverty and inequity, the belief that 'wellbeing does not depend solely upon economic assets' (Sen 1992) and a critique of aspirational consumerism, materialism and the consequent devaluing of people outside the money economy.

The assets agenda has powerful allies in Scotland, which may partly explain the absence of open debate. It's disappointing that the GCPH describes its new programme of work in this area as 'to provide evidence and support for an asset based approach for health improvement in a Scottish context', rather than a more critical assessment of whether assets approaches merit support at all. Or whether the 'widening gap in health inequalities in Scotland' might be better explained by the deficit in income equality than by the deficit approach of public health. At the same time, the language of assets has an intuitive appeal. It celebrates things that anti poverty activists and community development workers know to be true: that deprived communities are rich in relationships, resourcefulness and creativity. That coming together to change things for the better is inspiring and empowering.

A focus on strengths?

By their nature, assets based approaches are about strengths and in particular, resilience or what enables individuals and communities to survive, adapt and/or flourish, notwithstanding adversity. They strike a chord because they speak to the resistance of deprived communities to being pathologised, criminalised, ostracised; to being described in public health reports in terms of multiple deficits and disorders: 'chaotic, unengaged, and disaffected'. They call for the empowerment of citizens, for recognition and respect for their knowledge and preferences, for dignity and autonomy. These themes are familiar from community development traditions in Scotland, as well as from long standing campaigns for political voice by people fighting exclusion and discrimination because of poverty, class, disability or ethnicity.

What we're seeing here could be cause for celebration: a richer, more nuanced account of the experience of deprivation. One that recognises the importance of mental health, the social nature of human need and that respects the strengths, resilience, skills and potential of people living in poverty. But too often, psycho-social factors are abstracted from the material realities of people's lives and opportunities – as if 'sense of coherence' and hope for the future are unrelated to social and economic advantage. They are used to account for 'health damaging behaviours', not to deepen understanding of structural inequities. Much of the assets literature confirms the seductive powers of the happiness industry, where a cheerful disposition and a thankful heart are the primary determinants of positive outcomes in life. The growing emphasis on cultural



Battlefield Community Project, Glasgow



Second anniversary celebrations at the community owned Whiteinch Centre, Glasgow

and psychological explanations serves to move the conversation further and further from hard discussions about the current distribution of wealth in Scotland and the policies and practice that support this. Symptoms of oppression and exploitation – self harm, alienation and despair - masquerade as causes and questions of power and political voice are avoided.

Even so, the radical agenda that inspires commitment to assets based approaches still needs addressing. There is an important debate to be had about transforming the relationship between public services and people who are disadvantaged, (including the impact of steep income and status hierarchies within the public sector). The current welfare system is inadequate, demeaning and needs changed. But we should be clear that this is a debate about social justice. Respecting and valuing people cannot be separated from their human rights. We need to be especially alert to attempts to stigmatise need and dependency, and how these are being used to punish people who are poor and to undermine any sense of dignity in entitlement. It's important to recognise the scale of the neo liberal attack on the values of collective responsibility, pooled risk and universal services (Scambler 2007).

The assets agenda asks public services to work differently, to start from what disadvantaged communities have, not what they lack. We know good quality equitable services can make a significant difference to the experience of poverty:

'Arguably almost all public services play some role in delivering social justice, addressing the consequences of socioeconomic inequalities and disadvantage and supporting the vulnerable in society'
(Mair et al 2011)

Local authorities and the NHS, through community planning, can prioritise action that maximises income, reduces the impact of poverty and supports greater equity. These are important contributions. However we also need honest acknowledgement of what public services can and can't achieve, of the difference between treating symptoms (e.g. inequalities in health or educational attainment) and addressing causes: 'naming who and what are the forces and institutions creating and perpetuating inequitable conditions in the first place' (Birn 2009). Speaking up about societal determinants, repeating the evidence whenever decisions are made, is the special role of anti poverty activists working in the public sector; but it's difficult to see where this features in current conversations about assets.

Inequality matters

Scotland, like the rest of the UK, has one of the highest levels of earnings inequality in the developed world (Bertelsmann 2011). Since the 1990's, on most key measures, social and economic inequalities have remained unchanged or become more pronounced (Mair et al 2011). The income inequality gap has widened since devolution due to an increase in the income of the 30% of the population with the highest incomes, while the income of the 30% with the lowest



incomes has remained static. The gap in healthy life expectancy between the 20% most deprived and the 20% least deprived areas has increased from 8 to 13.5 years.

'The gap between the top and bottom of the distribution in key outcomes such as income, employment, health, learning and safety is significantly wider in Scotland than in other European countries. Worse still, most of these negatives are inter-related, mutually reinforcing and often clustered in small areas.'
Mair et al 2011

This account of the scale of inequalities in Scotland, from Making Better Places, also features in the Christie Report and in a series of papers from the Tackling Poverty Board. In each case, it is evident that deep rooted social problems persist because inequalities in income, wealth and power persist. As Mair et al observe, the greatest challenge facing public services is to combat the negative outcomes for individuals and communities arising from deep-rooted inequalities, outcomes that absorb around 40%+ of local public service spending. Nevertheless, the focus is on a 'radical change in the design and delivery of public services', rather than on a radical change in economic and fiscal policies that in Scotland, as elsewhere, 'sanction gross inequalities and obscene greed' (Rio de Janeiro Declaration 2011).

These issues matter more than ever for anti poverty activists. As Scotland explores the economic potential of independence (McKay 2011), the 'unexamined boxes of wealth and power' (Scambler 2007) need to be much more openly discussed. This includes difficult questions about the impact of global trends, the legacy of an unfettered UK free market in corporate control (resulting in declines in Scottish ownership and the loss of headquarters) and the scale of income inequality associated with neo liberal regimes. What levels of regulation will need to be in place in Scotland to achieve the Government's solidarity target, to ensure that corporate interests do not take precedence over other social goals – health, justice, social cohesion, environmental protection, the welfare of children and human rights? Huge efforts will be needed to sustain the gains made in reducing poverty and child poverty in the decade 1996/7 to 2005/6 – gains that still failed to reverse the poverty legacy of the Thatcher years (McKendrick et al 2011). Far from acceding to austerity rhetoric, we should be arguing that social protection is a necessary antidote to the operation of free markets and needs stepped up in times of recession. These are not battles that will be easily won but they are crucial to strategic thinking about action to reduce poverty.

Conclusions

The Christie Report, Making Better Places and the Tackling Poverty Board papers all embrace values and principles that need defending. These include 'dignity, rights and respect around entitlement' (Tackling Poverty Board 2011) 'protecting 'the collective nature

of social responsibility which has long been a defining characteristic of our country' (Christie 2011) and 'the aspiration that public services act as a force for social justice as well as human rights' (Mair et al 2011). As the Tackling Poverty Board notes, we should avoid language that stereotypes people, the reasons for their poverty or need for services. This means people living in poverty stepping up the fight for political voice. It also means keeping the focus on the root causes of poverty. Persistently asking: 'what are the social structures that result in and maintain profound inequalities in the distribution of assets in Scotland?' The failure to ask this question is the primary weakness of the assets movement. Like complexity theory and other ecological explanations for social problems, assets approaches are based on the view that achieving positive social change is essentially 'an organic, collaborative and apolitical process in which different stakeholders contribute to an agenda that benefits everyone' (Greenhalgh 2009). What are missing from these accounts are vested interests and the political struggle which is required to achieve both fairer distribution and 'lines of accountability for the factories of social injustice' (Birn 2009).

At one level, a focus on assets in deprived communities may serve to conceal wider class privilege. At the same time, a key strength of assets approaches lies in an insistence on the power of the human spirit and a determination to value people and places long discarded by the market and the state. Historically, collective traditions of making meaning out of adversity – feminism, civil rights, trades unions, gay liberation, disability rights and the survivor movement – have built strength and solidarity through a shared analysis of inequalities in privilege, power and resources. In the face of current market failure and growing public distaste for the scale of inequalities, we're seeing new routes to resistance and new forms of expressing solidarity, (as well as new state strategies to suppress them). Comprehensive asset mapping could provide a framework for asking new questions about equitable access to valued resources – green space, public buildings, transport, affordable food and fuel, sports and leisure facilities, cultural heritage, music, theatre, work experience etc. New ways of thinking about 'forgotten spaces', for example, have inspired a wealth of creative approaches to reclaiming land, water and buildings for communities. Nevertheless, as Occupy Edinburgh discovered in St Andrew Square, in the end it still comes down to who actually owns the assets. Who owns the public squares? Who owns the means of production?

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UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY ASSETS

The changing economic and political context has meant that community control of community assets is back on the political agenda both in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK. In this article Josh Stott of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation outlines their research programme in this area, highlighting some of the risks and opportunities associated with community assets.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Community Assets research programme has explored the control and ownership of physical assets – namely land and buildings – by community based organisations (CBOs). We have undertaken a historical review of community ownership and researched the motivations, benefits, risks and challenges relevant to asset owning CBOs today. We have also explored key themes such as finance, renewable energy and land reform in Scotland through a series of six seminars, each accompanied by specific briefing papers.

The programme coincides with a very live policy debate around the community assets agenda both sides of the border. At the same time, the potential supply of community assets has perhaps never been greater. As funding cuts take hold, local authorities are no longer hell bent on keeping hold of ‘the family silver’ and are looking to dispose of surplus assets in order to balance their books. This situation is likely to accelerate now in Scotland as local authorities start to feel the full impact of the cuts.

The current policy context

The 2011 Scottish National Party (SNP) manifesto proposes a Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill, which “will make it easier for communities to take over underused or unused public sector assetsThis will act as a catalyst for a wide range of community activities and enterprises”.

On the face of it this proposal mirrors the Localism Bill in Westminster, which, at the time of writing, is awaiting royal assent. However, there is a strong hope that the Scottish Government will not simply be seeking to replicate the new legislation south of the border. The provisions in the Localism Bill are very limited and in reality the much talked about ‘Right to Buy’ powers boil down to no more than a right to register an interest to buy. Communities will not have a pre-emptive right of first refusal (as for example granted under the Scottish Land Reform Act 2003), if land or buildings come up for sale; and assets will be offered on the open market. The Bill does guarantee a six month moratorium for

community groups to put together their bids, however, there is no requirement, except perhaps local political pressure, to transfer to the community group rather than any other bidder.

There is a wider agenda, which should not be ignored, in terms of public sector reform and future role of community organisations in delivering local services, many of which are delivered in physical assets. The Coalition Government’s Open Public Services white paper was published with a whimper and provides no clarity on how public service reform will play out at the local level and how it will interface with community assets. Whether or not these links can be made more effectively in Scotland, to take forward the recommendations of the Christie Commission, is impossible to predict and represents a major challenge.

Land reform and community empowerment in Scotland

To date, the legislative context of community assets in Scotland has been dominated by the Scottish Land Reform Act 2003 and the rights of rural communities. The agenda has lost momentum and the Scottish Government is now proposing a shot in the arm by establishing a Land Reform Review Group and a new Scottish Land Fund.

The implementation of current legislation has been criticised for its complexity and bureaucracy. A lack of capital funds especially following closure of Land Fund in 2006, and a lack of willingness on the part of private landlords to engage through the legislative route are cited as key constraints. Although there seems little argument that the reform has helped to galvanise community groups, raise awareness and has facilitated land transfer outside the legislative route, as at October 2010 there had been only 9 purchases of land under the Act. It seems telling that all successful acquisitions to date have been from public sector or absentee owners, rather than land belonging to locally-based private landowners. As something touted as one of the most significant reforms of devolved government its success, or its fitness for purpose, is open to challenge.

A crucial feature of the legislation is its sole focus on rural areas (with populations under 10,000). In Scotland, the rural land assets agenda is viewed in isolation from the wider community assets agenda. This wider agenda includes the diverse package of physical assets controlled by local communities in urban areas across Scotland. The Community Empowerment Action Plan (2009) accompanied by Big Lottery Fund’s (BIG) £50m ‘Growing Community Assets’ programme and the Development Trust Association Scotland’s (DTAS) ‘Promoting Asset Transfer’ programme has provided recent impetus to this wider community assets agenda.



These two community assets agendas are overseen by separate Government Departments. They are represented by different interest/lobby groups and in many respects are competing for funding and influence. Of course there are important distinctions between the rural and urban settings, not least the cultural and historical context of rural land ownership. But, is it helpful, as we look to the future of community empowerment across Scotland for the agendas to be so dislocated? Could a more coherent approach to the ownership of assets, based on the common values and principles of community empowerment, not provide a more compelling and effective platform to shape and influence policy?

A framework for community assets

Although a more coherent approach seems attractive, it must not be forgotten that community asset holders are not a 'sector' with common characteristics. Our research emphasises this lack of coherence; unsurprising given the diversity of community organisations which control assets, ranging from small voluntary organisations to large social enterprises.

Within this broad spectrum our survey and case study analysis suggests three main overlapping 'bands' of organisations:

Stewards – small, mainly volunteer-run groups with a single long-standing asset used largely for hiring out space to local community groups and residents. These groups often acquired their building as a legacy or gift. They usually have a low income and rarely any paid staff.

Community developers – medium-sized organisations, often with a range of assets, involved in local service delivery and local partnerships. These organisations normally have paid staff and a mix of income sources. They are more likely to have acquired their assets by design.

Entrepreneurs – organisations running larger, more professionalised social enterprises, still community based but with a mix of assets for social and commercial purposes and a comprehensive business model. These organisations are more likely to have capital-intensive assets and to have acquired them by design.

Applying this framework to Scotland it seems appropriate to include a fourth band to take into account 'Rural community land owners'. This framework is by no means rigid or static. Some organisations might move through these bands as they develop, but this would not always be the case, nor always desirable. Whatever framework is applied the underlying diversity of the field remains. Policy and support frameworks must therefore be nuanced, reflecting the different needs and types of community organisations that exist.

Across both sides of the border the diversity of organisations makes it difficult to speak with a single voice which ultimately weakens the position of community organisations. As discussed there is a clear rural/urban split but regardless of any progress on bridging this divide there is a need, particularly in urban areas, to come together to drive forward the agenda. Community organisations need to demonstrate first of all that they have an appetite for greater levels of asset ownership. This needs to happen at the local level, where appropriate through the Community Planning process, and also at the national level to influence the provisions and implementation of the Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill.

Ownership can deliver major benefits

From a psychological perspective it is intuitive that ownership of an asset will change an individual or a community's mindset. Ownership provides a genuine stake in an enterprise, motivating action and endeavour that otherwise may not happen.

There is no debate that an asset can provide a tangible focal point to inspire and harness community action. Our research reaffirms many of the well documented social, economic and environmental benefits that can be derived through community ownership including: a sense of community identity and pride; increased confidence, skills and aspirations; improved access to services and activities; jobs, training and business opportunities. Assets can also help organisations to achieve greater financial viability. They can generate income to cross fund other activities and create more credibility with the local authority and other outside agencies, helping to lever additional investment.

Community asset ownership can also be a way of preventing decline and blight in areas where local authorities and other owners have decided – or been forced – to withdraw from a building. In these areas the long-term cost of 'doing nothing' should be a key factor in decision making. By bringing such buildings back into use, community ownership can offer the opportunity to stem decline and regenerate an area, making it more attractive to existing and prospective residents.

The risks and challenges of ownership

Whilst recognising the potential of community ownership, our research sounds a clear note of caution. Acquiring and managing assets is a complex and risky business. Unless a range of 'success factors' is in place and a CBO is sufficiently resourced there are real risks that assets may turn out to be liabilities.



Tobermory Harbour: owned and managed by a local community group

Perhaps most importantly, communities need time and support. Time and support to get organised; to build capacity; and to develop sustainable business plans. This message was voiced time and again from practitioners throughout our seminar series. All of the successful examples of asset ownership which were discussed had evolved through an iterative, organic process over many years. Our research found other key success factors included:

financial and business planning – both in terms of the capital acquisition process and ongoing business planning;

physical factors – ensuring that the asset is fit for purpose and that there is due diligence to ascertain building condition and anticipated costs;

capacity and leadership within the community – the skills and time to make an asset work;

effective governance – clarity of roles and functions and community buy-in, with adequate democratic control;

external partners – establishing strong, effective relationships with other partners, such as local authorities

The importance and relevance of these factors will vary in different scenarios and are likely to evolve with time. What is clear is that asset ownership is not straightforward and many communities will need help through the process, especially at a time where local authorities are seeking to dispose of assets in a rush.

Targeting disadvantaged communities

Of course community capacity will vary from place to place. The biggest challenge is likely to be in poorer areas where people do not have the capacity or practical know how (for example business and legal experience), or the right connections that could help secure and run an asset. Analysis of the first wave of the BIG's programme (up to December 2009) suggests that only £1m of the £15.6m grants was received by communities within the 15% most deprived post code areas (Oxfam Scotland, 2010). It remains unclear whether, moving forward, the programme will really be able to reach the communities which need it the most and who may lack skills to prepare a compelling application.

It is also interesting to note some apparent contradictions highlighted by a survey of local authorities undertaken by



DTAS. It suggests that local authorities perceive a lack of community capacity as one of the most significant risks involved in transferring assets to communities. Yet, very few councils said they would commit resources towards building the capacity of groups where capacity was seen to be an issue. (DTAS, Public Asset Transfer). Where does this leave those communities, which lack capacity, but could have the most to gain from asset ownership?

Economic realities

Opportunities for generating income also vary massively from place to place. The scope for developing a self-sustaining business model in a deprived area is not always available. Perversely, the supply of financial support to facilitate asset transfer and asset ownership has contracted, just at the time when the policy environment has become more supportive and the supply of assets is greater than ever.

The reality of cuts to grants and service contracts mean CBOs need to develop a stronger enterprise culture and become more professional in their approach to asset management. Our research highlights the tricky balance which needs to be struck between generating income and delivering community benefit. Ultimately, only a viable and operational asset can generate community benefit. This means asset owners need to develop well thought through business plans and be creative and entrepreneurial in their approach. By way of example, the potential for renewable energy assets to generate income and support the delivery of broader community ambitions is one opportunity which has scope for greater development in Scotland.

At a time where local authorities are under financial pressure to dispose of surplus assets, CBOs need to ensure that they have their eyes wide open. "Always look a gift horse in the mouth!" was the message from one of our case studies. Community organisations need to be fully aware of all potential costs associated with the asset, or else risk being faced with potentially crippling repair and maintenance costs. Our research highlights the need for transparency in transactions and for a greater onus on transferring bodies to be upfront about historic and anticipated costs. This can be a question of 'can't' rather than 'won't' in some cases, given the poor quality of asset management information held by some local authorities. Regardless, the CBO needs to be able to make an informed decision about taking on assets and their associated risks.

Conclusion

The overriding message emerging from our programme is that the community ownership of assets is not a solution in itself. It does not provide a quick regeneration fix. Physical assets cannot be considered in isolation, they are only one part of a community's asset base. A community's greatest asset is undoubtedly its people - their skills, ideas, passion and leadership. The skills and capacity of the people who own and manage the asset will determine whether or not it will be successful and sustainable.

Community ownership of physical assets can deliver great benefits – economic, social and environmental. However there are significant risks involved and the wrong assets in the wrong hands can end up being liabilities. Asset transfer and ownership should be driven by a shared set of positive values structured to support and strengthen local communities. With local authorities looking to offload surplus assets there is a danger that communities will rush in to take on unsustainable assets which will end up undermining community aspirations and ultimately the wider community assets agenda.

There are also issues of equality at stake. Communities are not equally positioned to take on assets. In some areas there may be a lack of capacity and more limited opportunities to generate revenue. Unless it is recognised that some communities require more support, and these communities are afforded additional resources, there is a real danger that asset ownership will pass many places by. Inevitably this will include many of the most disadvantaged areas who would benefit the most but have the weakest capacities. This risks reinforcing and increasing inequality as some places get left behind.

JRF reports

These reports are all available on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation website at www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/community-assets

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THE CASE FOR COMMUNITY-LED REGENERATION

How we regenerate communities in Scotland is at the heart of the debate about the role of 'assets'. In this article, Angus Hardie of the Scottish Community Alliance outlines why, if we are to have successful regeneration and release the assets in communities then communities must be in control.

The global financial crisis is making its impact felt across all parts of society (or at least 99% of it) but inevitably it will be our poorest communities who will feel the worst of it. But even when the economy was strong, and when public expenditure enjoyed year on year growth, many of the most deep rooted inequalities faced by those living in our poorest communities were showing little sign of improvement. Despite the best efforts of successive regeneration strategies over the past thirty years, evaluation of their long term impact has consistently flagged up that any success has been, at best, limited while many of the disadvantages these initiatives were specifically designed to tackle have actually become more pronounced. But despite the mounting evidence that these regeneration strategies have been pointing in the wrong direction and achieving little in the way of positive and lasting change, a form of sustained and collective amnesia seems to have prevailed amongst policy makers in respect of learning from the lessons of the past. As a result, official regeneration policy over many years has persevered with variants of the same top-down approach, focusing largely on physical regeneration and driven by the public sector in the hope that the private sector will eventually find sufficient traction and the incentive to finish the job.

But now, at last, it looks as if the Government's obsession with top down regeneration is coming to an end. In its recent policy paper – Towards a Sustainable Future – the Scottish Government appears to acknowledge that previous approaches to regeneration have either simply failed to deliver the desired outcomes or, because of the fundamentally changed economic circumstances within which regeneration now has to take place, these approaches are effectively no longer fit for purpose. The financial climate and in particular the long term constraints now biting into public spending budgets mean that the traditional top down public sector led approach is simply no longer an affordable option. And the absence of public sector funding to pump prime investment opportunities, combined with the slump in land values, means that regeneration is no longer attractive to the private sector.

A new approach?

Whether this change of tack has come about because the Government has finally recognised the futility of pursuing approaches that have consistently failed in the past or whether it is because circumstances have conspired against them, is not entirely a moot point. Although the Government now seems prepared to countenance a different approach to regeneration, one which is bottom up and community led, the implications for government, both local and national, are highly significant if this change in direction of government policy is to be successful. It is important therefore that the Government is wholly committed to this new approach and recognises the full implications of what it means. Although the resource implications of community led regeneration are not insignificant, as much as anything else this approach implies a fundamental change in the culture of government, both at a local and national level, and new ways of thinking about communities and what they are capable of achieving. If Government is a reluctant conscript to the idea of community led regeneration, it is unlikely to succeed.

The fundamental assumption underpinning most regeneration effort in the recent years seems to be that it is the principle responsibility of the state, both national and local government working together, to deliver solutions to the complex challenges facing our most disadvantaged communities. It is this particular assumption that now needs to be laid to rest if the challenge of how to deliver successful community-led regeneration is to be met.

Beyond passivity

A community-led approach to regeneration is one where the emphasis in terms of the shape and direction of the regeneration process shifts from being determined principally by external stakeholders (local government, public agencies) to being determined principally by internal stakeholders (local people). Regeneration strategies in the past have typically incorporated some degree of community involvement with the aim of providing local people with an opportunity to feed into the process and to have their voices heard. Essentially, the role of the community in previous regeneration strategies has been primarily consultative and passive in nature. Community-led regeneration demands a much more proactive contribution from local people and as such it is not necessarily an approach that will suit all communities from the outset.



Solar panels on the Isle of Eigg © Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust Archive

Community-led regeneration can take many different forms and these will largely be determined by the local context. However, where a community led approach has been successful there are likely to be a number of features that can be observed in each instance:

one or more local organisations playing a leadership role within the community and has the capacity to provide support to a wide range of less formal community activities

significant assets under community ownership or control

community owned enterprises generating an independent income stream

a locally conceived community plan or 'charter' which identifies the short, medium and long term priorities for action as determined by local people

a level of engagement with external stakeholders which reflects a sense of genuine partnership and mutual respect

an absence of top down initiatives driven unilaterally by public agencies

Above all, community led regeneration requires significant culture change on all sides. Communities need to realise that it is no longer an option to assume that it is the responsibility of the public sector to meet all of their needs or to 'resolve' many of the problems that they face. Public sector agencies need to realise that it is neither appropriate nor realistic for them to imagine they should seek to be doing this. In essence, community-led regeneration requires the relationship between the state and communities to be recalibrated so that there is a much greater sense of mutual respect and equity of

status. This aspect was recently reinforced by the Christie Commission who looked at the future delivery of public services. The report argues that the public services of the future must be built around people and communities and highlights the importance of co-producing services with local people rather than delivering to them. The report concludes that, "people's needs are better met when they are involved in an equal and reciprocal relationship with professionals and others, working together to get things done."

Examples of community led regeneration can be found in many different parts of the country – from the island based community buy outs where local people have assumed control over virtually every aspect of community life (Isle of Eigg, Isle of Gigha, South Uist) to more urban communities where various combinations of development trusts and community based housing associations have acquired control and ownership over a wide range of assets and enterprises and where local people are now instrumental in shaping their own futures (Renton, Neilston, Easterhouse). Historically, issues of urban and rural poverty have been treated by Government within distinct policy silos. While this might have been appropriate in the context of the top down models of old, community led regeneration offers real opportunities for much closer integration of effort to be developed - indeed there are many principles and practices that have underpinned successful regeneration in rural Scotland that could and should be transferred into the urban context.



Changing Relationships

At the heart of community led regeneration is the notion that it is about redefining the nature of the relationships between a local community and the world about them. In this respect it is worth considering the transformational impact that the acquisition of land, and in particular the land on which a community lives, can have. When the community of Eigg finally took the step to free itself from being subjected to the whims of an absentee and disinterested feudal landowner, a wave of energy, creativity and passion was unleashed from within the local population that today seems to be unstoppable. Prior to taking the final step towards owning their island (and a sense of control over their future) the community had showed none of this passion or interest in their collective future. There is now a sound body of evidence stretching back over twenty years that indicates that this shift in the relationship between people and the land they live on can generate local energy like nothing else – regeneration begins to take care of itself. The fact that not every community is an island does not negate the fact that owning land or other forms of community asset and taking control over different aspects of community life can galvanise local people in unforeseeable ways and unlock a hitherto untapped human resource.

Indeed there are many close parallels between the experience of a remote island community such as Eigg and any one of hundreds of disadvantaged urban communities. For the absentee feudal landlord, substitute the urban local authority delivering public services within a traditional municipalist framework. Both are equally disempowering for the people who live under these paternalistic regimes. For a community land buy-out substitute the formation of a community led housing association and the purchase of the land and housing stock from the city council. Both are equally empowering for the local people involved and there is now plenty of evidence to support the argument that with appropriate external support, both models of community led regeneration, albeit in very different physical environments can produce the most stunning results.

Despite the prevailing wind of regeneration policy having blown in the opposite direction for so many years, nonetheless many fine examples of community led regeneration have emerged across the country. They all share a story in common with each other which describes many years of struggle in order to get to the stage of development that they are now at. In particular, and without exception, the community leaders involved would, in part at least, ascribe that struggle to varying degrees of opposition encountered from across a range of external stakeholders. While there may be some merit in the argument that the process of engaging in a struggle of some sort can forge a deeper level of commitment in the long term, the fact remains that community led regeneration has evolved as it has, in spite of the attitude and behaviour encountered from external stakeholders rather than because of them.

In many respects, given the history of regeneration in this country this oppositional behaviour that communities have encountered is entirely predictable. The state has hitherto assumed that its principal job was to 'fix' whatever the problem was and any suggestion from local people that perhaps the solution lay in a different direction ran counter to the received wisdom. This state sponsored resistance to the idea of communities taking responsibility for resolving their own issues, is further exacerbated in part by the overall size of the public sector in this country, and in part by the degree to which local government has become increasingly centralised through successive reorganisations and consequently more remote from the communities it is supposed to serve.

It is worth noting however, that in the Highlands and Islands, a particular approach to strengthening communities has been pursued by economic development agency, Highlands and Islands Enterprise. HIE work in the belief that the economic and social development of the region are inextricably linked and as such have developed a modus operandi of getting alongside communities to help them play their full part in the regeneration of the region. Although the effectiveness of HIE's approach to strengthening communities attracts widespread acclaim, for whatever reason it has not been pursued elsewhere in the country.

Consequently, although perhaps to a lesser extent in the highlands and islands, there remains a very significant barrier in the way of delivering widespread and successful community led regeneration. And that is the dominant culture and prevailing mind-set within the agencies of the public sector.

In those parts of the country where community led regeneration has been successful, there is a compelling argument to be made that the process should not have been as difficult to achieve or as costly in human terms as it has turned out to be. Nor should the whereabouts of the successful examples be as randomly haphazard and dependent on the fortuitous presence of key individuals or local circumstances. If the Government's new regeneration strategy is to place an emphasis on community led regeneration, it will be essential that a more systematic and strategic means of achieving this end is identified. It won't be cheap and it won't be easy – particularly for those who will need to reappraise their beliefs and attitudes towards the community sector - but it will build local resilience where it matters most and it may help to ameliorate some of the worst impacts of the financial crisis that is spreading across Europe and beyond.

*Angus Hardie Director of the Scottish Community Alliance.
For more information visit: www.localpeopleleading.co.uk*



MEMBERSHIP:

JOIN US!

The Poverty Alliance is a national anti-poverty development agency for Scotland which seeks to combat poverty through collaborative action, bringing together workers and activists drawn from the public sector, voluntary organisations, community groups and other agencies.

The Alliance's wide range of activities provide many opportunities for members to exchange

information and expertise which benefit the anti-poverty movement.

The benefits of membership include regular mailings, Scottish Anti-Poverty Review, opportunities to become involved in working groups and access to a wide range of organisations and activists who have the potential to influence the direction of anti-poverty policy in the future.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name and designation of contact person: _____

Name and address of organisation: _____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

MEMBERSHIP FEES:

Ordinary Members: Local Authorities, Health Boards, Enterprise Companies: £500.00 | Voluntary Organisations: Income under £10,000: £25 | £10,000-£75,000: £50 | £75,000-£175,000: £75 | Over £500,000: £100

Associate Members: Local Authorities, Health Boards, Enterprise Companies: £200 | Unwaged Individuals: £5 | All other categories: £25

I/We wish to apply for *Ordinary/Associate Membership for the year: _____

* Please delete as appropriate. NB Membership of The Poverty Alliance runs from 1st April to 31st March. Applications for new membership received after April 1st are charged on a pro rata basis.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please send the completed application form to the address below - thank you.